

Ayi Kwei Armah's Novels of Liberation

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Abstract: This study, which will be in two parts, examines Armah's five novels: *Two Thousand Seasons*, *Why Are So Blest*, *The Healers*, *Osiris Rising* and *KMT* as novels of liberation. The study seeks to show that Armah's works mentioned are not just meant for only aesthetic purpose, but a kind of continuous and conscious struggle against the forces of slavery and colonisation in the past, and neo-colonialism and globalisation in the present, forces which have plagued the African continent for so many years. Therefore, these novels are meant to serve as a kind of liberation tools for African intellectuals in the continent itself and for those in the Diaspora. Combined, these novels trace the various stages of the struggle for complete independence from such forces. This study, which is part one of the whole theses, will focus on *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*.

Key words: History, liberation, reconstruction, resistance, slave

INTRODUCTION

With the publication of his first narrative, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) to *KMPT*, *The House of Knowledge* Ayi Kwei Armah has constantly focused on the pre colonial, colonial and post-colonial chequered history of the African continent. He, no doubt, has carved a controversial reputation among African literary critics. This reputation hinges on, what appears to some critics, his radical and uncompromising stance on some sensitive problems facing post-independent African countries. Aroused by indignation or moral enthusiasm, no African writer is more trenchant than he in criticising the African situation. While many critics laud his narrative style and technique, others like Frederiksen (1987), Wright (1992), focus and criticize him for, what (Brown, 2009), describes as his "searing novelistic indictments of postcolonial society". Others like Chinua Achebe see Armah to be too pessimistic. In spite of all these controversies, Armah's soaring commitment to good governance and the retrieval of African traditional values are unquestionable. Armah's novels, apart from their aesthetic beauty, are deliberately crafted as tools of resistance and liberation. They are, according to Amuta (1992), "novels of historical reconstruction". They are meant to fight what Armah considers to be the injustice, prejudice and atrocities perpetrated over the years by foreigners and also by Africans on Africans. Armah novels of liberation, like some of the world's oldest literature, are designed (in his words) to speak of "revolutionary changes in social, economic and political structures in a language that is as unambiguous as, though more refinedly poetic than, Marx's explosively alliterative

'expropriation of the expropriators' (Armah, 2007). According to Ogede (2000) With the exception of Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2007), no other African writer has confronted and dealt so honestly and courageously with the problem of contemporary Africa as Armah has. Armah's fight can be defined as a radical quest for a new direction that can change the fortunes of Africa and the black people. The purpose of this discourse is to examine Armah's first two novels of liberation (*Two Thousand Seasons* (TTS) and *The Healers*) and how they respond to the need to revitalize the struggle against colonial, cultural, religious, economic and social enslavement.

DISCUSSION

TTS provides a survey of the history of Africa from the past to the future. It chronicles the life of the African people confronted with cultural, religious, economic and social enslavement. This calls for a struggle for the liberation for the land, Anoa. The youth team up with the aged symbolized by Isanusi to confront and overcome the forces of enslavement. They find ways of realigning the drive and direction of society through actions. The story, according to Okpewho (1992) is an "appeal to future generations for continued watchfulness and an exhortation to that reciprocity and communalism that will ensure the permanence of 'the way' long after the chroniclers of it have passed away." In *The Healers*, Armah again reinvents the story of the fall of the Ashanti Empire to negotiate the scramble, portioning and destruction of African continent. To him, this calamity can be attributed to the inhumanity of the West and the internal

discordance. For Africans to benefit from reunification, they must work hard to repair the damage. Again this novel becomes the guide to a better future. Therefore, Armah's novels of liberation, "Two Thousand Seasons, The Healers, Why Are We So Blest, Osiris Rising and KMPT", are revolutionary in perspective, display a global or communal African memory or history, and exhibit a high sense of social mission and a strong relationship with the African community. The arrangement of these novels, in terms of setting and milieu, shows a kind of historical and chronological trend as far as the unjust events Armah fights against on the continent are concerned, in these novels Africa becomes the plot, character, theme and the situation and Armah's novelistic vision is to emancipate the continent from the forces of slavery, colonialism and neocolonialism by heightening the awareness of the African to the imperialist socioeconomic structures that cause social inequalities.

Critics have looked at the concept of liberation in literature from different perspectives. Literature and various writers have succeeded in creating a total picture of reality in responding to the challenges of society. This allows for a mode of thought and action in which a people's interest, values and perspectives take center stage. To Ngugi (2007) liberation in literature could be summed up as a "writer's imaginative leap to grasp reality" aimed at helping his "community's struggle for a certain quality of life free from all parasitic exploitative relations". In other words, literature becomes relevant if it can deal with the people's "daily struggle for the right and security to bread, shelter, clothes and song, the right of the people to the product of their sweat". Muzorewa (2007), the liberation theologian buttresses this point "...ours is urgent business, seeking to transform the world through liberating the down-trodden, starving, dying, the oppressed, by any means necessary". In effect liberation in literature challenges people, community and the continent to identify the positive elements in their heritage and inspires them to find solutions to their problems.

TTS is a fight not only to rehabilitate Africa's battered image but also to liberate it from slavery, disintegration, distortion and dislocation of its unique African cultural identity, which Armah calls "our way, the way". This novel is a reconstruction of the history of slavery on the African continent. Fraser (1980) contends that *TTS* is "The historical experience of the whole African people from the dawn of remembered history to the present day". In this novel, the author identifies himself with the black community and breaks away from the isolation which characterizes his first three postcolonial novels. Armah portrays the catastrophic cultural damage that the "predators and destroyers" cause to African culture with the introduction of slavery. Armah's criticism and condemnation of the major players

of this obnoxious and dehumanizing culture in Africa in this novel is often seen when the omniscient narrator takes over with his verbal vituperations:

Killers who from the desert brought us in the aftermath of Anoa's prophecy a choice of deaths; death of our spirit, the clogging destruction of our minds with their senseless religion of slavery. In answer to our refusal of this proffered death of our soul they brought our bodies slaughter. Killers who from the sea came holding death of the body in their right, the mind's annihilation in their left, shrieking fables of a white god and son unconceived, exemplar of their proffered, senseless suffering.

To Armah, "the religion of slavery" is alien to the African culture, a culture of reciprocity, but not one of dependence on the toils of others (slaves). This creed of slavery, introduced by the Arabs and the Caucasians with its associated debauchery, marks the commencement of the destruction of African individuality and culture-"death of our spirit and the mind's annihilation". On the converse, the historian, Akosua Adoma Perbi (2007), observes that slavery is not a cultural importation as Armah opines in *TTS*. She argues that in pre-colonial Ghana various conditions of voluntary and involuntary subordination and subjugation existed that was not only tantamount to, but approximated in certain ways the characteristics of Western slavery. For example, the practice of the commoditization of the slave existed in the pre-colonial era. Perbi's crucial historical observation is incongruous to Armah's. However, Perbi agrees with Armah that the characterization of a slave as a chattel was not part of the domestic Ghanaian slavery experience, "In Ghana the slave was regarded as a human being and was entitled to certain rights and privileges" (Perbi, 2007). Ogede (2000) posits, "In *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah depicts unambiguously the history of Arabs in Africa as one of debauchery, and the tales of exploitation, humiliation, and degradation caused by Arabs presence are intended to elicit Arab shame, not merely indignation". Armah's mammoth denunciation of this culture is again seen in the indignation with which the seer, Anoa, curses "any man, any woman who will press another human being into her service" because she (Anoa) is possessed by a deity "hating all servitude" (14). Armah continues his attack on slavery when Anoa poses the rhetorical question "Slavery-do you know what that is?" Anoa provides the answer herself:

Ah, you will know it. Two thousand seasons, a thousand going into it, a second thousand crawling maimed from it, will teach you everything about enslavement, the destruction of souls, killing the bodies, the infusion of violence into every breath, every drop, every morsel of sustaining air, your water, food. (17)

Armah recommends that the solution is to find “the forgotten way of our life, the living way,” (16) intermittently referred to as “the way, our way”, the culture of “reciprocity” (17). Over here, Armah is conceptualizing nothing new but reverberating the old Akan traditional notion of “Sankofa”. Literally translated, it means “it is not a taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot” (The Drum, 1995). Consequently, through the exaltation of the “Sankofa” model, Armah advocates the restoration and preservation of the people’s collective memory in order for them to move forward. The restitution of these African traditional cultural ideals then, becomes synonymous to the re-establishment of the true African identity, the undermining and ultimate overthrow of the implanted foreign dominance. In other words, Armah recognizes the value of the African culture as an element of the resistance to foreign domination and consequently cultural liberation. “The machine gun may have chased the enemy, but there is a terminal cancer...” (Muzorewa, 2007) which, in Armah’s estimation must be treated and healed (culturally cleansed) to bring the continent to wholeness. This is in consonance with Amilcar Cabral (2007) thesis on cultural liberation when he observes that:

A people who are free from foreign domination will not be culturally free unless, without underestimating the importance of positive contributions from the oppressor’s culture and other cultures, they return to the upwards paths of their own culture...If imperialist domination has the vital need to practice cultural oppression, national liberation is necessarily an act of culture.

In his novels of liberation, Armah’s pessimism is completely drowned. Regardless of the hostility, debauchery, and the threat to life, he constantly reminds his readers that the situation is not hopeless. Consequently, Lazarus (1990) strongly argues that *TTS* portrays another significant change or break in direction from Armah’s earlier novels. He adds that:

Two Thousand Seasons explicitly repudiates the premise of irremediability. It insists that what it calls “our way-the “African way”- has not been obliterated by the centuries of foreign domination but only repressed. The narrative voice of the prologue represents itself as belonging integrally to two concentric populations: that of the African people at large and that of the artist-visionaries who bear the historical wisdom of these African people (Lazarus, 1990).

This is the strength of these novels. Ayi Kwei Armah’s disdain for the institution of slavery and its debauchery is seen in the cluster of oral rhetorical devices

he uses as a spur to commence the narration of the massacre of the Arab predators by the African women. The opening rhetorical question, “Who asks to hear the mention of the predators’ name?” is devoid of animosity, but the subsequent ones, “Who would hear again the cursed names of the predator chieftains? With which stinking name shall we begin?” (21) are loaded with so much loath.

Also, Armah handles the issue of the complete and deliberate distortion of Africa’s history, identity and culture (“our way”) with the same fervor he attacks slavery:

The air everywhere around is poisoned with truncated tales of our origins. That is also part of the wreckage of our people. What has been cast abroad is not a thousandth of our history, even if its quality were truth. The people called our people are not the hundredth of our people. But the haze of this foul world exists to wipe out knowledge of our way, the way. These mists are here to keep us lost, the destroyers’ easy prey.

Just as the mists (metaphorically the distortions) are to keep the Africans lost and alienated, so does Armah take on the invidious task of deliberately crafting his novels to liberate the African mind from these purposeful and malevolent distortions of an enviable history, identity and culture. *TTS* is a conscious fight to correct these distortions and this is seen in the narrator’s reminder and strong caution, “Beware the destroyers,” followed by the recalling and recounting of Africa’s rich history and cache of knowledge. Fraser (1980) confirms this notion when he states that Armah’s concern in *TTS* is “...to provide an overwhelming counteraction to the colonialist distortion of history”.

Lazarus (1990) also reinforces this notion of Armah’s reconstruction and recuperation of the African history to cleanse and liberate it from European ideology, dominance and distortions: “It is aimed, rather, toward restoring to Africans the right to construct their own truths in accordance with their own needs”.

In this *TTS*, Armah admonishes “the destroyers and the predators” for the seed of discord and the disintegration of the African society. They create the “askaris” and the “zombis”, a group which clings to and worships the culture of servitude: a group which has lost “the way, our way”, “the culture of reciprocity”:

There were others, perfect complement to these ostentatious cripples. These were the askaris. But how shall we explain their disease? Let sleep and death again give us an image. The mind: that is the soul’s conciliator with the body, guide to keep the awakened body and the soul together. In sleep, in death, body and soul are apart. The body may fall

victim to attack. The body may fall victim to an alien conqueror. The mind can also suffer attack, the mind can also fall to conquest.

The conciliatory tone of the narrator marks a significant and obvious shift from the severe criticism of the askaris, as witnessed in the novel earlier. In reference to the askaris, Ogede (2000) is right in arguing that Armah's "...combined tone of commiseration and mockery is intended to prick the conscience of these defectors, urging them to wake up to the reality of their oppression..." In the crusade to liberate the African, Armah leaves no one out, not even the defectors. In his fight against the disintegration- and to liberate the African mind which has been under siege for thousands of years- he reminds the African that "we the black people are one people".

From a global African perspective, Armah's fight and condemnation of the forces of slavery, distortions and disintegration is seen in his array of characters whose names cut across the entire continent of Africa. Names such as Isanusi, Kamusu, Juma, Kamara, Idawa, Mokili, Soyinka, Badu and Pili, attest to his effort to make his fight against the forces of destruction that characterized the period (setting) of his novel, *TTS*, an African agendum. Ogede (2000) reiterates this point in the following terms:

Armah is concerned primarily with a communal event, and the names of his revolutionaries, who are chosen from all parts of Africa, from myth and history reflect the originality of Armah's vision: the pan-Africanist formation he wishes to promote and his inventiveness.

Except in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments*, the novels of liberation, tend to have a global African, rather than a Ghanaian one, as far as slavery, dislocation and cultural alienation are concerned. Therefore, in the novels of resistance and liberation, Armah adopts a pan-African approach to the decolonization of Africa. The flight from Arab slavery leads to the migration beyond the forest belt and to Anoa. Anoa marks the African's first encounter with an extreme form of slavery under Europeans, whom Armah describes in this narrative as the "white destroyers". Isanusi is given the onerous responsibility of outlining the insatiable demands of the European slavers:

The first wish of the white men is this: they have our land, of the beauty...These metals it is the white men's wish to take away from us,... 'This is the white men's second wish,' Isanusi continued. 'They have been told of the forest here and of the grasslands; of the birds and animals we have roaming the land. It is the white men's wish to have

us help them kill these birds for food. The elephants they say...

There is a third wish the white men have made. Land they want from us, but not the way guests ask the use of land. The white men want...

Listen to their fourth wish. The white say they have heard we have many people here- too many, they say- and that our women's fertility is reported a wonder among them. It is their wish to take numbers of our people away from us. They say these numbers would in the new places beyond the sea work on land as fertile as ours here...

The fourth demand echoes the idea of the obnoxious Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade (referred to as the "fearful holocaust" in the narrative. It is the fourth demand that draws groans from the people of Anoa and sparks the resistance, which leads to the European brutalities and atrocities that characterized the period. In *TTS*, Armah exposes and condemns the whites, of both Arab and Christian origins, for perpetrating the heinous crime of slavery on the African continent. As a result of Armah's extreme condemnation of the whites, both Fraser (1980) and Lazarus (1990) have criticized and described *TTS* as a "racialist novel". While Fraser is a bit charitable in his criticism, Lazarus is uncompromising. Reacting to Fraser's stand, Lazarus (1990) states that:

...I would argue that the critique of racial essentialism that I brought to bear against *Why Are We So Blest?*... is equally applicable to the "mythological" *Two Thousand Seasons*. In both tests, Armah's racial essentialism is not clarifying, but instead simplifying and distorting, and not a spur to radicalism, but instead a soporific, whose ideological consequences are extremism, fatalism, and compounded mystification".

Although Fraser and Lazarus have made immense contributions to the interpretations of Armah's works, their conclusions that *TTS* is a racist novel are too rash. Armah's fierce confrontation of the dehumanizing institution of slavery, an institution that was born out of racism more than an economic desire, is a novelty in African Literature. No African writer has attacked and exposed the racist institution of slavery thoroughly in a single novel as Ayi Kwei Armah has done. His blunt and frank confrontation of slavery in *TTS* will definitely leave any white reader of the novel with a sense of uncomfortable remorse. But for any critics to accuse Armah for condemning the obnoxious racist institution of slavery is not only unfortunate, but amounts to calling any Jew who severely condemns the Jewish holocaust in the Second World War a Nazi. There is also no mystification and distortion about Armah's agendum in this novel and his other novels of liberation. Armah's

objective in *TTS* is very clear, as Ode Ogede (2000) rightly articulates:

By presenting in his writing a sense of the horrors, degradation, and humiliation of the experience of slavery, Armah participates in the process of racial re-engineering of the black person. He urges every one of us to keep alive the memory of that most difficult of periods in black history, and the sense of the past, he seems intent upon demonstrating, is essential to the future direction of society.

In the reconstruction and rehabilitation of African history in Africa, Armah does not criticize only Arabs and Europeans, who are historically said to be the major protagonists in the slave trade, but also some Africans. Armah condemns the greed and the major role some African kings, especially King Koranche, played in the trade:

For a cascade of infamy this is: the names and doings of those who from struggling to usurp undeserved positions as caretakers, in the course of generations imposed themselves on a people too weary of strife to think of halting them. Let us finish speedily with their mention. The memory of these names is corrosive. It poison sears our lips. Odunton, Bentum, Oko,

The account of the execution of the askari by those who migrate into the forest, Armah's bitter condemnations of King Atobra of Poano, king Koranche of Anoa, his courtiers and his spokesman Otumfur, and the trapping and execution of the mercenary killer Bofu by Insanusi are indications that Armah is not prejudiced in his reconstruction of slavery.

Ayi Kwei Armah advocates that Africans must see themselves as agents of liberation and change to "the way, our way." This is why in all his novels of liberation there is the very visible role of the agents of liberation. In *TTS*, the agents of liberation from the "mind's annihilation" are the Fundis, who according to Anyidoho (1999), are "those visionary artists and seers who have on them the burden of guiding society even through the most difficult periods into the future." The work of the Fundis in the novel epitomizes Armah's resistance to the institution of slavery and consequently the consolidation of colonialism. The plethora of peoples from sub-Saharan Africa which form the movement for emancipation, according to Okpewho (1992) is a testimony of Armah's African communal agendum. His fight against slavery in this novel is modeled on the Mau Mau style of struggle for independence in Kenya portrayed in Ngugi's *Weep Not Child*. The bush and the forest of Africa become the sanctuary for the African fighters led by Isanusi. Sometimes the agents of liberation from slavery are as

ruthless as the agents of servitude themselves, as portrayed in the women's revolt and the siege of the stone palace at Poano. However, the violence exhibited by the agents of liberation in Armah's novels of liberation is not "violence for its own sake, but as a means of liberation" (Ogede, 2000). The percipient Isanusi captures the significant role and what he terms the destiny of the revolutionary fundi as a negotiator of emancipation in the following words:

It is our destiny not to flee the predator's thrust, not to seek hiding places from the destroyers left triumphant; but turn against the destroyers, and bending all our soul against their thrust, turning every stratagem of the destroyers against themselves, destroy them. That is our destiny: to end destruction-utterly; to begin the highest, the profoundest work of creation, the work that is inseparable from our way, inseparable from the way.

In the expressions "...but turn against the destroyers" and "turning every stratagem of the destroyers against themselves, destroy them," Armah projects the ideas of resistance and liberation respectively. *TTS* is a rehabilitation of Africa's history and Ogede (2000) contends that in the novel "Armah evokes a realistic world and makes clear that his goal is to teach important human lessons". It is a narrative in which Armah portrays his verbal felicity and persuasive eloquence.

Contiguously, the historical novel *The Healers* continues Armah's struggle to purge the African society of slavery (this time, domestic slavery), colonialism and exploitation. Ogede (2000) posits that although Armah's thrust of thinking (emancipation of the African) in *TTS* remains the same in *The Healer*, the latter marks a difference and demonstrates a momentous contribution to Armah's novelistic vision and sociopolitical liberation of Africa. Ogede (2000) continues that:

... it is in *The Healers* that Armah offers a blueprint for decolonization of all oppressed societies, a blueprint which looks beyond the attainment of political independence and confronts wider and urgent issues of national reconstruction as prerequisites for pan-African unification and freedom.

It exposes and condemns the heinous cruelty that is also associated with this form of slavery. For example, both the people of Assen and Ashanti cruelly sacrifice slaves to the sacred river Nana Bosom Pra:

At the words "Accept, accept," strong men cast him forcefully down and a sword his throat. Blood poured out to redden the river. His weighted body

was flung into the water where, dragged down by its heavy stone, it disappeared from sight.

Armah insinuates that such cruelty is borne out of the culture of servitude that the deceased African society inherited from the “destroyers and the predators” during the thousands of years of manipulations portrayed in *TTS*. Such violence, according to Armah, has originally not been part of the African society, as the Healer, Damfo tells Densu on the second day of his initiation:

“The leaner wishing to be a healer does not use violence against human beings. He does not fight.”
“The principle sounds good,” Densu said.

Taking the violent reaction of the Fundis into consideration, this principle appears to have been contravened then in *TTS* because the Fundis are not remarkably different from the Healers. We can even argue that a Healer is a Fundi. However, Densu’s further expansion of the principle of respect for life as he argues with Damfo is significant and exonerates the Fundis:

“Suppose a man turns killer. Is he not more like a beast then? Or if he invades your house, flashing a weapon?” Densu asked.
“As one learning to be a healer,” Damfo asked, “what would you do in such a case?”
“I would stop him.”
“Violently?”
“Violently.”
“Without killing him?”
“If that is possible.”
“If it’s impossibl?”
“I would kill him,” said Densu.
“That goes against the rule,” the healer said.
“Not against its meaning, I don’t think.”
“What do you think is its meaning?” the healer asked.
“Respect for life.”
“How can you kill out of respect for life?”
“If what I kill destroys life,” Densu answered.

Densu draws Damfo’s consideration to another principle, the rule of self-preservation, which in decisive situations overshadows the principle of respect for life. The principle of self-preservation in the novels of liberation is a broader and a burning conception which encompasses the preservation of one’s freedom, community and socio-cultural identity. It is this code which propels the dissentious agents of liberation. Consequently, in the light of the brutal and hostile entry of the predators and the destroyers in the *TTS*, the Fundis are justifiably right in sacrificing the principle of

reverence for life in order to preserve their community and their socio-cultural identity.

However, the major focus of the novel, *The Healers*, is Armah’s fight against another disturbing occurrence on the continent, colonialism, the bouleversement that fuels the desire for more slaves and the total disintegration (partitioning) of the people on the continent. The colonialists feed on the discordance in the society, the dissipating wars between the Asantes and the Fantes. Asamoa Nkwanta observes this when he tells Damfo, “...these petty wars in which the army gets sent to fight other black people are waste”. The domestic discordance, a product of the wars makes the society disharmonious and vulnerable for external assault as exposed the novel. The fragmentation is a disease as pointed out by Damfo, “When different groups within what should be a natural community clash against each other that is also disease. That is why healers say that our people, the way we are now divided into petty nations, are suffering from a terrible disease” (98). Here, Damfo is referring to the partitioning of Africa and the rise of nation states in the African continent. Consequently, it can be surmised that apart from the internal disunity, colonialism contributed greatly to this perennial disease. In this novel, the agents of liberation, the Healers led by “mystic visionary protagonists Densu and Damfo” (Amuta, 1992), are also a more mentally conscious group. The significant role of the Healers as agents of liberation in this novel is to raise the consciousness of both the Ashantis and Fantis to their consanguineous ancestry as part of the healing process. Significantly, both ethnic groups sacrifice to the same sacred river, Nana Bosom Pra, without understanding the deeper meaning or the religious significance of the river as a symbolic and important connection between them (the flow of their common history). This is what Fraser (1980) terms as “the original integral thrust of a united people”, which according to Armah, predates the history of colonialism in Ghana and Africa. It is the onerous responsibility of the agents of liberation (the Healers) to draw the consideration of the warring parties to their common ancestry and the necessity to amalgamate against the external adversary who exploits the lapses in their memory and the fragmentation of the society. *The Hearlers* can be described as struggle to reunite the black people. This is realized when Damfo counterposes Asamoa Nkwanta in their conversation, “If the past tells you the Akan and the black people were one centuries ago, perhaps it also tells you there is nothing eternal about our present divisions. We were one in the past. We may come together again in the future”. The thought of this future unity is the catalyst for the work of the Healer. The unique function of the Healers and how effectively they

execute their responsibility are conveyed in the question Asamoah Nkwanta asks Damfu, "What exactly do you healers do that so frightens the whites?" and his (Asamoah's) subsequent contemplation, "I fail to understand why they fear unarmed women and men more than they fear us warriors" (ibid). The inquisitorial indagation itself portrays the fearful warrior's admiration for the agents of emancipation. Damfu's response to the question shows how resourceful and instrumental the agents of liberation (Healers) are:

...We greet them, and ask: 'Brother, why do you sweat so? Do you people have such a great quarrel with other black people that you must become beasts of burden for the whites? Would you do this if you were allowed to choose? Or are you doing this so some chief can grow a bit fatter than he already is? When last did you eat? And the pay you were promised, have you received it? that's all we do. We talk with people. We remind them of who they are. We open their eyes to what is happening to them. Sometimes they just drop their burdens and disappear. Often. (305)

Although Damfu appears simplistic and unassuming in his admittance of the importance of the vocation of the Healers as agents of liberation, his use of the word "Often" betrays how instrumental and influential they are. His answer, therefore, is a premeditated employment of an understatement (meiosis) to achieve an effect. The viperfish and unstinting denunciation of the indigenous, over-exploitative and viruliferous kings, quislings of the colonialists who exploit the situation to aggrandize themselves continues in this novel as well. Armah demonstrates that his sword cuts two ways. He reproofs their selfish interest and their promptness to vend the land and to abuse the people for nothing but "booze". Damfu takes a swipe at the ignominious and over exploitative Africans (chiefs) with the expression, "Or are you doing this so that some chief can grow a bit fatter than he already is?" (305). This inculpatory remark belies Armah position as far the institution is concerned. The extension and amplification of his confrontation with the chieftaincy tradition is further revealed in the interlocution between Damfu and Asamoah Nkwanta:

"Yes, no slaves, no king," Damfu said, his voice even.
"No slaves, no kings," Asamoah Nkwanta repeated to himself, incredulously. "What would there be then?"
"People," Damfu said. "Human beings who respect each other."
The laughter left Asamoah Nkwanta's face. "You think impossible thoughts, healer. Our people have always had kings and slaves."
"Not always," Damfu said

"When have the Asante not had kings and slaves?"

"Are our people the Asante only?"

"What do you mean?"

"The Asante are part of the Akan. Akan in turn come from something larger."

First, we detect the conspicuity of Armah's antagonism and contemptibility towards the chieftaincy institution which is equally articulated in *TTS*. He sees it as a manipulative and parasitic institution which depends solely on slavery to survive. Again, he sees royalty as a power diseased which in turn affects the people. His resentment towards royalty is borne out of the incrustation of their obnoxious behaviors over the years and the conspiratorial role they played in the colonization process. In Armah's African egalitarian revolution such a dependent class, whose authority grows out of contempt for the people, has no place. What is expected is equality and respect for all categories of people, and this respect must be reciprocal as indicated by Damfo, "Human beings who respect each other." Olaniyan (2009) also pontificates the fact that "Whether the target in the anticolonial novel is a colonizer or a native, the attack implies a restorative act against a colonially induced inferiority complex." Armah's attacks on chieftaincy and royalty is appreciated in light of certain developments in contemporary Ghana, where the institution is saddled with disputes, internal wrangling, manipulations and factionalism, which often result in brutal wars and assassinations as in the case of the Ya Naa of the Dagbon traditional area and the perennial Bawku feud. Chieftaincy has not discarded its cancerous nature. It has become a volcano whose frequent eruptions adversely affect the political landscape of African countries. Secondly, Damfo's education and cultivation of the carriers (the peasants) and Asamoah Nkwanta, a powerful warlord and a man of towering social stature is a significant move and portrays the kind of revolution Armah envisages, an African revolution that is all inclusive. Armah does not propagate an exclusive peasant nor proletariat revolution but a communal one that considers all classes of people. To him, the input of the peasant to the struggle is as vital as that of the elite. The revolution must be more communal if it is to tackle comprehensively Africa's problems. This demonstrates that Armah moves away from whole sale adaptation of the Russian concept of Marxism. This is Armah's conception of the African revolution, and therefore Africanization of Marxism.

The Healer, like *TTS*, is crafted as a gizmo of confrontation and with an elaborate global African agenda. The notion of collective aspiration superseding that of the individual seen in *TTS* is foregrounded in this novel as well. Lazarus (1990) posits, "Two Thousand

Seasons, as in *The Healers*, the question of postcolonialism is eschewed in favor of the larger question of African responses to all forms of alien domination, historically and in conjuncture of the present". The crafting of *The Healers* can be defined as the crystallization and objectification of Armah's cravings as a healer. His aim is to use the novel to initiate the process of the utmost work of a healer, an effort that will stimulate the black people and draw their attention to the verity that they belong to a single population: Ebibirman, "the community of black people" (99). This marks the restorative power of the novel and a shift from the pessimism that we witness in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. Consequently, *The Healers* is crafted to be more pedagogical and very provocative. It draws on the rich history of Africa to educate and heighten the awareness of the black community. In this direction, the narrative in the expressions of Damfo (the visionary Healer), takes our minds back to "find the truths of the past, come back to the present, and look toward the future" (204). To Armah, reaching to the past will forever be significant in reshaping Africa's future. Armah reintroduces the "sankofa" concept in *The Healers*. The intellectuality of the narrative is unquestionable. It, therefore, continues the counterdiscoursing and the struggle in *TTS* and shows that Armah is one of the most unwavering African novelists in terms of his novelistic vision as our scrutiny of his three other novels of liberation will also establish. *The Healers* is a significant African novel in terms of its revelations. It is not a cartoon as Lindfors (1992) erroneously asserts. It is a novel that lends itself to immense and consequential historical facts. *The Healers* is one of most imaginative and stimulating African artistic productions designed to contribute to the African anticolonial nationalism and aimed at convalescing Africa's image.

CONCLUSION

Indeed both *TTS* and *The Healers* attest not only to the fact that they are novels of liberation but that they provide answers to the colonial, cultural, religious, economic and social enslavement which have plagued the continent. There is no qualm that the two novels are premeditated instruments of resistance, change, transformation and liberation. They are counterdiscourses to colonialism and Europeanism. Armah demonstrates through these novels that he is a revolutionary and belligerent insurgent, who intends to utilize his works to unchain Africa from the shackles of imperialism. This motivating force behind his exertion is elucidated in a

dialogue with Professor Kofi Anyidoho during the Fifth Du Bois-Padmore-Nkrumah Memorial Lectures. In that interview, Armah reveals, "I wanted to work in the liberation movement. So I dropped my academic aspiration and pretensions to be a writer and set out trying to be a real liberator." This disclosure is very shocking and Armah himself realizes this when he says, "When people read my C.V. they can't believe that I want to change the world." He later admits in the same interview that it was only when he failed to become a bona fide liberator that he bowed to the writing of narratives, "I settle down to being a reactionary. That is why I decided to write novels." These revelations validate the fact that Armah's sturdy drive to employ his novels discussed as instruments of change or transformation is not inadvertent. They are radical and eloquent intellectual expressions of the author's thoughts and desires which he formerly wanted to accomplish through the barrel of a gun. Perhaps, the lexis of Professor Kofi Anyidoho during the Fifth Du Bois-Padmore-Nkrumah Lectures will better sum up Armah and his novels of liberation:

In his fourth novel *Two Thousand Seasons* he presents to us among other things, the life of what he describes there as the life of a fundi, the seer, those visionary artists and seers who have on them the burden of guiding society through the most difficult periods into the future. It seems clear to me that he has chosen to lead the life of a fundi and guide us into the craftsmanship of the soul (Kakraba, 2001)

Undeniably Armah's novels of liberation are truly works of a very great fundi, whose exclusive aim is to guide Africans into "the craftsmanship of the soul," "the way, our forgotten way", "the culture of reciprocity" and an African renaissance. Accordingly, his novels of liberation have a propensity to be curative in nature and as Ode Ogede (2000) precisely points out, "Armah's later novels (*Two Thousand Seasons*, *The Healers*, and *Osiris Rising*) ultimately backward glances as strategies for attaining racial renewal". He is an activist and one of the purveyors of Marxism in African Literature, whose writings robustly address the problems of post colonial Africa. His works can be described as the handicrafts of a pan African Marxist propagandist flavoured with negritudinal sentiments and designed to overthrow imperialism from the African continent. His novels of liberation are counterdiscourses meant to radically jolt and reform the consciousness of the African in the decolonization and the instauration processes. Summarily, the novels of liberation are intellectual strife to redirect the African's attention on what is the truth.

They are also a struggle to restore confidence and belief in what is exclusively African.

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