CHAPTER V

TWO THOUSAND SEASONS:  
“Our Way, the Way”

Armah’s first three novels, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Fragments* and *Why Are We So Blest?* attempt a critical survey of the post-Independence scene. These three novels deal with local realities and the alienation of the individual. Many critics attacked Armah for depicting rotten aspects of African culture in a pessimistic way. Armah has answered some of the questions raised about his art by writing two novels which attempt to put the accent on the positive side. To do this, he had to retreat into history, first into all imaginative past stretching back a full millennium in *Two Thousand Seasons*, then into the well-documented events a century ago that led to the downfall of the Ashanti empire, as recreated in *The Healers*. In the words of Bernth Lindfors, “At a moment when other African writers were insisting that the creative artist come to terms with contemporary African realities, Armah appeared to be swimming against the tide by immersing himself in times gone by. Yet his was a Janus-like view, for it looked forward at the same time that it fixed its gaze on the past. In fact, these novels are really more concerned with tomorrow than with yesterday or today. They are visionary myths rather than historical chronicles.”
Armah's fourth novel Two Thousand Seasons and his fifth novel The Healers are an attempt at the re-creation of history. As novels of historical reconstruction these two attempt to recreate the essence of pre-colonial African society in the light of contemporary experience. Both novels are set in West Africa — The Healers quite specifically in nineteenth century Ghana, Two Thousand Seasons more generally in a green area bounded on one-side by a great desert and on the other by the great sea. The people living in this peaceful sub-Saharan area are subjected to attacks from hostile strangers who invade their territory taking advantage of their trustfulness, generosity, and the internal political divisions that make them easy prey to foreign aggression. In other words, both novels present Africa as a victim of outside forces. These depredations of the past are responsible for the chaos that appears in Africa at present. Armah is of the view that only by properly understanding the past and the present that the Africans will collectively be able to tackle the problems of the future like how to get the victim back on his feet, how to raise the materially oppressed and downtrodden, how to heal the spiritually sick. Instead of merely enumerating various symptoms of the colonial disease, as he had done in his first three novels, Armah now wants to work toward effecting a cure. In his last two novels, Armah focuses on the conflicts and tensions in society at the same time as he draws his inspiration from traditional African art-forms.
Two Thousand Seasons marks a striking change from Armah's earlier novels in the sense that the emphasis on individual suffering is shifted in this novel to communal suffering and cultural regeneration. The novel covers one thousand years of African history and attains epic proportions in the compressed meanings it suggests, descriptions of battles it contains, and its distinctive use of folk mythology. As Kofi Anyidoho points out, "Some of the sensations Armah's Two Thousand Seasons generates by reinterpreting and recreating historical and contemporary Africa through a system of ideas, images, and symbols are carefully structured into a visionary ideal." The novel becomes an epic in the resonances it brings in. It is mythopoetic in texture, historical in perspective, and continental in its bearings.

Two Thousand Seasons reviews the old mythic traditions and furnishes new hopes for a better future. The novel embodies Armah's profound concern for his people, his race, and his continent. According to Hugh Webb, "Armah's historical novel Two Thousand Seasons, stands out as the most achieved work (in the sense of total unified form) within the present corpus of Anglophone African literature. It represents a significant instance of the harmony of literary form that can be created by an artistic design uniting structure and meaning, ideology and performance. Two Thousand Seasons is clearly a work that is adapted to the articulation of great alternatives."
describes the novel as Armah's literary "warfare" directed at the articulation of values that will enable the African people to move forward, collectively and fruitfully.

The title of the novel is based on an imagined prophesy of the female visionary, Anoa, who has spoken of a thousand seasons and another thousand seasons: "a thousand seasons wasted wandering amazed along alien roads; another thousand spent finding paths to the living way" (xv). The description makes it clear that the work is aimed at a reshaping of the meanings of historical experience, which will help rescue the integrity of Africans alienated from "the way" by centuries of Arab and European destruction. The seer-narrator of the Prologue speaks of the "remade" we are "pointers to the way, the way of remembrance, the way knowing purpose" (xv). In the words of Chinyere Nwahunanya, "Armah's approach to African history in this novel to believe that his vision in Two Thousand Seasons is a vision of the ideal, especially when we consider the central position he accords the ethos of "the way" as a guiding principle in precolonial Africa, and which could be exploited in charting a new course for Africa. Armah's vision is thus both backward-looking and forward-looking." Armah's intention is to ascertain the essence of this ideal in relation to Africa's contemporary problems. He situates these problems within the context of a comparison of what life was before colonialism and what it was during and after colonialism.
It is very much clear that the way of purpose rests on a racial imperative. Armah says that those who have been destroyed know only "whiteness" but "of our blackness they have yet to learn" (xvi). From this statement it becomes apparent that the novel incorporates a specific, collective pan-African vision of the essential oneness of black people. Armah suggests that there was an African ideal before the advent of Arab and European colonialism, an idea that sustained precolonial Africa. However, the experience of colonialism wipes this out and replaces it with an individualism cultivated through the divisive practices and selfish thoughts provoked by the whites. Armah's recapitulation and projection of his vision is therefore his own way of establishing "where the rain began to beat us," as Achebe does in his rural novels. For, as he puts it in Two Thousand Seasons, "A people losing sight of origins are dead" (xiii). We notice that the narrator's role is not only that of a visionary truth-teller but also that of a racial healer. The larger aim is "to find our larger, our healing self, we the black people" (9). At the end of the prologue, it is made clear that the novel is not to be seen as a manifesto of disillusionment:

Leave the killer's spokesman, the predator's spokesman, leave the destroyer's spokesman to cast contemptuous despair abroad. That is not our vocation. That will not be our utterance. (xvii)
Armah is aware that the various European attempts to falsify African history are an integral part of the efforts to destroy the African social essence, "the way": "That is also part of the wreckage of our people. What has been east abroad is not a thousandth of our history, even if its quality were truth... the haze of this fouled world exists to wipe out knowledge of our way, the way. These mists are here to keep us lost..." (2). Armah's mission is, then, to clear these mists about the African past by digging into the ethos sustaining that past. He approaches his task, in Wole Soyinka's words, as "the visionary reconstruction of the past for the purposes of a social redirection." Armah digs into the past, retrieves an almost lost gem, "the way", and presents it as the most viable of options of the future. It is a call for a return to a lost African Eden.

The most significant formal aspect of Armah's work is the fact that this tale of Two Thousand Seasons is told in the collective voice. Armah has introduced an African tradition of oral narrative in this novel. The voice of the speaker includes the authorial voice. The speaker shares the group experience with his communal audience. Isidore Okpewho says, "In Two Thousand Seasons Armah gives due acknowledgement to the power and charm of African oral tradition." This device allows Armah to shape his novel to suit the collective, racial response at which it is aimed. The first person plural "we" is the operative word in the novel. The use of the plural voice helps Armah in
the process of re-assessment of centuries of experience by means of a native standpoint.

Trapped now in our smallest self, we repositories of the remembrance of the way violated, we, portion that sought the meaning of Anoa's utterance in full and found another home on this same land, we, fraction that crossed mountains, journeyed through forests, shook off destruction only to meet worst destruction, we, people of the fertile time before these schisms, we, life's people, people of the way, trapped now in our smallest self, that is our vocation: to find our larger, our healing self, we, the black people (9).

Two Thousand Seasons aims at decolonizing the mind of the oppressed. The first part of the novel covers a mass of humanity and the second part is limited to a core of militant liberators. The collective voice of "we" helps Armah to place the action of the novel outside the frame of the western concept of time. He presents each year in terms of two seasons - dry and wet: 'But why should we make an unending remembrance of drought and rain, the mere passage of seasons?' (6) It provides an occasion for Armah to study critically the history of one thousand years of Africa. The recapitulation of two thousand seasons, or one millennium, helps to unravel the different phases of the confrontation. It is vital to the success of Armah's work that Africans should see that "we are not a people of yesterday. Do they ask how
many single seasons we have flowed from our beginnings till now? We shall point them to the proper beginning of their counting” (1).

In this broad time-frame, the mythical voice of Anoa integrates and reinforces the action of the novel linking all the generations of two thousand seasons. According to the legend, Anoa, even as a young girl, was gifted with visions of the future which she attempted to share with her people. Here is Anoa's foreboding the future predicament of a whole people:

Two thousand seasons: a thousand you will spend descending into abysses that would stop your heart and break your mind merely to contemplate. Two thousand seasons: a thousand dry, a thousand moist. (16)

The portrayal of “the way” delineates the course of action which the plural voice of “we” and Anoa’s utterance have set before the community as its goal. The need of the situation is to recapture “the way” of the people which they had lost because of both external and internal reasons. “The way” defines the mental attitude of a collective psyche and the culture of a community besides showing the way for the future. The narrator says that the way of the oppressors is the path of crime and violence. Whereas the way of the African people is generosity and fertility. The way is opposed to fragmentation, and the two important facets of the way are creation and connectedness:
Our vocation goes against all unconnectedness. It is a call to create the way again, and where even the foundations have been assaulted and destroyed, where restoration has been made impossible, simply to create the way. (8)

The road of the white destroyers is opposite to the way of the people.

The destroyers take. That is their way. They know nothing of reciprocity. The road to death – that is their road. (7)

Thus the group concept is symbolized in the collective voice of “we” and Anoa’s utterance, and the way of the people determines the basic structure and tenor of the novel.

The strategy in *Two Thousand Seasons* seems to be to take the longest possible view by moving backwards in time to that distant point when an alien civilization first impinged upon African existence. The novel is largely a condemnation of privileges that have infiltrated traditional African society under corrupt foreign influences. Armah begins his reconstruction with the implied thesis that in the beginning all black African people were one. This primordial unity resulted in the cultivation of a sense of the community and humane values. The precolonial African society into which the Arab and European invaders stepped was therefore peaceful, congenial, productive, and rich. Ime Ikiddeh suggests that by going back to the nature of the society before the Arab invasion, Armah is attempting to answer one central
question: What are the roots of the African tragedy? While answering this question, Armah traces the historical experience of the Akan from the precolonial to the colonial era, pointing out the various forces that endangered the society's disintegration.

The plural voice of "we" in the first four chapters involves a shared tale and communal experience ranging from the rule of women—"the time of fertility" to the patriarchal society. The first part encompasses Anoa's warning about the loss of "the way" and the long epic journey of the people in search of a "new home" and also the betrayal by the "ostentatious cripples," the blacks, who support the "white destroyers". The blacks are driven away from the desert. But in their new land, the blacks encounter another powerful enemy — "the destroyers from the sea."

The struggle against the whiteness of destruction and the sense of alienation are depicted in the second part comprising the last three chapters. The struggle for liberation is picturised in terms of mental and physical regeneration. The use of violence in the process is real and at the same time symbolic. It is carried out by a small group of revolutionaries inspired by the healers. The healer's work of inspiration is psychological and hence symbolic. The revolutionaries resort to rightful violence for liberation from the all pervading influence of the whiteness of destruction.
The story starts with a wistful memory of peaceful and congenial land, so welcoming and giving. The land is totally unaware of the demonic intent of the Arabs who come seeking hospitality. Armah calls the Arabs “predators” saying that they first came out of the desert in the guise of parasitic beggars. After gaining strength from their African hosts who are by nature noble, hospitable, and charitable, they turned their innate fury against their hosts, enslaving them. The desert predators have other ulterior motives unknown to the hospitable blacks. The minds of the predators are debased by a perverted religion, and for their self-gratification they are only capable of depravity and destruction. Armah calls the way of the predators as the way of annihilation, of absolute obliteration of all that is good and creative. For them:

Force is goodness. Fraud they call intelligence... In their communion there is no respect, for to them woman is a thing, a thing deflated to fill each shruthing, mediocre man with a spurious, weightless sense of worth. With their surroundings they know but one manner of relationship, the use of violence...

They plant nothing. They know but one harvest, rape... It is their vocation of fling themselves upon the cultivator and his fruit, to kill the one, to carry off the other. Robbery with force; that is the white destroyer’s road (40).
With the Arab conquest comes the alien God of Islam and there is a growing threat to the cherished way of the people which Armah calls the “way of death” steadily infiltrating the traditional way of life. As conquerors, the predators impose their will on the people, and thus begins an era of terror, suffering, and religious indoctrination that proves unbearable to the people. These desert people come with “a choice of deaths: death of our spirit, the clogging destruction of our mind with their senseless religion of slavery. In answer to our refusal to this preferred death our soul they brought our bodies slaughter” (3). The rejection of the foreign religious option offered by Islam leads to physical assault. The predators turned out to be more cruel and swing into full action, first in their lustful sexual relations with the subdued black women, and then in their forceful brainwashing of some natives who become their allies. All these conditions prove burdensome and intolerable for some of the more visionary members of the black community, and they decide to emigrate in search of a more conducive location to settle.

Armah presents the black migrants as a determined people. Yet they are defeated by the foreigners. Why? P.A.Busia has noted evidence from the novel and suggested that the defeat of the blacks was due to internal corruption that had set in during the years of slavery. According to her, “the years of slavery have created a
hierarchical social structure and a host of leeches - indigenous "cripples", "predators", and "destroyers" - upon whom the outsiders can rely to bring about the effective destruction of the societies from within, in return for material gain and undeserved social status."8

Armah presents the first stage of this internal corruption as a certain disunity resulting from interpersonal and interclan quarrels. The next stage is one where the relationship between men and women changes in the period just before the advent of the Arab predators, about which Anoa warns, but to which nobody pays attention. Unexpectedly the men became lazy and inactive, and sank into indolence. Consequently, they unwittingly hand over leadership to the women. These men "successfully pulled themselves out of all ongoing work" and fell into drunkenness "proclaiming between calabashes of sweet any how obvious it was that all such work was of its nature trivial, easy, light and therefore far from a burden on any woman" (16). Thus began "the rule of women" who "razed the men's unearned privileges" (18) to establish female authority. The women's rule resulted in a "headlong generosity" (25) that proves disastrous.

The prophetic voice of Anoa warned that generosity of the people would be their undoing. The voice urged them to move away from the path of generosity and return to reciprocity:
Reciprocity, that is the way you have forgotten, the going, the receiving, the living alternation of the way. The offerers, those givers who do not receive, they are mere victims. That is what in the needless generosity of your blinding abundance you have turned yourselves into. (17)

The tragic flaw of the black people is that they know only giving and they are not particular about the returns. The predators and destroyers exploited this weakness of the people. In the Prologue the narrator brings out the dynamics of reciprocity. In this connection the images employed are spring water and desert. The black people are compared to the spring water and the Arabs are denoted by the desert. It is the natural function of the spring to flow and give in abundance, while the desert takes and absorbs everything and gives nothing. The desert keeps expanding whereas the spring runs the risk of going dry if it attempts to change the desert. The narrator warns that the natives should never look up to the Europeans for guidance in the same way as the desert is not the direction of the spring flow since the “desert blasts with destruction whatever touches it.” Anoa’s prophecy of ‘a thousand seasons wasted wandering amazed along alien roads, another thousand spent finding paths to the living way’ provides a basis for the action and the structural strategy of the novel.

By the time the Arabs arrive, the essential reciprocity of marital relationship has been dislocated and women come to be increasingly
seen as servants and as vehicles for sexual pleasure. In addition to this, a system of privileges begins to develop from the newly formed hierarchical social structure, a feature that had never been part of the original African set-up. "An unproductive time it was, uncreative, a time which buried reciprocity and confused the way with crazy, power-thirsty roads" (17). Chidi Amuta suggests that "these are the imperfections in the African social past, that gave rein to the inhuman dimensions of alien influence." Robert Fraser has also noted that "the growing imbalance in the social structure of the tribe" in particular which occurs just before the alien intrusion is what inspires Anoa to prophesy two thousand seasons of spiritual and physical enslavement for these people who have deviated from "the way". The people's foreseen suffering is attributed to the lethargy to which they have fallen, the divisive forces which they have allowed to set to work among them, and their derailment from the vitalizing ethos of "the way":

You have lost the way. You have forgotten the way of our life, the living way. Your ears have stopped themselves to the voice of reciprocity. You yourselves have become a spring blindly flowing, knowing nothing of its imminent exhaustion, ignorant of replenishing reciprocity. (16-17)

Anoa prophesies that "another race is stalking, hungry for victims": "That race... is a race of takers seeking offerers, predators hunting
prey. It knows no giving, knows no receiving. It is a race that takes, imposes itself, and its victims make offerings to it" (17). But the black people fail to act appropriately in answer to Anoa's prophecy. The significance of Anoa's warning is that black people, through their indifference and deviation from the ethos of "the way", are partly the authors of their own fate.

Once entrenched, the predators begin to use the black women as playthings to satisfy their lust. The physical and moral degradation of the Arab predators is depicted in the scenes of sexual orgies. Hussein, the twin brother of Hassan, the syphilitic, Faisal and Mohammed – all these are wiped out by the black women. The women whom they used as mere instruments of their perverted happiness and sexual orgies make them meet with violent and suffocating death during the sexual act itself. However, a few of the remaining predators escape. Some of the predators who had been sent abroad as a follow up group for Islamic propagation during the initial period of Arab occupation return. Notable among these returnees is Abdallah who returns as a preacher of Islam. He gathers and converts those who follow him and travel out for further religious indoctrination, and when they return, it is "with minds somersaulting in the potency of religious madness..." (31). It is with these fully indoctrinated followers that the Arab predators launch their next phase of the attack on the black people.
The first phase of the Arab invasion ends with intensive religious indoctrination that leads to the emergence of "black-Arab" followers. Armah calls them "askaris" and "zombis", whose job it was to further this indoctrination, provide physical protection to their Arab masters, and see generally to the protection of Arab interests. The consequences therefore are these:

When the white predators from the desert came a second time they found a brood of men ready to be tools of their purpose. This time again the predators came with force – to break our bodies. This time they came with guile also – a religion to smash the feeblest minds among us, then turn them into tools against us all. The white men from the desert had made a discovery precious to predators and destroyers: the capture of the mind and the body is a slavery far more lasting, far more secure than the conquest of bodies alone. (33)

Armah suggests that the success of the Arab predators would not have been possible had there been no fissures or divisions in the black community in the pre-colonial and immediate post-colonial period, because, the predators exploit "divisions already in existence among us," "a division between the rulers and the ruled" (34). It would be recalled that in the aftermath of the women's revolt against the first destroyers, male domination came into being, and indigenous caretakers were appointed from among the black people. But these
caretakers "somehow came to do things after the manner of the overthrown destroyers" (34). First, they adopted the attitude of the Arab destroyers towards black women. The caretakers were always engaged in quarrels which were not related to the problems of the people. Classes and divisions came into existence. The schisms between the rulers and the ruled, the people and their chosen representatives became wider. All the ambitions frustrated power seekers like Edusei, and other askaris took refuge in Islam.

The new religion, in fact, is a fraud on the native people. It manifests in the form of cheating and violence:

> With their surroundings they know but one manner of relationship, the use of violence. Against other peoples they recommend to each other the practice of robbery, cheating, at best a smiling dishonesty. Among them the sphere of respect is so shrunken they themselves have become sharp-clamed desert beasts, preying against all. (40)

The initial schism in African society thus developed as a consequence of Arab invasion and the concomitant spread of Islam. Africans who succumbed to the new faith or who had chosen to serve the conquerors turned against their own kith and kin.

> It is at this point at which Islam gets fully entrenched that the more resilient Africans, those who steadfastly refuse to be converted or
corrupted by the new forces in their world, decide that the best way to counter such dangerous enemies is not to confront them in a counter-attack but rather to remove themselves from the surroundings of their harmful influence. So a migration takes place — long, arduous, lasting many seasons, covering great distances. Armah calls this as an “epic march.” This reminds us of the description of the march of the people of Ilmorog to Nairobi in Ngugi’s Petals of Blood. The black people undergo all kinds of privations, meet hostility and violence, are decimated, and they eventually arrive at the coast after crossing various obstacles. “We came away from the desert’s edge thinking we were escaping the causes of over disintegration” (58). But the original problems remain: “The causes running deepest were twin: among us had arisen a division between producers and parasites” (58). Chief among these parasites are the “ostentatious cripples,” men who “wanted to be raised than everybody else even if that raising was merely the pushing down of all of us” (58). The precise problem here is the desire for privileges, and it creates a division in the ranks.

A certain divisiveness thus sets in among the people, which makes it easy for the next group of colonizer — white hordes from over the seas whom Armah calls “destroyers.” These European destroyers look for a king among the black people to whom they would give gifts.
The consequence for the people of the ostentation of kings is hinted at earlier in the story of Mansa Musa I of Malik whose pilgrimage first attracted the Arab predator attention to the blacks:

Have we already forgotten how swiftly the astonishment he aimed in his foolishness to generate turned to that flaming greed that brought us pillage clothed in the idiocy of religion? We have among us even now humans with a reputation for wisdom in the knowledge of our people who yet remember that journey of an imbecile as if its gigantic wastage meant some unspoken glory for our people. The aftermath of that moron journey was the desert whiteman's attack on us. In the further aftermath of that stupid crossing other whitemen, their eyes burning with uncontainable gluttony, came roaring to the sea, searching to find a road to the source of all the wealth and ostentatious traveller had displayed hundreds and hundreds of seasons back. (62)

A truly damning attack on an African leader glorified by the oral tradition can be noticed in the above passage.

From this point there arises an unprecedented era of “caretakers” – kings whose characteristics are their unbridled selfishness and aberrant behaviour. Armah treats the caretakers and the local chiefs of the people with utter disdain. Instead of engaging in the task of reconstruction and re-creation in the process of finding “the
way" of the people, they were interested in "the external, the superficial and the manipulable" (63) affairs. Armah gives us a picture of African leaders and kings like 'Bulukutu', he who gave himself "a thousand grandiose, empty names of praise yet died forgotten except in the memories of laughing remembers" (63-64), or "Kanuze' who engaged an old singer with a high, racing voice to sing for him, and a hireling drummer brought from poano... for his flattery" (172). We notice a touch of mockery here. Bentum, Korbo, Tutu and Koranche, all caretakers, impose themselves upon "a people too weary of strife to think of halting them." In the fullness of their dreams and greed, "the spirit of community is raped by worshippers of impressive trash" (63).

The most important of these kings is Koranche, the idiot king who excelled "In finding means to destroy the efforts of the people more skilful than himself..." (68). He burns masks carved by his 'better-skilled peers (69), shoots human beings instead of animals during hunting expeditions (69), and is jealous of those like Ngubane or Isanusi who could command public respect merely through their skill or excellence in their chosen arts. Introducing us to the stage in the painful history of black people marked by the entrance of "white destroyers," the collective voice tells us, "It was in Koranche's time as king that the children of our age grew up. It was also in his time - disastrous time - that the white destroyers came from the sea" (74). We are also told with an underlying touch of sadness that at the time
people were beginning to be robbed of every measure of freedom, the narrator was too young to appreciate the loss:

All this was before the time when we of our age began our institutions — for us a beautiful time, time of friendship, time of learning, when in the blindness of childhood we know only of our own growing powers but of the weakening, the destruction of the power we were completely ignorant. (85)

The first meeting of Europeans and blacks in *Two Thousand Seasons* is symbolically represented in the image of the turbulent meeting of the river and the sea:

Where the river met the sea its easy flow gave way to a wild turbulence. The seawater came in long, curling waves to a meeting with the darker water from the land. In both waters there was a forward motion, so at the place of their meeting there was no quiet mixing but a violent upward surge from clashing waves. (75)

Regarding the symbolism employed here Emmanuel Ngara has written thus: "I was struck so much by the beauty of the symbolism of this passage that I asked Mr. Armah what the river and the sea stood for: his answer was that the river symbolizes the particular and the sea the universal. What is significant is the turbulence resulting from the influence of the river and the sea," 11 The writer perhaps suggests
that black people are a particular race with their own particular way of life, and that as soon as that particularity is disturbed by a contact with the universal there is bound to be a violent clash, usually characterized by a of the meeting of two alien traditions.

The European “destroyers” turn out to be even worse than the “Arab predators.” Under the notorious and damnable King Koranche, people begin to lose every shred of liberty they ever had. The Whites’ unlimited greed is backed by a technology of death more devastating than anything Africa had previously known. At one point, the spokesman sums up the desires of these monsters:

The whitemen wish us to destroy our mountains, leaving ourselves wastes of barren sand. The whitemen wish us to wipe out our animals, leaving ourselves carcases ratting into white skeletons... The whitemen want us to take human beings, our daughters and our brothers, and turn them into slaves. The whitemen want us to obliterate our remembrance of our way, the way, and in its place to follow their road, road of destruction, road of a stupid, childish god. (83-84)

To accomplish these goals, the white men offered African kings and their courtiers worthless, glittering gifts, thereby effecting enslavement by them of their own people.
The nature of the demands that the whites make during the period they try to penetrate reveals the economic orientation of the European enterprise in Africa. They demand the land's mineral resources like gold, copper, silver and others, the forest resources such as elephant tusks, and leopard skins. They also demand the land itself on which the people they hope to enslave will work for them. All these are in exchange for paltry gifts such as trinkets, clothes and wine. In addition, they want human beings who would work as labourers in distant lands beyond the seas, and they intend to complete the spiritual colonization of the people started by the desert predators.

A foolish King like Koranche does not see the dangers posed by the whites, and he decides to align with them against his people. But the danger that the destroyers constitute is made clear through the similarity Armah establishes between their methods of colonization and those of the predators:

Killers... from the desert brought us in the aftermath of Anoa's prophecy a choice of deaths: death of spirit, the clogging destruction of our mind with their senseless religion of slavery. In answer to our refusal of this proffered death of our soul they brought out bodies slaughter. Killers who from the sea came holding death in their right, the mind's annihilation in their left, shrinking fables of a white god and a son unconceived... (2) and
From the desert first, then from the sea, the white predators, the white destroyers came assailing us with the maddening loudness of their shrinking theologies. (3)

The second part of the novel signifies the juxtaposition of the structural polarities in the novel. The plural voice of “we” in this part personifies the sense of liberation and the revolutionary fervour of a militant group of young men and women – “eleven girls and nine boys” – who get sold to European slave traders. They stage a successful shipboard revolt and then form themselves into a pioneer liberation army which wreaks vengeance on the white destroyers and their black lackeys. This brutal slave revolt on a slave ship climaxes Armah’s novel.

Although the second part deals with “another thousand seasons” spent in search of “the way,” the time-span and action covered in this section, to a large extent, is limited. The action takes place precisely during the regimes of King Koranche and Prince Bentum. The realization of the way of the people is depicted in the second part in the collective predicament of a select group which represents the credo of a mass of people. The people begin to be tutored into an awareness of the real nature of white colonialism, and the special group, who refuse to be converted and migrated to the forest, constitute the core of the resistance against the Europeans.
The core group of young revolutionaries, before they launch a vigorous search for the lost way, become skilled in games and "dances of childhood." They also learn skills such as farming, rowing, and fishing. As a prelude to their training, they are "left to float to the knowledge of a craftsmanship of the soul, the vocation of those who used to be the soul guide of our people" (88). This is the period of their apprenticeship. It is in the course of their main initiation that they come into renewed contact with the castaway Isanusi and then come to understand the truth about him as one "whose vocation it was to keep the knowledge of our way" (89). Isanusi has learnt that kings and princes are people with deformed souls, by the very nature of the system of ascendancy. Isanusi refuses to be used against his people, despite the gifts offered to him. Economic exploitation of the black man, preceded by his spiritual enslavement, is the ultimate aim of the white man. Isanusi always speaks the kind of truth which can never be to the liking of selfish power-seekers. Because of his trustfulness he becomes a target of calumny and is subjected to elimination.

The young revolutionaries are guided, trained, and inspired by fundis who are experts in different fields of learning and practical experience. The attempts of the fundis are not only confined to mere training of the young. They are oriented to finding "the way." The fundis are most disturbed by the distance between the way and their people. They educate the young people by saying that their skills
would be meaningless if they are “actually turned like a weapon against their own people” (86). The learning itself becomes a mere waste if it is not guided by an awareness of their predicament. “The skills themselves were mere light shells needing to be filled out with substance coming from our souls” (86).

The young revolutionaries, before they are initiated into action, benefit from Isanusi’s analytical powers and historical knowledge. Isanusi embodies the wisdom of the traditional world and the revolutionary spirit of the modern age. He is the most articulate of the fundis. People respect his words and even King Koranche is afraid of him. He warns Koranche against welcoming the white destroyers. While analysing the point of conflict between the Europeans colonizers and the natives, he observes:

These white men, they do not want to be a part of us. But here they have come claiming they have crossed the sea from wherever it is they come from just to do us good. They are pretenders. They are liars. We have asked them for nothing. We should not let them come among us. They have no desire to live with us. They will live against us. (98)

Isanusi who lives in the forest is a conscience-keeper of the natives. He also works as a catalyst in the process of reconstruction. Isanusi’s experience as an exile has precedents. As he tells the young ones, when he came to the forest first he met a woman, Idama, who
was also thrown out in her time by the ruling class. “Her crime was speaking truth offensive to the powerful, singing truth. That is the way it has been among us for too many generations” (95). It was from this woman that Isanusi acquires the insight he shares with these younger ones. Though banished, he is happy at the other things he has learnt. One is that “the naturally decaying class of kings and courtiers — everything filthy among us — was now being deliberately supported and helped to multiply by the white destroyers from the sea for their own ends...” (104-105). This is a major insight to him, and the sharing of these insights affects the young ones positively and strengthens their resolve. But they make a costly mistake and at an unguarded moment get tricked into a feast aboard the whiteman's ship where they are taken prisoner, handcuffed, and taken away as slaves to be sold by King Koranche in exchange for some paltry gifts.

Through the role of Koranche in this event, Armah makes the most scathing remarks about the West African Chief of the colonial period as the source of West Africa's problems. To Armah, it was “the terrible treachery of chiefs and leaders, of the greed of parasites that has pushed us so far into the whiteness of death” (145). Again, “No one sold us but our chiefs and their hangers on” (146). Even the cultural hypocrisy of colonialism receives a big jolt in this novel. Armah's voice rises through Isanusi:
When we (will have lost our way completely, lost even our names; when you will call your brother not Olu but John, not Kofi but Paul; and our sisters will no longer be Ama, Naita, Idawa and Ningane but creatures called Cecilia, Esther, Mary, Elizabeth and Christina. (83)

The young revolutionaries are subjected to the most inhuman treatment following their enslavement. They also become witness to and victims of gruesome acts of ugliness and violence by the white destroyers during their transit in a ship. Hundreds of slaves are hoarded together in a dingy compartment in the ship amid stench and rot. Those who fall victims to contagious diseases are mercilessly thrown into the sea. The profit motive of the chiefs, backed by their greed which underlines their betrayal of their own people, fires the resolve of the chained “slaves” in the course of their Atlantic journey. Enslavement binds them together, and as their numbers grow, the desire to free themselves grows intense. Armah imbues the chained slaves with unusual resourcefulness, and this enables them to exterminate the tormentors, free themselves, and turn the ship back to the direction from where it came – to attack the whites in their castle on land.

The core group becomes a militant revolutionary outfit fired by a desire to find the way, the way of the soil, the way of reciprocity and wholeness. They are influenced by Isanusi. The core group mobilizes
others into an organized force to realize its cherished goal. The militant group’s close association with Isanusi is a practical demonstration of the fusion of revolutionary ideology with practice. Isanusi makes them realize that this is not a momentary sense of revenge inspired by rage. They are guided by an awareness that this is life’s work:

This has been no useless explosion of rage animating us, hurling us singly into the brief, senseless acts of momentary, particular revenge. In us has been the need to spend life against the present killing arrangements...

This life work, its fruit should be the birth of new seers, other hearers, more numerous utterers. And the fruit of all our life work together: that should be destruction’s destruction. (157-58)

The enslaved youth, now on their voyage to the land of the destroyers, combine courage with imagination to overpower their destroyers. The struggle for the total liberation of the land of Anoa has effectively begun. The youths finally link up with Isanusi in his jungle hideout, and after a series of lightning operations, the land is firmly rid of white destroyers and the puppets they have propped up to their advantage.
Juma, who had once served the white destroyers before joining the group, comes forward to train the others in shooting. Having learnt the subtleties of the art, they plan to attack the “stone palace” at Poano, the symbol of white authority. Again, Isanusi guides the members of the revolutionary group by negotiating with Kamuzu who has a pathological hatred for the princes of Poano and their parasites. After getting the minutest details about the stone palace they decide to start their action. Kamuzu acts as a mediator with the white enslavers on behalf of Isanusi posing as a chieftain. Kamuzu bargains with the white masters to give a large quantity of weapons in exchange for slaves. On the pretext of examining the guns, Isanusi and others enter the palace and send a message through Prince Bentum to King Koranche. They take away large quantities of arms to increase the stores they “had hidden along the safe half-circle from the cave to the fifth grove” (165). From this strategic place, they continue their offensive attacking seven ships and destroying the destroyers in them. Of the five hundred liberated, thirty members – twenty four women and six men – join the ranks of the militant group and they return to their work, “unending work against destruction” (177). Isanusi’s doubts about Kamuzu prove prophetic as he becomes a replica of the chief of the white destroyers, the one they used to call the governor. In his greed, he starts negotiations with the white masters. The militant group mobilizes its strength and returns to the
forest, leaving Kamuzu behind to be hanged by the destroyers and the parasites.

King Koranche had nightmares about Isanusi, and on the advice of the white destroyers he announces rewards for those who capture him. The militant group destroys two such attempts at capturing Isanusi. Following the counsel of the white masters, King Koranche and his Princes and parasites also begin to increase the number of their askaris. Isanusi prepares to go to the place where they had secretly hidden their weapons on a hill. In the process he is betrayed by Fosu, one of the new entrants into the ranks of the group. Before his death Isanusi kills the betrayer and two other askaris, but also saves the lives of Juno and Kisa. Thus the healers' work of destruction and creation is brought out in Isanusi's death.

The members of the militant group pick up the threads from Isanusi and carry their offensive straight into Koranche's palace. They destroy the askaris in the night and capture Koranche, Otumfer, the flatterer, and other parasites. At dawn, they are brought to the largest of the public places to the beat of the drums. Abena speaks eloquently about the betrayal by King Koranche and the destruction wrought by such parasites. King Koranche confesses his guilt in public and Abena herself shoots him to death at the end of his tale.
The story ends with an appeal to future generations for continued watchfulness. A plea is made for reciprocity and communalism that will ensure the permanence of "the way" long after the chroniclers of it have passed away:

Soon we shall end this remembrance, the sound of it. It is the substance that continues...
Against this what a vision of creation yet unknown, higher much more profound than all erstwhile creation! What a hearing of the confluence of all the waters of life flowing to overwhelm the ashen deserts' blight! What an utterance of the coming together of all the people of our way, the coming together of all people of the way. (206)

The enslaved youths regain their freedom only after collective action against the violence of the slave-drivers. It confirms Chidi Amuta's view that "part of Armah's thesis is that the community rather than the individual is the essence of African social existence both in the past and in the present," 12 This point is made by Armah in several passages in which he tries to define "the way" and describe its various attributes. To achieve his intended effect, he starts by contrasting it with the white road. He says that the white road symbolizes unconnected hearing and unconnected thinking. But "our vocation goes against all unconnectedness" (8).
Our way, the way is not a random path. Our way begins from coherent understanding. It is a way that aims at preserving knowledge of who we are, knowledge of the best way we have found to relate each to each to all, ourselves to other people, all to our surroundings...

Our way is reciprocity. The way is wholeness. Our way knows no oppression. The way destroys oppression. Our way is hospitable to guests. The way repels destroyers. Our way produces before it consumes the way produces far more than it consumes. Our way creates. The way destroys only destruction. (39)

Africans should now strive to return to "our way, the way" by destroying the destroyers of their former paradise. The last pages of Two Thousand Seasons reiterate this theme with evangelical fervour:

Destruction of destruction is the only vocation of the way... The liberator is he who from a necessary silence, from a necessary secrecy strikes the destroyer. (204)

The way of the people recognises connectedness as a part of its integral vision:

There is no beauty in relationships. Nothing cut off by itself is beautiful. Never can things in destructive relationships be beautiful. All beauty is in the creative purpose of our relationships; all
ugliness is in the destructive aims of the destroyers' arrangement (206).

In formal design and direction **Two Thousand Seasons** is essentially a forward-looking work, as the narrative voice points out: “What are we if we see nothing beyond the present, hear nothing from the ages of our flowing, and in all our existence can utter no necessary preparation of the future way?” (204). Armah emphasizes the features of “the way” as a visionary ideal, and in his implied call for a return to the ethos of the way as a solution to Africa’s problems, he is making a “call to reciprocity in a world wiped clean of destroyers, innocent again of predators” (149). Armah’s vision is an ideal one. In Hugh Webb’s words, “the way is ‘a pole of moral values’ which can be fallen back upon for revival, or which should be used as a beacon for guidance.”

The conclusion of the novel presents the true concerns of Armah in a proper perspective. We cannot miss the overwhelming influence of Frantz Fanon on Armah. The violence resorted to by the core group is one on the Fanonist lines. In order to achieve the beautiful path, counter-violence is needed. Creation of life and destruction of the destroyers are closely interlinked in the novel. The broad framework of past, present, and future is effectively brought out and is turned towards optimism, regeneration and creation. As Bernth Lindfors put it, “It is an interesting scenario, and a fascinating contrast to Armah’s
earlier fiction. Instead of watching one man struggle fruitlessly to maintain his purity or sanity in an atmosphere of rank corruption, we see a communal group, activated by the highest ideals, actually succeed in their military maneuvers against extraordinarily powerful antagonists. Instead of witnessing the anguish of a doomed, fragmented individual, we are shown the joy of a mini tribe united in the struggle against evil. Instead of existential despair there is revolutionary hope. Instead of defeat, victory." The importance of Two Thousand Seasons lies in the fact that in this novel Armah asserts "a past whose social philosophy was a natural egalitarianism..." However, "Armah insists that this past is not a nostalgic or sentimental one." He suggests that the positive elements in the past are transposable into a modern potential that can transform the society.16

Two Thousand Seasons fulfills one of the fundamental functions of myth, which is to transmute reality into fancy through the medium of symbolism. To put it in the words of Isidore Okepewho, "What Armah has done in his book is to identify one transcending concept - 'the way' - stretch it over a massive landscape of time, within which various stages of the black historical experience can be seen only as symbolic illustrations of the imminence of 'the way.' To be sure, the slave trade was a real historical experience; but within the massive canvas of the story it serves primarily as one in a series of
pointers to the superior claims of 'the way' over the horrors of 'white
death'."\textsuperscript{17}

Wole Soyinka holds the view that Armah's careful construction
of the mythical past is "a potential model for the future". The secular
vision in African writing finds its finest exposure in the writings of
Armah. This secular vision in Armah is expressed by Soyinka in the
following words:

The secular vision in African creative writing is
particularly aggressive wherever it combines the
re-creation of pre-colonial African world view with
eliciting, its transportable elements into a modern
potential. The process may be explicit, as in
Armah's \textit{Two Thousand Seasons}, or... may rely
in the reader's capacity for projection. The shared
knowledge of what now exists and the prior
assumption of a readership subjectively attuned to
the significations of posed comparisons is part of
the armoury of the novel, which depending on the
morailities of the conflicts and events does away
with the need for utopian presentations.\textsuperscript{18}

To this extent, Armah's vision is also a utopian vision – a vision which
prescribes a course for charting the future direction to Africa's social
and spiritual health.

Armah's \textit{Two Thousand Seasons} has humanism as its basic
underlying ethic. The "epi-dialectic" form, directed towards the
realization of a collective goal, makes the novel a milestone in African fiction. The scenes of transportation of the slaves, evoking mental and physical struggle against colonialism, are some of the most moving and poignant in the realm of fiction in the English language. In his mission of pathfinding, Armah discovers beauty in reciprocity and connectedness and the beautiful ones in thinkers, healers and revolutionaries. Emmanuel Ngara holds that Two Thousand Seasons is a great epic. He says: “The amount of material covered and the vision given to the African people are fantastic and admirable. There is nothing so far written in African to surpass its excellence of language, its epic splendour, its immense moral earnestness.”

Written in the tradition of the historical novel, Two Thousand Seasons includes fictional personages from history such as Lucaks and Fleishman and also specific events from African history. Armah stresses the urgency of historical experience and the contemporary scene in shaping the destiny of the race. Armah insists that the cultural progress of the black race is conducted only by recognizable historical figures. Accordingly, Two Thousand Seasons is peopled by characters, both good and evil, taken mostly from contemporary African culture and political history as well as from African historical classics like Chaka.
Yambo Ouoleguem of Mali also presents history in his novel *Bound to Violence*. He depicts Nakem as his fictional equivalent of pre-colonial and colonial Africa. Some critics are of the opinion that such a portrayal of Africa is an exercise in deprecation and distortion of history. Armah, on the otherhand, is attacked for his alleged racism in *Two Thousand Seasons*. Scholars such as Kirsten Holst Peterson, Bernth Lindfors, and Peter Sabor argue that Armah twists African history by what they consider to be his racist and offensive description of non-Blacks – Arabs and Europeans. Bernth Lindfors calls *Two Thousand Seasons* a “cartoon history of Africa” because of the exaggeration that characterizes many scenes in the novel. He dismisses the novel in terms of “a philosophy of paranoia, an anti-racist racism – in short, negritude reborn. In place of a usable historical myth *Two Thousand Seasons* overschematizes the past, creating the dangerous kind of lie Ahat Frantz Fanon used to call a “mystification.” Both *Bound to Violence* and *Two Thousand Seasons* deal with class collusion and exploitation in the pre-Independent Africa. *Two Thousand Seasons* ends in a discovery of “the way” whereas, in sharp contrast with it, *Bound to Violence* ends in cynicism.
REFERENCES:


