Chapter-II

Two Thousand Seasons

Two Thousand Seasons, written in an allegorical tone, unveils the philosophy of salvation history encompassing the past, the present and the future of the African continent. It is premised on the idea of historical eschatology. Armah goes back to the apocalyptic tradition to envision an eschatological pan-African ideal. The millenarian thought in a communal pluralized voice is a sardonic examination of African history, making a bold attempt at recreating the lost history of Africa. The novel recedes far back interpreting thousand years of African society talking about African past, African history and its traditions. Armah’s dissatisfaction with the historical frameworks, led his ambitious project to involve in the revisionism and reconstruction in which eschatological historiography concurs with traditional oral epics. The millenarian vision of renaissance and revival in the novel is created by spatial setting, time span and the actions of the protagonists which are epic. The historicized arc of time is operated to bring “reformation” to the present day corrupt African governments. The ideological origin of this project is embedded in the political and social experience of the past. The visionary programme charts an inspirational ideology for the future by engaging the elements that attains mythopoetic thrust. Armah steps ahead of traditional mythical construction and grafts a teleological eschatological dimension.

Africa’s millennial existence in the novel is shown equalising the evocation of myths with factual history. The discourse impenitently becomes the manifesto against the white supremacy and contributes to the debunking of western reductive myths and mis-representations in order to weaken the control and manipulation of the imperial powers. Belonging to the category of therapeutic works, the novel slides from giving realistic details to philosophical pondering in order to chart a new course for Africa as a remedy for the ailment that is afflicting Africa. It has a definite purpose, it invokes memories from the past in order to correct the future.

Although titled as an historical novel, there is much debate concerning its generic classification. The text problematises Eurocentric notions of genre, as any of the
European described structures for books do not apply on this book. As pinpointed by Fraser, “Indeed the term ‘novel,’ though it appears clearly on the title page, sits oddly on a book so apparently remote from the existing novelistic models” (Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah 64). While Armah’s previous novels had unambiguous narrative anatomy, this novel does not give us a straightforward narrative. One has to journey through numerous pages before arriving at the usage of third person singular.

This novel significantly adopted the form and voice of traditional oral epics to show deep concern with the continent’s past. The indigenous sensibility is trusted to lead out of the crisis and one strong essential element regarding this is the inclusion of oral tradition which is a substantial body of its past. The strategies of orature were borrowed to produce a historical vision that wrestles against the generalized stereotypes in the discourses of the imperial powers. The story is a communal form, a repertoire of collective wisdom, and this communal form is embedded in the novel. It functions as a conveyor of oral culture. The characteristics of oral culture have been integrated into Two Thousand Seasons because:

In traditional African communities storytelling provides entertainment, moral instruction, and an opportunity to express collective solidarity. It is one of the methods of educating young people by introducing them to the material culture, customs and usages, beliefs and philosophies of their people. Traditional African narrative can therefore be said to embody more than the art for art’s sake philosophy. (Obiechina, Language and Theme 22)

Cultural continuity is carried on by the oral transmission and Armah consequently by providing this climate adds more poignancy to his literary expression. Adopting the elements of oral phenomena, of traditional lore, using witticism, philosophical or moral expositions help in the cultural orientation and moral training of the society. Armah has unfolded his concern through falling back on folk tales and myths. As enunciated by Irele in The African Imagination, oral tradition is a sort of “true” African literature to which
African sensibilities are easily attuned and it is still the ruling communicative mode on the continent.

Emmauel Obiechina says that the novel is a representative “literary” form of the assimilation and synthesis of oral and written traditions, it more demonstrably illustrates the transformations that occur when the pressures of social and formal realism take place. He resolutely states:

It is impossible to ignore orality in a form that prides itself on a life-like portrayal of reality when exploring the life and experience of people more than seventy per cent of whom at any given moment live within traditional oral societies throughout the varied contexts of pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial history, and who have continued to sustain traditional solidarities and to espouse values, beliefs, and attitude conditioned and nourished by the oral tradition. The oral traditional impulse is therefore strong in the modern African novel, which embodies these experiences, especially because the writers themselves are a product of both the oral tradition and literate education. (“Narrative Proverbs” 199)

The structure and formal features of the novel runs deeply with underlying meanings. The skilful management of rhetorical devices in the novel grants it an epic proportion.

Armah creates the aura of Africanism, the essence called as “the way” which he is relying on for contemporary issues. “The way” is not a religion, it is a way of thinking and understanding, a worldview that is intrinsically African. This philosophical understanding is propagated, legitimated and appropriated throughout the story. He extensively indulges in reconstructing the past along with the projection of present time’s dilemmas. The traces of the tormentation are exhibited, by bringing up the crisis of identity, by interrogating their flaws in the past and consequently searching for the solution to the present crisis. The discordances existing are fictionalized by insisting upon the political theme and showing how the fracture created is widened with each consequent blow. This disquietness is visible in Armah’s expression, he makes an acute insight into the state of fragmentation as action moves from one time zone to another.
The summoning of time span in traditional African beliefs was determined by common use of seasons. So, the evocation of time in the novel is also a borrowing from oral tradition, Armah refrains from making practical use of the western calendar year in his novel.

While in *The Beautiful Ones are not yet Born*, Armah had given an intelligently analytical and critical expression of the social scene for failed political leadership in Africa, in this particular novel he graduates from giving an explanatory and incisive social commentary to digging back the continents’ lost past and ways to reclaim it. The spiritualist Isanusi in *Two Thousand Seasons* defines the primary goal of the venture undertaken by Armah, that is to answer “an infinity of questions,” not only just about “what went wrong when, how, why?” but more essentially “about what people could do against destruction, how, where, and when?” (*TTS* 104). Neil Lazarus reads the novel as an experiment at the “re-mythologization of African history” (*Resistance in Post-colonial African Fiction* 217) and Derek Wright writes that Armah’s fiction “bursts the bounds of historical realism, period-setting and naturalistic narrative and moves into the terrain of myth, legend, and racial memory” (*Ayi Kwei Armah’s Novels* 222).

The novel opens with a lyrical prologue in which the narrator, who undertakes the role of a griot, the poet-historian of the village, calls out to other skilled and intelligent voices to realise their proper “vocation.” The past is glorified against its methodical denigration by the imperialist forces. The beauty of the novel is that it challenges the version of African history doctored by European intellectual and asserts “the air everywhere around is poisoned with truncated tales of our origins” (*TTS* 1). European historians yawned out theories to keep the natives lost, the oral form is a form of maintaining continuity with the community, a conscious fight against these theories. Aware of the various European attempts to adulterate African history and destroy the African social essence referred to in the novel as “the way,” Armah took upon himself the responsibility to recover and protect the African tradition and culture as he writes:

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 fouled world exists to wipe out knowledge of our way, the way . . . the destroyers’ easy prey. (TTS 1)

Western intellectuals have falsified the image of Africa across the world this haze still continues to act as a deterrent, as an irritant to reach for the true knowledge. This mist is created by western intellectuals in order to establish their superiority the “haze of this fouled world” is distracting them from their way, their traditional way. These mists are here to keep African’s lost.

In order to clear these mists, Armah makes a conscious movement to recuperate the primal vision synthesizing and assimilating the authenticity of the past experience, digging into the ethos that sustained that past. This task is approached, in Wole Soyinka’s words, as “the visionary reconstruction of the past for the purposes of a social redirection” (Myth, Literature and the African World 106). Armah turns back, for cultural retrieval and traditional ethics, to the challenges confronting Africa. Two Thousand Seasons is a call for a return to a lost African Eden.

The griot calls out to the people to understand that the past one thousand years in Africa have been, first, a movement towards death, and then the other past one thousand years, a movement away from death. Africa has been following alien ways, which are death to the black culture. The prologue announces the purpose of the novel: to rephrase the story of Africa, in particular the story of Ghana, from the moment in history when the people first abandoned “the way” to the coming of the Europeans at the end of the nineteenth century.

The novel takes us into the region of the people of Anoa whose fortunes are suggestive of whole black race. The female progenitor, Anoa, from whom the race takes its name has “clarity of vision and a sharpness of feeling,” that marks her character (TTS 14). The account commences in media res by deploying the ancient griot in the novel. The novel is put together around Anoa’s prophecy. Anoa’s speech is an index of traditional wisdom, Anoa being both philosopher and an intellectual in the traditional African society. She puts into service her skills in instructing her students to
magnanimously serve their community. Anoa, had prophesized the coming of a catastrophic experience, one that would persist for two thousand seasons and one that would take them away from “the way” onto a path not known before. And another thousand years would be spent trying to claim back the lost way. The visions of approaching disintegration were prophesied, forecasting the clouds of the impending danger. However, hope was kept alive at every turn as people, like Isanusi, who knew ‘the way’ decided to hold on to it and teach others who were eager to learn. There were people whose love for ‘the way’ went beyond the gratification of the self and such people were always willing to take their land, Anoa, back to “the way” (TTS 1). Even though they never fully succeeded, the important fact was that they never gave up.

The pre-colonial African society before the imperial invasion was peaceful, congenial, reciprocative and rich. Enlisting the virtues of the past, the novel implies that in the beginning all African people were one. Collectivism looms large in the novel. Anoa speaks of “[f]ertile time before” (TTS 18) when the Africans knew only how to give and sheltered the outsiders. They welcomed them unaware of the fact they were harbouring snakes in their bosom. The generosity the “ruinous openness” only led to their downfall (TTS 2). The fearful ones tried to warn every one of the predatory nature of the outsiders but the words went unheeded. The alien forces took advantage of the generosity drifting them from their way. Due to the infancy of native people’s understanding, they could not understand unwelcome consequences of this new development in their lives. They were hospitable to their own destroyers, little did they know that the predators had come with some hidden agenda. The Africans existed as one entity whose unity was disrupted with the arrival of the destructive alien forces who brutally sucked out their lives, voiding them of ‘their way,’ their tradition. The destructive alien forces are referred to as “predators,” “destroyers,” and these names communicate their heinous image. The coming of the predators brought ruin to Africa, initially it was the Arabs, followed by the Europeans.

With the coming of predators and the white destroyers from across the sea, wicked and evil things started happening. They devoured the blacks of their identity,
ripping them off their culture. Not only did they slaughter black people’s bodies but also annihilated their mind, imposing their will on the people.

The alien forces tried to control the minds of Africans in order to create rift, in order to deny them of the truth. They assumed the role of preacher who has taken the task of instructing them. Natives were eventually weaned off from their motherland. Thousands of seasons were spent by them in journeying, they were forced out of their homes, their shelters. Africans were uprooted from their original place and were flung far away from each other. The history of black people’s scattering around the world and the forces responsible for their disintegration is amply suggested in the novel. Their exodus was due to predator first and later “destroyers.” With the barging in of predators when the peaceful existence was disrupted, some succumbed under the pressure while the resilient migrated. All men cowed under predators because of constant fear of murder but determined of them chose lonely life of hunters. Their fragmentation with the arrival of “harbingers of death,” scattered them away, cutting them off from their roots, as Armah writes of the non-natives “it is their habit to cut off fingers from the hand itself uprooted from its parent body . . .” (TTS 1).

The natives were forced to seek refuge somewhere else. It is a tale of dislocation from their land, their native place. They tried to avoid their terrible fate by running from their home in the hope they would find solace in the new place or that would bring them closer to their way but :

In the new place reciprocity found new murderers. The way was lost in the fascination with the white heat of easy roads to power. Among us new ostentatious cripples-the more dangerous because theirs were no visible, physical infirmities but deep inadequacies of the soul-were finding ways to turn the whole community into a lifeless thing, their crutch. (TTS 61)

The predators carried with them the seeds of death and destruction. They caused destruction wherever they went and wiped the surface with their greed. The main focus was on taking, giving nothing in return. Dead things were returned in place of life.
However, there was present a group of natives whom the predators/destroyers could win over their side. The predators came as beggars but their appearance was deceptive. They deviously used their religion to hold sway over the weak, turning the natives against their fellow Africans. The destroyers enlarged the fracture between the honest people and “death’s inspired vessels,” zombies, who were natives only employed by the destroyers to oppress their fellow Africans, which ultimately led to their fragmentation (TTS 7). An ideal Africa was fissured on account of the presence of these extrinsic forces.

An important agenda of colonialism was not only the destruction of native culture, but also an imposition of the coloniser’s religion. Among the destroyers were missionaries, too, with a different poisonous religion. Isansui, the seer, in the novel observes:

It is the white men’s wish to take us from our way—ah, we ourselves are so far already from our way—to move us on their road; to void us of our soul and put their spirit, the worship of their creature god, in us. . . They say it will be reward enough when we 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 would no longer be Ama, Naita, Idawa and Ningome but creatures called Cecilia, Esther, Mary, Elizabeth and Christina. (TTS 83)

The charade of missionaries became an incendiary agent in diminution of local values as Isansui further says, “this white missionary would be busy finding ways to eternalize our slavery through using our leaders in a cleverer kind of oppression, harder to see as slavery, slavery disguised as freedom itself. The whites intend a long oppression of us” (TTS 104).

Armah seems to be laughing at the religion of Christianity and Islam, for the fabrication of lies and inventing of fables, as all these are “seen as institution of cultural colonialism” (TTS 35). His narrative abjures these two religions simultaneously explaining how Africans view this world. These religious doctrines have contributed to
the enslavement of the Africans. Armah in the novel scorns the African convert for taking an Arab name. With the escape of destroyers to the desert due to the guerrilla warfare by women, few “ostentatious cripples” followed them to the desert, only to return as “slave of a slave-master god” (TTS 36). Notable among these returnees is Abdullah, who returns as a preacher of Islam, and gathers converts like him who propagate the mission of using religious indoctrination. Their minds “somersaulting in the potency of religious madness, bursting with a zeal to impose on their people the slavery the conquerors had forced upon themselves” (TTS 29). The incursive forces preached about their religion to clog the mind of the locals with their “senseless religion of slavery” (TTS 2). Their policies reiterate the argument that religion served as a mask for the conquest of native people.

Religion became a major tool in the hands of the colonisers to impose their authority over the natives so as to destroy the natives’ belief in their traditional structure, that is, ‘their way.’ The geniality of Africans is capitalized on by invaders. So Armah like Fanon supports that every anti-colonialist movement includes an effort by intellectuals, writers, and artists to restore confidence in the native culture to revive submerged mythologies. He tries to show African’s superiority over Europeans who are “stunted in spirit” and assails them with the “maddening loudness of their shrieking theologies” (TTS 3). The coloniser’s task was to control or play upon by artful, unfair, or insidious means especially to one’s own advantage.

Noted critic Mtshali talking about the African belief system, writes that the gods and goddesses are graded into “destructive or instrumental deities and creative or synthetic deities” (2). Armah’s projection of god as violence, fears and insecurities and gods as an emblem of human reciprocal relations or “our best selves” in The Eloquence of the Scribes is true for this novel too. The first mentioned belief is true for the gods of the Arabs and the Europeans. The advocates of this belief system convert others to their belief system under duress. The aim of their gods or the invented fables of their god was to magnify their injury. The predators reduced the cripples “to beasts” by starving their minds with their foreign religion and “indulging their crassest physical wants” (TTS 29). Throughout the thousands of seasons these beasts, also referred to as askaris, play an exigent role in gaining ascendancy over locals. The novel portrays how the askaris have
got psychologically deformed because of the abuse meted out to them, they have become brutes because their mind has been conditioned like that. Due to repeated exposure to violence they have become cruel and insensitive. These despicable heretics lead to the subsequent targeted killing of their own people.

Askaris became a byword for spiralling violence launched to mop up people who stood against them. Held with disdain and disrespect by the natives, the askaris referred to as the “white desert-men’s dogs” (TTS 29) became the keen and potent instruments of the predators. While the converts like Abdullah had bartered away their self-identity willingly, the askaris had the mental and physical assaults forced on them.

The latter concept of creative or synthetic deities is substantiated by the venture undertaken by Isansui and his supporters which displays that their god is a spiritual force which is made distinctive by reciprocal and holistic relations. Isansui speaks briefly of their god as:

There is indeed a great force in the world, a force spiritual and able to shape the physical universe, but that force is not something cut off, not something separate from ourselves. It is an energy in us, strongest in our working, breathing, thinking together as one people; weakest when we are scattered, confused, broken into individual, unconnected fragments. (TTS 96)

The novel brings to light another aspect of the colonisation of Africa, namely slavery. The slave trade which affected the African continent from many years is spoken of in this novel evidencing Armah’s pan-African sympathies. The Atlantic slave trade was one of the largest in volume and intensity. The story of the novel does not talk about any particular region and is set in years preceding and during the slave trade particularly recounting the episode during the last millennium of the trade.

The atrocities committed during slavery made the slaves yearn for death, to end the painful and endless cycle of agony. Treating the topic of slavery, Two Thousand Seasons represents its horrors and the suffering Africans had to undergo, simultaneously
exposing how African society altered with its introduction. The role of John, the mulatto assistant slave-driver, shows the stratagem of assailants to achieve their specific end of enslaving Africans. Born out of the union of the white and the black, John is servant to white men but thinks he is one of them. The innate faithfulness of the likes of John to the white colour shows the divisive tactics of white slavers to confirm the enslavement of Africans. The corruption of the people by the foreign invaders and the depiction of the mulatto posit that, “the mulatto is the only-too obvious badge of the white abuse of the Negro, of the hidden anguish of the system of slavery, of the continuing hypocrisy in racial attitude” (Berzon 53). John is cruel to the black people but good to things which are white thereby significantly becoming the instrument to unleash the irrational violence on members of his own race. He becomes the inhuman agent at the hand of white settlers, a source of tormentation. Abena P. A. Busia states:

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. (103)

Further describing the character of the mulatto, Armah highlights how barren and unproductive pillars were driven into their brains and after that they are left to do their “zombie work.” They were puppets in the hands of destroyers, slave to their destroyers which is a “perfect image of our hollowed chiefs today” (TTS 7). They after being voided of their souls, were injected with the white people’s urge to devastate so much so that they became the most cruel and barbaric instrument of the arrangement which also humiliated them.

When the whites tried to worm their way into the African land they made peremptory requests to use mineral resources, forest resources and land, where they wanted enslaved people to work. The Africans became guests on their own land. Isansui, the best spokesperson of the tribe, exposes in honest words to his people that the primary motive of the whites was economics. He declares:
The white men wish us to destroy our mountains, leaving ourselves wastes of barren sand. The white men wish us to wipe out our animals, leaving ourselves carcases rotting into white skeletons. The white men want us to take human beings, our sisters and our sons, and turn them into labouring things. The white men want us to take human beings, our daughters and our brothers, and turn them into slaves. (TTS 84)

These attempts of the whites substantially declare the economic orientation of the European syndicate in Africa. Lands were owned by community not by people in pre-colonial era. But, history is witness to the fact that during colonialism the lands were seized forcefully and trade centres were established to exploit resources. Interestingly, the extensive control of lands did not only persist but has even expanded in the neo-colonial era. The main tactic of new imperialistic powers to spread their rule was to invest capital into African nations, “developing mines, agriculture, railroads, bridges, harbours, telegraph systems and employ natives” (Parenti 20). Kwame Nkrumah making a precise observation regarding Africa’s resources has put in black and white that:

Africa is a paradox which illustrates and highlights neo-colonialism. Her earth is rich, yet the products that come from above and below her soil continue to enrich, not Africans predominantly, but groups and individuals who operate to Africa’s impoverishment. Africa’s natural resources show the continent to have immense untapped wealth. (Neo-colonialism: the Last Stage of Imperialism 1)

In return, the whites gave gifts to kings and his courtiers in recognition of their services. The British, tried to entice the local people by bringing gifts. In order to sustain this kind of economic systems in African nations they needed puppet governments so as to maintain their sphere of influence. The colonial intention is explicit in Isansui’s conversation with the group:

He told us in the town Poano he had heard a white man, a missionary whose white greed was so subtle it looked forward to the ending of the open trade of human beings, to the beginning of subtler destruction. This
white missionary thought there would be far greater profit in keeping the victims of the trade here on our own land, having the kings and courtiers use them to mine and grow whatever the whites need, then offering the product to the white destroyers . . . (TTS 104)

The kings and his hangers-on, adept in the exploitation of their people, are the pre-cursors of the emerging ruling class, the comprador bourgeoisie, which would help in the continuation of the exploitation of the Africans. The long catalogue of names of leaders, kings and cripples in the novel are crippled souls who indulge themselves in the superficies. The shift from African culture to another, in this case a more definite ‘Westernization,’ or the process of acculturation was not in accordance with nature. And “once set in motion, the speed of change was far more rapid than was typical of other societies and with far deeper implications” (Pandurang 46). The narrator presents these new ostentatious strayed from their path who were “treated like children needing to be humoured” (TTS 61). The presence of these cripples was responsible for bringing destruction to the whole community. They fragmented the community and it was so broken that the rest of the people became incapable to resist the greed of invaders. Though the historical time contemplated in the novel in all likelihood is dim and distant but the conditions expounded seem to be of present times.

The coming of the invaders, that is, the British revoked the past painful memories of predators forgotten by most of the people. British made the king along with his weak minded allies’ participate in the wheeling dealing and political scheming unscrupulously. The debauchery of the whites is stated amply when they bring things to entertain the crippled soul of king Koranche. The king is so overawed to see glittering gifts brought by white destroyers that he welcomes them and meets them like long “lost brothers” (TTS 80). The rudderless king let loose an orgy of violence in order to gain control over the voices which were against his wishes. The giving of gifts by British portended some misfortune for the whole community. Deviant practices to hegemonise the local masses and the indulgence in abhorrent addictions started rising. Decrepit practices creeping into the African community led to the betrayal of the community.
The temptation of African royalty to make or seek unfair profits by working in collaboration with colonialism highlighted by Armah shows the faltering of traditional way with the seeping in of the selfish mode of lifestyle. The conspirations, manipulations, plotting, scheming, noxious ambitions which Armah encompasses in his narrative shows how this made the grip of colonisation dangerously strong. Koranche thinks himself obliged to fall in with humours and passions of their white guests subjecting everyone to afflictions and additional sorrows. He was indoctrinated to see only the grandeur of the western civilisation. “The decaying class of kings and courtiers” (TTS 104) were being multiplied by white destroyers from the sea. This multiplied class became mealymouthed, corrupt and deviated from the martial tenets of the faith.

British cunningly used the patronage of king Koranche to fulfil their heinous agendas. Episodic agitations at various instances were led to expunge these forces. The king used indiscriminate violence to force his will. The community teetered on the brink of secession due to motley obscurantists. Life was so much more languid before a humungous amount of blood was spilt around a diabolic persona of the king. The king tried to maintain nightmarish supremacy by resorting to cheap tactics. Drums were beaten to give preliminary remarks about the white strangers. They were told by the spokesperson that “the white strangers had come wanting to be our friends to give us goods they had brought in return for ours, and to tell us of a wonderful creature they called god, a creature superior . . .” (TTS 78).

The spokesperson of the king, however, was interrupted by Akole, a woman of the duiker clan, who remarks that the people were tired of lies and they were no stranger to the white’s deeds “deeds of thieves, deeds of killers all of them” (TTS 78). She joggs everyone’s memory that “the white men from the sea were homeless brigands and soulless too” (TTS 78). Akole further looks at them as monsters that had come to mow them down, robbing them of their land and crushing their spirits into an endless barren emptiness. Akole, in her mission, is supported by people who were bent upon preserving their culture by opposing the white destroyers. The split in the African society was, thus, explicit. The tug of war ensued between those who wish to return to the way, the “producers” and those who wish to emulate the ways of foreigners, the “parasites.”
People flooding with the spirit of truth, who had strength of the spirit, maestro of the spear, the arrow and the bow set ablaze, the white destroyers’ ships. After few silent nights the town saw the destruction of the people of the spirit who dared to set on fire the white strangers’ ships. There was shocking silence from the king and his sycophants on this incident. The time was horrid when the people indulged themselves at the expense of others:

the time’s tale is of jealous, cowardly men determined to cling to power, and the result of that determination: the slaughter of honest people, the banishment of honest words, the raising of flattery and lies into the authorised currency of the time, the reduction of public life to an unctuous interaction. (TTS 9)

Opposed to the present situation, in the pre-colonial era there was natural egalitarianism, there were no chiefs or kings but caretakers before the arrival of the destroyers. The caretakers were scrupulously selected from any family. Any individual who appeared initiated and showed enough beauty of mind and character could become a caretaker. In fact critics regard Two Thousand Seasons as a novel invoking a utopian ideal state in its pre-Euro-Arab Africa. Bernth Lindfors advocates that the visionary reconstruction of the prehistoric Africa is equivalent to a “Garden of Eden” (“Armah’s Histories” 95) and Holst Petersen holding a similar kind of view considers that Armah’s portrayal of pre-dynastic Africa is warped in a “prelapsarian bliss” (333). Along with these critics, critics like Britwum and Eustace Palmer endorse the view that Armah glorifies traditional Africa. They argue that the novel fundamentally puts together components in relationship or structure pinpointing its racial retrieval that is return to Africa’s virgin and unblemished values and that as stated by them is Negritude reborn. Lindfors avowed that in Armah’s “legendary prehistory of Ujamaa” (86) “rulers did not exist, the communities were a cephalous, completely democratic . . .” (“Armah’s Histories” 89).

The seat of power was not transmitted genetically from parents to offsprings. The traditional fountainheads were put in power on the basis of their meritoriousness and
were called ‘caretakers’. This form of political entity was destroyed with the addition of poisonous invasions of European and Arabs. This paradisiacal state contained its own seeds of decay due to the internal corruption that set in during the years of slavery. The alien intrusions compounded the problem existing in Africa’s inner society. One of the stages of internal corruption was when the scuffle for power started and the power politics came into existence. The people were blinded by the greed for power, they were “seized by the fever of jealous ownership” and in this “festival of annihilation” they ganged up against each other (TTS 12). The idea of kingship came, which furthered the gulf between people. The white predators benefitted from the schisms and the internal rife within the African community as that made their task easy.

Priestess Anoa hauled the ancient “caretakers” over the coals for their rapaciousness. All the clans raked each other and got exhausted, so consequently there was an easy movement to the onset of women’s rule because “the masculine carnage had exhausted everyone” (TTS 10). During this abundance magnanimity certain kind of vice was produced which made them forget ‘their way’ and brought slavery and instituted the “parasitic hereditary rule of chiefs” (Ayivor 157). Opportunism became popular and the one entity phenomena slid into separatist actions and motives. The novel derides an immoral and wicked world in which human pursuits have been reduced to a frightening itch to quench their physical and carnal desires. This way of life became an imposing device to bring Africa under domination by the external trespasser.

Interestingly, the people in power acted like the destructive forces, they became despotic, hinting more or less at the neo-colonial situation in the continent where leader’s greedy thirst is still not quenched, as the narrator in the novel remarks, “Have you not seen the fat ones, the hollow ones now placed above us?” (TTS 7). Armah has nothing but disdain for the powers that are “[T]he quietest king, the gentlest leader of the mystified, is criminal beyond the exercise of any comparison” (TTS 64). This certainly holds for his prime example, the ravenous Koranche. Armah is certain, “There is nothing white men will not do to satisfy their greed” (TTS 78) or “Monstrous is the greed of the white destroyers, infinite their avarice” (TTS 137). For them then, there are people like Koranche and his flatterers who would do anything to satisfy their greed:
Among the white destroyers there was no respect for anything we could say. They had come determined to see nothing, to listen to no one, bent solely on the satisfaction of their greed, of which we had ample news. But the king was infatuated with the white destroyers and would not heed the people’s will, as quick in its expression as it was clear: to tell the white men to go. (TTS 96)

Armah places in correct outlook the collusion of natives with colonialist forces. There are the puny and complicit natives, all the time showing from the first a “fantastic quality (...): fidelity to those who spat on them,” (TTS 28-29) helping to cause wreckage from within for their souls are desensitized toward their compatriots. They have become lackadaisical to the health, happiness and fortune of their own people. First is Brafo’s father working in connivance with Arab invaders and then it is the king Koranche’s alliance with European powers.

Koranche, the king, is described as “an empty, strutting fool, suffered to strut this way only because of thin social conventions” (TTS 71). Though he is not fit to rule still he was at this position because of his lineage. He is aware of his inferiority and tries to assert himself by destroying the efforts of people more skilful than him. Nobody could drill into his protective social pomp. The social pomp acts as his shield camouflaging his hollowness. He is aware that it is impossible to denounce his profound inferiority and social conventions make it possible for him to “veil his inferiority with given power” (TTS 72). He is content that people accept this “social façade as reality” (TTS 72) and he knows very well that this power structure is not based on moral or on material power but on mystification of the people. He feels secure on account of people’s gullibility but the presence of people like Idawa unnerves him. He is burning with rage because though he had social pomp to hide his emptiness but she sort of challenges his manhood, so he wants her to “reaffirm for him his manhood” (TTS 73). He hankers after the beautiful Idawa who completely ignores his advances. She marries Ngubane who is killed by Koranche later. Her refusal brings Koranche to confront his inferiority and his emptiness which is covered in external artifices. He is haunted by a nightmare that society will “ridicule the social ordained rituals of reverence” (TTS 73). The king knows that he lacks
the necessary skill to be a worthy leader and that he stands nowhere in comparison to the experts who did not need even a shred of artificial social respect to bolster their importance. The experts manage to command an overflowing share of effortless respect because of their skill and spirit of truth. There was a conflict of power between the intelligent ones who were preoccupied with their art and the inferior ones in whose hands power was placed. The former did not need any social artifices or any stratagem to divert people’s respect for them as they were skilled craftsman in their field. They believed in giving and they gave more than they received not like the king who only received. Armah’s examination of kingship “anticipates his understanding of the colonial and neocolonial elites, both of which are held as being largely implicit within the pre-colonial set-up” (Fraser, Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah 75).

King Koranche is portrayed as a good for nothing king who grows out to be “a fool among fools” (TTS 67). Armah reverses the attributes of the epic followed in oral narrative tradition. He is a halfwit and by drawing down his origins to “an imbecilic background through a long line of idiots” (Ogede, Ayi Kwei Armah, Radical Iconoclast 104) and his bad leadership, he reverses the epic traits. Armah adjusts and moulds the oral formation to the context of changing times. Isidore Okpewho cites out that “the collective narrator’s avowedly anti-elitist standpoint shuns the griot’s customary glorification of the matchless deeds of past heroes since the destiny of a whole people is too important to be entrusted to individual heroisms” (qtd in Wright, Ayi Kwei Artnah’s Africa 224). As enunciated by Okpewho, in order to accentuate the nobility and superiority of the epic hero, special mention is given of his background and the set of happenings at his birth. In the novel, however, in order to highlight the impotency, bestiality and inferiority of the ruling strata, Armah alters the traditional epic strategies. His intention was to be heedful of the “sickening indulgence” because “the roots of the misbehaviour of contemporary African leaders lie deep in history, a reality the people must confront if they ever hope to be in a position to make any progress in the future” (Ogede, Ayi Kwei Armah, Radical Iconoclast 105).

Characters like Otumfur in the novel go against the good of the whole community. The complicity of people like Otumfur in the events of destruction made the
struggle against destroyers hard and bitter. Acting as a scourge on their brothers, individuals like Otumfur thrive on flattery and so would say anything that would get to the head of the king. They lick the feet of their masters so that they can be in the good books of their masters. The continuance of these kinds of individuals in post-colonial Africa has kept Africa still in the clutches of ex-colonial powers.

Armah successfully synthesizes persistent historical weaknesses of pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial with the representation of iniquitous leaders like Kamuzu. Kamuzu represents “the political culture of contemporary Africa” (Ayvior 188). Armah tries to re-interpret past in terms of the present while decoding history afresh. He underscores the fact that the inadequacies of the past have kindled stumbling blocks in the present. Kamuzu, like a parasite, attaches himself to king Atobra, prince of Poano, and his fawners. He aids and abetted them in putting slaves under lock and key and selling them off to the white destroyers. Kamuzu, however, is denied his agreed share of profit. This embitters him greatly. Describing Kamuzu’s character, Armah writes, “Kamuzu does not hate the enslavement of our people. What he hates is his own exclusion from the profits of the trade” (TTS 160). Isansui and his troop cash in on this anger and use Kamuzu’s grievance for their mission and vision. When the members of Isansui’s alliance stays at Kamuzu’s home they find that his house is in perfect likeness with the shelter of the white destroyers restating his willingness to act dishonestly in return for money or personal gains. For their mission, Isansui and his associates are dressed as local chieftains to avoid detection from the white destroyers. Their garish appearance makes one look through the showy and pretentious display of “traditional African royalty” (Ayvior 188). Armah parodies the royalty when he mockingly describes Isansui and his associates’ robes of royalty. The author takes a dig at the royalty by picturing them as nincompoops, he mentions “we are aristocrats today, and therefore should not have brains capable of seeing through the folly of our state” (TTS 163).

Ultimately, Isansui and his group fight and overtake the stone palace which was erected to keep all the slaves in bondage. Like Armah’s previous novels, the image of the stone palace finds mention in this novel, as well. The author has exploited this image persistently in his novels as this metaphor is a horrific reminder of Africa’s past and one
could still find these places in Africa. These stone palaces in Armah’s works provide a kind of explanation of the character of the invaders who are as alive as the dead stone walls they erected for the destruction of Africans. Armah while bringing out the similarity between the white destroyers and the stone palace in *Two Thousand Seasons* writes, “The white destroyers from the sea, these are a people of dead stone. What they have in place of a soul, that thing finds its solidest expression in the places of heavy stone they have built here, outposts for the destruction of our people, centres to continue the destruction of our way” (*TTS* 160).

The caretakers, as well as the leaders are unable to slip away from Isansui and his group in this fight. Prince Bentum after being made permanently invalid by Isansui and his alliance and is sent to his father with the message “Remember those you have destroyed. They remember you” (*TTS* 167). Revolutionaries freed all the slaves in the palace. They, however, still keep the flag of the white destroyers, routine number of guards and their own people dressed as askaris to mislead the destroyer’s ship who lack the knowledge of the capture of their strong stone palace. The ships which arrive crammed with slaves are also destroyed.

However, after their mission is a success Isansui and his group realise that Kamuzu’s game plan was to actually gain power and follow in the footsteps of the white masters, thus betraying the dream of African freedom. To appease his individual self Kamuzu walks around the palace as its owner. He wants to simulate the chief of the stone palace which shows the moral bankruptcy of leaders in the past and acts as a pointer to the moral abyss of leaders in the contemporary Africa. Armah enlists fictional African rulers in *Two Thousand Seasons* and condemns them, parodying the leadership in modern Africa. Armah’s indictment of the excessively deferential attitudes of African leaders is clear, “Terrifying is the still clear soul’s disgust at sight of the once destroyed aspiring not to abolish destruction but in their individual selves to become destroyers. Horrible is the sight of slaves hustling to place themselves on their master’s stool” (*TTS* 169). Kamuzu’s wolfish ambition goes to the extent of using the deceased governor’s residues, not only does he keep his woman but also sets his heart on the governor’s servants, clothes and everything which he felt would make him more like a destroyer. He is not
only diseased with greed but jealousy, as well. Fanon situates this kind of attitude in his work *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Skin White Masks*. The black person in black skin aches for white objects and the colonised look at white settler’s town with envy “his dreams of possession—all manner of possession: to sit at settler’s table, to sleep in settler’s bed, with his wife if possible” (Fanon, *The Wretched of Earth* 39).

The novel further reveals that Kamuzu is blinded by self-adoration which brings out into open “the African notables’ propensity for hero-worshipping, self-indulgence and praise singing” (Ayivor 185). His happiness is contingent on endless praise. Armah burlesques a praise which was sung for Kamuzu “to soothe him while our work continued we chanted more elaborate praises” and used grotesque epithets “Osagyefo,” “Mzee,” “Kabiyesi,” “Kantamanto,” “Mtengenezaji,” “Katachie” which unmarks his addiction to flattery and personality cult (*TTS* 172). This sort of self-deification shows “dishonest words are the food of rotten spirits” (*TTS* 171).

Kamuzu manoeuvres the revolution to his own advantage. As a countermeasure for the “misdeeds of the likes of Kamuzu, Bradford George, Koranche and the Out MFurs of Africa,” Armah offers as a remedy “the teachings of the character Isansui and the revolt of the youth whom he inspires.” Isansui is an “image, a metaphor for hidden leadership qualities gorgeously amplified” (Ogede, *Ayi Kwei Armah, Radical Iconoclast* 105). The African society is derailed from its traditional way and the major reason being the incompetency and power-drunkenness of the leaders and Armah acknowledges the significance of a good leadership which he exemplifies through the character of Isansui.

Isanusi’s vocation in the novel is to bring back the memory of the lost way to oblivious people. Isanusi, however, is asked by the king to use his gift of eloquence to mystify people and is forced to “fit into the strategies of destruction” (*TTS* 102). As Isanusi had taken a vow to speak the truth, he speaks the truth for which he is ostracized from the community by the king as Isanusi appears to be a deterrent in his greedy ways. Consequently, Isanusi is declared insane. In a state of confusion, not clear as how to fight destruction, Isanusi wanders for two seasons confused as what to do. Isanusi is in the
same plight as Ndola who was also declared insane because instead of truth the then king, Tutu, craved for “songs of deceit” (TTS 103).

Idawa comes forward openly without any fear to support Isansui. She is the first to defy king Koranche and insults him with truth. Isansui and Idawa are a source of life for each other. In variance with manipulation which has spiritually blinded the king, inspiration is a veritable way of establishing a correspondence with the world. So both Isansui and Idawa, are a source of spiritual nourishment for each other in their struggle against this darkness. Both are of the same thought process of sticking to the traditional way. Mtshali, insisting on the spiritual significance, writes, “A person who relates to others in this way sees the other person’s spirit and invites their spirit to participate in a shared project” (3).

Armah emphasises that a collective endeavour is necessary to wipe their community of these pests or termites and an inimical alien power. Isansui realises this but “there was nothing he could do against destruction as long as he remained alone” (TTS 104). The influence of ‘Ujaama’ with its pre-eminence on allegiance to one’s own ethnic group and reliance on one’s own powers and resources is contemplated in Armah’s progressively ideological and incisive vision in his last two novels, Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers. The accent in Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers is constructive and progressive than Armah’s earlier novels. The novels are marked by an attempt to incorporate indigenous forms, and more importantly, in the shift from an emphasis on intense individual characterisation towards the formulation of a communal philosophy. Armah is emphasizing collectivism as the most viable step to come out of the predicament in a neo-colonial society. In this context one can say that the novel’s narrative point of view is indicative of “collective consciousness” of the novel. The novel has no individualized or figural narrator, Armah uses “we narrator,” first person plural throughout the novel. The narrative strategy of applying this transcendent “we” recognises that the spirit of the book is discovering the collective ethics and experience delineated in the novel.
In a particular incident when the slaves are on their way for shipment to a distant land, they started dying due to diseases. Their lifeless bodies are thrown into the water; few are thrown even before their death. In order to combat this, there is an organized resistance by these slaves to escape this brutality. This episode reinforces the primacy of collective consciousness. The destroyers’ methodology was that the connected consciousness should be cut off by physical things. They try to separate each from the other so that they get no access to the “general consciousness.” Collectively the slaves manage to kill the slave driver by forcing all the bile and dead blood from a diseased body into slave driver’s mouth. Ironically, the slave driver does not die because of disease but because he is shocked to find himself trapped with his condemned half-brother rather than his friends, the whites. His place is taken by Sobo who still is connected to the whole. His individual freedom is used in the greater liberation of the whole group. Sobo also realises that his individual freedom is nugatory and pointless, as:

against the death brought by whiteness only the greatest connecting force will prevail: the working together of minds connected, souls connected, travelling along that one way, our way, the way, connected thought, connected action: that is the beginning of our journey back to our self, to living again the connected life, travelling again along our way, the way.

(TTS 133-134)

Although, Sobo had gained the credence of the destroyers by showing deference to them, his present horrific situation makes him realise that he is an extension of this larger living group. Individual lopped off from the whole community is disastrous. Armah elaborates that single power is unproductive:

[The] severing of each mind, the cutting of each soul off from the whole being of our people, the removal of each single present away from knowledge of our common past, our common destiny: against all this blood itself is impotent if it flows away from connectedness, away from our single way, the way. Ludicrous is the freedom of the slave unchained
in his single body if his mind remains a cut-off individual mind, not a living piece of our common mind, our common soul. (TTS 133)

The clear and vividly explicit details about the resistance put up by the hostages aboard a slave ship transmit the feeling of a collective ability of Africans to recover easily from misfortune. Whereas Fraser has accounted this episode as “cops-and-robbers episode; or a saga of cowboys and Indians” (Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah 77), claiming it as the weakest section of the whole novel, Wole Soyinka has rightly observed that “This weakness often tends to make the book read like an adventure story” (Myth, Literature and the African World 114). The episode involves around a group of twenty teenagers, eleven males and nine females who are captured, sold into slavery and later escape. The group meets wise Isansui in the grooves and is warned time and again of the dangers, but he is not heard or, at first, understood. Later, after they have been traded into slavery by their king and after they have slipped away from the confinement “his words came back as an echo to what we had lived to know” (TTS 149). Finally, they resolve not to look into the past, or “return to homes blasted with triumphant whiteness” (TTS 150). They would rather “seek the necessary beginning to destruction’s destruction” (TTS 150). Isanusi, however, realises that the road ahead is long and warns that this generation “would not outlive the white blight,” (TTS 155) but the groundwork could still be laid, the beginnings undertaken. As Isansui remarks that despite, “the treachery of chiefs and leaders, of the greed of parasites that had pushed us so far into the whiteness of death” (TTS 145), there is some hope for the future but not an immediate one.

There has to be an organised resistance by the society at large in the present scenario. The glimpse of this is showcased in this novel at various points, the protest put up by slaves and the group of boys and girls under the auspices of Isansui, proclaiming and extolling revolution as the best way to restructure society. The group solidarity is also shown when women plan and execute the elimination of locally appointed aides. Two Thousand Seasons is a story of triumphs of the spirit and the will, despite appalling horrors, oppression and betrayals. The white predators are beaten at their own games, their own arms stolen and turned against them. Treachery does not stop, but there are successes, small movements along the right way. Mtshalli writes:
Armah’s notion of personhood, with its tentacles on the three dimensions of time, challenges both the adherents to atomized individualism and the advocates of the romantic and nostalgic African personality. While projects with the goal of individual healing are important, Armah holds that Africa’s liberation is an African-centred and a collective endeavour.

Guided by collective consciousness, the group of young boys and girls, after escaping, do not return to their families. Instead, they make the decision as a collective to move along the slaving coast and risk their freedom and their lives for freeing other Africans. In other words, they make a conscious decision to place collective survival ahead of individual survival; to become freedom fighters. The notion of personal sacrifice in the interest of revolutionary struggle is amply suggested in the novel “If our individual lives have a worthwhile aim, that aim should be a purpose inseparable from the way” (TTS 39).

In contrast to this group of boys and girls, there is Dovi who betrays his friends by revealing their hiding space. Dovi is unable to resist the selfish desire to be with his family which leads to the breach of faith of his former allies. He chooses his own good above the community. These are the loopholes Armah tries to pinpoint which ruin this kind of resolve. The way is not the road of coercion of unwilling souls. It is in fact these type of shrunken souls, lacking the strength of character, who propagate the white men’s road. Such men see beauty in the triumph of ugliness and can see love in all pervading hate because their vision is cut off from the truth. Fraser explains “Armah’s attention is here focused on the weak spots implicit in any such project, the areas of sensitivity in the under-belly of the committed, unsteeled by resolve” (Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah 78). In order to retain the state of being whole and undivided the blacks should hold out against all the attractions.

The terror of the group affects the king as well. Isansui becomes a figure of terror for the king. Koranche as he starts having recurring nightmares of Isanusi following him. In his nightmare he sees implacable Isansui sitting on a mountain above the palace staring
downwards at the king and then something dark starts flowing from his eyes. This dark flow appears to be a long never ending chain of living men who look exactly like Isansui with the same disrespect in their eyes. Koranche tries to escape but his limbs refuse to move. He shouts for help and only his flatterer, Outumfur, comes forward. From far beyond Paono, the white ships can be seen coming but the endless black flow is already inside the palace. After waking up from this dream Koranche seeks counsel. On the white men’s suggestion he seeks to kill Isansui so as to get rid of this fear. Isansui is trapped and killed.

Isansui’s death is avenged by his group with the killing of the king. The intentions and purpose of this guerrilla faction articulates a sense of mission and politics of history. This was an intermediary step in the process of purifying the continent from the foreign rule. Eventually, Bradford George, the king’s son, takes the help of the white destroyers and kills all the revolutionaries. The white destroyers plan to make a ring of fire in the forests where all the revolutionaries are dwelling. The destroyers intend to tighten the ring of fire till the last of the revolutionary is wiped out. Subsequently, “the white soldiers trained mercenaries and forced slaves in the crafts of death. The white priest clawed the air four times and pronounced assembled hundreds blessed for the work of destruction” (TTS 201). Thus, this end envisages a prolonged struggle of the people of Africa to purify the country of undesirable elements.

Armah’s writing is specifically an agitated reaction to the frustrating post-independence experience of Africans, the disappointment that came with the realisation that they had merely exchanged the yoke of colonialism with that of neo-colonialism. Armah demonstrates his dissatisfaction with the African leaders. He accommodated his line of thought about the current social reality pertaining to the disillusionment preceded by pseudo-independence. While in The Beautiful Ones Armah had propelled the idea that communal harmony can get us out of the mess because “the only real power a black man can have will come from the black people” (82), With the publication of Two Thousand Seasons, however, he shifted his interest from the social reality and political leadership towards a deep concern with the continent’s past as “prescription of the correct cure is dependent on a rigorous analysis of the reality” (Ngugi, Decolonising the Mind ix). As
explained by Fraser, Armah’s aim was to provide “self-illumination” (*Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah* 73) and by looking back at the past one can understand oneself which helps in curing the ailment. In order to offset the “communal inferiority” engrained in the African people self-respect has to be boosted.

Isansui, before his death, beseeches “see the disease, and understand it well. It is important” (*TTS* 201). He felt the deeper commitment bring large numbers to their long lost way again. Akole too had guided the people “even if we did not have in us the courage of truth to execute them outright as punishment for their crimes against all people of the way we should at least have the wisdom not to welcome them among ourselves” (*TTS* 78-79).

Frederic Jameson in *Marxism and Form* registers it as a significant perception of a given experience when considered in relation or in proportion to something else by estimating the similarity or dissimilarity between one thing and another “is at the same time an awareness of what that experience is not” (163-164). In *Two Thousand Seasons* Armah reassembles “the way,” a system of values by propounding that what is not, is that which ought to be, or, in Derek Wright’s terms, by balancing out ‘the actual’ with “the postulative” (*Ayi Kwei Armah’s Africa* 238). Armah uses the ingenious hypothesis of an ideal African social ethos of “the way,” as a spring board in *Two Thousand Seasons*. Under neo-colonial conditions for cultural reinvigoration the moral privileging of placing past above all is necessary for retrieving “the way.” It is not the only thing, one should consider past as “not only a forgotten but the future way, the way of reciprocity and collective endeavour” (*TTS* 5), but also rather as action rather than reaction. The system needs to be cleansed. The Africans have to look forward as they cannot be stagnant. They can take inspiration for future from the past.

Armah has invoked the past, brought in notice the traditional way which he feels is a panacea of all evils in contemporary society. As stated, “It is a therapeutic work which aims to close the wounds left over and festering from centuries of implied cultural abuse” (Fraser, *Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah* 82). By being critically aware of their past the Africans can construct a vision for the times ahead. As an ideological apparatus it is trying to recoup from the assault done ideologically and physically by outsiders.