

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

A VISION OF SELF-REDEMPTION: A THEMATIC STUDY OF RESISTANCE
TO SLAVERY IN THE WORKS OF TWO CONTEMPORARY GHANAIAN
WRITERS

BY

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DECLARATION

Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own original work and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Candidate's Signature Date:.....

Name:.....

Supervisors' Declaration

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

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ABSTRACT

This study revisits the Trans-Atlantic slavery and analyses themes in slave resistance on the African continent, as fictionalized in Ghanaian literature. The topic, '*A Vision of Self-Redemption: A Thematic Study of Resistance to Slavery in the Works of Two Contemporary Ghanaian Writers*', is chosen because resistance is one aspect of slavery which is downplayed in the literature. Whereas the records are eloquent on the atrocities and immorality of that evil institution, those on slave resistance on the African continent pale into insignificance. Again, too much attention is paid to colonialism in Africa whereas too little is said about slavery and slave resistance on the continent.

Ayi Kwei Armah and Ama Ata Aidoo are the two main writers selected for the study. The choice of the two is informed by the fact that they are arguably the best-established contemporary Ghanaian writers, and that the theme of slave resistance runs through almost all their earlier works. In all, five themes of resistance are analyzed. The analysis foregrounds human suffering under the yoke of slavery, slaves' unflinching desire for freedom, and the heroism of our ancestors. Others are the theme of African culpability, and the theme of hope among slaves.

Among the findings of the analysis is the fact that slave resistance is precipitated by the intense suffering slaves go through; slavery is painful, and should not be allowed to happen again. Another finding is that slaves find freedom priceless and do everything possible to regain their liberty. It also comes out that slaves demonstrate they are not a mass of submissive objects that accept slavery with passive obedience. Two other findings are that slave resistance is directed against

both white slavers and their African collaborators, and that there is hope for victory over slavery, some day. Also emphasized is the point that the Atlantic slave trade remains a big stain on the conscience of humanity; there is therefore the need to guard against and abort any form of exploitation of man by man at its embryonic stage before it blossoms into full-scale slavery. This is the greatest lesson the study seeks to draw attention to, so that such a catastrophe does not befall mankind again.

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DEDICATION

To

The Memory of The Late Roger Koomson

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INTRODUCTION

This introductory section discusses the various definitions of slavery. It also provides a historical overview of slavery. Slavery is used in this research to refer to the Trans-Atlantic slavery, which began with raids in Africa, continued through the Middle Passage, and reached its pinnacle on American plantations where Africans were deprived of their humanity and reduced to human chattel. The section also includes Literature Review, Statement of the Problem, Significance of the Study, Methodology, and Organization of the Study.

Definitions of slavery

There has been a great deal of interest by scholars in the subject of slavery in view of its peculiar nature. In the words of David Northrup (1994), “The Atlantic commerce in African slaves has attracted more attention than any other slave trade because of the magnitude of its historical legacies” (xiii). Opoku-Agyemang (1996) describes the Atlantic slave trade as “The single most traumatic body of experience in all our known history” (p.1) ... a history that “bristles with so much that is irredeemably evil.” Benjamin Lay (1985) calls it “a notorious sin.” At the centre of this notorious sin is the ill-fated victim, the African slave. We will start our discussion by looking at who a slave is, and what slavery is.

Different scholars contextualize the slave from different perspectives. In *A History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana* (2004), Akosua Adoma Perbi draws

attention to the difficulty in arriving at the best definition of slavery. Like Kevin Bales and Peter T. Robbins (2001) before her, Akosua Perbi attributes the difficulty to the differences in the Western conception of slavery as against the indigenous African slavery experience. To buttress her contention, she quotes Miers and Kopytoff (1977) who postulate that

Any discussion on African slavery in English is necessarily bedeviled by the fact that the word (slavery) conjures up definite images in the Western mind. Anglo-Americans visualize slavery as they believe it was practiced on the plantations of the Southern U.S. and the British Caribbean (p.3).

Despite the inconclusive debate, Akosua Perbi (2004) hazards a definition. She notes that “In Ghana the slave was regarded as a human being and was entitled to certain rights and privileges ... The position of a slave was that of a person in a state of servitude guarded by rights”(p.4). On her part, Ama Ata Aidoo (1970) defines a slave in very simple terms. For her, “A slave is one who is bought and sold” (p.45). But the status of being a slave is far worse; far more demeaning and humiliating than that of a mere marketable commodity. Even marketable commodities sometimes carry the precaution: ‘Handle With Care.’ Slaves do not. Ayi Kwei Armah (1973), on the other hand, sees slavery as “the destruction of souls, the killing of bodies, the infusion of violence into every breath, every morsel of your sustaining air, your water, your food” (p.17). In the

opinion of Equiano (1789;1996), slavery “violates that first natural right of mankind, equality and independence, and gives one man a dominion over his fellows, which God could never intend”(p.66).

Aristotle’s metaphorical statement (in Ofosu-Appiah, 1969) that “a slave is a tool that breathes” (p.14), is very apt. Ofosu-Appiah (1969), however, creates a more vivid mental picture through his use of similes. In his opinion, a slave is “the property of another human being. He is like a sheep or goat owned by a man to be disposed of at will” (p.15). He explains further that “what distinguishes a slave from an animal is the fact that the slave can speak and perform other functions which normal human beings can perform. But he is not expected to have a mind of his own” (ibid).

The League of Nations’ *Slavery Convention of 1926* defines slavery as “the status or condition of a person over whom all of the powers attaching to the rights of ownership are exercised.” This definition is further expanded in the United Nations Organisation’s *Rome Final Act of 1998* which established the International Criminal Court. In this document, slavery is defined as “the exercise of any or all of the powers attaching to the rights of ownership over a person and includes the exercise of such power in the course of trafficking in persons, in particular women and children.”

The New Encyclopaedia Britannica (1980) defines a slave as one who is owned by another and deprived of most or all rights and freedoms, hence the term ‘chattel slave’, denoting personal property at law (p.853). The slave is dependent on the whims of the owner, who may generally force him to perform any service

and may even dispose of his life. “The feature common to all forms of slavery”, it continues, “is the social sanction that permits one person or group to compel the involuntary labour of another person or group”. In all cases the bonded individual “is obliged to perform personal service for his master under conditions that make him socially inferior and are restrictive of his freedom of action”(ibid). *The Encyclopaedia* explains the different degrees of social status ‘slavery’ embraces:

Slaves in ancient Rome, for instance, could be educated and could, in many cases, acquire property and the means of buying their freedom. Black slaves in the antebellum Southern U.S. on the other hand, were expressly forbidden by law to receive education or acquire property and thus could rarely attain on their own the means to buy their freedom (ibid).

In a document, titled “*No One Shall Be Held in Slavery or Servitude: A Critical Analysis of International Slavery Agreements and Concepts of Slavery*”, (in ‘Human Rights Review’, January –March 2001), Bales and Robbins contend that slavery as a social and economic relationship has never ceased to exist from the time of recorded history, but it is the form that it takes and its definition that have evolved and changed. They postulate that generating a universal definition of this relationship, one that is sufficiently dynamic to apply to a variety of historical and geographical settings, is difficult. To the two writers, slavery is “a state marked by the loss of free will where a person is forced through violence or

the threat of violence to give up the ability to sell freely his or her own labour power.” In this definition, three key dimensions are identified: control by another person, the appropriation of labour power, and the use of violence. The concept of ownership, according to Bales and Robbins, has resulted in slaves sometimes being described as chattels:

Traditional (Trans-Atlantic) slavery is often referred to as chattel slavery because the owners of such slaves had the right to treat slaves as possessions, like livestock or furniture, and to sell or transfer them to others. Slavery, thus, is a form of legal ownership of a person by another.

They further postulate that the economic exploitation and loss of free will that are inherent in slavery are often accomplished through the use or threat of violence and usually accompanied by on-going abuse, and for that reason violence also becomes a key identifying attribute of slavery.

For Paul E. Lovejoy (2000), slavery is a form of exploitation of man by man; in this context, the exploitation of one race by another race. It is fundamentally a means of denying outsiders the rights and privileges of a particular society so that they (outsiders) could be exploited for economic, political and or social purposes. Usually outsiders were perceived as ethnically different: the absence of kinship was a particularly common distinction ... When differences in culture (or dialect) were relatively unimportant, the level of

exploitation and the social isolation of slaves was usually limited ... The most developed forms of slavery were those where slaves were removed a considerable distance from their birthplace, thereby emphasizing their alien origins (p.5).

Thus, the Negro slave, far removed from his remote village in some obscure corner on the African continent, perfectly fits into this description of social isolation. Lovejoy goes on to show the characteristic features of slavery:

The special characteristics of slavery included the idea that slaves were property; that they were outsiders who were alien by origin or who had been denied their heritage through judicial or other sanctions; that coercion could be used at will; that their labour power was at the complete disposal of a master; that they did not have the right to their own sexuality and to their own reproductive capacities; and that the slave status was inherited unless provision was made to ameliorate that status (p.6).

Lovejoy (2000) thus agrees with Bales and Robins on the definition of slavery. He, however, adds another dimension, the issue of ownership of one's sexuality and the fruits of one's sexual reproduction. Slaves were denied the right to engage in sexual relationships or to marry without the consent of their masters. Their children, once slaves were given permission to have children, were not legally their offspring; the children were the property of the slave-master – just as the puppies of a bitch belong to the owner of the pet. Such children were

snatched away from their mothers, sometimes before they ‘celebrated’ their first birthday. In Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), Sethe’s lamentation: “I never knew my mother neither, but I saw her a couple of times ...” (p.118), and Fred Douglass’s wail (*Narrative*, 1845; 1982): “My mother and I were separated when I was but an infant – before I knew her as my mother” (p.48) give credence to this. Thus, slave parents were denied effective paternity over their own offspring.

Lovejoy (2000) also agrees with Ama Ata Aidoo (1990) when he states that “As property, slaves were chattel; which is to say they could be bought and sold” (pp:1-2). Lovejoy further notes: “Because they were chattel, slaves could be treated as commodities... Slaves had no rights, only obligations”. (p.2). In effect, slavery allows the master absolute control over the life of the slave, and all slaves are liable to the arbitrary cruelty of their masters.

It is obvious from the discussion that certain characteristics are common to and feature in all definitions of slavery: the concept of ownership, deprivation of rights and freedoms, economic exploitation of the individual, and, to a large extent, the use of violence. Victims of slavery lose control not only over their own labour and consciousness but also their own lives. Akosua Perbi (2004) summarizes the Western conception of slavery as follows: First, the slave is a commodity; second, the slave is a chattel; third, the slave is inheritable; fourth, his/her progeny inherits slave status, slavery is, therefore, perpetual and hereditary; fifth, the slave is property, and sixth, the slave is kinless, marginalised and an outsider (p.2). It was into such conditions that African captives were forced during the period of captivity in warfare, trickery, banditry and kidnapping

on the African continent; during the Middle Passage; and during life servitude on the American plantations and in the mines. And it was these conditions that compelled them to show, in diverse forms, resistance to their enslavement.

Background to the Study - A Historical Overview of Slavery

The enslavement of Africa by Europe is a painful, tormented history. The Trans-Atlantic slave trade was a commercial activity that transplanted, forcibly, millions of economically productive and intellectually vibrant men, women and children, mainly from West Africa and Angola, to a lifetime of servitude on plantations, in mines and in other places of toil in the Caribbean, parts of North America, and South America, after the discoveries of the West Indies by Christopher Columbus in 1492, and Brazil by Pedro Alvares Cabral in 1500. In these strange lands of the New World, Africans were stripped of their dignity as human beings. The conditions of slavery, as explained above, were such that slaves had no rights whatsoever, not even over their own sexuality; not even over their own lives. The violence, the brutalities, the exploitation, and the denial of rights and freedoms made slaves rebel against their enslaved conditions, time and again. One may wonder whether slavery was unique to African societies.

Slavery in Africa

Slavery was not new to Africa. It was widespread in all ancient civilizations. It had been an important phenomenon throughout history and it had been found in many places, including Africa, from classical antiquity to very

recent times. Akosua Adoma Perbi (2004) asserts that “Slavery and the slave trade have been immemorial institutions and practices in almost every continent in the world” (p.13). Several other authors, including Davidson (1961), Ofofu-Appiah (1969), and Lovejoy (2000), agree on this. Patterson (1982) adds that:

It has existed from before the dawn of human history right down to the twentieth century, in the most primitive of human societies and in the most civilized. There is no region on earth that has not at some time harboured the institution. Possibly there is no group of people whose ancestors were not at one time slaves or slave holders. Slavery was firmly established in all the great early centres of human civilization (vii).

Ofofu-Appiah buttresses this assertion when he relates that Ancient Egyptians used slaves to build the Pyramids and relied on slave labour before 3000 BC. So did the Sumerians in Mesopotamia before 2300 B.C. In the Old Testament period slavery was a practised institution. The case of the Israelites being slaves in Egypt (Exodus, Chapters 1-13) readily comes to mind. Ancient China had slavery during the Han dynasty (206 BC- 220 AD), and societies of classical Greece and Rome made extensive use of slave labour from the 6th century BC until the 5th century AD. K.R. Bradley (1989) estimates that in the four centuries between 200BC and 200AD about a third of the population of Rome and Italy was made up of slaves. Slavery also existed in Ancient India, Peru and Mexico.

The Trans-Saharan slave trade developed in the 7th and 8th centuries as Muslim Arabs conquered most of North Africa. It grew significant from the 10th to the 15th century, and reached its climax in the mid-19th century. In his novel, *Ama* (p.245), Manu Herbstein (2000) discloses that African slaves were sold in Lisbon, Portugal, as early as 1441. In an article entitled “*Slavery*”, (in *The African American Encyclopaedia* (1993), Sharon Carson points out that early Muslim invaders from North Africa raided territories in parts of black Africa, captured slaves or simply bought them from African chiefs and transported them across the Sahara to Muslim states in North Africa and in the Near East (p.1476).

On the East African coast (present day Mozambique, Tanzania, Kenya, the Island of Zanzibar, Pemba and the Comoro Islands, and Somalia) the practice of sending slaves overseas existed long before the Europeans arrived. Davidson (1961) records that Old Egypt and Arabia took slaves from the Horn of Africa and other cities along the East Coast, and that Negro slaves were known in Persia, Southern Arabia, and across the Indian Ocean to India, China, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and other places in the Far East (p.24).

Slavery had existed in different forms among different African peoples at different times for centuries before Europe and Africa first made acquaintance and began their trading intercourse in the fifteenth century. This was, however, quite different from plantation slavery where slave holdings were substantial. The major role of slaves was to provide labour. Slaves from the non-Muslim peoples of the forest verge, Davidson (1961, p.16) points out, were extensively used in agriculture in the Songhai Kingdom (of the fifteenth century) along the Middle

Niger. “They were settled on the land and tied to it. In return for this livelihood, the slaves paid tributes to their masters both in crops and in personal services” (p.13). Thus, African slavery, basically, was more like European serfdom of the medieval period, Davidson concludes.

Comparison of African Domestic Slavery and Chattel Slavery

A clear distinction needs to be made between domestic slavery in Africa and chattel slavery in the New World. Slavery in Africa was a marginal feature of society. Only royal families or kings and a few prominent people in the society owned slaves to provide labour and to add to their owners’ social standing as a visible symbol of their military might and their wealth. In *The Healers* (1978), Ababio aptly sums it up when he discloses that “Every royal family is also a slave family. The two go together. You don’t get kings without slaves. You don’t get slaves without kings” (p.341). Dilating on the Ghanaian slavery experience, Akosua Adoma Perbi (2004) provides historical evidence that offers a clear dichotomy between African indigenous slavery and chattel slavery:

There were traditional rules regarding the treatment of slaves and these rules served as ‘checks and balances’ in the property relationship between master/mistress and their slaves. These rules prevented the treatment of Ghanaian slaves as chattel ... No slave owner had the right of life and death over the slave. Only the king or the chief exercised that right over slave and free person alike ... To

kill a slave was 'murder' and the offence was liable to be punished. Even the Elders in the traditional political system did not have the power to kill their slaves. This was in contrast to what prevailed in the Americas where slave owners irrespective of their status had the power of life and death over their slaves (pp: 6, 7).

Although tribal warfare remains the main source of acquiring slaves, other factors such as judicial punishments and religious proceedings account for some other sources. African slavery may be classified into four categories. In the first instance, a person may be sold into slavery to cover a debt or a fine. Manu Herbstein (2000) provides an illustration with the case of Esi who becomes a victim of slavery because her father is unable to repay a loan he took from a woman trader (pp: 92-93). Such 'slaves' or indentured servants, serve their owners primarily as menials in the household. This form of slavery lasts for only seven years. The length of service may be adjusted in proportion to the debt. The slave owner may physically discipline the slave, but if any permanent physical disability is done to him, all debts or fines are considered paid in full, and the slave automatically regains his freedom. It is clear from this exposition that to refer to such domestic servants as slaves is an obvious misnomer.

The second form of slavery is the prisoner of war, or one convicted of murder, manslaughter or some other serious crime. With this form of slavery, the slave must pay for the life he has taken with a lifetime of servitude. One may recall the case of the nameless virgin from Mbaino who is brought (as atonement)

to 'compensate' Ogbuefi Udo (whose wife is murdered), and the case of the youth (Ikemefuna) who goes to stay with Okwonko, in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1962: p.9). Such slaves have no rights and are considered as properties that can be bought or sold, or disposed of in other ways.

The third category is the slave for life. Sometimes a slave who has a 'good' master may develop a special relationship with the master and continue to serve him even after the seven years has expired. If he swears to serve his master faithfully for the rest of his life, then he becomes a bond-slave until his master dies or chooses to release him. Lifelong slaves such as killers and bond slaves were usually marked to designate their status. They were branded or tattooed on the forehead and/or on the right hand with their masters' insignia; they usually wore, in their ears, a gold ring engraved with their masters' marks.

Other offences or crimes that attracted enslavement as a punishment included: inciting war against the king, attempting to kill the king through sorcery, and having had intimacy with any of the king's wives. Herbstein, again, provides an illustration in *Ama*, (2000) when he informs the reader that the king of Asante had three thousand, three hundred and thirty three wives (slave women included), and that any man who seduced or attempted to sleep with any of the wives suffered tragic consequences: terrible torture and certain death, or sale into slavery (p.70). Confessing to being a witch and confessing to having killed another person with poison were also crimes punishable by enslavement.

Finally, there were instances where people went into voluntary enslavement, particularly when their very existence was threatened not by any

internal or external aggressor but by abject poverty or lack of the basic necessities of life – food, shelter and clothing. There were people who were not able to feed or cater for themselves or their families. The threat of starvation sometimes left people with no other alternative than to go into voluntary enslavement. This form of enslavement, it must be emphasized, was not common; it accounted for only a small percentage of slavery in most African societies.

Slaves are instruments of labour and can be made to do any work, no matter how menial, how difficult or how risky. Some male slaves are turned into eunuchs; they guard and, sometimes, bathe the wives of the king. On the death of the king, slaves are sacrificed as an honour to the departed monarch. Ayi Kwei Armah provides an illustration in *The Healers* (1978, pp: 114-115). Slaves are also sacrificed for ritual purposes to ward off disasters (ibid, pp: 185-196).

Virginia Woolf (cited in *Introduction to Impressionism*, p.568), posits that “Fiction must stick to facts, and the truer the facts, the better the fiction”. The fusion of fiction and non-fiction in this section is to demonstrate how heavily imaginative literature on the Atlantic slave trade draws on historical realities. It is also meant to underscore the axiom that the real and the unreal are the main tools of the literary artist.

Apart from murderers and bond slaves, African slaves have some rights and are treated fairly. Their bondage, Davidson (1961) points out, is benign and relative; time and custom give them new liberties. Contrasts in status between the free man who belongs to a conquering people and the slave who comes of a conquered people grow narrower as time goes by (p.13). Among the Akan, for

instance, a slave is not called 'a slave'; he is 'Ofie Nyimpa' (literally translated as: a 'household person'). Discussing the status of Akan slaves, Perbi (2004) points out they were well treated in pre-colonial Ghana. Among other privileges,

The slave invariably became part of his/her owner's household and part of the owner's family, lineage and clan ... some slaves could inherit property on the death of their owners ... they could be credible witnesses...and could rise to positions of authority in the family, society and the state. They could succeed to political offices on the death of their owners. They could act as regents when there were no suitable heirs to the skin or stool (p.126).

Earlier writers such as R. S. Rattray and Samuel Crowther had, in their works, acknowledged this humane treatment accorded the African slave. Rattray's description of the status of a slave in Ashanti is vivid and instructive:

In Ashanti, a slave might marry; own property; himself own a slave ... and ultimately become heir to his master... Such briefly were the rights of an Ashanti slave. They seemed practically the ordinary privileges of an Ashanti free man... An Ashanti slave, in nine cases out of ten, became an adopted member of the family, and in time his descendants so merged and intermarried with the owner's kinsmen that only a few would know their origin (p.40).

This observation is similar to one made by Samuel Crowther, a Yoruba ex-slave who later became the Anglican bishop of the lower Niger River, about his society:

The slaves and masters in this country live together as a family; they eat out of the same bowl, use the same dress in common and in many instances are intimate companions, so much so that, entering a family circle, a slave can scarcely be distinguished from a free man unless one is told (Lovejoy, 2000: p.181).

Rattray's and Crowther's descriptions provide a lucid picture of how slavery was practised in Africa and how it was supposed to function.

From the foregoing, it is clear the term 'slave' in the context of African domestic servitude is a wrong label. Against the background of rights and privileges, the domestic servant in Africa cannot be described as a slave when we juxtapose his condition or status with that of his counterpart in the New World.

In an article entitled "*Debts To Humanity*", (in '*Canada and The World Backgrounder*' Vol. 67), Stanley Crouch agrees with Akosua Perbi that African slavery ended after a certain number of years, and it was not passed from one generation to another. With time, the thin line between slave and master faded out. As Davidson (1961) writes, "captives became vassals; vassals became free men; free men became chiefs" (p.40). This kind of 'slavery' was not peculiar to Ashanti or the Lower Niger River regions alone. *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1980) cites, for illustration, the most famous example; the case of the

Mamluk slave dynasty, which ruled Egypt for more than two and a half centuries (1250 – 1517), during which period one slave ruler succeeded another in the same way as normally a son succeeds his father (p.859).

As can be observed, these earliest forms of domestic slavery in Africa were significantly different in character and severity from chattel slavery which stripped men, women and children of all rights and freedoms - “the slave system of the North American states, where slaves were entirely a class apart, labelled by their colour, and doomed to an absolute servitude” (Davidson, 1961: p.41).

It must be admitted not all African slave owners played by the rules regarding the treatment of slaves; there were masters who ill-treated their slaves and created room for resistance. Akosua Perbi (2004) relates an instance where a slave in Assin assassinated his master in 1640, and another case in which eight slaves in Komenda plotted and killed their master in 1770 (p.122).

Even under relatively humane and favourable conditions indigenous slaves resisted their bondage. Some killed their masters, as shown in the previous paragraph. The commonest form of resistance was flight; a slave who escaped to the shrine of the traditional priest or to the royal mausoleum automatically regained his or her freedom. And slaves availed themselves of such an opportunity whenever it presented itself. The inference one can make from these instances of resistance is that slavery, no matter how lenient or humane, is, to borrow Benjamin Lay’s words, “a notorious sin”, and must be resisted.

And if indigenous slavery which was relatively humane in character was resisted, then obviously the type that achieved notoriety for reducing Africans to

chattels of Europeans was most likely to meet a stiffer resistance. It may be instructive to discuss how Europeans obtained their slaves from Africa. European slave merchants did most of their business through African tribal chieftains who attacked weaker tribes, burnt their villages, put the inhabitants to flight, and led the survivors into captivity and slavery. As Bosman (in Northrup, 1994: p.72) observes, a great number of men, women and children sold into slavery were the victims of kidnapping or prisoners of war who were sold by the victors as booty.

Slaves were also obtained by powerful chiefs through tributes paid by rulers of conquered states. After defeating the state of Dagbon, the northern neighbours of the Asante, in battle, the victorious Asante, Manu Herbstein (2000) writes in his 'Preamble', exacted from their defeated enemy an annual tribute of 1,000 cattle, 1,000 sheep, 1,000 fowls, 400 pieces of cotton cloth ..., and 1,500 slaves (see also: Akosua Perbi, 2004; p.58). It was such aliens that were usually sold into slavery. Rarely did African tribal chiefs enslave their own tribesmen.

In some instances, enterprising tribesmen ambushed or lurked in the territory of another tribe, and were on the lookout for a solitude juvenile or a child playing and, when they saw one, they gagged him, tied his hands and feet, and carried him off like a sack of cocoyam to where the slave traders waited to purchase the booty. The kidnapping of Olaudah Equiano and his sister, narrated in *Equiano's Travels* (1789; 1996), the abduction of Kunta Kinte in the film, 'Roots' (produced by Stan Margulies) and the abduction of Nandzi, in *Ama* (2000), readily come to mind. Warfare, raid, kidnapping, and capture, remained the main sources of obtaining slaves. After capture, the victims were marched

through long and dangerous slave routes to the coast where they were imprisoned in dungeons in the castles before they were tightly packed into the holds of slave ships and transported across the Atlantic to life servitude in the New World.

Literature Review

Enslavement, oppression and the exercise of absolute power over others marked by cruelty and absence of justice constitute an epoch of obvious social evil. The cruelty inherent in slavery, however, does not obscure the resolve of slaves; rather it emboldens them to fight against the unjust right restricted to one particular group that threatens their very existence. Slaves put up resistance.

In discussing the phenomenon of resistance, Mazzini (1949) emphasizes that “There is nothing ... to forbid a struggle against Right: any individual may rebel against any right in another which is injurious to him (the individual)” (p.3). Mazzini further holds that the mechanism for total liberation is inextricably interwoven with the mechanism for rebellion (ibid). In effect, what Mazzini is saying here is that there is nothing wrong with resistance against injustice and that there can be no freedom without rebellion. Mazzini, thus, endorses the resistance of slaves and all other people under oppression or any other form of injustice. Undoubtedly, Mazzini’s postulation is grounded on the nineteenth century theory of Libertarianism, which asserts the right of individuals to act as they choose as long as their actions do not interfere with the equivalent rights of others. Mazzini cannot be faulted. Against the backdrop that all human beings have a natural propensity to live in freedom, and that man has the right to resist the exercise of

absolute power in another which is injurious to him, African slaves have every justification in rising against their enslavement.

Herbert Marcuse (in Judith A. Boss, 1999) shares Mazzini's endorsement of resistance by oppressed people. In his opinion,

There is not ... any right for any group or individual (to rebel) against a constitutional government sustained by a majority of the population. But ... there is a 'natural right' of resistance for oppressed and overpowered minorities to use extra-legal means – if the legal ones have proved to be inadequate. Law and order are always and everywhere the law and order which protect the established hierarchy; it is nonsensical to invoke the absolute authority of this law and this order against those who suffer from it and struggle against it ... for their share of humanity. ... If they use violence, they do not start a new chain of violence but try to break an established one (pp: 615; 616).

Marcuse's position is premised on a milieu of legalities. His advocating the use of extra-legal means by overpowered and oppressed minorities presupposes a dispensation where the rule of law operates. The painful reality, unfortunately, is that in slavery, the slave has neither legal right nor any extra-legal means to rely on or test its adequacy. All a slave has is law and order, law and order which protect the established authority.

Under the circumstances, the only option open to the slave is to fight for survival. Resistance, thus, comes as a logical survival instinct. Marcuse is right; slaves do not start a new chain of violence, they use violence to break an established order of violence. They fight fire with fire.

The subject of African slavery and resistance has been studied from a number of perspectives in view of its magnitude and complexity. Scholars have, for example, raised questions as to why Africans were chosen for enslavement. Abdul-Rasheed Na'Allah (in Benaouda Lebdaï, *“Armah’s Obsession with ‘The Middle Passage’: Symbols and Reality”*, 2003: p.14) is one such writer. He contends, “We need to know whether Africans advertised to Europe that they were slaves and invited Europeans to buy slaves, or Europeans had their own plan, and enticed uninformed, militarily weaker Africans”.

Obviously, Europeans had ulterior motives. The African, in the opinion of Herbert Spencer, an English philosopher, is by his nature, incapable of abstract thinking and logical reasoning. “He thinks in concrete images only, and his emotions prevail over his reason. Neither can he perceive sophisticated philosophical ideas” (in Kirilenko and Korshunova, 1985; p.13). Basil Davidson (1961) quotes Thomas Jefferson as saying Africans are inferior in reasoning: “one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid; and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous” (p.29). In effect, what Spencer and Jefferson seem to be saying is that the negro is mentally and intellectually bankrupt, and thus, deserves to be enslaved. The

Calvinist Doctrine of Pre-destination - the belief that God had, before creation, selected certain people or races for eternal salvation and rulership, and others for eternal damnation and bondage, was a basis for the enslavement of the black race. In addition, the widespread perception that blacks were morally and intellectually inferior to whites contributed to the longevity of the Atlantic slave system.

Kofi Agorsah (2001) makes reference to a similar premise. Writing under the sub-heading, 'WHY AFRICANS?', Agorsah has this to say:

They (those who believed in the system of negro slavery) argued, and of course, erroneously, that Africans were not only intellectually inferior but also biologically inferior to whites and therefore articulated the view that Blacks were more qualified by biology to perform menial jobs. It has also been erroneously claimed that Africans were incapable of throwing off the chain of barbarism and brutality that have long bound them down (xiv).

Clearly, this is a falsehood; a mere propaganda that borders not only on racism and hegemony but also on giving a dog a bad name in order to hang it. If Blacks were weak intellectually and biologically, how come their sweat tamed the wilderness, fertilised the soil, exploited the minerals and laid the foundations of the vast economic empire and prosperity that has made America the super-power it is today? It is hardly possible to believe that a mentally inferior and physically weak people could perform the economic miracles they brought about on the cotton and sugar-cane plantations and in the gold mines. The weight of evidence

proves otherwise. “A weak people”, Opoku–Agyemang (1996) points out, “never built a world power” (p.3). At any rate, the white slave masters, as will be shown in the pages that follow, prove, with calculated cruelty, to be more barbaric and more morally bankrupt than the black Africans they enslave. One may want to know whether Africans were enslaved mainly because they were black.

The controversy over slavery and racism, as to which precipitated the other, is akin to the egg-and-chicken ambivalence. Eric Williams (in Northrup, 1994) posits that slavery was not born of racism: rather, racism was the consequence of slavery. He explains the origin of Negro slavery was economic, not racial; “it had to do not with the colour of the labourer, but the cheapness of the labour ... Slavery caused racism, but economic, not racial impulse, caused slavery” (p.2). In the opinion of Williams, the rise of plantation slavery was tied to the development of capitalism; the capitalists’ decision to import large numbers of Africans and to hold them in hereditary bondage was based on the fact that enslaved Africans were cheaper than any other form of labour...the money which procured a white man’s services for ten years could buy a Negro for life (ibid).

To buttress his contention, Williams further explains that the first instance of slave labour in the New World involved, racially, not the Negro but the (American) Indian. The Indians, nonetheless, proved unsuitable: they rapidly succumbed to the white man’s diseases, they lacked the strength to meet the excessive labour demanded of them on the plantations, and they often escaped into the forest since the terrain was familiar to them. Also, while the Indian reservoir of labour was limited, the African supply was seemingly inexhaustible.

Williams argues that the immediate successor of the Indian was not the Negro but the poor white: indentured servants, 'redemptioners', convicts and outcasts from Europe. Apart from the fact that white indentured servants served for a specific period and went back to their home countries, they were also not forthcoming in sufficient quantities to replace those who had served their term. Williams emphasizes that "White servitude was the historic base upon which Negro slavery was constructed ... In significant numbers, the Africans were latecomers (who) fitted into a system already developed" (p.10). Negroes therefore were stolen from Africa to work the lands stolen from the indigenous Indians in the Americas. "Here, then, is the origin of Negro slavery. The reason was economic, not racial; it had to do not with the colour of the labourer, but the cheapness of the labour. As compared with Indian and white labour, Negro slavery was eminently superior" (ibid). The European settler-farmer needed farm-hands. "He would have gone to the moon, if necessary, for labour. Africa was nearer than the moon (and) nearer too than the more populous countries of India and China" (p.11). Concluding, Williams writes:

Negro slavery therefore was only a solution, in certain historical circumstances, of the Caribbean labour problem ... Slavery in no way implied, in any scientific sense, the inferiority of the Negro. Without it the development of the Caribbean sugar plantations ... would have been impossible (p.12).

Winthrop Jordan (1968) does not disagree with Williams on the point that slavery had an economic base. In an article: '*The Simultaneous Invention of Slavery and Racism*' (in Northrup, 1994), Jordan contends "there would have been no enslavement without persistent demand for labour" (p.21). But, he is quick to add that racism was the major factor in the enslavement of Africans. In his view, colour prejudice and African slavery developed hand in hand (p.19).

In addressing the question: 'What was it about Negroes which set them apart and made them special candidates for enslavement?' Jordan identifies, among other parameters, the heathen condition of the Negroes. "Because Englishmen were Christians, heathenism in Negroes was a fundamental defect that set them distinctly apart" (p.16). Englishmen, according to him, were ill-prepared to see any legitimacy in African religious practices, practices which they termed as 'heathenism'. Heathenism, Jordan contends, was associated in some settlers' mind with the condition of slavery (p.21). He argues that because Africans were not Christians and practised customs repugnant to the English, the negative associations multiplied.

Jordan, however, dismisses this contention by asserting that the slave's religious condition had no relevance to his status. "Slaves by becoming Christians did not automatically become free" (p.22). The colonists did not distinguish between Negroes who converted to Christianity and those who did not. "It was racial, not religious, slavery which developed in America" (ibid). Jordan addresses the racial factor by discussing the wrong prejudices Europeans had about Africans. He asserts that the most obvious characteristic of the newly

discovered African was his 'blackness'. Jordan traces the negative associations 'black' had for English people long before the slave trade began:

The meaning of black, as described by the *Oxford English Dictionary* before the 16th century included: deeply stained with dirt; soiled, dirty, foul ... Having dark or deadly purposes, malignant; pertaining to or involving death, deadly; baneful, disastrous, sinister ...Foul, iniquitous, atrocious, horrible, wicked ... Indicating disgrace, censure, liability to punishment, etc. (p.14).

It is significant to note that the negative connotation of blackness which, in the opinion of Jordan, informed the selection of Africans for enslavement is almost as valid today as it was before the 16th century. This is exemplified by such English words and phrases as: blackmail, blacklist, blackout, black sheep, black market, black magic, black art, black spot, blackguard, blackleg, Black Maria, Black Mass, Black Death, and Black Hole of Calcutta. It seems to me the so-called 'white' race see black as the symbol of baseness and evil. Embedded in the concept of blackness was its direct opposite – whiteness. "White and black connote purity and filthiness, virginity and sin, beauty and ugliness, virtue and baseness, beneficence and evil, God and the devil" (ibid). Jordan concludes there is a relationship between slavery and racism:

Rather than slavery causing 'prejudice', or vice versa, they seem rather to have generated each other. Both were, after all, twin aspects of a general debasement of the Negro ... dynamically joining hands to hustle the Negro down the road to complete degradation (pp: 19, 20).

African slavery has many other dimensions that excite a lot of interest. One such perspective is the efforts of slaves in their quest for freedom. The African did not and does not lack intellectual dynamism, as will be shown in this work. The physical and intellectual energies expended by slaves in fighting to re-establish their freedom, it is argued, could have been utilized in developing their own economies, their culture, and for their intellectual and technological advancement. Kofi Agorsah (2001) observes:

The system (of slavery) simply involved a humanly established condition or a means of denying others the rights and privileges of particular societies so that they (the enslaved) could be exploited for social, economic and other purposes. It was a condition created through coercive activity, and all participants were defined on the basis of colour, place of origin, culture, assigned role in the economic strategy, relation to the power structure, warfare and violence. Slaves were property or chattel whose daily experience involved coercion, confinement, and deprivation of food, extra

hard and rough work and constant whipping as well. The system that operated in the colonization of the New World was fundamentally tied to labour and featured absolute lack of choices or self-determination for the enslaved even in matters of sexual and reproductive capacities or access to the benefits accruing from their toil. Consequently, rather than placing their attention in the development of their cultures, economy and welfare, blacks ... were forced to invest ... their energies (physical, intellectual, cultural) into fighting to regain their freedom (xii).

This view is shared by a number of scholars on the subject. Opoku-Agyemang (1996) postulates that “One by one the light of learning and of life was ... turned off ... scientific knowledge hid its head in ... magic ... Gibberish replaced the wise and healing word, and men talked more to gods than to each other ” (p.4). Concluding, the writer expresses disappointment: “Out of sheer fear the industry of growth became the invention of gods and protective amulets ... the place so savaged becomes a place of savages; it becomes the victim society” (ibid). Agorsah’s observation and a hundred other manifestations seem to speak the same identical language: deprivation of basic rights, economic and social exploitation, violence, and, degradation, constitute the destiny of the slave. Under such conditions, resistance seems a desperate option to freedom.

Agorsah recalls another argument that seemed to sanction the institution of slavery upon the black race – the argument that permanent enslavement of

Africans was essential for the improvement of Africans. For white slavers, blacks, as noted earlier, were considered heathen; it was therefore necessary to enslave them to ensure they would be civilized, and that their souls might be saved. This idea of enslaving blacks in order to save their souls from hell fire is closely linked to the theory that “God cursed Ham (the ‘ancestor of the black race, and his dark descendants’) and therefore American slavery is right” as observed by Frederick Douglass (p.50). There seems a good deal of material to support this misconception. Reading *The Slave Raiders* (2002), one comes across a similar misinformation. The Catholic Archbishop, Bartolome de Las Casas, pontificates, during the knighthood ceremony of Captain John Hawkins, that

The most pious means by which the Negro might be delivered from his second original sin is through slavery ... It is for the glory of your (whites’) Father in Heaven that the African Negro must be enslaved...This is why the Almighty God made the African Negro physically strong. Their woolly hair is made to serve as a pad to carry heavy burdens. Their brain also, being woolly and less developed, they hardly feel pain. These indeed are the qualities bestowed on the Negro for the benefit of other races ... Do the will of the Almighty by enslaving the Negroes (pp: 244-245).

Enslavement, the slavers emphasized, would make the heathen Africans civilized. Civilization alone, however, was not enough to secure salvation for

black slaves; religion was more expedient. So, blacks embraced Christianity and prayed to God. But Jehovah seemed to have been too busy converting Satan, to listen to black prayers. Kofi Agorsah (2001) shares this opinion. Writing under the sub-heading: 'IN THE NAME OF GOD, AMEN', Agorsah expresses regret:

God's ears were apparently locked away so that the prayers of the enslaved could not penetrate ... One might have thought that God may have been sleeping for all those centuries that the enslavement in the name of God occurred. During the same time the preaching and prayers of the Christian churches appeared to have been heard, as God afforded the colonists (slavers) success in their slave raiding and (slave) trading activities. This enabled them to make heavy contributions during church services on Sundays and "holy" days of obligations and celebrations (xiii).

Similar sentiments concerning the apparent indifference of Almighty Jehovah to the plight of the black race are expressed by Basil Davidson (1961): "To these Africans (Negroes) ... it must have seemed that God had indeed turned his back on them, and could now be attracted to their side again only by the most desperate measures" (p.230). Davidson asserts that the intolerable and special aspect of Negro slavery was its very permanence. Negroes were everywhere intended to occupy the lowest ranks of society and to stay there, permanently. This, the writer maintains, the slaves resisted: "African slaves rebelled time and

again They escaped when they could. They rose up in bloody rebellion. They fought for their lives” (p.62). Davidson then goes on to list a number of slave revolts in Hispaniola in 1522; in Puerto Rico in 1527; and in Panama in 1531 (ibid). He concludes with a discussion of the consequences the slave trade had on Africa: the colonial invasion, conquest and partitioning of Africa. “The influence of the slave trade”, he writes, “bore heavily, perhaps decisively, on the destiny of many African societies” (p.266). In all these discussions, the unbroken resistance put up by Africans, as usual, is not given any prominence in the text.

The dreadful conditions under which Africans were enslaved and the devastating effects the Atlantic slave trade had on Africa compel African scholars to keep discussing the topic. One such scholar who shows much concern about the slave trade is Ayi Kwei Armah. Consequently, Armah has attracted a number of critics, including Benaouda Leb dai. In a paper entitled ‘*Armah’s obsession with the Middle Passage: Symbols and Reality*’ (November, 2003) Leb dai observes that Armah’s obsession “looms over all his novels, more especially *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*.” Quoting Charles Mauron, Leb dai defines ‘obsession’ as “the verified presence in several texts ... of fixed networks of associations, of words, images, and themes” (p.2). He shows how such an obsession operates, by analysing the manifestation of the slave trade motif in terms of representation, the recreation and the portrayal of realistic scenes, which highlight the immense suffering of the slaves. Leb dai, however, downplays the unbroken resistance of captive characters in Armah’s novels.

Kevin Bales and Peter Robbins (2001) bring to the fore another element of slavery: violence. They postulate that the economic exploitation and loss of free will inherent in African slavery are accomplished through violence, sexual and psychological abuses. For this reason they identify violence as a key factor in African slavery. Although Bales and Robbins deserve credit for highlighting violence as a major element in slavery, they essentially fail to discuss the Africans' resistance to their bondage.

Statement of the Problem

Much has been said and written about the consequences of slavery in America as well as the effects of slavery on the economies of Africa. Again, any literature on the subject will not fail to make a roll-call of the atrocities of the institution. However, whereas the records are eloquent on the greed and horrors of slavery, slave resistance by Africans on the African continent seems not to have been given much prominence in the literature. Of course, material on resistance exists; for example, Giuseppe Mazzini's *Great Reformers* (1949), Frank Rosengarten's *Voices of Dissent* (1968), and Richard Hart's *Slaves Who Abolished Slavery* (1980) can be cited. But the socio-cultural milieu in which resistance is articulated in these works are foreign to the African continent. The heroism of African captives on the African continent is one of the least explored topics in the Atlantic Slave Trade. Researchers, it seems to me, have not done much in-depth study into this aspect of slavery, especially in the Ghanaian context. Again, too much attention is paid to colonialism in Africa in the

literature but too little is said about slavery and slave resistance on the continent. It is this problem that has attracted the interest of the present researcher. It is important to place the resistance of African slaves in its proper perspective.

Research Questions

Based on the research problem and objectives, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

- (i) Are Africans a mass of submissive objects that accept slavery with passive obedience?
- (ii) Is slave resistance targeted at white slavers only, or it is directed against African collaborators as well?
- (iii) What unstated messages do the writers convey to readers through the resistance of slaves characters?
- (iv) Does slave resistance have any moral lessons to teach the present generation?

Purpose of the Study

The study proposes to analyse the different forms slave resistance manifests itself. It proposes to bring to the fore the different themes such forms of resistance convey, as seen through the imagination of the creative writer, especially the two Ghanaian literary artists.

Significance of the Study

As observed above, there has been too little attention paid to themes inherent in slave resistance on the African continent, as portrayed in the literature. The study offers the researcher the opportunity to highlight this aspect of the slave experience, which seems to have been overlooked or downplayed. The study also shows the possibility of further research into other areas of slavery such as the notion of a 'good' slave master; the issue of collective amnesia, and the remnants of attitudes and traditional norms passed on from the days of slavery and which have survived through the ages and live with us today.

Limitation

The study is limited basically to Ayi Kwei Armah and Ama Ata Aidoo. The choice of the two, a man and a woman, a novelist and a playwright, is informed by the fact that they are arguably the best-established contemporary Ghanaian writers. Their selection is also influenced by the desire to achieve gender balance, to show the different literary genres in which the subject of slavery finds expression, and, by the fact that the theme of slavery and the slave trade resonates through almost all their earlier works. The two authors also draw heavily from the tradition of oral literature as a source of information and inspiration. Again, the selected writers project a lot of revolutionary women characters in their works. All these considerations are indicative that the two writers have certain characteristics in common.

Methodology

The study is a library research. It is a qualitative research. Texts are the main tools used. The nature of the topic lends itself to the use of this tool. Data are obtained from books, journals, periodicals and articles. Both slavery and its offshoot, resistance, are historical phenomena. References are therefore made to history and historical parallels, where appropriate, to buttress a point.

Though the focus is on Ayi Kwei Armah and Ama Ata Aidoo, references are made to such other Ghanaian writers as K. Opoku-Agyemang (1996), Manu Herbstein (2000), Kofi Agorsah (2001), and Kwakuvi Azasu (2002). The slave narratives of Frederick Douglass (1845;1982) and Olaudah Equiano (1789;1996), and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) as well as other relevant texts and secondary sources are also used. These sources include journals and periodicals such as '*African Literature Today*', '*Research in African Literatures*,' '*West Africa Review*', the '*Complete Review Quarterly*', and '*SPAN*' – '*Journal of the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literatures and Language Studies*'.

Ayi Kwei Armah and Ama Ata Aidoo, for reasons already explained above, are the two major Ghanaian writers selected for the study. The study involves a look at the authors' attitude to and treatment of the theme of slavery in their works. Although equally relevant methods of literary criticism like the psycho-analytical, mythological and formalistic approaches are available, the researcher uses the traditional (historical-biographical and moral-philosophical) approach. The historical nature of the topic lends itself to the adoption of this approach. Whereas the historical-biographical method enables the researcher to

step outside the text to get its full meaning, the moral-philosophical approach places a premium on the message of the text and thereby enhances the attainment of the larger function of literature. The psychoanalytical approach is also used to offer psychological interpretations regarding Africans' resistance to slavery.

Organisation of the Study

The research is organised in four chapters. The 'Introduction' examines different definitions of slavery and gives a historical overview of the slave trade from which imaginative writers select their themes. It also includes 'Literature Review'; this analyzes opinions expressed by other scholars on the slave trade, African slavery, and resistance. Also covered in this section are: Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Significance of the Study, and Methodology. Chapter One theorizes resistance. The discussion focuses on different definitions of resistance, their common characteristics, and factors that give rise to resistance. Illustrations are cited from Ghanaian literature and other literatures.

The two selected authors, who fictionalize the reality of the slave trade, are discussed in Chapter Two. The discussion explores their education, their literary works, styles of writing, and the themes they deal with. In Chapter Three a thematic study of the nature of resistance in the works of Ayi Kwei Armah and Ama Ata Aidoo is made. This involves an analysis of the underlying messages the writers seem to convey to readers. Chapter Four discusses the differences and similarities between the two writers in their treatment of themes of resistance. The study ends with a 'Conclusion'. In this section, a summary of the themes

identified is provided. Conclusions drawn from the analyses and the implications of such conclusions are also provided. Finally, recommendations are made as to what can be done to avoid a recurrence of such a human catastrophe.

CHAPTER ONE

THEORIZING RESISTANCE

Introduction

The previous section looked at definitions and characteristics of slavery, a historical overview of slavery, and the differences between African indigenous slavery and chattel slavery. This chapter discusses different definitions of resistance and their common characteristics. The chapter explores factors that provoke resistance. In this connection, the philosophical dimensions of freedom and liberty which form the moral justification for resistance are examined. The factors are discussed under two broad headings: denial of rights and freedoms, and perpetration of violence against slaves. Instances of exploitation and violence are cited to beef up the justification for the African's opposition to slavery.

Although the Trans-Atlantic slavery begins with kidnapping, internecine wars, raids, taking of captives and selling and buying of slaves on the African continent, it is on American soil that chattel slavery reaches its pinnacle. One cannot therefore discuss African slavery to any appreciable level without linking it with the Negro slave on American cotton, sugar-cane, and tobacco plantations. References are thus made to the African slave in the Americas and illustrations cited from African-American writers in our discussion of theorizing resistance.

The chapter also discusses the nature of resistance: this has been categorized into two – ‘Passive’ resistance and ‘Active’ resistance. The terms ‘African slave’ and ‘Negro slave’ are used interchangeably. The terms cover potential slaves, as defined by Opoku-Agyemang (1996), captives and chattel slaves. The terms ‘slave masters’, ‘slave owners’, ‘slave hunters’ and ‘slaveholders’ refer not only to European or American slavers; they cover Arab predators, slave overseers, mulatto offspring used as ‘factors’ (‘askaris’, ‘zombis’, ‘slave drivers’) and African kings as well, the lackeys who do the dirty work for the whites. Ayi Kwei Armah himself describes *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) as a ‘historical novel’, and Ama Ata Aidoo heavily draws on material from both oral tradition and historical sources, especially the trade in human merchandise at “The Big House at Oguaa” (*Anowa*. 1970: p.43). References are, occasionally, made to historical parallels to buttress a point. Though a thin line of difference exists between freedom and liberty, the two terms are, for the purpose of this discussion, used interchangeably. To get a clear picture of our subject we shall now examine some definitions of ‘resistance’.

Definitions of Resistance

The word ‘resistance’ originates from the Latin root *resisto* which means ‘to resist, oppose, withstand, usually physically (Simpson, 1968; p.518). Resistance is, thus, synonymous with revolt, uprising, insurrection, and rebellion. Calhoun (1994) defines ‘rebellion’ as rejecting the approved goals and means of achieving those goals, and embracing or using new, socially disapproved ones

instead (p.167) ... protesting or fighting back (p.246). On his part, Wilson (1973) sees 'resistance' as a conscious attempt to bring about change in the social order by non-institutionalized means (p.8). The two thus agree on what resistance is, and what it entails. By derivation, resistance implies a kind of guerrilla warfare – “a form of warfare by which the strategically weaker side assumes the tactical offensive in selected forms, times, and places ... (and) aims at overthrowing the existing authority” (Samuel Huntington, cited in S. Kalyanaraman, 2003; p.172).

The *BBC English Dictionary* (1992) defines 'resistance' (n) as a refusal to accept something; an attempt to fight back so as to prevent something from happening or continuing; an opposition to something. To 'resist' (v) is to refuse to accept something and try to prevent it from happening, or continuing; to oppose something. In *Everyman's Encyclopedia* Vol. 10, (1967), 'The Resistance' (capital 'R') is an organization that secretly fights against an enemy that has taken control of its country.

From the above, we realize all definitions cited have certain common features or integral ingredients. These we can summarize as:

- i. refusing to accept
- ii. refusing to be changed by something
- iii. fighting back
- iv. opposing something / fighting against something
- v. breaking down something
- vi. using violence to overcome or put an end to something
- vii. preventing something from happening or continuing or succeeding

Examining the various definitions, we can derive a functional definition of resistance as: refusing to accept a condition by fighting back, through the use of violence or other means, so as to prevent the condition from coming into being or continuing to exist. This definition, and, of course, all other published definitions, presuppose the existence of an unacceptable condition; a condition that is abominable, reprehensible and intolerable. The definition premises a state of oppression or the presence of subjugation. Resistance, thus, does not occur in a vacuum. But, what is the basis for the African slave's resistance? Is the slave's resistance justifiable? A close look at the philosophical theory of libertarianism will enable us to appreciate the moral justification for slave resistance.

Moral Justification for Resistance

Introduction

Resistance, as already pointed out, does not occur in a vacuum. It is the deprivation or perpetration of certain conditions that creates room for resistance. Using the moral-philosophical approach we shall now discuss the first of the two broad prerequisites – deprivation of rights and freedoms.

Basically, what provides the platform for resistance is the deprivation of the captive of his inalienable right to freedom. Hegel wrote in *Philosophy of History* (1832), that the history of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of freedom. Of course, he was right; we cannot fully appreciate the essence of freedom unless we are conscious of its history. In the opinion of Kofi Agorsah (2001), freedom is the most desirable and the tastiest of all things for

every human society (xi). He observes, however, that “for agents and perpetrators of slavery, freedom for the enslaved was absolutely tasteless until the Atlantic and Indian oceans piled up enough salt on the tips of their noses and melted into their mouth in the heat of the tropical sun” (ibid).

In *Towards Colonial Freedom* (1962), Kwame Nkrumah urges all oppressed peoples to unite and fight against exploitation and to fight for freedom. He identifies three types of freedom: political freedom, which he defines as complete and absolute independence from the control of any foreign government; democratic freedom, which he sees as freedom from political tyranny and the establishment of a democracy in which sovereignty is vested in the people; and, social freedom – freedom from poverty and economic exploitation (pp: 44, 45).

And what is freedom? P.H. Partridge, (in Paul Edwards, 1967), posits that freedom is a moral and a social concept which refers either to circumstances that arise in the relations of man to man, or to specific conditions of social life. He defines freedom as referring primarily to a condition characterized by the absence of coercion or constraint imposed by another person (p.222). He elaborates:

A man is said to be free to the extent that he can choose his own goals or course of conduct ... and is not compelled to act, as he would not himself choose to act, or prevented from acting, as he would otherwise choose to act, by the will of another man, of the state, or of any other authority. So long as a man acts of his own volition and is not coerced in what he does, he is free (p.223).

In an article captioned '*Freedom*', (cited in *The World Book Encyclopedia*, Vol. 7, 1996), William Havard Jr. conceptualizes freedom as the ability to make choices and to carry them out. In his opinion, the words 'freedom' and 'liberty' mean much the same thing. He contends that for people to have complete freedom there must be no restrictions on how they think, speak or act ... They must have the means and the opportunity to think, speak, and act without being controlled by anyone else (p.502). Like Nkrumah, Havard Jr. identifies three kinds of freedom: political, social, economic. Political freedom, according to him, gives the individual a voice in the manner he should be governed and an opportunity to take part in its decision-making process. Social freedom includes freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and the right to due process of law. He explains economic freedom as that which enables people to make their own economic decisions. This freedom includes the right to own property, to use it the way one likes, to profit from it, and the right to choose and change jobs (ibid).

The Philosophical Theory of Libertarianism

As may be observed from the foregoing discussion, it is evident that every human being has the right to freedom from oppression; every human being has the right to live his or her life as he or she chooses, compatibly with the rights of all other human beings to live their lives as they choose. It is upon this basis that the philosophical theory of libertarianism is premised. The libertarian theory is the doctrine that every person is the owner of his or her own life, and that no one is the owner of anyone's life; that consequently, every human being has the right

to act in accordance with his or her own choices unless those actions infringe the equal liberty of other human beings to act in accordance with their choices.

In defending libertarianism, John Hospers (in Mappes and Zembaty (1997), postulates that there are two basic implications of the theory: 'Human Liberty' and 'The Sovereignty of Man'. The first, according to him, is that no one is anyone else's master and no one is anyone else's slave. He explains:

Since I am the one to decide how my life is to be conducted, just as you decide about yours, I have no right, even if I have the power, to make you my slave and be your master, nor have you the right to become the master by enslaving me (p.274).

Hospers illustrates the second implication:

A hundred men might gain great pleasure from beating up, torturing or killing just one insignificant human being; but other men's lives are not theirs to dispose of. In other words, it is wrong to forcibly enslave someone else in order to satisfy some people or achieve the development goals of another race (p.276).

In the opinion of Hospers, no human being should be a non-voluntary mortgage on the life of another. "I cannot claim your life, your work or the products of your effort as mine ... The fruit of one man's labour should not be fair

game for every freeloader who comes along and demands it as his own.” (p.278). He buttresses the point with an analogy, that the theft of one’s money by an armed robber is not justified by the fact that the robber used it to cure his sick mother. Hospers concludes by re-emphasizing the sovereignty of man:

If we recognize the principle of man’s rights, it follows that the individual is sovereign of the domain of his own life and property, and is sovereign of no other domain. To attempt to interfere forcibly with another man’s use, disposal or destruction of his own labour, property or life is to initiate force against him and to violate his rights (p.282)

By implication, to deny the captive or slave his basic human rights - the right to life, liberty, and property - is to strip him of his humanity. Against the background of libertarianism, the ‘destroyers’, ‘predators’ and ‘pretenders,’ as Armah (1973) calls white slavers, have no moral right in enslaving Africans. It is the deprivation of the slave of his sovereignty that provokes resistance. The denial of the right to freedom, thus, is sufficient justification for slave resistance. Hospers’ article on human liberty and the sovereignty of man is an extension of the ideas John Stuart Mill developed in an earlier essay. In his book, *On Liberty*, (1859), (cited in Mappes and Zembaty, 1997), the English philosopher identifies two implications in the individualistic and liberal conception of freedom. He posits that human liberty comprises, first, in the inward domain of consciousness,

liberty of thought and feeling; absolute freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects; and the liberty of expressing opinion (p.284). Secondly, the principle requires liberty of tastes and pursuits; of framing the plan of our life to suit our own character; of doing as we like, subject to such consequences as may follow; without impediment from our fellow-creatures, so long as what we do does not harm them, even though they should think our conduct foolish, perverse or wrong.

J.S. Mill asserts that

The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs or impede their effort to obtain it ... Man cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so ... because in the opinion of others, to do so would be wise or even right (p.286).

Mill's argument clearly knocks out the European propaganda that slavery is better for the African, that to enslave the Negro is wise, even right; that it is good for his soul and will give him salvation and make him happier (see: Kwakuvi Azasu, *The Slave Raiders*, 2002: p.245; Ayi Kwei Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, 1973: pp.84, 200; Manu Herstein, *Ama*, 2000: p.375).

Recipe for Resistance I - Deprivation of Rights

The point has been made that under slavery, the African slave is stripped of his humanity. He is treated as if he were mere flesh and bones, without brains

and feelings, to be worked and tortured, like a beast. It is this awful deprivation of rights that compels Frederick Douglass (pp.67-68) to lament that a slave is not a human being before the law. Douglass's description of how the valuation and sharing of Capt. Anthony's estate were done (upon his death), speaks to the point:

We were all ranked together at the valuation. Men and women, young and old, married and single, were ranked with horses, sheep, and swine. There were horses and men, cattle and women, pigs and children, all holding the same rank in the scale of being ... After the valuation, then came the division. Our fate was now to be decided. We had no more voice in that decision than the brutes among whom we were ranked (pp: 89-90).

The Negro slave, equated in rank with horses, cattle and pigs, thus, has no say in matters concerning his destiny. This is the ground of departure on which the whole relationship between master and slave is firmly set. Obviously, there will be resistance in a dispensation that presupposes animal status for humans.

Instances of deprivation of freedom abound in the literature. When one reads *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973), one observes that not only are captives denied the freedom of mobility; they are also deprived of the liberty of communicating with one another. Captives from one ethnic group are chained to captives from other tribes who speak another language. Armah writes:

The white destroyer unlocked the left circle of the trap on Kenia's ankle, turned the whole thing so that the open circle caught Ndela's left ankle, and locked it. Sobo was dragged towards Ankoanda and locked together with her. Shale was locked with Suma; Ude was locked with Ona, Dovi with Makaa, Lini with Naita ... Mokili with Tawiah (p.113).

Clearly, this is not only a deliberate ploy to deprive captives of the opportunity of hatching a rebellion; more importantly it is meant to break their spirit. Armah's attitude towards this form of deprivation is one of repugnance.

In his *Narrative*, Frederick Douglass recounts how he is denied the right to education. In the words of Mr. Hugh Auld (his master),

A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master... Learning would spoil the best nigger in the world. If you teach a nigger how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave (p.78).

The same sentiment is re-echoed in *Ama* (2000), when Captain Williams of the slave ship, '*Love of Liberty*' (an irony of a name) tells De Bruyn, the Director-General of the Elmina Castle, that providing education for slaves will open their minds to ideas that are unsuited and detrimental to their station in life. Education, Captain Williams pontificates,

persuades them (slaves) to despise their lot in life, rather than making good servants of them. Instead of wearing their yoke with patience they become ill-mannered and intractable (p.212).

Conscious of the danger enlightenment of slaves may pose to their greedy enterprise, white slavers prohibit slaves from receiving education or acquiring any knowledge about their roots and identity – their parentage, their age, their history and their culture. Any inquiry on the part of a slave about such issues is deemed improper and impertinent, and evidence of an inquisitive, rebellious character. It is this deprivation or the withholding of the means of knowing, from slaves, with its concomitant loss of clues to their roots that makes Eulalie Rush plead with Ato Yawson to permit her to adopt his parents as her parents, his people as her people, and his gods as her gods too (*The Dilemma*, 1965: pp.3, 4).

Not only are slaves denied ownership rights, they are also denied the right to benefit from the fruits of their labour. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, Isanusi bemoans this situation as he laments that the lot of the black man is “the planting and the caring” while the white man enjoys “the harvest and its profits” (p.83). It is in line with this mentality that Captain John Baker of the *Indian Queen*, refuses to pay Equiano one farthing out of the eight pounds and five shillings sterling he earns as a free man, working on the sloop “although it was the hardest earned money I ever worked for in my life” (*Equiano’s Travels*, 1789;1996: p.142). Even the right to engage in sex is an abomination for men slaves. When we read *Beloved* (1987), we observe the plight of men slaves (in their twenties) who are

denied the right to sex. Such vibrant and sexually active men are so starved of women that they go about “fucking cows” (p.11).

As regards the denial of rights, even babies and infants are not spared. Babies born into slavery are snatched from their mothers before they reach their twelfth month. The infant is placed under the custody of an old woman, too weak for the tedious, hard labour on the plantation. In his *Narrative* Douglass cries out, “My mother and I were separated when I was but an infant – before I knew her as my mother” (p.48). This is collaborated in *Beloved* (1987) when Sethe grieves: “I never knew my mother neither, but I saw her a couple of times” (p.118).

Of all the rights and freedoms, however, the greatest a man can yearn for and boast of is the right to life. The slave, nonetheless, is often denied this inalienable right. A few illustrations will underpin the point. Reading Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973), one comes across three hundred ‘fundis’ (arrow-makers) murdered by agents of slave-holders (p.99). In the same novel we read of another terrible slaughter executed among those unfortunate men and women who refuse to flee with the main portion of the escaping potential slaves:

The relatives of all who had spurned oppression were burned (alive) to ashes. Children not yet born burst out in that fire, then scalded with the hissing liquid of their mothers’ wombs regained oblivion (p.45).

An arresting historical parallel is provided in *Black Mother* (1961). Basil Davidson, the author, reveals that in 1783, the captain of ‘Zong’, a Liverpool

slave-ship, caused 133 Negro slaves to be thrown overboard, alive, during the Middle Passage because they were considered too weak or sick (p.244). Malcolm Cowley and Daniel P. Mannix, in an article, captioned '*The Middle Passage*' (in David Northrup, 1994) add that "In an emergency they (captains of slave ships) simply jettisoned part of their (human) cargo" (p.111). Cowley and Mannix again narrate the story of a Frenchman from Brest who had a long passage and, for lack of water and provisions, had to poison his slaves. Out of five hundred slaves who set out, only twenty reached Haiti (ibid).

Incidents of such extreme inhumanity do not involve adults only; even children and babies receive no reprieve in this spirit of ferocious insensitivity. In *Tribal Scars* (1961), nine-year old Iome is so traumatized by so much bloodshed that even a harmless gust of wind sends the poor girl into a panic. Writing under the heading, '*A Reformed Slave Trader's Regrets*' (in David Northrup, 1994), John Newton narrates a soul-chilling experience:

A mate of a ship purchased a young woman, with a fine child, of about a year old, in her arms. In the night, the child cried much, and disturbed his sleep. He rose up in great anger, and swore, that if the child did not cease crying, he would presently silence it. The child continued to cry. At length he rose up a second time, tore the child from the mother, and threw it into the sea. The child was soon silenced ... (p.86).

Davidson (1961, p.59) provides another illustration, this time, on the American plantations. He discloses that

planters used slave labour with such wasteful folly that whole slave populations had to be replenished time after time. Plantation mortality was so high that in some instances the whole race of healthy slaves is totally extinct every 20 years

One could go on and on to illustrate this wanton destruction of life, this deprivation of the most basic right, with several examples. The institution of slavery, as we have seen, creates conditions that deprive the captive not only of his freedom and the fruits of his labour but also the control over his own life. It is into such conditions that the African slave is forced. But it is uncharacteristic of the African spirit to succumb to involuntary servitude or oppression forever. “The African”, Jomo Kenyatta (1938) observes, “is conditioned by cultural and social institutions of centuries to a freedom of which Europe has little conception, and it is not in his nature to accept serfdom forever” (p.318). With his freedom unjustly wrestled from him, the slave is compelled to resist his enslavement. Resistance, thus, erupts as a result of the captive’s desire to re-assert his freedom.

Recipe for Resistance II - Perpetration of Violence

Chattel slavery is characterized by violence and trauma, or what Marilyn Frye calls the ‘double bind’ - situations in which options are reduced to a very

few, and all of them expose the slave to a penalty of violence or deprivations (Marilyn Frye: '*Oppression*', cited in Mappes and Zembaty (1997)). In reality, the whole machinery of slavery is so constructed as to cause violence, suffering, and pain. At every stage of African enslavement, from the struggles in Africa during the raids in the hinterlands and imprisonment in the castles at the coast; through the mutinies during the Middle Passage; to the rebellions and escapes at the end of the voyage in the Americas, most captives who get entangled in the quagmire of slavery find themselves in the hands of torture squads. Ayi Kwei Armah (1973) calls them "zombies", "askaris" and "slave drivers;" Frederick Douglass describes them as "nigger-breakers," while Kwakuvi Azasu (2002) calls them "slave-hunters." Most prominent among the torture devices used are: the chain, the shackles, the halter, the iron muzzle, thumbscrews, the whip, the gun, starvation, excruciating labour, and gruesome executions of perceived 'trouble-makers'.

On the African continent, innocent peasants are hunted, captured, selected, imprisoned in grisly forts, and brought down, in chains, sometimes naked, to the coast. Whole villages are burnt down to render the inhabitants easy prey for capture. Only strong men and women are accepted as slaves. This partly explains why the captives sometimes put up audacious instances of resistance. People who are in their forties or have grown grey or who have any physical disabilities are rejected. Such rejects are known as 'Mackrons'. In *The Slave Raiders* (2002), Azasu discloses that such rejects considered useless as merchandise are used for accurate shooting practice by the white slave-hunters (p.229).

In the castles, captives are visited with more violence: men and women alike are branded on the chest or at the back, with the initials of their master's name or that of the trading company which owns them, for identification purposes. Ayi Kwei Armah (1973) provides a pictorial but harrowing description:

The tall slave-driver placed the four metal rods ... carefully in the hottest parts of the fires ... the man waited till the rods began to glow at their ends. Then, picking one up carefully with the cloth covering his palms, he turned to the captive closest to himself. The two other askaris held the captive by his shoulders, so firmly he could not move. The tall slave-driver pushed the burning iron against the captive's chest where oil had been smeared and held it there ...The tortured man yelled with pain, once. Smoke rose sharply from the oily flesh, then the iron rod was snatched back. Where its end had touched the captive's skin there was now raw, exposed flesh. The skin had come off in two pieces, each as long as a middle finger and half as broad ... The askari brought another captive forward and burned the mark into her flesh (p.118).

Inflicting open wounds and other forms of horrific lacerations on slaves is a common phenomenon in slavery. A similar gruesome picture is painted in *Equiano's Travels* (1996, p.62), in *Ama* (2000, pp:265, 268), in *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (1994, p.72) and in *The Slave Raiders* (2002, p.229) where slaves are

identified not by names but by a trademark, an identity number marked on their bodies, with red-hot iron rods. At the departure dinner for shareholders on board the slave-ship '*Jesus*' at Liverpool harbour, Capt. John Hawkins, the slave-hunter, orders four negroes to be brought on the deck. When the slaves appear, he orders them to converse in English to amuse his guests. So the slaves converse:

“What’s your name?” one of the Negroes began.

“I have no name,” the other answered.

“Why?”

“Because I’m not a human being.”

“How are you identified then?”

“By a number.”

“What is your number then?”

“My number is R.A.C. 121, which means Royal Africa Company 121

The R.A.C. owns me. What about you?”

“I am also owned by the Royal Africa Company.

My number is 243. Look at my back ...

My number is branded there with red-hot iron

Certainly, inflicting such wounds on slaves is not considered barbaric by the civilized white slaver who brings salvation and civilization to the African savage.

The Middle Passage

During the Middle Passage – the ocean journey from the West African coast to the Americas – the incidence of violence against slaves is staggering. On board the ship, slaves are kept in irons; they are shackled in twos, the right wrist of one slave is manacled to the left wrist and ankle of another, like chained beasts. This makes it difficult for them to turn or move without hurting themselves or each other. Several slaves are squeezed into the hold of the ship; they are so tightly packed that they have just a little space to lie on their back for the two to three month voyage across the Atlantic. Slaves do not have much room as a corpse in its coffin. To enter the hold of a ship to treat the sick, a surgeon has to remove his shoes to avoid crushing the slaves as he is forced to crawl over them. It is a common sight among the slaves every morning to find a dead body fastened to the living. Slaves considered dangerous catalysts are thrown overboard.

Transported with little clothing, slaves suffer sores, abrasions and splinters as their prostrate bodies get into contact with the rough wood of the hull. The constant rocking motion of the ship rubs sores onto slaves' buttocks and backs. Slaves also develop leg sores from constantly wearing shackles. Cowley and Mannix, writing on '*The Middle Passage*' (in '*American Heritage*' 1962, cited in David Northrup, 1994), paint another picture of horrific dimensions:

After the morning meal came a joyless ceremony called “dancing the slaves.” Slaves in irons were ordered to stand up and make what motions they could ... Dancing was prescribed as a

therapeutic measure, a specific against suicidal melancholy, and also against scurvy – although in the latter case it was a useless torture for men with swollen limbs. While sailors paraded the deck, each with a whip in his right hand, the men slaves jumped in their irons until their ankles were bleeding flesh. (p.105).

Despite the large number of human chattel, food is scanty, and sanitary conditions are death threatening. Dirt, filth, and lack of toilets result in the presence of huge quantities of human waste. As one captive remarks, “each body lay immobile in its own refuse” (*Two Thousand Seasons*, p.126). Describing the filthy conditions of slaves in transit, Manu Herbstein (2000) states “There was a pervasive smell of stale sweat ... rotten menstrual blood, urine and farting ...” (p.36). Cowley and Mannix buttress the existence of this culture of filth in the holds of slave ships. In their words, “The dock, that is, the floor of their rooms, was so covered with the blood and mucus which had proceeded from them (slaves) in consequence of the flux, that it resembled a slaughter house.” Randolph Meade Walker takes it further. In an article, captioned ‘*Slave Ships*’, he reveals

Most slave-ships lacked even simple toilet facilities for slaves. Ships’ hulls became foul-smelling cesspools of urine and faeces; it was said that when the wind was right, a slave-ship could be smelled five miles away (p.1470).

Throughout the Middle Passage the odours of human faeces, urine, rotten menstrual blood, festering sores, stale sweat, fart, and vomit assault the reader's sense of smell. Such filthy conditions combine to produce a conducive environment for the spread of diseases. The result is that flu and other infections take a toll on the slaves. In '*On His Sale in America*', (in *History of Slavery*, 1996), the account of Prince Zamba., a slave, reinforces Walker's revelation:

I have known ships ... arrive from Africa, in which 750 slaves had been embarked; but owing to cruel usage, ... impure air, and absolute filth, which prevailed on board, not more than 400 lived to reach Charleston and of these, one-half were in a most weakly and miserable condition (p.109).

Cowley and Mannix (in Northrup, 1994) add another dimension to the unwholesomeness of the Middle Passage; they see the sea journey as a crossroad and marketplace for diseases:

Along with their human cargoes, crowded, filthy, undernourished, and terrified out of the wish to live, the (slave) ships also carried an invisible cargo of microbes, bacilli, spirochetes, viruses, and intestinal worms from one continent to another. From Europe came smallpox, measles, gonorrhoea, and

syphilis. The African diseases were yellow fever, malaria, guinea worm, dysentery, leprosy, and yaws (p.109).

Considering such an insalubrious environment, one is tempted to believe the estimation that only one out of two captives who embark from Africa ever makes it to the New World, alive.

Starvation is another form of violence inflicted on the slave. Even among slaveholders, to starve a slave is regarded as the most heinous development of meanness. Yet slaves suffer starvation at the hands of their masters. In his *Narrative*, Frederick Douglass recounts how food, produced on the plantation by slaves, is rationed among men and women slaves: “The men and women slaves received, as their monthly allowance of food, eight pounds of pork, or its equivalent in fish and one bushel of corn meal” (p.54). Douglass again discloses how Mr. Thomas Hamilton so starves his two women slaves (Henrietta and Mary) that the two wretches contend with pigs for the offal thrown into the street (p.80). This disclosure resonates in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987) where slaves ventilate their hunger and anger in a song:

Little rice, little bean,
No meat in between.
Hard work ain’t easy,
Dry bread ain’t greasy (p.40).

The picture of starvation becomes complete in *Equiano's Travels* (1996), when the protagonist narrates how slaves are sometimes starved and reduced so low that they are turned out as unfit for service and left to perish in the woods or to expire on a dunghill (p.61). It is difficult to believe how human beings could be so inhuman as to treat fellow human beings, created in the image of God, in such a manner in order to obtain economic advantage. In *Ama* (2000), we also come across three hundred poorly fed slaves who walk from Yendi to the Kafaba slave camp, enroute to Kumasi. In the words of Minjendo, one of the women slaves, "some of the older ones and some of the children died on the road from hunger and thirst" (p.63).

The brutality of the captain of the 'Zong' who causes 133 Negro slaves to be thrown into the sea because they are too weak to fetch good prices in the New World has been described. In 1694, the 'Hannibal', a slave ship, also buried its cargo of slaves for the same reason. Cowley and Mannix (1962; in Northrup,1994) provide yet another spectacle: the story of a French slave merchant who experiences a long passage, runs out of provisions, and poisons his slaves. Only twenty out of five hundred of them reach Haiti (p.110). Taking into consideration other factors such as deaths in the harbours, diseases, poisoning, suicide, and throwing slaves overboard during the Middle Passage, it is plausible to believe Cowley and Mannix that only one slave was added to the New World labour force for every two purchased on the Guinea Coast (ibid).

The volume of work slaves do on the plantations is, in itself, torture. From the rising bell at dawn to close of work at dusk, irrespective of weather conditions, slaves work like beasts of burden. Frederick Douglass (1845;1982) relates another tale of woe:

We were worked in all weathers. It was never too hot or too cold; it could never rain, blow, hail or snow too hard for us to work in the field. Work, work, work, was scarcely more the order of the day than of the night (p.105).

Such hard labour, on a near-starvation diet, is, without doubt, scary enough to make slaves resort to resistance in an attempt to regain their freedom.

In all circumstances, however, flogging remains the commonest form of violence meted out to slaves. The principle, as Douglass observes, seems to be, “whip the slave for the smallest offence to prevent him from committing large ones” (p.118). So, a slave is whipped if he breaks any rule or disobeys his master. He is whipped if he looks dissatisfied; he is whipped if he looks satisfied. He is flogged if he ventures to vindicate his conduct when censored. A slave is whipped if he does not respond to time promptly; if he fails to work to the master’s satisfaction, and if he shows any sign of being inquisitive. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, the slave driver (John) flogs Abena, Pili, Lini and Kamara for stealing a glance at the gorgeously dressed chiefs (“the parasites of the coast”) who appear at the courtyard of the castle (p.121). In *Equiano’s Travels*, the

protagonist is tied and flogged severely when he refuses to eat, because of the separation of his captive sister from him (p.26). Kwakuvi Azasu's description of Captain John Hawkins' barbaric flogging of RAC 121 and RAC 243, which turns the dark bodies of the two, bloody, is photographic. Their crime? They stopped rolling their bodies on the floor of the ship (as a way of entertaining Capt. Hawkins' guests aboard the '*Jesus*') without being told to do so (pp:229-230).

The most gruesome instances of torture occur on the plantations. In her slave narrative, Mary Prince (1831) gives a vivid account of another savage insensitivity visited on a fellow slave. Hetty, a pregnant slave, is flogged to death for failing to fasten a cow properly and letting it break loose. Mary recounts:

My master flew into a terrible passion, and ordered the poor creature to be stripped quite naked, notwithstanding her pregnancy, and to be tied up to a tree in the yard. He then flogged her as hard as he could, both with the whip and cow-skin, till she was all over streaming with blood ... Her shrieks were terrible. The consequence was that poor Hetty was brought to bed before her time, and was delivered, after severe labour, of a dead child. She appeared to recover after her confinement (but) she was repeatedly flogged by both master and mistress afterwards, (and) her former strength never returned to her. Her body and limbs swelled to a great size; and she lay on a mat in the kitchen, till the water burst out of her body and she died (p.76).

Douglass' description of the flogging of his aunt, Aunt Hester, by Mr. Plummer, provides another horrid illustration of violence inflicted on women slaves:

I have often been awakened at the dawn of day by the most heart-rending shrieks of an aunt of mine, whom he used to tie up to a joist, and whip upon her naked back till she was literally covered with blood ...Before he commenced whipping Aunt Hester, he ...stripped her from neck to waist, leaving her neck, shoulders, and back entirely naked. He then told her to cross her hands ... After crossing her hands, he tied them with a strong rope ... and tied her hands to a large hook in the joist. She now stood fair for his infernal purpose ...after rolling up his sleeves, he commenced to lay on the heavy cowskin, and soon the warm, red blood ... came dripping to the floor ... No words, no tears, no prayers, from his gory victim seemed to move his heart from its bloody purpose. The louder she screamed, the harder he whipped; and where the blood ran fastest, there he whipped longest ...and not until overcome by fatigue, would he cease to swing the blood-clotted cowskin (pp: 51-52).

Douglass is, himself, severely flogged every week, for six months, by Mr. Edward Covey, the "nigger-breaker". Scarcely a week passes without him receiving some lashing, a situation that leaves him broken in body, soul, and spirit (pp:103-105).

There are several other forms of systematic brutality, apart from flogging, under which slaves agonize. The whole machinery of slavery, as noted earlier on, condemns all slaves to violence. This consists not only in direct torture but also in the daily knowledge that slaves are vulnerable to random, unprovoked violence on their persons. Physical assault or beating is one such form of brutality. Olaudah Equiano catalogues several instances, one of which is cited below:

I have seen a Negro beaten till some of his bones
were broken, (simply) for letting a pot boil over (p.62).

Equiano's nightmare is similar to one experienced by Frederick Douglass. Douglass is severely battered with sticks and stones by four white apprentices. As he puts it, it was a fight in which "my left eye was nearly knocked out, and I was horribly mangled in other respects" (pp:131-132). In *The History of Mary Prince...* (1831), Sarah, a little old slave with several bodily infirmities, and nearly pass work, is beaten mercilessly by Master Dickey, the overseer. Sarah's crime was that she did not wheel the barrow fast enough to please the overseer:

He threw her down on the ground, and after beating her severely,
he took her up in his arms and flung her among the prickly pear
bushes ... all covered with sharp venomous prickles. By this her
naked flesh was so grievously wounded, that her body swelled and
festered all over, and she died a few days after (p.83).

Double Jeopardy

The point has been established that slaves are brutally exploited. The exploitation, it must be emphasized, does not only involve the transfer of the fruits of material labour of slaves to whites; neither does it consist only in the sort of harsh tasks slaves perform on the plantations; it also consists in the fact that women slaves are sexually exploited for the satisfaction of the white master's lust. Slavery, undeniably, is a horrifying experience for men but it is, in several respects, even more devastating for women.

The horror and agony of slavery is seen with the greatest lucidity in the circumstance of the woman slave. This double exploitation of women slaves is commonly referred to as "Double Jeopardy". I call it "Triple Jeopardy" for, the black woman slave is triply bastardized; first for being black, second for being a slave, and third for being a woman. Apart from sharing the hard labour of the plantation with their male counterparts, women slaves are constantly raped. Cases of white slave owners fathering children with women slaves are common. Booker T. Washington was born to a slave-holding father and a slave mother (*Up From Slavery*, 1901; 1967: p.16). Frederick Douglass reveals that his master, Captain Anthony, a white man, doubles as his father: "The opinion was also whispered that my master was my father" (p.48).

The opinion is collaborated in *Equiano's Travels* (1789; 1996). Equiano relates the scenario of a French planter (in the island of Martinique) with many mulatto children who work like beasts of burden on his plantation ... "they were all the produce of the French planter's loins" (p.64). Yes, the Frenchman need

not waste his money buying more slaves. Why should he, when he can sexually exploit the few women slaves he has, to produce the cheap labour he needs? The magnitude of 'Double Jeopardy' is better appreciated if we ponder over the disclosure by Frederick Douglass that

Every year brings with it multitudes of this class of slaves ... thousands (of mulatto children slaves) are ushered into the world, annually, who, like myself, owe their existence to white fathers, and those fathers most frequently their own masters (p.50).

Most often, such illegitimate children are taken away and sold elsewhere to avoid suspicion and the unmitigated anger of the white mistress and also to avoid social embarrassment to the slave master-father.

The incidence of rape and sexual exploitation pervades almost all literature on the Atlantic slave trade. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, the Arab slave masters use or rather misuse the African women captives as sex objects; they engage them in sex orgies until the women, whose souls they desecrate, plot and assassinate them (pp:20-21). In *The Slave Raiders*, Azasu presents Sir John Hawkins as being more evil than the devil himself; the slave raider does not only kill old men and women, he also rapes young female slaves. His bitter disappointment, after conquering and taking captives from Lokpodzi, Dzelukofe, Vui and Atsikuta, we are told, emanates from the simple reason that there are no teenage negresses (among the captives) to be raped (p.337). Adzoblasu, one of the captives at Fort Singelenburgh, says it all when he discloses "No woman passes through the gates

of this fort, but they (whites) must rape her ... they all do it, in turns” (p.316). But as far as Captain Hawkins is concerned, “There is no offence in that” (p.322). No wonder when the fort is captured and the captives in the dungeons liberated, as many as 73 of the teenage girls and women are found pregnant (p.347).

When one reads Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), one cannot help commiserating with Ella, in whose body every fibre is overcome by terror so stark it transcends the pain in her lower abdomen and in her vagina, made sore by incessant bouts of rape. Ella, a young woman slave, is kept locked up in a room, and is pounded day and night as a father and his own son take turns to rape her. For more than a year, father and son keep the poor, wretched woman locked, for themselves. Her agony? Nobody knows the depth of her ordeal:

“You couldn’t think up”, Ella had said,

“What them two done to me” (p.119).

Ella’s horrifying experience is not a peculiar one. In Herbstein’s novel, *Ama* (2000), Nandzi, a teenager, is raped unconscious by her captor, Abdulai (pp:7, 8). Nandzi is again raped, in turns, by Akwasi Anoma (p.58), by the newly enstooled Asantehene, Osei Kwame (pp:118-120), by Pieter De Bruyn, the Director-General of the Elmina Castle (p.158), and by Sven Jensen (p.243). As if that were not enough, she suffers attempted rape at the hands of Van Schalkwyk, the Catholic Bishop of the Elmina Castle (p.196). Finally, she is brutally raped by Jesus Vasconcellos (p.441). The Director-General, we learn, makes his selection

of women slaves to satisfy his lust whenever new arrivals are brought to the castle. Sven Jensen, the young Chief Merchant at the Castle, is described as an “inveterate, indiscriminate, and shameless womanizer” (p.223). He engages in sexual intercourse with an unnamed woman, the woman’s daughter, and attempts to have sex with the woman’s mother as well (p.224). At the Castle, he samples the slaves at will. Against a wall, in the dark courtyard, he rapes Esi from behind, like a dog (p.145). He rapes Ama in the same posture (p.243). Even the Chaplain of the Castle is not left out of the sex orgy. The man of God, we are told, is a man of loose morals, with a penchant for raping slaves:

On Sundays he would preach the word of our Lord in
the church and the rest of the week he would spend
fornicating with the female slaves (p.181).

Even before they arrive at the castle, women slaves are raped by their overseers and camp commanders. At the Kafaba slave camp, the man in charge, Akwasi Anoma, like Pieter De Bruyn at the Elmina Castle, rapes the women in turns as he selects a new victim each day. His usual order is, “I want a woman. Line up the women so I can make my choice” (p.63).

Apart from sexual exploitation, women slaves are also victims of the most gruesome and outrageous punishments. Armah’s (1973) description of unspeakable bestiality visited on African women who make efforts to kill their slave masters but are unsuccessful in their attempt is really horrifying:

It was the askaris' violent job to kill off all caught trying to end our oppression. In this the mindless ones were truly expert. To punish women caught plotting our freedom they had a way of suspending the victims' bodies naked upon the stakes, stooped with the thighs apart, then goading horses trained for the purpose to copulate with them. The bloody victims were left hanging a day and a night, a warning to others ... (p.30).

That is the price they have to pay for being slaves and for being women. It must be admitted, however, that the sexual exploitation women slaves undergo has its positive effect, sometimes. In certain situations, women slaves use their sexuality as a weapon to gain advantage over their owners and to claw back certain privileges. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, the enslaved women are able to plot and assassinate a good number of their owners in one night because of the special dispensation the women enjoy. The eponymous protagonist of Herbstein's novel, *Ama*, utilizes her peculiarity as a woman, to advantage; she wins the trust and love of her owner, the Director-General of the Elmina Castle (p.158). De Bruyn, after taking Ama to bed on several occasions, teaches her to read, write, and dress like a white lady; he also changes her name to 'Pamela'. He even prepares a will for her. But for his death, De Bruyn would have restored Ama to her former status as a free born. In the same novel, Ama employs the same strategy to unnerve Captain Williams of '*The Love of Liberty*' (pp:285-290).

The phenomenon of women slaves using their sexuality to unman the man is significant in several ways. Apart from special privileges the individual woman enjoys, she may be able to influence the slavemaster-lover in a certain policy direction to the advantage of her fellow slaves, at least, some of them.

If flogging and rape are the commonest forms of violence perpetrated against slaves, then wanton destruction of human life remains the most deadly and the most ruthless. Slaves are murdered for the most trifling reasons. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, Tawiah, the woman captive, is shot dead by the white destroyer for refusing to let go her firm grip on the rock at the beach (p.122). In the same novel, a large number of the people of Enchi who protest against King Koranche's unholy alliance with the white slavers are massacred in cold blood. One potential slave who survives the carnage recounts that

The guards' weapons barked long that morning. There was no counting the number of our people who died then. The corpses were left around the palace for three days (p.84).

In *The Slave Raiders*, Azasu informs his readers that captives considered infirm, weak or old are lined up for target shooting (and are actually shot dead) for the simple reason that they are too old or too weak to be sold as merchandise (p.337). Frederick Douglass (1982) narrates how Mr. Austin Gore, (Col. Lloyd's overseer), described as "a man of severe barbarity", shoots and kills Demby, a slave, for disobeying his order to come out of a creek. No judicial investigation is

instituted against him, simply because the murdered victim is a slave (p.67). It is for the same reason that no legal action is taken against Mr. Beal Bondly, a slaveholder, for shooting and killing an old slave (belonging to Col. Lloyd) who trespasses into his (Bondly's) shore to look for oysters. The Negro slave has no legal rights. Obviously this is the basis for the common saying among white boys, "it is worth a half-cent to kill a nigger, and a half-cent to bury one" (p.69).

Unending toil, exploitation, rape, torture, fear, wanton destruction of human life – these form the daily routine of slaves. These experiences leave indelible nightmares of violence on the psyche of slaves; the agonies are life-threatening enough for slaves to embark on resistance. What make violence against slaves horrible are not only the particular acts of torture themselves but also the legitimacy with which they are accepted and tolerated as the norm of the white society. It is these inhuman conditions imposed on slaves, this denial of humanity, and this awareness of insecurity that provoke slaves to plan and execute resistance, collectively and individually.

Forms of Resistance – Introduction

The relationship between master and slave is, in several instances, one of a cat and mouse game, with each trying to outmanoeuvre and defeat the other. Olaudah Equiano (1789; 1996) provides an explanation to this war of nerves:

When you make men slaves you deprive them of half their virtue; you set them, in your own conduct, an example of ... cruelty, and compel them to live with you in a state of war (p.66).

Equiano's conviction is shared by John Brown, the firebrand who took Harper's Ferry hostage in October, 1859. To him, the slave-holding community was, by its nature, in a state of war; thus drastic actions were necessary and justified. Obviously a state of interminable war exists between master and slave in the form of brutal oppression and continual resistance.

Acts of resistance take place at every phase of African enslavement: on the African continent, during the Middle Passage, and on American soil. The specific form or dimension resistance takes depends on such parameters as: the size of the slave community; the temerity of the community, group or individual; the harshness or insensitivity of the slave master; the particular circumstance or situation; and precedence. A large number of slaves simply refuse to play the game of slavery by openly defying the authority of their masters. Such radical slaves acknowledge the wisdom in the philosophy that "in the triumph of destruction's whiteness the destruction of destruction is the only vocation of the way" (Armah, 1973: p.203). They not only advocate aggressive resistance; they rebel, assassinate their masters, or engage them in open physical confrontations.

Of course, one would not be justified in saying all slaves rise up in violent insurrection. Some slaves, for fear of fatal retribution, resign themselves to the ritual of submissiveness. This class of seemingly docile slaves, embittered by

their subjugation, conceal their true rebellious disposition and execute their resistance on a low key. Opposition to slavery, thus, may be covert or overt, non-aggressive or violent, psychological or physical. Manifestations of resistance are therefore categorized into two broad sub-headings: passive and active.

Forms of Resistance I - Passive Resistance

Passive resistance may be described as the activity or the process of undermining, sabotaging, or showing opposition to the slave system, in a covert, tactful, and shrewd manner rather than acting overtly and violently. The objective of passive resistance is to frustrate, sabotage and harm slave owners' interests, and to cause vexation to the slave master, at minimal or no risks to the perpetrators themselves. A form of passive resistance is the instance of psychological warfare; this manifests itself in the use of cleverness by slaves to outwit their masters. Slaves obtain satisfaction of knowing that their owners' powers are, after all, not absolute, and that they (slaves) can assert themselves over their masters, even if temporarily.

Piso's slave

Bradley (1998) narrates the story of a Roman senator named Papius Piso who orders his slaves not to speak unless they are spoken to. Piso has no time for idle talk. On an important occasion he arranges an elegant dinner-party at which the guest of honour is to be a dignitary named Clodius. At the appointed time, all the guests arrive except Clodius. So Piso sends the slave responsible for having

invited the guest of honour to see where he was, several times, but still Clodius does not show up. In despair, Piso finally questions the slave:

“Did you send Clodius an invitation?”

“Yes”

“So why hasn’t he come?”

“Because he declined”

(Piso becomes furious) “Then why didn’t you tell me earlier?”

“Because you didn’t ask”, was the response.

This story is a classic illustration of the phenomenon of passive resistance. It exemplifies the state of constant tension that exists between master and slave. It demonstrates how a common slave, the most humble and lowest of all humans, can use his intellect to outmanoeuvre his master and win a victory in the game of psychological warfare. Slaves, unlike other forms of chattel, are human beings with brains and the capacity to rationalize and to resist the absolute authority of their masters. Slaves and captives on the African continent, in the Middle Passage, and on American soil, do not always behave like ‘zombis’ and ‘askaris’ in Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons*; they do not always obey their owners or overseers as irrationally as they are supposed to. When Piso’s slave crushingly embarrasses his master by obeying his instructions to the letter, he, for a moment, places Piso in the inferior position that he (the slave) normally occupies himself.

The common slave finds a way “to exert power against the powerful, so that the asymmetrical roles of master and slave are suddenly inverted” (Bradley, 1998).

Azasu (2002) paints a similar picture of psychological defeat inflicted on Captain John Hawkins when RAC 121 and his fellow captives disobey the captain’s command to roll their bodies on the floor of the slave ship, ‘*Jesus*’, (p.228). And, when Fredrick Douglass obtains education in spite of Mr. Auld’s order that no slave should be educated (p.78), he (Douglass) indirectly tells Mr. Auld (his master): “I defy your authority; I refuse to remain ignorant; I can reason and take action to assert myself over you, even if temporarily”.

Trickster Tales

The war of nerves fought in the arena of the mind finds expression on different fronts. Parallel to the use of witticism by slaves for psychological fortification is the telling of trickster tales. Trickster tales are prose narratives in which the central character, in all cases the smallest and the least powerful of all animals, uses cunning and deceit to outwit his more powerful protagonist in the story. He is sly and shrewd, and depends on his wits for survival.

The trickster figure exists in the tales in different forms; among Negro slaves in Jamaica, he is ‘Brer Nancy’ or ‘Brer Anancy’; on the North American mainland, he is ‘Brer Rabbit’. He may be a rabbit, a tortoise, a spider, or the smallest in the animal kingdom yet he always comes out cleverly and triumphantly against the most powerful. Through his ruses, he sometimes even

makes an ass of the Supreme Deity. Cunning is emphasized to the point that lying in order to survive seems the most important and expedient thing. Narrating and listening to these stories, slaves feel emboldened and challenged to use their intellect not only to survive in their hostile environment but also to outwit their masters. Slaves narrate the stories also to psyche themselves up for the fire of freedom that keeps burning in their souls, and to rekindle the vision that a day will come, sooner or later, when, like the trickster character, the slave, the least powerful of all human beings, will triumph over the most powerful slaveholder.

Slave Religion

Another psychological armour with which slaves brave their circumstance is religion. Though slaves agonize under stabbing pangs of hunger, the whip, the thumbscrew, the shackle, and other instruments of torture, the grief and pain they live through is more psychological than physical. Home is far away and all its dearest associations disappear into fading dreams and nightmares. The nostalgic longing for loved ones left behind and faces to be seen no more precipitates sharp pains of sorrow. Freedom is painfully snatched away from them, and the idea of being someone's property is detestable. The mere thought of living a life of insecurity, a life under constant threat of violence, is hell enough to traumatize the slave. Yoked to these is the strange setting; the environment in which they toil is strange, so also is the climate. Equally strange are the pale human beings: strange complexion, strange language, and strange habits. The whole panorama is so weird that slaves are cruelly crushed beneath its awfulness. With their souls

plunged into a state of despondency, and with no vision of a redeemer in sight, slaves bury their heads in religion; they grope towards some unseen, supernatural power for spiritual energy to endure the roving malignancy. Two main forms of religion – slave religion and Christian religion - are practised by slaves.

We get a foretaste of slave religion in *Ama* (2000) as the novelist provides a detailed description of artifacts and rituals involved in the practice of the religion. This includes the description of clay altars, statues, tree trunks, goatskins, animal blood, bottles of drinks, and animals for sacrifices. Olukoya's libation, in which the names of African deities such as Ogun, Eshu, Olodumare, Obatala and Shango, feature prominently, is followed by a counter-clockwise dancing round the spirit-laden fig tree (pp.384-392). Through religious beliefs and rituals slaves are able to release themselves to their gods and to engage in passive resistance. Certain aspects of the belief system are vital in the resistance effort and in coping with the general adverse conditions. For instance, slaves believe that upon death, their spirits will return to Africa to dwell with the ancestors. This probably explains the numerous instances of suicide, as captured in *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973), *The Healers* (1978), *The Slave Raiders* (2002), *Ama* (2000), *Anowa* (1970), and in *Equiano's Travels* (1996), among others. Resisting the repressive and dehumanizing stranglehold of slavery and dying in the process is seen as a means of hastening the journey to join one's ancestors. Negro slaves also believe that a religious oath administered by a priest or the carrying of a certain object on their bodies will render them immune to any harm. This belief is given a practical interpretation by Frederick Douglass. Douglass

relates how the carrying of a root, given to him by Sandy Jenkins, a fellow black slave, renders it impossible for any white man to whip him (*Narrative*, p.111).

Some slaves genuinely convert to Christianity and look back to the story of Hebrew liberation from slavery in Egypt, for inspiration. Others do so as a means of avoiding the pervasive violence. Whatever the intentions may be, conversion to Christianity, however, does not guarantee the slave his freedom; neither does it confer any special privilege on the slave. In fact, there is no differentiation in the treatment of a converted and a non-converted slave.

Christian slaveholders accept religious doctrines that assert black racial inferiority and deny the full spiritual status of Africans. They simply refuse to acknowledge the Biblical admonition that before God “There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free ... for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians, 3:28), and similar texts which advocate equality of all races. Rather, they exploit Biblical injunctions such as “Servants, be obedient to your masters...with fear and trembling” (Ephesians, 6:5) to justify their barbarity against slaves. This attitude clearly exposes the moral bankruptcy of Christianity as well as the hypocrisy of religious slaveholders as they preach love on Sunday and torture their slaves the rest of the week. Perhaps, Fredrick Douglass is right when he describes Christian slaveholders of the south as the worst, the meanest, and the most cruel (p.117). The stories in the Bible, nonetheless, strengthen the slaves, psychologically, and give them hope of a Moses to deliver them from bondage.

Slave Songs

It is basically in songs that slaves express their religiosity. Almost every song is based on some scriptural passage, or created by imagination out of some religious experience. The songs reveal the deepest sorrow of the slaves; slaves sing most when they are most unhappy. In the words of Fredrick Douglass, “Every tone is a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains”. (p.58). Slaves thus sing to drown their sorrows and seldom to express happiness. When one reads *Ama*, one is touched by the inner pain of Minjendo and the other women slaves as they pour out their desolation in song:

We ... have died and yet we live still

We are as walking corpse ...

Hear our lamentation ...

Our freedom has been taken from us

Our spirits are chained in our dead bodies

Give us back life; give us back hope (pp: 69, 70).

The anguish of the slave has never been so powerfully summed up in the pages of the novel as in this song. Certainly such a dirge cannot be sung but by a tormented spirit. As slaves pour out their pent up emotions of soulful lamentations, they are relieved of the pain, as an aching heart is relieved by its tears. This helps them to confront the savagery of slavery. Every song of the slave, Fredrick Douglass observes, is not only a prima facie evidence against the evils of slavery but also a supplication to God for deliverance from bondage.

The songs exercise a third function - they serve as the audio portion of a good sophisticated system of communication which gird slaves who are about to escape with courage and determination; they are used to inform the fleeing slaves when to leave, what to do at a particular point in time, and where to go. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, when Sobo sings in a call-and-response fashion, his songs turn out to be explicit directives to his fellow captives in the slave boat to attack the white slavers, seize their guns from them, take care of the very young slaves on board, and to swim ashore (p.128). Slave songs, in most cases, are veiled; they have double meanings. The lyrics, the refrain, the call-and-response, all contain a hidden coded meaning which only the slave or the trained ear can decode.

It is evident from the foregoing discussion that music offers slaves the much-needed solace and an opportunity to escape, through their imagination, from the world of bondage. It is, perhaps, an acknowledgement of the significant function music plays in the life of African slaves that W.E.B. Dubois begins each of the fourteen chapters of *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) with a Negro song, songs in which the soul of the black slave speaks to men.

Cultural Articulation of Resistance

On the African continent, tribesmen do not sit down languidly, fold their arms in between their thighs, and acknowledge themselves fit only to be captured and sold as slaves. They employ several different tactics to resist the threat and reality of slavery. Communities not yet enslaved but live in persistent fear of

capture are potential slaves. Such communities develop different strategies for survival. Opoku-Agyemang (1996) has observed that

A society that lives under a real and constant threat of enslavement consists of potential slaves, and a society of potential slaves will experience a culture and psychological development peculiar to its environment. With the danger of capture constant, certain innate biologically determined drives to self-preservation will develop. The culture will acquire certain characteristics and tendencies in order to adapt to and survive the danger (p.7).

An example of this highly developed sense of survival is the phenomenon of scarification, especially among ethnic groups of the northern regions of Ghana, Burkina Faso, and elsewhere in West Africa. Among these communities, a newly born baby is given incisions on the face, the arms or the stomach. These tribal marks range from a single diagonal stroke running down from the bridge of the eyes to the jaw, to two, three, or several vertical or horizontal lines on one or both sides of the face. Tribesmen of the Gonja of Northern Ghana, the Sissala of Upper West and the Kassena of Upper East, for example, carry three small horizontal marks on each cheek, while the Moshie of Burkina Faso exhibit a labyrinthine pattern of tribal marks covering the whole face. The simplicity or

complexity of the incision depends on the tribe a person belongs to, the specific location the person hails from and the person's status in the community or tribe.

Though the often-cited motive of ethnic identification and therapeutic benefits as *raison d'être* for the incision of tribal marks may not be discounted, the use of scarification as a form of resistance against enslavement supersedes all other considerations. The incision, basically, is meant to render the marked tribesman unattractive as a potential marketable commodity and thereby to discourage slave hunters from capturing such marked persons. This use of scarification as a form of resistance recalls a story in Ousmane Sembene's *Tribal Scars and Other Stories* (1961), in which the protagonist (Amoo) and his nine-year old daughter (Iome) come face to face with the unpleasant prospect of capture into slavery. Confronted with the menace, the protagonist seizes his daughter and makes incisions on her face and body to discourage the advancing slave raiders from taking her. This is the price Amoo has to pay. And he does so, courageously. This, Sembene explains, is the origin of tribal scars (p.116). Scarification originated as a contrived stratagem of resistance against enslavement

Among the strategies African peoples devise as a means of resisting slavery is the siting of settlements. Communities that felt threatened assumed a posture of perpetual defensiveness. To ward off slave raiders, such communities built thick walls around their major towns and villages. Other communities built their settlements on high hills and mountains. This, apart from being a deterrent to slave raiders, who would have to climb the mountains at great risk to their own lives, also had the added benefit of offering the mountain dwellers the opportunity

of spotting the approach of such raiding gangs from afar and in good time to enable them to prepare their defences. Oral tradition has it that for the same reason of warding off slave raiders some African peoples lived near caves; in the event of an attack, women, children, and the aged were concealed in the caves. A case in point is the town of Buoyem, near Sunyani in the Brong Ahafo Region.

Maroon Societies

The African slave's resistance is demonstrated time and again by the number of successful and unsuccessful attempts to escape from bondage. In Herstein's novel, *Ama*, (2000), Nandzi runs away from her captors but she is recaptured by Damba's search party (pp:34-40). In *Equiano's Travels* the protagonist reveals that his first reaction after he had been sold to his first slave master, the goldsmith, was to plan his escape: "I therefore determined to seize the first opportunity of making my escape ... for I was quite oppressed and weighed down by grief" (p.15). When we read *Two Thousand Seasons*, we learn of the attempted escape of forty-three captives from the unnamed slave-ship. Thirty of the escapees are recaptured and brought back to the ship. "Ten of them had died at the destroyers' hands; three had leaped afterwards into the sea and held themselves under till they died" (p.126).

In the New World, the slaves' desire for freedom never wanes. The excruciating labour, the torture and abuse of humanity convince slaves that they do not have a chance of clawing back their liberty and dignity as human beings if they do not break loose from the shackles of slavery. The only alternative course

open to them is to risk their lives for freedom. Slaves therefore avail themselves of many avenues of escape. In Douglass' *Narrative* (1982), the bold attempt by Henry Harris, John Harris, Henry Bailey, Charles Roberts, and Douglass himself to escape from the plantation of Mr. Freeland (pp:120-130) is an illustration.

Slaves escape from the plantations, sometimes in small groups, sometimes in large numbers, into temporary hiding places, and then to more secure locations to establish their permanent, independent settlements. Such run-away slaves or 'Maroons' build Maroon communities or Maroon societies. Manu Herbstein (2000) relates the story of Palmeras, an independent African (Maroon) state which flourishes a hundred years in the forest of Brazil (p.399). In reading *Paradise*, we come across a group of a hundred and fifty-eight Negroes, led by the Morgans, escaping from Mississippi and two Louisiana parishes to found their own settlement, Haven (in Oklahoma); the town is later renamed 'Ruby' (pp:13-17).

Forms of Resistance II - Active Resistance

Though some slaves have strong faith in religion and the redemption power of Jehovah to deliver them from bondage, they do not expect their owners to relent their savagery; neither do they anticipate slavery to disappear with the shrill sound of a siren from the skies. The point has been made that Africans do not tamely resign themselves to their fate and submissively allow predators to capture and sell them into slavery. In several instances they strongly resist capture; they aggressively hold out against enslavement. In *The Slave Raiders* (2002) Captain John Hawkins illuminates this assertion when he confesses that

Quite unlike the popular belief that the Negroes are very cooperative and are easy to capture, we meet stiff resistance at many spots. In fact, we lose several of our operatives in some operations. The Negroes simply murder them (p.105).

Hawkins is right. African slaves engage in active resistance. Active resistance is more aggressive in nature and it achieves immediate results. It targets at causing fatalities, injury or physical pain, destruction of property, and financial loss to the slaveholder. There is a good deal of literature, including historical material, to support the fact that the enslavement of Africans is never accepted by African people. African slaves find their bondage immoral, loathsome, and unacceptable. Consequently, they resist through various strategies. These strategies are too obvious to dwell on; any literature on the Atlantic Slave Trade will not fail to mention them. Yet, they are worth discussing here for one reason: they offer a platform for the attainment of the purpose of this study - analyzing and thereby highlighting the African slave's unbroken resistance, heroism, and dignity. A few illustrations will serve this interest.

Evidence that some slaves refuse to be whipped is widespread, writes Russell Duncan (in Michael Williams, 1993, p.1469). Many African slaves will not submit to the whip. The most publicized account of a slave resisting a whipping is the story told by Frederick Douglass in his *Narrative*. Douglass relates that after a series of floggings from Mr. Covey, the nigger-breaker, he made up his mind that if Mr. Covey tried to beat him in spite of his best efforts to

please him (Covey), he (Douglass) would defend himself to the best of his ability ... He is no longer afraid to die. When Covey tries to whip him, Douglass fights him to a draw (p.112). “This battle with Mr. Covey was the turning-point in my career as a slave”. Douglass becomes a changed person after the fight ... “I did not hesitate to let it be known of me, that the white man who expected to succeed in whipping me, must also succeed in killing me.” (p.113).

Methods of active resistance range from open physical combat, military engagement, ambush, and assassination, through suicide and infanticide, to open rebellion and mutiny on slave ships. In the New World, resistance mainly takes the form of deliberate destruction of farm tools and equipment; setting fire to barns, farms and buildings; poisoning or injuring farm animals; and open slave revolts. Slaves unable to tolerate the burden of slavery any longer escape from their owners and found safe refuge or new settlements of their own, somewhere.

On the African continent, military engagement is one common modus operandi ethnic communities utilize to ward off slave raiders. It is through a military offensive, commanded by Boko Agozi and Awadada Axolu, that Captain John Hawkins and his colleague slave-hunters (including Rev. Father Elias, young Francis Drake, and Rachel) are captured, subdued, and placed in the inferior position to which they always subject their captives (*The Slave Raiders*, pp:345-355). Reading Ayi Kwei Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons*, we come across a group of Arab predators (and their askaris) who, having ravaged seven towns and taken fifty captives, march the captives through tall grass vegetation towards the coast, intending to sell the booty to the white slave merchants in the castle. The

Arabs, however, do not reach the coast; they are ambushed and killed in a military operation led by Juma (pp:177-178). Juma inspires his followers in these words:

It is our destiny not to flee before destruction, not to wander
impotent, our soul turned coward, ... It is our destiny not to
flee the predators' thrust...but to end destruction, utterly (p.157).

Through this military intervention, Juma and his group end destruction; the Arab slave hunters are killed and the fifty would-be slaves set free. Another fifty Arab slave raiders are slaughtered in a military operation on River Osu (pp:176-177). Juma and his band of freedom fighters succeed in freeing five hundred out of six hundred captives being taken into slavery. (The other hundred are massacred by the predators who find themselves trapped). In *The Healers*, the Asante army, under Asamoah Nkwanta, engages the invading British army in battle in a valley near Amofo. Describing the battle, the narrator paints a picture of blood bath:

All around the valley and the hills above it the forest shook.
Branches broke and fell, cut through by bullets ... Smoke rose
endless from thousands upon thousands of guns fired incessantly,
and the morning turned to night (p.323).

Even though the former is vanquished, the armed confrontation bears testimony to the military option African communities choose in resisting enslavement. And, in *Ama* (2000), a group of Bekpokpam warriors armed with bows and poisoned

arrows, engages the Bedagbam slave hunters in a bloody battle (pp:14-22). Once again, like the Asante, the Bekpokpam are defeated. But their armed resistance conveys a clear message; Africans detest slavery and will resist it at all cost.

In the New World, armed resistance takes the form of open rebellions and slave revolts. Slave uprising, it must be admitted, is not unique to the New World. The phenomenon dates as far back as Hellenistic times. Bradley (1989) recounts that in 73-71 BC, the gladiator Spartacus famously led an uprising of thousands of slaves in central Italy, formed an army that defeated several Roman legions, and, at one point, threatened Rome itself. Spartacus himself is reported to have died in battle and thousands of his followers executed for insurgency.

Despite that rebellion is the most dangerous form of resistance, in view of the enormity of its reprisals, African slaves still resort to its application. We shall, at this point, use the historical-biographical approach of literary criticism. The use of this approach enables us to step outside the texts and cite a few historical events for illustration. Apart from enabling us to get a better understanding of the desperation with which slaves tackled their quest for freedom, the historical realities will also show how closely history influences literature, sometimes.

In September 1739, twenty Negro slaves met in secret near the Stono River (in South Carolina) to plan their escape to freedom. Minutes later, they burst into Hutcheson's store (armoury) at Stono's bridge, killed the two guards or storekeepers, and stole the guns and powder inside the store. From twenty, the group of slaves grew in number to about a hundred as they headed south. Stono's Rebellion, the largest slave uprising in the colonies prior to the American

Revolution, was underway. When the slave owners caught up with the rebels, the battle that ensued resulted in the death of more than twenty whites; nearly twice as many blacks were also killed in action. Stono's rebellion was only one among 250 rebellions documented in the colonies and later in the southern U.S.A.

In 1822, the largest ever slave rebellion, involving thousands of slaves, was hatched by Denmark Vesey (a former slave of Capt. John Vesey) around Charleston, South Carolina. Having read from the Bible about the deliverance of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, Denmark Vesey, a Methodist, moved from plantation to plantation, calling for the violent overthrow of slavery. He incited about nine thousand slaves on different plantations to rise up against the whites. Vesey and about thirty-five of his followers were captured and hanged before they had a chance to put their plans into action; the plot was foiled by slave informers.

The execution of Denmark Vesey in 1822 did not deter other Negro slaves from fighting to regain their freedom. The Nat Turner slave uprising of 1831 in Southampton County, Virginia, the most well known slave revolt in U.S. history, erupted less than a decade after Vesey's death. During the uprising led by Nat Turner, a Baptist preacher who was himself a slave, slave rebels systematically went from house to house and killed about sixty whites before they were disbanded. In the suppression of the revolt, about a hundred slaves lost their lives, and about sixteen more were hanged by the Virginia authorities.

Long before the nineteenth century, armed resistance had achieved some positive results. Haiti, the first Negro republic in the New World, was founded after a slave revolt led by Toussaint L'Ouverture, toppled the government of the

French colony of St. Domingue in 1791. And even before the Haiti revolt, Negro slaves, Davidson (1961) writes, had risen up in bloody rebellion in Hispaniola in 1522, in Puerto Rico in 1527, and in Panama in 1531, among many others (p.62).

Mutinies on Slave Ships – The Middle Passage

Even before they get to their final destination of doom, African slaves exhibit their opposition to enslavement. During the Middle Passage, captives rise up in armed insurrection to demand their legitimate right to freedom. They mutiny on board slave trading vessels, overpower, and, in several instances, murder the crew. One unguarded moment is all the opportunity the slaves need to cause mayhem. Cowley and Mannix (in Northrup,1994) report that there are detailed accounts of over a hundred and fifty-five plotted and executed mutinies on slave-ships from 1699 to 1845 (p.104). In an article, headed: '*A Reformed Slave Trader's Regrets*', (in Northrup, 1994), John Newton discloses that

An attempt to rise upon the ship's company brings on instantaneous and horrid war: for, when they (slaves) are once in motion, they are desperate; and where they do not conquer, they are seldom quelled without much bloodshed on both sides (p.85).

Newton is vindicated in Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*. In the novel, a mutiny, cunningly crafted by Sobu, and executed by the one hundred and fifty captives on board an unnamed slave ship, ends in bloodshed on both sides. About two dozen

captives are shot dead while all ten slave traders perish at the hands of the irate captives. Armah describes how the last five slavers suffered violent death:

One white destroyer was thrown into the water with not one of his limbs: these followed after. Another had his left thigh stretched away from the right till the bones between them cracked. He was hurled off the ship in the wake of the first. The third was strangled by so many pulling hands his neck turned longer than a chicken's ... The fourth and the last white destroyers, they went down together, bound tight with rope (p.142).

Mutiny on slave ships is sometimes plotted secretly over a long period of time. Sometimes too, it erupts, unpremeditated, in response to unbearable cruelty at the hands of the crew or slavers. The spontaneity with which RAC 121 and three others (Azasu, 2002) butcher some slave dealers on board the '*Jesus*' readily comes to mind (pp:231-233). A historical parallel is found in 1833 when captives on a Rhode Island slave ship, near Cape Coast, revolted and murdered the captain and all crew members, except two who jumped into the sea and escaped. This uprising recalls the best-known mutiny in history, the *Amistad* mutiny of 1839.

After being abducted from their home country (Sierra Leone) by Portuguese slave traders and placed on board the Spanish schooner, *Amistad*, bound for Cuba, a group of fifty-three captives, led by Joseph Cinque, the son of a Mende tribal chief, revolted, killed the captain and some crew members and ordered the rest to sail back to Africa. By day the crew complied but at night

they sailed towards the American mainland where it was discovered drifting off the coast of Long Island (New York) and was seized by the U.S. Navy.

Like the we-narrator in Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* (p.125), and like his contemporary, Frederick Douglass (p.124), and Olaudah Equiano (p.56) before him, Joseph Cinque speaks the minds of many an African slave when he tells his co-mutineers he prefers death to life in perpetual bondage:

Brothers, we have done that which we proposed ... I am
resolved it is better to die than to be a white man's slave.

This declaration makes the walls of the slave ship vibrate with the dignity of African bravery. Perhaps, it is knowledge of the heroic exploits of the Sobos, the Jumas, the Abenas and the Isanasis that emboldens the L'Ouvertures, the Veseys, the Turners, and the Cinques to take up arms and wage war on slavery, in similar fashion. There are other bold options for resistance.

Suicide is another desperate recourse slaves resort to in their resistance against the slave regime. With an anxious desire to be relieved from all pain, a good number of slaves come to the realization (and agree with Cinque) that "It is better to die than to be a white man's slave". Slaves commit suicide at the least opportunity. This they do either by starving themselves to death or by jumping into the sea and getting drowned, especially during the Middle Passage.

We read in *The Slave Raiders* that apart from RAC.121 and RAC.243 who die from gunshot wounds on board the 'Jesus', the two other unnamed slaves

jump into the sea to end all torture and humiliation at the hands of Capt. John Hawkins (p.233). In Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa*, the protagonist, whose name the play bears, commits suicide by drowning in the sea near the Cape Coast Castle (p.63) in protest against Kofi Ako's indulgence in the trade in human beings. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, the narrator, talking about the thirty new captives who attempt to escape but are recaptured and brought back on board the slave ship, discloses that three (other captives) had leaped into the sea and held themselves under (water) till they died (p.126). Armah again informs his readers of how Kwamen Owusu, one of the envoys sent from Kumasi, commits suicide at Praso (*The Healers*, p.316): rather than become a white man's slave, the emissary blows out his brains with a gun. Reading *Equiano's Travels*, one finds a man whose life becomes a burden to him; he resolves to starve himself to death and consequently refuses to eat any victuals (p.62). In the same *Narrative* the persona recounts the following episode of suicide on board a slave ship:

One day ... two of my wearied countrymen (slaves) who were chained together preferring death to such a life of misery, somehow made through the nettings and jumped into the sea: immediately another quite dejected fellow ... also followed their example; and I believe many more would very soon have done the same if they had not been prevented by the ship's crew (p.26)

Suicide is so common a weapon that slave owners sometimes become alarmed at the rapidity with which slaves deploy its utilization. Randolph Walker, in his

article, '*Slave Ships*', points out that during the Middle Passage, slaves often jumped overboard to show resistance to their enslavement and to indicate their preference of honourable death to life of misery and hopelessness. He writes:

It was said that so many slaves jumped ship that a school of sharks would follow a slave ship all the way from the African coast to the Americas (p.1471).

Resistance is carried out not by men only. Women slaves play a significant role. While men slaves who find their bondage beyond the limits of tolerance commit suicide, women slaves afflicted by the depressing violence of slavery commit infanticide. Toni Morrison provides an illustration in *Beloved* (1987). Sethe, a pregnant slave, overwhelmed by the weight of so much violence and, in spite of the pride of motherhood, slashes the throats of her daughters rather than allow them to live and experience the mortifying circumstances of slavery.

Some women slaves, at great risk to their lives, refuse to engage in sexual intercourse with their owners. One other instrument of resistance is the high rate of abortion among women slaves. Female slaves unwilling to produce children to suffer the same fate as themselves abort their pregnancies. Like Sethe in *Beloved*, such women slaves prefer to 'murder' their unborn babies rather than allow them to come into the world to taste the bitter dregs of slavery.

It is clear from the discussion that resistance manifests itself in many diverse forms and, that these forms are utilized by both men and women slaves at different times and different places, when slaves find it expedient to do so.

This chapter examined the various definitions of resistance and their common characteristics. It discussed the philosophical dimensions of the rights of man, which forms the moral justification for slave resistance. The chapter also looked at factors that give rise to resistance, namely: the deprivation of rights and the perpetration of violence against slaves. Finally, the chapter explored the nature of resistance and the different forms – passive and active - in which resistance manifests itself. The discussion underscores the assertion that resistance does not occur in a vacuum. It erupts as a reaction to an unjust system of deprivation executed through violence.

The next chapter discusses the selected authors, Ayi Kwei Armah (a novelist) and Ama Ata Aidoo (a playwright), the two renowned Ghanaian writers who, among others, fictionalize the reality of the Atlantic Slave Trade and its offshoot, slave resistance.

CHAPTER TWO

SELECTED AUTHORS

Introduction

The previous chapter threw the searchlight on theorizing resistance. In so doing, it discussed the philosophical underpinnings of the rights of man as a justification for the Negro's resistance at every phase of his enslavement. It also discussed the factors that create room for resistance, and the various forms resistance manifests itself, as captured in the texts. One cannot effectively study a text, especially a historical novel or play, without studying the context. A study of such a text without considering the context will not be fully complete; it will be, as Ruth Finnegan (1970) has stated, a study of the mere shadow of the printed word (p.13). Text and context are, in a large measure, inseparable and complementary for a better understanding of a literary piece. A contextual analysis of the two main authors: Ayi Kwei Armah, a novelist; and Ama Ata Aidoo, a playwright, who (among others), recreate the reality of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and African slavery through the power of imagination, forms the focus of this chapter.

A contextual analysis refers to the personality of the literary artist, the historical background, and the socio-cultural context of events. "The artist, like the God of creation", writes James Joyce (1984), "remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork ..." (p.194). This chapter takes a look at the

milieux that inform the work of the two Ghanaian writers. It explores their birth, education, their early influences, sources of inspiration and their sources of information. The chapter highlights the literary works and achievements of the two writers. We shall, first, discuss the personality of Ayi Kwei Armah.

I. Ayi Kwei Armah

Ayi Kwei Armah was born in 1939 to Fante-speaking parents in the twin city of Sekondi-Takoradi in the Western Region of Ghana. On his father's side, Armah hails from a royal family in the Ga tribe. He attended the prestigious Achimota College in Accra, Ghana. In 1959, Armah briefly worked for Radio Ghana then went on scholarship to Groton School, an exclusive preparatory school in Massachusetts, U.S.A. After spending a year at Groton School, he entered Harvard University in 1960, intending to major in literature but eventually shifting his focus to the social sciences. This change, according to Armah himself, was partially motivated by an attempt to come to grips with the assassination of the Congolese anti-colonialist leader, Patrice Lumumba, in 1961, and it foreshadows the intense concern with social and political issues that would come to characterize all of Armah's fiction.

Armah's sense of political commitment was further energized by the political atmosphere of increasing political activism he encountered in the United States, especially among African Americans. Figures such as Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X were especially important influences during this period. By 1963, Armah had decided not to complete his degree at Harvard. He moved to Algeria

and worked as a translator for the magazine '*Revolution Africaine*'. In 1964 Armah returned to Ghana, to participate in the process of revolutionary change he hoped was underway. He worked, first, as a scriptwriter for Ghana Television, then later taught English at Navrongo Secondary School. Between 1967 and 1968 he was editor of '*Jeune Afrique*' magazine in Paris. From 1968 to 1970 Armah studied at Columbia University (U.S.A) and received an M.F.A (Master of Fine Arts) degree in Creative Writing (the '*complete review*' Quarterly, August 2001).

Armah has lived and worked in different cultural zones of Africa, an opportunity which makes him familiar with a variety of African experiences and political experiments. In the 1970s, he taught at the University of Massachusetts, and in East Africa, at the College of National Education, Chamg'omge, Tanzania, and also at the National University of Lesotho. He also lived in Dakar, Senegal, from the 1980s and taught at Amherst, and University of Wisconsin at Madison. Currently, he lives in the village of Popenguine, (in Senegal) where he has established his own publishing house, PerAnkh.

Ayi Kwei Armah started his career as a writer in the 1960s. He published poems, articles, and short stories in various literary journals and magazines. His short stories include:

“Contact.” *The New African*, 4, 10, December 1965, 244-246, 248.

“Asemka.” *Okyeame*, 3, 1, December 1966, 28-32.

“Yaw Manu’s Charm.” *The Atlantic Monthly*, May 1968, 89-95.

“An African Fable.” *Presence Africaine*, 68 (1968), 192-196.

“Halfway to Nirvana.” *West Africa*, 24 September 1984, 1947-1948.

He is, however, better known as a novelist. Armah's first novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, considered a modern African classic, was published in 1968. Two years later, *Fragments* followed. Armah is one of the most significant authors currently active in Africa. In all, he has published seven novels:

- (i) *The Beautiful Ones Are Not yet Born (1968)*
- (ii) *Fragments (1970)*
- (iii) *Why Are We So Blest (1972)*
- (iv) *Two Thousand Seasons (1973)*
- (v) *The Healers (1978)*
- (vi) *Osiris Rising (1995)*
- (vii) *KMT: In The House Of Life (2002)*

The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born (1968) is essentially about post-independent Ghana; its setting is the twin city of Sekondi-Takoradi. It is an allegorical story that depicts the life of an anonymous railway office clerk, simply called 'the man', and his daily struggle in the slums against poverty on one hand, and material greed on the other. He is pressured by his acquisitive family (at home) and fellow workers (at the office) to accept the norms of society – bribery and corruption – in order to guarantee his family a comfortable life. His virtues go largely unrecognized and unrewarded, his wife thinks him a fool ... At the end of the novel the moral strength of 'the man' is contrasted with Koomson, a once-powerful politician who has been deposed in a military coup d'état. Published in

1968, *The Beautiful Ones* gives a clear indication that Armah's early enthusiasm over the prospects of post-colonial Ghana had already been coloured by an extreme skepticism toward the conditions he observed around him (the 'complete review' Quarterly, August 2001).

Armah's second novel, *Fragments*, was published in 1970. In this novel, as in the first, the writer is concerned about the decay in the Ghanaian society after independence. The expectations of the masses of Ghanaians for a total political and economic freedom, which will ensure their well-being, do not materialize. The society is so corrupt that it has carefully re-arranged its value systems to accommodate and glorify the new breed of corruption. People with the old value systems are completely contemned and considered as failures. Armah condemns the Ghanaian society as one that has abandoned its traditional norm of altruism, honesty and egalitarianism and is pre-occupied with consumerism and the crave for useless Western value systems. The novel focuses on the experiences of Baako Onipa, a "been-to", a young Ghanaian intellectual who has 'been to' the United States. Baako returns home from his studies in the States, virtually empty-handed, to find a society rife with corruption and enthralled by the lure of Western commodity culture. He refuses to accept the life-style people have fashioned for themselves in the Ghanaian society. Instead of concentrating on the search for money and material gains, Baako, the protagonist, decides to create works that will point out the plight of the ordinary people and thereby make their lives better. His vision gets shattered in the end because the people he comes from abroad to meet in the house have their own idealistic goals in which

selfishness and avarice are the order of the day. Baako refuses to accept the set down values of the society. Consequently, he becomes alienated because he refuses to accept the new values created by the new society. He becomes an outcast because he is considered an eagle that refuses to soar. Under the strain of the unfulfilled expectations, frustrated by his family's disappointment that he did not return wealthy from the United States and disillusioned by his experience working as a television producer for Ghanavision, Baako eventually suffers a nervous breakdown. As in his first novel, Armah contrasts the two worlds of materialism and moral values, corruption and dreams, two worlds of integrity and social pressure. (the 'complete review' Quarterly, August 2001).

In Armah's third novel, *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972), an even more pessimistic vision is portrayed, suggesting that the corruption associated with post-colonial African societies, as depicted in the first two books, has infected even supposedly revolutionary African anti-colonialist movements. The story revolves around Modin Dofu, an African who studies at Harvard University on scholarship (like Ayi Kwei Armah). He becomes disillusioned by Western culture and abandons his studies. In fact, he discovers that he has become assimilated and feels that he is being trained to go back home to plunder his own people on behalf of his white masters, to become another "factor". (The 'factors' were the blacks employed by white slave dealers to handle black slaves for them). Disillusioned, Modin finds himself in a dilemma; he is torn between independence and Western values. He returns to Africa with his white American girlfriend, Aimee Reitsch, hoping to join the anti-colonial revolution in Congheria

(a sort of blending of Congo and Algeria). In America, Modin meets another African intellectual, named Solo Nkonam, (another Baako) who leaves the 'carnage' back home to meet a worse form of it in a city called Lacryville, (meaning a city of tears) where he finds himself surrounded by "Ugliness, insistent and grim"(p.15). He becomes completely cynical about the possibilities of a successful revolutionary change. Nonetheless, Aimee's frigidity and devotion to the revolution leads finally to destruction, when Modin is killed in the desert by O.A.S. revolutionaries. Solo, the rejected writer, keeps a diary, which is the substance of the novel (the '*complete review*' Quarterly, August 2001).

Two Thousand Seasons (1973), Armah's fourth novel, has been described as a visionary myth. It goes back a full millennium: a thousand years back. The novel describes a period of Arab incursion into the Sudanese grasslands. The people who live in this peaceful, sub-Saharan haven are attacked by Arab predators who come from the desert. These Arabs are overthrown by the very women whose souls they violate. After the overthrow, there is a migration lasting one thousand years (that is, two thousand seasons – each year made up of wet and dry seasons) through grassland, forest and swamp to a land, a short distance from the sea. Here, too, the people are invaded, this time, by white men who come from the sea. These are worse than the Arabs. Their main desire is summed up in the words of King Koranche's eloquent spokesman, Isanusi: "The whites intend a lasting oppression of us" (p.104). Like the Arab enslavers who were aided by African zombies, the whites also gain the support of some African kings and

princes who sell their own people into slavery. But a small band of freedom fighters overthrow the whites and their African lackeys (Yankson, 2000: p.16).

Whereas Armah's first three novels end in a defeat for individual characters, *Two Thousand Seasons* ends in a victory for the communal group of disciplined, dedicated, selfless revolutionaries led by a young lady, Abena. After the capture of King Koranche's palace and after this king, who sold his own subjects into slavery, had confessed his sins against his subjects, Abena shoots him dead. As the narrator tells us "... in the triumph of destruction's whiteness, the destruction of destruction is the only vocation of the way" (p.203). Throughout the novel, there is a journey in search of "the way", "the living way", a journey away from oppression and slavery. In this novel resistance is directed against not only the white destroyers but also the African royalty, Africa's kings and princes, described as ostentatious cripples crippled not in their bodies but in their souls (p.62). The lives of these enslaved souls are characterized by self-interest, deceit, fraud, mental slavery, and love of power and pompous titles. For example, one of the African kings, Kamuzu, moves into the castle at Poano, after the overthrow of the white destroyers, while another wants all subjects coming to his presence to crawl on their knees. Tezebu, Kamuzu and Koranche are some of the hollow kings who seek to enslave their own people. Armah, thus, sees royalty as part of the moral sickness of the African society (Yankson, 2000).

Armah's fifth novel, *The Healers* (1979), is set in nineteenth century Gold Coast and it is based on events leading to the British invasion and subsequent conquest of the Asante Kingdom. The healers in question are the traditional

medicine practitioners who see fragmentation as the lethal disease of Africa. The chiefs and people of the land have a choice: to resist the British invaders or to collaborate with them. In this novel the royalty again come under attack, especially the Fante kings and the kings of the eastern part of the country. They support the British invasion against their own kith and kin, the Asante. The white men are determined to take possession of the land and, Ababio, like the enslaved souls of the zombies in *Two Thousand Seasons*, decides to help them to enslave his own people (Yankson, 2000: pp.14, 15) in order to derive personal benefits from the bargain.

It is this attitude of individualism, self-interest, and betrayal on the part of some African chieftains that makes Ottobah Cugoano, the 18th century Fante slave (in the West Indies) who later becomes an anti-slavery advocate in London, lament (in Richard Hart, *Slaves Who Abolished Slavery*; 1980):

I must own, to the shame of my own countrymen, that I was first kidnapped and betrayed by my own complexion, who were the first cause of my exile and slavery (pp:35, 36).

Betrayal of one's own people, pursuit of self-interest, slave mentality, deceit and fraud; these are the hallmarks of the Fante kings and also of the eastern royalty. As Damfo says, "healers see royalty as a disease affecting the people" (p.103). The chiefs and their courtiers are part of the conspiracy to enslave the people. The healers reject royal power, because they (healers) are people whose souls are

opposed to courtly intrigues. Like the core group of twenty freedom fighters in *Two Thousand Seasons* but lacking their revolutionary temper, the healers stand for the truth, social justice, and unity. They are committed to the service of the community – being each his brother’s keeper (Yankson, 2000: p.16).

Armah invites Africans to unite to save Africa. He believes that Africa’s redemption cannot come from outside but from within. He suggests three ways by which Africans can overcome the disease of fragmentation. First, Africans must see and understand fragmentation as a disease inimical to the unity and growth of the continent, and must return to the old way of communalism; to discover or create an authentic African personality; to be themselves as Africans and not to be ‘factors’ or carbon copies of the white man. Second, Africans must be bold to reject all forms and structures which continue to assist colonial domination; Africans must destroy the destroyers from outside and from within, must destroy foreign exploiters and also our own chosen caretakers (chiefs and political leaders) who try to enslave us, because, as he puts it, “... in the triumph of destruction’s whiteness, the destruction of destruction is the only vocation of the way” (Armah, 1973: p.203). This is what Abena and her band of revolutionary freedom fighters do in *Two Thousand Seasons*; they destroy the destroyers. The third prescription is that Africans must lay the foundation for a United Africa – for the unification of the black race. In an article, ‘*Our Language Problem*’, (in ‘*West Africa*’, 24th April, 1983 (pp:831-2), cited in Yankson, 2000: p.18), Armah lambastes the Organization of African Unity (now African Union) for its “sanctification of colonial boundaries” and calls for the scrapping of

the old colonial system with its border posts, flags, anthems, the whole cancerous overload of embassies, ministries and governments -- all as expensive as they are useless – and create something human and intelligent, a unified Africa, in its place

In *Osiris Rising* (1995), Armah portrays the impact of the Middle Passage on the African people and on slave descendants, embodied by Juana and Ast, who return to Africa to see, to feel, to try a new life but, above all, to understand. Armah's powerful lexis and metaphorical use of language condemn both the whites and the Africans: the whites for their contemptuous behaviour, lack of morality and hegemonic history; the Africans for their betrayal and cynicism. There is no quarter given to those who raped Africa and those who helped the rapists.

Armah's latest novel, *KMT: In the House of Life* (2002), is structured on an epistemic premise: that it is possible to envision Africa's multimillennial history as one coherent continental narrative embracing all our space and time. Lindela, an African woman, narrates her life's quest, and the answers she uncovers. Mourning a lost friend, Lindela plunges into history, seeking meaning in life's flow. Loving companions - an Egyptologist and two traditionalists – show her secret hieroglyphics texts left by migrant Egyptian scribes millennia ago. As Lindela translates them, old questions animating her search for knowledge of self and society acquire a sharpened urgency. How best can Africa's multimillennial history be envisioned as one continuous stream? Why did

the (African) society that invented literacy sink into the misery of illiteracy, ignorance, and religion? What creative African values lie buried under the lethal debris of slavery, colonialism, structural adjustment, and globalization? And why did the ancient scribes call the concept of Maat our best promise of regeneration? The people articulating the vision that Africa's history can be treated as one continental narrative, form a corpus of professional intellectuals whose destiny it has been to preserve Africa's consciousness, and whose fate it has also been, century after century, to betray the continent's most ancient values in the interests of personal survival. These are the scribes of Ancient Egypt, the griots of the medieval empires, and the academic scholars of the age of structural adjustment. What these ancient values are, why they got suppressed, in what form they survived suppression, whether future generations can revitalize them – these are the issues addressed in this novel.

Ayi Kwei Armah has often been regarded as belonging to the next generation of African writers after Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka. At the same time he is said to epitomize an era of intense despair (Robert Fraser, 1980). Among the major themes he concerns himself with are the themes of betrayal and despair; bribery, corruption, and social decay; the slave trade; liberation and resistance; fragmentation and disintegration; and Afrocentrism.

Much of Armah's earlier works, especially his first three novels, deal with the theme of betrayal and despair - the betrayed ideals of Ghanaian nationalism and Nkrumahist socialism. When one reads *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* one comes across various instances of this phenomenon. The bus conductor steals

from the day's collection, the allocations clerk working at the harbour takes bribes from the timber contractor, Amankwa, before he loads his logs onto a train, the policeman at the roadblock takes bribes from drivers, and the Honourable Minister of State also steals state funds to buy fishing trawlers and Mercedes Benz cars. On the very first page of the novel, passengers on the rickety Municipal Authority bus are presented as "the walking dead". The Ghanaian workers are also living ghosts. Their expectations of a better living and working conditions and a just society, under Nkrumah's CPP government, do not materialize. There is, as Yankson (2000) puts it, "a metaphorical burial of these workers ... They are buried neck deep in debt with no hope of redemption in sight" (p.2). Sharply contrasting the hungry-looking, under-privileged masses, are "the socialist politicians of the Convention People's Party, the party then in power, (with their) chubby profiles and prosperous-looking bellies"(ibid). Yankson continues: It is "this corruption and the insensitivity of the ruling class to the misery of the proletariat that Ayi Kwei Armah describes in the novel as 'the rot of the C.P.P. promise', a regime which was so full of promise and hope for ... the masses" (ibid), a regime that coined the motto: 'Freedom and Justice' and promised same for all. In *Fragments*, Baako cannot obtain employment with the television station because a junior officer wants to be bribed. Baako is isolated because he refuses to collaborate in society's corruption. The entire society in the novel is portrayed as corrupt, at both individual and group levels. This is supported by images of decay and lack of growth, for example, the use of colour; the uncompleted building; and the urinal at the airport.

Another popular theme Armah preoccupies himself with is the theme of slavery. Lebdai (2003) describes him as an author obsessed with the past (p.2). He defines 'obsession' as "the verified presence in several texts...of fixed networks of associations, of words, images, themes" (ibid). The leitmotif of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, the clash between Europe and Africa with devastating consequences for Africa, is a popular theme that runs throughout Armah's earlier novels. Reading *The Beautiful Ones* one finds the crippled Kofi Billy staring out over the ocean and watching the distance beyond as he comments: "I see a long, long, way and it is full of people (slaves), so many people going so far into the distance (the New World) that I see them all like little bubbles joined together" (p.74). In *Two Thousand Seasons* Armah exhibits a realistic pedantry to create the reality of the slave trade on the African coast of the Atlantic Ocean in order to keep readers from forgetting it. He describes in vivid terms the organization of the slave trade, the atrocities the captives go through, the callousness of the white slavers and their 'zombies' as well as the complicity and guilt of African chieftains, 'The Ostentatious Cripples', who, because of their selfish interest, their immediate comfort and their petty power, sell their kith and kin into slavery. In *The Healers* the climax of the plot takes place around the Cape Coast Castle, the most important castle in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, the strong 'warehouse' and seat of government of the white slave-masters.

Two other closely related important themes Armah deals with in his novels are the theme of condemnation of white callousness and the theme of resistance. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah condemns the destructive

disposition of the white slavers and calls on Africans to reject all forms, structures, and institutions which continue to assist colonial domination. Throughout the novel he refers to the white slave traders as 'predators', 'pretenders, 'liars' and 'destroyers'. Chapter Three of the novel is captioned 'The Predators' while Chapter Four is titled 'The Destroyers'. His denunciation of the white men is total and is applicable to everything connected with them: their greed, their banditry, their vandalism; even their religion. He calls the white man's God "a slave-owning god" (p.36); "a stupid, childish god" (p.84). Against the backdrop of such hard-hitting, vituperative diction the reader is left in no doubt about Armah's condemnation of white slavers and their callousness.

Ayi Kwei Armah also takes issue with the fragmentation of the African continent and its people, a people with similar cultures and similar history but artificial boundaries, different national flags, different national anthems, different national currencies and different languages. He laments the dismemberment and the compartmentalization of the once closely-knit African people; a people who have been deceived, betrayed and plunged into internecine wars, bitterness and strife, "so that the life of our people is become a tattered thing and we are everywhere in shreds" (Armah, 1973: p.203). The theme of fragmentation and disintegration comes out more eloquently in *The Healers*. The conquest of the once powerful Asante Kingdom is consequent upon the fragmentation of the Asante army and the Asante chiefs, the coastal royalty, and the Eastern royalty. But, as Armah says, through the narrative voice, "The Akan were all one people before....The black people were all connected before" (p.204).

The theme of Afrocentricism is concomitant with the themes of slavery and fragmentation. As an essayist, Armah has dealt with the identity and predicament of Africa. His main concern is for the establishment of a Pan-African agency that will unite all the diverse cultures and languages of the continent. He makes a call for the total liberation of Africa, a significant contribution to the venture to create a new creation myth for Africa. *Two Thousand Seasons* (p.134) illustrates this concern as the narrative voice keeps repeating the call for a return to “the way”, “our way,” the “working together of minds connected, souls connected” to travel along. (Armah has called for the adoption of Kiswahili as the continental language).

A good literary artist does not only show his pre-occupation with the message he puts across to his audience, he also exhibits appropriateness of style and technical competence. As Palmer (1972) observes in his ‘Introduction’, “...what transforms the novel from a political or sociological work to a work of art is the novelist’s technique, the devices he uses to shape, explore, define and finally evaluate his material” (x). Style, thus, is an essential element of a novel. Ayi Kwei Armah is acknowledged as one of the finest stylists among African writers. Some literary critics rank him among the more superior class of writers of the world today. Writing on Armah’s style, Ode Ogede (2000) (in the ‘*complete review*’ Quarterly) comments, “Armah perfectly represents the notion of the ideal artist, one who does not merely copy but transforms reality”. Palmer (1972) agrees with Ogede; he sees Armah as a writer whose art is imaginative rather than

imitative (xiii). Like Soyinka, Palmer continues, Armah has “a great capacity for evoking a scene and presenting it vividly to the reader’s imagination” (ibid).

Armah presents his vivid scenes through the use of imagery and symbolism, among other devices. In *The Beautiful Ones...* Armah articulates his repugnance against social and political corruption in high and low places by exploiting symbols of filth, human excrement, and obscenity. There is what had once been a gleaming white waste container, still bearing the legend ‘KEEP YOUR COUNTRY CLEAN BY KEEPING YOUR CITY CLEAN’; the container attracts the worst kinds of filth and, within a very short time, gets buried under the weight of filth. There is the recurrent image of the public latrine with the rows of cans encrusted with old shit; the latrine (in the man’s house) with the wooden box seat encrusted with old caked excrement, the shit-hole through which both the man and Honourable Koomson pass. “The latrine becomes a symbol for the Ghanaian body politic, decayed, and stinking with corruption, just as the latrine reeks of excrement” (Palmer, 1972: p.135). The nation itself is symbolically presented as a rickety omnibus whose decayed parts are held together by rust:

What happens in the bus is a parable of what happens in the country as a whole. The bus, like the State, is in a state of decay, its pieces only held together by rust. The passengers represent the ordinary citizens, and the driver and conductor are authority, conniving to defraud citizens and, if caught, to bribe them into silence (p.131).

In *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah reinforces his points by a powerful deployment of images and symbols. To quote Palmer (1979) again, “Images of life, fecundity, and meaningful movement associated with the pristine African ‘way’ play against images of death, aridity, and inertia associated with the world of the predators and destroyers” (p.224). There is the symbol of the desert, an agent associated with barrenness, unproductivity, destructiveness and with the white predators, as against the recurrent image of water, a symbol of life. Recurrent metaphors relating to water are seen through references to the sea, river, the lake, and the rain. In *The Healers*, there is the symbolic clash of the water of an African river (River Pra) and the high waves of the ocean – a metaphorical representation of the clash between Europe and Africa. A similar image of the clash of two water bodies recurs in other African novels such as Ousmane Sembene’s *God’s Bit of Wood*. In the words of Lebdaï (2003) the obsessive images of water “build up to become an integrated part of the novelist’s psychology and sub-consciousness” (p.8). Again, in *The Healers*, one cannot fail to discover that both Damfo (an Akan word for ‘friend’) and Ababio (‘have you come again?’) are symbolic figures – representing what Yankson (2000: p.1) calls “healthy souls” and “diseased souls”, respectively.

Armah’s narrative technique is innovative and unpredictable. It shows, as Garry Gillard (in ‘SPAN’ No 33, 1992) points out, a progression from the use of indistinct personae and a shifting point of view, through clear but fragmented narrative, where, although individual personae are submerged in the collective, the point of view is remarkably unified and maintained, and to a narrative

situation that is self-reflexive. The narrative situation in Armah's novels is largely figural but it is also often authorial. An 'authorial' narrative situation, Gillard explains, is defined as one in which the experience of the narrative proceeds from a point of view external to the action, while a 'figural' narrative situation is one where the point of view is that of one of the actors, (or characters), although narrated in the third person.

This style is noticeable in almost all his novels. In *The Beautiful Ones...*, we see "amorphous characterization and an ambivalent narrative situation, particularly with regard to the main character and to the lack of distinction between him and the external narrative voice... Throughout the narrative there are moments of ambivalence in the narrative situation when the point of view moves fluidly between narrator and protagonist..." (ibid). This comes out clearly in chapter six of the novel where the narrative situation is actually divided between two personae, one of the strands being narrated in the first person and the other in the third. The first person sections, as Gillard observes, represent the speech of the Teacher to the man, while the intercalated third person sections such as 'The listener has heard. He is not so far in the cave that he cannot hear what is said' (p.85) represent the reaction of the latter as seen partly from inside his viewpoint and partly authorially. A similar metonymic mode of representation ('the listener', 'the listening mind'), by which the writer refers to characters by activity, is noticeable in *Two Thousand Seasons*: "You hearers, seers, imaginers, thinkers, rememberers, you prophets called to communicate truth of the living way to a people fascinated unto death..." (xi). This use of an interaction of narrative

situations with imagery (for example, the cave metaphor taken from Plato's *Symposium*) and delimited characterization constitutes a rich and complex worldview containing significant patterns of disillusionment (ibid).

In *Fragments*, fragmentation in the narrative situation as well as in several important aspects of the novel is visible. A good illustration is the enclosure of the central narrative which emanates from the consciousness of Naana, Baako's grandmother, who seems to represent the values of the old Africa being swept away under the influence of western ideas. Gillard is right when he observes

It is significant that this mother figure encloses the story of the son who falls a victim to the unresolved tension between the two value systems, Western and African, in the sense that her voice is heard at the beginning and at the end of the novel. The enclosure has the effect of restoring the lost balance by placing the story of Baako's rapid decline into madness within the context of the traditional ideology, which contains a cynical worldview. (Naana believes not only that those who go will return, but also that there is a continuity of life in death, and that contact with the dead must be maintained). (ibid)

Fragmentation of the narrative situation seen in *Fragments* is further developed in *Why Are We So Blest?* where the story is narrated by multi-voice: three separate narratives, representing three distinct personae are identifiable.

Each chapter is devoted to one character, and each chapter deals with the same event seen from the perspective of the different character whose name is given to the chapter. Ayi Kwei Armah, as Lief Lorentzon (in the *'Critique'*, Spring 1997) observes, "takes such liberties with the narrative voice that ... it is quite unique in literature from anywhere in the world". A similar observation is made by Garry Gillard. Discussing the splitting process in his article, *'Narrative situation and ideology in five novels of Ayi Kwei Armah'*, Gillard points out that

With regard to narrative situation, then, two opposite but complementary developments have taken place in the course of Armah's first three long works. On the one hand, one central character becomes two, then three. On the other hand, the declination of the personae has become more precise. The amorphous 'man' of the earliest work (*The Beautiful Ones*) is replaced in the second by Baako, the confused and divided but more identifiable character, with clearly defined socio-economic characteristics. He is then succeeded by three figures of roughly equal importance ... Modin ... Aimee ... and Solo (Gillard in *'SPAN'* No. 33, 1992).

Gillard explains further it is not only the narrative that is concerned with three different characters but also it is itself split into three separate strands, each told in the first person by the character concerned. "The effect of this is to create

polyphony of worldviews, each voice following the other, and in some cases taking up the same material for treatment from a different point of view”.

When we read *Two Thousand Seasons*, we hear a pluralized communal voice expressed through individual views. The narrative starts with the first person plural pronoun, ‘we’: “We are not a people of yesterday. Do they ask how many single seasons we have flowed from beginnings till now? We shall point them to the proper beginning of their counting... ” (p.3). Throughout the novel the story-teller uses the same first person plural narrative:

We were being turned into things to be moved for use elsewhere,
things bound for destruction ... and none of us knew ways to halt
this fatal progress (p.121).

This ‘we’ narrative style reflects and buttresses the theme of African communalism and the truism in the axiom that “A group thinking (and speaking) together could act but a single person thinking would spread mere dreams ...” (p.116). One cannot agree more with Ngora (1982) when he describes the narrator as “a collective voice in the true tradition of African Communalism.” (p.123)

In *The Healers*, the narrative technique is extended a step further. The narration processes, as Gillard points out, are, to a large extent, conventionally novelistic: mostly authorial, with the usual varying degrees of figurality. At other times, Gillard continues, the narrative voice refers to African conventions of

story-telling in creating a dialogue with itself to discuss proper ways of conducting the narratives, a dialogue in which the storyteller speaks to its tongue:

The speeding tongue forgets connections. Let the deliberate mind restore them. Proud tongue, child of the Anona masters of eloquence, before you leap so fast to speak, listen first to the mind's remembrance (pp: 8, 9).

Another stylistic feature Armah employs in his novels is the use of the rhetorical question. This is evident in all Armah's novels. When reading *The Beautiful Ones...*, the reader hears the authorial voice, asking 'Why do we waste so much time with sorrow and pity for ourselves?'(p.62); 'But what can a person do with things that continue unsatisfied inside?' (p.86); and, 'How long will Africa be cursed with its leaders?'(p.80). In *Two Thousand Seasons*, one is drawn into the fray of the story when one is indirectly persuaded to ponder over such questions as: 'Do they ask how many single seasons have flowed from our beginnings till now?' (p.1); 'Must we remain upon the land we have come to call home, and there have the destroyers drag us each day farther from the way that is our way?'(p.40); and, '...what shall we call the soul crawling so low, soul so hollow it finds fulfillment in the praising of mere things?'(p.205). In *The Healers*, the authorial voice calls on the reader to reflect on questions such as 'What sense was there in excluding the whole community from the center of the field, leaving only a few grim battlers? Why should everything have to end in a senseless

victory for one isolated individual? What meaning could such a ritual give to the community, turning it as it did into a defeated mass, all worshipping a lone victor?' (p.50). This use of the rhetorical question has the effect of projecting Armah's narrator towards the reader; it creates the illusion of a living voice, an orator addressing an audience, a speaker addressing a listener, in this case, the reader. The reader is indirectly drawn into the mainstream of the story.

Truly, Armah's style is innovative and iconoclastic. His themes are mostly African oriented. He treats Africa's glorious past with nostalgia. His concern with that past, bastardized by the coming of the Europeans, the slave trade, subsequent colonization of the continent, post-colonialism and its attendant frustrations, finds expression in several of his novels. Armah not only exposes the evil nature of the Atlantic slave trade but also draws attention to the social ills that confront post-independence Ghana and the African continent today, and calls for revolutionary action. This is the real essence of the true African writer.

II. Ama Ata Aidoo

Ama Ata Aidoo is a Ghanaian scholar, playwright, poet, novelist, and a feminist, of international repute. Born in March, 1942, at Abeamze Kyeakor, near Mankessim, in the Central Region of Ghana, she grew up in the Fanti royal household and folk culture, her father being the chief of Abeamze Kyeakor where she started her elementary school education. At the elementary school, she published a short story, '*To Us a Child is Born*', which won a Christmas story competition organized by the '*Daily Graphic*' in 1958. From 1961 to 1964, Ama

Ata Aidoo attended Wesley Girls High School in Cape Coast; that was the time her artistic talent and interest began to develop. In 1964, she entered the University of Ghana, in Legon, Accra, where she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English. While still an undergraduate student at the University of Ghana, she put on her first play, *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, in 1965. Ama Ata Aidoo was awarded a fellowship in Creative Writing to Stanford University. In 1974, she was a consulting professor to the Phelps-Stokes Fund's Ethnic Studies Programme in Washington, U.S.A. In the early 1980s she became Minister of Education in Ghana in the government of J.J.Rawlings. As Minister, she wanted to make education freely accessible to all but, after eighteen months in office, when she realized that she could not achieve her aims, she resigned.

Ama Ata Aidoo has lectured in universities in Ghana, Kenya, Zimbabwe and in the United States. She has made important contributions to the development of African literature and literary criticism. With the publication of her second novel, *Changes*, in 1991, she won the Commonwealth Writers Prize for African Writers. Ama Ata Aidoo is undoubtedly, Ghana's leading female writer. Her major themes include feminism and women's rights, conflicts between Western and African cultures, displacement, alienation, and African slavery. She is concerned about the fate of Africa – her past, present and future. It is this deep love for her African people that informs all or most of her writings.

Ama Aidoo is an embodiment of literary versatility; she writes in several genres and has chalked successes in drama, the short story, poetry and the novel. She gained recognition as a writer with her first publication, *The Dilemma of a*

Ghost (1965), which she published when she was only twenty-three years old. She has since contributed a lot to African Women writing and has been successful with many types of writing – drama, the novel, poetry and the short story. Some of her works reflect her own life experiences. Though she writes and has produced literary works in different genres, Aidoo is primarily acknowledged more as a playwright and a novelist than a poet. Her major publications are:

- (i) DRAMA - *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (1965)
- (ii) DRAMA - *Anowa* (1970)
- (iii) NOVEL - *Changes – A Love Story* (1991)
- (iv) SHORT STORY - *No Sweetness Here* (1977)
- (v) SHORT STORY - *Our Sister Kill Joy* (1977)
- (vi) SHORT STORY - *The Girl Who Can & Other Stories* (1997)
- (vii) POETRY - *Someone Talking to Sometime* (1985)
- (viii) POETRY - *The Eagle and The Chicken* (1986)

The Dilemma of a Ghost, Ama Ata Aidoo's first play, is about the dilemma of a Ghanaian man, Ato, a "been-to", who returns home from his studies in the United States with an African-American wife, a descendant of ex-slaves. He has not consulted his Ghanaian family members about the marriage to the descendant of ex-slaves, and the conflict between the two cultures is played through the characters' interaction. Ato himself is torn between his Ghanaian past and his acquired American ideals. The tensions between the communal and

traditional Ghanaian value system on one side, and the individualistic American culture, on the other, are further exhibited in the confrontations between Esi Kom (Ato's mother), and Eulalie Rush (his Afro-American wife). At the end of the play, mother and wife reconcile, and then the dilemma of the title is solved (Reboussin, Daniel A. "*Africana Collection*", 1999).

The play can also be said to be about Eulalie Rush, a young Afro-American woman who chooses to come and live in Ghana for two major reasons: out of attachment of emotion with Ato, the man she falls in love with. The other is of a more profound psychological and historical significance. Having lost a sense of family for historical reasons she comes in search of her roots – in search of a more profound and permanent sense of belonging. *The Dilemma* dramatizes this return and raises important issues of slavery, this time, on the part of those who were left back on the African continent. The play again highlights the shortcomings of the rising middle class (represented by Ato Yawson) who do not have full intellectual understanding of their own culture and who do not also have a full understanding of the new culture they embrace. The play also reflects the traditional African society's conflicting views of womanhood. While motherhood is adored, the woman who is childless is totally antagonized and made to feel miserable. The cruelty to such a woman – in this play, Eulalie – indicates the premium traditional society places on motherhood.

In *Anowa* (1970), Ama Ata Aidoo borrows heavily from the heritage of oral literature for the structure, the language, the themes, and the characters of the play. She consciously uses these and effectively shows the merits and intricacies

of these traditional art forms while adapting them to deal with modern issues in Ghanaian society such as – the consequences of intolerance and intransigence, the position of the woman in traditional African society, the militant African woman, motherhood and child-bearing in marriage, and the effects slavery and capitalism have had on the Ghanaian people. The story is originally an old Ghanaian (Akan) legend about a beautiful, strong-willed, young woman who rejects all suitors and, without any consultation, chooses her husband all by herself – against the advice of her parents. The village beauty’s chosen husband eventually turns out to be a monster in disguise, and she ends up tragically. The play, set in the late 1800s at an important moment in the history of The Gold Coast (Ghana), describes some of the earlier encounters of African societies with Western traders. Drawing on the tradition of oral literature, through which several societies passed their histories from one generation to the next, the playwright portrays a crucial moment in Ghanaian history through the personal tragedy of Anowa and Kofi Ako.

Ama Ata Aidoo, in the prologue, sets the play in Abura, in Fanteland, “less than thirty years/ When the lords of our houses / Signed that piece of paper - / The Bond of 1844 they call it - / Binding us to the white men / Who came from beyond the horizon” (p.8). The background of the play is thus the beginning of colonialism in Fanteland. The bond of 1844 which is referred to was a group of separate but connected treaties that legalized the importation of the British legal system throughout Fanteland and promised British protection to the Fante signatories in the event of aggression from the Ashanti, one of the most important enemies of the British and the Fante. Thirty years later, in 1874, at the time the

play is set, the British defeated the Ashanti and established the British crown colony of the Gold Coast, incorporating the Fante states and the newly conquered Ashanti domains into one colony, despite strong opposition by a coalition of traditional rulers, including the Fante. It is thus, in this context, the onset of formal colonialism in the Gold Coast (as most of what is now Ghana was known prior to independence) and rising nationalism that this play must be situated.

Anowa is not solely a historical tale; by using oral literary techniques, Ama Ata Aidoo portrays a sort of symbolic history of events which forces her audience to reflect on contemporary social issues. The history of the colonization of what is now Ghana is, in a sense, told through the personal tragedy of Anowa and Kofi Ako. Anowa, at the beginning of the story, is a strong-willed woman who refuses to marry any of her suitors until she meets Kofi Ako. Her parents, her mother in particular, do not approve of the marriage because they think the young man is lazy and will not make a good husband. Anowa ignores this advice and disobeys her parents. She runs away with Kofi Ako and vows never to return home. The young couple leave and start their own business, trading with white foreigners. With Anowa's help, Kofi Ako begins to accumulate much wealth and slaves; their relationship, however, begins to break down. The greatest blight on their marriage is that Anowa is not able to conceive and bear a child. Anowa also greatly resents being told that she no longer needs to work as they have slaves to do it. She does not approve of and actually resists Kofi Ako's indulgence in the slave trade. She cannot bear the idea of possessing slaves because she deems it morally wrong and evil. In response, Kofi Ako treats her with contempt and

acquires more slaves. He behaves like a powerful white slave master, with slaves carrying him from his bedroom to the hall. As Kofi Ako becomes richer and richer, Anowa becomes weaker and weaker and more unhappy. When Anowa learns that her husband has sacrificed his manhood for more wealth and has, thus, become impotent, she confronts him on the issue. After this final confrontation, the play ends tragically; both Kofi Ako and Anowa commit suicide, thereby giving credence to the authorial assertion that no man made a slave of his friend and came to much himself (Megan Behrent, 'Ama Ata Aidoo: "Anowa"', 1997).

No Sweetness Here (1977), is Ama Ata Aidoo's third publication. It is a collection of short stories that deals with the wide-ranging issues of urban and rural life, youth and old age, family relationships, and struggles of women. In the collection, Aidoo criticizes the elite of Ghana and their imitators but she does not offer any solutions to the inherent problems facing the country. In Aidoo's critical view, there is no sweetness in Ghana. Throughout the stories, there is the atmosphere of gaiety, playful quarrelsomeness, glitter, wine, women, music, and dance. However, at its merriest, society lacks quintessential sweetness. *No Sweetness Here* highlights the social and political milieu of immediate post-independence Ghana – an atmosphere filled with aggrandizement and corruption by self-important politicians and social-class discrimination by the elite and their bootlicking cheerleaders. In such an environment, it is unfortunate to be lower class and more so if you are a female. A female in colonial Ghana was "a colonized territory". The independence story of Ghana did nothing to emancipate her from subservience. Thus the world of *No Sweetness Here* reflects the social,

economic, and political atmosphere in which the female becomes only an adjunct – except when she is needed at the kitchen (Amissah-Arthur, 1999).

Ama Ata Aidoo's other collection of short stories, *The Girl Who Can and Other Stories* (1997), highlights the struggles and triumphs that characterize the daily reality of men and women in post-colonial Africa. Among these problems is the feeling of depression among African women and the need to fight back in the face of cultural practices that do not encourage women to assert themselves. Through these stories, Aidoo makes political statements and advocates women's rights. In the lead story, "*She-Who-Would-Be-King*", the writer projects her vision of the position of the African woman in the 21st Century, a century during which a woman shall rule as president of the whole of Africa. Much as this epitomizes the fact that the African woman is not all-passion but is also capable of rationale judgment and assumption of the highest political post, it also emphasizes that the emancipation of the female from the clutches of a patriarchal societal order leads to the emancipation of the wider community – in this context, the confederation of African States. It is therefore clear, Amissah-Arthur observes, that Ama Ata Aidoo's feminism is strongly attached to the political sphere.

One of the popular stories in *The Girl Who Can* is "*Nowhere Cool*". The story is about the difficulty women encounter when they attempt to combine the roles of a mother, wife, and career woman. The woman always faces a dilemma in such instances: whether she should abandon her life unlived, her potentials unexplored, her dreams unfulfilled – as opportunities for self-advancement pass her by – because the responsibilities of marriage and motherhood oblige her to be

perpetually fixed at the domestic realm; or take the rare chances that come her way which will lead to the development of her dormant potential and thus incur the antagonism of her husband's family. Torn between these options, most African women choose the former – to stay at home, cater for the children and the husband, and maintain the low, insignificant position at the work-place where her male colleagues take advantage of scholarships and get all the promotions. Yet, the liberated woman, like Sissie, would risk leaving home, taking a scholarship and embarking on a study programme abroad, than stay at home because the exigencies of motherhood and marriage require her to do so (ibid).

In *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977), the narrator complains about the great ills and the social problems that afflict Africa. The story explores the questions of exile and return, colonialism, racism and economic exploitation, conflicted relationships between man and woman, and other social, moral and political problems, the most significant of which is the nuisance of the so-called “big men” who throw big cocktail parties while there are a great many children out there on the streets for whom there are no schools. There are also the problems of the endless desire for consumer goods, the clashes of nations in the race for power and the exploitation of Africa by foreigners. As a writer and a feminist, Aidoo points out these social ills because to her, the female question cannot be separated from the struggles against exploitation and national well-being. Writing in “*To Be a Woman*”, *Sisterhood is Global* (1985: p.264), Aidoo stresses that “one must resist any attempt at being persuaded to think that the woman question has to be superseded by the struggle against any local exploitative system, the nationalist

struggle or the struggle against imperialism and the global monopoly capital". By foregrounding the negative in *Our Sister Killjoy*, Aidoo posits an alternative path, the path to redeem the nation; and this redemption must involve the female.

Changes (1991), addresses various issues in contemporary African women's lives – love, betrayal, career, family, social and economic life, and parenting. It is a story about a woman, Esi Sekyi, who loses her husband, Oko, and struggles to begin with a second, Ali Kondey, only to lose him also. Esi confronts problems facing African womanhood – society's stereotyping of the wife as an appendage of her husband, such that her emotions, thoughts and aspirations are subordinated to and governed by the whims of her husband.

The story depicts a typical, male chauvinistic African society in which the man always commands and the woman obeys. In such a society, for any marriage to succeed, one party has to be a fool, and that party is always the woman. Fusena, Ali Kondey's Muslim wife, epitomizes the fool stereotype. Though academically good and capable of pursuing further education after obtaining her teacher's certificate, she sacrifices her profession, her intellectual freedom and her attraction, for her marriage. At the instance of her husband she becomes a kiosk shopkeeper-housewife while Ali Kondey climbs higher on the social and academic ladder by obtaining his Master's Degree in Economics. It is this societal tendency of seeing women as appendages to men that Esi Sekyi revolts against; she rejects the idea of having more children, as demanded by Oko, her husband. Esi Sekyi, the protagonist, is an ardent feminist, an iconoclastic figure who refuses to conform to generally accepted beliefs and traditions. In fact, she

rebels against patriarchal and sexist obstacles that impede her personal freedom; she wants a society in which a woman's voice will also be heard, a society in which both men and women will be accorded equal rights and opportunities. Such a woman, in her view, must have good education for, an educated woman sorts thing out with her husband, maturely. Education is the key to empowerment.

Ama Ata Aidoo, as indicated earlier, writes in several genres and has chalked successes in drama, the short story, poetry and the novel. Her style of writing may be described as a synthesis of oral tradition and Western literary technique. Like a majority of her contemporary African writers, Aidoo writes in English but her style has all the trappings of and shows a close affinity with the oral tradition. Her early upbringing at the palace where folklore is seen in its highest form may account for this. *Anowa* is a folktale – the story is based on oral sources. *The Dilemma* is also partly folktale – the song sung by the boy about a ghost not knowing whether to go to Cape Coast or Elmina is an aspect of folktale, a form of a traditional musical interlude to get the audience's involvement. The oral tradition, as Isobel Armstrong observes, is very much one of taking the reader or listener along with you, not taking you through any elaborate preparation or elaborate description, but enabling the reader or listener to be there inside a dramatic scene. Aidoo's literary works, especially her award-winning novel, *Changes*, illustrates this oral traditional style: as the story opens Esi Sekyi's encounter with Ali Kondey is presented to the reader in a dramatic fashion.

Ama Ata Aidoo writes from a feminist perspective. Obviously unhappy with misogynistic sentiments in her Ghanaian society and the portrayal of women

characters in literature in positions of dependency, Aidoo gives women the central role in her literary works: Anowa in *Anowa*, Eulalie Rush in *The Dilemma*, and Esi Sekyi in *Changes*, are illustrations. By her style she launches a sort of literary crusade for an abrogation of male protection, and a call for a determination on the part of African women to be resourceful and self-reliant, and not to be mere adjuncts to men. Aidoo's works are full of marriage relations, and the relations are full of conflicts as men and women try to reconcile traditional ways with personal expectations (Reboussin, 1999).

Ama Ata Aidoo's literary art is summed up in the words of Pamela Olubunmi Smith when she describes Aidoo's voice, like that of fellow Ghanaian author, Ayi Kwei Armah, as the voice of conscience and protest, exposing not only the evil nature of the Atlantic slave trade but also the social ills of post-independence Ghanaian society, especially in its treatment of women – womanhood and child-bearing, and women's struggles for intellectual, educational and professional independence in a male-dominated, modern, African society. (Olubunmi Smith, cited in "World Literature Today", Spring 2000).

Clearly, a lot of similarities both in content and technique can be identified in the art of the two authors. The two undoubtedly also have their differences. An analysis of the similarities and differences between Armah and Ama Aidoo on the basis of their treatment of themes in slavery is provided in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER THREE

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE NATURE OF RESISTANCE

Introduction

The previous chapter provided a contextual analysis of Ayi Kwei Armah and Ama Ata Aidoo, the two writers selected for the study. The chapter looked at their biographies, especially their literary achievements, themes they deal with, and their literary techniques. In this chapter, five themes of resistance to slavery, as treated by Armah and Ama Ata Aidoo, are analyzed.

Bennett and Rashkis (*Understanding Literature*, 1986) define ‘a theme’ as “the main idea of a work of literature; the message the writer conveys to readers” (p.687). In *Appreciating Literature* (1987), a theme is defined as “the main idea, the insight about life and human experience that an author expresses in a work. The idea may be a general truth about life ... The theme is a complete idea and should be expressed in a complete sentence” (p.82). The author continues that a theme may be stated directly or may be implied in the other elements of the work. “No matter what form it takes, the theme lies at the very centre of a work and ties all aspects of the work together to express the author’s insight” (ibid). Writing in defence of theme, Achebe (1974) posits that every literature must seek the things that belong unto its peace; must speak of a

particular place; evolve out of the necessities of its history, past and present; and the aspirations and destiny of its people (p.274). Functionally, a theme may be defined as a recurring idea or the underling message of a text, an action or inaction, at its deepest level. A thematic analysis is a study based on a close examination of a particular theme or several themes in order to recognize unstated assumptions and logical fallacies, and to compare, contrast, criticize, justify, support and or judge the worth of a particular theme based on some criteria.

In analyzing the themes of resistance, we shall discuss both the denotative and connotative meanings of the conduct of the African slave, as depicted by the literary artist. The purpose of this approach is two-fold: first, to highlight the unbroken resistance and heroism of our ancestors, which is our heritage and, second, to foreground the underlying messages the various acts of slave resistance seek to convey, as fictionalized by the creative writer. The psychoanalytical approach and the moral-philosophical approach are mainly used; other approaches such as the historical-biographical and the mythological/archi-typal are also used.

The Theme of Human Suffering under the yoke of Slavery

The suffering slaves endure is a theme that runs through all the texts. This is understandable when one considers the fact that the institution of slavery is predicated primarily on violence. Ayi Kwei Armah's treatment of the agony slaves go through exposes the evil nature of the institution of slavery and brings the theme of suffering into limelight very forcefully. His description of how slaves are marked on the chest with red-hot iron rod (*Two Thousand Seasons*,

1973: p.118) does not only show the physical pain inflicted on innocent peasants, whose only crime is that they are captives; the description also depicts the mental agony slaves endure as they watch their compatriots undergo excruciating torture. Not all people, especially, women, have the guts to withstand imminent danger or to control fear. It may be inferred that many faint-hearted slaves, as they await their turn to be branded, collapse or even die from shock at such cruelty.

Armah's intention to effectively communicate to the reader, the pain slaves undergo, is seen in his use of sensory imagery. The novelist's description of the smoke from the burning iron on oily skin as well as the aroma of burning flesh appeals to the reader's sense of sight and sense of smell, respectively. Similarly, Armah's skill in playing on the reader's sense of hearing is remarkable. Not only do we hear the shriek of the tortured man, we also catch the sizzling sound of the red-hot iron as it glides on oily human flesh. Not even the reader's sense of touch is spared; one cannot help but feel the pain of the tortured captive as Armah describes the raw, exposed, fresh sore created by the burning iron. The effect of this vivid description is that the writer succeeds in portraying slavers as being insensitive; he also evokes the reader's sympathy for the suffering slave.

The novelist illuminates the suffering of slaves in another light – the forced peregrination of captives to the coast. His description of the trek of potential slaves, led by the visionary Anoa (*Two Thousand Seasons*) to escape slavery at the hands of the Arabs at the edge of the desert (pp:4-8), and Juma, the ex-askari's mournful story that he and his compatriots were forced “along unknown paths and strange rivers till we reached the sea” (p.147) illustrate this form of suffering.

Such peregrination comes along with its symptomatic agonies, as captives, shackled and yoked, have to endure exhaustion due to the long walk through savanna regions, forest areas, hills, valleys, rivers and streams.

Undoubtedly some captives, especially women and children, die of thirst, hunger, exhaustion or a combination of these. Others encounter death from snakebites and from ferocious attacks by wild beasts. Others may get drowned in the rivers they are compelled to cross, while some others may die of malaria, dehydration and other diseases. Pregnant women are likely to experience miscarriage, pre-mature birth or may deliver stillborn babies; some may even die in the process of delivery. This form of suffering may not be as much of the physical as of the mental torment the captives go through, living with the knowledge that they do not deserve such injustice. The emotional disequilibrium becomes more pronounced if we consider that some captives are of royal blood, untouchables, or are tribal leaders in their respective communities. For such captives the sudden paradigm shift from royalty to slavery may be too traumatic to bear. Ordinary peace-loving peasants who realize their status reduced to that of common criminals and are subjected to unjustifiable torture also find it hard to believe what might be happening to them. This is the type of suffering the writer draws attention to and solicits the sympathy of the reader for the sufferer.

Ayi Kwei Armah demonstrates the old axiom about women and children being the most vulnerable in society by positioning several of such characters at the center of his portrayal of suffering. His description of the terrible extravaganza – the burning alive of men, women, children, (and babies unborn)

who refused to escape with the fleeing potential slaves (*Two Thousand Seasons*, p.45), showcases another profile of suffering slaves endure – arson. The white predators, angered by the success of the escape, burn to ashes the relatives of all who chose to stay. The novelist’s enterprise in exposing his readers to this horrid spectacle, a spectacle in which “Children not yet born burst out alive in that fire, then scalded with the hissing liquid of their mothers’ wombs regained oblivion” (ibid) is, without doubt, to emphasize the theme of suffering. Arson is again given prominence in the description of the death of three hundred ‘fundis’ of the spear, the arrow and the bow; the three hundred are killed in one night when their houses are set ablaze by the white destroyers (p.99). The question is, how will those who survive in both instances of mass slaughter organize their thoughts and their lives after witnessing such inhumanity of man to his fellow man? And what will be the fate of those who survive the arson? The theme of suffering is strongly communicated here.

Another medium through which Armah sketches the suffering of slaves is human sacrifice. By exposing how slaves are sacrificed as an offering to river gods to ward off disasters (*The Healers*, 1978; pp:185-197), Armah evokes a feeling of horror and indignation in the reader. Like Anowa (in *Anowa*, 1970), Densu has a soul which repels slavery in all its forms. The sight of slaves suffering brings pain to his being. When he risks his life to rescue slaves about to be sacrificed by the Asante army into the River Pra (*The Healers*, 1978; pp:190-195), he does so to save the slaves from suffering unjustifiable pain and execution. Armah again reveals that on the death of a king, slaves are slaughtered

at random; no one is safe. It should be remembered the root cause of Asamoah Nkwanta's illness is the killing of his nephew, like a slave (pp:202-204), on one such occasion. Executioners can kill as many as a hundred. There is such an orgy of bloodletting, as some of the corpses are used to cushion the grave of the dead king. What makes the situation scarier is the fact that news about the death of a king is not immediately put in the public domain. It is shrouded in secrecy for a considerable number of months. The whole episode starts as a rumour. For the long period that the rumour makes the rounds, the slave has to live with the painful uncertainty of the next moment. What can be more painful, emotionally, than for one to live with the daily knowledge that one's life can be taken away, any time, any day, anywhere? The suffering of slaves, no doubt, is the message Armah transmits in this episode. When slaves rebel they do so as a result of pain.

The agony is not limited to the destruction of human lives and the daily fearful speculation about an unknown tomorrow. Rape is a very common phenomenon. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah's attitude to the Arabs who subject the enslaved African women to sex orgies (pp:20-26) is one of total disgust and condemnation. Not only do the women endure rampant bouts of forced sex; they are compelled to accept whatever the slave masters insert into their female genitals – meatballs, the dawa drug (p.21), the tongue, the thumb, and the overgrown, dirt-filled fingers and toes of the Arab slavers (p.24). The sex act, meant to bring sensual pleasure to both partners, Armah portrays, becomes a painful, physical motion without any emotional involvement, an instrument of torture for the enslaved African women.

Ayi Kwei Armah shows clearly the women slaves nurse a furious hatred for the Arabs for having deflated their ego as would-be wives and would-be mothers. The progressive brutality by the predators puts the women in a rebellious frame of mind. Using their most powerful weapon, the women first unman the Arabs, and, having mesmerized them with an overdose of sex, hit them hardest where they are most vulnerable. The action of the enslaved women raises a considerable alarm among the predators and their askaris as it aims at the eventual overthrow of slavery and oppression. That surely is a blow coming from intense pain. Such a blow spreads fatalities.

Finally, the author arouses pathos in his readers with his description of how women who try to assassinate their oppressors (but are unsuccessful in their attempt) are stripped naked and horses made to copulate with them. “The bloody victims are left hanging for a day and a night, a warning to others” (p.30). The enslaved woman’s state of helplessness is depicted through her tied hands, her nakedness, her stooping posture, her parted legs and her exposed vagina. The total humiliation of womanhood has never been so vividly and powerfully communicated in the pages of the novel as in this unwholesome description. A warning to others, indeed. The inference here is that some other women slaves are compelled to witness the gory dehumanization in all its terrible grandeur. In this image, the woman slave becomes the epitome of agony. By placing the female slave in the foreground of the picture, Armah provides a visually arresting image and allows his readers a degree of responsiveness. This is so because every

reader has a sister, or at least, a mother. Obviously no reader is likely to endorse or applaud such bestiality upon their own sister or mother.

The suffering is not so much the physical pain from the victims' lower abdomen and vagina made sore by beastly copulation as the humiliation the victims have to go through the rest of their lives, living with the knowledge that they had been raped by a four-footed animal, a beast. And what mind-set, what nightmare, will the other women slaves who are forced to witness this horrid spectacle carry the rest of their lives? This is the type of suffering the writer draws attention to. Armah, in this description, seems to suggest that in slavery humanity stoops so low to the level of wild beast. It is hard to understand how any sentient human being could treat fellow human beings, created in the image of Allah, with such callousness and savagery. Really, slavery defaces the divine image. By highlighting the sex orgies as vulgar aberrations of humanity that need to be condemned, the writer stimulates pity for the slave. Armah incites anger and damnation against slave masters and indirectly accuses them of being insensitive in their treatment of slaves. He indirectly calls for drastic action.

Ama Ata Aidoo, on her part, foregrounds the theme of suffering from a different perspective; mental slavery. In *Anowa*, the eponymous protagonist is not a slave. She is not marked or flogged or raped as most women slaves are. But Aidoo portrays her as a 'captive'. Anowa is put under severe predatory pressure by her slaveholding husband, Kofi Ako. Her freedom to engage in any economic activity is curtailed. There are slaves everywhere. She is denied the pleasure of sexual intimacy because Kofi Ako, in pursuit of his inordinate ambition for more

slaves and more wealth, has become impotent. Anowa thus suffers from a besieged mentality. Her suffering is psychological, not physical. She suffers mental slavery. It is this mental agony, this denial of rights that compels her to stand up against Kofi Ako in open defiance.

Ama Aidoo sketches Anowa as a character whose soul grieves and abhors slavery with a strong passion. As a child, Anowa dreams about slaves, men and women being seized and tortured, and a reflection on that dream makes her very ill for weeks (*Anowa*, 1970; pp:46-47). As an adult, she complains to Kofi Ako: "I shall not feel comfortable with slaves around" (p.30). Anowa somehow acquires the ability to feel the pain of the slave: "...any time there is mention of a slave, I see a woman who is me..." (p.47). Not only is her freedom taken away by Kofi Ako; she is also childless, a circumstance which gives her a great emotional torment and makes her sensitive to the plight of the "motherless" twins, Panyin-na-Kakra (pp:51-52). While her relationship with Kofi Ako is one of oppression and resistance, characterized by tension and acrimony, her interaction with the twins is intimate and on a mother-and-child basis. The twins call her 'mother' and she calls them 'my children' (ibid).

One is highly impressed by Ama Aidoo's portrayal of Anowa's personal commitment to the cause of the slaves. Anowa will not sit idly by and watch her husband treat fellow Africans like second rate human beings. A growing awareness of her slave status compels her to resist Kofi Ako as though her own soul has been pierced with the spear of slavery. It is this pain in her soul that makes her passionate and unequivocal in pontificating the evils of slavery to Kofi

Ako: “Kofi, no man made a slave of his friend and came to much himself. It is wrong. It is evil” (p.30). It is this slave mentality that makes her talk to herself, look wizened, dress shabbily, walk barefooted (p.50) and pick up interminable quarrels with Kofi Ako. When she rebels, she does so to give vent to the pain in her soul. It is this emotional and psychological pain the potential slave suffers that the writer communicates to the reader. One understands Anowa’s emotions and therefore one cannot fault her when, at the end of the story, she commits suicide. By committing suicide, Anowa ends all mental agony, all suffering and all humiliation; she goes to join the ancestors.

Again, Ama Aidoo explores the theme of suffering through Anowa’s dream in which Anowa sees herself as a grown up woman, with many children and grandchildren. The arrival of the men from the sea culminates in the capture and enslavement of Anowa’s children, as the whites “rushed ... and seized ... and tore them apart and dashed them to the ground and stamped upon them” (p.46). By exposing the reader to the emotional agony of a mother who looks on helplessly as her own children and grandchildren are decimated, Ama Aidoo tries to draw attention to the difficulty in maintaining family bonds in slavery; she also tries to show that nothing can be more heart-rending for a mother. Anowa divulges her agony: “And from their huge courtyards, the women (slavers) ground my men and women and children on mountains of stone” (ibid). The playwright chooses her words with care; the use of harsh-sounding words like ‘rushed’, ‘dashed’, ‘stamped’, and ‘ground’ arouses pathos in the audience.

Though Ama Aidoo (1970) does not make a categorical statement about the Middle Passage, the sea-journey from the West Coast of Africa to the Americas is alluded to. In a dream, Anowa sees her captive children kept in “the big houses” (p.45) and taken away (in ships) to the land “beyond the horizon” (p.46). This allusion readily brings into focus the tight packing, the filth, the diseases, the torture and painful death slaves suffer during the dreaded sea journey. The allusion reminds the reader of the physical and psychological ordeal slaves go through. The theme of suffering is alluded to, here.

Perhaps, the most severe of all emotional pain, stabbing enough to provoke a saint, is suffered not by captives in the Middle Passage or chattel slaves on American plantations, but by a category of victims almost always forgotten (or not given any attention) in the literature. I am referring to the unfortunate potential slaves who escape the onslaught on the Africa continent; the surviving relatives (of captured Africans) whose grief over their abducted sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, wives and husbands persists ad infinitum. The parents of the eight-year-old twins, Panyin-na-Kakra (*Anowa*, 1970; pp:51, 52), probably came back home from wherever they went that day only to find their twin sons abducted, never to be seen again. Such mothers, fathers, aunties, uncles, brothers and sisters, who do not have the privilege of organizing decent burials for their beloved relations, suffer intolerable and indelible psychological agony. Such relatives do not express their message of intense suffering in song, neither do they ambush, murder, nor revolt. They bear their torment in silence. They convey their message through silence.

It is this form of suffering that Ama Ata Aidoo exposes the reader to, in *Anowa* (1970). Panyin-na-Kakra call childless Anowa 'mother'. How does she feel, inwardly? And how does the real biological mother of the twins bear her loss? A similar scenario of suffering mental agony in silence resonates in Opoku-Agyemang's *Cape Coast Castle* (1996). In discussing the trauma of Equiano's mother, whose young son and daughter are captured, the writer has this to say:

Equiano's mother came home from the farm one evening to find her only daughter and youngest son stolen, never to be heard from again. We don't know her story. Nobody knows ... her grief (p.6)

Indeed, no one knows the intensity of her emotional shock and pain on discovering the disappearance of her two young children. Similarly, we do not know the depth of fright of the mother of Panyin-na-Kakra, as she grapples with the uncertainty of the next moment. What we can be sure of is that she undergoes a tormented, painful existence the rest of her life. That is the pain of mental slavery. The mother of the twins, like Equiano's mother, is only one woman out of a hundred, a thousand, a million other women who go through similar hell on earth. What about the whole society? Opoku-Agyemang hazards a suggestion:

To discover a measure, one small teasing inkling, of the impact of slavery and the slave trade on African societies we shall have to think of the orphaned-mother, her pain and suffering at the sudden

and irrevocable loss of her children, the uncertainty and wild fears she carries all her life-long years. We shall have to consider the measures she takes, and the adjustments she will make to her life, to her family, and to her society. And then we shall have to tame this bundle of untamed agonies and multiply it not by one woman, not by one family, not by one fearful village but a continentful of people ... We shall have to consider what such precarious living does to motherhood, fatherhood, attitude to child-rearing, community organization, the arts, religion, science, medicine, the very ontological basis of society (ibid).

That is the true face of mental slavery; it gives the potential slave nothing but a legacy of pain and mental agony. Anowa is unable to cope with the lincination. She feels neglected and very unhappy (p.34). She therefore relates to and empathizes with the slaves, especially Panyin-na-Kakra (pp: 51, 52) more than with Kofi Ako. She does not hide her innermost thought: "...any time there is mention of a slave, I see a woman who is me ..." (p.47). The severity of her slave mentality explains her drowning in the sea near 'The Big House at Oguaa' (p.63). By ending the story that way, Ama Aidoo cuts short the pain; Anowa could have easily gone insane, considering the state of her mental disequilibrium at the tail end of the play. The message conveyed here is clear; slavery is horrible, and it is this suffering that compels slaves to resist their enslavement. Civilized society must therefore not repeat this terrible mistake.

Another dimension from which Ama Aidoo addresses the theme of suffering is alienation. Eulalie Rush (*The Dilemma of a Ghost*, 1965) epitomizes this terrible sense of alienation better than any other character in this regard. Ama Aidoo characterizes her as an enlightened black woman obsessed by her slave ancestry and her rootlessness in American society. She seems to have no kindred relationship and no cultural linkages with people around her. She suffers an identity crisis. This awareness seems to recur and engross her thoughts. Eulalie feels like a fish out of water; she feels alienated.

Alienation, Emile Durkheim (cited in *Microsoft Encarta*, 2008) points out, stems from loss of societal and religious tradition. Eulalie grapples with self-estrangement on daily basis. Her rhetorical question to Ato Yawson, “Could I even point to you a beggar in the streets (of New York) as my father or mother?” (p.3) sums up the depth of her sense of alienation. She finds herself a social outcast, an alien, in the American society. It is her obsession to search for her roots, to “belong to somewhere” (p.4), and to emancipate herself from mental slavery. It is this introspection, this mania for cultural identity that oppresses her soul and pressurizes her to come to Africa with Ato Yawson. Back in Africa, Ato’s parents, family, and gods will become hers, too (ibid). That is the extent of her rootlessness. She is a wife without a people. In Africa, husband and wife hope to “create a paradise” (ibid) for themselves. But the hope remains a mere dream and Eulalie is unable to divest herself of her sense of alienation.

Paradoxically, back in Africa, Eulalie finds herself being painfully reminded of her slave status; an alien. Her aggressive resistance against Ato and

his Odumna Clan stems from her feeling of not being acknowledged and accepted as a respectable member of the society. Despised in America and rejected in Africa, Eulalie finds her alienation compounded. Ato's failure to build bridges and to synthesize the value systems of his African-American wife on one hand, and those of his African extended family on the other, turns Eulalie's dream of coming back to her roots into a hysterical nightmare. The message Ama Ata Aidoo seems to communicate here is that alienation, especially one coming from an awareness of one's slave ancestry, can be devastating and dangerous.

By positioning women (Anowa, Eulalie Rush) at the centre of her portrayal of suffering, Ama Aidoo demonstrates the old axiom about women (and children) being the most vulnerable in society. The playwright indirectly calls for action to forestall any future reoccurrence of such a calamity.

The Theme of Desire for Freedom

The one unifying element contained in all slave resistance is the desire for freedom. Slavery, as already discussed, dispossesses its victims of all freedoms and subjects them to a life of deprivation, exploitation and violence. Slaves therefore jump at the least opportunity to claw back their liberty, where possible.

Ayi Kwei Armah treats this theme in different perspectives. In *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973), when the we-narrator and his compatriots, under the guidance of the visionary Anoa, embark upon the long journey from the edge of the desert towards the coast, they do so in search of a safe haven where they can live in peace and practise their authentic African culture, as first rate Africans

rather than as second rate Arabs. It is the desire for freedom that compels the we-narrator and his compatriots to migrate. Rather than submit to subjugation and Islam, they abandon their land in search of a new shelter. The journey, as Palmer (1979) observes, is not just physical but spiritual and psychological; it is partly a journey into the racial psyche – to rediscover authentic African values and standards (p.231). It is a journey to re-establish their freedom. The love of liberty, Armah indicates, is such a strong driving force, so valuable, so compelling as to make a whole tribe abandon their ancestral home and migrate elsewhere. The writer illustrates the price slaves are prepared to pay for freedom, even if that price involves the repudiation of one's ancestral gods or native land.

Escaping to throw off the yoke of slavery is a common strategy slaves employ, where safe, in their quest to regain their freedom. Armah (1973) reveals how groups who succeed in executing their escape build new settlements or Maroon communities and maintain their cultural identity. It is worth noting Maroons operate under a clear paradox; they look for safety in very unsafe places and make those places their homes. A home is meant to be a place of comfort. But maroons live in such most uncomfortable places as in caves, on water bodies, in swampy areas and on mountaintops. This strategy is meant to discourage slave raiding gangs and war adventurers. Maroons, Armah points out, are among the front rank of slaves and potential slaves who spearhead resistance; they are among the first pioneers who explore, settle at, and adapt to the uninhabited regions. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, the fleeing group of potential slaves, led by Anoa, first settles at the crest of a mountain close by a big river (pp: 58,144). Maroon

societies in West Africa include Nzulezu (in the Jomoro District of Western Region of Ghana), an entire township built on a lake. The settlement stands on platforms constructed on pillars erected in the water. Ganvie, ‘The Lake City of West Africa’ in the Republic of Benin, is another example. The lake, the cave, or the mountain thus becomes a haven and a weapon of resistance.

In *The Healers* (1978), Armah discusses the quest for freedom in different contexts, among them the context of war. For once, the Asante Kingdom becomes what Opoku-Agyemang (1996) calls ‘a victim society’, a society whose population growth and material growth are put under severe disruptive pressure by predators. For once, the Kingdom’s freedom and territorial integrity are threatened by the advancing British war machinery. In spite of the enormity of the menace that stares them in the face, the Asante royalty and army decide on the military option. They resolve that there is, as Armah (1973) puts it, no “better way to fight fire than with similar fire” (p.60). The question is, what considerations inform their decision on this head-on collision course? Although the Asante armies are routed, we may applaud their bravery in confronting the danger head-on. The outcome of the war is not what is in focus here. What merits analysis in this discussion is the rationale behind the decision to confront the might of the invading British force, when intelligence reports reaching Kumasi point to an inevitable, ignominious defeat.

A scrutiny of the possible reasons for the adoption of this line of action, perhaps, admits of only one interpretation: desperation, desperation to protect and preserve Asante dignity and freedom. The Asante armies, Armah demonstrates,

are ready to pour out their blood in defence of their freedom. The message conveyed here is clear: every living organism will protect itself if attacked; and every community will defend its freedom if threatened. Of course, freedom is irreplaceable. And, the desire for freedom can compel people into desperate action. When potential slaves adopt violence as a way of resistance, they not only demonstrate their commitment to freedom; they also prove the point that they are not a mass of submissive objects that accept slavery with passive obedience.

The ego-centrism and opportunistic propensity of Ababio (*The Healers*) offers another context, negative, though, in which the theme of desire for liberty finds expression. It is for the selfish interest of ensuring his individual, personal freedom that Ababio, a grandson of a slave, opts to become a factor of the white slavers. He reveals to Densu the ultimate objective of the white predators and how he (Ababio) intends to benefit from it, for his personal survival:

Now they want to control everything that goes on. From the coast to the forest, to the grassland, even to the desert. And they will. If we help the whites get this control, we stand to benefit from the changes. Those foolish enough to go against them will of course be wiped out. I'm among those who'd rather profit than be wiped out (p.42).

By this statement, Ababio exposes his hidden ambition. He is aware that resistance, under the circumstances, would be suicidal. He is also aware that

resistance lacks the material benefits he is likely to gain if he becomes a stooge of the white man. So, he chooses to be with the hunters rather than with the hunted.

Of course, Ababio is not alone in this game of individualism; he is only a microcosm of a much larger class. In the novel, Armah characterizes the Fante Kings, the Ga Kings and the other kings from the Eastern Province, and their courtiers, as 'Ababios', traitors; they use their eloquence to secure their personal interest, to guarantee their freedom – freedom from enslavement by the whites; freedom from attacks by the Asante. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, when Juma agrees to become an askari, he does so in order to secure his individualistic, personal freedom, to escape the unrelenting violence, as promised by the slavers: “You can escape the worst suffering of slavery if you’ll become an askari for us. Help us in the destruction of your people. That will be your individual salvation from destruction” (p.147). The love of liberty can, in a negative sense, impel people to sell their conscience. In both Ababio’s and Juma’s cases, the message is the same: slaves love freedom and will do everything possible to avoid losing it. They are prepared to regain their freedom by any means, fair or foul.

The point has been established that open rebellion is the most dangerous form of resistance in view of the gravity of its reprisals. But, despite the risk involved, its appeal is phenomenal. Armah’s handling of this form of resistance brings to the fore the extent to which slaves are prepared to risk their lives to regain freedom. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, when the women slaves revolt against their Arab oppressors and assassinate a hundred and twenty-seven of them in one night (p.24), they do so with the tacit intent of reclaiming their liberty. In the

same novel, a group of captives led by Sobo mutiny in a slave ship, kill all the white slavers on board and succeed in regaining their freedom (pp:137-143). The daring revolt by the 'fundis' of the spear, arrow and the bow, which culminates in the setting ablaze of the white destroyers' ships (p.79), the bold attack and capture of 'the stone place', an uprising led by Isanusi and Kamuzu (pp:164-169); the assault on King Koranche's palace (p.84); and the ultimate offensive against the parasitic King, who is finally shot by Abena (p.196), are all treated with passion by the writer. At the bedrock of the resistance lay a vision of self-redemption.

The preponderance of successful and unsuccessful, individual and collective slave rebellions on the African continent, during the Middle Passage and on American and Caribbean plantations is significant for three reasons. First, it exposes the fallacy in the white man's assertion that slavery is beneficial to the African because it will bring salvation to the slave (*Two Thousand Seasons*, p.200), and that slaves are content with their condition. The question that comes to mind is, do people who are content with their socio-economic status commit themselves to conspiracies and subversive plots? Do such comfortably placed and gratified workmen carry out violent protestations against their employers? Obviously, 'No', because the basis for such an action will be non-existent. That, in spite of the brutal retributions slaves still plot and execute rebellions in diverse ways is an indictment against the institution of slavery. It is a clear manifestation of vexation and growing impatience among slaves. Secondly, it demonstrates the very high value slaves place on regaining their freedom. The conclusion seems to be that slaves are willing to risk severe punishment, even their lives, to claw back

their liberty. Finally, the profusion of slave insurrections further buttresses the conclusive evidence that the seed for the abolition of slavery was sown by African slaves themselves, long before the nineteenth century; hundreds of years before Granville Sharpe and William Wilberforce were born.

It must be admitted, however, not all slaves attain success in their attempt to regain freedom by force. They are either betrayed from within, or suppressed by greater numbers or superior weaponry. Such freedom fighters suffer savage reprisals. But even in such instances, the insurrections often leave in their trail heavy losses on both sides. Win or lose, more rebellions follow sooner or later. Such display of indomitable spirit leaves us in no doubt about the slave's unquenchable desire for freedom. It is this desire that energizes slaves to embark upon resistance in diverse forms.

The Theme of African Heroism and Dignity

Kirilenko and Korshunova (1985) define a 'hero' as a mortal endowed with outstanding strength and insight. Hudson and Wesley (1997) provide a more comprehensive definition. In their *Afro-Bets Book of Black Heroes*, a 'hero' is "one noted for feats of courage or nobility of purpose; especially one who has risked or sacrificed his (one's) life. A person prominent in some event, field, period, or cause, by reason of special achievements or contributions" (vii).

The theme of African heroism and dignity comes out cogently in slave insurrections, especially during the Middle Passage. In handling this theme, Armah brings to the fore a display of raw valour by African slaves. This is very

conspicuous in *Two Thousand Seasons*. Armah explains that a large majority of captives brought down to the castle do not come from the coast but from the hinterland: the forest and the savannah regions. Against this background, one can infer that almost all captives are unfamiliar with or are even afraid of the sea and find any encounter with it a most frightening experience. Juma's confession (Armah, 1973), "The sea is strange to my people. We live far, very far from it....." (p.147), attests to this assertion. It is thus plausible to deduce that it takes inspired courage and heroic qualities for people who know practically nothing about the ocean, much less about navigation, to rise up in mutiny against armed, white slavers on the high seas. It takes even greater intrepidity to triumph and take control of a ship. By portraying Sobo as having accomplished this feat (pp:137-144), Armah depicts him as epitomizing the indomitable spirit of the African slave. Slaves fight fire with fire and destroy destruction with destruction.

Armah characterizes slaves as showing a lot of enterprise in the fight to retrieve their freedom. In *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973), the enslaved women assassinate the Arab slavers one after another that night, as if they (slaves) were the executioners of a death sentence decreed by a military tribunal. The brutal retaliations by the 'askaris' after the women had plotted and murdered the twenty six Arab slave masters reveal the deadliness of the mission the women captives embark upon. Obviously the women are not unaware of the consequences of their action. But the African spirit is not afraid of fear, danger or death. Slaves fight fire with fire. Failing to achieve their objective or feeling frustrated, they demonstrate their preference for death in dignity to life in abject misery. This they do either

by shooting themselves, by embarking on hunger strike, by hanging themselves or by slashing their throats. In *The Healers* (1978), when Kwamen Owusu blasts his brains out with a gun (p.316), he does so to show his preference for honourable death to life in agony. Owusu intends to mean he could have been contented to suffer himself the calamities which were about to befall the Asante Kingdom, were it possible for him, by such a sacrifice of himself, to save Asanteman. Armah shows the iconic status of Owusu through the character's dignified death.

The most frequently used instrument of suicide, however, is drowning. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, captives on board a slave ship leap into the sea and hold themselves under till they die (p.126). In *The Healers*, slaves jump from the canoe in which they are being conveyed (to be sacrificed) into the Pra River and get drowned instead of giving the Asante army captains the privilege of slaughtering them like pigs into the river (pp:190-193).

An analysis of the phenomenon of suicide reveals the interplay of several factors. First, it is worth noting that a large majority of Africans abducted or captured and sold into slavery are freeborn, peace-loving citizens in their respective communities. Some are of royal birth. Some are family heads and other opinion leaders. They may be heathen, simple-minded or unlettered. But they are human beings; they have intelligence and integrity. Naturally, they react when they find their freeborn status drastically distorted by the mortifying circumstances of slavery. African slaves demonstrate their humanity by refusing to be treated like beasts. They choose death! They commit suicide, individually, collectively. The message that runs through all instances of suicide, therefore, is

the same: it is better to die than to be a white man's slave. By bravely taking their own lives, they give meaning to the popular Ghanaian axiom, "Fer na owu, fenyim owu" (Better die than live a tormented, miserable, shameful life).

Secondly, the belief, Armah shows, is widespread among slaves, that a dignified death enables the soul of the departed to return to the homeland and join the ancestors. An honourable death is a gateway to immortality. Attaining ancestor-status is a cherished dream of all Africans. This explains the apprehension of the we-narrator in *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) when he cries out, "Ancestors, this death (at the hands of white slavers) is so new. We cannot join you ... No, this is a complete destruction, death with no returning" (p.127).

Thirdly, slaves see suicide as an honourable means of escape from pain and as a heroic quest for justice. Having enjoyed life as freeborn citizens before forced into captivity, slaves are conscious and desirous of the kind of world they wish to have. By taking their own lives, slaves demonstrate integrity, dignity, and heroism. They end all pain once and for all, in the dignified Roman way. Obviously only the brave can tread this path. Timidity or docility and suicide are unlikely bedfellows.

It is not only on the high seas or on American soil that African bravery is put on display. Armah's portrayal of a reversal of roles in *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973: pp:164-173) underscores the heroic qualities of African captives. By capturing the 'stone place' (Cape Coast Castle), killing the killers, releasing the captives from the dungeons, and setting the castle ablaze (p.167), Isanusi and his gallant company attain heroic status. Armah's attitude towards the white slavers,

as usual, is one of contempt and ridicule. In this scenario he exposes the cowardice and lack of intelligence on the part of the whites. What the writer seems to be saying here is that ‘after all, the white man is not as clever and brave as we perceive him to be. We can trick him, attack him, and even defeat him. He is just an ordinary human being as we are. There is nothing extraordinary about him’. The plot to attack, the capture of ‘the stone place at Poano’ and the subsequent victory over the whites demonstrates the will power of a people determined to survive in the face of intense predatory pressure. It shows the impregnable African spirit and further buttresses the theme of African heroism. We see a reversal of roles here, as the hunters become the hunted and the destroyers destroyed; a case of ‘the lizard chasing the cobra’. The victim society, as Bradley (1998) puts it, “exerts power against the powerful, so that the asymmetrical roles of master and slave (are) suddenly inverted”.

A historical parallel may be found in the capture of the Christiansborg Castle, Osu, Accra, by Asamani, an Akwamu trader, in 1863. With these acts of gallantry and many others, African slaves, Armah tries to show, prove themselves people of remarkable shrewdness. This tears into shreds European misconception of the Negro being deficient in mental capacity (Armah, 1973; p.200).

It must again be conceded that a few cowardly characters resign themselves to the pervading propaganda of their black inferiority status and accommodate slavery as an expression of the divine will. Armah, however, proves that a good majority of slaves believe in the dictum of destroying destruction with destruction. Even slaves of the former category, who seemingly

accept their slave status, use silence and indifference as weapons of resistance. We may conclude, then, that the violence employed by slaves does not originate from slaves; it is a response to the excruciating brutality inherent in slavery. The underlying message conveyed by such aggressive reaction, one may infer, is that slaves resent their animal status and they do not sit idly by and accept their captivity in helpless passivity. By fighting fire with fire, slaves prove the heroic qualities they are made of.

Not all slave energies, however, are expended in violent resistance. The avenues through which slaves demonstrate their heroism are many and varied. And these are not limited to men only. By their high-spirited acts of defiance and bravery, women slaves also attain iconic status. Sexual intercourse, or the denial of it, is one such tool. Women slaves are no strangers to rape and sexual exploitation. They are conscious of their vulnerability to be used as sex objects to satisfy the slave master's lust, any time, anywhere, any day. Some women slaves find this not only humiliating but also an affront to womanhood and their moral sensibility. To demonstrate their abhorrence of this form of offended dignity, women slaves use their ingenuity to contrive strategies of resistance peculiar to them as women; they refuse to be used as phallus receptacles. When Idawa refuses to be sexually exploited by King Koranche (*Two Thousand Seasons*, 1973: p.71), she does so to show not only the sacredness of womanhood but also her contempt for the bloated stooge. Idawa hands King Koranche a crushing defeat and achieves a psychological victory when she snubs the King's romantic advances. Her open show of contempt for the king not only depresses him; it

makes King Koranche acknowledge his profound inferiority and his powerlessness over her, a subject. Again, Isanusi's refusal to be corrupted with the white slavers' gift, and more importantly, his refusal, with a tinge of arrogance, to tell lies about the massacre of the three hundred 'fundis' by the white slavers in one night, greatly upsets King Koranche. Otumfur, the flatterer, is appointed to do the work of deceit Isanusi had refused to do. But, it is significant to note that at the point where Isanusi turns down Koranche's proposition, Isanusi places the King in an inferior position of powerlessness, at least, for a moment. Isanusi scores a psychological victory over the mighty King who sells his own people into slavery. Isanusi achieves iconic status as he exhibits tenacity and bravery.

The Theme of African Culpability

Condemnation of the inhuman trade in human beings cannot be heaped on European slavers alone; it takes two to trade. Both Armah and Ama Aidoo establish that some indigenous Africans sold their compatriots into slavery, and that some Africans owned slaves, just like European slaveholders. African chiefs, African slave traders, and African collaborators stand equally indicted. The culpability of the African constitutes another theme in slave resistance.

In *Anowa*, Ama Aidoo symbolizes Kofi Ako's indulgence in the trade in human species as an incontrovertible proof of the African guilt. She characterizes Kofi Ako as a successful slave merchant who "sits fat like a bullfrog in a swamp" (p.41); he is carried in a chair from his bedroom to his living room (p.44) by four

brawny men. Ako is neck-deep in the trade because he does not see anything wrong with it. His simple reason for buying and selling fellow Africans is that “They are cheap (p.29) ... Everyone does it” (p.30). By putting these words in the mouth of Kofi Ako, Ama Aidoo puts the guilt of the African beyond doubt; readers are made aware that every African who has the means and the desire to trade in slaves does so. Obviously Kofi Ako’s profit in the trade in slaves far outweighs that of his trade in hides and skins, which he started with, hence the paradigm shift in the item of trade. Any attempt at abolishing the trade, therefore, is bound to be resisted by such Africans who depend on it and stand to profit by it.

Another conclusion that may be drawn from Kofi Ako’s reference to the cheapness of slaves is that profitability of the trade outweighs all moral and ethical considerations. To insinuate that profit margins and individualistic interests are the compelling motives that persuade Africans to sell fellow Africans is to concede African ethical and moral values have been thrown to the dogs.

Again, by failing to see anything wrong with trading in slaves, Kofi Ako creates the impression that even on the African continent, Africans equate fellow Africans with goats and sheep and pigs and other auctionable merchandise. Thus, there is no dichotomy between African slave traders and America slaveholders who rank horses with men slaves, cattle with women, and pigs with children (Frederick Douglass, *Narrative*, pp:89-90).

Furthermore, the Old Man’s lamentation, that “Those who have observed have remarked that every house is ruined where they take in slaves” (p.39), equally incriminates Africans. By inference, some African clans or houses

actively partake in the buying and selling of fellow Africans. Ama Ata Aidoo (1970) emphasizes this guilt when she puts the words "... men of the land sell other men of the land, and women and children to pale men from beyond the horizon who looked like lobsters boiled or roasted ..." in the mouth of Anowa (p.46). Clearly the African cannot be absolved from blame. If there were no sellers there would be no buyers.

Upholding the conviction about the guilt of the African, Ama Aidoo (1965) subjects the Odumna Clan to some bashing, indirectly. Her portrayal of the clan brings into focus the guilt of the African slaveholder. It is difficult to say precisely that ancestors of the Odumna Clan were slaveholders; however, there are substantial indications that they were. The justification of this inference is derived from the hostile outburst of protestation by members of the present generation of the clan against the presence of a slave offspring in the family (pp:12-14). A fundamental question that agitates the minds of readers is whether members of the clan would have reacted the way they did had their own ancestors been victims of slavery, as Eulalie's ancestors were. Again, one really wonders what is so dreadful about the offspring of slaves that throws the whole Odumna Clan into a state of mourning (ibid). Judging from the reaction and attitudes of members, one can reasonably infer the ancestors of the clan sold their fellow Africans, hence the presence of Eulalie pricks their conscience and reminds them of their guilt. This seems the message Aidoo seeks to carry across to her readers.

Ayi Kwei Armah (1978) lends a fresh impetus to the theme of African culpability. Characteristically, his presentation of African chiefs reveals his

disgust and contempt for this class of greedy simpletons who owe their positions to clan lineage rather than intellectual or academic excellence. Armah deeply incriminates African royalty when, speaking through Ababio, he discloses that every royal family is also a slave family and that one cannot find African Kings without slaves (p.341). Juxtaposing this statement with that of Ofosu-Appiah (1969) that in certain parts of West Africa, Europeans were forbidden to kidnap or to engage in raids for slaves because that was the monopoly of African kings (p.19), the reader is left in no doubt about the guilt of Africans. At any rate, we should not forget it is Africans (not Europeans) who wage the tribal wars, burn down villages, round up inhabitants, march captives down to the coast, and sell them to Europeans in the castles and forts. We can reasonably conclude from the two statements then, that African Kings constitute the main trading partners of European slave merchants since they (the Kings) own the bulk of the slaves. Owning a large stock of slaves naturally makes it easier to engage in the lucrative trade with its high profit margins. This, the African Kings do with gleeful abandon, as Armah portrays in *Two Thousand Seasons*. Both European slavers and their African collaborators stand accused. A monstrous weight of guilt hangs around the necks of both white slavers and their African accomplices.

In *The Healers*, Armah shows that the decision of the coastal chiefs to provide a thousand African soldiers each to enable Sir Garnet Wolseley to invade Kumasi (pp:218-227), equally deserves condemnation. Given that “The Akan were all one people before” (p.204), the Fante and the Eastern chiefs, by supplying troops, compromise their Akan solidarity; they provide the catalyst for

the invasion and oppression of their kith and kin. The vanquished Asante kingdom may be even more peeved with their Akan kinsmen on the coast than with the white invaders. As an Akan proverb has it, “The lizard says, ‘The one who killed me does not cause me as much vexation as the one who held me by the tail and flung me away’ ”. The writer treats the coastal and Eastern royalty with characteristic disdain as he exposes their materialistic and self-seeking interests.

The theme of African culpability is foregrounded more cogently in *Two Thousand Season*. In the novel, Armah informs his readers of the mode of collection of slaves from the interior. Boats belonging to the destroyers travel upstream on a big river and collect captives assembled at specific landing spots along the river (p.125). The question is, who capture and assemble the captives? Europeans? Undoubtedly Africans. This constitutes another testimony of African guilt. Throughout the novel, nothing complimentary is said about African Kings and their willing collaborators. Armah lumps them all together as imbeciles and mindless robots. They are not only greedy, selfish and ostentatious; they are also dishonest, perfidious and crippled in intelligence. Armah deeply incriminates African Kings when he speaks through Juma. In the words of Juma:

No one sold us but our chiefs and their hangers-on.

Our chiefs, our leaders, they have bellies and they

have tongues. Minds they do not have (p.146).

This statement is an indictment of a man much embittered by a form of injustice visited on him by his own community leader. Juma is justified. When an African King lures his own subjects to go on board a ship, under the pretext of holding a feast for them aboard, only for the subjects to be made drunk, shackled, and taken captive while the King sneaks back to shore (pp:106-110), one is convinced, beyond all reasonable doubt, about the greed and guilt of the African royalty. Certainly, the authorial intrusion, “a tremendous monstrosity is the greed of whites” (p.163) is equally applicable to African Kings. Consequently, when the people attack King Koranche at his palace, their action underscores the culpability of African royalty. The underlying message here, one may infer, is “African Kings are betrayers. By conniving with white destroyers to enslave our people, African Kings become destroyers as well. And they must die with their white mentors.” The execution of King Koranche and his hangers-on by Abena and her group of freedom fighters (p.196), justifies this inference.

Ayi Kwei Armah (1973) does not hide his indignation for this unjustifiably privileged class of Africans who sell hundreds and thousands of their fellow Africans. The venom he directs at African royalty is unrelenting. He captions chapter two of his novel ‘The Ostentatious Cripples’ (p.19). By calling African Kings ostentatious cripples and parasitic elders (p.28), leaders who have bellies and tongues but no intelligence (p.146); by calling them rotten chiefs and bloated leaders who pride themselves in spurious praise names and empty titles (p.171), Armah holds them up to public ridicule. Characteristically, Armah’s portrayal of the gifts and inferior quality goods to the chiefs, as Palmer (1979)

observes, reveals the novelist's contempt for the greedy and simple-minded kings who allow themselves to be captivated by such trifles (p.232). "The gifts suggest the Europeans' complete contempt for the African mind...Unfortunately, the behaviour of the king and his courtiers confirms the European imperialists in their view" (ibid). Armah even curses African kings: "May ... disaster strike those among our elders whose greed overwhelms their knowledge of the way" (p.5).

In '*West Africa Review*' (2000), Molefi Kete Asante, in reviewing *Wonders of Africa: A Eurocentric Enterprise*, argues that since we do not blame apartheid on South African blacks who collaborated with whites in South Africa, nor blame the holocaust on Jews who assisted the Germans, it is wrong to blame Africans who collaborated with Europeans in enslaving Africans. I beg to differ. In the first place, the holocaust and the Atlantic Slave Trade are incomparable; the former does not come anywhere near the latter in terms of numbers, duration and the severity of its inhumanity. Again, unlike South African blacks, the African collaborators in the slave trade are not mere informants and 'zombies'; they are active participants and equal partners in that commercial enterprise, even if the terms of trade weigh heavily in favour of the buyers.

Literature abounds with instances where African Kings and slave traders sell their fellow Africans for a few bottles of wine or mirrors or guns or pieces of cheap cotton cloth. There is no way Africans, represented here by their leaders, the kings, can escape blame for their role in the inhuman trade. Both Armah and Ama Aidoo leave no doubt in our minds about the culpability of the African. The African king or merchant or collaborator, as he or she supports and participates in

the trade, in one way or the other, becomes partaker in the guilt of it. The two writers highlight the guilt of the African when they fictionalize slave resistance against African royalty and merchants. Perhaps, if Africans had resisted with the same zealousness exhibited by Anowa, the trade would have collapsed earlier.

The Theme of Hope

One persuasion slaves cling on to with tenacity is hope. Hope of the slave is another subject of thought given prominence in the texts. Armah envisages the hopeful anticipation of the slave; he shall overcome, some day. *Two Thousand Seasons* ends in victory for the potential slaves, whose resistance is championed by the group of dedicated freedom fighters led by Abena. The fascination of being free and the hope in re-establishing 'the way', a just, communal society of shared common humanity, exert on the imagination of slaves and catapult them to victory. At the end of the story, the stone place at Poano is captured and captives in the dungeons set free (pp:167-169). The destroyers are completely annihilated. In the words of the we-narrator, "Not one escaped execution at our hands (p.166) ... We executed them all" (p.168). Not only white slavers suffer extermination; King Koranche's palace is vanquished, and the king is shot dead (p.196). The death of the white destroyers and King Koranche, the two emblematic faces of slavery symbolizes the demise of slavery; it portends hope. Slaves revolt, the writer seems to say, because there is hope for self redemption in the future.

It is significant to note how, in spite of all the violence and the misery, slaves remain hopeful. The hope of slaves rises above their physical and

psychological wounds and fires them to achieve successes in their resistance. The theme of hope resonates in *The Healers* (1978) as good prevails over evil. Araba Gyesiwa survives Ababio's evil machinations, and Densu ultimately inflicts a crushing defeat on Ababio. By flaunting his slave characters as unbeatable heroes and heroines who almost always triumph over slavers, Armah communicates a message – there is hope for the slave, the slave will overcome, some day.

Like Armah's revolutionary potential slaves, Ama Aidoo's women characters are always heroines. Aidoo creates strong-willed, uncompromising women characters who hold on stubbornly to their convictions and their hopes. In *Anowa*, the protagonist's hope, it seems, is to prevail upon her slaveholding husband to abandon the trade in slaves. The presence of slaves in her marital home is a torment to her soul. Anowa sees the whole institution of slavery as a notorious sin. "It is wrong. It is evil" (p.30). In the end, the slaveholder husband takes his own life. Kofi Ako's self-destruction, like the death of the white slavers and King Koranche in *Two Thousand Seasons*, symbolizes the demise of slavery. The message of hope is well grounded here. There is hope for a better tomorrow.

In *The Dilemma*, Ama Aidoo ends the play on a bright note. The bone of contention between Ato and the Odumna Clan is his marriage to an offspring of slaves. It is this revelation that makes "All the women break into violent weeping" (p.12). Nana gives the 'calamity' a spiritual dimension. She is haunted by the fear that she will be blamed, when she appears before her ancestors in the spiritual world, for having supervised Ato's marriage to a slave. In spite of these hostilities, however, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, at the end of the play,

hug each other in an embrace of reconciliation. The reconciliation of Esi Kom and Eulalie Rush signifies another symbolic gesture of hope for the slave. All is not lost, Aidoo seems to say; there is hope. The slave shall overcome, some day.

This chapter analyzed the themes Armah and Ama Aidoo address in their treatment of slave resistance on the African continent. Five themes were examined. These were the themes of human suffering, slaves' desire for freedom, and the theme of heroism and dignity of African slaves. Others were the theme of African culpability and the theme of hope for the slave. The analysis shows how the two writers expose slavery as an institution of extreme physical, emotional, and psychological agony. This comes out clearly in the first three themes. The last two themes show that African slaves display courage and maintain their dignity while, at the same time, they remain hopeful of a better life in freedom, some day. In the next chapter, a comparison of how the two writers deal with themes in slave resistance is made.

CHAPTER FOUR

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF AYI KWEI ARMAH AND AMA ATA AIDOO ON THE BASIS OF THEIR TREATMENT OF THEMES IN SLAVE RESISTANCE

The previous chapter analyzed themes in slave resistance Ayi Kwei Armah and Ama Ata Aidoo address in their works. In all, five themes were analyzed and their underlying messages highlighted. This chapter looks at differences and similarities in the approaches the two authors adopt in dealing with the themes. The words ‘slaves’ and ‘captives’ are used interchangeably in this chapter.

The theme of a literary work, as already explained, is the central or main idea or the underlying message that runs through the work. A theme or themes are developed through characterization, episodes and/or the subject-matter.

Characterization in Ama Ata Aidoo’s plays is conventional. The playwright creates characters with distinct, individual identities. Eulalie Rush and Ato Yawson (in *The Dilemma*) and Anowa and Kofi Ako (in *Anowa*) are individuals with identifiable idiosyncrasies. Eulalie’s speech mannerism, a peculiarity Ato describes as “This running-tap drawl” (p.3) as well as her slave ancestry gives her a unique identity; it sets her apart from all other characters.

Ama Aidoo sketches her as a strong-willed woman, a university graduate with an analytical mind – an attribute that makes her stand up squarely to Ato Yawson in any argument, be it about graduation at a university, postponement of producing babies to start a family, or about her personal character traits. Eulalie is obsessed by a desire to find her roots, to belong to somewhere. She feels alienated. However, she believes that reconciliation could be achieved through attachment to Ato Yawson. Naturally, she resists when, in Africa, she is reminded of her slave status and her paradisiacal dreams about coming to Africa turn into a frightful nightmare. Her reliance on cigarettes and alcoholic drinks is her outward resistance. She executes her resistance boldly and single-handedly.

Like Eulalie Rush, Anowa is strong-willed and intelligent. She holds strong opinions, especially about slaveholding, and about who an ideal woman is. She has a lot of physical energy too. Ama Aidoo depicts her as a workaholic; she enjoys self-expression through work and finds it difficult not to be doing any work. An ideal woman, to her, is one who works hard. The relative harmony between her and Kofi Ako takes a nosedive from the point Kofi begins to acquire slaves and thereby denies her of the opportunity to work. The strong opinions she holds about the evil nature of trading in slaves coupled with her inability to engage in some form of useful economic activity make her resist Kofi Ako relentlessly. Like Eulalie Rush, Anowa carries out her resistance as an individual.

On the other hand, characterization in Armah's novels is unconventional. In reading *Two Thousand Seasons*, for example, one observes the novel does not exhibit the kind of characterization one finds in Ngugi's *Weep Not, Child* or

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. No one character stands out conspicuously. As Gillard (1992) observes, "The trend away from centrality of one character and toward multiplicity, as seen in *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972) is continued to the extent that a large number of figures are given equal importance". In the novel, only a few characters emerge as individuals and none of them is used as figural viewpoint for any length of time. To quote Gillard again,

Although the view point is consistently figural and although members of the group are named, it is always from the viewpoint of the group as a whole that the action is seen. Thus, when a particular actor is identified it is as if he or she steps out of the group to perform the action as observed by the others and then moves back into the group as observers and reporters (ibid).

Thus, resistance in Armah's novels, unlike that in Ama Aidoo's plays, is executed by identifiable groups, not by individuals. Also, whereas characters in Aidoo's plays have individual identities, those in Armah's novels carry a group identity.

Themes can also be developed through episodes. Ayi Kwei Armah demonstrates time and again that resistance occurs as a result of the excruciating agony to which slaves are subjected. In treating the theme of suffering, Armah depicts episodes in which captives under the control of foreign slave masters - Arabs and Europeans - bleed from physical torture. The branding of slaves with red-hot iron is an illustration. Armah's description of this episode - the burning

human flesh, the yelling of the tortured slave, and the fresh, exposed sore - is so vivid the reader is tempted to stretch a finger to feel the festering sore. Again, to enable his readers to see in very clear terms the agony slaves endure, and to underscore the point that physical pain is not the exclusive preserve of men slaves, Armah places a woman at the centre of that gory episode of beastly copulation (*Two Thousand Seasons*, 1978, p.30). The woman bleeds profusely from her vagina, battered and bruised by a beast. The terrible pain is physical.

On her part, Ama Aidoo handles the theme of suffering from a different dimension. Her characters are not actual slaves; they are 'potential' slaves. Neither Anowa nor Eulalie nor the mother of the twins (Panyin-na-Kakra) is branded or raped or tortured, physically. Their suffering is not physical; it is emotional, psychological. Whereas Armah's women captives suffer an overdose of gangbang (gang-rape) at the hands of Arab predators (*Two Thousand Seasons*, 1978: pp.20-26), Anowa is completely denied the pleasure of sex by her slaveholder husband (*Anowa*, 1970: pp.57, 61). In *The Dilemma*, (1965: p.44ff), Eulalie's agony emanates from being declared a 'persona non grata', indirectly; she is not accorded the much-needed recognition that will set her mind at ease; rather she is painfully reminded of her rootlessness. It is emotional and psychological pain Aidoo's potential women slaves suffer from, not physical.

Ayi Kwei Armah widens the scope of resistance by involving a multiplicity of individual characters, identifiable groups and nation-states in the execution of rebellion, at different levels. These individuals and groups adopt open confrontational methods, guerilla tactics and military engagements in their

fight for freedom. Ababio (in *The Healers*, 1978) and Juma (in *Two Thousand Seasons*, 1973) are two individuals whose egocentric propensities stem from their desire for self-preservation and individual freedom. The group of potential slaves, led by Anoa, who abandon their ancestral gods and migrate from the edge of the desert down-south (*Two Thousand Seasons*) as well as the group of freedom fighters, led by Abena, who kill King Koranche (*The Healers*) do so for the sake of freedom. There are also the Fante and Ga states, led by their chiefs, who sell their birthright for British protection. And, when the Asante nation-state, led by its army, opts for a head-on collision with the advancing British war machinery, it does so to safeguard Asante dignity and freedom (*The Healers*).

Armah completes the panoramic view of resistance by showcasing both foreign perpetrators (Arabs and Europeans) and African collaborators as the focal points of resistance. In his novels, slave victims include men, women, children and even babies. Resistance takes place in the bedrooms, in the forests, at the banks of rivers, at the palaces of African chiefs, at the castles, on the shores of the African continent and on the high seas.

Ama Ata Aidoo, on the other hand, narrows resistance to domestic, spousal conflict. Whereas Armah throws the searchlight on a wide range of characters, including men, women, children, foreigners and African indigenes, Ama Aidoo confines it to connubial resistance. Ama Aidoo's slaveholding characters, Kofi Ako (in *Anowa*) and the Odumna Clan (in *The Dilemma*) are not foreigners; they are Africans. Again, there are no group actions or open military confrontations. Instances of resistance in Aidoo's plays are restricted to husband

and wife confrontation: Anowa against Kofi Ako (in *Anowa*) and Eulalie against Ato Yawson and the Odumna Clan (in *The Dilemma*). Resistance in both works does not go beyond the bedroom, the family house or the frontiers of the family set-up. Thus, whereas resistance in Armah's novels covers a wide spectrum, that in Aidoo's plays is domestic in nature.

Though the two authors have their peculiar differences, there are similarities between them as well. One of these is their use of language. Both Armah and Ama Aidoo show sensitivity to language. In their respective genre, speech is an index of age, education and/or social status. In Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, Juma's speech in which he lambastes African chiefs as leaders who have bellies and tongues but have no minds clearly portrays him as a radical captive consumed by intense bitterness and hatred. Such a scathing attack on African royalty can only come from a potential killer; no wonder Juma teams up with the group of freedom fighters who assassinate King Koranche at his palace.

In *The Dilemma*, Nana voices her apprehension about the responses and explanations she will have to proffer when she appears before her ancestors in the spirit world (for having superintended over Ato's marriage to a slave, p.14). Her speech of lamentation clearly shows the speaker is a traditionalist, an elderly matriarch, an octogenarian, perhaps, with one foot in the grave. Language thus becomes a vehicle for characterization in the hands of both writers.

Furthermore, both Armah and Ama Aidoo identify their slave characters not by numbers but by their individual names – Abena, Juma, Isanusi, Ababio, Kwamen Owusu, Asamoah Nkwanta, in Armah's works, while in Ama Aidoo's

plays we meet Eulalie Rush, Anowa, and Panyin-na-Kakra. By giving specific names to slave characters the two writers seem to emphasize the human status of all slaves; slaves are human beings capable of reasoning and reaction just like the white slavers themselves; slaves are not mere marketable commodities.

Another common ground between the two is that both writers establish the guilt of African collaborators in the slave trade beyond all reasonable doubt. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, King Koranche, a stooge of the white slavers, is not only an instrument of oppression against his people; he is also neck-deep in the selling of his own subjects. In *Anowa*, Kofi Ako's active participation in the buying and selling of fellow Africans (because "they are cheap") puts the guilt of African collaborators beyond dispute. The two authors indict all African slavers.

Finally, both authors project revolutionary women characters as protagonists in the execution of resistance in their works. Their women characters (Abena in Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, and Anowa in Ama Aidoo's *Anowa*) are often rebels who do not conform to societal expectations of passivity, dependency, confinement and compliance usually ascribed to the African woman in literature. They are women who always stand by their convictions and refuse to be intimidated or stampeded in any circumstance.

From the foregoing it stands to reason that even though the two Ghanaian writers have their individual differences in terms of style and presentation, they have several things in common as well when it comes to their treatment of themes in slave resistance on the African continent.

CONCLUSION

Summary

The subject of the Atlantic slavery continues to excite scholarly interest. Discussion on the issue is far from conclusive. This is true not only from the historical perspective. Indeed, the moral and ethical lessons to be learnt from that man-made catastrophe find expression in several literary genres. Novelists, playwrights, poets, and essayists continue to explore, to gain new insights, and to give fresh impetus to the subject. As Opoku-Agyemang (1996) rightly points out,

it is necessary to keep the story of slavery and the slave trade open-ended and to avoid closure; to clear the way to debate and to perpetually initiate rather than conclude the argument so that every new generation may visit it to quarry its lessons (p.9).

This study revisits the story of slavery “to quarry its lessons”. The study examines an aspect of slavery which is usually downplayed - slave resistance on the African continent, as portrayed in Ghanaian literature. Ayi Kwei Armah and Ama Ata Aidoo’s treatment of the theme of slavery in their earlier works demonstrates their determination to keep the debate on slavery and the slave trade

open-ended. Emphasis is on the themes conveyed in the slave protestations. In all, five themes are analyzed and the underlying messages highlighted. Resistance does not occur in a vacuum. In bringing our ancestors' unbroken resistance and heroism to light, the study goes back to the factors that engender resistance. This leads to an examination of the very nature of the institution of slavery. This may be summed up in one word: violence! One brutality opens the gate to another. Whole African villages are burnt down to render inhabitants easy prey for capture. Captives uprooted from their homes are forced to walk long distances to the coast, imprisoned in grisly dungeons in the castles, and branded on the chest or back with red-hot irons. This is done with the active connivance and collaboration of African chiefs. On the high seas, insanitary conditions in the slave ships breed diseases and fatalities. Captives considered too weak to fetch good prices in the New World are thrown overboard. Strong, healthy men and women suffer the same fate when provisions run low. Even babies are not spared.

Slavery, the study shows, is terrible for men but even more traumatic for women. Women slaves (pregnant women included) are stripped naked and whipped to death. They are raped at will, sometimes for fun, sometimes by beasts, sometimes to satisfy the white master's lust. Some women slaves are used as sex machines or baby-producing factories to churn out offspring, either to increase the slave master's labour force or to be sold elsewhere.

Work on the plantation is a sentence to life imprisonment with hard labour; slaves work in all weathers from dawn to dusk. Men, women, and children slaves are denied adequate food; some die of starvation. Slaves are

denied the right to education, the right to own property and the right to enjoy the fruits of their economic and sexual activities. Slaves are molested, maimed or murdered, without mercy. In sum, they are denied the right to be human beings.

It is this unusually horrendous blend of highly variegated violence and dehumanization executed through the gun, the shackle, the whip, starvation, back-breaking labour, rape, torture, molestation, humiliation and, above all, the denial of the right to freedom, that predispose the slave to resistance.

Resistance, the study has shown, takes two forms; passive and active. Passive resistance aims at causing financial loss and vexation to the slave master, and winning psychological victory over him, even if temporarily. It takes the form of obeying instructions to the letter, feigning illness, and sabotaging farm operations, among others. Active resistance, in most instances, means death or physical injury to the slave master. It requires courage. Active resistance manifests itself in open physical or military engagements, slave insurrections, mutinies on the high seas, arson, and cold-blooded murder of slave owners. Slaves preferring honourable death to life in perpetual bondage commit suicide. Others run away to safe havens to found maroon societies.

These heroic deeds of the African slave, unfortunately, pale into insignificance in the literature. The time has come for Africans to foreground the heroism and dignity of our ancestors. The roll call of atrocities and forms of resistance is done here not to showcase the barbarity of slavery; the instances are cited in terms of the lessons that can be learnt from them, so that such a human calamity does not befall humankind again.

Obviously, the two writers' treatment of African resistance transmits deep-rooted messages. In all instances, certain themes stand out conspicuously. The study has focused on five of these – the themes of: suffering, the desire for freedom, the heroism and dignity of our ancestors, the theme of African culpability, and the theme of hope among slaves for a better life, some day.

Conclusion

Based on the analyses of the themes discussed in this study, one of the major conclusions drawn is that slavery is painful, it is dehumanizing; chattel slavery is the epitome of misery, suffering, sorrow, and humiliation. It bristles with so much that is irredeemably evil. Human life means nothing to the slaver; physical and emotional pain is of no significance to the slave master or his agents. Under the yoke of slavery, women suffer double or triple agony as the dignity of womanhood is bastardized. Even children and babies are not spared the ordeal in this culture of unmitigated suffering. It thus behoves our common humanity, our present generation – black, white, yellow, coloured – to do everything possible to avert a recurrence of this human calamity.

Another conclusion that may be drawn is that all slaves desire to regain their freedom, to claw back their humanity. No one wants to forfeit or cede one's God-given rights to another person; no one wants to be someone's slave; and no one has the right, even if the one has the might, to make another person one's slave. It is immoral. It is unethical. It is a notorious sin that must be avoided. The Atlantic slave trade still remains a big blot on the conscience of mankind.

Any trace of slavery in any form must be aborted at its embryonic stage before it blossoms into another human catastrophe, so that all men and women, black and white, rich and poor, strong and weak, can live in peace and in freedom.

Perhaps, one may be right to conclude that our ancestors were brave, courageous, even in the face of seemingly insurmountable oppression. They did not sit idly by to be carried away into slavery, neither did they passively fold their hands in-between their thighs to be molested and humiliated. They fought fire with fire. Even in captivity they exhibited heroism, dignity, and shrewdness. Their resistance was bent but not broken. Their justifiable wrath was directed against not only whites but also against black slave owners. The inference we may draw from this action is that slavery is evil and must be resisted, no matter who practises it. Therefore, we have to see our ancestors' resistance in proper perspective - a rich heritage for inspiration to our present and future generations.

A further conclusion that may be drawn from the analysis is that under no circumstances can Africans, especially African royalty, escape blame for their instrumental role in the transaction of the slave business. Being trade partners of white slavers, Africans are no less guilty than their foreign business counterparts. Whether Africans were cheated in the bargain or profited very little from the transactions is beside the point. An Akan proverb has it that "An elder who passively looks on while children feast on a meal of python flesh is counted among python eaters". In the Atlantic slave trade, African chiefs were not passive onlookers; they were active collaborators. The fact that resistance against slavery was directed against not only whites but African royalty as well speaks volumes.

Perhaps, this shared responsibility of guilt constitutes the spoke in the wheel of Africa's demand for reparation from the West.

Finally, it follows from the analysis that it was slaves themselves who, having tasted the bitter dregs of slavery, and who, based on their hope for a better tomorrow and their conviction that they shall overcome, some day, initiated the move, and ignited the flame, for the abolition of slavery. This conclusion effectively knocks out the European propaganda of African docility. Slaves themselves abolished slavery and they must be accorded the right recognition for their bravery and foresight. This seems one of the many important messages Armah and Ama Aidoo seek to convey to the present generation.

Recommendation

On a wall in the main alley to the courtyard of the Cape Coast Castle stands this plaque:

IN EVERLASTING MEMORY

Of the anguish of our ancestors.

May those who died rest in peace

May those who return find their root

May Humanity never again perpetrate

Such injustice against humanity

We, the living, vow to uphold this.

That is the Cape Coast Castle – “the edifice and the metaphor”. The Castle has to be seen as a living reminder of this injustice of man against humanity, a standing provocation to thought and action.

Nonetheless, in spite of all the grave abuse of humanity and the concomitant condemnation of that evil institution, slavery still exists in different guises in modern civilized society. Child trafficking, child labour, forced child-marriages, the ‘Trokosi’ system, and other practices that have the trappings of slavery continue to plague our enlightened world today. Screaming newspaper headlines such as: ‘*Slavery at Orphanage*’, ‘*Slavery at Trokosi Shrine*’, ‘*Slave Cargo Halted*’, and ‘*2 in Slave Trading Held*’ (see: Appendix) are common captions on the front pages of the Ghanaian print media. Ofose-Appiah (1969), reveals there are stories of African pilgrims being kidnapped (and enslaved) during the pilgrimage to Mecca, and stories of some pilgrims selling their children to pay their expenses for the pilgrimage (p.21). All these lead to the conclusion that slavery still exists in various forms. And, so long as these pockets of cruelty to humanity continue to exist, “it cannot be said that the dream of the 20th century abolitionists (and that of our heroic ancestors) has been realized” (Ofose-Appiah, 1969: p.107). Slavery should, therefore, not be perceived as history, a thing of the past. It is present, in a different cloak.

No, the world is not yet free from slavery. A new phase of slavery is emerging today in the struggle of economic contradictions. The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (MOWAC, 2005) reports that an estimated

284,000 child labourers work in hazardous conditions, such as spraying pesticides without protective gear, on cocoa farms in West Africa. This is a call to action.

This study does not only analyze themes of resistance dealt with by Armah and Ama Aidoo, it is also a rousing call to Africans to emancipate themselves from mental slavery and all practices which, in the past, led to the destruction of souls and the infusion of violence into every breath. We need to act fast, by way of education, by way of legislation and international conventions and protocols, to save lives, to stop the child trafficking, before it blossoms into a full-blown catastrophe. As Opoku-Agyemang (1996: p.76) aptly cautions, we need to

Fear them all, those who sing indifference
Who live and die with the sound of nod, indifferent
Fear lest your dawn changes its mind at night
And take you, vein to the sea, captive again

We need to continuously keep the debate on the slave trade alive and avoid closure. We need to find out why no one talks of these things anymore. We need to continuously denounce its savage cruelty and find in the heroism and dignity of our ancestors the inspiration that can identify ideas for any type of social change. “That our ancestors were enslaved does not make slavery our heritage. It is more reasonable and true to the history to consider the ancestors’ unbroken resistance to enslavement as our proper heritage.” (K. Opoku-Agyemang, *Amanee*, July-August, 2001).

A number of constraints emerged in the course of the study. For instance, the study could not cover such themes as the theme of collective amnesia. These lapses could be attributed, among other things, to lack of access to some relevant books and articles on the subject. Further research is recommended to cover other areas not dealt with in the present work. For example, further studies could be undertaken into the notion of “a good slave master”. Further research is also recommended into areas such as the paradox of the Akan surnames ‘Donkor’ and ‘Efirim’. Despite that ‘slave’ (donkor) is a taboo word in Akan, there are several prominent Akan men and women who bear the surname ‘Donkor’ (or ‘Donkoh’). What accounts for this paradox? Then also is the name ‘Efirim’ (literary meaning: ‘having emerged victorious from..., redeemed, rescued, liberated, delivered from ...’). From what was the bearer of the name or his/her ancestors delivered? Further research will unearth other aspects of slave resistance to help place the heroism and dignity of the African slave into proper perspective.

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APPENDICES

GHANAIAN NEWSPAPER HEADLINES ALLUDING TO THE RE- EMERGENCE OF MODERN SLAVERY UNDER DIFFERENT GUISES

APPENDIX A : “Slavery at Orphanage – Girl, 14, sold to U.S. couple”
(Daily Graphic, Monday, July 31, 2006).

APPENDIX B : “Child Slavery on Ghana’s Cocoa Farms”
(Daily Graphic, Monday, March 3, 2008).

APPENDIX C : “2m Children Engaged in Child Labour”
(The Ghanaian Times, Wednesday, March 5, 2008).

APPENDIX D : “Moves to Stem Child Trafficking : Police Wage War on
Perpetrators”. (The Ghanaian Times, Saturday, May 17, 2008).

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX D