

**Distributive Justice and the Blind Continent:  
A Study of *Cross of Gold* by Laretta Ngcobo  
and *Osiris Rising* by Ayi Kwei Armah**

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The search for justice is archetypal, a timeless all-encompassing human urge which finds expression in creative literature. Consequently, it is of no surprise to find justice a major preoccupation in the novels of black Africa. From the earliest communal works of Chinua Achebe, to current works written by Chika Unigwe and other African authors living in the metropolises of Europe, the archetype has been explored in relation to locale, age, gender, religion, class and race. It is a topic that allows for unending debate because of its complexities, its controversies, and its foothold on philosophies stretching back into the period of the ancient Greeks. With regard to the ancient nature of the subject, for example, M.D.A Freeman, editor of *Lloyd's Introduction to Jurisprudence*, alleges: "Some of the earliest thinking about justice is found in Aristotle. It was he who distinguished between 'corrective justice' and 'distributive justice'" (523). Expounding on the first of these, corrective justice, Freeman goes on to identify it with "the law of tort"; that is, laws relating to "crooked" conduct (Rutherford and Bone 326), or civil wrongs such as breach of contract between persons, institutions and so forth. He proceeds to make an interesting observation: "Most contemporary writing about justice is about distributive justice, about *the appropriate distribution of goods*" (523, emphasis added). Of course the "writing" he refers to is the expository type, produced by professional lawyers like himself, but it is engaging to think that his observations could apply also to creative writing. One can easily imagine the legal minds poring over the minutiae of an equitable distribution of resources, while the literary minds seize upon the kernel of the idea and render it in terms of fantasy, highlighting those themes that are of most importance to their own societies.

A number of black African writers are actively engaged in this pursuit, and in many cases an absorbing theme is the link between distributive justice and knowledge. Reading through many African novels, one is struck by the regularity with which the degree of justice obtainable in a situation is allied to the balance of knowledge between the parties involved. Where there is an equitable distribution of knowledge, with both parties being relatively equally informed, there is a proportionately equal distribution of other social advantages, but where knowledge is one-sided then other things tend to follow suit. In fact, knowledge, or the want of it, appears to be critical in matters of fair play.

This may not be news in itself, but it is revealing to see how African writers re-cast it. Two novels provide elaboration. The first is *Cross of Gold* by the South African novelist Lauretta Ngcobo, which appraises justice for the African in the well-known colonial context; and the second is *Osiris Rising* by the Ghanaian author Ayi Kwei Armah, which appraises the same subject but within the modern forum. There is no evidence that the texts have been studied in this light before, or even studied as a pair. On the contrary, *Cross of Gold* seems to have successfully concealed itself from reviewers. *The Companion to African Literatures*, edited by Douglas Killam and Ruth Rowe, provides the only information that could be found aside from biographical details. It states: "In her first novel, *Cross of Gold*, Ngcobo laments the lack of options open to young black South Africans. Set in the 1960s, the narrative traces the progress of a young Zulu man, Mandla, through a chilling catalogue of institutionalized oppression towards his violent end as a freedom-fighter" This is plainly more of a summary than a critique, but it suffices to show that the issue of justice is paramount in the novel, even if researchers have failed to comment on it.

*Osiris Rising* is Ayi Kwei Armah's sixth novel. His earlier works are regularly attacked for their negativism and individualism, but *Osiris Rising* is evidence of a new vision first detected by the critic, Robert Fraser, some years back. Fraser recalls that in Armah's earlier novels the reader was presented with "the harrowing position of the artist figure isolated in an unsympathetic environment[...]. Recently, however, the artist figure disappears, or is merged in a wider professional group or

guild. [... Armah] is now the craftsman of the plural voice, the communal consciousness, the racial memory” (x). Nowhere is the professional guild more functional or the plural voice more audible than in *Rising*. As Killam and Rowe attest, it is a voice speaking on behalf of a united continent with a single heritage traceable to ancient Egypt: “Together with other educational reformers, Asar [the protagonist] intends to reinstate ancient Egypt as the matrix of African history and culture, and begin long-term changes capable of breaking the neo-colonial deadlock” (205). Fraser and Killam and Rowe postulate that Armah is speaking on behalf of the African race in respect to neocolonialism. Issues of a free and fair allocation of goods are not visibly within their scope of study.

Another writer, Ode Ogede, deems *Osiris Rising* “one of the most penetrating analyses of the African postcolonial situation ever presented in a creative work” (132). Among other things, his opinion is informed by Armah’s accurate representation of a present-day African state in the clutches of a dictator obsessed with retaining power, and totally indifferent to the misery of the public. The product of his leadership is the inordinate attention given to “military buildup”, the suffocating bureaucracy, the neglected infrastructure, and especially “the alarming disparity between the living standards of rich and poor people” (131). This last point, which touches on a breakdown in distributive justice, is rooted in mass ignorance, as Ogede stresses when evaluating the duties of the novel’s revolutionary group, “the cult of the ankh”:

Crucial to the work of the group [...] is the raising of awareness among the unenlightened segments of society, so that they too can understand the link between their poverty and the unbridled official corruption and rank opportunism of the members of the local ruling elite who operate in complicity with foreign sponsors. (142–143)

Clearly Ogede recognizes that knowledge is the core of justice. Nonetheless, he is content with registering the affiliation and does not submit it to further investigation.

Kwame Ayivor is unsparing in his deprecation of the local ruling elite indicted in the quotation above. He dwells extensively on the avarice

of this elitist class in the light of “the Cinque Syndrome”; an obnoxious behaviour named after a historical figure in the novel called Joseph Cinque. Cinque is the prototype of every African prepared to betray personal integrity or family interests for the sake of wealth. Ayivor points out that major evils successive on the Cinque Syndrome are “the general economic mess and the acute shortage of consumer goods” which typify Africa in *Osiris Rising* (60), and accurately mirror the economic tumult of many African states in the 1980s. Economic difference is in fact a burning issue in his discourse, addressed with confidence and ingenuity in terms of his views on betrayal, but without recourse to the laws of distribution.

There is a second burning issue he addresses which has a greater bearing on this essay, and which concerns the Euro-Arab interpretation of Black African history. The Euro-Arab interpretation holds that the only history Africa has is “contained in the records of European activities in Africa” (64), or is “the history of Arabs and Europeans in Africa” (65). However, in line with other notable Pan-Africanist historians and scholars, Armah refutes this. According to Ayivor, *Osiris Rising* “reconstructs the Pan-Africanist historical thesis, which posits that Black Africans, and not, as suggested by Eurocentric historians, Caucasians and other non-Africans, created the Kemet civilization and that the Kamites (Ancient Egyptians) and the Pharaohs were Black” (40). Ayivor is emphatic in defending Armah’s contention that Kemet was a Black dynasty, and declares the Eurocentric historians and their allies racist in their refusal to acknowledge this fact. Granted that Ayivor’s speculations are correct, and they are certainly erudite, they bring the present critical commentary to a befitting end because they signify that he has unsuspectingly entered the territory of distributive justice. A denial of Black Africa’s status in Kemet is simultaneously a breach of the former’s rights, a point which Ayivor may not reckon with, but which the coming study highlights.

It can be inferred from the above that literary scholars have not looked at the novels from the perspective of distributive justice. As obvious as it might seem, it has not been previously noticed that Ngcobo and Armah believe distributive justice has slim chances where there is unenlighten-

ment, be it unenlightenment in the shape of illiteracy or misinformation. They present a nation plagued by misconceptions lingering in the wake of slavery and colonialism, and prone to holding onto “comforting untruths” (Erdinast-Vulcan 19) when it should be digging for its own answers. The apparent reluctance of the people to face facts squarely is of great concern to both authors and gives their Africa the semblance of a “blind” continent as opposed to the “dark” continent it was designated in yesteryears. The idea is examined in *Cross of Gold* and *Osiris Rising*, novels that investigate the problem of ignorance in black Africa and the transfer of injustice from the traditional colonial setting to the contemporary world.

In his celebrated thesis, *A Theory of Justice*, the eminent legal scholar, John Rawls, claims that justice consists of two parts: “(1) an interpretation of the initial situation and of the problem of choice posed there, and (2) a set of principles which, it is argued, would be agreed to” (qtd. in Freeman 567). Having made this rather technical proposition, he rephrases it in a manner that is more accessible to the layperson. He says the two principles are particularized:

[... they] are a special case of a more general conception of justice that can be expressed as follows:

All social values—liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self-respect—are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any, or all, of these values is to everyone’s advantage. (qtd. in Freeman 570)

Hence the concept of distributive justice is founded on *social values* and comprises more than just those things that are tangible. It extends its embrace to freedom of thought, freedom of speech, freedom from unlawful arrest, equal opportunities for education and employment, equal opportunities *within* education and employment, and so on. As Rawls mentions, these values are to be apportioned meritoriously to all citizens except where discrimination will improve the general welfare.

With this information in hand, a reader familiar with *Cross of Gold* will speedily endorse Killam and Rowe’s verdict on the text as “a chilling

catalogue of institutionalized oppression.” There can be no mistaking the unevenness in the distribution of social values among the races, nor the fact that this unevenness is constitutionally sanctioned. The novel is a chronicle of the South African liberation struggle over a period of three generations. It parades all the expected sights of apartheid: vicious Boer police, an arrogant judiciary, and a pampered white citizenry dominating a debased African citizenry. Trapped in this institutionalized web of disparities is a fourteen-year-old African boy called Mandla, who is the novel’s protagonist. He is a son of freedom fighters who both die in the course of the liberation struggle. His father dies before the novel begins and his mother dies in the opening pages when she is shot by a patrolman. Thus events take off starkly by presenting a youngster who is severely disadvantaged, and appears to have no right to anything connected to a healthy childhood. The situation improves marginally when he travels to the city. He is adopted by an indigent aunt, which offers him a brief period of respite from the torments of his bereavement. The respite ends quickly, however, for a few weeks after his rehabilitation he is arrested for not having a pass and sentenced to a term in prison that he calls “his first journey into adulthood” (Ngcobo 37).

Accordingly he grows up in a peremptory fashion that turns out to be customary for a black South African boy: “Africans [in the apartheid regime] were robbed of their youth,” notes Ncobo ruefully, “there were only children and adults” (42). The narrative shows unequivocally that neither group anticipates a positive future. The children live in dread of the inexplicable sorrows of adulthood, and the adults live in fear of the terrible moment when their young will realize that their parents cannot protect them. In his early years Mandla supposes his calamity is personal, but over time he sees that what he considered to be his own private hell is the abode of his entire race. As a unit, they are all “going downhill, sometimes at a hurtling speed, sometimes just inexorably [...] in a world that [has] no bottom” (72).

Mandla’s woeful biography unfolds with the turn of each leaf. It proves to be not one, but a series of calamities, sparingly broken by interludes of joy. One has to read the novel to feel the full weight of his suffering, and the suffering of the black indigenes generally, but the opening

events alone demonstrate that the novel is dealing with a community that is conspicuously bereft of the social values Freeman outlined. The definitive attribute of this community is not freedom but fear. Fear is the natural outcome of the vague sensation of spinning down into a bottomless pit, the vulnerability Mandla gives voice to which is peculiar to his people. His own apprehension, for instance, is total and faceless until Marumo, a revolutionary and friend of his late mother, explains it to him in respect of South Africa's indecipherable legal set-up:

“The maze, Mandla, the tangle of countless laws that tie us down. No one knows [which policeman] picks up [which African], who said they should and for what; it is all under the law, it is legal; even those who act against the law are protected by the law.” (64–65)

The law is the backbone of South Africa's social organization, and the black population has aptly nicknamed it “the maze”. Its strength lies in its obscurity for it generates a moral fog that paradoxically shields the European nationals and oppresses the Africans at the same time. The reader is indeed fascinated by the two faces of legal activity in the novel. The law is curiously akin to the proverbial pillar of cloud and fire in Exodus, giving light to one camp and throwing the other into confusion. The Europeans are the favoured camp in *Cross of Gold*. The law is their brainchild and they know how to utilize it. The product of their knowledge is a stratified system in which the best the nation has to offer is channeled to White doorposts. In contrast, the bulk of the black South Africans find the law impossible to fathom. It is a conundrum to them in essence, and becomes doubly so because they are mainly unlettered and unexposed to its intricacies.. As Marumo asserts, the predominant weakness of the Black populace is that “no one knows”, that is, no one understands the workings of the legal machinery controlling them. Again the product of *not* knowing is palpable. Their townships and villages are hallmarked by squalor, and they sit paralyzed by silent dread while affluence, independence and peace pass them by.

Perhaps the subtlest triumph of the law in its perversion of distributive justice is the discreet fashion in which it allots “rightness,” or acceptabil-

ity, to one sector of the community, and “wrongness”, or unacceptability, to the other. “Rightness” is the prerogative of the European sector. European yardsticks for measuring right or wrong conduct are absolute, and have become formalized in the legal code. It has been stated at length that the Africans find this code impenetrable. By implication, therefore, they are caught in a dilemma whereby they can only be judged acceptable law-abiding citizens if they consent to an arrangement that is alien and makes little sense to them. As the plot unfolds, it is pitiful to witness the teeming masses consent to this injustice. The reader is awed by the odds with which they grapple: ignorance, rusticity and doubt, mingled with an almost naïve desire to play by the rules. Nobody wants to be branded a dissident, not even Mandla at first. Most of them just want to be “respectable” and are either unable or unwilling to perceive that respect is an illusion in their circumstances.

Unfortunately, it is in their very eagerness to bask in this illusion that they add self-deception to the numerous deceptions entrapping them. Their grasp of legal tenets is imperfect, it must be granted, but they cannot claim to be wholly unaware of the fact that they are acquiescing to a set-up that operates to their disservice. The evidence is everywhere manifest that South Africa’s judiciary is not cut out for the black South African. Ignoring this, the black population clings tenaciously to an system that is patently taking them “downhill”, possibly on the baseless supposition that one day it will begin to function for them. The narrative does not castigate them for this failing because their reluctance to focus on acrid truth is obviously a survival strategy. Nevertheless, their self-deception has its pronounced drawbacks. Since they are making do with the shadows of justice—mirages of dignity and progress and a place in affairs—the substance is methodically evading them. While they concentrate on blanking out those elements of their existence that hurt, others concentrate on reaping the utmost from their imprudence.

South African justice baffles the nation’s black residents. In contrast, it does not baffle the outside world in the least. The abnormalities riddling the Boer regime are not hidden from onlookers but they choose to remain non-committal, and this may be adduced to the economic bonds between South Africa and its sister nations in the developed



world. This refusal to see or act is the bitter reality of the cross of gold. The black South African is alone, crucified by his white countrymen and abandoned by international spectators who subordinate justice to financial gain. As Marumo tells a co-revolutionary, Makeletso:

“I’m not convinced that the world does not know we are dying, *They know*. But we are crucified on the cross of gold, Makeletso. The Western world cannot set us free, they tie the hands of all who would have helped us. All the young African states who promised us freedom stand, even as they speak, with their hands spread out in surrender, negating all they are saying.”  
(137, emphasis added)

Thus Ngcobo draws a line between the relative ignorance, and helplessness, of the indigenes, and the relative awareness, and guilt, of the global community. This is an important distinction that Armah also makes, as will be seen later. It is useful to note here because it falls in line with the author’s observations on distributive justice and knowledge; the ignorant indigenes benefit minimally from the nations resources even though they are its inhabitants, while the politically wise developed nations are major utilizers and benefactors.

Because of the fear, the incomprehension and the futile dreams that cloud the people’s vision, their dispossession is protracted. When reality finally dawns upon them, however, one by one and then in multiples they join forces with those prepared to throw off their shackles. Significantly, the leaders that they rally around are distinguished from the vast majority by their level of insight. Either they have had formal education or they have had first-hand experience of the law-courts and the cells. They have left the realms of the painfully unlearned. Armed with the indispensable weapon of an awakened consciousness, they set out to restore justice. It is an impossible venture within the tenets of the South African legislature, first because the legislature is predominantly inarticulate as far as the Africans are concerned, and second because even where it does make sense, it is not tuned towards an unbiased distribution of social values. The surest way to proceed therefore is to replace the inarticulate with the articulate, to replace legal doctrines cre-

ated by the colonial administrators with new rules that will instigate fair play for the black African. These rules must be sufficiently straightforward to allow the most unlearned young revolutionary to rehearse them. It is to this end that the rebels evolve a code that re-assesses the meaning of criminality and overturns traditional morality in sweeping terms. According to the new guidelines, crime is simply “cooperat[ion] with evil” (185); that is, the government. Any act of non-compliance is morally justified. Further, precedents of right and wrong, which have erstwhile been made infallible by the law-courts, are turned inside-out. “Right” is no longer tested by a European barometer; it becomes synonymous with violent or non-violent resistance on the part of the African, and is worthy of reward, even if it is no bigger reward than praise from one’s comrades. Similarly “wrong” is synonymous with conformity and demands punishment, even if it is purely instilling a sense of disgrace in the wrong-doer.

It is to the credit of the rebels that this code does not degenerate into anarchy, but rather is formed into a type of curriculum. Marumo and his aides open “schools” in the townships, the reserves, the black universities, the prisons, and wherever Africans are aggregated to give them a re-education in ethics. The core lesson is unchanging: “Violence is morally better than passive submission ... acquiescence is evil” (2).

Mandla’s education is grounded on this principle. It gives rise to an extraordinary timetable in which theory classes are supplemented with field work that is left-wing in the extreme, and Mandla is assigned to a group of *tsotsis* (pickpockets and cut-throats) who coach him in roaming the streets and robbing Europeans. He finds these dealings distasteful initially but they are actually standard practice in the human quest for justice. A sociologist, Peter Calvert, makes this clear through his investigation of a figure that sociologists tag the “social bandit” (80). This figure is a “primitive resistance fighter” who is “motivated not just by loot but by a desire for social justice” (80). Calvert enumerates three classes of social bandit, one of which is the “noble robber” or “Robin Hood”, who “robs the rich to give to the poor” (80). In effect, Robin Hood is the man or woman who participates energetically in the distribution of benefits without waiting for government’s approval. Calvert

sagaciously adds that even though this figure has receded into the shadows in the twentieth century, “[it] has not disappeared completely.” “Criminals” like Robin Hood are still around and still receive the people’s benediction. The critic, Lewis Nkosi, corroborates this comment when he declares that in apartheid South Africa the black middle class accorded the criminal who murdered or robbed white people the stature of a hero (110). Mandla may be viewed as a modern-day Robin Hood in consequence. He steals from the whites to give to the blacks, which might not unseat the powers-that-be but is at least a tiny gesture intended to promote even-handed appropriation.

Before proceeding to *Osiris Rising*, mention should be made of the revolutionaries’ project to re-define identity, which is integral to the project to restore justice and invest the African people with their share of dignity. The revolutionaries know that the “gentleman” status to which the Africans are aspiring is whimsical, but they equally know that Robin Hood is not a paragon either. Ideally the people’s identity should rest within their own culture, and so Marumo directs his students’ gaze back to African history. He avers repeatedly that Mandla and his companions are the seed of “the heroes of the past, the magnificent Zulu regiments who mortified the reputation of the British generals of the last century and ended a French dynasty” (Ngcobo 279). Courage and co-ordination are in the African blood and need only be stirred up, Marumo reminds them. This information brings unbounded psychological healing to Mandla. Like ninety-nine per cent of the youth, he is relieved to hear that he is more than what apartheid dictates, namely, a mere addendum to those “on his side of the colour line” (56). The conception of himself, an ex-convict, as an intelligent being defending an honourable cause is eye-opening, and the humiliation that has been his signature as an orphan, a refugee, a third-class citizen and a jail-bird gives way slowly to pride in the indomitable fighting spirit of his ancestors, his colleagues and himself. Perhaps it is strange that drillings in violence and felony should help him to place a higher premium upon himself but that is undoubtedly the case. Marumo’s lessons have the inestimable merit of holding up to him a complimentary racial image, one that has not been engineered by the regime. The effect is that he bestows upon

Mandla a cardinal social value that has eluded him throughout his life: self-respect.

*Cross of Gold* rounds off with the toppling of the apartheid regime, although it takes place after Mandla's generation. *Osiris Rising* ends less commendably. The protagonist and chief crusader for justice, Asar, "explode [s] silently into fourteen starry fragments" under the gunfire of government's secret police (Armah 305). Like Mandla, Asar never sees justice done, and again it is an evil linked to unenlightenment.

A reviewer, Kaye Whiteman, gives us a clue to the factors motivating Armah's writing when she contemplates the resolutions of his publishers, Per Ankh. According to Whiteman, Per Ankh is a self-help project by a group of entrepreneurs who refuse donations from governments or international bureaucracies because they believe that "living off yearly infusions of donor cash confirms (*the*) anti-African stereotype, damaging Africans' self-perception as achievers" (1714, emphasis added). The notion of the African's damaged self-perception is at the heart of the novel and provides the bridge between this work and Ngcobo's novel. Armah's thesis is that the inability of Africans to perceive themselves as achievers accounts for the injustices they suffer in both the local and the foreign arena. He depicts a West African populace that is sadly reminiscent of its black South African counterpart. The West Africans, too, live with scales over their eyes and have reconciled themselves to the shortchanging that often accompanies blindness.

The same distortions in equity that arise in *Cross of Gold* resurface in *Osiris Rising*, transcending the gap in time and space between the two texts. *Osiris Rising* is set in the late twentieth century, approximately three decades after *Cross of Gold*, and in a fictional West African state called Hapa. The white elite of Ngcobo's narrative has been substituted with a black elite, but the difference is only skin deep because Hapa's top citizens are as committed as the Boer overlords to the preservation of hierarchy. Utumbo is Hapa's tyrannical president. He heads a system that, like Apartheid, guarantees the ruling class the lion's share of the things that make life pleasurable. In this event, the offending system is neocolonialism—the the new version of colonialism, and as such a policy hinged on the belief of "superior expatriate status" (104).

This belief finds expression in Hapa in the false pride of the expatriate academics, and the subservience of the African rulers to Europe's socio-economic mentorship. Most significantly, it finds expression in unjust distributive practices that are a direct result of the colonial example.

One has to step slightly outside the novel to appreciate how and why distributive *in*justice trailed the colonial pioneers into Africa. It was more than just a question of their misconstruction of the black race, the well-known prejudice which led them to maintain segregated living standards, and which was based on some of the Aristotelian concepts of justice remarked upon in the introduction of this paper. For instance, one concept of justice that readily loaned credence to the European tendency to create a superior lifestyle for themselves was the idea that “notions of equality applied only within classes, not across them” (Smith 18). In the context of the European colonizer and the African colonized, this meant that equality applied within the class of white colonizers, and equality applied within the class of the black colonized, but equality did not of necessity cut across the two classes. Such an Aristotelian presumption was supposed to have been confuted in the seventeenth century, but as Smith points out, it was a matter that “progressed very slowly through human history” (19). In a nutshell, racial equality was more a theory than a fact during the era of imperialism. Aside from this, the colonizers' actions were quite clearly prompted by a desire to ensure their continuation. The sub-Sahara has often been dubbed “the white man's grave,” because of numerous deaths from climate and disease, particularly malaria. Despite these conditions, the fact remains that early Europeans allocated to themselves privileges denied the Africans, and in so doing intimated to the latter an undemocratic distributive scheme.

By Asar's time, the scheme has expanded to include unabashed favouritism. Utumbo and his ministers adopt neocolonialist philosophy without scruple, complete with its prejudices. Their regime is hallmarked by a steady flow of choice goods—jobs, money, accommodation, promotion, leisure, selected food and household items, even toilet paper—to preordained quarters. There is no commitment to equality from those in a position to advance it. Rather, the official attitude is summed up by

the government's spokesman, Seth Soja Spenser, Deputy Director of the Secret Service, who declares scandalously: "You know, justice is a vague concept, meaningless except to intellectuals. From whose point of view is a system just or unjust?" (37). Seth and those he represents will not involve themselves in the exacting business of dispensing goods creditably. In the rare instances when justice is seen to prevail, it is a parody of what it ought to be; for example, Utumbo has proclaimed freedom of speech a universal taboo as opposed to being a universal right. And so citizens interested in claiming their quota of social goods are left to their own devices as to how to do it. The options include climbing into elitist circles—an arduous and normally dishonourable task—or patiently hovering in the orbit of the lucky few. A third option is to buy the tangible goods at an exorbitant price from the government's middlemen. None of these alternatives have a vestige of fairness, and yet, as in *Cross of Gold*, the reader is struck by the number of people who consent to them. The text exhibits a panorama of individuals aspiring to tap the precious flow of resources by ingratiating themselves with the privileged. It equally shows a small group of characters who refuse to join the bandwagon, and consequently are almost entirely cut off from a sphere of well-being. In effect, the reader does not have to go far through the novel before making the unmistakable deduction that in this modern African state distributive justice is still absent.

The mystery behind the recurring phenomenon is not profound. As in South Africa, injustice is rife in Hapa because, to a considerable extent, the inhabitants are not privy to the information that will curb it. In this case the information that will curb injustice is not tied to an understanding of the system. They already understand it. It is tied to their recognizing that all roads in Africa do not automatically lead to Europe or America, which is the primary theme of the narrative. The people of Hapa comply with the administration chiefly because they cannot see alternatives, not because they cannot see its flaws. Within the confines of their worldview, neocolonialism is filling a space where there would otherwise have been a void, and its removal will land them at a cross-roads. The reader has no reason to castigate them for their attitude since the consent to neocolonialism has become legendary for the

black African in literature. In fact Hapa is no different from the other African states in the novel, which all faithfully tread the path laid down by the First World. It suits Hapa's government to leave the people with this Eurocentric mind-set and, where possible, to fossilize it, because the colonial paradigm is the government's lifeline. It is the structure of the regime, its senior servicemen, its military brass, its wealthiest denizens and a considerable number of its intellectuals.

The intellectuals in particular drive home the author's point that misinformation is a cog in proceeding towards justice. The intellectuals are in the thick of government's double-dealing with the masses, for it is through the universities that the authorities sustain the ideologies that legitimize their undeserved rights. A case in point is the regime's pet ideology of the European as "teacher" and the African as "pupil." The model demonstrates that Europe, as a technologically-advanced nation, has much to tender, and Africa, as a developing nation, has much to learn and accept. The lifestyle of the academic staff, the curricula they utilize, the students they turn out, and even the syllabuses they devise for lower educational institutions, all tacitly promulgate this model. Armah objects rigorously to it, but not because he forbids one race learning from another. The relationship of Ast and Asar, an African and an African-American, illustrates the advantages of the mutual learning process. Armah's objection is on the grounds that, in the European-African context, the latter apparently has nothing to offer. In essence, the "anti-African stereotype" that Whiteman alluded to previously is the picture of the socially or mentally unproductive African who can never outgrow the "pupil" stage.

Following from this line of thought Charlotte Bruner, a literary analyst, scrutinizes the anti-African stereotype in its naked form. Bruner strips it of every romantic pretension, unearthing more of its derogatory insinuations and how they reflect on a neocolonialist organism. She states bluntly that the colonialist construction of the African is fundamentally akin to Shakespeare's Caliban: "a slave, brutish, violent, lazy, stupid, perhaps sub-human" (241). She professes in addition that these assumptions gained credibility by re-iteration. They were "contrived and invented by the colonizer, [but] eventually believed by both oppressor

and oppressed, and to an extent lived by. The fact that this image [was] ... divorced from truth ... does not mean that it [was] not effective” (241).

It is to the shame of Hapa’s leadership that they obliquely utilize this unflattering and racist prototype as a national portrait. The portrait is demoralizing, as they well know, but as Bruner has shown it is “effective” and “lived by,” and above all else it is economically expedient. Indeed, once the populace can be persuaded to perpetually see themselves in the light of Caliban then neocolonialism is secured, together with the comfort of its proponents.

Utumbo and his cabinet work on the premise that the majority will accept the status quo as long as they remain oblivious to the possibilities of changing it. Their calculations are correct, and as it is in *Cross of Gold*, so it is in *Osiris Rising*: the people defer to the superiority of Western thought, partly because government is deceiving them and partly because they are deceiving themselves. Admittedly, in both texts the people are deprived of the enabling circumstances to fight for their benefits, much more so in *Cross of Gold*. But, distressing as their plights are, the reader cannot help but notice a parallel predisposition of the oppressed to bury their heads in the sand. The West Africans in *Osiris Rising* are especially liable because they watch their nation degenerate into chaos while consoling themselves with dreams of their children “begin[ning] the cleanup” (78). Once more evidence is everywhere manifest that the system is not cut out for the African, but like their black comrades on the Southern side of the continent, they turn from possibilities of change and cling to what is on offer. The truth is that it is easier for them to cope with a refined ready-made socio-economic package from abroad than to put one together for themselves.

Luckily not everyone in Hapa wears blindfolds. There are those who know that the “sub-human” portrait is a lie and they are ready to make the effort to correct it. They purpose to “retrieve [Africa’s] human face, [its] human heart, the human mind [its] ancestors taught to soar” (9-10). This reclaiming is the goal of the cult of the ankh, a secret companionship comprising Africans from all walks of life “committed to ... the idea of justice, Maet” (263). “Maet” means “justice” in ancient



Egyptian, and “ankh” means “life”. As far as the cult-members are concerned, the two go hand in hand.

Their organization spans the peninsula and has a unit planted in a teacher-training college in the remote township of Manda. From this hidden spot Asar and a team of co-lecturers make the preliminary moves to eliminate preference. They embark on a public enlightenment campaign to invalidate the “teacher-pupil” precept. Their proposition covers several pages of the text but can be summarized as follows. Using ancient Egyptian culture as a springboard, they state that Africans are an inherently creative people, dispossessed of their identity and their innovative skill by decades of greedy domestic and imperial rulers. Because the greedy few consistently sell out their country and their countrymen to aliens—beginning with African involvement in the slave trade—they have impoverished the nation, reducing it to such a level of dependence upon others that they have smothered the enterprising instincts of the indigenes. Hence, left with neither the courage nor the incentive to break new grounds, the people’s initiative has dwindled by regular gradations, and prospects like neocolonialism have taken on the guise of the inevitable. Their argument stresses that it is the dearth of African courage and incentive that has translated the West into a false ideal. Thus it is that a consuming syndrome has been cultivated; a propensity to consume foreign products that is so conspicuous in Hapa and its fictional counterparts in twentieth-century Africa. Inane consumption is not compulsive in Hapa’s aborigines; nevertheless, it has been carelessly and short-sightedly acquired over time. “Our people degenerated from builders to consumers,” the cult-members claim, “the ancestors were makers, creators. The descendants were finders, consumers” (261). The crux of their argument is that the African has immense creative capability, more than enough to work out a judicious people-oriented means of government. Once the masses have digested this basic principle, then the days of neocolonialism, together with its inbuilt tendency towards lack of respect for persons, will be numbered.

The tactics of the revolutionaries in *Osiris Rising* are not so different from those employed by the rebels in *Cross of Gold*. As before, they will furnish the race with a different system of opinions and an identity that

will induce the people to “stand up’ in the world”, to borrow the expression of Donald Kleen (275). The chosen identity has its inception in ancient Egypt, which is held to be the authentic cradle of Africa’s history and culture and, moreover, is an excellent illustration of “a high, original civilization” (OR 217). The cultists take the proficiency of the ancient North Africans as the indelible proof of the race’s talent. It establishes that Africans have the skill to generate a competent government for themselves in isolation from Europe. It follows that clinging to a system that has failed as transparently as neocolonialism is unproductive, all the more so when tenable options can be created. The revolutionaries suggest looking into the ancient Egyptian philosophy of Kemet and from there evolving a workable mode of government. Armah makes his characters expound this point exhaustively, knowing that for the average West African student with the conventional neocolonialist background the thought of a modern black African government structured on ancient Egyptian philosophy is a little overwhelming. The novel closes before the reader can estimate the full impact of this teaching, but judging from events in the teacher-training college at Manda the drift is assuredly towards revolution. The pattern duplicates *Cross of Gold*. Once young people have access to information that their exploiters have not doctored they are on the road to self-knowledge and self-respect, and with the advent of self-respect comes the confidence to press for other social entitlements.

Before concluding, one may recall Ngcobo’s comment on the guilt of the global community in condoning injustice against the black African. Armah takes up the refrain, slightly modified. His conviction is that Africa records a significant deficit internationally in terms of loss of its due recognition, and that as usual the deficit stems from a lack of exposition. His narrative lays great store on the central role of ancient Egypt in African history, and the Egyptian influence that extended beyond Africa’s coasts. The inference is that Africa has contributed immensely to the development of the humanities world-wide, bequeathing upon the earth’s population a cultural legacy that merits recognition, but for unspoken reasons, the recognition is not accorded to the appropriate quarters. This lack of acknowledgement is a clear instance of an abor-

tion of distributive justice, the narrative concludes. Asar makes an acute observation on Europe's disposition in this regard. He accuses Europe of dishonesty in peddling the image of the African that suits its foreign policy. He tells Ast:

“Ancient Egypt was a high, original civilization. Africans were *a priori* incapable of developing civilization. If it was necessary [for the Western world] to indicate a source for ancient Egyptian civilization, that source was located outside Africa. If that proved awkward, Egypt was isolated as a unique phenomenon connected to no people in its African environment.”  
(217)

Asar's contention is that it has pleased the Western world to make permanent the “African pupil” stereotype in order to sanction what can only be called its interference in that sector of the Third World. Africa is constrained to persevere in a discipleship role, and Europe is eternally both guardian and pace-setter, dispensing foreign aid, approving International Monetary Fund loans, setting up industries, championing a European lifestyle through the electronic media, and generally monitoring details in favour of a Euro-centric globe. Africa's diffidence means that others determine on its behalf what goes where, and the exact quantities. And this is the essence of distributive justice.

In conclusion, it can be seen that distributive justice is frustrated where knowledge has no seat. It is frustrated in *Cross of Gold* because the masses are mystified by government's sophistry, and because their identity as a prestigious race is lost in the identities carved out for them by their negative circumstances. One must add that justice is far from the black South Africans because for a long time they remain unaware of the basic fact that the system cannot work for them. Justice is frustrated in *Osiris Rising* for more or less the same reasons. Those in the know juggle facts and fallacies and the common people are ill-equipped, and frequently ill-disposed, to differentiate between the two. Ignorance is consistently the loop-hole for manipulation. Should the reader attempt to assemble all the categories of ignorance in the texts and weigh them against one another, such a reader might posit that the most dangerous

of all is the race's ignorance of its own potential. This could well be *the* blind spot of the black African in the last century. On a positive note, there are signs of reversal in the new millennium. Beginning with their literature, Africans are starting to meticulously take stock of their position both as a nation and in relation to the global village, and as they expand their horizons and reject "comforting untruths," they anticipate the winning hour in the battle for their entitlements.

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