

OUR MYTHICAL CHILDHOOD

# OUR MYTHICAL HOPE

The Ancient Myths  
as Medicine for the Hardships  
of Life in Children's  
and Young Adults' Culture

Edited by  
Katarzyna Marciniak



# OUR MYTHICAL HOPE

“OUR MYTHICAL CHILDHOOD” Series

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in the series "Our Mythical Childhood", edited by Katarzyna Marciniak (University of Warsaw, Poland)

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PART IV

# Hope after Tragedy



## AYI KWEI ARMAH'S TWO THOUSAND SEASONS AND OSIRIS RISING AS PAN-AFRICAN EPICS

The neocolonial theory formulated by Frantz Fanon (*Wretched of the Earth*)<sup>1</sup> continues to serve as an inspiration to most postcolonial writers, including Ayi Kwei Armah (b. 1939 in Ghana). Writers active within this doctrine continue to fire the imagination of post-independent youths, who for many decades have been misled into believing that an upward trend in development in Africa is a long day's journey into the night. Known for his extremely rich visionary symbolism, poetic drive, and firm Pan-African vision,<sup>2</sup> Armah, besides his indoctrination in neocolonial theory, has taken another leap into dredging up the Egyptian regeneration myth of Osiris and Isis and other related myths in *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) and *Osiris Rising: A Novel of Africa Past, Present and Future* (1995) as tools for reconstructing what has been fragmented by slavery, colonialism, and neocolonialism. Most of the characters in his writing are set on an epic journey to liberate the Africa he envisions, and they give hope to new generations in the context of the immediate developmental needs of the continent.

### Introduction

Ayi Kwei Armah's early writings, such as *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments*,<sup>3</sup> project him as one of Africa's most pungent satirists, with

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<sup>1</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, New York, NY: Grove Press, 1963 (ed. pr. in French 1961).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Petri Liukkonen, "Ayi Kwei Armah (1939–)", Authors' Calendar, <http://authorscalendar.info/armah.htm> (accessed 18 August 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1968; Ayi Kwei Armah, *Fragments*, London: Heinemann, 1970.

an arsenal locked and loaded with some of the most grim, obscene, and pessimistic metaphors. In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, he depicts a post-independent Ghana where everyone (from the ruling upper class through the working middle class to the poor, suffering lower class) contributes to a debilitating social maladjustment. Consequently, positive heroism is far-fetched as moral rectitude is scorned and despised. Instead, there is a lopsided social heroism attained on the basis of ill-gotten wealth and political power. The protagonist, known simply as the Man, is a passive, lonely, and weak husband, who is both unable and unwilling to inspire morality in anyone. Rather than speak out, he sits back and watches how his wife engages in a corrupt boat business scheme. Likewise, Baako (in *Fragments*), a visionary protagonist, remains passive. When he at last attempts to take some decisive action, he is bogged down by his Western-oriented mind. Social totality is made unattainable by the fragmentation orchestrated by the twin forces of Arab and Western imperialism.

In his later novels, such as *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*,<sup>4</sup> the transition from pessimism to optimism, particularly in the former novel, occurs after the first thousand years. Through Isanusi's and Densu's "resolute revolutionary zeal" in the aforementioned texts, respectively, Armah convinces his audience that "change is both imperative and possible".<sup>5</sup> For him, the Africa whose underdevelopment and fragmentation are flaunted before us today, originally had its own way, be it good or bad, but it was its own way: a way that defined who and what its peoples were and are in the midst of others. These visionary protagonists, often imbued with characteristics of epic heroes, are able to achieve extraordinary feats despite the sociocultural, political, and economic odds stacked against them.

Armah's optimism is further highlighted in *Osiris Rising*,<sup>6</sup> wherein his redemptive efforts are expressed. Through Asar and his troop mate, Ast, one can foresee the imminent reconstruction of Africa, hence hope for the younger generation who are threatened with losing their grip on the continent. The hope envisaged is evident in their dynamism and determinism. Armah's visionary protagonists are "objectifications of the creative consciousness"<sup>7</sup> through which

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<sup>4</sup> Ayi Kwei Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, London: Heinemann, 1979; Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Healers*, London: Heinemann, 1978.

<sup>5</sup> Chidi Amuta, "Portraits of the Contemporary African Artist in Armah's Novels", in Derek Wright, ed., *Critical Perspectives on Ayi Kwei Armah*, Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1992, 19.

<sup>6</sup> Ayi Kwei Armah, *Osiris Rising: A Novel of Africa Past, Present and Future*, Popenguine: Per Ankh, 1995.

<sup>7</sup> Amuta, "Portraits of the Contemporary African Artist", 13.

the author proposes a cure for the colonial and neocolonial malaise plaguing his beloved continent. On this note, the present chapter first examines the relationship between Armah's writings and myths, bearing in mind Neil ten Kortenaar's view "that most African and West Indian writers" are "most grateful to writing for its power to preserve memory and even restore the dead".<sup>8</sup> Second, the chapter makes a diagnosis of the genesis of the fragmentation that has long bedevilled Africa – the obstacles, and the revolution therein. Third, we chart Armah's historical and mythological swerve as important factors in effecting change on the continent. Finally, the work probes into exploiting the notion of "provincializing" other cultures as a means of asserting the self.

## Myth and Archetypes

Melissa Tandiwe Myambo in "Imagining a Dialectical African Modernity: Achebe's Ontological Hopes, Sembene's Machines, Mda's Epistemological Redness" notes that "part of regaining this past and selfhood which is fundamental to the dialectical project of moving into the future of modernity is revising the 'archaic energy' of 'creation myths' [...] with which 'our ancestors created their different polities'".<sup>9</sup> This shared vision and a Pan-African inclination propels Armah to place his characters in *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Osiris Rising* on an epic journey to reclaim agency.

In order to attain his objective, Armah first creates archetypal characters and structural patterns that fit well within the realms of the epic tradition, with mythic heroes traversing insurmountable obstacles on their mission to liberate humanity. The chain of the following motifs: the quest, scapegoat, and initiation, is set into motion. Imbued with the spirit of collective self-reliance, which can drive them to authentic power consolidation, as most Pan-Africanists emphasize, Armah's epic heroes transcend all obstacles on their path to liberation in order to re-establish the link between the present, the past, and the future, thereby re-asserting a civilization that helps define the people against monumental odds, like racism, colonialism, slavery, neocolonialism, and globalization. Consequently, in *Osiris Rising*, Armah first and foremost relocates – as part of the quest

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<sup>8</sup> Neil ten Kortenaar, *Postcolonial Literature and Impact of Literacy: Reading and Writing in African and Caribbean Fiction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 187.

<sup>9</sup> Melissa Tandiwe Myambo, "Imagining a Dialectical African Modernity: Achebe's Ontological Hopes, Sembene's Machines, Mda's Epistemological Redness", *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 32.4 (2014): *Writers and Social Thought in Africa*, ed. Wale Adebani, 465.

stage – his heroes (Asar and Ast) from America to Manda,<sup>10</sup> and then empowers them to break through the forces of assimilation (represented by characters such as the fake historian), colonialism (epitomized by the characters of Professor Wright Woolley, Professor Clive Jayasekera Padmasana, and the Dean of the Faculty at the University of Manda), and neocolonialism (represented by Seth, Deputy Director for Security). Similarly, in *Two Thousand Seasons*, the Anoa<sup>11</sup> people, by sheer dint of their bravery, coupled with a collective spirit of togetherness and unity of purpose, are able to cross through the bog (a muddy wetland in which nothing survives) separating them from their new home.

The second phase is the scapegoat stage, wherein the hero (Asar) in *Osiris Rising* is killed by the antagonist (Seth) and the heroine (Ast) becomes a widow. Unfortunately for Seth, Asar leaves behind the fruit of vengeance in Ast's womb. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, the role of scapegoat is played by the fearless heroes and heroines who strongly opposed the colonial order (Abena – often referred to as the soft-voiced – Kisa, and Taiwa) and were murdered. However, their death is heroic, since it helps inspire rather than discourage the people from pursuing their course of liberation.

The last stage is initiation. In *Osiris Rising*, this is shown through the education obtained by the hero and heroine (Asar and Ast) at university. In addition to this education, the legend surrounding the broken *ankh* (symbol of tradition) narrated by Ast's grandmother gives a clear-cut explanation on why the truth about Africa is always hidden or distorted.<sup>12</sup> Further, much knowledge is obtained from Armah's naming of characters and the structure of the novel, especially as its structural pattern is drawn from the Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris. The relationship between this novel and the Ancient Egyptian myth suggests the efficacy of ancient myths in surmounting contemporary problems. The myth provides Armah with the general structure of his novel, character types, and later gives hope to the younger generation that Osiris is rising again (that is, there is hope that the dismembered or mutilated African continent is on its road to restoration).

In *Two Thousand Seasons*, the initiation stage is described by the omniscient narrator: "In the natural growth of our friendship, in pursuits of our vocation,

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<sup>10</sup> The imaginary African state that serves as the setting in *Osiris Rising*.

<sup>11</sup> The name, Anoa, is originally that of the prophetess (priestess) who prophesied the 2,000 years of hardship in the text. Later, the community takes on the name. Thus, Anoa is the name of the prophetess, the land, and the people, depending on the context.

<sup>12</sup> If the truth is told, Africans will be conscientized and the next step will be reclaiming agency. Such an approach will give birth to a new order that will destabilize the existing world order.

we wandered against all unexplainable prohibitions into the forbidden grove of sources, intent not on destroying but on seeking".<sup>13</sup>

Noliwe was the only survivor of the massacre of the leaders in *Two Thousand Seasons*, and later he advises the people to always remember their past experience for it informs them of the present and the future. In this way, Armah's novels transcend physical counterpower and turn it into intellectual counterpower to resist effectively the existing hegemony. In breaking this path, he makes a diagnosis of the colonial germ that ignited African fragmentation, the obstacles, and the revolution therein. Furthermore, Armah brings into the limelight the historical and mythological swerve as important factors in effecting change, and how such change can be obtained through "provincializing" old centres rather than rejecting them – an approach that helps in character re-assertion and integration.

## The Germinal Stage

Bessie House-Soremekun and Toyin Falola in their introductory note in *Globalization and Sustainable Development in Africa* observe as follows:

To those who are ever impatient about change and the future, the past can appear irrelevant. To the contrary, the past is relevant, as it explains the emergence of contemporary structures and institutions. The imagination of a better future rests in part on the assumption that the limitations and weaknesses of contemporary arrangements can be corrected and transcended.<sup>14</sup>

On this premise, delving into the roots of Africa's mishaps becomes imperative if we want to ascertain why emerging writers, suddenly, especially from the early 1960s on, revolt against the imperial forces that have given Africa a different image in order to satisfy their egos. These imperialists have made several attempts to exclude Egypt from Africa because of its productive past. Some critics from the West do not want to associate Egypt with the "empty" Africa they have invented, and claim to have known. Armah, in *Osiris Rising*, shows how Europeans, ashamed to uphold original Egyptian values, adopt

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<sup>13</sup> Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, 87.

<sup>14</sup> Bessie House-Soremekun and Toyin Falola, eds., *Globalization and Sustainable Development in Africa*, Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2011, 2.

different strategies to veil Egyptian history, since they cannot continue to pretend to civilize a community that was already civilized millennia before and that was the root of world civilization according to Cheikh Anta Diop in *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*.<sup>15</sup> As a matter of fact, in *The Myth of the Negro Past*, Melville Herskovits proves that “the civilisations of Africa, like those of Europe, have contributed to American culture as we know it today”.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, not many Western scholars are willing to acknowledge Africa’s ancient contribution to human civilization.

One of the fascinating aspects of Egypt, which Armah equally pays homage to in *Osiris Rising*, is the hieroglyphic script, which preserves the pictorial element. Armah does not fail in resuscitating this, as virtually all titles of chapters in the novel are drawn from this type of writing. The hieroglyphic script was used as a form of writing in Egypt, while elsewhere in Africa other forms of written communication existed, though not fully developed because of colonialism. For example, French colonial authorities in Cameroon banned the development of “Shù-mom”, a writing system of the Bamoun people in the western region of Cameroon. Drums and gongs were used as other means of communication. Art was also developed, but the two major types which have survived in sufficient quantity are wall-paintings and sculpture. John Ruffle in *The Egyptians* notes that “[t]he form and techniques of Egyptian art are dictated by the religious and magical purpose [...], for the idea of ‘art for art’s sake’, although instinctively present, was not paramount in the approach of the Egyptian artist”.<sup>17</sup> The above observation makes us realize that before Africa’s entry into mercantilism, the purpose of art was not for sale, but for the people’s immediate needs, and because Egyptian society was so religious, artists acted according to the religious needs of the people.

The practice of medicine, as seen also in Armah’s *The Healers*, was a mixture of religious, scientific, and magical methods. Ailments such as wounds, injuries, and diseases, whose causes were obvious, were scientifically treated, while others were given magical remedies. However, some illnesses were often attributed to evil forces or to offended gods and ancestors, and “amulets and

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<sup>15</sup> Cheikh Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*, ed. and trans. Mercer Cook, Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill Books, 1974 (ed. pr. in French 1955).

<sup>16</sup> Quoted after Manyaka Toko Djockoua, *Cross-Cultural Affinities: Emersonian Transcendentalism and Senghorian Negritude*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2016, 18.

<sup>17</sup> John Ruffle, *The Egyptians: An Introduction to Egyptian Archaeology*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977, 156.

ritual spells formed part of the treatment", as Ruffle states in *Heritage of the Pharaohs*; thus, doctors were also priests.<sup>18</sup>

As Samson Shu Njimuwe observes, "[i]n their religious life, the Egyptians were too superstitious, like most Africans today".<sup>19</sup> The Egyptian gods "were the strong forces in the world",<sup>20</sup> and this included wild and domestic animals.<sup>21</sup> The Ancient Egyptians' well-being was dependent on "great cosmic forces, such as the sun, the wind, and the storm, and a particular deity was responsible for inundation, fruitful harvest, and that god could be cajoled, threatened and thanked".<sup>22</sup> This rich history and tradition reigned for long until the invasion and destruction of Egypt by the Arabs and the British as seen in *Two Thousand Seasons*.

Although traditional Africa is venerated in Armah's writings, it is also presented as having some imperfections. Actually, within the African society that the author portrays, some groups of people are considered to be hinderers to the smooth functioning of things. These people include the upholders of traditional power, such as Chiefs and Dibias,<sup>23</sup> who are sometimes adept at corruption and double-dealing: they are dogmatized and then revered. African society also suffers from the syndrome of personality cults. For example, Kings or Chiefs obliged their subjects to worship them. Beside this, they often sexually exploited women and/or eliminated their enemies at will. King Koranche in *Two Thousand Seasons* sells his people to the white destroyers as if they were his personal property. Another vice presented is greed. Armah qualifies it as the main cause of the fragmentation of Africa by the colonizer: "In the end it was this hot greed that destroyed the power of men".<sup>24</sup> Armah here, in *Two Thousand Seasons*, refers to these leaders as Zombies and Ascaris who through corrupt and selfish behaviour betray "the way". Koranche, for example, initiates his courtiers into telling lies and corrupting justice. Among other things, they conduct trials for uncommitted crimes, and innocent citizens are declared guilty. The case of Dovi

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<sup>18</sup> John Ruffle, *Heritage of the Pharaohs: An Introduction to Egyptian Archaeology*, London and New York, NY: Phaidon, 1977, 159.

<sup>19</sup> Samson Shu Njimuwe, "Oral Traditions as Paradigm in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*", in Blossom N. Fondo and Magdaline B. Nkongho, eds., *Interdisciplinarity and Transdisciplinarity: Mapping the Episteme in Language and Literature*, Kansas City, MO: Miraclaire Publishing and Ken Scholars Publishing, 2020, 348.

<sup>20</sup> Ruffle, *The Egyptians*, 176.

<sup>21</sup> Njimuwe, "Oral Traditions as Paradigm", 348-349, and Ruffle, *The Egyptians*, 176.

<sup>22</sup> Njimuwe, "Oral Traditions as Paradigm", 349, and Ruffle, *The Egyptians*, 176.

<sup>23</sup> Seers or medicine men (or priests or prophets) are called Dibias.

<sup>24</sup> Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, 9.

is especially glaring. He drinks the traditional hot drink,<sup>25</sup> amid his innocence. In this case, the accused man admits to something he has not done out of fright. In *The Healers*, similarly, Densu is unjustly accused of having murdered Prince Appia, and he is given the "truth drink" as a sign that he is guilty, and he is subsequently killed.

In most, if not all, African set-ups, tradition demands an all-embracing hospitality and generosity. Visitors like strangers are treated the same, irrespective of their origin, colour, or religion. This openness, as Armah intimates, has not had the return it expects but has retarded progress on the continent tremendously, and paves the way for multiform hazards and exposures detrimental to the people's well-being. The unreciprocated generosity has served as a flaw to Africans, thereby transforming them into toys in the hands of the colonialists and their cohorts. As Armah underscores:

The giving that is split from receiving is not generosity but hatred of the giving self, a preparation, of the self-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. [...] 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.<sup>26</sup>

This prophecy is an early warning from an African prophetess (the young girl Anoa), whose revelations were ignored by giving precedence to tradition – generosity. The consequences are: first, the physical confrontation, and, later, the colonization of the mind, which accounts for Africa's demise to date. The omniscient narrator in the text notes:

We did not have to wait at all for the beginning of unfolding of the truth of Anoa's utterance. The truth was unravelling itself even as she spoke. Under the calm surfaces of the fertile time, a giddy disequilibrium swallowed all lasting balance.<sup>27</sup>

From all indications, not heeding to the revelation resulted in the physical and psychological fragmentation of the continent, and hence the loss.

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<sup>25</sup> An oath-taking drink that people imbibe to prove that they are innocent of an accusation. Sometimes, others drink even when they are guilty. The consequence is usually death, but hardened criminals take the risk, in the hope that they can get an antidote.

<sup>26</sup> Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, 16.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, 18. See also Njimuwe, "Oral Traditions as Paradigm", 334–365, esp. 355–356.

## Loss

Despite the odds registered by Africans (betrayal and lack of vision from the outset), which to a great extent contributed to the architectural design it has today, the dawn of colonization historically is regarded as the genesis of Africa's destruction, both physically and spiritually. John McLeod in his introduction to the *Routledge Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, within a similar framework remarks that "colonialism required and shaped certain kinds of behaviour, described and imposed new models of identity, and recodified cross-cultural relationships through European-derived models of difference and inequality".<sup>28</sup> Armah in *Two Thousand Seasons* adds: "Killers who came from the sea came holding death of the body in their right, the mind's annihilation in their left".<sup>29</sup> To them, the first task was to dismantle the status quo, adopting a politics of "Divide et impera" (Divide and rule). In this process of fragmentation, Africans lost their unity, and thus their "way". In order to fulfil their ignoble mission, the whites took advantage of the naivety and greed of Africans. It became easy for them to rot the Africans' soul and use them as destroyers. Armah on this note postulates that "[t]he desert was made the desert, turned barren by a people whose spirit is itself the seed of death. Every single one of them is a carrier of destruction".<sup>30</sup> The corrupted Africans (Zombies, Ascaris, and Caretakers<sup>31</sup>) become spiritually barren and resort to self-interest as their sole mission.

The first whites to invade Africa as stated in *Two Thousand Seasons* were the Arab Muslims or "predators" from the desert; their strategy was to transform some Africans into Zombies and Ascaris, and then set them against each other, in order to facilitate the invader's destructive mission. The Ascaris and Zombies are reduced to "beasts" so that they can kill pitilessly, even their close relations. Their slogan is: "Turn to slaves or perish".<sup>32</sup> According to the predators in *Two Thousand Seasons*, the non-converts had no right to live.

After the predators from the desert came, the white destroyers from the sea, armed with the same weapons as their predecessors, but worse, as Bernth Lindfors remarks in "Armah's Histories": "'These European destroyers' turned out to be even worse than the Arab 'predators', for their unlimited greed was

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<sup>28</sup> John McLeod, "Introduction", in John McLeod, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, London: Routledge, 2007, 2.

<sup>29</sup> Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, 2.

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem, 6.

<sup>31</sup> Neocolonialists.

<sup>32</sup> Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, 26.

backed by a technology of death more devastating than anything Africa had previously known".<sup>33</sup> The colonizers poisoned the minds of local caretakers, especially the Kings or Chiefs. The case of King Koranche is a striking example. In fact, he is described as a rotten-soul man, ready to satisfy every white's desire even to the detriment of his people. Thus, inspired by his own greed and attracted by the gleaming gifts from his cohorts, he betrays "the way". As a result, he sets the stage for their settlement. Many of the captives are killed or tortured. Ndlela, one of the revolutionaries, bitterly expresses his regret about the King's complicity with the white destroyers thus: "We have been thrown into death; we have seen its whiteness and yet escaped it".<sup>34</sup> Koranche is not only selling his people into slavery but also killing them with much delight. For example, he kills Ngubane, whose beautiful wife turns down his amorous advances: "[T]he King felt happy at the thought of Ngubane's destruction and gratitude filled his heart when he contemplated the social power that had made it possible".<sup>35</sup> Thus, it is his social position that permits him to act with impunity.

In *Osiris Rising*, the responsibility for Africa's fragmentation and destruction is shifted (though not completely) from the imperialists to African leaders who are totally embroiled in corruption, and content to perpetuate death and destruction. The post-independent leader in this text is epitomized by Seth, who parallels Set in the Egyptian regeneration myth of Osiris and Isis. His main concern is to accumulate wealth, sexually exploit women, misappropriate public resources, oppress the lower class, and jail or even kill all opponents in order to satisfy his individual ego and that of the imperialist. Seth, who has a doctorate in Criminology, is portrayed as a destructive agent. He posits that "some elements can be neutralized shortly by physical liquidation".<sup>36</sup> Faced with this destruction coming from various directions, Armah decides to set Ast and Asar (who represent Isis and Osiris in the Egyptian regeneration myth, respectively) in *Osiris Rising* and the people of Anoa in *Two Thousand Seasons* on an epic journey to seek "the way", which had been lost with the advent of the colonizers and internal flaws, as a redemptive measure.

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<sup>33</sup> Bernth Lindfors, "Armah's Histories", *African Literature Today* 11 (1980), 86.

<sup>34</sup> Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, 197.

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem, 73.

<sup>36</sup> Armah, *Osiris Rising*, 31.

## Historical and Mythological Swerve: En route to Redemption

At a certain moment, Africans were fed up with colonization and neocolonization to the extent that they decided to revolt and throw off the yoke. Thus, they realized that they had to begin by diffusing "the cultural bomb" that the colonial masters had dropped in order to annihilate their belief in themselves and inspire doubt and hate of themselves;<sup>37</sup> they needed to reject or deconstruct the fable of Western greatness and a glorious past that was constantly sung to them and taught to their children by the oppressors. While Africa was presented as a pre-historic entity that was uncivilized and unprepared for self-rule, the West was projected as its very antithesis. As Dipesh Chakrabarty avers in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, "this degrading view of Africa had its foundations in the European concept of historicism which claimed that modernity began in Europe and was now being spread to other parts of the globe. The European notion of history was just a way of saying 'not-yet' to the colonised".<sup>38</sup> Africans realized that if such a notion were to be left unchallenged, it would continue to stifle the continent's re-emergence. This is in agreement with Vilashini Cooppan's view in *World Within: National Narratives and Global Connections in Postcolonial Writings* that "nations, like subjects, say what they wish were true (a glorious past, a childhood in which they reign supreme), not what is or was true".<sup>39</sup> As a result, Africans remained in bondage for long, but the time soon came when groups of determined leaders opted for the liberating but risky mission. In this light, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o writes: "[A] man must rise and save the people in their hour of need. He shall show them the way, he shall lead them".<sup>40</sup>

In this vein, the liberators realized that putting up armed resistance alone will never suffice against the colonial mindset that had demeaned Africans in their own eyes and led them to accept their own destruction, exploitation, and subjugation. They sought to break the Western myths that had been used to enforce stereotypes and Western dominance. For as Myambo aptly asserts:

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<sup>37</sup> Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1994, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000, 7.

<sup>39</sup> Vilashini Cooppan, *World Within: National Narratives and Global Connections in Postcolonial Writing*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009, 5.

<sup>40</sup> Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *The River Between*, Ibadan: Heinemann, 1965, 24.

[T]o guide us “on the slippery slopes of modernization” [...], new stories and new creation myths are necessary to counter the “threats to [the psyche’s] integrity” in order to “[provide] through [...] self-discovery [...] a veritable weapon for coping with these threats” [...], and this self must be reclaimed from the pre-colonial past but dynamically (re)created.<sup>41</sup>

These are clarion calls to (re)create the way again, “where even the foundations have been assaulted and destroyed; where restoration has been made impossible, simply to create the way”.<sup>42</sup> Armah, like most Pan-Africanists, preaches the restoration of the way, the way of reciprocity, destroyed by the West and its Arab cohorts. Through an ever so conscious first-person narrative point of view, he presents himself both as a member of the revolutionary group and as an ardent adherent to the Pan-African creed.

In these two novels, Armah shows how the intellectual counterpower and the physical counterpower complement each other to reverse the monstrous adversities of colonial and neocolonial oppression. To liberate the community from the debauched and tyrannical Arab masters, the action, in *Two Thousand Seasons*, is initiated by a group of women and accomplished on “the night of slaughter”. The women use their sexuality as a powerful political weapon. Through gruesome and brutal sex, they kill most of the predators, and their people are delivered from slavery. Unfortunately, this liberation is short-lived, given that the Zombies and Ascaris turn against these women.

After the invasion of Africa by white predators from the desert, the local people prefer to move away from their land. The migration takes not only many arduous seasons, but it covers great distances as well. These refugees encounter hostility along their way, and many perish. Finally, they arrive at a new peaceful land, Anoa, after losing many people and goods, including almost all of their pathfinders. The surviving pathfinder, Noliwe, as earlier mentioned, advises them to always remember their past experience. They remain hopeful in spite of the cost of the journey. Noliwe notes: “We had fled, our hope being that new places, new circumstances might bring us back to reciprocity, might bring us to our way, the way”.<sup>43</sup> In Anoa, they hope to retrieve their lost “way”. But in this new land, they realize that the traditional outlook has been infiltrated by the Arabs. Because of this, a strong desire for privileges and social prestige

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<sup>41</sup> Myambo, “Imagining a Dialectical African Modernity”, 465.

<sup>42</sup> Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, 8.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, 61.

seizes them. The old "way" is now replaced by a new one, which is the selfish instinct for absolute power and exclusive authority.

About their security, Lindfors states that "here they hoped to be left undisturbed by marauders, but almost immediately they met a new alien force – the White invaders from the Sea".<sup>44</sup> It is this divisiveness among the people that makes it easy for the new group of colonizers to entrench itself. To liberate themselves from the hands of the white destroyers, and reconstruct "the way", the locals are obliged to destroy the destroyers. Everybody is called to resist the white road to violence, hypocrisy, fraud, and death. This revolution requires meticulous preparation: "After preparation of the body, after the mind's preparation, we were again ready for the continuation of our work, ready for motion tending towards the way".<sup>45</sup> The talented warriors include a small band of newly initiated youths sufficiently prepared in the art of protection. This group of guerrilla fighters, self-trained, and splendidly disciplined, is soul-guided by the scoutmaster, Isanusi. The group is devoted to destroying Africa's enemies and purging Africa of the debilitating malignancies inflicted upon the continent by Europeans and Arabs.

Among the revolutionaries is a young lady called Abena. Her role is pivotal, as she does not only fight but also encourages her co-fighters. Abena's spirit consists of collective action, as she always acts in concert with others. She is convinced that individual salvation is of no consequence. For that reason, she is ready to be enslaved with her less ferocious friends, rather than take action that would liberate her alone and leave her friends in captivity. During the battle, she not only fights, but also leads. In her character, Armah dramatizes a return to the universality of roles under the old "way": fighting for freedom is a communal action. In addition, it is not regarded solely as a male prerogative.

Isanusi, the senior Fundi (teacher) in *Two Thousand Seasons*, also plays a paramount role. He is a wise counsellor who, because of his rejection of the whites' presence, "is forced into exile by the overwhelming degeneracy of the land and its leaders. Fortunately, the apostasy of these leaders later yields good results".<sup>46</sup> He conceives a crusade against the Europeans and the Kings. In this context, his spirit becomes a crystallization of the aspirations of his co-fighters from "the way". Being the main character in the novel, his voice coalesces with

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<sup>44</sup> Lindfors, "Armah's Histories", 87.

<sup>45</sup> Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, 174.

<sup>46</sup> Isidore Okpewho, "Myth & Modern Fiction: Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*", in Eldred Durosimi Jones and Eustace Palmer, eds., *Recent Trends in the Novel*, "African Literature Today" 13, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1983, 6.

that of the collective voice of the narrator. While in a grove, a rebellious group joins him and he advises them not to respond to Koranche's invitation. They refuse to heed his advice and eventually become captives. They are tortured, and some of them killed, but in the end they fight and liberate themselves as well as other captives in the slave camp. The revolution is carried out thanks to Sobo's genius, who secretly elaborates the liberating plan: he perfidiously stoops to the slavers in order to conquer. By so doing, he succeeds in liberating the other captives. As a prelude, the slaves are unchained and later begin the battle for liberation. The narrator relates the epic clash as follows: "We sent them to their soulless ancestors, sent them with their instruments of death".<sup>47</sup> Here, Armah shows how the whites are killed with their own guns.

As seen above, Armah's focus is on one of the principles of "the way", which consists of "destroying the destroyers". Even those who are spiritually dead are resurrected, leaving their graveyards to join the band. The narrator relates: "It was impossible immediately to tell how many of the Zombies had revolted, turned miraculously human and thrown death, rebounding against the destroyers they were bound to protect from their victims".<sup>48</sup> The resuscitated Zombies betray their masters and join the revolutionaries. Afterwards, Isanusi is betrayed by Fosu, who has joined the group, only to lead him into a fatal trap. Isanusi dies as a hero. Yet his death does not discourage others. They are determined not to come to terms with white domination. His words re-echo and provide them with the ideological guidelines for an important struggle. The novel ends with the resolution to continue the fight, until "the way" is rebuilt and hope restored:

Soon we shall end this remembrance, the sound of it. It is the substance that continues. Soon it will end. Yet still, what a scene of carnage the white destroyers have brought here, what a destruction of bodies, what a death of souls.<sup>49</sup>

Despite the destruction, there is hope for putting the fragments back together. This hope, Armah seems to show in both novels, can only be reconstructed and sustained through recourse to a restored mythic imagination and intellectual traditions that are revolutionary and Pan-African. In this perspective, the novel *Osiris Rising* presents another way of reviving the dismembered continent. This new move is an intellectual revolution:

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<sup>47</sup> Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, 166.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*, 14.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, 206.

We are after the intelligent understanding of our realities, not simply the politics of power. 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.<sup>50</sup>

The passage above alludes to a peaceful intellectual revolution. In fact, there is a search to retrieve the lost values. The reformist protagonists do not suffer from power lust like most African intellectuals; they are animated by a humanitarian spirit, inherited from their ancestors. Asar is depicted as the antithesis of Seth who is portrayed as a prototype of destructive leaders. The author describes the former as the "incorrigible challenger". Asar claims that a social revolution led by intellectuals would take a lot of preparatory work because "the revolution is not an event. It is a process".<sup>51</sup> His main concern is to rebuild Africa and retrieve its lost values. In this process, he is assisted by a group of reformist intellectuals and an Afro-American lady who comes back to Africa with a similar vision of reconstructing the mutilated continent. To her, finding her roots is not enough because "it is not what roots look like that's important. It's what roots do. If we let ours do their work, they'll send amazing springs of creativity into the universe".<sup>52</sup> Roots are not searched for exposition, but to be used in reconstructing Africa. Armah's rhetoric is not only aimed at unearthing historical facts but also at utilizing them for an effective reconstruction.

The concern of Ast and Asar is the educational system, which is Western-oriented. In order to dismantle the old structures, proposals for new curricula in literature, history, and African studies are submitted as a means of "provincializing" former spheres of influence within the University of Manda: "We should show why the old System has lost whatever value it had and needs replacing. Then we'll have to spell out the underlying principles of our new System".<sup>53</sup> As Gbemisola Adeoti observes in "The Re-Making of Africa: Ayi Kwei Armah and the Narrative of an (Alter)-Native Route to Development":

Ast joins Asar in the companionship of *ankh* in Manda College. This is a revolutionary group that believes that no positive change can be achieved in contemporary Africa without a decisive reformation of the educational system, especially its orientation, form and content. To this end,

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<sup>50</sup> Armah, *Osiris Rising*, 10.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, 193.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, 243.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, 190.

they pursue a review of the existing curricula in the disciplines of African Studies, History and Literature. The group sees education as the bedrock of social change and a window into a new world. It advocates a system that displaces the centrality of Europe and America, making Africa its starting point.<sup>54</sup>

The ancient curricula are exclusively European and American, and the way of teaching is not pragmatic. Asar presents the major steps of their reforming project as follows:

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 be 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.<sup>55</sup>

The issues raised above are concerned with “provincializing” Europe in the educational domain, by changing the structure and content of the educational programmes to suit African reality. In each domain, they start by bringing out its historical background in order to determine principles appropriate for the new approach. These principles include the reinstatement of Ancient Egypt as the centre of African history, the inclusion of oral sources in studies, and a rational definition of the African people, viewed historically. In the curriculum, students should focus on Egyptology, African tradition, and creativity.<sup>56</sup> These reforms at the University of Manda are saluted with the murder of Asar, the hero in *Osiris Rising*, who is accused of preparing a *coup d'état*. His body is mutilated like that of Osiris. Though killed, regenerated Asar (like Osiris in the Egyptian regeneration myth) is envisioned in the pregnancy of Ast (who incarnates Isis of the Egyptian myth of regeneration) – their child<sup>57</sup> will eventually avenge the killing of his father, like Horus in the Ancient Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris. Thus, the

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<sup>54</sup> Gbemisola Adeoti, “The Re-Making of Africa: Ayi Kwei Armah and the Narrative of an (Al)-Native Route to Development”, *Africa Media Review* 13.2 (2005), 11.

<sup>55</sup> Armah, *Osiris Rising*, 104.

<sup>56</sup> We discuss the theme of education in Cameroon in the chapter “Revisioning Classical Mythology in African Dramaturgy: A Study of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* and Ola Rotimi’s *The Gods Are Not to Blame*”, in Lisa Maurice, ed., *Our Mythical Education: The Reception of Classical Myth Worldwide in Formal Education, 1900–2020*, “Our Mythical Childhood”, Warsaw: Warsaw University Press, 2021, 399–418.

<sup>57</sup> The unborn baby in Ast’s womb.

Egyptian myth of regenerations serves as a structural base for Armah's response to contemporary worries about the state of pathfinders in different societies. He makes us understand that these heroes will rise again or are rising. It is within this framework that Sola Ogunbayo in "Border-Crossing through Myth-Making: The Unbarred Muse in Selected Nigerian Literature" admits, extrapolating from Carl Gustav Jung:

[M]yths contain images or "archetypes", traditional expressions of collective dreams, developed over thousands of years, of symbols upon which the society as a whole has come to depend. These archetypes revealed in peoples' tales establish patterns of behaviour that can serve as exemplars, as when we note that the lives of many heroes and heroines share a remarkable number of similar features that can be identified as worthy of emulation.<sup>58</sup>

As described in this excerpt, and in the process of creating a myth that can counter already established tales from the West and Orient, Armah delves into ancient myths to recreate a new world that can define his people and give hope to the younger generation that the dismembered continent can be assembled again, or is already in the process of assembling.

## Conclusion

This chapter set out to examine Armah's Pan-African vision and its different stages. In this process, the germinal, fragmented, and later the redemptive phases were brought into the limelight. This was achieved through the framework of mapping the events in both novels onto ancient African myths. In the course of the analysis, we realized that Africa's lack of vision was the main germ that enabled the colonizers to invade and establish themselves on the continent. Thus, the reason that accounted for Africa's invasion and later the destruction of "the way" is the fact that most Africans are viewed as "path cleaners" to colonization. Armah's Pan-African vision, as this chapter has shown, is to identify and present the possibilities that *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Osiris Rising* offer

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<sup>58</sup> Sola Ogunbayo, "Border-Crossing through Myth-Making: The Unbarred Muse in Selected Nigerian Literature", in Jennifer Wawrzinek and J.K.S. Makokha, eds., *Negotiating Afropolitanism: Essays on Borders and Spaces in Contemporary African Literature and Folklore*, Amsterdam and New York, NY: Rodopi, 2011, 62.

to twenty-first-century African youth to forge ahead in today's globalized world. Consequently, Armah gives preference to an intellectual counterpower rather than physical counterpower; thus providing a leeway for addressing Africa's endemic problem with the academic reforms introduced at Manda University. As the analysis has equally proved, his protagonists' progression from the dominant physical counterpower in *Two Thousand Seasons* to the dominant intellectual counterpower in *Osiris Rising* ascertained that Osiris is rising, though without his genitals. The genitals eaten by fish (as the original Egyptian myth of regeneration stipulates) would obviously be what the rest of the world will offer Africa to make it complete again after centuries of castration and oppression. The reserved genitals in the unborn baby in the heroine's womb would obviously be functional, if the world fails to provide potent ones for Africa in time. In fact, the two enchanting works of Armah discussed in this chapter offer philosophical reflections on Africa's resuscitation and the eventual solution to the plethora of problems of this troubled continent within the global framework.

The book is to be recommended for academics as well as graduate and post-graduate students working on the reception of Classical Antiquity and its transformations around the world.

David Movrin, University of Ljubljana  
From the editorial review

*Our Mythical Hope* is the latest collection of articles by scholars participating in an ongoing collaboration to ensure that the beauty and profundity of Classical myth remain known, and (hopefully) remain part of our modern culture. The size of this compendium, the sweep of subjects considered, the involvement of leading experts from around the world, all testify to how important and extensive this initiative has become over the last decade. The project's continued commitment to engage all ages, especially the young, and to extend its outreach beyond the Academy merely, makes it a leading model for how research retains its relevance.

Mark O'Connor, Boston College  
From the editorial review



Classical Antiquity is a particularly important field in terms of "Hope studies" [...]. For centuries, the ancient tradition, and classical mythology in particular, has been a common reference point for whole hosts of creators of culture, across many parts of the world, and with the new media and globalization only increasing its impact. Thus, in our research at this stage, we have decided to study how the authors of literary and audiovisual texts for youth make use of the ancient myths to support their young protagonists (and readers or viewers) in crucial moments of their existence, on their road into adulthood, and in those dark hours when it seems that life is about to shatter and fade away. However, if Hope is summoned in time, the crisis can be overcome and the protagonist grows stronger, with a powerful uplifting message for the public. [...] Owing to this, we get a chance to remain true to our ideas, to keep faith in our dreams, and, when the decisive moment comes, to choose not hatred but love, not darkness but light.

Katarzyna Marciniak, University of Warsaw  
From the introductory chapter

