Fragments: The cargo connection

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Abstract
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DEREK WRIGHT

Fragments: The Cargo Connection

Gareth Griffiths has written of Ayi Kwei Armah’s second novel, *Fragments*:¹

Although the traditional value systems persist they persist in altered and debased forms, and are often as potent a source of pressure and corruption as the new. For Armah then there is only a marginal comfort in the past…. There is no nostalgia in Armah’s treatment of Naana. Her world cannot be restored. Its systems and patterns were effective and valuable, but they have been perverted into the modern myth of the ‘shiny things’ of consumer dreams.²

This is an accurate account of the outcome of an old process in a new world. There has to date, however, been no attempt in the criticism of Armah’s novel to examine the course of developments by which this state of affairs was arrived at. The dangerous transitional area glimpsed here, across which the corruptive energy of alteration moves between ‘tradi-
tional value systems' and 'the modern myth', has been little explored and
the dynamics of the process of perversion, especially as regards the
warped mentality of cargoism, have gone largely uninvestigated.
Naana's monologues and reported conversations insist upon the superi-
ority of a lost order of value which, because it is a past and a failed order,
is problematic as a moral centre in the novel. But she remains a reposi-
tory of valuable information about this traditional past and her poetic
reveries give some guiding indication of the seriousness with which the
novel's implied continuities between beliefs about ancestors and a
contemporary cargo mentality are to be taken.

Discussion of the cargo phenomenon needs to distinguish between
cargo cults, tied up with the shame of colonialism,³ and the cargo
mentality which, as in the independent Ghana of Armah's novel, may be
shamelessly neo-colonial in outlook. Although cargo cults proper usually
break with and destroy the native religious traditions of the past, they
paradoxically look to the benefits of Western commodities to recover
some of the past's lost dignity,⁴ and their concern to wrest the white
man's possessions from him goes hand in hand with the openly hostile
demand for his expulsion. Cargo cults — in colonial Melanesia as in
Central Africa — were explicitly anti-colonial. But the white man's exit
also removed the animosity which caused it, even to the extent of inviting
him back. Post-colonial cargoisms erected around the new black gift-
bringers are less literal in their faith than their cult-prototypes but they
are more slavishly worshipful in their attitudes towards white values and
are more truly degraded in their undignified dependency upon the West.
Armah's Ghana appears to be afflicted by many of the requisite condi-
tions for a modern cargo-faith: an oppressed or dissatisfied mass of
people awaiting a miraculous deliverance as a reaction to unequal access
to newly-acquired power and European-style prosperity;⁵ a post-colonial
black-white reversal which produces 'a new man, a black man with
European abilities and capacities of understanding, a black man enjoying
European conditions of being';⁶ a readiness in the popular consciousness
to believe in America as an 'ultimum bonum', a land 'far away and
beyond the seas where everything could be learned and the good things of
this world obtained'.⁷ Moreover, the returning been-to fits with deceptive
ease into the prototype of the cargo-prophet, 'a well-travelled man who
has had experience of other kinds of assumptions'.⁸ But underlying these
superficial similarities, the cargo mentality makes another significant
divergence from the cult proper. It has become a commonplace of studies
of millenarian activities that cargo-faiths must be cast in traditional
moulds if they are to take root in indigenous cultures:
All prophets take on themselves the task of renovating tradition, of seeking into the familiar and accepted in order to reach forward into the new, of so phrasing the new that it emerges as a more appropriate expression of what had always been agreed to be true. The millenium is expressed within a particular cultural idiom; in this case access to European goods and forms of power are brought into line with traditional assumptions about power.  

Baako’s inspired cargo-exposition stumbles upon and surprises into existence what is really a set of bizarre correspondences between African cargo mentalities, loosely grounded in increasingly remote beliefs about ancestor-intermediaries, and the cargoist logic of the Papua New Guinean ‘Mansren myth’ of the black and white brothers, which also features in Randolph Stow’s novel *Visitants*. Baako muses:

The idea the ghost could be a maker, apart from being too slow-breaking to interest those intent on living as well as the system makes possible, could also have something of excessive pride in it. Maker, artist, but also maker, god. It is presumably a great enough thing for a man to rise to be an intermediary between other men and the gods. To think of being a maker oneself could be sheer unforgiveable sin…. Did the Melanesians think of this? (pp.224-5)

Evidently they did, according to Burridge’s outline:

Because of an act by a mythical ancestor … one of the brothers was well endowed with brains, ability and inventiveness, whilst the other was dull and could only copy. The clever brother was the ancestor of white men, and seems to have represented white men as a class; the dumber brother was the ancestor of black men, representing black men as a class.

Nevertheless, these polarities, along with the type of the well-travelled prophet and the concept of the ‘ultimum bonum’, have no roots in traditional assumptions. For Baako the cargo parallel is an ingenious conceit, not a literal reality, and the divisions of black and white, inventor and copier, are not seen to be magically inherent in traditional myth but are part of the historical inheritance of colonialism, which myth neither anticipates nor rationalises: ‘The most impressive thing in the system is the wall-like acceptance of the division. Division of labour, power, worlds, everything. Not inherent in the scheme, this acceptance. Inherent mainly in the INTERPRETATION people give the system. Saves thought, I suppose’ (p.225).

Caught up in a dependency complex inherited from colonialism, Armah’s Ghanaians readily alienate to the white world god-like powers of invention and innovation which they are unwilling to develop themselves, an apathy summed up in the attitude of the Public Works Engineer at the ferry: ‘I was patient, and waited, that’s why I have my
present post' (p.200). He represents a whole nation which waits for things to be done for it, whilst mindlessly taking over colonial routines which leave it incapable of constructive thought and without energy for independent enterprise. There is nothing 'traditional' in any of this — Baako’s capitals emphatically insist that the slave mentality derives from the interpretation people give the system and does not inhere in the scheme itself — and the origins of its occurrence in the novel are to be found not in cargo-myths but in Fanon.

The apparent cargo-potential of Naana’s dream, which analogises America to the ‘other world’ of the Akan ‘samando’, is more subtly disquieting, however, and warrants special attention:

...I saw Baako roaming in unknown, forbidden places, just born there again after a departure and a death somewhere. He had arrived from beneath the horizon and standing in a large place that was open and filled with many winds, he was lonely. But suddenly he was not alone, but walking one among many people. All the people were white people all knowing only how to speak the white people's languages. Always, after saying anything, however small or large, they shook their white heads solemnly, as if they were the ones gone before. Some touched hands, slowly. But Baako walked among them neither touched nor seen, like a ghost in an overturned world in which all human flesh was white. And some of these people bore in their arms things of a beauty so great that I thought then in my soul this was the way the spirit land must be. Only it was a beauty that frightened also, and before I could remember again that he was not yet gone I had made in my fear a hurried asking for protection on Baako’s head.... We did not go with him inside the airplane ... but parted company in a room large as Nyankom, Esuano and Patase all put together, and in this place also we had the amazing brightness all around us ... after a long time we saw the line of people, many many white people but also others who were black, go like gentle ghosts into the airplane. When it swallowed Baako in his turn, I could look no more. (pp.15-16)

There are many beguiling resemblances here between traditional Akan beliefs about the spirit world and cargoist credulities. The stock cargo-motif of black men departing to be reborn as white ghosts carrying 'things of beauty' is not inconsistent with the Akan belief that the ghosts of the recently departed are, when visible, always dressed in white, and act as intermediaries between the living and the ancestors. Naana’s imagination transfigures the airport lounge into the Akan royal palaces and, in the third chapter ‘Akwaaba’ (‘Welcome’), Baako materialises her metaphors of the ‘samando’ — traditionally a place of cold and ‘many winds’ — into the unwelcoming windy whiteness of a European capital. Naana’s spirit-analogies even slip into the cargoist phraseology of the ‘overturned world’, echoing the idea that returning ancestors bringing ‘white men’s somethings’ would ‘make the world turn over’, the
prophet’s announcements that ‘the whole world would be turned upside down’. The swallowing of ghosts by the aeroplane and Naana’s earlier reference to Baako being ‘taken up into the sky to cross the sea and go past the untouchable horizon itself’ (p.4), anticipate Efua’s cargo-minded expectations of her son magically appearing either from the sea or ‘out of the sky, in a plane’ (p.50). Naana admits that she herself has not been immune to the ‘things of heavy earth’: ‘I have known that if riches and greatness should ever cross his path and walk with him to the end of his days ... I am not one he will choose to forget’ (p.4). Preparing at the end to cross to the spirit world, she asks forgiveness for ‘the thousand things I had gathered around my body to give it comfort’ (p.286).

Nevertheless, the reader would be ill-advised to embark upon a search for the roots of cargoism in Akan religion. Firstly, a historical caveat. The devotees of Congo cults such as the Bashilele and Kimbango, who combined the Christian Apocalypse with native beliefs about ancestors and waited in prophetic idleness for the collective rising of the dead (either white or half-white) to bring untold riches, end oppression and expel the white man, had no equivalents in the British colonies of West Africa. In the latter, messianic prophet-cults were more religious than political, more specifically Christian-centred, and made little or no reference to ‘ancestor worship’. In most West African beliefs the intermediary role of the ‘living dead’ who have recently joined the ancestors entails the conveyance of prayers, not the things prayed for: the spirits are a transmission line for requests and responses, not for the goods themselves. Such requests to the newly departed, in Akan dirges and laments, are sometimes materialistic ones: ‘Mother, if you would send me something, I would like parched corn. So that I could eat it raw if there was no fire to cook it.... I would like a parcel and a big cooking pot that entertains strangers.’ But the blatant and frequently farcical nature of the supplications usually implies realistic doubts about the spirits’ power to confer bequests, or even to convey requests, often expressed in the attendant refrain: ‘If the Departed could send gifts/ They would surely send something to their children.’ In Abraham’s view, the dirge’s sceptical irony and dismay extend to the general view of spirit-messenger roles:

There is a half-cynical, half-reverent attitude ... illustrated in the saying that if the spirit world has nothing to it, at least it has its name behind it. Each man has to go there himself, messages are neither sent nor carried. Nor does one go there oneself and return as one pleases. If Orpheus had been an Akan, he would not have known any route save death to the underworld.
Secondly, Naana's conflation of the human and divine worlds, and material and spiritual journeys, is perfectly in accord with the Akan world-view and has little to do with the idolatrous materialism of cargo-faiths:

The supernatural and the natural, man and society, and in fact all things, according to the Akan, exist in dynamic correspondence, whether they are visible or not.... In Akan thought, creation is going on all the time, and did not stop with the original creation at the beginning of time, in the dim past.... Festivals, rituals and ceremonies re-enact the unending nature of the universe, and life itself is a cycle of birth, death and rebirth, a rhythm which is in conformity with the reality of the universe.²²

In the seamless fabric of this universe, where one world is always immanent in and contiguous with another, the equality of humans and spirits and the inter-relatedness of all experiences within the cycle are a matter of course: ‘The Akans did not conceive the world in terms of the supposition of an unbridgeable distance between two worlds, the temporal and the non-temporal, in terms of the supposition that of the two the latter was infinitely the better and the more important.’²³ It is natural and proper for Naana to give to Baako's journey between earthly locations at least an analogical continuity, if not a wholly common identity, with the spirit's passage between lives for the reason that all journeys, like the pilgrimage in medieval Christian thought, are typologically-bound microcosms of the one great journey of the soul through ‘the passing flesh of ... this world’ (p.286). ‘Spirituality’ is a dimension of all travel because departed spirits are thought to watch over the passage of travellers both into and within this world and to intercede to the ancestors for their safety. Thus every voyage is a rebirth into the experience of a new reality and returns the voyager wiser than when he went: ‘But what is a traveller just returned from far journeys started years ago if not a new one all again?’ (p.4). The spirit world which Baako steps in and out of in Naana's imagination is not reduced to the literal immediacy of cargo spirits or reincarnated ancestors.

Thirdly, the removal of the spirit world to distant realms by Naana's dream is quite untypical of her customary expression of belief in the closeness of the invisible world. Naana's direct communications with the 'Great Friend' and 'Nananom', the community of ancestors, penetrates the ritual 'veils' which exist between worlds in the traditional cultures described by van Gennep: since 'seeing is itself a form of contact',²⁴ her blindness in the visible world carries her closer to the unseen one. Akan religion visualises no geographical separation between worlds: there is
only 'one internally contiguous order'.

‘In the whole great world,’ says Naana, ‘all things are living things’ (p.1). In Akan myth death is represented in terms of the geography of this world, usually as crossing a river or climbing a hill, not as skybound travel, which is probably a cargoist offshoot of a missionary Old Testament Christianity. Abraham argues convincingly that only by the remotest metonymy is Onyame, the Akan Supreme Being, turned into a sky-god.

For Naana, as for all traditional Akan who live very close to their dead, the ancestors are a constant and contactable presence. None of the periodic visitations of revenants in Akan belief — the return of the dead at New Year and to watch over newborn lives, or the ‘reincarnation’ of elders’ characteristics in their grandchildren (which links Baako with Naana) — amount to the miraculous airborne return of ancestors from remote regions.

Fourthly, Naana’s supposed materialism. J.S. Mbiti writes:

For the majority of African peoples, the hereafter is only a continuation of life more or less as it is in its human form. This means that personalities are retained, social and political statuses are maintained, sex distinction is continued, human activities are reproduced in the hereafter, the wealth or poverty of the individual remains unchanged, and in many ways the hereafter is a carbon copy of the present life.

The Akan, in fact, favour this life over its ‘carbon copy’ but the familiar notion of parallel worlds — ‘The spirit world has a social organisation complete with chiefs and subjects’ — encourages a corporeal conception of spirits. The latter are kept posthumously alive by nourishing food offerings and libations — ‘Nananom’ puns on the plural for ‘ancestor’ and ‘the ancestor drinks’. These material offerings are apparently prompted by imperatives stronger than the ethical one of self-denial, for the spirits are in turn accosted by the living, albeit half-believingly, for material returns. Although she later has reservations about the ‘perfect words’ at the departure-libation, Naana sees nothing fundamentally wrong with Foli’s mundane exhortation of the spirits for such returns:

Watch over him, fathers.
Watch over him
and let him prosper
there where he is going.
And when he returns
let his return, like rain,
bring us your blessings and their fruits,
your blessings
your help
in this life you have left us to fight alone. (p.8)
The interdependency of ‘spiritual’ and ‘material’ in African thought has been seized upon by Western commentators who have been quick to deny asceticism to African spirituality. Gerald Moore argues that ‘Africans were never spiritual in the same sense as that understood by a monk, a yogi or a fakir; they did not seek to transcend materiality but to obtain material ends by spiritual means, in the belief that these were the most effective’. Apparently in line with these observations, Armah is reluctant to obscure continuities by erecting diametric oppositions between a grossly selfish Western materialism, on one hand, and a pure, selfless African spirituality, on the other. In the light of these interdependencies, G.C.M. Mutiso’s bald declaration that ‘Old Africa ... by definition spiritual and the negation of materialism ... is represented by the grandmother Naana’, will not do. But the apparently cynical exploitation of spiritual channels for material gain is counterbalanced by the reciprocating spirituality of much apparent materialism. This is evident from Nketia’s researches into the Akan dirge, which a number of common elements — incantatory repetition and assonance, journey-motifs, compressed allusions to remote traditional lore — identify as the model for Naana’s reverie. These show that, in traditional religious practice, gifts requested of the ancestors are motivated less by material greed than by the desire for an expression of continued fellowship and solidarity between the living and the dead. The dominant wish is for some specific proof that the ‘ones gone before’ have not broken contact with the living but are still watching protectively over them in return for the libations and other acts of communion which recognise the continuing life of the dead and invite them to share and participate in human rejoicings.

Another dirge refrain captures this reciprocity: ‘Send me something when someone is coming/ Father, you and I exchange gifts.’ Moreover, the funeral address to ancestors seeks not only personal but corporate gain. It is ‘a corporate act of the whole community of both the living and the departed’, expressing sentiments that ‘bind the living and the dead together in fellowship’. Materialism diffused into a communal property ceases to be materialism in its most crude and naked form. The real change in modern practice, Baako discerns, is not from the spiritual to the material but from the dispersive communalising of materialism in the traditional culture to its intensifying privatisation by the Western nuclear family. It should also be noted that the dirge’s main emphasis falls not on the motif of the returning ancestor but on the reverse passage of the spirit’s circular return from this world to the next, the ‘going’ here which, Naana insists, will be a ‘coming’ there.
tional practice in each of the foregoing particulars. Her faithful observ-
ance of prayer and libation is more mindful of obligations than of dues 
and places the insignificant self at a mere stage in a vast cycle traversed 
by a community of souls. Her moral horror at her family’s avarice is not 
diminished by the occasional failure of her own immunity to material 
temptation. Naana’s vision constitutes an exemplary model of African 
ascetic spirituality, in which the novel’s two senses of the word ‘spiritual’ 
— on the one hand, pertaining to the ‘okra’, the encapsulated spirit or 
ongoing human essence recycled through a variety of incarnations, and, 
on the other hand, the Western meaning of moral self-denial and 
unworldliness understood by Baako — come very close.

In the light of Naana’s traditional beliefs, it is quite incorrect to allege, 
as does Ron Rassner, that ‘she is helplessly drawn into the cargo 
spectrum’, that, like Efua, she ‘confidently awaits the return of Baako to 
bring richness and greatness’, and that her ‘awaiting the return of the 
prophet-hero, the been-to, can be interpreted within a religious context, 
within a millenarian belief’. Naana’s values are not ‘sucked in’ to 
cargoist practice except as sacrificial victims to the new god of material-
ism, on whose altar Baako’s last remaining writings, in parodic cargo-
fashion, are also offered up. It is she, as clairvoyant, who has the 
monopoly on prophecy in the novel whilst Baako, in the naivety of his 
expectations, foresees very little. Neither, incidentally, is Baako a Pro-
methean ‘forethinker’, except in the most distantly ironic way: he is, by 
his own admission, a mediator not a liberator, a deliverer of goods, not 
people. Most importantly, there is nothing millenarian about Naana’s 
patient faith in Baako’s return. Such faith is intrinsic to a system of 
properly ritualised behaviour which, measuring out gifts and rewards, 
duties and dues, governs the cycle of departure and return in traditional 
belief. Naana’s final anticipation of her rewards from the spirit-
community she is about to enter — returns worked for, not waited for — 
could not be further removed from the slavish dependency and fatalistic 
apathy of the cargo mentality, given its most extreme form in the 
 providentialist faith of the ‘nexologist’ and roundly condemned by an 
Akan culture which prizes thrift and personal independence. ‘I am in 
need, please do this for me,’ runs one Akan proverb. ‘That is how some 
men become slaves.’ Naana’s discovery of a common origin for the 
slave-trade and the modern unproductive consumerist mentality in the 
psychology of dependency follows a traditional habit of thought: ‘The 
origins of slavery were traced by the Akans to the loss of independence by 
shiftless persons, who depended on others for their livelihood and 
security.’
To return to Naana's dream. Another striking similarity between the Akan dirge and Naana's reverie is the play of a material-based imagination around tenuous hopes, vague yearnings and wishful projections. The Western-induced cargo mentality concretely vulgarises these into specific expectations and requests, perverting the uncertain and gestural into the explicit and material. Drawing naturally upon the devices of analogy and parable from Akan fable, Naana's materialising imagination plays around Baako's American exile as a figure for the spirit's sojourn in the 'samando'. The 'strange lands' crossed in her mind are no doubt partly prompted by the increasingly strange, foreign Ghana in which she herself has 'become a stranger' (p. 14), but essentially Naana thinks — and dreams — in metaphor and, as in many dirges, the similes and conditional expressions confirm the figurative status of the envisaged reality. Foli's ceremonial speech poetically identifies the two worlds: Baako is in 'lands of the ghosts/ alone in white men's lands' (p. 8). But the white people in Naana's dream 'shook their white heads, as if they were the ones gone before', Baako is 'like a ghost in an overturned world', and Naana speculates that 'this was the way the spirit land must be' (my emphases). Naana's mystical intuitions about the words of the Afro-American singers, who by extension of the poetic analogy are the ghosts to whom she is the closest, are also given the conditionality of hypothesis: 'It was as if I understood what they were saying ... I shook my head with the perfect understanding that was not in it. I had not understood the words at all...' (p. 13). Her final proviso about the deadly soul-killing material beauty which Baako needs 'protection' from — 'Only it was a beauty that frightened also' — undermines the analogy of the two worlds almost as soon as it is made. In her closing monologue Naana will admit to the roaming poetic licence which fosters subjective correspondences between the spirit-journeys of Baako and herself: 'the habit those about to travel have of seeing a like readiness to go in all else around themselves' (p. 283).

When her grandson and companion-spirit, exhilarated by his own ingenuity, reiterates such correspondences in the more discursive form of the cargo conceit, it is with an awareness that the connection is a preciously poetic, not a solidly historical one. Baako maintains a clear distinction: first, there is the original 'unelaborated system' where the departed 'intercede on behalf of those not yet dead', 'where the been-to has yet to make his appearance, and there is no intermediary between the earth below and the sky above, no visible flesh and blood intermediary at any rate'; second, the warped modern equivalent in which the been-to, 'the ghost in person returned to live among men ... fleshes out the
pattern' of the distant prototype. The unseen ancestor is visibly vulgarised into flesh, replacing a spiritualised materialism with a spiritless materialism. In the new version the community awaiting succour has shrunk to the 'narrower ... gaining circle' of the family, moved by a 'rockbottom kind of realism', the 'reality principle' of 'quick gains' (pp.223-4). 'There are two communities, really,' Juana later remarks of the modern order — the family and the larger society — 'and they don’t coincide' (p.275). As noticed earlier, Baako’s exposition cautions the reader that the cargoist twist is a matter of modern interpretation, not something inherent in the traditional scheme. Only in his madness does he literalise these parallel excursions into metaphor, trying to convince himself that the cargo mentality is genuinely compatible with African traditions and that, in disappointing the family, he has failed the whole community — a community which, in his first communication with Juana, the family is seen as ‘a concave mirror ... a closer, intenser, more intimate reflection of...’ (pp.145-6).

African religious faiths have no more nor less cargoist potential than any other faiths and what there is only becomes evident when put to certain pernicious uses. The closeness of the poetic analogies indicate how less discerning sensibilities than those of Naana and Baako could be deceived into finding unholy continuities between the two. In a faithless age the surviving religious emotions of awe and wonder are driven to find their correlative in modern technology’s glittering profane paradise of material objects. The novel’s ‘unconnected eyes’, unable to see beyond surfaces, crudely materialise the narrators’ metaphors, turning the returnees into reborn cargo-spirits. ‘Oh, they have made you a white man.... And you have come back to us, your own,’ cries Sissie Brempong. ‘The big man has come again.... The air where he has been is pure, not like ours’ (pp.81,85). Efua beholds her newly-arrived son as a semi-supernatural being, inquiring after his car ‘in a near-whisper filled with wonder and gladness’ (p.101). The demented fantasy of Bukari’s mother, who cannot wait for her son to ‘come again’ with his ‘many things’, is seen to transplant the Western world of commodities visited by the been-to into the spirit world: by the pseudo-logic of the new magical materialism, her unseasonable death is a sign of her impatience to get into these regions of purer air (p.132). Both Efua and the old woman at the airport act out the pathetic faith of Baako’s surreal nexologist, respectively squandering savings on house foundations to get back the return of the whole edifice and spending a ‘last cedi ... to come and welcome someone’s swollen peacock’ (p.85). ‘Kill the pigs, burn the crop and wait with faith,’ comments Baako. ‘Throw the last coins, brokeman’
These welcomers who come 'with a ceremony in their hearts' follow 'no mere laid-down ceremonies', however, but the promptings of private greed (p.88).

If the cargo mentality has anything at all to do with traditional faiths, then it is a perversion of very limited elements and is not an emanation from the whole. Rather, Armah prefers to lay it at the door of the West, out of which, in his tendentious fictional polemic, nothing good ever comes. Cargoism is another ex-colonial product designed by the West to make Africa more like and more tied to itself: its samples are skin-lightening creams, wigs, American jargon and neon advertising. It is another of the received, consumed ideas aimed by Euro-American powers at the markets of under-developed countries with a view to keeping these slavishly, magically dependent upon themselves by creating demands for products which the buyers can ill afford. In Naana’s mind, cargoist dependency is an inverted continuation of slavery in which white vendors and black buyers replace black salesmen ‘selling, gaining, spending till the last of our men sells the last woman to any passing white buyer and himself waits to be destroyed by this great haste to consume things we have taken no care nor trouble to produce’ (p.284).

Regrettably, the characters’ unthinking materialisation of the novel’s metaphors is a vice of which some Western commentators cannot be acquitted. If a too drastic dichotomy of the human and the divine, the spiritual and the material, leads to over-simplified distinctions between Naana’s ‘Old Africa’ and an unashamedly materialistic new one, an opposing critical tendency to take the figurative thinking of Naana’s dream and Baako’s cargo-mythology at their literal face value has resulted in the confused ‘spiritualisation’ of America, Baako’s exile, and, implicitly, the Westernised Africa which looks to America as if it were really the land of the ‘blest’. Rassner writes of Baako as ‘one who has been to Europe or America or the spirit land of the unknown’ as if these were really as interchangeable as cargo-credulities would have them, and Larson crassly concludes:

Out of her faith in the unseen world there can be hope for Baako too.... Naana’s thoughts suggest that for Baako, too, the only release will be exile to a place where there will be new eyes, new faces.... As it is suggested in Naana’s poignant dialogue with herself, Baako/Armah later left his native Ghana, and has since continued his writing in other African countries, the United States, and Europe.43

The passage of Naana’s human essence into the spirit world and Baako’s psychological-cum-spiritual crises during and after his American sojourn
are, of course, logically distinct experiences which involve quite different readings of 'spirituality'. Naana's final hopeful exodus is not meant to be, in some sense, Baako's solution too and its contrastive apposition with his slow return from madness makes its relevance to his predicament problematic. Certainly, it is not used to recommend analogically his return to Western exile in an earthly spiritual haven, fatuously identifiable with America. Richard Priebe's more subtle reading of affirmation into the ending also treads perilous paths, and Rosemary Colmer comes dangerously close to suggesting that America, in the novel, is the location of a higher spiritual consciousness and the source of Baako's spiritual values. Referring to Baako's 'gifts of vision', she writes:

In the novel, Baako has received these gifts during his training in the United States, but his family rejects such spiritual offerings…. In the United States he attained the expanded consciousness which separates him from other been-tos. It is his experience of the ghost world across the sea which is the source of his artistic inspiration, which proceeds from the clarity of his new expanded vision.

Although his American training gives Baako the technical means and power to express his vision, only in indirect and inverted ways can it be seen as the source of his inspiration. His doubtful visionary gift clearly has its origin in his mental suffering abroad: it appears to have been formed in opposition to America's material vulgarity and received its birth from the tension between his American training and his rejection of American values, instanced in his revulsion from the Americanised culture he finds on his return to Ghana. In their confusion of the material and the mythological, these critical misreadings — crudely in Larson's case, subtly and perhaps unintentionally in the others — fall into the trap of the very cargoist thinking which is the novel's target.

NOTES

1. Ayi Kwei Armah, *Fragments* (London: Heinemann, 1974). All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
6. Ibid., p.69.
7. Ibid., p.57.
8. Ibid., p.52.
9. Ibid., pp. 32, 52.
17. Ibid., pp.45-54.
20. Ibid., p.120.
23. Abraham, p.52.
27. Abraham, p.53.
32. Nketia, pp.48-49.
33. Mbiti, pp. 26, 82-84.
34. Nketia, p.189.
35. Mbiti, p.70.
37. Ibid., pp.200-203.
40. Abraham, p.73.
41. Ibid., p.75.
42. Rassner, 62.
The Pakistan Academy of Letters (Islamabad) selected Alamgir Hashmi's *My Second in Kentucky* (Vision, 1981) for its 1981-1982 (1402 A.H.) prestigious national literature prize, the Patras Bokhari Award. The award is named after the famed writer and scholar, the late A.S. (alias Patras) Bokhari, who made a lasting contribution to both English and Urdu letters. This is the first time that the award has been given for English poetry. The award was announced on 16 May 1985. *Kunapipi* wishes to congratulate Alamgir Hashmi.

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**Ezenwa-Ohaeto**

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**THE POET WHO WAS SILENT**

*(For Odia)*

On the stage  
His voice rang clear  
Prompting lusty cheers from the sheep-audience:  
The Chief Celebrant  
At the unscheduled ceremony,  
But he broke the magic circle,  
As he stepped beyond.  
Did he know  
Truth need fists  
When he unclasped his clenched fingers  
Choosing the company of lions?