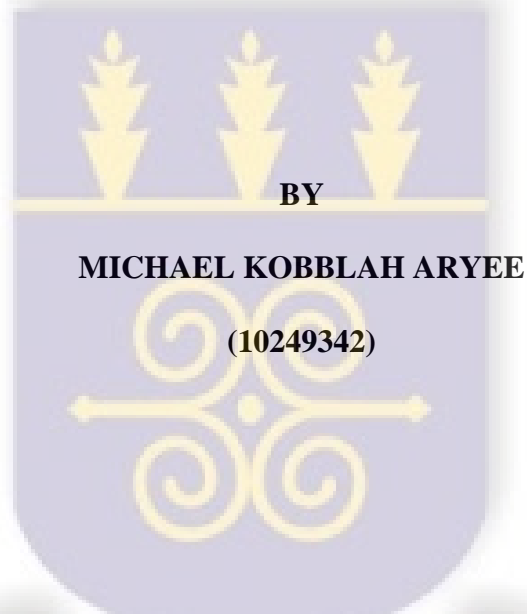


**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY OF GHANA**

***ARMAH'S TWO THOUSAND SEASONS, OSIRIS RISING AND KMT: IN THE
HOUSE OF LIFE AS A SINGLE PAN-AFRICAN EPIC STORY***



**THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON IN
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF
THE MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH DEGREEE**

JULY, 2014

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is the result of my original research, except for references to other studies, which have been accordingly acknowledged, and that no part of it has been published or presented as part of the requirement for the award of any other degree in any university.

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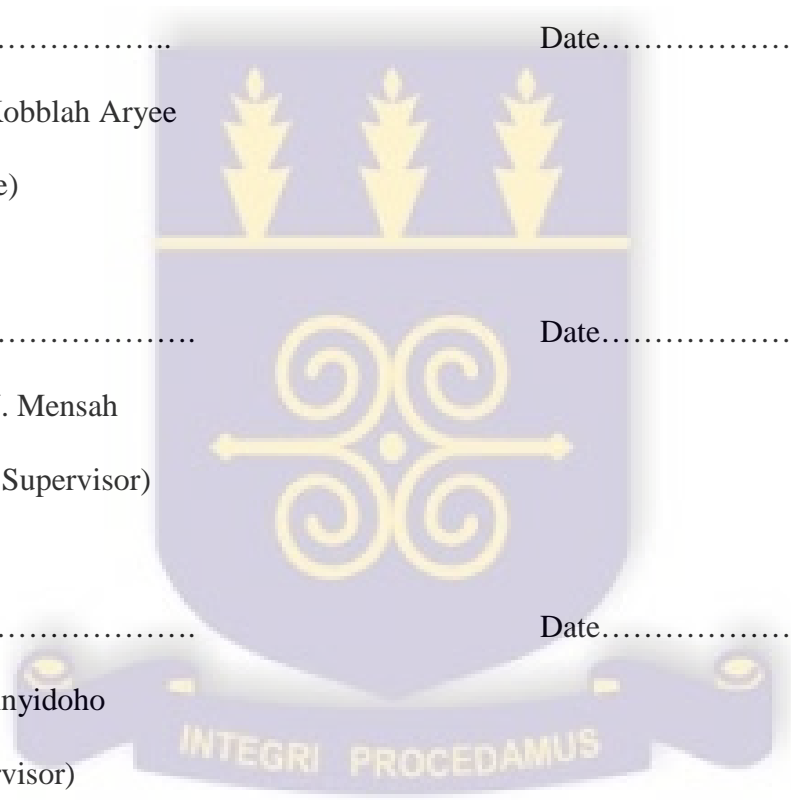
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ABSTRACT

The epic is quite familiar in literary study and criticism. Its Western as well as African variants well-known among scholars and students of literature all over the world. African versions of the epic such as *Mwindo*, *Chaka* and *Sundiata* give us some ideas about the African epic. But is there any such thing as the pan-African epic, and do Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life* belong to this category? The choric characterization, the strong female characters in prominent roles, the monolithic setting, the concept of heroism, the nature of warfare and the message of a seamless Sub-Saharan African nation being propagated by these novels suggest the genesis of a new form of the African epic—the pan-African epic. This peculiar approach calls for a critical study of the aforementioned novels. This research, therefore, examines the three novels as pan-African epic novels, analyzing features such as focalization, character, diction, setting, and themes while exploring the nature of their relationship with one another in the propagation of Armah's pan-African message. It also explores the difference between Armah's epic and the African epic. The thesis concludes that *Two Thousand Seasons*, *Osiris Rising*, and *KMT: in the house of life* share a complex relationship within a politico-literary pan-African epic form and that this form is a modification of the African epic that makes a significant contribution to literature in general, and the African epic in particular.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to all my African sisters and brothers scattered across the nations, especially those who look forward to that new dawn when all Africans shall be united and truly free from the withering injustice of imperial domination and exploitation.



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Finally, to You, Mawu Segbolisa, for being with me right from the beginning of the journey till now, I say I can only take all the gifts You have bestowed on me so far, and humbly ask for more.

Michael K. Aryee

INTEGRI PROCEDAMUS

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines Ghanaian writer, Ayi Kwei Armah's three novels, *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973), *Osiris Rising* (1995) and *KMT: in the house of life* (2002) as pan-African epic novels. The study samples general features of the African epic as discussed in Okpewho's *The Epic in Africa: Towards a Poetics of the Oral Performance* (1979). It looks at features such as the role of the bard, the oral mode of composition, the emphasis on music and performance, audience participation, and characterization among other things. It then studies some of the features of the primary texts. Technical features such as focalization, character and diction will be discussed. Major themes will also be examined; with a view to finding out if these features show significant differences that point to the emergence of a new kind of the African epic, the pan-African epic, why the author does so, and what such an innovation means for world literary discourse. Apart from this, the study also explores ways in which each of the novels fits into Armah's pan-African project.

1.1 Background to the Study

Today, African epics such as *Sundiata*, *Mwindo* and *Chaka* are well-known among scholars and students of literature all over the world. However, when some critics refer to Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, *Osiris Rising* or *KMT: in the house of life* as either an epic or a pan-African epic, it calls for critical study. In this regard, A. N. Mensah, E. Ngara and Erik Edi among others have all referred to at least one of the above-named novels either as an epic or a pan-African epic. This study, therefore, stems from the

critiques of such earlier scholars; it attempts to examine the novels, especially as “pan-African” epic novels as a way of finding out if there are any significant differences between them and the African epic. If successful, this study should enable us determine whether Armah’s “pan-African” epic marks the emergence of another form of the African epic or not.

1.2 Origins of pan-Africanism

Pan-Africanism is commonly associated with an ideology that proposes practical unity among African nations and black peoples the world over. It is an ideology intended to defeat imperialism and its effects such as endless wars, poverty and underdevelopment on the continent and to uphold black identity all over the world. The basis of pan-Africanism is, thus, political, and some of its earliest proponents were Henry Sylvester Williams, E. W. Burghardt Dubois, and William Marcus Garvey. Others were to join later: Nnamdi Azikiwe, Mbonu Ojike, Hastings Banda, Kwame Nkrumah, Peter Mbiyu Koinage and George Padmore. But the concept of pan-Africanism, itself, is usually attributed to Henry Sylvester Williams:

Henry Sylvester Williams, a West Indian lawyer from Trinidad, was the first to use the term pan-Africanism and the first to organize a pan-African congress in 1900 in London where he brought together a number of Africans and men of African descent then living in Europe to discuss the question of colonialism and foreign domination of black peoples, racial prejudice and the treatment of Africans in South Africa, the future of Africa and the international standing of the only three black states existing in the world at the time, namely Haiti, Ethiopia and Liberia (*Inside the OAU: Pan-Africanism in Practice* 34).

Since its first political application, however, pan-Africanism seems to have acquired an extended usage we may here call literary pan-Africanism, the use of literary expression to

advance the ideology of pan-Africanism. Literary pan-Africanism, thus, has a dual role: both as literary expression and as political ideology. It is in this context Armah's pan-African epic becomes relevant. In this sense, Armah does not stand alone, for other African writers and scholars have equally used literary expression as a vehicle to convey their pan-Africanist message, a message of solidarity, liberation and hope for the future of Africa. Wole Soyinka, Kofi Awoonor, Kofi Anyidoho, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and several others have all spoken to the issue of pan-Africanism, usually through poetry, drama or prose-fiction. In a sense, all these African writers seem to agree on the role of literature in the service of Africa's future; they all use literature to convey the message of pan-Africanism, which is invariably a message steeped in politics and social justice.

But why would Armah use an indirect mode, literature, to express his pan-Africanist dream for Africa? The answer is not far-fetched; as a youth then studying in the United States of America, much like earlier pan-Africanists, Armah had felt the need to be part of the crusade for the freedom of Africa. He, therefore, attempted to join forces then fighting to bring about revolutionary change in Angola. He was not successful in that attempt. Consequently, he chose literary expression as a means to advance his political vision for his Africa. He puts it this way: "It is because in my initial push to find and work with like-minded bringers of social change—revolutionaries—I failed. Having failed to work for revolutionary change, I wanted to find a profession least likely to turn me into an auxiliary of the established world order" (*The Eloquence of the Scribes* 14-15).

Armah argues that a borderless Africa is desirable for the continent's economic, political and social advancement since other continents have similar configurations that have

contributed to making them influential in the world today. The following excerpt should clarify Armah's view on the geo-political configuration of Africa:

At a time when people on other continents are coming together to form economic and political unions in order to meet their human needs, African space is still chopped up into walled-off chunks, with complex barrages of administrative, military and political obstacles installed to keep the continent frozen behind its imposed divisions (*Remembering the Dismembered Continent* 13).

The main argument here is that if it is good for other continents to form unions for the strategic purpose of dealing more effectively with the daily challenges of their populations, then it ought to be equally good for Africa. Armah, however, insists that the same European and American forces that spearheaded the division of Africa are still at work to keep it so. He maintains that the current situation where African nations are made to see one another as "independent", with defined geographical demarcations, is a well-calculated scheme by more powerful external influences such as Europe and the United States of America to weaken Africa and make the continent easy to dominate and control. Examined within the context of independent African nations, the relevance of Armah's argument becomes more compelling. Once African nations perceive one another as independent, they assume an increasingly combative and competitive stance against one another, a situation that could trigger civil unrest bordering on 'territorial' matters, and this is unhealthy for the overall development of the continent. That Ghana is currently negotiating maritime border issues with neighbouring Ivory Coast brings home to us the harsh realities of Armah's argument. To remain 'independent' African nations, Armah would argue, is to remain perpetually powerless economically and politically, and therefore, vulnerable to external manipulation, and that, he maintains, is part of the

reasons for the unwarranted interest Europe and the United States of America seem to show in the affairs of African nations. Armah is quite unequivocal on this point:

If the present configuration of African space is so demonstrably harmful to the continent's population, and yet has powerful agencies actively maintaining it and extending it into the future, it is logical to wonder why. What purpose was the system designed to serve? Why, in spite of its lethal toxicity, didn't Africans of the post-independence generation abandon it, to replace it with a humane, intelligent, African system? (*Remembering the Dismembered Continent* 13).

Clearly, Armah is not pleased with the current "configuration" of Africa where each country is administered as an independent nation-state, and he intends to help find a solution to this state of affairs. His pan-African epic story should, therefore, be seen as an artistic response to what he sees as the political, social and economic challenges of his Africa. It is in this context we understand more clearly what Armah implies when he writes:

When I looked into my psyche, what I saw was a consciousness desiring first of all to bond with all Africans, to live out that desirable bond, thinking of the most creative ways in which Africans might be brought together, and bending my work deliberately, consciously, toward that aim (*The Eloquence of the Scribes* 120-121).

The above quotation further lends substance to our claim earlier that behind Armah's literary pan-Africanism is a political vision, the latter providing the impetus for the former. What we have here, then, is a two-fold pan-Africanism—literary and political. Like other pan-Africanist writers, Armah is using literary expression to achieve what his forebears had long dreamt of—African unity or pan-Africanism—without which, according to him, the continent will remain forever subjugated, oppressed and plundered by external forces, led mainly by Europe and America.

This invitation to African nations to rally together in order to assert their total liberation from imperial influence, Armah concedes, will not be an easy task. Through some of his characters in the novels, such as Isanusi in *Two Thousand Seasons*, Asar in *Osiris Rising*, and Biko Lema and Djieli Hor, in *KMT: in the house of life*, Armah shows that freeing Africa from the shackles of imperialism is going to be difficult to execute; it will require total commitment; it will leave some maimed; and it will result in the death of some; but in the end, it will be worthwhile, and Africa will be the better for it. “I know I will go through mountains of pain to get a taste of victory,” says Denden, a character in *KMT: in the house of life* (336). It is no wonder that lead characters like Isanusi, Asar, and Djieli Hor all perish in the struggle to “re-member the dismembered continent.” What is significant, however, is that the struggle continues despite the exit of such lead characters.

1.3 The Epic as an Established Literary Form

Epics existed long before Homer’s *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* and before Aristotle’s treatise on poetry in general, and on tragedy and the epic in his *Poetics*. *Gilgamesh*, for instance, which is often counted among the masterpieces of world literature, predates *The Iliad* and *The Bible*, and is considered one of the world’s great epics. Among literary scholars today, however, there is the tendency to draw on Aristotle’s *Poetics* in which he clarifies some of the features of the genre. Homer’s *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* have also become seminal texts in literary study as far as discussions of the epic are concerned. In chapter XXIV of his *Poetics*, Aristotle draws attention to four elements of the epic, namely **plot**, **character**, **diction** and **thought** (133 – 135). Apart from these, he also

mentions as an important feature the **historicity** of the epic message, for it is that which enhances the epic message and accords it a national character. To Aristotle, then, the five elements mentioned above are crucial in the epic. Other scholars have since explored the epic in an attempt to further understand the genre.

Sackey (2010) refers to Robert J. Clements' checklist of elements of epic poetry which presents thirteen elements taken from Aristotle and eighteen others from modern scholarship, making up a total of thirty-one. However, Sackey thinks that all thirty-one epic elements suggested by Clements could be reduced to the five Aristotelian elements earlier mentioned. Sackey further suggests that the five Aristotelian epic elements constitute two main aspects of the epic, and these, he explains, are the **structure**—made up of plot, character, diction and thought, and the **moral** or **national value**, which refers to the historicity of the epic message. According to Sackey: “. . . even if the story of the epic is more fable than history, the final historical outcome or value should be inevitable” (*Dimensions of Comparative Literature* 26). Put differently, the epic story, no matter how fictional it appears, should contain a historical antecedent that all the people can identify with.

It is instructive to mention at this point that for some time, the existence in Africa of the literary form called the epic remained an issue of contention. Whereas some critics thought the genre did not exist in Africa, others maintained that it did. This debate was set off by Ruth Finnegan because of the doubts she expressed in her *Oral Literature in Africa* (1970) about the existence of the epic in Africa. She argues as follows:

Epic is often assumed to be the typical poetic form of non-literate peoples or at least of non-literate peoples at a certain stage. Surprisingly, however, this does not seem to be borne out by the

African evidence. At least in the more obvious sense of a “‘relatively long narrative poem,’” epic hardly seems to occur in sub-Saharan Africa apart from forms like the (written) Swahili *utenzi* which are directly attributable to Arabic literary influence (Finnegan 108).

It is obvious, from the above quotation, that as far as Finnegan was concerned, there was no evidence that the epic existed in Africa. In her concluding remarks on the issue, she adds, “But in general terms and apart from Islamic influences, epic seems to be of remarkably little significance in African oral literature and the *a priori* assumption that epic is the natural form for many non-literate peoples turns out here to have little support” (110).

However, the above view no longer holds since several publications, both scholarly and artistic, on the African epic have emerged. Okpewho’s *The Epic in Africa: Towards a Poetics of the Oral Performance* (1979) is crucial here, and equally important are two significant anthologies published in 1997. Drawn from the oral epics of Sub-Saharan Africa, the two anthologies, *Vibrant Voices from a Vast Continent* (published in English), and *Les Epopee D’afrique* (published in French) have served to enrich world literary studies, particularly the corpus of African epic literature. These publications have helped to give us a more comprehensive idea about the African epic.

1.4 The African Epic in Perspective

Although several African epic texts exist today, a standard definition of what the African epic is or should be is not easy to come by. That notwithstanding, Isidore Okpewho’s *The Epic in Africa: Towards a Poetics of the Oral Performance* (1979) is relevant as it brings out certain features that give us a fair idea about the African epic. Okpewho mentions

culture and geography, orality, the role of the bard, musical accompaniment, performance, character, among other things as features of the African epic. Our conceptualization of the African epic in this thesis, therefore, will be based on the above-mentioned features.

On culture and geography, Okpewho points out that there is no unified, homogenous cultural and geographical background for the African epic although he has sought to treat the genre as though it were so. In other words, there are as many cultural and geographical disparities as there are different African epics. “Is Africa not too diverse in geography, race, and language patterns to be subjected to such ready paradigms, even with the best of intentions?” he asks (29). *Mwindo* and *Chaka* are good examples here, for although they are both African epics, they are culturally and geographically different. Whereas *Mwindo* belongs to the Banyanga, a Bantu-speaking group of the Congo, *Chaka* is of the Mazulu, one of the numerous ethnic groups of the Bakone of South Africa.

Another feature of the African epic is its oral form. By this we mean that the manner of composition of the African epic is oral rather than literate. Okpewho defines an oral epic as one that is:

“fundamentally a tale about the fantastic deeds of a man or men endowed with something more than human might and operating in something larger than the normal human context and it is of significance in portraying some stage of the cultural or political development of a people. It is usually narrated or performed to the background of music by an unlettered singer working alone or with some assistance from a group of accompanists” (34).

Because of its oral mode of composition, any one African epic tends to have more than one text since the conditions prevailing at one performance would slightly differ from

those of others. This feature has often given rise to different versions of the same epic. *Sundiata*, also rendered *Sunjata*, for example, is known to have different versions. Okpewho refers to at least two different versions of this epic, each with a different griot. The griot or bard in Niane's version is Djeli Mamoudou Kouyate, but "in yet another version, the griot" is "Banna Kanute" (46).

Again, the African epic is usually prosodic rather than poetic. In other words, the African epic is almost always rendered as a tale and not a poem. This is not to imply that there could be no poetic elements in the African epic. In fact, the tale itself is often interspersed with poetic lines, but on the whole, what we have is a tale. A reading of a number of African epics reveals this: *Sundiata*, *Mwindo*, *Chaka* and *Kambili*, among others, are all tales, heroic tales, as Okpewho calls them, although parts of the narration tend to be poetic. This is one essential point of difference between the African epic and the European epic. It appears, however, that Finnegan and other scholars, unaware of this, attempted to define the African epic using European standards, a reason why they thought the epic could not have existed in Africa.

Musical accompaniment is also a known feature of the African epic. The music is usually played in the background with varying degrees of intensity. As we noted earlier, the African epic is a tale, and as such, is performed rather than recited. In its performance, it tends to emphasize more drama and music than mere narration. This is done to stir and sustain the interest of the audience who are an integral part of the performance (*The Epic in Africa* 52). This is a common phenomenon in the performance of most African epics.

The African epic also tends to concentrate on the great and noble in society. We are talking about character here. The African epic is the tale of warriors, kings and princes. These characters are usually portrayed as men with admirable attributes. They may be thick, tall and handsome, and endowed with unparalleled strength. In *Chaka*, not only is Chaka brave and strong; he is also extremely handsome. They may also be liberators at crucial moments in the history of their people. *Mwindo* presents us with a good example. The battle between Mwindo and his father, She-Mwindo, is an example. Mwindo fights his father's decision to have only daughters, and through that, he liberates his people from his tyrannical father's rule. Other African epics such as *Sundiata* and *Kambili* show similar tendencies. Generally, then, African epics are tales of the brave and strong, and of royalty rather than about the ordinary people.

As far as character in the African epic is concerned, female characters are less prominently portrayed. If they are present at all, they are far removed from the centre of action, and are usually those closely related to the men involved in the action. The women in the African epic, like those of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, live on the fringes of their society. In *Mwindo*, She-Mwindo has many wives, but they do not have much say in what goes on around them, not even in matters that affect them directly. It is She-Mwindo, the king, who decides that only daughters are acceptable in his household. Whether the king's wives agree with him on the matter or not is really not important. *Chaka* too presents us with a not-so-different story as far as the peripheral role of women in the African epic is concerned. Nandi, Chaka's mother, typifies this role. Although she is the mother of the epic hero, she is no more than an appendage of her husband, who uses and discards her when he no longer finds her useful (*Chaka* 7). When Chaka himself

becomes king, he is not at any point married properly to any woman, but he regularly selects beautiful young virgins and deflowers them, and when he feels he has had enough of them, he discards them (*Chaka* 109).

What about diction in the African epic? It is believed that the epic is a higher literary form that must have diction that matches its status. “The epic diction itself is expected to possess a grand style worthy of the grandeur of the genre” (*Dimensions of Comparative Literature* 58). There are various characteristics of the epic diction, according to Sackey, and these are endless epithets, emotional apostrophes, epic similes, long speeches, and the repetition of important phrases or entire sentences. In the African epic, this may take the form of repetitive lines that have a thematic function. It is what Milman Parry, referred to in Okpewho (1979), calls the “formulaic line” (*The Epic in Africa* 143). As Okpewho points out, the oral poet, through the “formulaic line,” expresses sentiments and ideas he finds necessary to repeat. In this context, repetition in the form of the “formulaic line” serves a thematic function (*The Epic in Africa* 144-145). The following lines from *Mwindo* exemplify this:

I am Mwindo,
The one born walking,
The one born talking.

Thematically, the above-cited lines seek to emphasize that Mwindo is an extraordinary child, for he was “born walking...talking.” In *Chaka*, appellations constitute an important part of the diction, and they are used mostly in reference to Chaka, who has become very powerful and fierce: “Mooing bovine, fit to bellow in the royal village, if it bellows in a lesser village it is not fitting . . . god with the wet nose, who causes quarrels among the

nations!” There are also epithets, and these are used in praise of Chaka: “. . . you who are the heaven that gives rain and pastures” (*Chaka* 110); “Bayede,” which means “he who stands between God and man . . . the junior god through whom the great God rules the kings of the earth and their nations” (*Chaka* 115). Repetition in the African epic, as the above examples indicate, serves to extol the super-man and otherworldly attributes of the epic heroes as well as expose important themes in the narrative.

Last but not least, let us consider **focalization** in the African epic. Genette (1972) makes a distinction between focalization and narration, where the former refers to the art of seeing, while the latter has to do with the actual telling. This distinction helps us differentiate more easily between the **focalizer**, the one who sees what is being narrated, and the **mood**, the one who does the telling. Genette identifies two main types of focalization, namely external focalization and internal focalization. Whereas external focalization corresponds with the 3rd person narrative perspective, internal focalization corresponds with the 1st person narrative perspective. Regarding external focalization, Genette discusses three sub-categories. He calls the first category “vision from behind,” the same category Todorov describes by a formula: **Narrator > Character**. Here, the narrator has more information on all unfolding events than any of the characters who are actually involved in the action. The second category, according to Genette, is where the narrator knows no more than a particular character. Here, **Narrator = Character**. In the third and final category, the narrator knows less than the character. This means that **Narrator < Character**. Pouillon calls this “vision from without.”

Most, if not all African epic texts, are externally focalized. *Sundiata*, *Kambili*, *Mwindo* and *Chaka* are all externally focalized, with an omniscient narrative point of view. In

other words, the narrator in each of these epics knows more than any one character does. In *Mwindo*, for instance, the narrator knows everything about both Mwindo and his father, She-Mwindo, including their thoughts and emotions. The story is no different in *Chaka*.

1.5 A Glance at Armah's pan-African Epic

Although critics of Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life* freely use the term "pan-African" epic in reference to these novels, a clear definition of what this "pan-African" epic is or should be is unavailable. Consequently, we shall at this point attempt a working definition of the term. This should help us have a clear point of reference to the term in this thesis. A "pan-African epic" in this thesis is a novel or a selection of novels that portrays ordinary everyday women and men engaged in ideological warfare to bring about a political and economic liberation of Africa presented as a seamless continent without obvious geo-political and economic boundaries. A pan-African epic is, therefore, a politico-literary novel that asserts African unity and independence. It is a modification of the African epic, for it adopts the oral narrative form of the African epic and modifies it into a literate form while emphasizing the "telling" in a dramatic manner as opposed to the music and performance that accompany the African epic.

1.6 Elements of Armah's pan-African Epic

We should now take a look at *Two Thousand Seasons*, which actually serves as the background for *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life*. Perhaps, the first indication

Armah gives us that *Two Thousand Seasons* is an epic is the kind of narrator we meet. In the African epic, the poet-griots or bards who narrate the epic story are often presented as people with unparalleled knowledge of the history of the people whose story they tell. The poet-griot in Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* is cast in the mould of a poet-raconteur whose knowledge of his people is based on firsthand knowledge of the events narrated. The few opening sentences are relevant here: "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" (*Two Thousand Seasons* 21). These words suggest a court-historian at work. Bards, Okpewho tells us, are confident and "generally outspoken about their merits" because they want to prove that they have unquestionable knowledge about their subject of narration (*The Epic in Africa* 45). The attitude of the narrator in this novel gives the impression that he intends to be seen as a bard with excellent knowledge about his subject.

Most epics are set in the dim past whose events could only be related by special people like a poet-griot. We observe this trend in *Two Thousand Seasons*. Clearly, the period whose events the narrator tells us about in this novel belongs to a putative distant past, and although we are unable to prove the veracity or otherwise of these events, we certainly admire the unmistaken authority with which the narrator relates them to us. Closely related is an extensive geographical travelling embarked on by epic characters. In some cases, the travelling may cover both the physical and the supernatural world (*Dimensions of Comparative Literature* 52). Armah's epic characters mainly represented by the twenty initiates, travel extensively on a mission to recover their best traditions, customs and practices summed up as "the way, our way." What is different, though, is

that these characters do not straddle both the physical and the supernatural worlds in their journeys.

From our discussion earlier, we have gathered that war is a recurring feature in the African epic. Due to this, one is likely to encounter in the African epic an epic hero and a catalogue or catalogues of troops before a battle. For it is through these wars that the hero proves his mettle. Sackey (2010) observes that “... catalogues of troops...” are parts of the epic plot. Clearly, the characters in Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons* are heroic and are presented as warriors engaged in a war to recover their best customs, practices and traditions which they believe are under threat. At certain moments in the story, the names of these characters are mentioned almost the same way they are done just before a battle.

Diction, according to Sackey, “is expected to possess a grand style worthy of the grandeur of the genre” (58). Formality is, usually, a feature of the epic diction. Armah’s choice of words in *Two Thousand Seasons* as shown in the poet-griot’s account and from the utterances of the characters is obviously formal. Even the account of the Dance of Love, which merely recounts a night of entertainment, is rendered in formal language, and so is the one on the women’s revolt on the night of the feast of Ramadan. The use of long speeches is also commonly associated with the epic diction. *Two Thousand Seasons* abounds in such long speeches as well. Another feature of Armah’s diction in *Two Thousand Seasons* is his use of the 1st person plural nominative, “we.” This is a mark of formality as it is similar to the royal use of the pronoun.

Apart from diction, Armah’s style in *Two Thousand Seasons* also deserves mention as far as the work as an epic is concerned. Repetition and parallelism, which are marks of

formality, are also common in the novel. Specific pronouns, words, phrases and whole sentences are repeated in a manner that slows down the narrative and gives it a certain serious tone commonly associated with the epic genre. Long speeches, a common feature of the epic, are also present. Isanusi's public address to the people on the arrival of "the destroyers from the sea" is a typical example.

The most significant epic feature present in Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, perhaps, is myth. Myths are known to be a part of the oral traditions of all human societies: "Nowhere on earth has a society developed a cosmology that did not involve itself with fundamental truths about all humankind" (*Introduction to Myth*, 1977). Created around known historical truths, myths may help the epic achieve its objective of inspiring "nationalism and national pride" (*Dimensions of Comparative Literature* 27). Homer's *Iliad* is based on *The Myth of Troy*, which is itself based a historical truth. *Two Thousand Seasons* presents us with the myth of Anoa. This myth is directly linked to a well-known historical antecedent, an encounter between Africans and foreigners and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Examined, this myth serves to support Armah's pan-African message, and thereby inspire a feeling of "nationalism and national pride," for it serves to remind the people of their common past, their present challenges and their future hopes and fears.

The epic nature of *Two Thousand Seasons*, as shown above, is plain enough. *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life*, however, tend to differ significantly in terms of form: their choice of narrator, setting, character, diction and the application of myth are markedly different from *Two Thousand Seasons*. For one thing, the narrator in these two novels is not cast in the mode of the poet-raconteur. Apart from that, setting in the novels

does not depict the rustic, dim past *Two Thousand Seasons* presents us with, and the warlike characters are also missing. Again, we do not see in *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life* the same elevated language as used in *Two Thousand Seasons*. Last but not least, the Anoa myth and its direct reference to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade are not seen in these novels. These differences notwithstanding, a critical reading of both novels suggests that they still have a lot in common with *Two Thousand Seasons* and that they advance Armah's pan-African epic story begun in the former.

Armah's pan-African epic story in *Two Thousand Seasons* is a story of the loss of what he calls "the way, our way." Briefly, this "way" is the total worldview of the people. "The way, our way" is one that thrives on gender equality, communal or group existence and social, rather than religious interpretation of existence. "The way," however, is lost through an encounter between Africans and foreigners and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade that resulted. The loss of "the way" reaches its highest point when Koranche, a collaborator-king, attempts to sell some of his own people into slavery, but through a bold, well-coordinated shipboard revolt, the victims of the attempted slave trade return to their homeland. The battle to recover "the way, our way," which began earlier in the narrative, at the arrival of the "predators from the desert" and the "destroyers from the sea", continues unabated. This battle, unlike the one we see in the African epic such as *Sundiata*, *Mwindo*, or *Chaka*, in which much emphasis is placed on physical warfare, is one fought with ideological weapons. We realize that even though the "epic" characters are portrayed as warriors, their first concern is not to engage their adversaries in a mortal combat; they respond physically only when "the way, our way" comes under attack.

In *Osiris Rising*, we observe that the effort to recover “the way” is continued, this time, through collaboration between African intellectuals on the continent, represented by Asar, and their counterparts in the Diaspora, represented by Ast. The collaboration we observe among the characters in this novel is similar to the one in *Two Thousand Seasons*. Here again, the characters are not engaged in a physical battle fought with guns and other artillery. Rather, they engage their opponents in a battle which must be won mainly with intellectual and ideological weapons: arguments and debates about what they consider practical ways of solving everyday challenges. The Africa-centered type of education anchored in the history and best practices of the continent proposed by the characters should be seen as part of the battle to “re-member the dismembered continent” (*Remembering the Dismembered Continent* 2010). Nowhere in this novel do we see the characters physically attack their opponents. By the time we get to *KMT: in the house of life*, the battle of “re-membering the dismembered continent” is still raging. Here, however, the battle is not only for African intellectuals. Like the one in *Osiris Rising*, it assumes the form of an alliance, but an alliance between intellectuals and traditionalists. What is also clear here is that although each novel could be seen as a complete work independent of the others, the motif of loss and recovery of “the way, our way,” which is also directly linked to African identity and unity, runs through all three.

The kind of focalization, characterization, the representation of women, the monolithic setting, the concept of the epic hero, and the idea of warfare the author presents to us call for a critical study of this new form of the African epic we are calling the pan-African epic. In all three novels, focalization tends to be internal and emphasizes group rather than individual identity. Again, characters in these novels, although heroic, are not super-

human characters. We also observe that the success of any one character is dependent on the rest, so we see the strength in unity instead of the glory in individual exploits; there are no epic heroes in these novels. Armah's female characters also call for critical attention as far as their prominent roles as agents of change in novels described as "epic" are concerned, and so is the monolithic setting in stories that seek to speak for the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa. Last but not least, physical warfare, which is invariably a part of the epic plot, is not a major feature in these novels; what we have is ideological warfare. These features make Armah's pan-African epic different from the traditional African epic. Using Okpewho's *The Epic in Africa: Towards a Poetics of the Oral Performance* (1979), this thesis critically examines the texts in terms of their focalization, character, setting and themes, among other things, with a view to determining how each fits into Armah's single pan-African epic story while exploring the extent to which it differs from the African one. As part of the analysis of the texts, the study will explore the role of myth in the creation of Armah's pan-African nation, a seamless, monolithic Sub-Saharan Africa without its current "independent" nation-states. Since a fundamental function of myth is to explain origins, and since the epic is known to be partly myth, an exploration of myths in this thesis should enhance our understanding of Armah's pan-African epic.

1.7 A Statement of the Problem

The "pan-African" epic nature of Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life* has not been lost on critics of his works. In "Style and Purpose in Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*," A. N. Mensah refers to *Two Thousand Seasons* as ". . . a novel which has characteristics that properly belong to the epic" (1) and discusses in

some detail some of the epic elements such as the formal, elevated language and the high mimetic mode in which characters are cast in the novel. In his article, “Africa and the New World Order: Voices and Ways of Liberation in Armah’s *Osiris Rising*,” Erik Edi sees the novel as “pan-African and revolutionary.” In their joint article, “Reunification and the Search for the African Identity in Armah’s *Osiris Rising* and *KMT*,” Kakraba and Addei maintain that the two novels constitute what they describe as “articulate and eloquent expressions of an African scribe’s constant desire to interact and set an agenda for the global African community.” The global African community Kakraba and Addei talk about is obviously a reference to Armah’s pan-African community he invites his African compatriots to build

As the above discussion clearly indicates, critics are aware that Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons*, *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life* are either epics or “pan-African” epics. What is unclear, however, is the peculiar nature of this “pan-African” epic. The relationship among the three novels as far as the epic or pan-African epic is concerned is also not stated; and neither are we told how far this pan-African epic is similar to or differs from the African epics we know. There is, however, copious textual evidence suggesting that what we are calling Armah’s pan-African epic, with particular reference to *Two Thousand Seasons*, is significantly different from the African epic, and the purpose for this new approach is to create the right platform to discuss pan-Africanism, a theme that he further explores in *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life*.

Armah’s characters are engaged in an ideological warfare rather than a physical battle fought with weapons as is the case in the African epic. Apart from that, characterization in these novels is also remarkably different; there is choric characterization instead of

individual skill. Consequently, the hero-figures we see in the African epic are missing in Armah's pan-African epic. Accordingly, diction is carefully chosen to reflect this group-driven activity. Related to the choric characterization in Armah's pan-African epic is the special role women play. Unlike the passive female characters in the African epic, Armah's pan-African epic presents female characters in prominent roles, usually as co-adjutants with their male counterparts. There is also an unspecified setting in all three novels, and the reason for this is to emphasize the common identity motif that the author seeks to propagate. This is further strengthened by the selection of names for the characters from across South-Saharan Africa. What we have here, therefore, is clearly a modification of the African epic form to create a pan-African epic that seeks to speak for South-Saharan Africa.

This thesis is, therefore, an attempt at examining *Two Thousand Seasons*, *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life* as pan-African epic novels, with an emphasis on the pan-African epic form of the precursor text and how its message is extended into *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life*, while showing the nature of their relationship to *Mwindo*, *Chaka*, and other African epics.

1.8 Objectives of the Study

This thesis aims to:

examine some technical and formal features of Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* that could help to define the novel as a pan-African epic,

draw on these features to explore the relationship between *Two Thousand Seasons* on the one hand, and *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life* on the other,

explore how far Armah's pan-African epic form resembles or differs from the African epic,

and find out the implications of Armah's pan-African epic form for world literary discourse in general and on the African epic in particular.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

Isidore Okpewho's *The Epic in Africa: Towards a Poetics of the Oral Performance* (1979) serves as the main theoretical framework for this study. Okpewho's book spells out certain general features of the African epic. It talks about the role of the bard, an oral mode of composition, an emphasis on music and performance rather than mere narration, a deliberate projection of the image of the epic hero, and the prosodic form of the African epic. Okpewho's book is, therefore, relevant to a discussion of Armah's pan-African epic as it enables us to see how far Armah modifies or maintains the African epic tradition.

1.1.0 Significance of the Study

The African epic has enjoyed some critical attention. But very little is known about the pan-African epic. Consequently, this study brings into critical dialogue this relatively new form of the African epic. This should help us expand our boundaries on the discussion of the epic in general and the African epic in particular. Beyond that, the study should also help us look anew at Armah's works, and this should further enrich the already extensive scholarship on Armah.

1.1.2 A Justification for the Study

Two Thousand Seasons is markedly different from *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life* as far as form is concerned. The authoritative narrator, the seamless setting, the warlike characters, the elevated diction and the application of myth in *Two Thousand Seasons* clearly differ from what we see in *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life*. We notice that the narrator in these two novels does not come across as one who has firsthand knowledge of the events narrated. Again, we do not find the same rustic, monolithic setting, and neither do we find warlike characters ready to take on their adversaries. Quite apart from these, the formal language of *Two Thousand Seasons* is missing in these novels; and the Anoa myth which Armah uses as a reference point for his pan-African nation does not apply in these two novels. These differences notwithstanding, a careful reading of all three novels together shows that they tell a single story of loss and recovery. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, there is the loss of “the way, our way” which sends the warlike characters into the battle of recovery. “The way” pursued by the characters is one based on a vision of a future pan-African community that thrives on best African customs, traditions and practices such as communal as against selfish, individual existence, equal opportunities for all the people, irrespective of sex; and the social rather than the religious interpretation of existential problems. The return of the twenty initiates to the visionary Isanusi after the unsuccessful attempt by their collaborator-king, Koranche, to sell them into slavery, represents the beginning of the odyssey to recover “the way.”

In *Osiris Rising*, the battle takes the form of educational reforms in academic institutions. The characters still intend to retrieve “the way,” by calling for educational reforms that

reflect the peculiar history, traditions, culture and best practices of the peoples of the continent. They believe that any academic programme that fails to take cognizance of these is doomed to fail.

We discover in *KMT: in the house of life* that the battle of “the way” described in both *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Osiris Rising* is still being pursued. Here, the characters are fighting to recover a lost tradition that once made knowledge a commodity accessible to all, but now made the preserve of a privileged few. The characters in this novel, like those in the first-two, are fighting an ideological war in which knowledge of their history, traditions, customs and best practices are the main weapons, although they are up against a physical force that threatens their very lives.

One thing stands out when we read all three novels together: In *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah diagnoses what he perceives in his “Remembering the Dismembered Continent” as “The accidents of history” that have made “us what we are today” and begins to lay the foundation for the recovery of that which was lost. In both *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life*, Armah has clearly moved from the rustic setting in *Two Thousand Seasons* to a modern one where African intellectuals collaborate with their traditional counterparts to pursue the agenda of recovering “the way, our way.” In other terms, *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life* serve to point out more clearly what we need to do in order “to shape the course of our future...” (*Remembering the Dismembered Continent* 10). However, the above clear relationships among the novels have not been adequately explored in earlier studies, hence the justification for this project.

1.1.3 Methodology

As stated early on in the study, this thesis argues that Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life* tell a single pan-African epic story of loss and recovery, and that the style employed by the author in these novels, especially *Two Thousand Seasons*, signals a new approach to epic writing, a modification of the African epic. This makes the study, essentially, an exercise in comparison. Consequently, features of Armah's pan-African epic, as borne out particularly by *Two Thousand Seasons*, will be compared and contrasted with those of the African epic as discussed in Okpewho's *The Epic in Africa: Towards a Poetics of the Oral Performance*. These will include formal elements such as orality, the role of the bard, musical accompaniment, audience participation and performance. Technical elements such as focalization, characterization, style and diction will also be examined. Apart from these, thematic issues will also be dealt with. Among them are history, betrayal, conflict, religion and resistance. This approach should help draw clearly the difference between Armah's pan-African epic and the African, making it possible for us to see the uniqueness of this new form of the African epic.

1.1.4 Organization of the Thesis

Divided into five chapters, this thesis will be organized as follows:

Chapter One: Entitled Introduction, this chapter will comprise the background to the study, the problem statement, the objectives of the study and the justification for the study. Also to be included in this chapter are the significance of the study, the theoretical framework, methodology and the organization of the study.

Chapter Two: This chapter will review relevant literature. It will focus on scholarship that discusses the novels either as epic or “pan-African” epic. In addition, the African epic tradition will be discussed. This would help clarify what the African epic is and enable us to compare Armah’s pan-African epic and the African epic.

Chapter Three: Chapter three focuses on two main aspects of Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons* within the context of a “pan-African epic.” It examines some of the formal and technical features that make it uniquely different from the African epic. It also examines some of the themes through which Armah addresses his ideology of pan-Africanism.

Chapter Four: Here, *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life* will be discussed. Like the previous chapter, this one will examine both the content and form of these novels with emphasis on how they both extend the pan-Africanist message in *Two Thousand Seasons*. Finally, it examines the points of divergence between Armah’s pan-African epic and the African epic.

Chapter Five: This chapter, the concluding part of the study, will discuss the significance of Armah’s pan-African epic story within the politico-social and economic realities of contemporary Africa. It will also point out how *The Revolutionaries*, Armah’s latest novel, feeds into, or departs from his pan-Africanist focus. In addition, the chapter will examine what contribution this pan-African epic project brings to the discussion table as far as the postcolonial African literary discourse goes. Finally, the chapter will make recommendations for further studies.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter sets out to do two main things. First, it examines literature on the African epic in general. This is to help us clearly conceptualize the African epic in terms of its formal, technical and thematic elements. It then moves on to review literature on the three primary texts: *Two Thousand Seasons*, *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life*. It focuses on only scholarship that treats these novels as either epics or pan-African epics. Scholarship referring to these novels as pan-African epics already exists. A review of such scholarship should reveal how much is known of this “pan-African epic.” Since the study argues that Armah’s pan-African epic is a modification of the African epic, a review of both the African epic and the pan-African epic should help us clearly single out the features of each for closer analysis, and this would ultimately help us see the extent to which Armah modifies what we are already familiar with.

2.1 Scholarship on the African Epic

African epic texts are not in short supply at all, but scholarship, especially on individual texts, is not readily available. That notwithstanding, a few scholars have written on the African epic in general. Isidore Okpewho, John William Johnson and Tijani El Miskin are among those who have dealt with the subject. In his Essay, “The Kayawar in the context of the epic tradition” (1981), Miskin discusses the African epic, holding up *The Kayawar* as an example; but he also points out some of the difficulties to encounter when one attempts to discuss the epic, particularly in the African context. However,

Okpewho's *The Epic in Africa: Towards a Poetics of the Oral Performance* (1979) seems to be a most comprehensive treatise on the African epic. In this book, Okpewho discusses in some detail some of the formal and technical elements of the African epic. His book, therefore, is relevant to a study of Armah's pan-African epic.

2.3 Formal Considerations of the African Epic

As far as form in the African epic is concerned, certain elements seem to cut across: oral composition, the role of the bard, prosody, musical accompaniment, balance of performance and audience participation, among other things. We examine, briefly, these elements.

The African epic is typically a tale rather than a poem orally composed and performed. Due to its oral form, a single epic could have several renditions by different bards with some variations in detail since the circumstances prevailing at each performance would be different. Even the same bard performing the same epic on different occasions would not produce exactly the same text in the same manner. Okpewho, for instance, refers to at least four different versions of *Sunjata*, also rendered *Sundiata*, and in each case, the bard is different. The version referred to as *Sunjata I* has three Mandika versions, all sung by the same bard, Bamba Suso. *Sunjata II*, *Sunjata III* and *Sunjata IV* were sung by Banna Kanute, Dembo Kanute and Mamoudou Kouyate respectively (xvi). *The Mwindo Epic* is also known to have different renditions. In some cases, it is referred to as *Mwindo*; in some other cases, it is called *The Mwindo Epic*. Consequently, an African epic or heroic tale with a fixed text is very difficult, if not impossible to find.

Closely related to the oral form of the African epic is its prosodic structure, which deals with rhythm and sound. As already mentioned, the African heroic tale is performed, and sound and rhythm are an important part of its prosodic structure. The “prosodic structure of the [heroic] song,” according to Okpewho, allows the bard to perform other activities alongside his performance: music, dance, drama etc. It also allows “impromptu repartee and other participation from the audience” (154). The prosodic structure thus leads us to the role of the audience in the performance of the African heroic tale.

The audience are considered important in the structure of the African epic. They are not merely passive onlookers or listeners. Their mood, general behavior and acceptance of the bard’s efforts can significantly affect the performance since they are expected to take an active part in the musical accompaniment, dance and drama. Okpewho’s point that there is an “emotional relationship between singer [bard] and audience” (135) is relevant here. We could, therefore, say that the audience can make or mar the bard’s performance depending on how they respond, both physically and emotionally.

Lastly, the African epic also embraces the balance of performance. We should remember that in his performance, the bard is more interested in showing rather than telling. This is where the balance of performance comes in. The bard intersperses his narration with short performances, usually aided by the audience. In this way, what the bard is not able to narrate in vivid detail is compensated for by the performance. The balance of performance is thus a special ingredient that helps the bard to spice up his narration and make his characters come alive.

2.4 Technical Features of the African Epic

We now turn our attention to some technical features in the African epic. Here, we discuss focalization, character, setting, style, the concept of heroism, and the nature of war in the African epic. We shall draw our examples from individual texts.

Focalization in the African epic is generally external, usually with a 3rd person omniscient narrator. In this type of focalization, the narrator knows more than any one character. The bard in the African epic is often a 3rd person omniscient narrator who is always at pains to show how knowledgeable he is as far as what he narrates is concerned. In *The Mwindo*, for example, the narrator begins thus: “In the village of Tubondo lived a great chief. His name was She-Mwindo.” In *Chaka*, *Sundiata*, *Kambili* and many other African heroic tales, focalization is external.

When it comes to character, the African epic seems to privilege men over women. These male characters are usually of the noble class, such as kings or princes; they may also have acquired nobility through the display of sheer bravery or by some other means. We also observe that these male characters are developed as individuals; there is no choric representation of characters in the African epic. They are almost always portrayed as heroic figures with extraordinary abilities, particularly in the display of unbridled strength, for they must accomplish what everyone else is unable to do. The world of the African epic hero, Okpewho points out, “is too much a world for the unusually strong” (6). In *The Mwindo Epic*, Mwindo, the hero, a child of just a few days old, is unmatched in strength; not even his own father is able to tame him. He stages a war against his father and wins convincingly. The hero in *Kambili* demonstrates a similar feat; on a lizard expedition in the company of his peers, the boy who has just begun walking, finds and

picks up two cubs of a leopard and throws them into his hunting bag. When their mother approaches to fight for her cubs, Kambili swiftly kills her and runs home to show the captured cubs to his father. If the African epic hero is an unusually strong man, he is also presented as one who straddles both the physical and the supernatural worlds, and may even be able to take on divinities in physical combat. A good example is Mwindo in *The Mwindo*.

That strong male characters dominate the African epic world does not mean, however, that there are no women characters at all. Female characters are present in the African epic, but they are usually few and play less prominent roles: they are wives, mothers, sisters, and concubines. In *Sundiata*, some of the female characters are Sundiata's mother and her co-wife, and their main roles in the narrative are those of wives and mothers. In *The Mwindo Epic*, the wife and mother role of women is still upheld. One does not find strong, heroic female characters doing some of the great things done by their male counterparts. Female characters are represented in *The Mwindo Epic*, *Sundiata*, *Kambili*, and *Chaka*, but in each of these epics, not a single woman is involved in any of the brave acts, such as wars or killing wild marauding beasts that threaten the lives of the people. In the African epic, then, female characters tend to exist only in the shadows of their male counterparts.

Examining various African heroic tales, we notice that setting varies as we move from one text to another. So far, no African epic presents a monolithic, "pan-African" setting. In each case, the setting reflects a particular geographical space within Sub-Saharan Africa. The truth is that Africa is significantly "diverse in geography, race, and language

patterns” (*The Epic in Africa: Towards a Poetics of the Oral Performance* 29), and setting in the African epic tends to show this diversity.

Diction in the African epic is usually simple. A reading of any number of African epics would reveal simplicity of diction. This is because the audience, who are an integral part of the performance, are also quite familiar with the story the bard relates to them. The interjections and repartee they throw in during a performance issue from this familiarity. Consequently, it does not call for the use of any obscurantist language to talk about things the audience already know. Thus the simplicity of diction in the African epic is in keeping with the familiarity of the audience with the issues being related.

2.5 Major Thematic Issues in the African Epic

Although there is no limit to the number of themes one may find in the African epic, physical warfare or some other struggle of a physical nature seems to be common. Examining various African epics, we notice that war or battle appears to be the main occasion for the epic hero to showcase his extraordinary bravery and strength. The eponymous Mwindo shows his father what he is capable of through warfare, and it is through several conquests that Chaka establishes himself as the greatest among his contemporaries. Okpewho’s observation that the world of the African epic hero “is too much a world for the unusually strong” (6) holds much truth here.

2.6 Scholarship on *Two Thousand Seasons*, *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life*

Much scholarship on Ayi Kwei Armah's novels already exists. However, we shall here focus on only three of his novels: *Two Thousand Seasons*, *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life*. Specifically, we examine scholarship that deals with these novels as either epics or pan-African epics. In this direction, Robert Fraser, A. N. Mensah and Erik Edi among others have all referred to at least one of the above-named novels as either epic or pan-African epic. However, no scholarship, as far as this researcher could verify, has yet looked at all three novels as together telling a single pan-African epic story, although there is evidence to suggest that that is the case. Again, scholarship on these novels does not tell us the extent to which Armah's pan-African epic is similar to or different from our traditional African epic. But when carefully examined, Armah's pan-African epic, with particular reference to *Two Thousand Seasons*, reveals certain features that make it significantly different from what we have come to know as the African epic. Its literate form as opposed to the oral form of the traditional African hero tale, its focalization, setting, character, diction, and the concept of war call for a critical study into Armah's type of epic.

2.7 *Two Thousand Seasons* as an Epic or a pan-African Epic

Critics of Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* tend to agree on one point: not only is the author's style in this novel different from that of his earlier novels; it is also remarkably different from known novelistic forms. In "Style and Purpose in Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*" Mensah quotes Fraser thus 'the term, novel, though it appears clearly on the

title page, sits oddly on a book so apparently remote from existing novelistic models' (1). Fraser and Mensah could not have put it more explicitly, for the epic and the novel belong to two entirely different literary genres, and yet Armah seems to have merged characteristics of both genres in the same work, resulting in what Ngara cited in Mensah describes as an 'epic novel'. Fraser draws a parallel between Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, on the one hand, and Ouologuem's *Bound to Violence* and Andre Schwartz Bart's *Le Dernier de Justes*, on the other. Mensah, on the other hand, sees only one major point of similarity between *Bound to Violence* (1968) and *Two Thousand Seasons*, which difference is the historical period in which they are set. He argues that although both draw on the African past, each applies it differently. "Ouologuem's novel is a totally ironic work which invokes African history and tradition in order to mock them," he stresses, adding that "Armah's work is a very different kind; its intention is the very opposite of Ouologuem's, namely, to give dignified expression to Africa's ancestral values" (1). A major setback of Fraser and Mensah's argument, nonetheless, is that it seems to be based, largely, on content, and an analysis of this nature based on content alone might not reveal other equally important literary features such as form and style both of which may be crucial in doing a more comprehensive analysis.

Osei Alkebulan is another critic who establishes a link between Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* and Yambo Ouologuem's *Bound to Violence*. He argues that the former is a response to the latter. He suggests that *Bound to Violence* (1968) is a biting critique of African nationalism, an apologia for neocolonialism. Following its publication, Ouologuem's *Bound to Violence* was widely celebrated, especially in Western circles, winning the **Prix Renaudot**, one of France's highest literary awards, and this, some

critics have indicated, puts the novel in the same category of literary prize-winning novels with Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. But Alkebulan maintains that the wide approbation of the novel by the West was a result of its negation of African nationalism. Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, on the other hand, Alkebulan insists, remains largely unacknowledged in the West because of its pan-African agenda, a clear "manifesto against white supremacy," an urgent invitation to Africans to reassert themselves. Alkebulan's observation ties in with Mensah's claim earlier; mainly that *Bound to Violence* and *Two Thousand Seasons* do not belong together because whereas the former invokes African history and tradition in order to mock them, the latter upholds them. Alkebulan notes that *Two Thousand Seasons* is a "radically different notion of African fiction" in which the story is told, not through an individual "I" narrator, but rather through a collective "We," a feature he describes as a "signal achievement in the history of modern literature." To Alkebulan, even the language is an "Africanized form of English, a form of the English language that attempts to express ideas in a way that does not try to strictly adhere to the British Standards of usage. Mensah also shares this notion; however, he insists that the "Africanization" of the English language did not originate with Armah, for earlier African writers such as Achebe, Aidoo, and Okara had all experimented with it.

Alkebulan also points out the use of African oral traditions and history in *Two Thousand Seasons*. He observes that Armah's narrative discourse in *Two Thousand Seasons* builds on "the ancient prophecy of Anoa [myth] which forecasts two thousand seasons of tumult and eventual triumph, and two Akan narrative traditions, Anansesem [story] and Abakosem [history]." As far as Alkebulan is concerned, then, the main sources of

Armah's narrative in *Two Thousand Seasons* are African oral traditions such as myths and folktales, and history. His observation is relevant to the discussion of Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* as an epic narrative, for these features, according to Okpewho (1979), are defining features of the traditional heroic tale or African epic. We should, however, point out that in spite the oral resources Armah uses in this novel, his attempt to present his narrative in a controlled, literate form, marks a point of departure from the African epic whose form is essentially oral.

In a fairly detailed discussion of Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, Mensah, in "Style and Purpose in Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*," asserts that the novel is "a highly skillful work on a subject which should appeal to African readers, but which seems not to have gained the attention and acclaim granted *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* or *Fragments*" (1). The subject which Mensah talks about here is the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade with its link to pan-Africanism, one of the thematic concerns of Armah's pan-African epic narrative. It is a subject that makes many, especially in the West, very uncomfortable; one that many an African writer would rather not tackle. Liukkonen (2008) observes that, "Not many African authors have dealt with the slave trade in the African past." Quite aware of the nature of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and its far-reaching consequences on the entire African continent, Armah chooses it as a major issue in his pan-African epic project. We should see Armah's inclusion of the history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in his pan-African epic story as strategic, as it is an issue that cuts across the entire continent. But that is not all. As a historical antecedent to Africa's present challenges, both political and economic, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade is one that should appeal to all people of African descent who care about their past. Sackey

(2010) reminds us that “even if the story of the epic is more fable than history, the final historical outcome or value should be inevitable.” Armah obviously uses the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade for its “historical truth.” Armah, perhaps, hopes that a widely-known historical account such as the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade whose scars some would argue continue to haunt the continent even today, would serve as a common ground for building his pan-African nation.

A major issue Mensah raises in his article is Armah’s style in *Two Thousand Seasons*, a style he maintains makes it difficult to determine the particular genre *Two Thousand Seasons* belongs to. He notes that, “a central problem in discussing Ayi Kwei Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons* is to decide what kind of work it is” (1). He asserts that in this novel, Armah presents his readers with a “novel, but a novel which has characteristics that properly belong to the epic” (1). He points out the high mimetic mode of expression, repetition and roll-call of characters as some of the epic features of the novel. Ngara must have had a similar inkling when he posed the question: “Can we therefore describe it as an epic novel, a novel which is much more than an ordinary novel?” (1) It is, indeed, an extraordinary novel; a novel cast in the mould of an epic, with an extraordinary purpose—to speak for the entire Sub-Saharan Africa. An epic narrative that attempts to present a homogenous picture of Africa in the twenty-first century would definitely pose a difficulty to critics who might be concerned with realism not only because historically, no such configuration ever existed, but also because the continent is so divided both politically and economically. This unusual feature of the novel, according to Mensah, constitutes what he terms a kind of “strangeness” which might explain why it has failed to receive the same wide readership and critical attention accorded Armah’s first and

second novels, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments* respectively. Both Mensah and Ngara are right about the epic nature of *Two Thousand Seasons*, but Ogede in his *Ayi Kwei Armah: Radical Iconoclast* (2000) puts it even more accurately; he observes that “the spirited vigor with which the novelist presses his case, using oral rhetorical devices, as well as his didactic intent...” not only lend epic proportions to the narrative...” but also give it a “pan-African” appeal (96-7).

Mensah argues further that Armah’s use of the high mimetic mode of expression, which employs a careful selection of formal language, puts *Two Thousand Seasons* in the epic category. According to Northrop Frye quoted in Mensah: “The high mimetic poet is essentially . . . a counselor or preacher, a public orator or a master of decorum” (5). He observes that in an attempt “to tell a story affirming public values . . .” (5), Armah adopts the model of the tradition of the court historian, “traditional raconteur” Ogede (95) who in effect, is a public speaker, and this ties in with Frye’s idea of the high mimetic mode of expression.

Mensah also points out that repetition is “the most salient device” (7) in *Two Thousand Seasons*, noting that the kind of repetition we see here is not just a repetition for its own sake, but rather, one that is carefully done to bring about “variation, balance and antithesis” (7). Repetition here directly points to diction, an important element in the epic. Sackey (2010) notes that: “The epic diction itself is expected to possess a grand style worthy of the grandeur of the genre” (58), and “the repetition of important phrases or whole sentences” (58) forms a part of this grand style. Armah’s use of repetition, as this thesis hopes to point out, is not only to raise the novel to an epic level, but also to

emphasize his pan-African vision. In other words, repetition in *Two Thousand Seasons* has a thematic function similar to what we observe in the African epic.

In discussing the roll-call of characters in *Two Thousand Seasons*, Mensah refers to the shooting event that follows the return of the twenty initiates sold into slavery by the collaborator-king, Koranche. This observation is pertinent as far as the study of *Two Thousand Seasons* within the context of the epic is concerned. “Catalogues of troops before a battle,” according to Sackey (52) form part of the structural devices of the epic plot. The roll-call, as referred to by Mensah, apart from pointing to the epic nature of the novel, also marks a point of difference between Armah’s pan-African epic and the African epic, for the “catalogue of troops” points to warfare through which the hero in the African epic asserts his ultra-human attributes. Conversely, the “catalogue of troops” in Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons* rather emphasizes the strength in numbers, and therefore carries a thematic meaning in this epic novel. Directly linked with the catalogues of troops is single combat, which Mensah describes as “another recurring feature of epic narrations” (9). Mensah refers to the encounter between Bofo and Isanusi in which the former has been hired by Koranche, the collaborator king, to murder the latter – an encounter that proves rather fatal for Bofo because of Isanusi’s sheer wisdom and skill in combat (*Two Thousand Seasons* 288-292).

Mensah, however, rejects attempts by other critics to compare *Two Thousand Seasons* to Achebe’s *Arrow of God*, or *Things Fall Apart*. Such critics usually assert that, compared to Achebe’s two novels, Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons* lacks complex characters. Mensah’s view on this point is that the two authors might well have employed different approaches to “characterization.” Elsewhere, Mensah has also argued that whereas *Two*

Thousand Seasons is in the high mimetic mode, Achebe's historical novels employ the low mimetic mode. Based on Frye's description of the high mimetic work – a category that comprises most epics and tragedies, but not novels. . . Mensah explains that, “In the high mimetic mode, the hero is superior in degree to other men, but not his environment. He has authority, passion and powers of expression far greater than ours, but what he does is subject to social criticism and to the order of nature” (5). He adds: in the “low mimetic mode—where the novel [properly] belongs—the hero is one of us and we demand from the poet the same canons of probability that we find in our own experience” (5). Thus Mensah clearly demonstrates the entirely different modes of characterization in *Two Thousand Seasons* and in Achebe's historical novels, and why it is improper to attempt a comparison between the two authors based on their works, for each uses a different style for a different purpose.

Mensah's dichotomy between Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, on the one end, and Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, on the other, is clearly supported by textual evidence. The two African writers are diametrically opposed to each other as far as their application of African history is concerned. Whereas Achebe's account of the African past would suggest that the African tradition must succumb to Euro-Western pressures, Armah's gives a totally different picture of an African past that was sufficient for Africans—a representation some have described as perfect and therefore, unrealistic. Generally, however, Mensah's discussion, as shown above, achieves one aim; it succeeds in pointing out the epic features of Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*. Beyond this, however, it does not tell us what specific type of epic the novel is. Are we to read *Two Thousand Seasons* as another African epic, or are we to do more than that?

Still on Armah's works, Ogede (2000) argues that even though Armah has at one time condemned Senghor's Negritudean philosophy, calling it "... an artistic statement that reflects the leader's inferiority complexes, his slave mentality," (12) a good number of Armah's own works clearly "... resemble Senghor's work in tone, intention, and achievement" (12). He further suggests that Armah stands with other English-speaking Africans such as Wole Soyinka, Lewis Nkosi, and Esk'ia Mphahlele in this show of "... insensitiveness to the significance of Negritude, although their own works are replete with the features of this ideology..." (Ogede 12-13).

Ogede also observes that, "One of the basic features of the novel [*Two Thousand Seasons*]... is that it is narrated by a seer-historian, who employs the plural voice that draws from the pool of the communal experiences of his people." This, he points out, enhances the "pan-African appeal" of the novel, giving it "an all-African focus" (Ogede 97). What Ogede does not tell us, however, is what constitutes this "all-African focus" of the novel, and how it is connected to other Armah novels such as *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life*.

For some critics, Armah's application of African history in *Two Thousand Seasons* seems to be a major issue. Chinua Achebe, as quoted by Nwachukwu-Agbada in the *Massachusetts Review* (1987), seems to question Armah's representation of the history of Africa in the novel. He states:

"[H]is *Thousand Seasons* . . . in which he is trying to re-create the history of Africa . . . I find unacceptable on the basis of fact, and on the basis of art. The work is ponderous and heavy and wooden, almost embarrassing in its heaviness. It doesn't have the air of authenticity which Ouologuem achieves in his *Bound to Violence* (1968). [I]t is like a lump of concrete sitting in place" (*Massachusetts Review*, 1987).

The issue of authenticity regarding African history Achebe raises looks like an attempt to read *Two Thousand Seasons* as though it were a catalogue of historical facts; and this is rather misleading. A careful reading of the text reveals that Armah is only using the African history as raw material out of which he creates a myth in support of his pan-African nation. In these novels, Armah shows “...how history and myth collide to give rise to fresh visions of order...” (Ogede 95). Armah’s appropriation of African history is thus a means to an end—to project his pan-Africanist ideology through which he hopes Africa’s challenges, political and economic, could be surmounted. Thus the suggestion that the novel lacks authenticity because of its representation of African history is rather unfair to the writer. Nonetheless, *Two Thousand Seasons* still reveals factual historical antecedents such as the Arab and European invasions of Africa and the subsequent Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. In order to avoid such unfair assessments of the works of writers, it might be important that critics take into consideration the intent and use to which writers want to put history. Read with this understanding, Achebe’s own works, for instance, appear to have a different purpose as far as the application of African history is concerned. For instance, in none of Achebe’s novels does he attempt to project a common, homogenous African setting, and this, consequently, influences his application of the African past. This shows that both ideologically and artistically, he and Armah are opposed to each other. It would, therefore, amount to unfairness on Achebe’s part to attempt to pass judgment on Armah’s works, using his own standards.

As earlier pointed out, Armah’s aim, especially in *Two Thousand Seasons*, *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life*, is to tell a story that asserts a common identity for his Sub-Saharan African compatriots. Consequently, his representation of the African past is

deliberately bent towards that end. This explains why the African past in these novels is given a nostalgically dignified representation. African history, as we encounter it here, is one loaded with traditions, customs and practices that Africans are encouraged to revive. It is Armah's own creation of the African past. In a way, Armah revolutionizes the African past in order to create an epic that is itself revolutionized as far as the African epic is concerned. Armah believes that in Africa, revolution and art are synonymous, and so artists are revolutionaries. Solo the translator in *Why Are We So Blest?* tells us: "In my people's world, revolution would be the only art, revolutionaries the only creators" (231). If Solo's assertion is anything to go by, then the African artist is a revolutionary, a creator. We should see Armah as one of such revolutionary creators.

Achebe, on the other end, does something totally different. For one thing, he is not writing an epic, and neither does he intend to tell a story asserting a common African identity. This, to a large extent, influences how he applies history. History, as Achebe represents it here, does not necessarily dignify African traditions, customs and practices the way Armah does. Achebe's history in *Things Fall Apart*, for instance, points us to an African tradition where twins were considered an abomination and were, therefore, thrown into the "evil" forest to perish. Such a view of Africa could not be dignifying. Although some critics would argue that Achebe presents his pre-colonial Africa in both its positive and negative lights, a careful study of such a representation would reveal that it seems to indirectly emphasize why it was necessary for foreigners to step in and save the situation. Obviously, Armah and Achebe are doing different things as far as their use of African history in their literary works is concerned.

If there are critics who find Armah's representation of African history in *Two Thousand Seasons* problematic, there are also those who assert that the author appropriated the American Puritan Salvation History. One such critic is Guendouzi Amar. Analyzing Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* in his paper, "Salvation History in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*" (2012), Amar, like some earlier critics, notes the epic impulses in the novel. For Amar, the novel's "plural narrative voice . . . its spatial setting, time span, and the actions" of the protagonists all speak of the epic. However, Amar's main focus in that paper appears to be the historico-religious dimension of the discourse. He does not tell us the nature of this epic.

Amar's main argument is that even though Ayi Kwei Armah clearly demonstrates deep knowledge of the "strategies and the pleasures of orature," he also appropriates the American Puritan Salvation History. The reason for this borrowing, Amar insists, is to enable Armah to assert a difference between his philosophy of African history and the Senghorian Negritude Philosophy. However, Mensah and Ogede would disagree with Amar on this claim of Armah appropriating the American Puritan Salvation History. Mensah, for instance, insists that Armah's artistic source is the rich African oral tradition, holding up the Anoa myth as a typical example. Ogede, in "The World of African Storytelling," [even though he does not directly mention Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*], indicates that several oral traditions exist in Africa—from which the modern African literary artist could freely borrow to enrich his work.

Even though Amar's line of argument clearly indicates that his aim here is not to point out the pan-African epic thrust of Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, he ends up affirming it, albeit indirectly. How does this come about? One may ask. Behind the concept of the

American Puritan Salvation History to which Amar alludes was the ideology of American identity and self-determination. Through this ideology, the American people sought to assert an identity that was different from, and opposed to that of Britain. It was an ideology that was steeped in national liberation and total independence of the American people. In much the same way that the American people used the Puritan Salvation History to assert a common identity and freedom from Britain, their “colonial” masters, Armah, through his pan-African epic novels, presents to his African audience a proposal for both literary and political identity and liberation. In other words, Armah’s pan-African ideology is similar to the American Puritan Salvation History. But this is the only point of convergence between Armah’s pan-African ideology and the American Puritan Salvation History. Even more important, Armah’s pan-Africanism is also a literary or artistic pan-Africanism, as a closer reading of the formal features of the three novels, *Two Thousand Seasons*, *Osiris Rising*, and *KMT: in the house of life* reveals. Thus, by attempting to show that Armah borrowed from the American Puritan Salvation History, Amar only succeeds in pointing out ideological similarities. However, his claim that Armah’s source of artistic inspiration is the American Puritan Salvation History flies in the face of textual evidence. Certainly, Armah could not have borrowed his Anoa myth, which is his own creation, from American Puritan Salvation History, and neither could he have borrowed the history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Indeed, Amar would be hard put to it to show real evidence of the influence of the American Puritan Salvation History on Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons*.

2.8 *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life*

The change in Armah's artistic style as observed in his *Two Thousand Seasons* is also evident in his *Osiris Rising*, and scholarship on the novel shows this. In his unpublished article, "Africa and the New World Order: Voices and Ways of Liberation in Armah's *Osiris Rising*," available on jpanafrican.com, Erik Edi describes the novel as pan-African and Revolutionary. He points out Armah's clear departure from the tone of despair that informs his earlier novels such as *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments*, to one of hope and optimism. It is, however, important to point out that Armah's departure from despair to optimism does not begin from *Osiris Rising*; it properly begins in *Two Thousand Seasons*, which actually predates the former. Edi is however quick to add that this optimism Armah espouses in *Osiris Rising* does not in any way attempt to down-play the harsh realities of "the road for African liberation." In other words, while Armah invites his African compatriots unto the road of liberation for the continent, he also makes it clear that the road is not an easy one; it is certainly not a leisurely walk in the park. Edi could not be more accurate on this point. When we examine the main character, Asar and his tragic end, we see that there are more powerful forces at work both outside and inside Africa today, forces whose main objective is to prevent any real positive changes that would free the continent from its current shackles of domination and exploitation with their resultant poverty and underdevelopment, as such changes might rob them of their own positions and political influence. Edi's observation here clearly challenges the views of other critics such as Derek Wright, who speaks of Armah's simplistic representation of Africa and its liberation. For Edi, Armah's "treatment and presentation of Africa" in *Osiris Rising* speaks of a "new direction for the

African novel, and African arts in general.” Edi is referring to an all-African perspective Armah adopts, which fits into the pan-African thought he sets off in *Two Thousand Seasons*. Thus when he points out the Afrocentric focus of the novel, claiming that “*Osiris Rising* adopts an introverted and Africa-centered approach to liberation,” he is emphasizing the pan-African message of the novel, for there is a direct connection between the “Africa-centered approach...” and the pan-African epic project Armah embarks on. It is, however, important to mention here that this strongly African-centered approach of Armah in his works has made some critics, especially from the West, describe his style as racist.

Myth is still an integral part of Armah’s *Osiris Rising*, and the purpose is no different from what pertains in *Two Thousand Seasons*. Anyone familiar with the ancient Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris would see clearly the parallel between it and Armah’s *Osiris Rising*, for there is a direct transposition of the major characters of the ancient Egyptian myth into the main characters of Armah’s *Osiris Rising* so that Asar represents the mythic Osiris, Ast stands for Isis, while Soja is Set in the ancient myth. We observe that the rivalry between the mythic Osiris and Set, his brother, resulting in the latter killing the former and dismembering his body is clearly played out in *Osiris Rising* through the antagonism between Asar and Soja in which Soja pursues Asar and finally kills him. But that is not the end as far as the parallel between Armah’s *Osiris Rising* and the ancient Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris is concerned. Just as it took the efforts of Horus, Osiris’ son to avenge the death of his father, Ast’s unborn son is expected to continue the fight begun by his late father to liberate Africa from the likes of Soja. The significance of all of this is that Ast’s unborn son represents a flicker of hope for the liberation of Africa from

imperialism as Horus represented hope for the liberation of ancient Egypt from the evil Set, according to the ancient myth.

On setting in *Osiris Rising*, an online critic observes that, “Armah sets the story in a contemporary unnamed West African country.” This observation is of importance within Armah’s pan-African epic both as a literary genre and as a political ideology. As a literary form, the African epic has a known geographical, historical and cultural background, usually depicting the particular ethnic group. Known African epics such as *Mwindo*, *Chaka*, and *Sundiata* have all named settings. Armah’s unnamed setting obviously represents a modification of the African epic, an attempt to create the illusion of a unified Sub-Saharan Africa without borders.

Another discussion of Armah’s works that is also particularly relevant to this study is Divine Che Neba’s “Recycling Myth and Revisionism in the Post-Colonial Discourse” which appeared in *Culture without Borders* (2008). In the abstract to his article, Neba refers to what he calls “the old assertion”, especially in Western circles that Africans lack the ability to develop “beyond what nature provides them, except through external influence.” Quoting some 18th century Western philosophers, “Hegel” among them, he continues thus, “...as we see [Negroes] today, so have they always been.” Neba finds this blanket condemnation of Africans by Westerners rather distasteful, calling it something “...rooted in centuries of denigration of Blacks as a whole, and from the disdainful treatment of African values...”, and which needs to be adequately addressed by contemporary African writers ready to challenge the old narratives and tell the African story. It is in this direction he finds Armah “... a revisionist mythologist” [who] attempts in *Osiris Rising* to demythologize and demystify the external notion of “forward never,

backward ever.” This, Neba says, Armah does, “by resuscitating the African past as a means of restoring lost African values.” It is not only in *Osiris Rising* that Armah “demythologizes and demystifies” existing narratives. Demythologization and demystification are to be seen in nearly all his subsequent novels. Neba also points out the obvious connection between Armah’s fourth novel, *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Osiris Rising*. He notes that in the former, Armah traces the “history of a severed continent ...” and then uses “his regenerative ability to domesticate and recycle the ancient Egyptian myth” about Osiris and Isis in the latter to show how the dismembered African continent could be re-membered. Neba’s observation points to one of Armah’s artistic strategies [the appropriation of history and myth] in his pan-African epic novel experiment mentioned earlier. His observation is similar to what Okpewho, in “Myth and Modern Fiction: Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons*” (1983), terms “tradition revised” (281). By this, Okpewho is referring to the tendency of some contemporary African writers such as Armah to revise existing historical and mythological conventions in order to make them fall in sync with their own artistic objectives, especially when they feel the existing narratives do not sufficiently help them do so. In reference to *Two Thousand Seasons*, Okpewho states that:

What we have in the book is a tale in the oral style all right, but one that rejects the present social history of Africa as unrepresentative of its true character and so projects us in true prophetic fashion to a vision of an Africa that is free of its shackles and guided by an ideology or religion- ‘the way’- which the race was nurtured in since time immemorial (282).

As already indicated, studying some of Armah’s works more closely shows that his “revisionist” approach to the history and myth of Africa that Neba and Okpewho refer to begins all the way from *Two Thousand Seasons*, and continues through *Osiris Rising*, *The*

Healers, and *KMT: in the house of life*. And this historico-mythical approach Armah adopts is a major artistic strategy in his pan-African epic project in these novels. For while his mythologization of history forms part of his modification of the African epic, it also forms a major foundation for the pan-African community he proposes.

Kakraba and Addei (2011) in “Reunification and the Search for the African Identity in Armah’s *Osiris Rising* and *KMT*” have also pointed out Armah’s pan-Africanist vision behind his works. These critics have suggested that Armah’s *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life* clearly announce Armah’s futuristic African vision, a vision that is pan-African. For them, these two novels, together, constitute “articulate and eloquent expressions of an African scribe’s constant desire to interact with and to set an agenda for the global African community.” To talk of a “global African community” is to talk about pan-Africanism. In short, Kakraba and Addei have pointed out Armah’s pan-African vision as it is articulated in these two novels. However, they establish no connection between *Two Thousand Seasons* on the one end, and *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life* on the other. Their discussion, thus, appears to concentrate more on the ideological dimension of these novels.

In a recent discussion of Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons*, *Osiris Rising*, and *KMT: in the house of life*, Jerome Masamaka (2012) looks at the novels from a literary utopian point of view. In this study, *Defining the African Utopian Literature: A Study of Ayi Kwei Armah’s Two Thousand Seasons, Osiris Rising, and KMT: in the house of life*, Masamaka argues that the three aforementioned novels constitute “a utopian trilogy.” In other words, the novels, particularly in their ideology, present us with the idea of a perfect society in which everyone works well with each other and is happy. According to *The Encyclopedia*

Britannica, utopian novels are “... extravagant castles-in-the-air, nostalgic Shangri-Las, provocative satires, and rank political tracks thinly disguised as novels”.

Masamaka refers to More’s *Utopia* and argues that the thought and form of the novels put them in the utopian category: “The radical ideological vision these works collectively propose and the unconventional narrative strategies Armah adopts” (v) all go to emphasize the utopia project the author pursues. Masamaka’s association of the above-mentioned novels with utopianism, especially in ideology, appears a bit problematic because with the mention of utopia or utopianism comes the notion of idealism, but one may be hard put to it to prove that the pan-African community Armah calls for could really pass the utopian test. The highlights of Armah’s pan-African nation as borne out by the three primary texts are group identification and action of sister-African nations for political and economic advancement, women empowerment in the struggle for the liberation of Africa, re-examination of foreign religions, and an educational system that is truly relevant to the African situation. It is difficult to conceptualize how the above proposals constitute idealism.

But perfectionism is not the only reason for Masamaka’s utopian argument. His main reason for labeling the novels utopian is what he calls “the socio-political reality of Africa,” which for him, means that “Postcolonial Africa is so much controlled politically and economically by Western powers that any dream of a future Africa free from Western imperialism remains an idealist’s dream” (Masamaka 7). Masamaka, by this claim, seems to suggest that Western influence on Africa is something etched in stone, making any attempt to change it impossible, otherwise, why should it be considered a utopian idea to propose an Africa that is truly independent of Western interference and

manipulation? Although some may argue that shaking Euro-Western influence off Africa would be long in coming, even if it does come at all, that would be different from suggesting that it is impossible. And are Euro-Western powers not who they are because they always assert a common identity both politically and economically? A united Africa will not be a new concept in world politics since the “Western powers” are themselves practicing something akin to that, and this, some would argue, is partly why they wield so much power, both politically and economically worldwide today. If the idea of the European Union is not a utopian concept, then the idea of a united Africa, which underlies Armah’s pan-African epic story, could by no means be utopian either. A union such as the European one requires that members de-emphasize some of their individual agenda for a collective one. In other words, any such union will only thrive if members stress the things that unite them rather than those that divide them. Different European sub-groups speak different European languages, for example; but the members still see the need to present a united front. Armah’s pan-African epic proposes a similar idea. Masamaka’s utopian claim as shown above is problematic since it seems to over-emphasize what divides Africa rather than what unites her.

Having cited the “socio-political reality of Africa” as the reason for referring to the three novels as constituting a “composite utopian project,” Masamaka goes on to cite Armah’s call for egalitarianism, Africa-centered education, balanced gender relations, and a critical examination of organized foreign religions such as Christianity and Islam, part of his “ideal African state.” Why he calls the future African state Armah proposes “ideal” is in itself part of the attempt to force on the author this utopian ideology. However, it is clear that as far as the issues raised in *Two Thousand Seasons*, *Osiris Rising*, and *KMT: in*

the house of life are concerned, Armah is not calling for a perfect “utopian” African society, as Masamaka invites us to believe. Rather, Armah, through his pan-African epic narrative, invites his compatriots to conceptualize an Africa in which artificial political boundaries no longer falsely separate sister-nations, for it is only through such a configuration that the continent could assert real economic and political liberation. Masamaka’s claim that Euro-Western influence on Africa is still very strong, and that breaking it will not be easy to achieve, is largely incontrovertible. It is, however, difficult to see how this makes the idea of a politically united Africa utopian.

What this literature review reveals is that critics are clearly aware of the epic, or pan-Africanist dimension of Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons*, *Osiris Rising*, and *KMT: in the house of life*. Nonetheless, the contours of this epic or pan-African epic still remain a blur. Discussions of the novels as epics or pan-African epics, so far, do not tell us much about the specific nature of Armah’s type of epic. Neither are we told the extent to which Armah’s epic is similar to or different from the African epic.

The literate form of Armah’s pan-African epic, particularly with reference to *Two Thousand Seasons*, points to a different kind of the African epic. Also, the concept of war in all three novels is different from what pertains in the African epic. Again, the a-priori acceptance of “catalogues of troops before a battle” has a different application in Armah’s pan-African epic. Apart from these, focalization, setting, character diction and the concept of the epic hero in Armah’s pan-African epic all call for a critical study of the novels. Currently, there is no known study that examines all three novels as telling a single pan-African epic story. This research hopes to fill this gap.

CHAPTER THREE

FOUNDATIONS OF ARMAH'S PAN-AFRICAN EPIC: A READING OF *TWO THOUSAND SEASONS*

3.0 Introduction

Although all three novels, *Two Thousand Seasons*, *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life* together seek to propagate pan-Africanism, its foundations, both in form and content, are first laid in *Two Thousand Seasons*. In this novel, Armah presents to us what is clearly an epic in form and pan-African in ideology. However, as we have already noted in Chapter One, this pan-African epic is very different from what we know the conventional African epic to be. Close readings of *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life* also reveal that these two novels are further extensions of Armah's pan-African epic project. This chapter looks at the first of the three selected novels, *Two Thousand Seasons*, focusing on two main things. First, it isolates, for a detailed analysis, some of the formal and technical features of this new form of the African epic. Second, it examines some thematic concerns in the novel, with a view to exploring how the author uses these to advance his pan-Africanist ideology. These discussions should give us a clear idea about the nature of Armah's pan-African epic.

3.1 Formal Features of *Two Thousand Seasons*

An important feature of the African epic is its "oral" form, and Okpewho stresses this point in his *The Epic in African: Towards a Poetics of the Oral Performance* (135). And as mentioned early on, since prevailing circumstances at each performance may be different, a single epic may have different versions, with remarkable differences. For a

work described as a pan-African epic, one would have thought that Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* would have an oral form, but this is not the case. Rather, it has what is obviously a literate form, and this feature constitutes an important aspect of Armah's pan-African epic form. Although the poet-narrator in this novel is cast in the mould of a court-historian orally delivering the story, in much the same manner the oral bard in the African epic undertakes his performance, there is no any other version of the text except what is herein narrated. Clearly, what Armah has done is to conveniently appropriate the oral form of the African epic to produce his literate pan-African epic.

We should also mention that as far as form is concerned, *Two Thousand Seasons* is presented as a narrative and not as a song. The African epic, though perceived as a tale about the heroic deeds of a man or men writ large, is often rendered as a song rather than as a narrative. It is a heroic "song" (Okpewho 65). It is for this reason that the bard is often referred to as a "singer" (Okpewho 55) and not as a narrator. Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* is clearly a heroic tale, but a tale that is told, not sung. However, the kind of "telling" we have in this novel is peculiar, for it is done in a manner that creates the illusion of an audience who are being directly addressed: "Do they ask how many single seasons we have flowed from our beginnings till now? (210). But the role of the audience in this instance is unlike that of the African epic in which the audience are actually present and make significant inputs in the entire performance. In Armah's pan-African epic, the audience are not really present and consequently, they cannot influence the narrative in any way.

Poetry is another feature of *Two Thousand Seasons*. We notice this right from the prologue. It reads more like a poem than prose:

Springwater flowing to the desert, where you flow there is no regeneration. The desert takes. The desert knows no giving. To the giving water of your flowing it is not in the nature of the desert to return anything but destruction. Springwater flowing to the desert, your future is extinction (xi).

The poetic quality of the above quotation derives from three main elements: there is apostrophe, a direct address to Springwater as though it were listening; there is repetition of “the desert” and “Springwater,” and there is a rhythmic flow of one sentence into another. This pattern is replicated throughout the entire prologue and spills over into the novel itself.

But if poetry is a feature of Armah’s pan-African epic form, then so is drama. A careful reading of the novel reveals an attempt to show rather than tell what happened to the characters on their various journeys. This “showing” suggests an attempt by Armah to modify the African epic in terms of its emphasis on performance. The African epic, we should remember, thrives on performance. Through the performance, characters and events are made to come alive. Apart from that, the performance also presents the oral bard, who relies mostly on his memory, to cogitate and to refocus his song. In the absence of a live performance in Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons*, we have a dramatic representation of events. The graphic detail in which the women’s bold revolt on the night of the Ramadan is told attests to this (48-56). Another example is the vivid description of the manner in which the ostentatious cripples commit atrocities against their own kith and kin (110-113). The narration of the “dance of love” is not different (150-155).

3.2 Technical Elements of *Two Thousand Seasons*

Among the elements to be discussed are focalization, character, setting and diction. It is important to discuss these elements to ascertain if they represent significant differences between the African epic and Armah's pan-African one. As part of character, we discuss Armah's representation of women in the text. Still on character, we examine the concept of heroism in this novel. Apart from these, we also look at the concept of war in a novel that is said to be a pan-African epic.

3.2.1 Focalization in *Two Thousand Seasons*

Clearly, the desire to tell a story that purports to speak for the entire Sub-Saharan Africa has influenced Armah's choice of narrative perspective, internal focalization, in *Two Thousand Seasons*. A term coined by Genette, focalization is only one of the aspects of narrative studies. According to Genette, the term has become necessary because of the confusion that sometimes arises when it comes to drawing fine distinctions between mood or focalizer, that is, the one who sees what is narrated, and voice or narrator, which is a reference to the one who does the telling. Genette identifies three main types of focalization namely zero focalization, internal focalization, and external focalization (189). Zero focalization, which is also external, according Genette, is to be found in narratives with an omniscient narrator, one who knows more than any character at any given time. Pouillon calls this type of focalization "vision from behind," while Todorov represents it by a formula: *Narrator* > *Character*. Internal focalization, on the other hand is one in which "the narrator says only what a given character knows." In Todorov's representation, this means *Narrator* = *Character*. In the third category, "the narrator says

less than a character knows.” This type, Genette tells us, is “objective” or “behaviorist.” To Pouillon it is “vision from without.”

In *Mwindo* and *Chaka*, focalization is largely external, for the narrator in these two texts is located outside the narrative. *Mwindo*, as retold by Shepherd, for example, begins with: “In the village of Tubondo lived a great chief. His name was She-Mwindo (*Mwindo*). Part of the opening chapter of *Chaka* reads thus:

The nations were living in peace, each one in its own original territory where Nkulunkulu, the Great-Great One, caused the people to emerge from a bed of reeds ... The tiny nation of Mazulu was ruled at that time by Senzangakhona, a very young man who had three wives or maybe four (*Chaka* 4).

From the two quotations cited above, we observe that mood (focalizer) and voice (narrator) refer to the same entity. However, the focalizer-narrator is not involved in the action being related. In other words, those directly involved in the narrated event are not the ones telling the story. We hear another voice, from behind, doing the seeing as well as the telling. This is what Genette terms external focalization. And as he has pointed out, the main indicator of the external focalization is the use of the third-person plural nominative: “He, She, and They” etc. In *Mwindo*, we have “his name was Mwindo,” while in *Chaka*, it is a “very young man who had three wives or maybe four.” Further reading of both texts indicates that in both cases, the narrator’s attention is essentially focused on the epic heroes. We could conclude, quite fairly, that the use of external focalization in the African epic makes it possible for the narrator to focus on individuals since the African epic, has consistently shown that it is essentially about heroes with superhuman qualities.

However, the type of focalization we find in Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* is internal. Internal focalization, Genette tells us, is one in which narrator is also part of the narrated event; it is equivalent to the "I" narrator (voice). However, what we have here is a "We" narrator. The use of this plural genitive is a "radically different notion of African fiction . . . a signal achievement in the history of modern literature," observes Alkebulan. The narrator's first statement, "We are not a people of yesterday," which directly points to this peculiar way of internally focalizing the narrative, is also Armah's first signal to his pan-African vision in the novel. The first-person plural nominative, "We," gives the narrator a choric identity that creates the impression that the focalizer-narrator in this narrative is not just a single person but rather a group. Obviously, by this design, Armah is emphasizing group identity over individuality, and this clearly re-echoes his pan-African vision. The narrative is replete with this first person-plural nominative, "We." In Chapter One alone, one could count over forty of the first-person plural nominative pronoun! To complement this, Armah also makes a generous use of the first-person plural objective case "us" together with a copious mix of the plural genitive "our." We see clearly Armah's pan-African agenda behind this peculiar focalization. As the text clearly indicates, the "We" as used in this context essentially includes the focalizer-narrator in the action being recounted. But even more significant is the fact that this plural narrative voice Armah uses here refers also to a large unspecified group which we understand to be the author's sub-Saharan pan-African community. Each time the narrator speaks in the first-person plural nominative, "we," or its objective case, "us," or the possessive, "our," group identity and action are emphasized. Herein lies Armah's pan-African vision. The desire to stress a group perspective is so strong that even when the narrator passes

comments on other characters outside the group, usually, in the third-person plural nominative, “they,” it only goes to reinforce the “We,” as the following quotation shows:

The predators, their first appearance among, us was that of beggars. Haggard they came, betrayed and lonely in their hunger of body and soul. We pitied them, for is it not a part of the way that the stranger shall be given sustenance and helped along his road? . . . They grew yet stronger, and in the fullness of their strength turned sudden predators against an easy host (47).

From the above quotation, we see that the narrator’s reference to the predators, “they,” reinforces the “We.” “They,” the predators, appeared among “us.” Seeing that “they,” were “haggard . . . betrayed and lonely,” “We” decided to have pity on them. Thus, it is them against us, and this is sustained throughout the entire novel. While the preference for the “We-Narrator” as opposed to the “I” is a deliberate artistic move to emphasize this all-African, indeed this pan-African message Armah is delivering, it also marks a major departure of Armah’s pan-African epic from the African epic as far as focalization is concerned.

3.2.2 Character in *Two Thousand Seasons*

Character is another feature on which Armah once again departs from what commonly pertains in the African epic. One observation that any reader of an African epic is likely to make is that its characters are usually members of the top echelons of society: kings, princes, brave warriors etc. According to Okpewho in *The Epic in Africa: Towards a Poetics of the Oral Performance*, “an examination of a wide range of epic songs in Africa would reveal that many of them dealt with the ruling or noble houses of the community, perhaps because, historically, these houses bore the brunt of martial action, which is one of the most popular subjects of epic song” (84). Known African heroic songs such as

Sundiata, *Kambili*, *Mwindo* and *Chaka* confirm this trend. On the contrary, the major characters in Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* are clearly ordinary members of the community who strive together to hold up its best practices, customs and traditions. This bold attempt to place the future of society in the hands of commoners is made even stronger by the total denigration and mockery of those from the noble class. Kings, princes and their associates are deliberately written off as parasitic elements, for they exist at the expense of others. The likes of Adusei (70), Ziblim, Jezebu, Bulukutu, Oduntun, Bentum, Oko, Krobo, Jebi, Jonto, Sumui, Oburum, Ituri, Dube, Mununkum, Esibir, Bonto, Peturi, Topre, Tutu, Bonsu and Koranche (111) are all characters Armah uses to stress the point that the so-called nobility of society are really not noble at all. For Armah, then, those who deserve approbation in society are the ordinary people who are truly concerned about the general good. The twenty initiates, architects of the revolt, and their mentor, Isanusi, exemplify this notion.

The African epic also seems to endorse individual characterization. It is essentially the tale of a hero whose abilities supersede those of everyone else in his community. The epic heroes in *Mwindo*, *Chaka* and *Sundiata* exemplify this. Mwindo, for instance, is presented as an unusually tough figure whose strength is unmatched, so that not even his own embattled father, She-Mwindo, is able to face him. Even as a baby, Mwindo is unbeatable. All initial attempts by his father to kill him while he is still a suckling fail. Setting his eyes on baby Mwindo for the first time, the enraged She-Mwindo throws a spear at his own son in an attempt to kill him. On his part, Mwindo only whisks his flyswatter at the approaching spear, and the weapon meant to kill him falls on the floor. Picking it up, he breaks it into two. So much for a newly born baby boy! In much the

same way, the eponymous Chaka is shown to be of extraordinary strength. When danger is at hand, and other men run for dear life, Chaka alone stands up to face what everybody else is afraid of. In chapter three of *Chaka*, Chaka displays the kind of bravery common to most African epics. When a lion attacks his village, and men run in all directions, he alone single-handedly kills the beast to the admiration of everybody:

Gracious! They scattered in all directions and they ran helter-skelter, most of them in the direction of the village. Many had not even seen it, but had only heard its roar. . . Chaka came running from one of the farther ranks. . . Chaka went running and shouting so that the lion should hear that someone was coming and not kill that poor man immediately. . . Chaka waited... without fear. . . [Chaka] plunged his black-and-white spear into a vital spot just under its shoulder blade, and when the [lion] fell on the ground, it fell for good (17).

It is all about Chaka, as the above quotation reveals. All other men are reduced to cowards; Chaka alone is man enough. Examined together, both *Mwindo* and *Chaka* reveal that as far as the African epic is concerned, the leading role of the epic hero is an essential part of the entire narrative, for the hero is the leader of his clan, tribe or nation. Without the hero, the group cannot make any significant progress. What is emphasized here then, is individual valour.

Character in Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, on the other hand, differs significantly from the above convention. What we observe at a glance is that characters are denied individual existence. No single character is allowed to possess extra-ordinary attributes that make him or her indispensable. This is because Armah does not intend to write a hero-tale. His intention, as borne out by the choric characterization he adopts, is to write a group-tale. Consequently, his characters in this novel are always presented as a group which acts with a singular purpose. The success of any one character depends largely on

the entire group. As a group, they must either sail or sink together. We are, therefore, not surprised when Abena, one of Armah's strong female characters, refuses to take advantage of the opportunity that comes her way to save herself because there is no self to save apart from the group.

The desire to extol group existence over individual effort even influences the names of Armah's characters. A systematic study of the names reveals that they have been carefully and deliberately selected from across all the regions of sub-Saharan Africa. We find names found in Ghana, examples of which include Anoa, Yaniba, Adwoa, Antobam, Brafo, Bentum, Dwemo, Edusei, Kumi, Okai, and Pentsir. Other Ghanaian names are Beyin, Togbui, Mensa, Tete, Ankonam, Tutu and Akole. There are also Nigerian names such as Soyinka and Irele. Dedan and Kimathi are clearly Kenyan while Isanusi, Nandi and Ngazi are from Southern Africa. Mensa, Dovi and Akole are names that are common to certain ethnic groups both in Ghana and Togo. However, what is of interest here is the prominence given each name in the narrative. It is quite unusual to find so many names given equal importance in the African epic. What Armah seems to be saying to his African readers is that where they come from on the continent does not matter; what matters is that they see one another as Africans with a common challenge which can only be dealt with through a united vision. As far as Armah is concerned, designations such as Ghana, Togo, or Nigeria, are meaningless constructs; they constitute a "dismemberment of Africa" the purpose of which is to "degrade African life while enhancing European wellbeing" (*Re-membering the Dismembered Continent* 9-10). It is better for Africans to think of themselves as one people coming from various regions of Africa.

3.2.3 Gender in *Two Thousand Seasons*

Gender also comes up strongly in the way Armah presents characters in *Two Thousand Seasons*. In the African epic, there is a clear distinction between men and women; the former are brave, strong and warlike, but the latter are weaklings who must constantly depend on their men for survival. At the lion-killing scene described in 3.1.1, women are completely absent. What we usually see in the African epic is a lop-sided gender representation in which men are placed at the forefront of the narrative. Women, if they are present at all, are at the periphery. This is also true of the Western epic. Sackey (2010) observes, in connection with the Western epic, that “heroic characters” such as “kings, princes, lords, and barons” are all represented, usually in great numbers. Citing the *Iliad*, Sackey points out that the main heroes are “Achilles, Diomedes, Ajax, Aeneas and Hector,” all male. For Sackey, “. . . this lack of interest in the feminine principle is due to the public nature of epic poetry” (51). Sackey suggests that the epic has a “public” character, which makes it more of a man’s affair than a woman’s. In other words, the epic world is the world of men, not women. However, in *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah’s new African epic, gender is largely de-familiarized. What we observe is a marked departure from the dichotomy between men and women as far as the main action is concerned. We observe an attempt by the author to give equal representation to both his male and female characters. Quite a sizeable number of the characters are female, and this is rather unconventional for an epic. Armah’s female characters in *Two Thousand Seasons* include Anoa, Ajoa, Noliwe, Ningome, and Idawa. Others are Ekua and Ronke. But there are yet more: Sibiri, Ndole, Kenia, Ankoanda, Suma, and Naita.

A reading of the novel also reveals that Armah not merely includes female characters in the narrative for their own sake; he also assigns them prominent roles. In this novel, a most significant character, the seer who foresees and warns the people of “the way” about their imminent slip into slavery and subsequent recovery from it, all “maimed,” is female, Anoa. What is even more significant about this character is that she is not even an adult yet; nonetheless, she is the one assigned the all important role of foreseeing and warning the people of “the way” about their future. The narrator tells us:

At the time she spoke she was not of an age to have gained wisdom from experience. She had not lived long enough. She had not had time to move patiently from one hilltop down the next valley, up the adjoining hillside to the sound and visions possible at the top, then down again and on. But an intensity of hearing, clarity of vision and a sharpness of feeling marked her character even in childhood, the time when most knowledge sprang from play (40).

In this novel, women are also portrayed as initiators who persevere when things get tough. In a way, these characters are symbols of hope to the group. One such character is Yaniba, who, in a period of drought, goes single-handedly in search of water because she is “unwilling to tolerate the dryness outside and the indolence of mind among us...obsessed with our people’s need of water” (34). Noliwe and Ningome are two more examples of female characters that represent hope for the entire group when times are hard. We are told that in their attempt to flee from their assailants, the people face myriads of challenges, including attacks from other unfriendly groups, wild animals and other water creatures, resulting in the loss of hope among the people of “the way” as their leaders, described as “pathfinders” give up. In the face of all these setbacks, it is two girls, Noliwe and Ningome, who rise to the occasion, even at the peril of their own lives (*Two Thousand Seasons* 97-106). These two girls remind us of the legendary Yaa Asantewaa of the Asante of kingdom. According to this legend, Yaa Asantewaa was a

Queen-mother of ancient Asante Kingdom at a time when the Asante State of which she was Queen-mother was under attack from British forces. However, the men-warriors, who were supposed to defend the state, had all run for shelter. Consequently, she stood up, gathered other men and led them into war against their assailants. Although she and her men lost the war, according to the legend, her courage at a time when men had been seized by fear is often recounted among the Asante to date.

The above-mentioned representation of women is markedly different from Armah's earlier works such as *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Fragments* and *Why Are We So Blest* in which Armah's female characters retain what is usually believed to be their traditional roles: grandmothers, mothers, wives, sisters and so on. We could, therefore, say that Armah's female characters in *Two Thousand Seasons* have undergone a transformation as far as their representation in his earlier works is concerned. However, not all critics see this transformation as necessarily progressive. Abena P. A. Busia's "Parasites and Prophets: The Use of Women in Ayi Kwei Armah's Novels" is relevant here, not only because it establishes a dichotomy between Armah's two main different representations of women, but also because it fails to account fully for the purpose of the change in the author's characterization of women.

In the above-cited essay, which was published in *Studies of Women in African Literature* (1986), Busia examines the representation of women in Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Fragments*, *Why Are We So Blest?* *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*. She argues that Armah's representation of women in his works swings between two extremes; they are either oppressive parasites or liberating prophets. She states: "So far as the portraits of women are concerned in all five novels, the division between

parasites and prophets is stark” (90). According to Busia, Armah’s parasitic female characters, on the one hand are usually portrayed as essentially materialistic women who “make demands, generally material ones concerned with keeping up social appearances, which always provoke a storm of conflict in their men” (90). Clearly, Busia does not approve of Armah’s stereotypical representation of women as cited above. At the other extreme end, she argues, are the prophets, with reference to *Two Thousand Seasons*. She maintains that, “Pitted against [the parasites] are the liberating prophets. This conception of them springs primarily from the literal role they play in the fourth novel, *Two Thousand Seasons*, the only work in which women ever initiate any action” (102). Of course Armah has since gone ahead to produce other works in which women continue to play lead roles. But Busia’s acknowledgment of Armah’s revised representation of women as “liberating prophets” is not an approval either, for she believes “that these female figures are more often than not simply female voices, and, as women, are unsexed” (102).

One of Busia’s difficulties regarding Armah’s representation of women in his works, it seems, is what she describes as Armah’s one-dimensional female characters. She contends that “... Armah’s women remain on the whole one-dimensional; we never find, in the same person, a true complex of both virtues and faults” (107). But she also agrees that in *Two Thousand Seasons*, in particular, Armah has broken away from the “... conventions of the modern realistic novel” (106). She is absolutely right. In Armah’s historico-mythical pan-African epic world, what seems more important is group identity rather than individual excellence, and this has obviously influenced the kind of female characters in the work. In fact, Armah’s male characters are no more complex than his

female characters are. Thus, the unconventionally strong female characters should be seen as an essential part of the author's pan-African epic form.

Armah's pan-African women are not only initiators; they are also sometimes presented as close partners with their male counterparts in the day-to-day activities that give meaning to their existence. We observe this equal yoking of women and men, first of all, in the training of the initiates. Throughout the initiation ceremony, the young women are presented side by side with their male counterparts without any attempt to make distinctions between women and men based on gender. This is unusual, for anybody conversant with African traditional rites of passage would agree that the sexes are usually initiated separately so that young women and young men do not mix during these ceremonies. Clearly, Armah is advocating a society in which people are treated based on their capabilities, and not their gender. It is in advancement of this view that Armah presents the people of "the way" as a group without the usual gender distinctions. In this direction, "the dance of love" ought to be seen as symbolic, for at the said ceremony, the young girls are not presented as objects to be picked and chosen by the young men. Rather, it is the young women who decide who they want to be with, and the result is a collaborative relationship based on mutual respect (155). The argument, as Armah presents it to us, is that bravery or heroism, which is usually a major motif in the African epic, is not the preserve of men; women heroes also exist, at least in his pan-African epic world. It is in this context we understand better why Armah presents his women characters in the way he has done.

During the shipboard revolt, too, we observe another representation of the co-existence of women and men who exhibit bravery and solidarity among themselves. The revolt, as the

narrator relates it to us, speaks of a hazardous encounter, a close brush with death. Yet we are not presented with a story of women crying and calling on men to save them. Instead, they stand up together in unison with the men to deal with a situation that threatens their society. It is, therefore, no wonder that they succeed in spite of all the odds. Gender is not important in Armah's pan-African society as portrayed through his female and male characters. This is a new African society, a pan-African society in which relationship with people is dependent on their abilities and capabilities.

3.2.4 Heroism in *Two Thousand Seasons*

The epic hero is often taken as a given in the African epic. In either the Western epic or the African epic, the hero is easily distinguishable from all other characters mainly because of the sterling qualities he may possess. He may be a fearless warrior at the head of an army engaged in an important war. In addition, he may also possess certain ultra-human qualities such as being partly human and partly spirit, and being able to engage with the spirit-world. In essence, the conventional epic hero is a figure that towers above all ordinary human beings.

In *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah presents us with a totally new perspective on the epic hero in the epic. We observe that the most important characters in this novel are not necessarily endowed with unparalleled physical strength, and neither are they portrayed as possessing super-human qualities, such as being partly human and partly spirit. Rather, they are ordinary everyday people who are endowed with clear visions of what the future of their society should be. Isanusi is certainly not a warrior, and he is not super-human either. None of the twenty initiates made up of eleven young women and nine young men

straddles both the physical and the spiritual worlds. Not a single one among them is a warrior. It is no wonder that we do not find a clearly-defined epic hero in this novel, for as we earlier pointed out, Armah's pan-African epic is not a hero-tale in which the story ends with the exit of the hero. It is a pan-African epic story that continues beyond the life of any one character. This should explain why the epic hero is conspicuously absent in this novel.

3.3 Setting in *Two Thousand Seasons*

As far as the African epic is concerned, there is no uniform geography or culture. Okpewho's question: "Is Africa not too diverse in geography, race, and language patterns to be subjected to such ready paradigms, even with the best of intentions?" (*The Epic in Africa: Towards a Poetics of the Oral Performance* 29) addresses this. Known African epics tend to project this diversity of Africa. In *Mwindo*, *Chaka*, *Sundiata* and *Kambili*, the setting is different. *Mwindo*, for instance, is of the Nyanga, a Bantu-speaking people of the east of the Congo. In other words, as far as setting is concerned, *Mwindo* can be traced to an identifiable ethnic group in the Congo; it is an epic of the Bantu Group, also known as the Nyanga. Similarly, *Chaka* is set in South Africa, but it belongs to an identifiable group within that country. The narrator tells us that "the nations that inhabit [South Africa] are numerous and greatly varied in custom and language" (*Chaka* 1), and *Chaka* is of the nation of the Mazulu located among a larger group called the Bakone to the east of the larger South Africa. However, a close study of Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* reveals a departure from this convention observed in both *Mwindo* and *Chaka*.

In Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, the specific setting is unnamed, and some critics have raised concerns about this. Achebe, for instance, has questioned the nameless setting, arguing that if the setting in the novel is nameless, then so must everything else. Achebe and others of like mind seem to overlook the purpose for which Armah adopts the nameless setting. The understanding we get exploring the author's purpose in *Two Thousand Seasons* is that the subject of the total liberation and development of the African continent brought about through the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and subsequent subjugation and colonization of Africa, is too huge for any single African nation; it is a continental issue that requires an equally continental approach to its solution. This approach is, therefore, to be understood as a way of emphasizing the borderless African nation behind the pan-Africanist ideology upon which Armah establishes his narrative.

To further emphasize this seamless pan-African nation, Armah has carefully framed the discourse in such a way that a direct mentioning of well-known geographical locations is avoided. The narrator tells us: "This land is ours, not through murder, not through theft, not by way of violence or any other trickery. This has always been our land. Here we began" (25). One may ask: What does "This land... our land... here..." refer to? Certainly, the narrator is not talking about Ghana, Nigeria, Togo, South Africa, or any other African country for that matter; the referent is Africa as a whole. We should also mention here that even though certain places are later named in the narration, these names are highly fictional as the intention of the author is not to tie the action down to any specific place. We could, therefore, infer that by not naming his setting, Armah emphasizes the wide, pan-African setting of his novel.

Ultimately, Armah uses movement to stress his pan-African ideal. Right from the beginning of the narrative to its end, the characters, we are told, are in constant motion from one part of Africa to another, and we are informed that this is because “this land,” Africa, is theirs. In other forms of the epic, there is movement across large geographical spaces; this is one of the defining elements of the Western epic, for instance. It is clear, however, that Armah’s use of movement in *Two Thousand Seasons* is not merely to follow conventions. This rather free movement of the characters across the length and breadth of their land indirectly goes to emphasize the borderless, single pan-African society Armah seeks to build. Thus the large epic setting of the novel is clear to the reader, but for Armah, it is the emphasis on pan-Africanism that is important. Setting in Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons* is another important feature that differentiates his pan-African epic from the African version.

3.4 Diction in *Two Thousand Seasons*

Diction, an author’s choice of words in a work of art, could be one of several things; it could be simple, difficult, informal or formal. Regarding diction in the epic, Sackey (2010) writes:

“The epic diction itself is expected to possess a grand style worthy of the grandeur of the genre. It’s various characteristics are the endless epithets, emotional apostrophes, epic similes, long speeches, repetition of important phrases or whole sentences, and in general, it must reach the heights of poetic expression” (58).

Although Sackey’s claim quoted above is in direct reference to Euro-Western epics such as the *Iliad*, the *Aeneid*, the *Odyssey* and *La Chanson*, some of the characteristics are also true of the African epic. Repetition, for example, which is actually an element of style, is

a common feature of the African epic. Repetition in the African epic tends to be formulaic. It could take the form of phrases or clauses, and it has a thematic purpose. Kambili (950-54) presents us with a good example of this.

Apart from repetition, epithets are also a feature of the African epic. Usually descriptive, epithets are used to point out a characteristic of a person or thing (Harmon and Holman 2006). In their conventional application, epithets are used to extol admirable features of epic heroes. Both *Mwindo* and *Chaka* employ epithets for the purpose of extolling and raising their heroes over and above the reach of ordinary men. In *Mwindo*, the following are examples of the use of epithets through which Mwindo describes himself:

I am Mwindo,
The one born walking,
The one born talking.
Oh god of fire,
Even you cannot stop me.
Oh god of death,
Even you cannot hold me.
The god of fire tried to stop me,
But Mwindo stopped the god.
The god of death tried to hold me,
But Mwindo held the god.

From the above quoted lines, Mwindo's extraordinary personality is established: he is already walking and talking by the time he is born! What is even more curious about him is his godlike nature. Here is a baby boy who is as strong as the gods, or even stronger.

The god of fire is unable to curtail Mwindo's powers, and neither is the god of death able to hold him.

In *Chaka* too, epithets abound, and just as is the case in *Mwindo*, these epithets are used solely in describing the hero, Chaka. The use of epithets is more widespread in *Chaka* than in *Mwindo*. Through these epithets, Chaka is raised to the level of a deity. He is variously described as: "Mooing bovine fit to bellow in the royal village; if it bellows in a lesser village, it is not fitting...god with the wet nose, who causes quarrels among the nations!" Chaka is also addressed as: "Bayede, O King! You who are the heaven that gives rain and pastures" (Chaka 110). At other times, he is described as: "Beautiful Child, Most Excellent One! Sport of the women of Nomgabi" (Chaka 111). Clearly, the purpose of epithets in the African epic, as these two texts have shown, is to elevate the epic heroes above ordinary men, and to legitimize their powers. The reason, as already stated, is that the African epic tends to emphasize individual exploits over group action; it is indeed a hero-tale.

3.5 Style in *Two Thousand Seasons*

Armah's style or use of language in *Two Thousand Seasons* deserves critical attention. Style in this novel appears more complex than it is in the African epic. Diction is one of the defining features of Armah's style in this novel, and its apparent indicator is the indirect or metaphorical references to people or things. Examples of these could be seen in the prologue. "Springwater," "desert," and "setting sun" are indirect references to Africans, Arabs and Europeans respectively. Further examples in the novel itself include "the way, our way," "predators," "destroyers," and "ostentatious cripples."

Epithets are also a feature of Armah's style in *Two Thousand Seasons*. Unlike the African epic, in which epithets are mainly used for the purpose of describing the epic heroes, usually with a view to bringing out their ultra-human qualities and other virtues; Armah's pan-African epic has little use for epithets, especially in their conventional application. A careful study of Armah's use of epithets shows two main ways in which he applies them. His first use of epithets conforms, to an extent, to conventional usage, in which case they are used to praise. Here, he uses epithets only in reference to his African characters whose virtues he seeks to extol. "Beautiful as a walking dream Azania" (*Two Thousand Seasons* 52) is the way the narrator describes one of the women of the "way" on the night of the Ramadan. But even here, Armah does not use epithets to praise or extol epic heroes. Azania is certainly no heroine, and Armah does not intend to portray her as one. But beyond the familiar use of epithets, Armah also employs them in a remarkably unconventional way that deserves mention. In his pan-African epic, Armah defamiliarizes the popular notion of epithets in extolling epic heroes. He uses epithets to achieve the very opposite effect. Instead of the praises that epithets are known to shower on epic heroes, Armah's use of epithets serves to criticize and to exaggerate the follies of undesirable characters. Hassan, an "ostentatious cripple" from among the Arabs, is described as: "Hassan the Syphilitic," with a capital "s." Abdallah, once a member of the people of the "way" but now an adherent of the religion of the "predators from the desert," is described as "slave of a slave-owning god." This rather unfamiliar use of epithets may sound strange initially, but as we come to understand Armah's purpose, which is to propose a society where group action is emphasized over individual achievements, we see why any individual who acts contrary to group advancement is

disapproved of and castigated; and why outsiders whose ways are considered contrary to “the way, our way” are satirized.

Apart from epithets, Armah also employs parallel structures as far as style in *Two Thousand Seasons* is concerned. The parallelism in the following structures is obvious:

How inadequate the seeing that remains broken off, unconnected to any larger perception.

How lacking in sufficiency the hearing unconnected to a greater knowledge.

How stupid the utterance cut off from the higher understanding of the connected whole.

How infinitely stupefying the prison of the single, unconnected viewpoint, station of the cut-off vision.

How deathly the separation of faculties, the separation of people (211, 213).

We also observe long speeches in *Two Thousand Seasons*. One of these is attributed to the prophetic Anoa who, in her prophecy, warns the people of “the way” against their bad ways, and the consequences thereof. This speech is quite long, covering nearly three pages, but only a few lines will be quoted here for illustration:

Turn from this generosity of fools. The giving that is split from receiving is no generosity but hatred of the giving self, a preparation for the self's destruction. Turn. Return to the way, the way of reciprocity. This headlong generosity too proud to think of returns, it will be your destruction. Turn. But our voice is not harsh enough for your hearing. You are hastening into destruction so fast its flavor, its very name, will be sweetness to you, to your children, to so many generations of our people hurtling down the whiteness of destruction's slope. Two thousand seasons: a thousand you will spend descending into abysses that would stop your heart and break your mind merely to contemplate. The climb away from there will be just as heavy...Two thousand seasons: a thousand dry, a thousand moist (43).

The famous address delivered by Isanusi to the people on the proposed exploitative relationship between the people of “the way” and the “destroyers from the sea” is another

example of the use of long speeches in *Two Thousand Seasons*. Part of that speech reads as follows:

The first wish of the white men is this: they have heard of our land, of the beauty of the mountains and the plains' fertility here, and of the metals our earth contains – iron in abundance, gold, silver, and our pure, red copper. These metals it is the white men's wish to take away from us, to take them to their home beyond the sea. In return they promise to give the king and his courtiers shiny things, entertainment for their eyes. They would have us break up the mountains, take out what is good in them to give them, leaving ourselves here the waste sand (137).

Perhaps, the most outstanding feature of Armah's style in *Two Thousand Seasons* is the length of his sentences. Some of the sentences in the novel are quite long, running into several lines. These could be seen right from the prologue. The following is a typical example:

You hearers, seers, imaginers, thinkers, rememberers, you prophets called to communicate truths of the living way to a people fascinated unto death, you called to link memory with forelistening, join the unaccountable seasons of our flowing to unknown tomorrows even more numerous, communicators doomed to pass on truths of our origins to a people rushing deathward, grown contemptuous in our ignorance of our source, prejudiced against our own survival, how shall your utterance be heard (xi)?

Apart from the length of the above-quoted structure, it is also syntactically complex. And it would be noticed that this trend is sustained in much of the prologue and carried over into the main text. The following sentence is a quotation from the text itself:

Thousands upon thousands the seasons that have passed since the heavy time of parting, countless those among us who have rejoined the ancestors since we left, but the knowledge has come surely down of the skirting of great waters, kin to the sea, lacking only salt; of long and tiring seasons spent journeying through high forests; of our settling down at the foot of beautiful mountains joining earth to sky again; of the fearful wailing rush when these same mountains of our admiration, now belching smoke, vomiting hot mud, throwing on our bewildered heads ashes and rocks of fire,

like demented demons forced us out of all shelter; of other forests where, astonished, we met predecessors we thought had disappeared along other paths, people who had lost half our language but still had our ways, who gave us the water of welcome and after we had rested long with them guided us the length of all the paths they knew; of a hundred seasons spent journeying till we came to the wide, clear plains before the desert, that place in spirit so like other remembered places our people have called home (25-26).

The above-cited sentence speaks for itself of the extremely long and incredibly complex syntactic structure of Armah's sentences in *Two Thousand Seasons*. The two sentences quoted above reveal a deliberate and controlled structure that could not be possible in an oral form such as the African epic, and therefore, mark a major point of difference between Armah's pan-African epic and the African epic. Again, these sentences reveal a clearly formal and highly elevated use of language that we do not find in the African epic. In fact, much of the narrative reads like a formal speech rather than a story told to an audience.

3.6 Myth and the Epic Convention

As a genre, the epic seems to go hand-in-hand with myth, for part of the narrative is always steeped in myth. Both *Mwindo* and *Chaka* are known to be partly myth, for not all the accounts are known to have actually taken place. To some people, nonetheless, myth should not even be entertained, for it has the tendency of being used as a tool for deception. In her paper, "What is Myth?" which appeared in *Perspectives on Mythology*, 1997, Esi Sutherland-Addy notes that, "in everyday parlance, the word 'myth' drips with negativity" (15). According to her, those who hold this view of myths see nothing good in them. To these people, not only are myths built on "superstitious piety," but also, they are "malignantly planted and devious paradigms conceived to deceive unsuspecting

persons,” apart from being part of “obscurantist and overblown aura hiding reality and seeking to entrench political, religious or economic power” (15).

Others see myths as a feature of ancient or primitive societies. What this means, invariably, is that “civilized, modern” societies have little or no room for myths. Sutherland-Addy tells us that myths are taken to be “a particular type of story with defined features that are collected, anthologized and analyzed,” adding that they are usually associated with children’s literature and are also “depicted as representing the heritage of ancient and primitive societies” (16). Here, there is a veiled tendency to dismiss myths for being merely stories associated with children and ancient, primitive societies. Thus the same negative attitude of those who describe myths in terms such as “superstitious, devious and obscurantist” is being held up here once again.

In spite of the negative attitude that sometimes attends myths, studies have shown that myths have a universal application that is not all together negative. In *Introduction to Myth* (1977), Stillman states that:

Myths are not merely localized, primitive responses to natural or cultural phenomena. Nowhere on earth has a society developed a cosmology that did not involve itself with fundamental truths about all humankind.

What we make of Stillman’s observation is that every human society, whether ancient, primitive, modern or civilized, makes use of myth. Sutherland-Addy observes that in “Linguistics, Anthropology, Folkloristics, Psycho-analysis, Philosophy, Literature, and Religions,” myths have been widely applied. But what are myths?

For Thompson (Sebeok 173), “Myth has to do with the gods and their actions, with creation and with the general nature of the universe and of the earth.” He holds that in

defining myths, it is important to consider their “practical value...according to the type of subject-matter they include.” Frye (1962) says, “A myth is a simple and primitive effort of the imagination to identify the human with the non-human world, and its most typical result is a story about a god.” A god, to him, is a “being who is human in general form and character, but seems to have some particular connection with the outer world” (13). Thompson and Frye seem to agree on the presence of gods in defining myths, for while the former talks of “gods and their actions,” the latter mentions the “non-human world...and...a story about a god.” What seems to be important to both men, however, is the element of functionality in the definition. We observe from the two definitions above that myths have a function: to explain one existential phenomenon or another.

Fawcett (1970) sees myths as a source of symbols which cannot be pinned down to specific meanings, for their meanings constantly change to suit different interpretations and applications. In other words, myths are capable of generating multiple meanings, and this is what Fawcett calls “that characteristic multi-valence of symbol” associated with myths. Myths, he argues, “are concerned with the meaning of human existence at the deepest level.” On the same multiplicity of meaning associated with myths, Ka Mana (28) states that:

Myth is perceived here as the expression of a sacred tradition which cannot be reduced or confined to a fixed meaning according to a single, eternal and unchanging norm from the creation of the world to the end of time. It refers instead to superabundance of meaning ... still constitutes an important point of departure for new possibilities of being and new prospects of self-creation in new contexts of life.

Obviously, Fawcett and Mana also converge on the multiplicity of the meaning of myth. Whereas Fawcett talks of myth being “capable of constant reapplication,” Mana tells us

about “new possibilities of being and new prospects of self-creation in new contexts of life.”

In his *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976), Soyinka states that “Myths arise from man’s attempt to externalize and communicate his inner intuitions.” He also holds that gods and goddesses are projections from the human psyche, and that individual deities are representative of particular aspects of the human imagination, a view Armah also shares. Armah even takes it a step further, adding that myths, especially in Africa, do not stand alone; they move hand-in-hand with history. He notes that:

In Africa, connections between myth and history are strong and obvious. Both myth and history are invaluable psychosocial resources, especially for societies aware that they have lost their way, and willing to work their way toward a more lucid future. In addition to the intrinsic fascination of our myths as artistic narratives, they offer us insights about our society, its experiences and its potential, its fears and dreams ... the study of our myths, along with a serious immersion in our history, is a path to self-knowledge (Armah 2006, 25).

From the above quotation, we can see Armah’s perspective on myths, particularly regarding African cosmology. Myths, to him, are not merely artistic narratives for their own sake; they also bear the key to understanding ourselves, our society, its past, its present, and its future. And this is where the direct “connections” Armah talks about become even clearer: if myths can make us understand the past, the present and the future of our society, then there is a link between myth and history. What this also implies is that there comes such a time when in an attempt to adequately explain our past, present and future hopes and aspirations, we need to go to the myths. In a way, Armah is saying exactly what Soyinka is saying, that “myths arise from man’s attempts to externalize and communicate his inner intuitions.” Beyond this common ground, however, Armah’s

application of myth, as the above quotation reveals, is more inclined towards the social rather than the religious interpretation of existence.

From the few definitions of myth cited above, we can see that there is no generally accepted definition of the term. It is variously a symbol, a metaphor, a narrative with a multiplicity of meanings and applications. What is, however, clear is that whether as a symbol, a metaphor or a narrative, myth is that through which people project their ideals for a better understanding of themselves, their past, their present and their future hopes and expectations. The symbols or metaphors could be human entities or other things, but beyond what they appear to be, they are loaded with other meanings from which people attempt to explain the world around them. In this thesis, therefore, myth is taken to be a narrative, a symbol, or a metaphor to explain various concepts within Armah's pan-African epic. To this end, myth, in this thesis, is seen as the main background against which Armah repackages the history of Sub-Saharan Africa in order to legitimize the existence of his pan-African nation.

3.6.1 The Relevance of Myth in *Two Thousand Seasons*

Carefully examined, Armah's use of myth in *Two Thousand Seasons* falls into two main categories which we shall call myth-making and myth-breaking. In both cases, Armah exploits the world of myth to enhance his pan-Africanist message. Under the myth-making category, we can identify at least two instances where Armah is obviously creating myth and using it as a basis for his pan-African nation. The first instance is the prophetic Anoa narrative. Here, Armah tells of a time in the putative distant past when a prophetic voice warns the people of "the way" of a "choice of deaths: death of our spirit,

the clogging destruction of our mind with... senseless religion of slavery (23). In fact, Anoa's prophecy is not the first, for hers, we are told, is preceded by three, and while she is still a child, two more speak. Prophecies the people ignore, sadly. The narrator recounts:

Concerning the two thousand seasons thrown away to destruction—we speak of the central prophecy that heard the curse of our present coming before its violence burst upon our heads, we speak of the vision that saw our scattering before the first shattering stroke exploded from the desert's white light—of destruction's two thousand seasons against us Anoa was not the first to speak. Three we remember who spoke before her birth, and after, in her childhood, two (37).

Part of Anoa's prophecy reads:

Slavery—do you know what that is? Ah you will know it. Two thousand seasons, a thousand going into it, a second thousand crawling maimed from it, will teach you everything about enslavement. The destruction of souls, the killing of bodies, the infusion of violence into every breath, every drop, every morsel of your sustaining air, your water, your food. Till you come again upon the way (44).

As earlier mentioned, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade is an important subject in Armah's pan-African epic. It is therefore not for nothing that Armah creates a myth about the slave experience of the characters, the people of "the way, our way." For as earlier indicated, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade is one that affects the entire sub-Saharan Africa, if not the whole continent. The political, social, economic and cultural challenges of contemporary Africa are all directly or indirectly linked to Africa's encounter with foreigners and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade that resulted from that encounter. Thus, with this myth about a subject that affected and continues to affect nearly the entire sub-Saharan Africa, Armah indirectly points his African audience to their common past, and why they should

come together in order to fight for a common future. There is, indeed, what we may call a mythologization of the history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, which goes to reaffirm Armah's claim that "In Africa, connections between myth and history are strong and obvious." In order to make his case for pan-Africanism, Armah looks for common grounds in the African past, and finds that in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, and out of this history he creates a myth which basically says that once upon a time, Africans lived together here on the continent, without the shackles of national or ethnic identities. However, out of their own collective irresponsibility, they lost that communal identity, an identity they must now collectively fight to regain. This historical myth clearly points to a social rather than a religious explanation to the challenges the people of "the way" encounter, for the Anoa myth tells of negligence on the part of the people when they ignore the principles of "the way, our way."

Myth as we see it applied here is both a narrative and a symbol of identity. Carefully analyzed, the Anoa myth stated above operates at two levels, namely the narrative level and the symbolic level. At the narrative level, Armah presents to us the Anoa myth in what appears to be a simple story that recounts how a prophetic voice arises from among a people, and foretells their destruction which will come to them in the form of enslavement if they do not act within their own time-honored traditions and customs. The people of "the way" have a rude awakening for ignoring the warnings; they get punished for their lack of attention. Just as the prophecy foretells, they descend into slavery out of which they must struggle to free themselves. In a way, this narrative is a subtext within the main text. However, a closer look at it reveals that beyond this meaning, there is a symbolic significance.

Symbolically, the Anoa figure is meant to serve as an emblem of unification among Armah's pan-African people of "the way" in much the same way that the Myth of the Golden Stool is an object of unification among the Asante. For according to the latter, the Golden Stool was conjured up from the sky by a powerful traditional priest, Okomfo Anokye; and the purpose of this mystery stool is to bring all Asante together under one traditional authority. The Golden Stool, a symbol of authority, it is believed, has helped to keep the Asante Kingdom together for ages. The Anoa myth serves a similar purpose here. As we examine this myth, we realize that Anoa, the seer, prophesies on the future of the entire Sub-Saharan Africa since the slave experience in the message is meant for all the people. Historically, this is significant because the slave raiders did not make any distinctions among their victims when they raided, carried and sold Africans into slavery. In a way, this myth seeks to create the impression that all Sub-Saharan Africa has a common past per the slave experience, and so they belong together and must remain so in order to chart a common future.

The second instance of myth-making we discover in *Two Thousand Seasons* stems from the author's attempt to claim a monolithic status for his pre-colonial African nation. The description we have of the setting and the ways of the people of "the way" make it all look more like a nation than a continent: the people live together and move about around the same place(s); they engage in the same activities such as farming and hunting; they subscribe to the same customs and traditions such as the initiation ceremonies and the dance of love; and ultimately, they practise the same faith. This part of the narrative that suggests that at a certain point in the dim past, Africans were one people is highly mythical. This is what the narrator says: "That we the black people are one people we

know” (*Two Thousand Seasons* 24). To indicate that Africans once spoke the same language, to claim that once upon a time, Africans shared the same faith and lived in the same space without any geographical differences is indeed mythical. “This land is ours...this has always been our land” (*Two Thousand Seasons* 25), says the narrator. Undoubtedly, Armah is using this myth as a symbol to legitimize the claim for his pan-African nation long “dismembered” by “predators from the desert” and “destroyers from the sea.” But we are not unaware of the author’s position on myths, particularly in Africa, for he holds that myths “offer us insights about our society, its experiences and its potential, its fears and dreams.”

While he creates new myths to enhance his pan-African vision, Armah also breaks long-existing ones for the same purpose. One of such instances is to be found in his bold attempt at de-familiarizing gender and its roles in the text. In Armah’s new pan-African nation, the relationship between men and women is one that thrives on mutual respect and collaboration and where individuals are dealt with based on their capacities and capabilities rather than on their gender. Again, in this pan-African society that Armah presents to us, women sometimes take on certain unconventional roles such as hunting wild animals in the fields and bringing home to their husbands the meat and skin. In other words, Armah’s women are no more defined by their biological make-up than their men are. Thus Armah’s treatment of gender ought to be seen as an attempt at breaking the old myths that seek to discriminate against women through gender. A popular Akan proverb translates as: “When a woman buys a gun, it’s a man that keeps it.” The Ewe tell us that: “A woman must not try to urinate the same way a man does.” Both proverbs clearly say the same thing: the woman must know her place in relation to a man. These two

expressions seem to legitimize certain old perceptions which are at best, myths. Armah intends to break some of these, and the ultimate aim is to make his women equally free to contribute in whatever capacity they choose to the development of his pan-African nation.

3.7 Thematic Issues in *Two Thousand Seasons*

In *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah addresses a number of historico-social issues and shows how they together lead to the “dismemberment” of “the way, our way.” Among these are history, betrayal, conflict, religion and resistance. This section explores these thematic issues with a view to establishing their relationship with the pan-Africanist ideology Armah espouses throughout the novel.

3.7.1 History in *Two Thousand Seasons*

History plays an important role in Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons*, and this is made clear right from the first chapter of the novel. A major issue in the novel is the history of Sub-Saharan Africa, and all other issues in the novel are directly tied into this history. Armah contends here that the full, accurate, historical account of Sub-Saharan Africa has not been told and that “what has been cast abroad is not a thousandth of our history, even if its quality were truth” (*Two Thousand Seasons* 21). Armah calls those spreading these false and “truncated tales of our origins” destroyers whose main aim is to “wipe out knowledge of our way, the way”. It is therefore time to tell the full history so as to set the records straight. So, when the narrator declares, quite polemically, “We are not a people of yesterday,” the statement comes off with a sense of authority as of a knowledgeable

historian sure and confident enough about his subject to be able to make such a declaration without any fear of contradiction. And then in the proper fashion of a griot-historian, he states further: “We shall point them to the proper beginning of their counting” (21). The implication of this statement is even more serious than the first one quoted earlier. This narrator proposes to teach those who presume to tell the African history the genesis of their [those who arrogate to themselves the responsibility of telling the African story] own history. A statement such as this presupposes that those it was aimed at did not even know the beginning of their own history well enough to be able to tell others’ history, and that is why the narrator wants to “point them to the proper beginning of their [own] counting.”

As far as Armah is concerned, the false historical information about Africa that is now flying about is dangerous because it is poisonous. “The air everywhere around is poisoned with truncated tales of our origins,” laments the narrator. The declaration to “point them to the proper beginning of their counting” is crucial to Armah’s pan-African epic, for we are not unaware that history is an important subject in the epic in general; it serves to emphasize national identity (Sackey 2010). So we realize that Armah’s preoccupation with the history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade is to use it as a background to claim legitimacy for his single pan-African nation. What Armah is doing, specifically, is to exploit the history of Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly, the history of the encounter between Africans and foreigners, Arabs first, and then Europeans; the result of that encounter: the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade; how all these contributed to the “dismemberment” of an original way of life of his African/ Black people; and to point out the way to rebuild or “re-member” what was “dismembered.” The core of Armah’s pan-

African vision, as we see it in *Two Thousand Seasons* is “the way, our way” which was destroyed, in his own words, as a result of the “accidents of history,” which he intends to re-establish. “The way, our way” is carefully woven into the history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. So, Armah’s pan-African epic narrative is grounded on a solid historical foundation because as Sackey (2010) points out, “even if the story of the epic is more fable than history, the final historical outcome or value should be inevitable (26). The history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade is an argument in favour of a common identity, a major issue Armah explores in the novel.

The understanding we get is that since Armah’s main argument in this pan-African epic is that there used to be a common way, a world-view, which was authentically African, and devoid of all the present divisions now called “independent” African nations, he needs to establish a common ground for such a claim; he requires a narrative, a symbol, something that can hold sway for him in this bold attempt to unify his African continent and to claim a common past for her in order to propose the common future he envisages for the continent. The history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade is one of Armah’s strategies for negotiating such a difficult task. But why, specifically, does the author choose the history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade?

The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, we should remember, is one dark part of the African past which has had a far-reaching effect on the entire continent. That single event, directly or indirectly, drew a large part of Africa, if not the entire continent, into the dehumanizing capture and sale of Africans into slavery in foreign lands. The continent has yet to recover from the impact of that encounter. In reference to this encounter, Kofi Awoonor, in *The African Predicament* writes:

The African continent is in a deep crisis. This crisis has a historical genesis. The dislocation of our original social, political and cultural institutions through a well-crafted program of violence has imposed on us a certain degree of dislocation, sometimes bordering on trauma and sheer dis-function.

Introducing his collection of poems, *Cape Coast Castle*, Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang also makes his position on the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade quite clear. To him, the ramifications of that trade are still alive even today, a reason why it is important to keep the history alive. He puts it thus:

Slavery is the living wound under the patchwork of scars. A lot of time has passed, yet whole nations cry, sometimes softly, sometimes harshly, often without knowing why... One by one the light of learning and of life was dimmed, and then was turned off. This began an eclipse whose effect we are still living.

Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang (2008) is another voice that has described the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade as an issue that continues to linger in the memories of Africans in spite of the many years that have passed. In *Where there is no Silence: Articulations of Resistance to Enslavement* Opoku-Agyemang indicates that the issue of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade is not one that can be swept into the dustbin, for there are time-tested monuments such as castles and forts that once served as places of capture of the slaves before their final shipment across the ocean. These monuments, she points out, daily remind Africans of that sordid past. Opoku-Agyemang insists that Africans have not forgotten the slave experience, and that there are remembrances of that ordeal across the continent. “Thus it is not possible for any group of people to experience enslavement and simply expunge it all out of their consciousness, as the theories on amnesia regarding the slave experience would have us believe” (2), she emphasizes. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, with its negative effects, cuts across Africa. Obviously, Armah places the

history of this trade at the center of his narrative to emphasize the reality that Africans have a common destiny anchored in a common past, a common present, and a common future; and this is where Armah's pan-African ideology comes in. Evoking the history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade fits into his pan-African thought because the author uses it to remind his African readers of their common past experiences, present fears, and future hopes. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade is thus strategic in Armah's pan-African mission since its ever present effects affect nearly the entire African continent.

It is instructive, however, to note that Armah does not blame only foreigners for the enslavement of Africans as some critics claim. He shows that the people of "the way" (Africans) themselves also contributed, either advertently or inadvertently, to their own predicament. One way he has done this is through the narrative of "the rule of men." The narrator gives an account of how some of the men among the people of "the way", on account of power, break up their ranks into warring factions and engage each other in senseless wars which divide and exhaust them so that by the time real external aggression threatens them, they have no strength left to stand up as one against it. In the words of the narrator:

The remembrance is of a harsh time, horrid, filled with pains for which no rememberer found a reason, choked with the greed, the laziness, the contempt for justice of men glad to indulge themselves at the expense of their own people. 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 authorized currency of the time, the reduction of public life to an unctuous interaction (32-33).

From the above quotation, we observe that the disintegration of the society of the people of "the way" is not a consequence of the invasion of foreigners alone; the people

themselves, especially the men, play a significant role in it. The unbridled ambition of the men to wield power and influence over others is a major issue Armah explores. Using the desire for power among the men, Armah makes a case for how undesirable the concept of kings and chiefs is, as he shows how such a system is open to exploitation and self-aggrandizement at the expense of the general good of society. Thus, Armah's biting satirical representation of the kings through Koranche, the collaborator-king, is a deliberate attempt to de-emphasize the concept of concentrating so much power in the hands of a few perceived to have been divinely ordained to rule, and the divisions that result from that. This is true even today, in the form of political power struggle, where some political leaders on the continent have vowed to remain in power for life, a behavior that has resulted in senseless wars and bloodshed on the continent.

3.7.2 Betrayal in *Two Thousand Seasons*

Betrayal is also a major issue in Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, and it is explored at different levels in the novel. Carefully examined, betrayal is tied to the "dismemberment" of Armah's pan-African community. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah deals with betrayal in two main instances. The encounter between the people of "the way" and their Arab guests described by the narrator as "predators from the desert," represents one instance of betrayal. These Arabs are not people of "the way." They arrive only as hungry, exhausted beggars. They are well-received, fed and sheltered by their generous African guests because for them, it is a "part of the way that the stranger shall be given sustenance and helped along his road" (*Two Thousand Seasons* 47). Grown stronger after

feeding and resting, these Arabs turn against their unsuspecting guests, killing them, enslaving their men, and turning their women into mere objects for sexual gratification:

They grew yet stronger, and in the fullness of their strength, turned sudden predators against an easy host. Thirty days of unrelenting massacre brought them the fruit they sought: the power of new masters over their old hosts (47).

This is indeed the worst way to experience betrayal from those to whom one has been generous.

The second instance of betrayal is even more serious because it is done from within. Here, Armah explores betrayal at two levels. First, there is the group identified as “askaris, zombis kept to guard the predators, destroyers of our people” (48). The people described as askaris are originally part of the people of “the way” now turned into weapons in the hands of enemies against their own people. So serious is the betrayal and so strong the allegiance of these askaris to their Arab taskmasters that they are ready to kill their own African brothers and sisters in revenge for the deaths of their Arab taskmasters. It is no wonder that the leader of these askaris openly murders his own grandmother for questioning his senseless allegiance to his own “people’s killers” (56).

Koranche and his hangers-on represent the second level of betrayal from within, probably the highest form in the entire narrative. Usurping the position of caretakers, and later imposing themselves on the people as kings is in itself a serious betrayal of “the way.” Referred to as “ostentatious cripples,” they “turned the honored position of caretakers into plumage for their infirm selves” (111). Among them are Ziblim, Jezebu and Bulukutu. Others are Odunton, Bentum, Oko, Krobo, Jebi, Jonto and Sumui. Also among

the usurpers of public power are Oburum, Ituri, Dube, Mununkum, Esibir, Bonto, Peturi, Topre, Tutu, Bonsu, and finally, Koranche.

Koranche deserves special mention because not only does he impose himself on the people as king like those before him, but he also willingly becomes an aide to the “destroyers from the sea” to plunder both the human and natural resources of his own people. And he does so in return for personal gain in the form of “shiny things” (134-141). In so doing, he becomes so vicious as to destroy anyone who tries to stand between him and his shiny things. That is how come Isanusi gets banished for disagreeing with the king over allowing the Europeans to have their way (165-166). And then, finally, Koranche, the collaborator-king, does what is probably the most unpardonable act of betrayal of his people. He conspires with his “white friends” to sell the twenty initiates into slavery. Pretending to have forgiven the initiates for disobeying his orders, Koranche proposes a feast to be held aboard the white men’s ship offshore, and this, he claims, is to honor the initiates at the end of their training. His real motive is to sell them as slaves to his white companions (171-178). This is the worst manner possible to betray one’s own people. So, betrayal, as we have seen here, is essential in Armah’s pan-African vision because it is directly linked to the “dismemberment” of the author’s once vibrant pan-African nation which he hopes to recall and rebuild.

3.7.3 Conflict and its Different Realizations in *Two Thousand Seasons*

The term, conflict, is a much discussed concept in literary study and interpretation. In this sense, it is often perceived as an element of plot, a major element of fiction. (William Harmon 2006) calls it “the struggle that grows out of the interplay of two opposing

forces” of which one is usually a person who is often the protagonist. The conflict that the protagonist is involved in is of two broad categories: external and internal. External conflict is one in which protagonists come up against forces located outside themselves. Under the external category, we have Man against Man, Man against Society and Man against Nature. In this case, conflict takes the form of a physical struggle between the protagonist and other forces externally placed. Internal conflict, on the other end, is one in which two elements within the protagonist struggle for prominence. The struggle is more psychological than physical. Through the complications that it creates, conflict brings about suspense and tension which help sustain interest.

As far as the conventional concept of conflict as “the struggle that grows out of the interplay of two opposing forces” is concerned, *Two Thousand Seasons* differs significantly, especially if we conceive of conflict as necessarily involving a “protagonist.” This is because in Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons*, the protagonist or the hero is not clearly defined as characters are presented as a group rather than as individuals. And there is hardly any character involved in a conflict within himself or herself. What Armah gives us in this novel is conflict as physical combat.

3.7.4 Conflict as Physical Struggle or Combat

As stated above, Armah explores conflict as physical struggle or combat in *Two Thousand Seasons*, and this is seen at different levels in the novel. Long before the Arabs arrive, conflicts already exist among the people of “the way.” Engendered by an uncontrollable greed for power among the men, this conflict seriously divides the people; they split into warring factions. The narrator recounts, “It was the fathers themselves

who, splitting into the headlong greed for power into seven warring factions, broke each other's strength and left themselves impotent against the coming of more reasonable night" (33). Conflict, as we see it here, represents a physical phenomenon, and is a major cause of the destruction of the people's front.

The relationship between the people of "the way" and their Arab guests is also one of conflict. The resolve of the Arabs to turn their former hosts into slaves creates tension between the two groups since the natives will not lose their land to foreigners; not without a fight. Apart from that, the ways of the "predators from the desert" bring them into direct conflict with the natives: it is not originally part of "the way" for men to dominate women or vice versa; neither are women mere objects for the sexual pleasure of men. However, these are normal with the "predators." Again, the two groups diverge on belief, and this is clearly seen in the way the narrator describes the religion of the Arabs. The narrator refers to the religion of the Arabs as one that enslaves, and their god as a "slave-owning god." Thus as far as the relationship of the natives and their Arab guests goes, it is heavily conflict-dominated. And ultimately, this conflict leads to further "dismemberment" of "the way, our way."

3.7.5 Religion in *Two Thousand Seasons*

On religion in Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, some critics have heavily criticized him for presenting what they have described as an essentially "materialist" view of Africa. Masamaka, for instance, maintains that:

Armah identifies religion as partly responsible for the destruction of ancient African civilization, and partly responsible for the problems of underdevelopment and conflict in contemporary

Africa...In his ideal African state, there is no place for gods and faith because in “the intelligent heart kings died long ago, and with them the gods and religions made to sustain them” (65).

Nonetheless, a critical scrutiny of the text does not support this assertion. In fact the text shows a striking way in which Armah explores religion. Armah demonstrates that religion is more than just faith or worship of a deity. Religion, to Armah, is the entire way of existence of a people; it is their worldview, their way of life. It is, therefore, an important mark of identity. Consequently, religion must originate with the people who adhere to it; and it must reside in them. It is not supposed to be anything built on dogmas imposed from outside. In this way, we can see that even though the word “religion” is omitted from the narrator’s accounts in relation to the people of “the way,” they still have a way they follow, and the prophetic voices that predict their future represent only one way in which they go about their “religion.” The difference between this “religion” and what Armah preaches against is that it is authentically African, originating with the people of “the way,” and therefore understood by the people while beliefs such as Christianity and Islam are of foreign origin, usually misunderstood and open to abuse by some adherents as exemplified by Abdallah (*Two Thousand Seasons* 71-73). Any disregard for prophecies emanating from such original sources must be attended by serious consequences as suffered by the people of “the way” for not paying heed to the prophecies of Anoa.

3.7.6 Religion as a Tool for Psychological Conquest

Armah also argues that religion, as it is currently practised by Africans, is an organized system of beliefs whose aim is to capture the mind, so that together with the physical conquest of the body, total and complete slavery is achieved. Armah develops this theme

using the askaris [also described as zombis], who are actually originally part of the people of “the way,” who after their conversion to Islam, are ready to kill their own people in revenge for the deaths of their new religious masters, the Arabs. We are told of “the askari zombi leader” who kills his own maternal grandmother on the night of the Ramadan during the women’s revolt (57). Thus, religion (foreign, organized religion), as Armah has demonstrated, is an effective tool that could arm people against their own:

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 both is slavery far longer lasting, far more secure than the conquest of bodies alone (67).

3.7.7 Religion as a Recipe for Identity Loss

Last, Armah explores religion as a means of taking away other people’s identity. Through Isanusi, the conscience of the people of “the way,” Armah brings into dialogue how the adoption of organized foreign religions, such as Christianity, can lead to the loss of identity. Armah’s argument here is that the Christianization of a people usually comes along with the obligatory christening of new converts when the new adherents to the new faith adopt Christian or English names to reflect their new status. As Armah indicates in chapter four, this process of dropping native names for foreign ones constitutes a serious tampering with an essential part of the identity of the people concerned because names are an integral part of the identity of people anywhere in the world. In his last famous public speech before his banishment, Isanusi tells the people assembled:

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 will no longer

be Ama, Naita, Idawa and Ningome but creatures called Cecilia, Esther, Mary, Elizabeth and Christina (143).

It should be clear from the foregoing that Armah's perspective on religion is not that religion is not relevant in his pan-African society, and therefore must be discarded. Rather, what he seeks to do is to subject religion, especially when it is foreign and imposed, to proper scrutiny in order to expose all its abuses, contradictions and inconsistencies for a better appreciation and understanding of the phenomenon. To him, then, religion should originate naturally with the people who adhere to it because it is "the living spirit there is in everything," rather than an entity that is held "separate, raised above all surrounding things" (139). But what has all this talk about religion to do with Armah's pan-African epic? One may ask.

It should not be lost on us that religion is a major subject in the epic, for like history; it is directly linked to national identity and pride (Sackey 2010). Religion in this sense serves to legitimize a certain common worldview of a particular people. In much the same way that Armah uses the history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade to underscore the claim for his pan-African society; he uses "religion" to indicate that his ancient African society once had a common way of life which in itself, was sufficient for the people. In other words, in the process of "re-membering of the dismembered continent," Armah is asking his modern African compatriots to go back to the original "the way, our way."

3.7.8 Resistance in *Two Thousand Seasons*

As a theme, resistance is the most important issue in *Two Thousand Seasons*; it directly relates to the author's idea of "Re-membering the Dismembered Continent." A critical examination of the themes discussed above indicates that they are each linked to the

disintegration of Armah's pan-African community. History and betrayal, in all their manifestations, serve to undermine and break apart the community; conflict continues it, and religion deals the final blow, and the "dismemberment" is complete.

After dealing with the various levels at which his original pan-African politico-social system was brought to its current "dismembered" state, Armah now proposes how further onslaught could be resisted. In other words, Armah, through the theme of resistance, invites his African compatriots to rebuild the continent destroyed, to "remember the dismembered continent." There is, first, the resistance of the women against their Arab tormentors, guests-turned-masters. The new masters, in their new roles, turn some of the weak men among their victims into their personal soldiers called askaris or zombis; their women they turn into objects for sexual gratification. The narrator says, "Our women the predators from the desert turned into playthings for their decayed pleasure" (48). The women revolt on the night of the feast of Ramadan, and killing their tormentors, win a victory for their entire community.

There is also a resistance from the people of "the way" when the Europeans arrive in Anoa. Even though Koranche, their king, attempts to make the "the destroyers from the sea" appear friendly, and harmless, the people will not be fooled, armed with information about the atrocities they have visited on other communities such as Edina, Enchi, Anago and other places. The "experts of the spear" among the people attack the ships of the intruders with fire, and "in panic the white destroyers" retreat for a while (133).

The Atlantic crossing revolt in which the twenty initiates and others fight for their lives and free themselves from the grips of their captors to return to their land is probably

Armah's most poignant statement on resistance. In spite of clear challenges in terms of differences in their languages, the captives see that they are significantly connected in their captivity, their pain, their desire to be set free. Motivated by their common interests, their differences are diminished, and together, the people stage a successful revolt, beating their captors at their own game (215-225).

In each of the instances of resistance cited above, victory is achieved through group action: the women on the night of the Ramadan feast win the battle on their well-coordinated group action; the "experts of the spear" are presented as a group; and finally, the shipboard revolt succeeds on group action and solidarity. Thus, group action, an important motif in Armah's pan-African epic, is given expression in the theme of resistance:

Against the death brought by whiteness only the greatest connecting force will prevail: the working together of minds connected, souls connected, traveling 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, traveling again along our way, the way (212).

In conclusion then, what Armah is saying is that only group action, devoid of all tendencies of individuality, will bring into fruition the single pan-African society he seeks to build; only group action will ensure a force formidable enough to help the continent deal with all external influences. Any attempt anchored in lone individual strength is doomed to fail. "How inadequate the seeing that remains broken off, unconnected to any larger perception. How lacking in sufficiency the hearing unconnected to a greater knowledge. How stupid the utterance cut off from the higher understanding of the connected whole" (*Two Thousand Seasons* 211), observes the narrator. Pan-Africanism is the way forward.

CHAPTER FOUR

FURTHER DIMENSIONS OF ARMAH'S PAN-AFRICAN EPIC STORY:

READING *OSIRIS RISING* AND *KMT: IN THE HOUSE OF LIFE*

4.0 Introduction

In Chapter Three, we discussed Armah's pan-African epic, both in form and in content, with particular reference to *Two Thousand Seasons*. As we pointed out earlier, as far as form is concerned, *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life* are remarkably different from *Two Thousand Seasons*. That notwithstanding, a reading of these two novels shows significant ways in which they advance the message of pan-Africanism that was begun in *Two Thousand Seasons*. In this chapter, we examine *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life* with a view to establishing the extent to which each one of them advances Armah's pan-African vision.

4.1 History in *Osiris Rising*

The history of Africa, particularly, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, is a major issue Armah explores in *Two Thousand Seasons*. We observe that *Osiris Rising* continues on the same path. Very early in the narrative, Nwt, Ast's grandmother asks her granddaughter: "Do you know that our people were sold into slavery?" (*Osiris Rising* 11) This question immediately brings to the fore the issue of the history of Africa, which history is intricately intertwined with the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. The literary artist, Armah seems to suggest, is a visionary creator, and history is just one of the raw materials that can come in handy in this venture. Armah has shown through his use of historical material that such material is worthless unless it can be adapted to solve

contemporary African problems. Kofi Anyidoho, in reference to *Two Thousand Seasons*, observes that Armah "... subverts and recreates..." historical reality (Historical Realism and the Visionary Ideal: Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* 109). This is exactly what Armah does in *Osiris Rising* too. In this novel, Armah gives a mythic interpretation to the slave experience of Africans in order to make it relevant to his aim of showing how it contributed to the destruction of "the way, our way." We recall Anoa's prophecy in which she warns of an approaching destruction through slavery (*Two Thousand Seasons* 44). That prophecy has indeed been fulfilled, producing people like Nwt and Ast in the Diaspora. What it also means is that those scattered abroad through the dehumanizing Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade have still not forgotten their story. Thus Nwt's attempt to pass on the story of the Slave Trade with its subsequent enslavement of Africans to her granddaughter is significant as it serves to extend a major cause of the destruction of "the way, our way", begun in *Two Thousand Seasons*, into *Osiris Rising*.

That Ast herself has been reading a book, *Journey to the Source*, is equally important. The "source" here refers to Africa from where Africans, the commodities for the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, were carried away before their subsequent sale into slavery. Like the main characters in *Two Thousand Seasons*, Ast is also embarking on a "journey to the source." Critically examined, this "journey" of Ast is a journey back to "the way, our way." It is also a reference to the physical journey she is to later embark on to Africa. Apart from that, it is also a journey directly connected to Armah's pan-African ideology. The work of rebuilding Africa as a result of "the accidents of history" (*Remembering the Dismembered Continent* 9), requires full collaboration among African intellectuals here on the continent and across the world as well as traditional historians. Ast's journey to

Africa is, therefore, symbolic since it brings her, a descendant of the victims of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, into direct partnership with other Africans here on the continent, who are as much victims as she, so that together, they could work to find a solution to Africa's contemporary challenges caused by their common past. Having lived far away from Africa for centuries has not expunged from the memories of these Africans who they are; neither has it made them forget their origins. Ast emphasizes this as she tells Asar: "I prefer not to forget several thousand years of our common history because of a few centuries of separation" (*Osiris Rising* 124). Ast's mention of "... several thousand years of our common history" we should remember, is in reference to the history of Kemet, and so she is talking about a return to Kemet, Armah's preferred African past which was destroyed through the "accidents of history". That is, through Ast, Armah adds another dimension, Africans in the Diaspora, to his pan-African epic narrative. The importance of history thus features strongly here, for the same motivation that drives the narrator in *Two Thousand Seasons* to declare that: "We are not a people of yesterday" (21), drives Nwt to tell her granddaughter about the story of her origins, and this knowledge empowers her to embark on a journey to her origin. There is, therefore, no doubt at all that Armah is still pursuing the factors that caused the "dismemberment" of his once stable African continent.

4.1.1 Betrayal in *Osiris Rising*

With the introduction of the history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade comes the issue of betrayal, for the revelation that "our people were sold into slavery" raises several questions in Ast's mind. One of these is: "Who sold us?" (*Osiris Rising* 11) This

automatically introduces the theme of betrayal: “What did such a betrayal mean?” (*Osiris Rising* 11) As we saw in the previous chapter regarding *Two Thousand Seasons*, such a betrayal meant that some Africans right here at home, epitomized by Koranche and his hangers-on, willingly collaborated with foreigners to sell their own people into slavery in return for “shiny things” (137). These were native Africans who found in the sale of their own brothers and sisters an opportunity to acquire wealth for themselves. But what should we make of this betrayal? Just like the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade itself, the acts of betrayal of people by their own kinsmen all contributed to the “dismemberment” of the continent, the destruction of “our way, the way.”

4.1.2 Education in *Osiris Rising*

Another thematic issue Armah stresses in *Osiris Rising* is education or knowledge acquisition, and this has a direct link with the narrator’s assertion in *Two Thousand Seasons* that “the air everywhere around is poisoned with truncated tales of our origins” (*Two Thousand Seasons* 21). We may recall that in *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah’s moral touchstone, Isanusi, plays a roll similar to providing education when he educates the people, especially, the young initiates each time he gets the opportunity. If the “tales of our origins” (21) are inaccurate because they have been told by outsiders who presume to know our stories better than we do, then it is important to point out to them the “proper beginning” (21) of their accounting. It is only through the acquisition of knowledge that one can learn to tell the African story, which is an important issue in Armah’s pan-African epic narrative. Thus when Nwt helps Ast learn to read ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphs, the venture is directed toward empowerment through knowledge

acquisition. This is because Armah believes that knowledge in the ancient Egyptian texts is a sure way to retrieve some of Africa's best traditional practices, such as communal living that thrives on group solidarity, fellow feeling and egalitarianism. Armah is emphatic on this point:

My aim here is to focus on a number of texts that, analyzed together, enable us to see African literature as an evolving body of interconnected works covering the entire recorded history of this continent, from the beginnings of writing in Ancient Egypt to the latest publications of today (*The Eloquence of the Scribes* 19).

What we observe is that education or knowledge acquisition is another dimension quintessential in Armah's pan-African epic; there is no room for ignorance. For this reason, education is a central issue in *Osiris Rising*. Thus for Armah, rebuilding Africa from the ruins of the past entails "working in the educational system in preparation for the remaking of a devastated continent, a people destroyed..." (*Osiris Rising* 30). This is what Asar emphasizes when he enumerates the three main changes that should be made to the educational system in Africa:

One, making Africa the center of our studies. Two, shifting from Eurocentric orientation to universalistic approaches as far as the rest of the world is concerned. Three, giving our work a serious backing in African history. The last would mean placing a deliberate, planned and sustained emphasis on the study of Egyptian and Nubian history as matrices of African history, instead of concentrating on the European matrices, Greece and Rome. We would also bring in Asian and pre-Columbian history... (*Osiris Rising* 125).

4.1.3 Conflict in *Osiris Rising*

Conflict also features prominently in *Osiris Rising*. Similar to what we observe in *Two Thousand Seasons*, this conflict is both ideological and physical, the former initiating the latter. Coming mainly between the two opposing sides in the novel, conflict, as Armah

explores it here, has a direct relationship with the motif of “our way, the way.” On the one end are those who see nothing wrong with the present “dismembered” scheme of things in which power is in the hands of Westerners, while a few African “rulers,” who are actually mere caretakers, help to further plunder the resources of the continent to enrich the West. This group is exemplified, first of all, by the older academics at the Manda Training College. The members are used to the conventional ways of handling educational matters, where students are strictly kept out of decision making, and the curriculum is imported from Europe. These older academics are portrayed as not being in favor of any real changes. As Asar describes them, they are “conservatives, people who want rigid exclusion of students from decision making; syllabuses and teaching approaches modeled on European practices; an emphasis on theory; the proud old ignorance of practical work” (*Osiris Rising* 124). Another wing of this group is the political administration mainly represented by Seth and his security operatives. In Seth’s thinking, slavery was not an “inhuman practice in Africa” (*Osiris Rising* 50). Therefore, he and his security apparatus see any call for change in the order of things as a direct threat to their own success and importance, and they do everything to prevent it. On the other end are those who are calling for a change in the current scheme of things. These are, in the words of Asar, “innovators.” For them, the Ankh symbol, from ancient Egypt or Kemet, which means life, is a guide to a return to forgotten ways of Africa destroyed in the dim past, so the current way must ultimately give way to the old. Seth, on the other hand, thinks the Ankh is a symbol of subversion, and so he does everything in his power to defeat those promoting this subversive symbol (*Osiris Rising* 49). Obviously, there is a divergence of opinion resulting in physical confrontations, and these become the factors

which drive the plot in this novel. Whereas the conflict on the Manda Training College between the younger, innovative academics and their senior colleagues is mainly ideological, the one between the “innovators” and the political system is both ideological and physical. These “innovators,” led by Asar, are calling for changes that are mainly ideological in scope: they are pursuing a sign, the Ankh, which according to Ast, is from Kemet or ancient Egypt and means life. The principles of the Ankh, according to the “innovators,” could be adopted to make African a better place since they believe that ancient Egypt was part of Africa. This is obviously an extension of Armah’s literary pan-Africanism. Unfortunately, this position brings them into a direct confrontation with the powers that be who meet them with brute force.

4.1.4 Resistance and Change in *Osiris Rising*

Resistance and change also constitute a big issue in *Osiris Rising*. Resistance and change are on what we may call a collision course in this novel. There is, first of all, a group that seeks to prevent change by putting up a resistance, and those who represent this are once again, the old academics at Manda Training College, and the political powers, spearheaded by Seth, the Head of Security. When we carefully examine resistance from this group, we realize that it works directly to undermine the attempt by the “reformers” to rebuild or “re-member the dismembered continent.” The old academics together with Seth and his operatives essentially play the same role that Koranche and his hangers-on play in *Two Thousand Seasons*. Just as Koranche usurps the powers of caretakers and becomes very powerful and draconian in his capacity as king over his people, takes decisions that are not in the best interest of the people, and yet puts in place a system that

eliminates anyone who disagrees with him; Seth and his operatives empower themselves with the wealth of the people and create an aura of fear around themselves using military brutality to sustain it. In this way, both *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Osiris Rising* emphasize resistance to re-establishing “our way, the way.” Then there is a second group that works directly against the current system in order to bring about change. In other words, this second group, for the purposes of change in the current system, also puts up a resistance. Led by the tragic Asar, this group’s resistance is anchored in knowledge acquisition leading to the empowerment of the masses; it is not a military coup d’état. A careful study of this mode of resistance shows that it is directly linked to the author’s pan-African agenda. By empowering the masses through knowledge acquisition, Asar makes it possible for the fight for liberation to continue even after his death. Asar, in this role, is doing exactly what Isanusi does in *Two Thousand Seasons*. It will be recalled that Isanusi educates the twenty initiates about “the way” by revealing to them what would otherwise remain a secret. Empowered by this knowledge, the initiates continue the fight to re-member the “dismembered continent” well after the death of Isanusi. In Armah’s view, “re-membering the dismembered continent” cannot be achieved by a single heroic figure, and it is in this light we understand why he has not presented us with a hero-tale as we find in the African epic. In *Mwindo* and *Chaka*, the narratives are no more than hero-tales in which the plot is mainly driven by the epic heroes. In *Mwindo*, the narrative moves according to what Mwindo does; he is the plot, and the plot is he. And accordingly, by the time Mwindo settles the score with his embattled father, there is no longer a story to tell. Similarly, *Chaka* is all about Chaka the greatest, bravest, most courageous; he moves the plot. The plot traces Chaka’s life right from birth up to his rise

to fame, power, affluence and influence. And so, in conventional epic style, the fall of Chaka the epic hero, is the end of the story. In Armah's pan-African epic, on the other hand, the fight for the total liberation of the African continent must continue long after the death of lead figures such as Isanusi and Asar. This is the reason why the liberation struggle is not a military takeover, but rather, a knowledge-based empowerment.

As the above discussion has shown, Armah carries the same thematic concerns he explores in *Two Thousand Seasons* into *Osiris Rising*. The history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade is still pursued; betrayal is still an issue; conflict is still explored; and resistance is still at the forefront of the narrative. Just as in *Two Thousand Seasons*, all the above themes are directly or indirectly linked to the dismemberment of "our way, the way" which drives Armah's entire pan-African epic. But in addition to all the above, Armah has also introduced other dimensions of his pan-African concept, as the discussion has shown. Armah's pan-African nation does not include only Africans on the continent; it also involves the descendants of the victims of slavery. Again, Africa, as far as Armah is concerned, includes ancient Kemet. Consequently, the liberation of the continent also requires serious knowledge acquisition, including research into Ancient Egyptian history, traditions and customs.

4.2 *KMT: in the house of life*

A reading of *KMT: in the house of life* shows that it is also an extension of Armah's pan-African epic story which was begun and continued in *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Osiris Rising* respectively. Thematically, this novel, like its precursors, explores the African past. It also deals with education or knowledge acquisition, ideological conflict and last

but not least, resistance, which are all major themes Armah explores in the two earlier texts.

4.2.1 History in *KMT: in the house of life*

History or the African past continues to be a major issue in *KMT: in the house of life*, and quite predictably, it is interwoven with the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. The narrator remarks:

Around us in our youth hovered the teachers of the established order. They never talked to us of the principles on which that order was built. They had come riding the ocean to guide us away from the forbidden paths of our past and future, onto the highways of the here and now. They were here to help us learn how to live in a world founded on the profitable injustice of slavery, consolidated under the fascism of Europe dressed up under the alias of colonialism (13).

The above extract re-echoes what the narrator says in *Two Thousand Seasons*, that: “The air everywhere around is poisoned with truncated tales of our origins” for “what has been cast abroad is not a thousandth of our history, even if its quality were truth” and that the purpose for such a deliberate distortion is to “wipe out knowledge of our way, the way” (21). Thus when the narrator, Lindela, in *KMT: in the house of life* speaks of the “forbidden paths of our past and future” and a “world founded on the profitable injustice of slavery...” she is not only talking about the history of Africa, particularly, that part of the history steeped in the event of human beings forcibly taken from the continent and sold to Europeans and Arabs, but also about the conscious attempt by the perpetrators of slavery to conceal the full historical account of the events of slavery. So once again, the history of sub-Saharan Africa is at the center of the narrative in *KMT: in the house of life* just as is the case in both *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Osiris Rising*. And

as noted earlier, the emphasis on the history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade is crucial to Armah's pan-African concept because of its far-reaching consequences on Africans on the continent and even beyond. It is, therefore, a strategic thematic issue which Armah explores for the purposes of claiming a common ground for his single pan-African nation.

4.2.2 Education or Knowledge Acquisition in *KMT: in the house of life*

Education or knowledge acquisition is an important dimension to Armah's pan-African epic, and we see the same prominence given to it in *Osiris Rising* being repeated here in *KMT: in the house of life*. Just as is the case in *Osiris Rising*, Armah explores two forms of education, namely the Euro-western form of education, and the Africa-centered kind of education. Regarding the former, Armah's argument is quite familiar; Euro-western education is meant to "guide us away from the forbidden paths of our past and future..." (*KMT: in the house of life* 17). Armah contends that under the Eurocentric type of education, Africans are led to believe that "African humanity is nothing, that we've contributed nothing to history..." (112). Any such education, Armah maintains, will only result in Africans disregarding their own history, and that ought to be prevented from happening because a "society that holds its own history in contempt is dead in the heart and sick in the brain" (184). Thus, in place of this limiting type of education, Armah proposes a form of education that rests primarily on conscious efforts to search for authentic historical and literary information about Africa. Two solutions Armah suggests; and these are the "oral traditions of the African Sahel and the written documents of ancient Egypt" (116). For the former to happen, there is the need for a "meeting of

academic scholars and traditionalist historians” to be initiated (122). As we can see, education or the acquisition of knowledge is intricately tied to the history of Africa, an issue Armah makes central in *Osiris Rising* too. It should be obvious by now that Africa-centered education, for Armah, is the way to confront Euro-western education in order to expose its inconsistencies and inaccuracies as far as the history and traditions of Africa are concerned, for therein lies the solution to the numerous challenges of contemporary Africa.

4.2.3 Conflict in *KMT: in the house of life*

Conflict in Armah’s pan-African epic is largely de-familiarized, for it arises more from ideological differences than from a motivation to be physically locked in battle. In *KMT: in the house of life*, it is the same. Contrary to what is the case in the African epic where conflict usually involves physical warfare fought with weaponry by combatants on either side, conflict in this novel, in a sense, arises out of ideological disparities about knowledge acquisition about Africa and how to use such knowledge. In her current “dismembered” state, Africa can only come into her own if Africans are prepared to “give ourselves the trouble to know what it takes” (*Remembering the Dismembered Continent* 9). And as previously stated, it will take conscious efforts to dig up authentic information about the history of Africa. However, the system, as it currently operates as presented in *KMT: in the house of life*, shows that knowledge about Africa has been “attractively packaged” (*Osiris Rising* 17) so as to make it presentable and less offensive to the powers that be. In this way, the full historical truth is lost on the masses, and this is what Armah explores in *KMT: in the house of life*. One group argues that information

about Africa belongs to Africans and so it should be made available to whoever wants it: “What the traditionalists in this town want is to turn knowledge into the property of everyone, like air” (149). Knowledge, here, is symbolic of something that gives life, for it is “air” whose short supply means death. Armah calls the group that advocates this “Sharers” of knowledge about Africa. On the other end are those who think that knowledge about the continent should not be turned into a public property, and that it should be made available to only a select few: “The new master of knowledge must swear never to reveal what he knows to the people, only to other initiates” (149). These differences in ideology create the conflict that propels the entire plot in the novel. However, like the conflict we observe in *Osiris Rising*, ideology brings about physical confrontation in which lives are lost. What we also observe here about conflict, as it is explored in this third novel, is that the path leading to “our way, the way,” is not going to be easy as there will always be obstacles deliberately planted to make it difficult to discover the path to that “preferred” African way of living. The fates of both Biko Lema and Djiely Hor attest to how dangerous the road to “our way, the way” could be. The battle of epic proportions pursued by the characters is thus one about knowledge of “our way, the way” and how it should be managed. The “sharers” are obviously against the “keeping” of knowledge about Africa as a secret commodity meant for only a select few. They think that knowledge should be made accessible to all who need it, for the African way of living is a way of egalitarianism. But there is a stiff opposition to their position. However, the “sharers” do not intend to embark on a physical warfare; theirs is an ideological battle, and that explains why they are not weapon-wielding combatants locked up in battle with their adversaries. As should be clear by now, conflict as Armah

treats it here, stems from the contention between keepers and sharers of knowledge – a conflict that destroyed ancient Egypt, the author’s preferred African society. And we should mention here that the destruction of Armah’s ancient Egypt is invariably the destruction of “our way, the way” which he seeks to re-establish.

4.2.4 Resistance in *KMT: in the house of life*

Resistance also lurks in the background as far as themes in *KMT: in the house of life* are concerned. There is resistance from those who want to prevent change, and there is resistance also from the agents of change. Those who are against change apply every means possible, including murder, to ensure change does not happen, but that does not deter the advocates of change to pursue their agenda. Carefully studied, resistance, in its unmasked brutality in *KMT: in the house of life*, closely resembles what happens in both *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Osiris Rising*. And resistance here is directly linked to the motif of “our way, the way.” Some characters are resisting a return to “our way, the way,” but others are resisting a continuation of the current order of things, which they argue does not conform to “the way.” What is particularly curious about resistance in this novel as well as in *Osiris Rising* is that although the advocates of change are not in a physical battle with their opponents, the response from the opponents is often very physical and violent. This shows that even the non-violent, ideological battle being waged against the established order will not be won so easily.

4.3 Formal Features of *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life*

Apart from advancing Armah's pan-African epic story through their themes as shown above, *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life*, through some formal features, also fit into the pan-African epic story Armah begins in *Two Thousand Seasons*. The way in which Armah uses focalization, character, conflict, setting and myth in these two novels points to a continuation of his pan-African epic story.

4.3.1 Focalization in *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life*

As previously noted, focalization in Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* is mainly internal, but instead of the usual "I" narrator, we find a "we." While this kind of focalization clearly sets Armah's pan-African epic apart from the African epic, it also emphasizes the pan-African thought behind the entire narrative. In *Osiris Rising*, Armah's pan-African thought is still apparent to the reader. However, focalization in this novel is not internal; it is external. We notice this right from the first chapter, through the use of the third-person nominatives such as "she" and "it." The chapter opens with:

From far off, it looked like an ellipse mounted on a cross. Close up, it was a female form, arms outstretched, head capacious enough to contain the womb. The day she asked its name, her grandmother Nwt turned an incredulous smile on her" (*Osiris Rising* 11).

Upon a careful scrutiny, however, we observe that what looks like external focalization is, invariably, internal focalization in disguise, for most of the narrative is rendered in direct speech in which the characters speak for themselves, emphasizing the same group identity and action we find in *Two Thousand Seasons*. When Nwt asks Ast, "Do you know that our people were sold into slavery?" she is actually stressing the same group

identity encoded in the account of the “we” narrator in *Two Thousand Seasons* who says, “The people called our people are not a hundredth of our people” (21). At the beginning of chapter two of *Osiris Rising*, part of the article sent to Ast reads:

For centuries now our history has been an avalanche of problems. We’ve staggered from disaster to catastrophe, enduring the destruction of Kemet, the scattering of millions ranging the continent in search of refuge, the waste of humanity in the slave trade organized by Arabs, Europeans and myopic, crumb-hungry Africans ready to destroy this land for their unthinking profit (22).

The above quotation sounds like an authorial comment; but it also reads like part of chapter one of *Two Thousand Seasons* in which the narrator asserts group identity. We observe here that even though focalization in *Osiris Rising* is conspicuously external, Armah has deliberately crafted it in a way that asserts group identity, a major motif in his pan-African vision. Carefully scrutinized, the above quotation highlights certain ideas we have already gathered in *Two Thousand Seasons*. Expressions like “... our history... we’ve staggered from disaster to catastrophe... the destruction of Kemet... the waste of humanity in the slave trade” are all too familiar as far as our reading of Armah’s pan-African *Two Thousand Seasons* is concerned.

In *KMT: in the house of life*, Armah goes back to internal focalization once again. However, this time, the narrative voice does not take on the choric character we see in *Two Thousand Seasons*. Instead, what we have is an “I” narrator. This narrator, Lindela, recounts to us the events from her own perspective:

Let me begin with a confession, in the hope, no doubt quite vain, that it will free my mind of the burden of betrayal. This is not work I chose. I ran from it in the silent panic of a frightened spirit. Life had brought me to a point where I recognized one mission only: evasion. For years I thought, with relieved regret, that I’d achieved

it, and so could slide into forgetfulness, another intellectual living my personal peace above the turmoil of a doomed search for a greater aim. I thought my mind could rest in peace (11).

Even though the above extract clearly shows an “I” narrative voice, a closer study of the narrative shows an emphasis on a group perspective rather than an individual one. In her account, the narrator emphasizes group activity. She speaks more in terms of “we, us, our” to emphasize group identity. The effect is similar to what we experience from the speech of the narrator in *Two Thousand Seasons* who speaks largely in plural terms. Thus the same group identity that Armah emphasizes in *Two Thousand Seasons* seems to run through all three novels. We realize that no matter what type of focalization Armah employs, group activity and identity are central to the narrative.

4.3.2 Character in *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life*

Armah’s pan-African epic structure, as already pointed out in Chapter Three, stresses group characterization. Consequently, characters are not allowed to possess special traits that make them indispensable. This is unlike the African epic, in which character is cast in a heroic, even ultra-human dimension, which also depicts essentially individual ability. A careful study of *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life* shows that Armah has not departed from this kind of characterization.

In *Osiris Rising*, group characterization is stressed right from the beginning of the novel. The narrator emphasizes group identity and collaboration between Ast and Asar, for these two characters are portrayed as sharing a similar vision. “I want to work in a society I belong to, with friends moving in directions I can live with,” (*Osiris Rising* 87) says Ast to Netta, the hotelier. Indeed, Ast and Asar are moving in directions tied into

“remembering the dismembered continent” (Armah 2010) through the appropriate type of education. This type of education, as the novel reveals, is an Africa-centered one. Ast and Asar also agree that ancient Egyptian history and culture constitute an important source of information for contemporary Africa. By the time we get to the campus of the teacher training college in Manda, the Ast/Asar pair has enlarged to include more characters of similar vision: there is the Mystic Comrade; there are the Kamaras, namely Bai and Ndeye; there is Iva Mensa; and there is Lamine Djatta. Dineo, Moko, and Bantu Rolong are also part of the group. There is no attempt to portray any particular character as a colossus, bigger and higher in rank than all others. This kind of characterization, we should remember, is in keeping with what Armah adopts in *Two Thousand Seasons* in which characters wear group identity as portrayed by the twenty initiates. Not even Isanusi whose intelligence, eloquence and moral uprightness we admire is indispensable. And all of this begins to make more sense to us when we understand that Armah is not writing an ordinary novel, and that his aim is to write a novel which has features that belong to the epic. The work “tries to be an epic in the time of the novel” (“Style and Purpose in Ayi Kwei Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons*” 12). It is a novel with a difference; it is an epic novel that celebrates group initiative instead of the superhuman tales of heroes we find in the African epic. His is a pan-African epic in which the total liberation of the African continent is not a job for one heroic character. In the African epic, as already noted, the end of the epic hero is the end of the narrative; in Armah’s pan-African epic, the death of a character in the group is not the end of the story. The struggle continues. Asar implicitly means this when he tells Ast, “We’ve thought of the

possibility of our getting killed, as individuals. Or jailed. Or made to disappear. But we decided it won't matter which of us they kill if we do our work well" (192).

So important is group initiative to Armah that he emphasizes this once again in *Osiris Rising* through Ast's nightmare and dream. In the nightmare, Ast struggles against a whirlwind. Her predicament is made worse by the fact that she is all alone, and she is bereft of all hope. She remains in this seemingly hopeless situation until the nightmare gives way to a dream in which she finds herself in the company of a "companion" and suddenly she realizes that there is no longer a storm. As she keeps dreaming, she finds out that there are others apart from her and her friend:

But there were others, none alone, many in pairs connecting, the clusters coming together, riding storm, wind and breeze. Where now was the pain, the terror of the storm? Dissolved in the love she'd found, the companionship that had found her (*Osiris Rising* 73).

The import of the above nightmare and dream is clear. The whirlwind and the storm signify the challenges that individual "independent" African nations face on a daily basis. Like the lonely "companionless" Ast, each nation struggles against these seemingly insurmountable challenges without any hope. But the stranded Ast finds a relief in the company of a "companion" and suddenly, her pain and terror issuing from the storm are all over! What Armah is saying is clear enough: African nations, as the above dream has shown, must as a matter of urgency, begin pairing up, "connecting" with other pairs to form huge "clusters" in order to assemble the right force to deal with their whirlwinds and storms. Clearly, this is Armah's pan-Africanism presented in the form of a nightmare and a dream.

Characterization in *KMT: in the house of life* is also similar to what it is in *Osiris Rising*. Group action is very much emphasized. Quite early in the narrative, we have the Lindela/ Biko/ Wennefer group. What propels this group of three, as the story unfolds, is the motivation to search for information. With the elimination of Biko, the group appears almost broken until Jengo appears on the scene. Lindela is re-awakened to join Jengo in continuation of what was started earlier. The new pair, as the story unfolds, brings other characters of like mind to join: Astw and Djiely Hor thus become part of the group. No wonder they make tremendous progress in their knowledge-seeking endeavors until Hor is murdered, once again, by forces opposed to the ideals of the “Sharers” of knowledge, but the group still holds together, moving on. Just as is the case in *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Osiris Rising*, no particular character is made indispensable. Again, names of characters do not reflect those of any particular African destination. Armah thus uses names of characters here also, to emphasize his pan-African vision.

We cannot talk about characterization in Armah’s pan-African epic story without emphasizing the naming of characters in both *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life*. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, we notice a deliberate selection of names from across sub-Saharan Africa. In both *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life*, too, Armah does a similar thing, albeit on a smaller scale. Even at a glance, we notice that the names, as mentioned earlier, are not peculiar to any particular African nation, but rather spread across the continent. But the names of Armah’s characters in these two novels are not restricted to only contemporary African nations, for he goes as far as ancient Egypt for Asar [which is also spelt Ausar] – the Hellenic or Greek version being Osiris, and Ast, which is the same as Isis in Greek. Other ancient Egyptian names Armah appropriates in

the service of his single pan-African nation are Astw and Hor (*KMT: in the house of life*). Thus, we see here that naming of central characters in *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life* carries a pan-African intention just as it happens in *Two Thousand Seasons*; it must involve the entire African space because it is about the entire African continent.

4.3.3 Setting in *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life*

In both *Mwindo* and *Chaka*, as already noted, setting is named. Setting in *Two Thousand Seasons* is unnamed. But what is setting like in *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life*? When we carefully examine *Osiris Rising*, we notice that just like in *Two Thousand Seasons*, setting is unnamed. Places such as Aru, Majini, Pale, Ker Lo, Khati, Teye, Bara, and Manda are highly fictional; they could be anywhere on the African continent. So we see a similar setting description here as is the case in *Two Thousand Seasons*. But here, it even goes beyond Africa to include the Diaspora. That Ast comes all the way from the United States of America to partner Asar and his colleagues here on the African continent in pursuit of the same agendum to “re-member the dismembered continent” thus extends the setting of Armah’s pan-African community beyond the shores of sub-Saharan Africa.

As far as setting is concerned, Armah’s *KMT: in the house of life* does not differ from *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Osiris Rising*. For in this novel, too, Armah leaves the specific setting just as open as he does in the aforementioned novels. So, once again, there is this wide nameless African space against which the characters live their lives. When we encounter the narrator, Lindela, right at the opening of the novel, one thing is clear: no attempt is made to name the setting. Even when she undertakes to recount her experiences at home as a child growing up in the company of her “twin spirit” childhood

friend, Biko, she does not mention where exactly all these happen. Then she goes on to recount her experiences at the Whitecastle School. Even though there is enough information to suggest that this is Achimota School being described, it is not stated in plain terms; and in spite of all the detailed account she gives of the events that lead to the rustication of Biko, her best friend, Lindela leaves the setting unnamed. It is, however, worth-mentioning that like in the two earlier works, certain places are named. But as earlier observed, these are highly fictional; no real place names are given. A good example is Yarw, where Jengo and Lindela go to meet Astw and Hor. Even though some may rightly argue that Yarw is a place name taken from ancient Egypt, such names still remain fictional. However, it should not be lost on us that Armah's consistent appropriation of these ancient Egyptian names is also intended to emphasize his argument elsewhere that ancient Egypt survived the onslaught of thousands of years of destruction and that this could be seen in the striking semblance between the ancient Egyptian name Asar and such Akan names as "Asare" or "Esar." As we examine the issues Armah explores in the novel: African history and culture, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, ancient Egyptian history and culture and its link with modern day Africa, and ultimately, the issue of pan-Africanism, we realize why Armah treats setting the way he does. Since he is propagating pan-Africanism, just as he has done in *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Osiris Rising*, setting has to reflect the broad African space he is claiming for his characters. In this sense, we understand Armah's setting here to mean the whole of sub-Saharan Africa.

4.3.4 Myth and Identity in *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life*

Having used history and myth as the basis for exploring his pan-African ideology in *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah does not stop there; he continues this approach in both *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life*. As noted early on, the history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade runs through both *Osiris Rising* and *KMT: in the house of life*, and Armah shows in these two novels, just as he does in *Two Thousand Seasons*, how this history is linked to the “dismemberment” of the continent into the so-called independent states and the destruction of the supposed original way of his pan-African nation:

For centuries now our history in Africa has been an avalanche of problems. We've staggered from disaster to catastrophe, enduring the destruction of Kemet, the scattering of millions ranging the continent in search of refuge, the waste of humanity in the slave trade organized by Arabs, Europeans and myopic, crumb-hungry Africans ready to destroy this land for their unthinking profit. We have endured the plunder of a land now carved up into fifty idiotic neocolonial states ... (*Osiris Rising* 22).

The above extract reaffirms the importance of the history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Armah's pan-African thought. The Berlin Conference, in which Africa was literally carved up and shared among despoilers, might have succeeded in “dismembering” the continent, but what seems more important to Armah is how to “remember the dismembered continent.” Armah believes that there is hope for the future of Africa:

It may look as if all we ever did was to endure this history of ruin, taking no steps to end the negative slide and begin the positive turn. That impression is false. We are after intelligent action to change these realities. For we intend, as Africans, to retrieve our human face, our human heart, the human mind our ancestors taught to soar (*Osiris Rising* 22-23).

What the above quotation also reveals is that Armah does not deny the “realities” on the ground. His aim, however, is to show the way to dealing with these “realities.” But what kind of myth(s) does Armah explore in these two novels to deal with the realities, and how does he do so?

In *Osiris Rising*, Armah’s exploration of myth takes a form other than the mythmaking we see in *Two Thousand Seasons*. In this novel, Armah transposes the ancient Egyptian myth of Osiris to his narrative. A careful study of the ancient Egyptian myth of Osiris reveals obvious similarities with Armah’s Asarian narrative in *Osiris Rising*. Putting the two narratives side by side, we see a striking one-to-one mapping between the main characters. Some critics have mentioned this closeness of the two narratives. Angmor, in “Myth as Aesthetic Perspective in the African Novel,” for instance, mentions these obvious similarities between the Egyptian myth of Osiris and Armah’s *Osiris Rising*.

The Osirian myth may be summarized as follows: Osiris, a visionary ruler unequalled in history, attracts the wrath of his brother, Set, who has become envious of the former’s success. Confining Osiris, alive, to a coffin, Set casts his brother into the Nile. Even after Isis, their sister who is also wife to Osiris, and pregnant at his death, retrieves his remains from the river, Set pursues his hatred for his dead brother. He seizes the body and dismembers it. Eventually, Horus, the child resulting from the encounter between Osiris and Isis, grows up and later avenges his father’s death. Clearly, the main actors in Armah’s *Osiris Rising* point us to the characters in the above cited myth. We could see the mythic Osiris, Set and Isis are directly transposed to Armah’s Asar, Seth, and Ast respectively. Critically speaking, however, the names of Armah’s main characters— Asar, Ast, and Set, reveal that even though he adopts the Osirian myth, he goes to the original

Egyptian version, which actually predates the Hellenic or Greek version. The animosity Seth feels towards Asar, which ultimately results in the former killing the latter, again reveals the danger that lurks from within [a motif that runs through all three novels] as far as the battle for the return to the lost African ways is concerned. However, Armah keeps hope alive in Ast's unborn baby, the replica of the mythic Horus. In effect, Armah's transposition of the ancient Osirian myth seeks to preach the possibility of regeneration of Africa after its "dismemberment." In a way, Armah is saying that like the mythic Osiris who resurrects through his son, Horus, Africa will rise again through the right kind of leadership.

A good point to begin a discussion of myth in Armah's *KMT: in the house of life* is the title. The name *KMT* points us to ancient Egypt or Kemet. This is not really surprising, seeing that in *Osiris Rising*, he adopts the ancient Egyptian myth of Osiris to explore the possibility of regeneration for Africa. Armah believes that there is much in the history, traditions and customs of ancient Kemet that modern Africa could benefit from in the process of rebuilding or regenerating itself from the ruins of the past. This is because, as far as Armah's position goes, ancient Kemet was unquestionably Africa, and its inhabitants were Black Africans, for there are oral and written records that support such a claim (*KMT* 49-53). By the title, *KMT: in the house of life*, Armah thus reasserts this African identity of ancient Egypt and why Africa should lay claim to it. *KMT* is thus a "house of life" to Africa.

As earlier observed, Armah has consistently dwelt on the need to scrutinize the existing Euro-Western education that is currently being practiced in Africa, arguing that such a system not only erases original historical truths about Africa, but also serves to

impoverish the continent. Armah's aim, as we see in his fiction and in some of his essays, is to produce a counter narrative to the Euro-Western version as has been the pre-occupation of many a West African writer. However, the difference between Armah and other West African writers is his unwavering emphasis on ancient Egypt or Kemet as the citadel of African civilization. *KMT: in the house of life* is one of Armah's counter-narratives, a counter myth that seeks to undo what might well pass as the Euro-Western myth about Africa. One of Armah's strategies towards achieving his aim is his emphasis on ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, and what Africans could learn from such a venture. Characters such as the tragic Biko, Djiely, Lindela the narrator, and Professor Jengo are some of Armah's voices of advocacy countering imperial narratives that seek to suppress African history.

4.4 Armah's pan-African Epic versus the African Epic

Our discussions so far have demonstrated that in spite of the general epic nature of Armah's pan-African epic, there are major ways in which this epic form departs from the African epic. Armah's differs from the African epic in terms of focalization. Whereas this pan-African epic essentially thrives on internal focalization irrespective of mood, the African epic usually adopts external focalization. The reason for this unusual style, the study has shown, is to emphasize Armah's resolve to tell the African story which, for him, has so far been told by outsiders and inaccurately done.

Character is another point of divergence between the pan-African epic and the African form. We have observed that Armah typically emphasizes choric over individual characterization. The reverse is the case in the African epic. Again, when it comes to the

role of women, Armah sharply moves away from the African epic norm. The women in the pan-African epic play prominent roles; they are initiators, leaders and co-adjutants with their male counterparts. Women in the African epic are cast in what is usually described as their traditional roles: as wives, concubines, mothers and objects for sexual gratification of the male characters. As far as the representation of women is concerned, then, we could say that Armah's pan-African women are no more defined by their sex than their men are.

The epic hero or heroism in the epic is also largely de-familiarized in the pan-African epic. What we notice is that there are no heroes in this pan-African epic in the true sense of the word as it is applied to the conventional epic in which there is, obviously, a hero, usually a male who has ultra-human qualities. The hero in the African epic practically controls the plot. In contrast, Armah's pan-African epic story continues even when any one major character exits because there are several of such characters, and none is indispensable.

Our discussions have also shown that setting in Armah's pan-African epic differs from that of the African epic. We always have a clear sense of where exactly characters in the African epic live their lives. This is not the case in Armah's pan-African epic story. We are aware that the characters are living "here, in this land," somewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa, but where specifically, we have no idea.

A most outstanding point of divergence between Armah's pan-African epic and the African epic is the concept of war. We are quite certain about the nature of war or battle in the African epic. It is physical, often fought with weapons such as guns, spears and

cudgels. And the motive is often to show who is more superior in terms of physical strength and strategy in battle. War in Armah's pan-African epic is not typically physical. We observe that the characters, especially those representing "the way, our way," in this epic story are engaged in a battle of epic proportions all the same, but they are not portrayed as people who are out to show their heroic prowess in physical combat. Theirs is an ideological battle which must be won solely on the authentic knowledge and history about Africa. Their main weapons are arguments based on what they perceive as authentic knowledge about Africa. It is, therefore, no wonder that these characters are not weapon-wielding soldiers or fighters even though they are often met with brute force from the powers that be.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 Conclusion

This thesis has discussed Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, *Osiris Rising*, and *KMT: in the house of life*, as together telling the same story, a pan-African epic story. In so doing, the study has isolated the defining features of this pan-African epic for a closer analysis, with a view to establishing its closeness to, or difference from the African epic. So far, we have established that all three novels, *Two Thousand Seasons*, *Osiris Rising*, and *KMT: in the house of life* are connected, particularly, in terms of content. All three novels seek to propose a unified African state, a pan-African nation without the current geographic demarcations that make movement from one part of the continent to another look like a journey from one [foreign] country into another.

In carrying out this study, we have looked at the epic genre for a general conception of what an epic is, or should be. Aristotle's *Poetics* and Sackey's *Dimensions of Comparative Literature* (2010) have been useful in this regard. A major argument of this thesis is that Armah's pan-African epic, with particular reference to *Two Thousand Seasons*, is a modification of the African epic. Consequently, we have situated our discussions within Okpewho's *The Epic in Africa: Towards a Poetics of the Oral Performance* (1979) for a working definition of the African epic. This has been done with a view to ascertaining the general formal features of the African epic so as to be able to state, with some clarity, what it looks like, and to make it easier for us to determine the extent to which Armah modifies this tradition

As far as the three primary texts are concerned, the study has examined some of the major thematic concerns that Armah explores, to find out what connections exist between

these and Armah's pan-African thought. Here, we observe that themes such as history, education, betrayal, conflict and resistance run through all three novels. What we notice is that these themes are all linked to the destruction of an original African system of life that Armah calls "the way, our way." It is a way of life that emphasizes the communal spirit; that treats women with dignity; and that stresses knowledge-based action and social interpretation of existence rather than an over-indulgence with gods and the religions that sustain them. However, this fictive African way of life is destroyed when the people of "the way, our way" allow their ranks to be infiltrated by Arabs and Europeans. The destruction of this original way of life, according to Armah, constitutes another "dismemberment" of the African continent, apart from the "dismemberment" that took place in Berlin where world political powers literally cut up and shared Africa among themselves. To prevent further destruction, and to bring about a "re-membering of the dismembered continent," some of the visionary members of the people initiate resistance. Their main weapon is knowledge or education that is based on the peculiar African situation rather than what is fashioned after Euro-Western models. In other words, resistance here is a means to "regeneration" after the long night of destruction.

The study has revealed that the pan-African vision the author pursues is both literary and political. Armah's literary pan-Africanism, with particular reference to *Two Thousand Seasons*, stems from his attempts to write an African epic that clearly rejects the conventions of the African epic. Carefully examined, Armah's pan-African epic departs significantly, both in content and form, from the African epic as exemplified by *Mwindo*, *Chaka* and *Sundiata*. Whereas these epics tend to celebrate extraordinary male individuals, especially those from the top rungs of society, Armah's is about a way of life

that promotes communal participation and the liberty of ordinary individuals, regardless of gender: "...a time when the traditionalists themselves were not just men but women and men" (*KMT: In the House of Life* 163). Bent on projecting a pan-African nation in which individual valour is de-emphasized, Armah rejects the kingship system that places some people in the ruling class while making others perpetual subjects. He uses a plot structure which deliberately incorporates myth created around the history of Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, internal focalization and choric characterization, as well as a broad unnamed setting, to represent his literary pan-Africanism.

As far as plot structure in *Two Thousand Seasons* is concerned, Armah's pan-African epic is more complex than the African epic. In true epic fashion, Armah intricately weaves the history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and myth into the plot structure of his pan-African epic to the extent that sometimes it is difficult to tell where history ends and where myth begins. We should also mention that even though Armah is not the first African writer to employ history and myth in his fiction, the bold attempt he makes to use these as a basis to claim a common ancestry for the entire sub-Saharan Africa devoid of all manner of divisions makes this approach uniquely his.

Regarding focalization, we realize that in *Two Thousand Seasons*, the narrative is internally focalized, in which case the narrator, a character in the narrated event, assumes the position of a griot-historian with just about the right information to tell the story of the people of "our way, the way" because "what has been cast abroad is not a thousandth of our history" (*Two Thousand Seasons* 21). This narrator is at pains to relate events as personally experienced. The case is different in *Osiris Rising*; here Armah goes for external focalization. However, we immediately notice that the narrator in this novel,

unlike what pertains in the African epic, does not appear to be a 3rd person omniscient narrator. To compensate for this, Armah makes judicious use of dialogue, for while the narrative is externally focalized, most of it is rendered in direct speech, so that the reader hears from the characters themselves as they reveal their thoughts and emotions. The effect is, thus, similar to what we observe in *Two Thousand Seasons* in which the narrative is internally focalized with the narrator speaking of events personally witnessed. What is also clear in *Osiris Rising* is that Armah's preferred African characters, in their various conversations, continue to emphasize the same group existence we observe in *Two Thousand Seasons*. As we move to *KMT: in the house of life*, focalization changes to internal, but this time with an "I" narrator, while still emphasizing group existence. Thus, we notice that no matter what kind of focalization Armah uses in each of the above-named novels, choric characterization or group existence is always advocated.

The political message behind Armah's pan-African epic is also clear, as revealed by the study so far: in the face of her teeming contemporary challenges, Africa must unite, throwing away all the political boundaries renamed sovereign independent nations. But Armah is not calling for a unified African community for its own sake. The basis for this claim, he insists, is historical. He argues that the current picture of Africa, with all manner of political divisions, is a mere artificial creation of Euro-Western powers with the purpose of dominating the continent and plundering its resources (*Remembering the Dismembered Continent* 13-16). Looking back, we realize that Armah's nameless setting in the novels seeks to emphasize a common nation devoid of political divisions. Again, his deliberate selection of names of characters across sub-Saharan Africa is also geared towards a similar goal. A second basis for Armah's political pan-Africanism is also

historical, he maintains. Here, Armah claims a common ancestry from ancient Egypt as a reason why contemporary African nations must see one another as belonging together. Last but not least, Armah contends that a call for a united African continent is no new concept in modern political administration, for nations on continents elsewhere, including the Euro-Western nations that superintended the dismemberment of Africa, are already united for obvious reasons such as economic and political expediency. “At a time when people on other continents are coming together to form economic and political unions in order to meet their human needs, African space” cannot remain “chopped up into walled-off chunks, with complex barrages of administrative, military and police obstacles installed to keep the continent frozen behind its imposed divisions” (*Remembering the Dismembered Continent* 13) because such divisions are retrogressive and inimical to the total development of the continent. The link between Armah’s literary pan-Africanism and its political version should be clear by now.

Another important dimension of Armah’s single pan-African nation, as we have seen from this study, is education. Here, Armah calls for an overhaul of the entire educational system being run on the African continent today, a system he contends has been fashioned after Euro-Western models and is therefore irrelevant to the African situation. To make formal education relevant to the developmental challenges of Africa, therefore, Armah proposes a number of steps to be taken:

One, making Africa the center of our studies. Two, shifting from Eurocentric orientations to universalistic approaches as far as the rest of the world is concerned. Three, giving our work a serious backing in African history. The last would mean placing a deliberate, planned and sustained emphasis on the study of Egyptian and Nubian history as matrices of African history, instead of concentrating on the European matrices, Greece and Rome (*Osiris Rising* 125).

Armah's pan-African nation, as this study has shown, is also one that raises a big issue with modern religion, as Africans practise it here on the continent, especially when it does not originate from the best traditional practices of the people but rather appears to be something imported, and therefore largely misunderstood and ultimately misapplied to the detriment of the people. On this point, Armah argues that religion, particularly foreign religion, could become a recipe for division and a cause of strife among Africans. Foreign religion, as far as Armah sees it, is a potential weapon in the hands of Africans against Africans. And as should be expected, Armah calls for a return to original traditional African beliefs. Armah's Anoa myth is crucial to this point. Using this myth, Armah sends a simple but clear message: Africans once lived without adhering to divisive foreign religions and yet they lived in a way that gave them insight into the future concerning safety and danger. It bears mentioning, nonetheless, that this putative distant African society Armah refers to is fictional. Armah has not indicated in any way that such a society ever existed, Masamaka (2012). It should, however, not be lost on us that historically, before Arabs and Europeans arrived in Africa, Africans had their own way of living—a way which, according to Armah, was exemplified by ancient Egyptians, who were Black "Africans." Thus, Armah's call for a single pan-African community is a call to return to the best customs, traditions and practices of ancient Egypt.

5.1 Armah's Single pan-African Nation and the Politico-Socio-Economic Realities of Contemporary Africa

The political, social and economic realities of the African continent today, many would argue, make Armah's call for a single pan-African nation more relevant than ever before.

Geographically, the continent is still so divided that when Africans move across the borders of their country into a neighbouring one, they are regarded as “foreigners,” in spite of the political charade put up by African leaders under the so-called Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (CEEAC), the East African Community (EAC), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and their elder brother, the African Union (AU). Again, in terms of politics, each African state is administered differently, usually with a heavy, but unwarranted interference from Euro-Western forces. And even though most African countries claim to be democratic, the dynamics of this democracy are totally different in each case, bringing about unequal levels of development in member countries. Economically, the situation is no different, for each African country pursues its own economic agenda, again, with unnecessary external influence. The cultural dimension of the division of Africa, together with its attendant religious complexities, is also there for all to see. In many an African country, civil unrest has often been precipitated by religious differences between Christians and their Muslim counterparts. The consequences, in most cases, have been grave. And last, but not least, there is the language aspect of the “dismemberment” of the African continent. Here, some African countries see themselves more as English-speaking than African countries whereas others perceive themselves more as French-speaking or Portuguese-speaking, as the case may be. Armah revisits this language issue in his latest novel, *The Resolutionaries* (2013), in which he calls for Africans to adopt a common African language as a further step towards re-enforcing their African identity and unity. All the above contribute in no small way to the under-development, poverty, disease, war and squalor that have engulfed the

continent for years, thus making Armah's literary and political pan-Africanism an issue that should interest African readers (Mensah: "Style and Purpose in Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*"). However, other critics argue that the same politico-social realities of contemporary Africa make Armah's call for a pan-African nation a utopian idea (Masamaka 2012) because of the stiff opposition that such an attempt is likely to face both from within and from without.

Perhaps, an important question to ask at this point is: what does Armah's pan-African epic story contribute to literary study in general and the epic genre in particular? For one thing, Armah's pan-African epic story opens a fresh page for literary study and criticism as far as the study of the epic genre is concerned. But even more specifically, it also brings into a critical dialogue the type of epic we have come to call the African epic.

5.2 Recommendations

As a genre, the epic is an old form that is quite popular in literary studies the world over. Its numerous variants, including the Western and the African epics, are well-known. Nonetheless, Armah's version, the pan-African epic, is relatively new, which explains why some critics find it difficult to adequately describe and/or categorize it. It should be clear by now that although this thesis has aimed to examine the defining features of this new form of the African epic, the pan-African epic, and to explore the extent to which it departs from earlier forms, particularly, the African epic, it has not been able to achieve this aim fully. This is because the corpus of African epic texts is so large that such an enterprise would be extremely difficult, if not impossible to achieve within the time available. An obvious limitation of this study, therefore, is that its claims are restricted to

no more than three African epics. That notwithstanding, the study throws open further research opportunities into the pan-African epic and other African epics, with possibilities of conducting full comparative studies between the pan-African epic and other major forms such as the Western variant. It is hoped that when such studies are carried out, a clearer picture of the pan-African epic will emerge, further enriching and enhancing studies of the epic genre as a whole.

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