

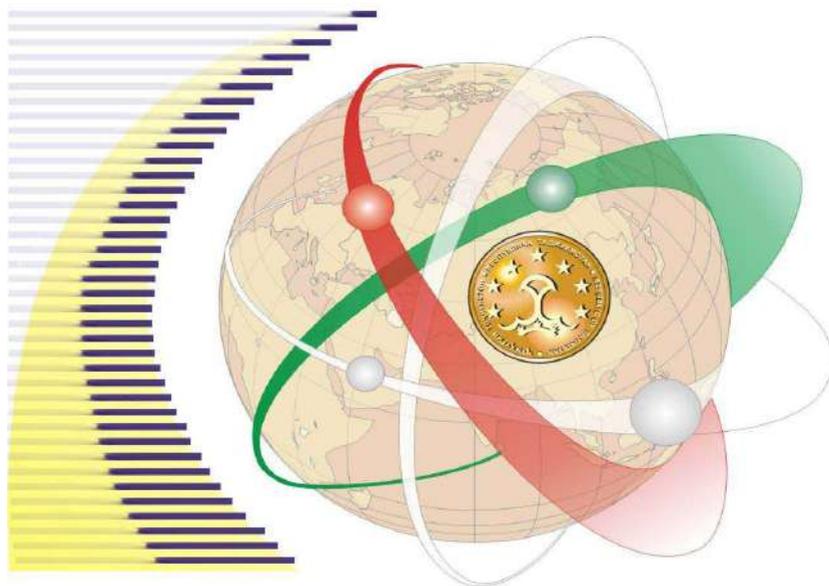


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**RESISTANCE TO SLAVERY IN AYI KWEI ARMAH'S *TWO THOUSAND SEASONS* AND *THE HEALERS*****AGUESSY Yélian Constant¹ & SIDI CHABI Moussa²**¹Université de Parakou, BÉNIN; Email: aguessico@yahoo.fr²Université de Parakou, BÉNIN; Email: sidichabi@yahoo.fr**ABSTRACT:**

*The present article aims at examining resistance to slavery in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*. It explores the factors that have provoked African people's resistance to slavery in the two novels. In this connection the philosophical dimensions of freedom which form the moral justification for resistance are examined. The factors are discussed in terms of denial of rights and freedoms, and use of violence against slaves. Instances of exploitation and violence are cited to beef up the justification for the African's opposition to slavery. The slave dealers have proved very violent in their endeavor to exploit their so-called slaves. It is true that they have paid in one way or the other for them, but the way they treat them is extremely absurd and inhumane. Hence the African people's resistance in order to put an end to such inhumane treatments. The study has found that although the trans-Atlantic slavery has begun with kidnapping, internal wars, raids, the taking of captives and the selling and buying of slaves on the African continent, it is on the American soil that slavery has reached its pinnacle. The Marxist critical approach which focusses on class struggle is the literary theory which is applied to the study.*

Keywords: *resistance, slavery, freedom, rights, violence.*

RÉSUMÉ

*Le présent article vise à examiner la résistance à l'esclavage dans *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers* de Ayi Kwei Armah. Il explore les facteurs qui ont provoqué la résistance des africains à l'esclavage dans les deux romans. Dans cette optique, les dimensions philosophiques de la liberté qui forment la justification morale de la résistance sont examinées. Les facteurs sont discutés en terme de dénégation des droits et libertés, et*



de l'usage de la violence contre les esclaves. Des exemples d'exploitation et de violence sont cités pour donner du poids à la justification de la l'opposition des africains à l'esclavage. Les esclavagistes se sont montrés très violents dans leur tentative d'exploiter leurs soit disant esclaves. C'est vrai qu'ils ont payé d'une façon ou d'une autre pour eux, mais la manière dont ils les traitent est extrêmement absurde et inhumaine. D'où la résistance des africains dans le but de mettre fin à de tels traitements inhumains. L'étude a découvert que bien que l'esclavage trans-Atlantique a commencé par les enlèvements, les guerres internes, les razzias, la prise des captifs et la vente et l'achat des esclaves sur le continent africain, c'est sur le sol américain que l'esclavage a atteint son apogée. L'approche critique Marxiste qui converge vers la lutte des classes est la théorie littéraire qui est appliquée à l'étude.

Mots clés : *résistance, esclavage, liberté, droits, violence.*

INTRODUCTION

One cannot 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 American plantations and illustrations are done from African-American writers in our discussion of theorizing resistance. The paper discusses the nature of the resistance which has been categorized into two forms: 'Passive' resistance and 'Active' resistance. The terms 'African slave' and 'Negro slave' are used interchangeably. The term covers potential slaves as defined by Opoku-Agyemang (1996) as captive and chattel slaves.

The term 'slave master' or 'slave owners', 'slaves hunters' and 'slave holders' refer not only to European or American slavers but also to Arab predators, slave overseers, mulatto offspring used as 'factor' ('askaris', 'zombies', 'slave drivers') and African kings as well, the lackeys who do the dirty work for the whites. Armah himself describes *Two Thousand Seasons* as a historical novel and Aidoo heavily draws on material from both oral tradition and historical sources, especially the trade of human merchandise at the big house at Oguaa (Aidoo, 1970, p. 43). References are occasionally between freedom and liberty; the two terms being used interchangeably for the purpose of this discussion.

The paper is divided into three sections. The first section is "Moral Justification for Slavery." The second section is "Forms of Resistance" and



it includes Passive Resistance and Active resistance. The third section which is “Thematic Analysis of the Nature of Resistance” includes the Relevance of Contextual Analysis, Human Suffering under the Yoke of Slavery, the Desire for Freedom, African Heroism and Dignity, and African Culpability and Hope.

1. MORAL JUSTIFICATION FOR RESISTANCE

Resistance is synonymous with revolt, uprising, insurrection, and rebellion. Calhoun (1994, p. 167) defines ‘rebellion’ as “rejecting the approved goals and means of achieving those goals, and embracing or using new, socially disapproved ones instead.” He further defines it as “[...] protesting or fighting back” (Calhoun, 1994, p. 246). Resistance does not occur in a vacuum. It is the deprivation perpetration of certain conditions that create room for resistance. Using the moral – philosophical approach, we shall now discuss the first of two broad prerequisites deprivation of rights and freedoms.

Basically, what provides the platform for resistance is the deprivation of a captive of his inalienable right to freedom. According to Agorsah (2001, p. xi), “Freedom is the most desirable and tastiest of all things for human society.” 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 tropical sun” (Agorsah, 2001, p. xi).

Instances of deprivation of freedom abound in the literature. When one reads *Two Thousand Seasons*, one observes that not only are captives denied the freedom of mobility, but 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 dragged toward 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. 123). Clearly, this is not 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 toward this form of deprivation is token that he denounces that repugnance.



Not only are slaves denied ownership rights, they also denied the right to benefit from the fruit of their labor. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, Isanusi bemoans this situation as he laments that the lot of black man is “the planting and the caring” while the white man enjoys “the harvest and its profits” (p. 83). Of all the rights and freedoms, however, the greatest a man can yearn for a boast of is the right to live. The slave, nonetheless, is often denied this inalienable right. A few illustrations will underpin the point. Reading Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons*, 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, the scalded with hissing liquid of their Mothers’ wombs regained oblivion” (p. 45).

Chattel slavery is also characterized by violence and trauma. In reality, the whole machinery of slavery is so constructed as to cause violence; men and women alike are branded on the chest or at the back, with the initial of their master’s name or that of the trending company which owns them, for identification purposes. Armah provides a pictorial but harrowing description:

The tall slave-driver placed the four metals rods... carefully in the hottest parts of the fire... the man waited till the rods began to glow at their ends. Then, picking one up carefully with 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 for the oily flesh, 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. (*Two Thousand Seasons*, p. 118)

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). That is the price they have



to pay for being slaves and for being women. It must be admitted, however, that the sexual exploitation the 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 owner in one night because of the special dispensation the women enjoy. 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 slave master-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 a 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' weapon 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).

2. FORMS OF RESISTANCE

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. Equiano (1789, p. 66) 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."

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; this drastic action was 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 opening defying the authority of their masters. Such a radical slave acknowledges the wisdom of the philosophy that “in the triumph of destruction’s whiteness the destruction of destruction is the only vocation of the way” (*Two Thousand Seasons*, p. 203). They not only advocate aggressive resistance, but they also rebel against their masters, and assassinate them, or engage them in open physical confrontations.

Of course, one would not be justified in saying that 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.

3. RESISTANCE

3.1. 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 masters, at minimum or no risk to the perpetrators themselves. A form of passive resistance is an instance of a psychological warfare which manifests itself through the use of cleverness by slaves to outwit their masters. Slaves obtain satisfaction when they discover that their owners’ powers are, after all, not absolute, and that they (slaves) can assert themselves over their masters, albeit temporarily.

Piso’s slave is used in passive resistance. Bradley (1989) 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 honor is to be a dignitary named Clodius. At the appointed time, all the guests arrive except Clodius. So, Piso sends the slave in charge of inviting the guest of honor to see where he is, several times, but sill Clodius does not show up. In fact, Clodius has declined the invitation, but the slave fails to tell his master about it as a sign of resistance. When his master asks him why he didn't tell him about it earlier, he simply answers that it is because the master didn't ask. 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 physical warfare. Slaves, unlike other forms of chattel, are human beings with brains and the capacity to rationalize and 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 'Zombies' and 'askaris' in Armah's *The 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 master are suddenly inverted" (Bradley, 1989).

In *The Slave Raiders* (2004), Azasu 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 Douglass obtains education in spite of Mr. Auld's order that no slave should be educated, 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" (p. 78).

Slave religion is also used in passive resistance. So, another psychological armor with which slaves brave their condition is religion. Though slaves agonize under stabbing pangs of hunger, the whip, 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 they 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 a slave. Yoked to these is a 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; their grope toward some unseen, supernatural power for spiritual energy to endure the roving malignancy. Two mains forms of religion – slave religion and Christian religion – are practiced by slaves.

Through religious beliefs and rituals slaves are able to release themselves to their gods and to engage in passive resistance. Certain aspects of the beliefs 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* and *The Healers*. Resisting the repressive and dehumanizing stranglehold of slavery and dying in the process is seen as a means of hastening they 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. Some slaves genuinely convert themselves 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 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 or Greek, neither bond nor free... for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians, 3:28) and similar test which advocate equality of all races. Rather, they exploit biblical injunction 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 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, Douglass is right when he describes Christian slaveholders of the south as the worst, the meanest, and the most cruel (p. 177). The story in the Bible, nonetheless, strengthens the slaves, psychologically, and give them hope of a Moses to deliver them from bondage.

Slave songs constitute other means that slaves use in passive resistance. 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 the slaves; slaves sing most when they are most unhappy. In the words of 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 Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons*, one touches the inner pain of Minjendo and 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

Gives 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 lamentation, 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, Douglass observes, is not only a prima facie evidence against the evil of slavery but also a supplication to God for deliverance from bondage. The songs exercise a third function – they serve as the audio portion 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 captive 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 hear can decode.

It is from the foregoing discussion that music offers slaves the much-needed solace and 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 Du Bois (1996) begins each of the fourteen chapters of *The Souls of Black Folk* with a Negro song, songs in which the soul of the black slave speak to men.

Slaves also resort to the cultural articulation of resistance in passive resistance. On the African continent, tribesmen do not sit down languidly or fold their arms in between their thighs, and acknowledge themselves fit only to be captured and sold as slaves. They use several different tactics to resist the threat and reality of slavery. Communities not yet enslaved lived in persistent fear of capture and potential slaves. Such communities develop different strategies for survival. Opoku-Agyemang (1996, p. 7) has observed that a society that lives under a real and constant threat of enslavement consists of potential slaves, and a society with potential slaves will experience a cultural and psychological development peculiar to its environment. With the constant danger of capture, certain innate biologically determined drives to self-preservation will develop. The African culture will acquire certain characteristics and tendencies in order to adapt to and survive the danger.

An example of this highly developed sense of survival is the phenomenon of scarification, especially among ethnic groups of the Northern regions of West Africa. A newly born baby is given incision on the face, the arms or the stomach. These tribal marks range from a diagonal stroke running from the bridge of the eyes to the jaw, to two, three, or several vertical or horizontal lines on one or both side of the face. The simplicity or complicity of the incision depends on the tribes a person belongs to, the specific location a person hails from and the person status in the community or tribe. Though the motive of the ethnic identification and therapeutic benefits as *raison d'être* for the incision of tribal marks may not be discounted, the use of scarification as resistance against enslavement supersedes all other consideration. The incision is basically meant to render the marked tribesman unattractive as a potential marketable commodity and thereby to discourage slave hunters from capturing such marked person. This use of scarification as a form of resistance recalls a story in Sembène's *Tribal scars and others stories* (1987), 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 an incision 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, Sembène explains, is the origin of tribal scars (p. 116). Scarification is originally used as a contrived stratagem of resistance against enslavement. Among the strategies African people devised as a means of resistance to slavery is the sitting of settlement. Communities that felt threatened assumed a posture of perpetual defensiveness. To ward off slave raiders, such communities built thick walls around the major towns and villages. Other communities built their settlement on high hills and mountains. This, apart from being a deterrent to slave raiders who would have to climb to mountains at great risk to their own life, 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 defense. Oral tradition has it that for the same reason of warding off slave raiders, some African people live near caves. Thus, in the event of an attack, women, children, and aged were concealed in the cave.

Maroon societies are constituted by slaves in passive resistance. The African slave resistance is demonstrated time and again by the number of successful and unsuccessful attempts to escape from bondage. In Herstein's *Ama* (2000) Nandazi runs away from her captors but she is recaptured by Dambass search party (pp. 34-40). In *Equiano's Travels*, the protagonist reveals that his first reaction after he has been sold to his first slave master, the goldsmith is to plan his escape: "I therefore determine to seize the first opportunity of making my escape... for I was quite oppressed and weighed down by grief (p. 15). When one reads *Two Thousand Seasons*, one learns of the attempted escape of forty-three captives from unnamed slave-ship. Thirty of the escapees are recaptured and brought back to the ship. 'ten of them had died on 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. They excruciating labor, 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'



Narratives (1982, pp. 120-130) the bold attempt by Henry Harris, Hohn Bailey, Charles Roberts, and Douglass himself to escape from the plantation of Mr. Freeland 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 settlement. Such run-away slaves or ‘Maroons’ built Maroon communities or Maroon societies. Herstein relates the story of Palmeras, an independent African (Maroon) state which flourishes a hundred years in the forest of Brazil Herstein (2000, p. 399). It is clear that Maroon communities are widespread among the slaves.

3.2. Active Resistance

Though some slaves have strong faith in religion and 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 sirens 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 and aggressively hold out against enslavement. In *The Slave Raiders* (2004, p. 105), Captain John Hawkins illuminates this assertion when he confesses that quite unlike the popular belief that Negroes are very co-operative 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.

Hawkins is right. African slaves engage in active resistance. Active resistance is more aggressive in nature and it achieves immediate results. It aims 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, and no 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 slaves’ unbroken resistance, heroism, and dignity. A few illustrations will serve this interest.



Many African slaves refuse to submit to whip. The most publicized account of a slave resisting a whipping is the story told by Douglass in his *Narratives*. Douglass relates that after a series a flogging from Mr. Covey, the nigger-breaker, he made up his mind that if Mr. Covey tried to beat him in spite of his best effort 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 building; 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 a common modus operandi that ethnic communities use to ward off slave raiders. It is through a military offensive, commended by Boko Agozi and Awadada Axolu, that Captain John Hawkins and his slave-hunters (including Rev. Father Elias, Young Francis Drake, and Rachel) are captured, subdued, and placed in the inferior position to which their always submit their captives (*The Slave Raiders*, pp. 345-355). While reading Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, one comes 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 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 are set free. Other fifty Arab slave raiders are slaughtered in a military operation on



River Osu (pp. 176-177). Juma and his band of freedom fighters succeeded 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, led by 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 in these terms: “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 have chosen in resisting enslavement. In Ama's *Anowa* (1970, pp. 14-22), a group of Bekpokpam warriors armed with bows and poisoned arrows, engages the Bedagbam slave hunters in a bloody battle. 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 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 the fact that rebellion is the most dangerous form of resistance, in view of the enormity of its reprisals, African slaves will 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.

Active resistance includes 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, p. 104) report that there are detailed accounts for over a hundred and fifty-five plotted and executed mutinies on slave ships from 1699 to 1845. In an article, titled “A Reformed Slave Trader’s Regrets”, (in Northrup, 1994, p. 85), John Newton discloses that: “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.”

Newton is vindicated in Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons*. In the novel, a mutiny, cunningly crafted by Sobob, 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 captive. Armah describes how the last five slavers suffered violent death in these terms:

One white destroyer was thrown into the water with none of his limbs: these followed later. Another had his left tight stretched away from 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 a 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 butcher some slave dealers on board the ‘*Jesus*’ readily comes to mind (Azasu, 2002, 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 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 great group of fifty-three captives, led by Joseph Cinque, the son of 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 toward 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),



Joseph Cinque speaks the mind 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 Isanusis that emboldens the Louverture, the Veseys, the Turners, and the Cinques to take up arms and wage war against slavery, in a similar fashion. There are other bold options for resistance. Suicide is another desperate recourse that 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. They do this 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 other two unnamed slaves jumped into the sea to end all torture and humiliation at the hands of Cap. John Hawkins (p. 233). In Aidoo's *Anowa* (p. 63), the protagonist, whose name the play bears, commits suicide by drowning in the sea near the Cape Coast Castle in protest against Koffi Ago'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, once more, informs his readers of how Kwamen Owusu, one of the envoys sent from Kumassi, commits suicide at Praso: "Rather than become a white man's slave, the emissary blows out his brains with a gun" (*The Healers*, p. 316). Reading *Equiano's Travels*, one finds a man whose life becomes a burden to him. So, he resolves to starve himself to death and consequently refuses to eat any victuals (p. 62). In the same narrative, the following episode of suicide on board a slave ship reads:

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 the 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 honorable 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 African coast to the Americas" (p. 147).

Resistance is not carried out by men only. Women slave 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 to this fact in *Beloved* (1987). In that novel, Sethe, a pregnant slave, overwhelmed by the weight of so much violence and in spite of the pride of motherhood, slashes the throat of her daughter rather than allow her 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. Another 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 used by both men and women slaves at different times and different places, when slaves find it expedient to do so.

4. THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE NATURE OF RESISTANCE

4.1. Relevance of Contextual Analysis

According to McGraw-Hill (1987, p. 82), 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." He goes on



further to say: “No matter what form it takes, the theme lies at the very center of a work and ties all aspects of the work together to express the author’s insight” (p. 82). Functionally, a theme may be defined as a recurring idea or the underline 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 an 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 theme 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 underlined 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/archetypal are also used.

4.2. Human Suffering under the Yoke of Slavery

The suffering that slaves endure is the theme that runs through all the texts. This is understandable when one considers the fact that the constitution of slavery is predicted primarily on violence. Armah’s treatments of the agony slave go through exposes the evil nature of the institution of slavery and bring 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*, p. 118) does not only show the physical pain inflicted on innocent peasants, whose only crime is that they are captive; the description also depicts mental agony slaves endure as they watch the compatriots undergo excruciating torture. Not all people, especially, women, have the guts to withstand the 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 on 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 slaves' suffering in another light – the forced peregrination of captives to the coast. His description of the trek of the potential slaves, led by the visionary Anoa to escape slavery at the hands of the Arabs at the edge of the desert (*Two Thousand Seasons*, 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” (*Two Thousand Seasons*, 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 or premature childbirth, 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 captive, the sudden paradigm shift from royalty to slavery may be too traumatic to bear. Ordinary peace-loving peasants whose status is reduced to that of common criminals and who 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 the reader's attention to and solicits his sympathy for the sufferer.

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 unborn



babies) who refused to escape with fleeing potential slaves (*Two Thousand Seasons*, p. 45), showcases another profile of suffering that slaves endure – arson. The white predators, angered by the success of the escape, burn to ashes the relatives of all those who chose to stay. The novelist's enterprise in exposing his reader 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" (p. 45) 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 disaster (*The Healers*, 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*, pp. 190-195), he does so to save the slaves from suffering unjustifiable pain and execution. Armah also reveals that on the death of a King, slaves are slaughtered at random; no one is safe. It should be remembered that the root cause of Asamoah Nkwanta's illness is the killing of his nephew (pp. 202-204), one such occasion. Executers can kill as many as a hundred. There is such an orgy of bloodletting, as some of the corpses are used to cushion the graves 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 secretly for a considerable number of months. The whole episode starts as a rumor. For the long period that the rumor makes the rounds, the slaves have 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 is, without doubt, 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 daily fearful speculation of 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 total condemnation. Not only do women endure rampant bouts of forced sex; they are compelled to accept whatever the slave masters insert to their female genitals – meatballs, dawa drug (p. 21), the tongue, the thumb and the overgrown, dirt-filled fingers and toes of the Arab slavers (p. 24). The sexual contact meant to bring sensual pleasure to both partners, Armah portrays, becomes a painful and physical motion without any emotional involvement, an instrument of torture to the enslaved African women. According to Armah, the women slave nurse a furious hatred for the Arabs for having delated their ego as would-be mothers. The progressive brutality of the predators puts the women in a rebellion frame of mind. Using their most powerful weapon, their women first unman the Arabs; and having mesmerized them with an overdose of sex, hit them hardly where they are the 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 fatality.

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 days and nights, a warning to the others (*Two Thousand Seasons*, p. 30). The enslaved woman's state of helplessness is decided through her tied hands, her nakedness, her stooping posture, her parted legs and her exposed vagina. The total humiliation has never been so vividly and powerfully communicated on the pages of the novel as in this unwholesome description. A warning to others, indeed. The inference here is that some women slaves are compelled to witness the gory dehumanization in all its terrible grandeur. In this image, the woman slave becomes an epitome of agony. By placing the female slave in the foreground of the picture, Armah provides a visually arresting image 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 physical pain from the victims' lower abdomen and vagina made sore by beastly copulation cannot match the humiliation they have to go through



the rest of their lives, living with their knowledge that they had been raped four-footed animal, a beast. And what mindset, 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 the reader's 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 his fellow human beings, created in the image of God, with such callousness and savagery. Really, slavery defaces the divine image. By highlighting the sex orges as vulgar aberrations of humanity that need to be condemned, the writer stimulates pity for slaves. 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 against slavery.

4.3. 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. Armah treats this theme in different perspectives. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, 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 practice their authentic African culture, as first rate 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 Palmar (1979, p. 231) 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." It is the journey to reestablish 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 their 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 use, where safe, in their quest to regain their freedom. In *Two Thousand*



Seasons, Armah reveals how groups who succeed in executing their escape build new settlements or Maroon communities and maintain their cultural identity. It is worth noting that Maroons operate under a clear paradox; they look for safety in very unsafe places and make those places a home meant to be a place of comfort. But Maroons live in such 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 adventures. 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 in, 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 the Western Region of Ghana), an entire township built on a lake. The settlement stands on platforms constructed on pillars erected in 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*, Armah discusses the quest for freedom in different contexts, including 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 freedom and territorial integrity Kingdom are threatened by the advanced 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 waging a war against the invaders is the only course open to them. 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 deserves analysis in this discussion is the rationale behind the decision to confront the light of invading British force. Armah demonstrates that the Asante armies are ready to pour out their blood in defense of their freedom which 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, but they also prove the point that they are not a mass of submissive objects that accept slavery with passive obedience.

In *The Healers*, Ababio's egocentrism and opportunistic propensity offers another context, albeit negative, in which the theme of desire for



liberty finds expression. It is for the selfish interest of ensuring his individual or personal freedom that Ababio, the grandson of a slave, opts to become a factor of the white slavers. He reveals to Densu the white predators' ultimate objective and how the traitor (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 am 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 these 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 considers the Fante Kings, the Ga King and the other Kings from the Eastern province, and their countiers, like 'Ababio', as traitors. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, when Juma agrees to become an askaris, he does so in order to secure his individualistic, personal freedom, to escape the unrelenting violence, as promised by 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 to avoid losing it. They are prepared to regain their freedom by any means, fair or foul.

The point has been established that rebellion is the most dangerous form of resistance in view of the gravity of its reprisals. However, 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 for 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 intention 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 the 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 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 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 in 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-excitant. An illustration of this is the fact that slaves still plot and execute brutal retributions and 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 Greenville Sharpe and William Wilberforce were born).

It must however be admitted that not all slaves attain success in their attempt to regain their freedom by force. They are either betrayed from within or suppressed by their greater numbers or superior weaponry. Such freedom fighters suffer savage reprisals. But even in such resistances, the insurrections 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 doubt about the slave's unquenchable desire for freedom. It is that indomitable spirit which energises slaves to embark upon resistance in diverse form.



4.4. African Heroism and Dignity

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 valor 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 and destroy destruction with destruction.

Armah portrays slaves as showing a lot of enterprise in the fight to retrieve their freedom. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, 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 retaliation by the 'askaris' after the women had plotted and murdered the twenty-six Arab slave masters reveals 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 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*, when Kwamen Owusu blasts his brain out with a gun (p. 316), he does so to show his preference for honorable death to life in agony. By opting to commit suicide, Kwamen Owusu intends to show that he is not ready to suffer the calamities which were about to befall the Asante Kingdom. Through this act, he definitely resorts to a sacrifice of himself to save the Asanteman. Armah shows the ironic status of Osuwu 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 scarified) 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 adduced 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 others are opinion leaders. They may be heathen, simple-minded or unlettered, but they are human beings who have intelligence and integrity. Naturally, they react when they find their freedom status drastically distorted or captured by the mortifying circumstances of slavery. African slaves demonstrate their humanity by refusing to be treated like beasts. They choose death! They commit suicide; therefore, their objective 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 "Fernaowu, Fenyimowu" (Better die than live a tormented, miserable, shameful life). Secondly, the belief, Armah shows, is widespread among slaves, that a designed death enables the soul of the departed to return to the homeland and join the ancestors. An honorable death is a gateway to immortality. Attaining ancestor-status is a cherished dream of all Africans. This explains the the we-narrator's apprehension in *Two Thousand Seasons* 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 no returning" (p. 127).

Thirdly, slaves see suicide as an honorable means of escape from pain and as a heroic quest for justice. Having enjoyed life as free citizens before being forced into captivity, slaves are conscious and desirous of the kind of world they wish to have. By taking their own lives, slaves show their integrity, dignity, and heroism. They opt to put an end to all pains once and for all, in the dignified Roman way. Obviously, only the brave can tread the 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 displayed. Armah's portrayal of a reversal of roles in *Two Thousand Seasons* 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'. 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 the destroyed; a case of 'the lizard chasing a 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 Christiansburg Castle, Osu, Accra, by Asamani, an Akwamu trader, in 1863. With these acts of gallantry and many others, Armah tries to show that African slaves prove themselves people of remarkable shrewdness. This tears into shreds the Europeans' misconception of the Negro being deficient in mental capacity (*Two Thousand Seasons*, p. 200). 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 most of the slaves believe in the dictum of destroying destruction. Even slaves of the former category, who seemingly accept their slave status, use silent and indifference as weapons of resistance. We may conclude, then, that the violence used by slaves does not originate from slaves; it is a response to 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 numerous and varied. And these are not limited to men only. By their high-spirited acts of defense and bravery, women slaves also attain iconic status. Sexual intercourse, or the denial of it is one such tool. Women slaves are not also 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, anytime, anywhere and any day. Some of the women slaves find this situation not only humiliating but also consider it as an affront to womanhood and to their moral sensibility. To demonstrate their abhorrence of this form of offence to 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*, p. 171), she does so to show not only the sacredness of womanhood but also her contempt for her bloated stooge. Idawa hands King Koranche a crushing defeat and achieves a psychological victory when she snubs his advances. Her open show of contempt for King Koranche not only depresses him, but it also makes the King 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 to be in league with the white slavers in one night, greatly upsets King Koranche. Otumfur, the flatterer, is appointed to do the work of deceit Isanusi has refused to do. However, it is significant to note that at the point where Isanusi turns down Koranche's suggestion, he 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 an iconic status as he exhibits tenacity and bravery.

4.5. African Culpability and Hope

Condemnation of the trade in human beings cannot be heaped on European slavers alone insofar as 'it takes two to trade'. Armah establishes 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 indicated. The culpability of Africans constitutes another theme in the resistance to slavery.

In *The Healers*, Armah 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, European 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 that 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 the Europeans in the castle and forts. We can reasonably conclude from the two statements that African Kings constitute the main trading partners of European slave merchants since they (Kings) own the bulk of the slaves. Owning a large stock of slaves naturally makes it easier for them 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 whites 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 the oppression of their kith and kin. The vanquished Asante Kingdom may be even more peeved with Akan kinsmen on the coast than with the white invaders. As an Akan proverb puts it, “The lizard says, ‘the one who killed me does not cause me as much vexation as the one who held me by my tail and flung me away’”. The writer treats the coastal and the 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 Seasons*. 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 who assemble the captives? European, undoubtedly Africans. This constitutes another testimony of African guilt. Throughout the novel, nothing complementary 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, but they are also dishonest,



perfidious and crippled in intelligence. Armah deeply incriminate African Kings when he speaks through Juma in these terms:

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. (*Two Thousand Seasons*, p. 146)

The statement above is an indictment of a man much embittered by a kind of injustice inflicted on him and by his own community leader. Juma is justified. When an African King lures his own people to go on board a ship, under the pretext of holding a feast for them abroad, only for the subjects to be made drunk, shackled and taken captive when the King sneaks back the shores (*Two Thousand Seasons*, pp. 106-110), one is convinced, beyond all reasonable doubt, about the greed and the guilt of African royalty. Certainly, the authorial intrusion, “African Kings are betrayers. By conniving with white destroyers to enslave our people, African Kings are betrayers as well. And they must die with their white mentors”. The execution of the King Koranche and his hangers-on by Abena and her group of freedom fighters (*Two Thousand Seasons*, p. 196), justifies this inference.

In *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah does not hide his indignation for this unjustifiably privileged class of African who sell hundreds and thousands of their fellows Africans. The venom he directs to 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 superior’s praise names and empty titles (p. 171), Armah holds them up to public ridicule. Characteristically, Armah’s portrayal of 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 Europeans’ complete contempt for the African mind... unfortunately, the behavior of the King and his courtiers confirms the Europeans imperialists in their view” (p. 232). Armah even curses African Kings: “may... disaster strike those among our elders whose greed overwhelms their knowledge of the way” (p. 5).

Although we may not blame apartheid on South African blacks who collaborated with whites in South Africa, nor blame the holocaust on Jews who assisted Germans, it is important that we should blame the Africans who collaborated with Europeans in enslaving Africans. In the first place,



the holocaust and the Atlantic slave trade are incomparable. The former does not come anywhere near the latter in term of numbers, duration and severity of its inhumanity. In addition, unlike South African blacks, the African collaborators in the slave trade are more informants and ‘zombies’; they are active participants and equal partners in that commercial enterprise, even if the term of slave trade weighs heavily in favor of the buyers.

Literature inbounds with insistences where African Kings and slave traders sell their fellow Africans for a few bottles of wine or mirrors or guns or pieces of cotton cloth. There is no way Africans represented here by their leaders, the Kings, can escape blame for their role in the inhuman trade. Armah leaves no doubts 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, on one way or the other, becomes partaker in the guilt of it. The writer highlights the guilt of Africans when he fictionalizes slaves’ resistance against African royalty and merchants. Perhaps, if Africans had resisted with the same zealotry exhibited by Anowa, the trade would have collapse earlier.

One persuasion that slaves cling to with tenacity is hope. Hope of the slave is another subject of thoughts 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 slave 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 ‘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 portents hope. Slaves revolt, the writer seems to say, because there is hope of 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 raises above their physical and psychological wounds and fire them to achieve successes in their resistance. The theme of hope resonates in *The Healers* 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 slave, the slave will overcome some day.

CONCLUSION

The paper has examined three sections. The first section which is “Moral Justification for Slavery” has discussed the philosophical dimensions of the rights of man, which forms the moral justification for slaves' resistance. The second section which is “Forms of Resistance” has shown that Passive Resistance and Active resistance are the two forms of resistance used by slaves in their endeavor to break the chains of slavery. The third section which is “Thematic Analysis of the Nature of Resistance” has dealt with the Relevance of Contextual Analysis, Human Suffering under the Yoke of Slavery, the Desire for Freedom, African Heroism and Dignity, and African Culpability and Hope.

In a nutshell, this study looked at the factors that give rise to resistance, namely the deprivation of right and the perpetration of violence against slaves. Finally, it has 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 vacuum. It erupts as a reaction to an unjust system of deprivation executed through violence. Armah fictionalizes the reality of the Atlantic Slave Trade and its offshoot, slave resistance. Through the use of horrible scenes and actions, he has succeeded in showing how inhumane the Atlantic Slave Trade is. He has succeeded in impacting his readership by rousing his readers' sorrow and sympathy. Without doubt, slavery remains the most awful and the most terrible historical phenomenon that the world has ever known.

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