In an article published in *Presence Africaine*, Armah points out that the one theorist who has worked out consistent formulations concerning, "a revolutionary restructuring of African society" is Frantz Fanon.¹ Fanon's work provides fine insights into views concerning social motivation. Having worked as a psychiatrist, Fanon fuses clinical observation and historical perspective in order to develop certain arguments about the mind of a colonized people. One of the major propositions of Fanon is that after decades of domination the natives have developed an inferiority complex which manifests itself in their acute dependence on their masters. This condition can be redeemed only by a decisive act of war. Violence not only emancipates the natives from foreign subjugation but helps them emancipate themselves from a state of awe. It thus enables them to rise to a pitch of equality. These views of Fanon would help us in an understanding of Armah's reaction to the Ghanaian situation. Armah's dissatisfaction with the aftermath of independence is seen in the *Presence Africaine* article mentioned above. In this article Armah writes thus:

as the Algerian revolutionaries have so sarcastically noted, the African politicians love
flashy scenes and high-falutin' words. That is only a partial exploration. More important is the historical fact that in a very radical sense the nationalist leaders of Africa have found themselves sucked into the role of hypocrites, actors involved in a make-believe situation. (28)

Armah's first two novels, The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born and Fragments, set in Ghana before the 1966 coup d'état, probe in terms of characterization and a depiction of the engrossing hunger for material possessions, the lust for wealth seen as a kind of material dependence on the West. This, Armah notices, undermines the solidarity of the people. In Fragments, the mother's desire for the whiteman's things, compared to the Malanesian "cargo cult," prevents her from appreciating her son's artistic dedication. In The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, the rat-race instinct of the man's family is such that it is blind to the considerations which inhibit the man from collaborating in Koomson's boat-buying schemes. In these novels Armah dramatizes the factors of cultural resistance. His observations follow the pattern of Fanon's thought. Fanon's theory of neocolonialism, which has its roots in the notion of dependency, has had a profound effect on the thinking of many African writers including Armah.²

Though it is an exaggeration to state that Armah's understanding of his people's dilemma is completely influenced by his
study of Fanon, Fanon's theory of neo-colonialism supplied him with a way of analyzing the perplexities of the Third World. It provided him with a historical explanation for contemporary failure. It is perhaps this which is responsible for Armah's increasing concern with questions which are historical in nature. If The Beautiful Ones and Fragments give the impression of having been written under the immediate impact of social obloquy, in Two Thousand Seasons, in the words of Robert Fraser, "the breadth is both geographical and historical, a vast slice of human history serving to illuminate that process of imaginative enslavement that has become ... overriding obsession."³

Armah's historical sense reveals a style closely attuned to a particular way of marking the passage of time. The passage of time is charted in Armah not in a chronological progression but in a cyclical pattern, reminiscent of the notion of historical experience as discussed by Emmanuel Obiechina:

The past is never remote from the present but is frequently a back extension as well as a reinforcement of the present, a manner of elucidating contemporaneous, experience as well as validation of such experience. There is a deep and abiding interest in history, not as a dead substance of remote antiquity, but as an accumulation of
human ingenuity and will reaching down to ancestral roots.⁴

Though Obiechina refers to this way of perceiving time as being characteristic of novels set in the rural environment, Armah’s works, whether in the urban setting like The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born or in a predominantly rural setting like Two Thousand Seasons, evoke the very same sense of continuity and a sense of liberation from literal time.

Each thing that goes away returns and nothing in the end is lost. The great friend throws all things apart and brings all things together again. That is the way everything goes and turns round. That is how all living things come back after long absences, and in the whole great world all things are living things. All that goes returns. He will return.⁵

As we can notice in the opening section of Fragments, the blind grandmother, Naana, talks about the expected return from America of Baako. This single episode is projected by Naana as a part of a huge cycle of birth and death. Robert Fraser offers a brilliant analysis of this passage and outlines the features of the use of the present tense and the use of the device of repetition in order to suggest that Armah achieved a sense of continuous flux and a mode of narration suggestive of an incantatory tone.⁶
The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born is a novel in which, apart from a fearless castigation of contemporary corruption, a larger pattern of betrayal is portrayed. The overall effect of the novel is to suggest how a corrosive malaise has affected the whole nation. The novel abounds in imagery of sickness. Sickness affects the society at all levels and Armah goes to the root origins of the national illness which lay in an obsessive self-distrust and a determined dismissal of anything that smacks of local inspiration. The man, the protagonist of the novel, symbolizing social obscurity, is a typical product of the society. His revulsion at the squalour in which he toils is quite characteristic of that of Bakha in Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable. He is a product of a long process of history that has left no scope for hope. The perspective which Armah offers us takes cognizance of recent Ghanaian politics as well as centuries – old cultural betrayal.

The Fragments, divided into thirteen sections, employs biblical language in the process of suggesting the theme of betrayal and loss. If in The Beautyful Ones the family is seen as characteristically a reflection of the nation as a whole, in Fragments Baako is seen as attempting to hold in a precarious balance two notions of the role of the artist. Ocran, the art-master, portrays the artist as a man alone who carves out a unique destiny in the manner of the artist in the post-Romantic European tradition. Baako offers a counter to this. His vision of the artist is very much closer to the traditional African one of
a man who serves the spiritual need of the community. Baako proposes to put this conception into practice by using the screen image to communicate with the rural masses. He thus hopes to fulfil his larger social obligation to the nation. But ironically in the case of Baako, his experience with Ghanavision reveals that the very community he attempts to serve rejects him. The novel, as Robert Fraser point out, projects two complementary centres of focus: Baako, the struggling individual, and the society with which he is trying to relate.\textsuperscript{7}

As in The Beautiful Ones, Fragments is a novel in which the protagonists are brought gradually to an awareness of an underlying sickness. In depicting this theme, Armah employs multiple perspectives and draws upon African lore. For example, the belief regarding animism, a belief which, in the libation ceremony performed before Baako's embarkation for America, turns into a mere material feast. As Naana tells us, this was originally intended to serve as a compact between the ancestors and the living, and like the "outdooring" ritual it has degenerated.

Why Are We So Blest? breaks new ground in Armah's writing. Here he breaks away from the liberal approach to the issue of decolonization. The novel demonstrates the manner in which western education as an agent of neo-colonialism turns Africans into people
alienated from their roots. They are not given the status of white men because of the phenomenon of white racism. These Africans, revolting against the values of the west which they have absorbed, see themselves as the liberators of their people from colonial shackles. They are often looked up to by their people as saviours. However, the violence of westerners deprives these Africans of dignity and self-assertion so much so that they cannot recover their sense of roots. With Africans continuing to be victims of white racist supremacy, the dream of inter-racial harmony recedes. That is, in terms of Fanon what Armah advocates seems to be decolonization by violent means, if necessary. In the process, he disqualifies western educated Africans from a lead role in the struggle, for they neither have the ability nor the orientation for the purpose.

In _Why Are We So Blest?_, the African community is mythicized into the beneficiary of delivery by a promethean effort, an idea scoffed at by Mike: “I know nobody goes through the struggle to get here so that they can fall back into that communal dirt”8 (101). Meanwhile, the community’s would-be revolutionary saviours are revealed as paralysed and emasculated by the luxuries of westernized exile.

_Why Are We So Blest?_ sets the tone for the exposition of the group consciousness. Solo, Modin, and Aimee unfold the thematic
patterns of the novel in such a way that the novel is a complex study of contrast in its thematic and structural dimensions, and the fragmented narrative as it emerges in the novel reflects on the all pervasive sense of failure. Solo, the artist figure, declares thus: “In this wreckage there is no creative art outside the destruction of the destroyers. In my people’s world, revolution would be the only art revolutionaries the only creators. All else is part of African’s destruction” (231). This statement shows the spirit of the fight against colonialism and defines the fictional oeuvre of Armah.

In Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers, Armah holds a “Janus-like” view and examines contemporary Africans in terms of its past. At a time when the other African writers were insisting on the creative writer coming to terms with contemporary Africa, Armah seems to be swimming against the tide. The deprivations and destitutions of contemporary Africa are, as Armah visualizes them, a heritage of the past. It is only in a due recognition of its relation to the present can the Africans collectively tackle the problems of the future. The pervasive use of the imagery of sickness and spiritual healing in Armah’s novels indicates that he is not merely interested in a sociological concern of identifying the root origins of the disease. For him, a larger social purpose of bringing about a cure is of considerable importance. It is in this context that he traces the history of the Arab incursion into the sudanic grasslands and shows how their way was
one of destruction or obliteration. The essence of Armah's view of man in society is to be found in his formulation of "our way":

Our way is reciprocity. This way is wholeness. Our way knows no oppression. The way destroys oppression. Our way is hospitable to guest. 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.\(^{10}\)

In Two Thousand Seasons Armah's art reveals a predominantly disease-healing imagery. The seer Isanusi decrees towards the close of the novel, "See the disease, and understand it well" (201). Armah's concern is to provide self-illumination, for to understand one's past is to understand one's self, at least in part. It also entails recognizing the therapeutic processes that lay in one's establishing of one's link with the past. Armah's concern in this novel is to provide an overwhelming counteraction to the colonialist distortion of history. His view of the past, however, involves an overschematization. It is thus prone to what Frantz Fanon describes as "mystification". Therefore, between Armah's portrayal of history and Achebe's, as for example in his Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God, there is a measurable difference. Achebe's projection of the interaction between Europe and Africa documents numerous ironies of a confused era. Achebe portrays with compassion and lucidity the co-

243
existence, at times fraught with violence, of differing world views. His stress on the failure of communication as responsible for certain catastrophies of the colonial period shows a deeper understanding on his part of ethnocentrism. In the words of Bernth Lindfors, "whereas Achebe deeply understands this phenomenon, Armah only advocates it in a somewhat shallow manner."11

Two Thousand Seasons incorporates a pan-African vision of the essential oneness of the black peoples. This vision is expressed by the narrator's role as both a visionary truth teller and a racial healer. The most significant formal feature of Armah's work is that this tale of two thousand seasons is told in the collective voice, thus directing the historical events towards a communal rather than an individual interpretation. This use of an all-seeing narrator is further refined in The Healers. Armah's discourse is aimed at correcting the method of narrating African history and is anti-elitist in its approach.

In The Healers Armah sees the fall of the Asante Empire as emblematic of Africa's destruction. The calamity that has befallen Africa is attributed not only to the rapacity of the West but also to the forces of disunity within Africa. In recapturing the history of the Asante Empire, Armah deals with the history of the Akan tribe in territorially definable terms without an exact enumeration of the dates. Through a series of clues he conjures up precise historical
moments in terms derived from the local culture. While the historical method in *Two Thousand Seasons* was deductive in the sense that it started from certain clearly defined tenets and from a consideration of an entire span of racial memory, *The Healers* may be viewed as an inductive work which illustrates the whole colonial experience by taking as its field of enquiry one particular moment. In this respect, Armah's tracing of African history contradicts the Western point of view according to which the history of the Asante Empire has been seen as an obscure, ignorable phenomenon.

In Armah's fictional creation, healers have a significant role in that they are agents of social transformation whose attempt is to restore the pre-colonial system of a just and egalitarian social order. Further, in *The Healers* Armah uses the narrative technique of the "griot" in keeping with the traditions of oral narration. The griot's technique of repetition and absorption of traditional modes of expression and folk tales and customs of the Asante people shows *The Healers* to be reflecting, with an epic resonance, the entire African consciousness in its rootedness and collectivity. Both in *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers* Armah's reproduction of the features of orality leads to an almost "self-parodying rhetoric which is at home in neither the oral nor the literary form... This failure in economy, translated into written form, leads inevitably to rhetorical
redundancies and to what, in novelistic terms, is some of Armah's most unreadable writing."12

We see Armah as a griot-like activist valorizing certain models and inventing an ancestry for them. However, a striking feature of Armah's writing is that his novels gain in vigour and sense of direction from what Soyinka calls, "the visionary reconstruction of the past for the sake of social direction."13 Under the pressures of social transformation, the question of the novel's purpose figures predominantly in the thinking of the African writer. A seminal essay by Chinua Achebe entitled "The Novelist as Teacher" refers to the traumatic effect on the Nigerian psyche of the psychological wounds inflicted during the colonial period. This essay has special relevance in the context of our study of Armah for the essential realism with which it portrays how the African writer has to work against the background of social and material deprivation:

Here, then, is an adequate revolution for me to espouse – to help my society regain its belief in itself and away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-denigration. And it is essentially a question of education in the best sense of that word. Here, I think, my aims and the deepest aspirations of my society meet. For no thinking African can escape the pain of the wound in our soul. You have all heard of the African personality; of African democracy, of the African
way to socialism, of negritude, and so on. They are all props we have fashioned at different times to help us get on our feet again.\textsuperscript{14}

In creating a literary work that gives significant insights into the potentialities of the fictional treatment of historical material and into the modes of articulation of the socio-political ethos from the perspective of communality incorporating orality, Armah offers a fascinating novelistic form revealing a fresh sensibility.

It can be seen that Armah’s writing captures the whole gamut of the black experience and derives its narratological strength from an attempt to “ingraft into English,” the language of traditional storytelling, the device of the griot, and dirges to produce an incantative pattern of images and myths. Although he begins by looking up to the elite in Africa to bring about decolonization, he gradually comes round, like Ngugi and Ousmane, to see Africa’s destiny as lying with a community of dedicated people whose endeavour is necessary for launching a tirade against neo-colonial forces. Armah’s approach is similar to that of Senghor in that while it distinguishes traditional culture from western culture it adopts a more syncretic attitude towards these two cultures. This does not mean, as Larson claims, that “Armah has gone to rather great pains to make it clear that he is writing literature first, and that the Africanness of his writing is something of less great importance.”\textsuperscript{15} Larson’s is a sweeping
generalization which fails to locate Armah’s work in the African
tradition where it really belongs.