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**Presented by:**

Naima Akkache.

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**The Reconstruction of Black History in Ayi Kwei  
Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) and Toni  
Morrison's *Beloved* (1987).**

**Panel of Examiners:**

SIBER Mouloud, MCB, Université Mouloud Mammeri de Tizi-Ouzou, Président.

HADDADOU Mohammed, Maitre Assistant Classe A, Université Mouloud Mammeri de Tizi-Ouzou, Rapporteur.

LAOUARI Boukhalfa, Maitre Assistant Classe A, Université Mouloud Mammeri de Tizi-Ouzou, Examineur.

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**Abstract:**

The following dissertation argues that the prominent concern of the contemporary African writer Ayi Kwei Armah and the American Toni Morrison is the recuperation of lost, misrepresented or occluded history of their communities. At the basis of the research is the belief that a commonality of experience and interests can lead writers belonging to different cultural backgrounds and disparate geographic areas to write in a similar way and share a similar concern. Our special aim is to explain how Morrison and Armah in their respective novels *Beloved* (1987) and *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) reconstruct the history of their communities by transgressing what is mapped out in the traditional historiography. To achieve this aim, we resort to the New historicist theory, borrowing from the theoretical ideas of the French thinker Michel Foucault in his acknowledged work *The Archeology of knowledge* (1969) and his theoretical assumption of Counter-History (1970). Armah's and Morrison's retelling of the history of their communities from that angle leads, as it is portrayed in their novels, to a history which demarcates from the official one and seeks to revise it at both form and content. Our dissertation centers mainly on the affinities that exist between the two author's endeavors, but we have also sorted out some points of divergence concerning the authors' use of the African oral tradition.

**Key words:** New Historicism, Michel Foucault, Literary Archeology, Dominant Discourse, Traditional Historiography, Counter-History, Ayi Kwei Armah, Toni Morrison, African Literature, American Literature, African Oral Tradition.

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" You Know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down its gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened."

**Toni Morrison.**

"We are not a people of yesterday. Do they ask how many single seasons we have flowed from our beginnings till now? We shall point them to the proper beginning of their counting. On a clear night when the light of the moon has blighted the ancient woman and her seven children [...] After the beginning they will not have ponder where to start. Have them count the sand. Let them count it again from single grain."

**Ayi Kwei Armah.**

## Introduction

Throughout history, the so called “inferior” human races have suffered from slavery for thousands of years. This practice goes back to ancient times and expanded more in the fifteenth century in the African continent, especially during the slave trade and the Middle Passage from Africa to the Americas. Black People were the most exposed to this practice as they were bought and sold because of the color of their skin and were deprived of their humanity.

From the mid-eighteenth century onwards, “pro-slavery” emerged as an ideology to justify this practice. Thus, the supposed absence of civilization in Africa, and the alleged primitive and backward nature of its indigenous societies, coupled with the negative connotations of blackness in western thought, provided justification for the enslavement of black people.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, these people were excluded from the realm of human consideration in Western books of geography, travels, novels, history and media.

It is on the basis of the foregoing context that the primary concern of most “race-conscious” writers is to inscribe their works in the process of rewriting the history of their communities that the traditional historiography has often occluded, distorted or manipulated. Different voices emerged from Africa and the Diaspora to endorse this historic mission. Among these writers, we can cite the African author Ayi Kwei Armah and the American Toni Morrison. These two writers tried in their respective works *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) and *Beloved* (1987) to provide a better representation for their race and put the history of their communities in a position of centrality in the Grand Narratives, after they have been for so long put into the margins.



The American writer Toni Morrison, who received many awards including the 1988's Pulitzer Prize for fiction and the 1993's Nobel Prize for literature, in her literary works, *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992), *Paradise* (1997) and *Love* (2003) has made a great effort to rewrite and correct all what has been written on blacks. The same enterprise has been undertaken by Ayi Kwei Armah, a Ghanaian author who, for a long period of time tried to fight with his pen Western education and its heritage in Africa. His literary works, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) and *The Healers* (1979), have established him as one of the black outstanding writers in Africa along with Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and Ngugi WaThing'o.

When reading Morrison's *Beloved* and Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, we can easily remark that their primary concern is the urge to put the record straight while revising the history of their communities. This is why they try to offer in their works, an original way of revising the history of their communities by transgressing what is mapped out in official histories.

## **Review of the Literature**

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* have received a wide range of criticism. Concerning *Beloved*, the critic Melanie, R. Anderson states that it is a mere work of fiction. She considers this narrative as an "*obvious ghost story since one of the integrality characters of the novel is a revenant*"<sup>2</sup>. She also considers "Beloved" as a ghost resulting from slavery which leaves the reader with the impression that she "*will return if ever a need for cultural "rememory" occurs again.*"<sup>3</sup>. Here, Anderson considers the main character Beloved as the "embodiment" of slavery and a medium between the past and the present.

Harold Bloom on his side says that “*Beloved reenacts sexual violation [...] Her insistent manifestation constitutes a challenge for the characters who have survived rape inflicted while they were enslaved; directly and finally communally, to confront a past they cannot forget.*”<sup>4</sup>. Here, Bloom tries to show how such experiences may infiltrate the lives of the future generations of black people as they are difficult to move on and forget. He also insists on the character Beloved as a figuration of sexual trauma, as this character recalls the experiences of rape suffered by her mother, Paul D, Ella and countless unnamed ancestors forced to make the Middle Passage from Africa to the Americas.

Concerning *Two Thousand Seasons* by Ayi Kwei Armah, Adéléko Adéko states that Armah in this novel is deeply concerned with a narrative method which seeks to reveal the cultural damages caused by colonialism by using a fictive narrative strategy to reveal the deep suffering of the African people:

A novel which mixes the historian’s devotion to truth-ascertaining methods and the mythmakers passion for rhythmic images [...] This novel thematizes both the agonies of cultural emasculation caused by colonialism and the narrative maneuvers employed in the fictionalization of those pains”<sup>5</sup>.

Oyekan Owomoyela moves beyond the cultural damages of colonialism to consider *Two Thousand Seasons* as an allegory of the abuse of the Africans “*The novel basis thesis is that blacks lost a path and it is clear from the prologue that this loss is responsible for the travail suffered by blacks over a period of thousands years.*”<sup>6</sup>. This critic emphasizes more the abuses and atrocities inflicted upon the blacks and relate them to the causes of the disorientation of the African people.

In addition to these critics, Malika Bouhadiba is among the recent ones who put Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons* and Morrison’s *Beloved* together into perspective. This Algerian critic asserts in her article ‘The Work of Memory as a ‘Counter-Discursive Strategy’

in Ngugi's, Armah's and Morrison's Fictional works' that Morrison and Armah are among the many other "Diasporic scholars" who rely on the work of memory for a traumatic historical retrieval "*Morrison and Armah's memory work is concerned with a dramatic and traumatic episode of their race history*"<sup>7</sup>. Bouhadiba means that the Counter-Memory strategy used in both works plays a pivotal role in reactivating the past and making the horrors of the Middle Passage in *Beloved* and the episode of the slave-trade in *Two Thousand Seasons* well recorded and fathomed.

### **Issue and Hypothesis**

We have seen in the review of the existing literature on the two writers that Malika Bouhadiba relied on the work of memory as a counter-discursive strategy in her reconstructing attempt. However, our work demarcates from Bouhadiba's since we will resort to different literary strategies in our comparative study between Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Thus, to show the shared ways in which the two authors narrate the history of their communities in defiance of the official historiography, we suggest exploring the two works from a new historicist standpoint. To achieve our aim, we will borrow from the French thinker and theoretician Michel Foucault's theoretical assumptions in the *Archeology of Knowledge* (1969) and his theoretical concept of Counter-History (1970).

To implement our research, we will divide our dissertation into four sections. In the Method and Material section, we will include short summaries of the two theories that we are going to apply in our analysis. We will also include brief summaries of the two chosen novels, their historical background and setting, as well as a short biography of the two authors. In the third section which is the results section, we will give an overview of our findings. The fourth section will be the discussion section and we will divide it into two chapters. The first

one will be devoted to an archeological reading of Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* and Morrison's *Beloved*, borrowing from Foucault archeological method in the *Archeology of Knowledge*. The second chapter will be a complement to the first one, and we will show in it the ways in which the two authors revise and reconstruct the history of their communities and challenge the official historiography, relying on Foucault's theoretical assumptions of Counter-History.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Adeleke Tunde, *The Case Against Afrocentrism* (U.S.A: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 60.

<sup>2</sup> Melanie R Anderson, *Spectrality in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (U.S.A: University of Tennessee Press, 2013), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.,80.

<sup>4</sup> Harold Bloom, *Toni Morrison's Beloved* (U.S.A: Chelsea House Publishers, 2004), 71.

<sup>5</sup> Adéléké Adééko, *Proverbs, Textuality and Nativism in African Literature* (New York: Florida University Press, 1998), 78.

<sup>6</sup> Oyekan Owomoy, *West African Literature: Ways of Reading* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 103.

<sup>7</sup> Malika Bouhadiba, 'The Work of Memory as a 'Counter-Discursive Strategy' in Ngugi's, Armah's and Morrison's Fictional works' (AWEJ Special Issue on Literature, No. 1, 2013).

# Method and Materials

## I-Methodological Considerations

New historicism emerged as a challenge to the traditional historiography which claims objectivity and truthfulness<sup>1</sup>. The French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984), has largely marked and influenced the literary sphere of the Twentieth Century with his archeological ideas that have been of a paramount importance in the development of New Historicist theory.

### 1- The Archeology of Knowledge

Michel Foucault explains in *The Archeology of Knowledge* that he brings a new method and orientation while dealing with the account of history. Therefore, he lays the foundation of his work on the postulate that the supposed task of a historian is to explore a given epoch to expose the “other history”, which “runs beneath history”<sup>2</sup>. To achieve such a task, a whole process is to be undertaken.

One pertinent point in this process which summarizes better Foucault’s endeavor is his idea of discontinuity. In fact, *The Archeology of Knowledge* is conceived as a challenge to the traditional Western “*holistic view of history that emphasizes such concepts as unity, continuity and correlation*”<sup>3</sup>. However, Foucault points out that history is a process of ruptures and discontinuities “*which must be detached from the image which satisfied it for so long, and through which it found its anthropological justification: that of an age-old collective consciousness*”<sup>4</sup>.

Foucault argues that one of the most important features of his “*new history is probably this displacement of the discontinuous*”<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, he contends that history should not be viewed as a continuous line of knowledge, “*but that we must identify ruptures to be*

*able to identify fragments of history that were left behind*<sup>6</sup>. We are told in his work that “Archeology is much more willing than the history of ideas to speak of discontinuities, ruptures, gaps”<sup>7</sup>. Accordingly, by interrupting the linearity of the official history and looking at its ruptures, we will be able to identify and decipher “*fragments of history left behind by the social and political powers*”<sup>8</sup>.

According to Foucault, knowledge is created through discourse. However, the discourse that becomes history is the discourse of the powerful<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, we shall look at the knowledge eliminated from history with the same respect as the one propagated as history. We have to do this to dig out the truth that the official history wishes to ignore. This is why his “discursive field” is oriented to identify the other “forms of statement” or discourses that the global history excludes<sup>10</sup>.

Foucault based also his new method in dealing with the account of history on the questioning of the already said as stated in the following quotation from the *Archeology of Knowledge*:

All these syntheses that are accepted without question, must remain in suspense [...] the tranquility with which they are accepted must be disturbed; we must show that they do not come about themselves, but are the result of a construction <sup>sick</sup> the rules of which must be known, and the justification of which must be scrutinized”<sup>11</sup>.

Another pertinent point in Foucault’s archeological method is the need of detaching the individual discourse from the statements of the dominant one “*we must oust those forms and obscure forces by which we usually link the discourse of one man with that of another; they must be driven out from the darkness in which they reign*”<sup>12</sup>. This will free the individual discourse from the constraints of the holistic and global one and therefore give a voice to the marginalized categories of people as stated by Foucault in the following quotation from the *Archeology of Knowledge* “*Archeology articulates the language of a voice since reduced to silence*”<sup>13</sup>.

## 2-Foucault's Theoretical Concept of Counter- History

Michel Foucault has also exerted a notable influence on the development of New historicism with his theoretical assumptions of Counter-History that derives from his ideas of Critical Genealogies that according to him contribute to the production of Counter-Histories, which are based on the experiences and memories that have not been integrated in official histories.<sup>14</sup> The critic José Medina explains in his article entitled "Toward a Foucaultian Epistemology of Resistance: Counter-Memory, Epistemic Friction, and *Guerrilla* Pluralism" (2011), that Foucault's Counter-History is the one which can rip the veil of all what has been silenced or not heard before and which can speak the discourses of those who have no glory and who were kept in darkness and silence for a long period of time as stated in the following quotation<sup>15</sup>:

This counter-history also breaks the continuity of glory. It reveals that the light, the famous dazzling effect of power, is not something that petrifies, solidifies, and immobilizes the entire social body, and thus keeps it in order; it is in fact a divisive light that illuminates one side of the social body but leaves the other side in shadows or casts it into darkness<sup>16</sup>.

Foucault believes that Counter-History challenges the official one as it teaches us precisely how to listen to those silent and dark moments<sup>17</sup>. We find therefore in his work helpful insights and explanation that play a pivotal role "*in fighting against the omissions and active oblivion produced by discursive practices*".<sup>18</sup> Hence, he believes that fighting against those exclusions, omissions, silenced voices and occluded meanings in official historiography requires a Counter-History. This Counter-History aims at revisiting the texts that have come to be considered as being foundational of one's history, "*the primary points of reference of the practice, and developing a new way of reading them, so as to train our eyes and ears to new meanings and voices*"<sup>19</sup>.

Foucault means that a return to the texts that have come to be seen as foundational of one's history is a crucial process in revising history, in objecting to the dominant discourse and in reactivating the past as shown in the following quotation:

The ability to revise these foundational texts is a crucial part of the critical agency for resisting power/knowledge frame-works. Hence, the disunity effects of a counter-history have the potential to destabilize a normative order by introducing a counter-perspective that resists and invalidates the normative expectations of the imposed dominant discourse.<sup>20</sup>



## II-Materials

### 1-Biographical Elements

#### a- Biography of Toni Morrison

Toni Morrison was born Chloe Anthony Wofford in Lorain (Ohio) in 1931. She was descended from a family of migrants and sharecroppers. Her father, George, was a welder, and often told her folktales of the black community, handing down his African-American heritage to her generation. As an African-American woman in a town of immigrants, Morrison grew up with the conviction that the only safe place for her is within her own community in Lorain, Ohio, where she can escape from stereotyped black settings <sup>21</sup>.

In 1949, Toni Morrison entered Howard University in Washington, D.C, one of America's most prestigious black colleges, and then continued her studies at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, where she received her M.A. in 1955. Two years later (1957), Morrison became an instructor in English at Texas Southern University, at Houston, and taught in the English department at Howard <sup>22</sup>.

In 1970, Morrison started her literary career while publishing her first work *The Bluest Eye*. The novel failed to attract the public's interest. *Sula*, Morrison's second novel, was published in 1973, and because of her thorough portrayal of the African-American lifestyle; it was nominated for National Book Award and received the Ohioana Book Award. Her next novel, *Song of Solomon* (1977), was a paperback best seller in which she renders homage to the richness and variety of the black cultural heritage. This novel was one of Morrison's masterpieces that won her many distinguished awards including: The National Book Critics Circle Award and the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award <sup>23</sup>.

In 1987, Morrison published *Beloved*. The novel succeeded to win public interest and international success. It was honored with the Pulitzer Prize and won other distinguished awards including the New York State Governor's Arts Award, the First recipient of the Washington College Literary award, the National Book Award nomination as well as the National Book Critics Circle Award nomination <sup>24</sup>.

In 1993, Morrison was rewarded with a precious award; the Nobel Prize for Literature which established her as a major American writer along many other names in the American literary agenda. Therefore, she became the eighth woman and the first African-American woman to win the prize. Morrison states: "*What is most wonderful for me, personally, is to know that the Prize at last has been awarded to an African-American. Winning as an American is very special-but winning as a Black American is a knockout.*"<sup>25</sup>.

After receiving the highest honor in literature, Morrison continued her success and reentered the best sellers list with the publication of *Paradise* (1997) and *The Big Box* (1999), a novel she wrote with her son <sup>26</sup>.

#### **b- Biography of Ayi Kwei Armah**

Ayi Kwei Armah was born in 1939 in the twin harbor city of Sekondi Takoradi in western Ghana. He was descended from a royal family in the Ga tribe. He was raised in this British colonial city, in a multilingual environment. Armah received his early education at the prestigious Achimota College, a secondary school in Accra; its alumni have included Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president, and the writer Kofi Awnoor <sup>27</sup>.

In 1959, Armah studied in Groton School in Groton, Massachusetts. After graduating, he entered Harvard University, where he changed from literature to opt for social Science studies, where he received with honor a degree in sociology. Armah entered Algeria and hold a job of translator for the magazine *Révolution Africaine* <sup>28</sup>.

Armah's poor health in the 1960's pushed him to return to Ghana, where he occupied a post of a scriptwriter for Ghana's television and later taught English at the Navarongo School. In the years of 1967 and 1968, he became an editor of *Jeune Afrique* magazine in Paris and in 1968-70, he obtained his M.F.A. in creative writing from Columbia's University<sup>29</sup>.

Armah's career as a writer began in the 1960s while publishing poems and short stories in the Ghanaian magazine *Okyeame*, and in *Harper's*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, and *New African*. His first novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are not Yet Born* (1968), was conceived as an allegorical story of the failure of an African ruling system. In his second novel, *Fragments* (1971), as in his first, Armah tries to contrast two opposite worlds, one of materialism and corruption and one of dreams and moral values. *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972), is Armah's third novel which provides an insightful portrayal for the life he experienced in American campuses where blacks were targets of racial insults and stereotypes<sup>30</sup>.

Not many African authors have devoted their works to the slave trade in the African past. This is why this topic has been of great deal in *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973). The novel illustrates the different invaders that entered Ghana and West Africa including the Arabs and western ones. Concerning Armah's third novel, *The Healers* (1979), it tackles the issue of traditional medicine practitioners who consider fragmentation as the lethal disease of Africa. Armah then remained silent as a novelist for a long period until 1995 when he published *Osiris Rising*, a work about an educational reform group, which reinstates ancient Egypt at the center of its curriculum<sup>31</sup>.

## 2- Summaries of the two Novels

### a- Summary of *Beloved*

We are in 1873, during the Reconstruction, in the United States of America. Sethe, a former slave, lives with her daughter Denver in a house in a rural area near Cincinnati. Eighteen years have passed since she escaped from slavery from a farm called Sweet Home and killed her two years old daughter "Beloved. This farm was run by a white man known as schoolteacher, who treated the slaves in the most atrocious ways. Sethe fled from this farm while she was pregnant; giving birth to Beloved along the way. Her husband, who was supposed to give a hand, disappeared, leaving her alone in a hostile environment where blacks, especially women, were ill-treated and turned into sexual playthings.

After this slave woman succeeded to escape to Cincinnati with her four children, her hope for freedom and liberty was high but at the end, it was shattered as she was recaptured again by her old master. Not knowing how to cope with this incident, she decided to kill her children, rather than allowing them to be recaptured back to slavery, but she succeeded only in killing her two years old daughter. Because of this act, Sethe was rejected by her master and was released from jail to raise her other children.

Eighteen years have passed since Sethe's infanticide and the ghost of the dead baby began to haunt her house. Sethe's two sons, Howard and Buglar, left the house after knowing that it is haunted by a spirit. The grandmother, Baby Suggs, who is regarded as a "holy woman" and one of the emblems of the black community at Cincinnati, died of melancholy after knowing what happened to Sethe. After Baby Suggs' death, Paul D Garner, a man who was a slave with Sethe back at Sweet Home came to Sethe's house. This man, like Sethe, is haunted by the pain of the past and the horrible memories he endured in bondage in a prison for blacks.

Some months later, a girl named Beloved came to Sethe's house. At first, Sethe, Paul D and Denver thought that this girl is one among the many other blacks who survived slavery and welcomed her to their house. Later, because of the strange nature of this girl, it becomes clear that she is the ghost of the dead baby that comes back to life at the age she would have been if she lived. The presence of this girl in Sethe's life is almost destructive for Sethe as Beloved's main purpose is to take off the life of her mother and turn her mad.

The presence of Paul D Garner in Sethe's life leads to a love relationship between them. However, Beloved does not allow their love to grow and tries her best to separate them. Sethe, on discovering Beloved's identity, believes that she has been given a second chance and starts to develop an obsessive love for this young woman as a way of repairing the damage she has done eighteen years earlier. The ghost does not forgive her for her action and settles in the house to take revenge. With Beloved's presence in Seth's life, Sethe becomes almost depressed and Paul D Garner leaves when he learns that Sethe murdered her own child.

When the women of Cincinnati heard about the ghost and the pain it causes to Sethe, they helped her to exorcise it. The ghost disappeared, but Sethe's psyche has been broken. Paul D Garner returns to Sethe's house and swears to help her in healing her psyche and forgetting about the past. Denver, Paul D, and Sethe decide to build a new life, one in which they try to learn how to cope with their painful past while focusing on the future. Sethe realizes: "*The future was sunset; the past is something to leave behind. And if it didn't stay behind, well, you might have to stomp it out.*"<sup>32</sup>.

#### **b- Summary of *Two Thousand Seasons***

*Two Thousand Seasons* starts with a lyrical prologue in which the author announces with a very firm tone that he is going to retell the history of Ghana and Africa in general. The

novel contains seven parts. The first one opens with a remembrance of how the people of Anoa's land lived before the advent of the foreign invaders. The first predators to arrive to "Anoa" are the Arabs. They are described as "beggars" and given the name of the "predators" that began to enslave the natives and impose their culture, including their religion on them.

The second wave of invaders comes to reach Anoa. They are the Europeans who came from the sea. They are called the "destroyers" and are depicted as more brutal and harsh with the natives than their predecessors. The native King Koranche welcomes the white men and sells his own people for them for jewelry. Consequently, the people of Anoa begin to flee from their homes.

The people of Anoa flee Koranche's terror and met the wise "Isanusi", a native that Koranche has punished because of his opposition to the white invaders. This old man begins to instruct the people who fled from their land, searching for peace and provides them with spiritual and moral education. These, later on, and in spite of this, accept Koranche's invitation to a reconciliation meeting. The latter betrays them and sells them as slaves to the Europeans.

At the end of the novel, the group of Africans goes to their home city to exact justice on King Koranche, the corrupt African ruler who betrayed his own people and sold them into slavery. Koranche puts an end to his life after a public confession of his crimes.

### **3-Historical Background and Setting of the Novels**

Although *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Beloved* are set in different geographic areas, both Morrison and Armah refer in their work to a time-period where black people are treated in inhuman ways by the white people.

#### **a- Historical Background and Setting of *Beloved* (1987)**

Racial tensions were by no means over in the 1970s and the 1980s in the United-States. The Civil Rights Movement (1954-68) did not put an end to racial segregation in spite of Affirmative Action. Slavery and segregation have had enduring effects on the lives of the Afro-Americans. *Beloved* by Toni Morrison centers on this period of the American history where Racial issues were the source of many problems, finding their roots in the institution of slavery, especially the Middle Passage during which millions of people from Africa were transported to the New World as part of the Atlantic slave trade.

Toni Morrison drew her inspiration and based the narrative of her novel on the true story of Margaret Garner, a fugitive slave from Kentucky, who killed her daughter rather than allowing herself and her children to be taken back to slavery. The incident stirred emotions 150 years ago and has had the power of doing so even much later, as Morrison's book and several other publications prove<sup>33</sup>.

In January 1856, a group of seventeen slaves belonging to different farmers in Kentucky decided to flee together from Kentucky to Ohio. They crossed the Ohio River on foot. When they reached Ohio near Western Row, Margaret, her husband Robert, their four children, and Robert's parents went to find Mr. Kite, a former slave from a neighboring farm who was bought out of slavery<sup>34</sup>.

The other nine fugitives followed a different route to reach Canada. Kite, went to Levi Coffin, a white Underground Railroad agent, to arrange the escape for the fugitives. Unfortunately, they were discovered in Kite's house by their slave masters. Barred in the house, they chose to fight and die for their freedom rather than being recaptured again to slavery. Robert fired on the officials but was eventually overpowered. Margaret, to put an end to the situation, cut the throat of her child with a knife and attempted to do likewise with her remaining three children <sup>35</sup>.

Before she could do this and kill herself at the end, she was stopped and arrested by the officials. The Garners were arrested and put in jail. Nevertheless, no appeals and pleadings could divert the Garners from being judged as property and as such they were returned to slavery and sold down the river <sup>36</sup>.

#### **b- Historical Background and Setting of *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973).**

Ayi Kwei Armah wrote during post-colonial Ghana, a turning point in the history of the country. This period was seen by the Ghanaian as being a new era of freedom and prosperity after gaining independence, but it seems that such hope was shattered by a certain chaotic disorder that characterized the country. In fact, the social justice and the equity for which the Ghanaians fought was overpowered by the continued neocolonialist practices, and the political, social and economic instability that marked the country at that time under the dictatorship of Nkrumah's regime.

The historical periods referred to in *Two Thousand Seasons* consist of the medieval Ghana Empire of West Africa under the reign of the Emperor Mansa Musa I (14<sup>th</sup> Century), the Arab imperialism and the Western one.

Mansa Musa I was a devout Muslim known for his famous pilgrimage to Mecca, in the Arabian Peninsula, in 1324-5. It was recorded that this king has taken more than 500 people



with him on this “hajj”, holy visit, each carrying a staff of solid gold.<sup>37</sup> When Mansa Musa I crossed the Egyptian city of Cairo, legends say that he gave away so much gold that the price of gold fell, and the economy was affected for more than twenty years. The appearance of a wealthy king from a faraway land impressed the people he encountered, causing Mali to appear on maps throughout the Middle East and Europe<sup>38</sup>.

Muslim traders, from North Africa and Arab countries, had begun to reach the region from the 8<sup>th</sup> century. They were known to have taken West Africans as slaves for many years and African female servants, selling them to be used for sex labor. However, it was gold that really attracted them.<sup>39</sup> Arabic texts mention that from the late 8th century, Ghana was considered as “the land of gold”. The historian John Iliffe recorded the narrative of the Arab geographer Al-Bakri which describes the royal court of Ghana: “*Behind the king stand ten pages holding shields and swords decorated with gold, and on his right are the sons of the [vassal] kings wearing splendid garments and their hair plaited with gold.*”<sup>40</sup>

This image stuck to Ghana which was called Gold Coast until its independence. In the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, the Portuguese reached Ghana and found so much gold between the rivers Ankobra and the Volta that they named the place Mina, meaning “Mine”<sup>41</sup>. In their turn, the French were impressed by the trinkets worn by the coastal people and named it the Ivory Coast. In 1481 King John II of Portugal sent Diego d’Azambuja to build this castle and in 1482, the Portuguese built a castle in Elmina to trade gold, ivory and slaves”<sup>42</sup>.

In 1598, the Dutch joined the Portuguese and the French, and built forts at Komenda and Kormantsil. In the mid-eighteenth century, European traders including, the British, Dutch, Dane and Swedes joined them and built forts in the land. At the end of the 19th century, the Dutch and the British were the only traders left, and when the Dutch left in 1874, Britain made the Gold Coast a crown colony<sup>43</sup>. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the first Britons came as

traders to Ghana. They were known for enslaving the Africans and taking profit from the richness of their land <sup>44</sup>.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Pariza Changizi and Parvin Ghasemi, 'A Foucauldian Reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*' (M.A diss., Shiraz University, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Michel, Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. Smith Sheridan (Great Britain: Routledge, 2002), 136.

<sup>3</sup>Sima Farshid, 'A Foucauldian Reading of Morrison's Novels' (Tehran: Islamic Azad University, n.d ).

<sup>4</sup> Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>6</sup>'Foucault: Archeology of Knowledge' Viewed 15 March 2014,  
<<http://prelimsandbeyond.wordpress.com/2009/01/05/foucault/>>.

<sup>7</sup> Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge*, 187.

<sup>8</sup> 'Foucault: Archeology of Knowledge'.

<sup>9</sup>'Foucault: Archeology of Knowledge'.

<sup>10</sup> Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge*, 30-31.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>13</sup> Sima, 'A Foucauldian Reading of Morrison's Novels'.

<sup>14</sup> José Medina, 'Toward a Foucaultian Epistemology of Resistance: Counter-Memory, Epistemic Friction, and *Guerrilla* Pluralism' (U.S.A: Vanderbilt University, 2011.), 12.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>21</sup> Leslie M. Alexander and Walter C. Rucker, *Encyclopedia of African American History* (U.S.A, 2010), 902.

<sup>22</sup> 'Toni Morrison' Viewed 4 April 2014, <[http://voices.cla.umn.edu/artistpages/morrison\\_toni.php](http://voices.cla.umn.edu/artistpages/morrison_toni.php)>.

<sup>23</sup> 'Toni Morrison'.

<sup>24</sup> 'Toni Morrison'.

<sup>25</sup> Bernard D. Alger, *100 Most Popular African American Authors* (U.S.A, 2007), 228.

<sup>26</sup> 'Toni Morrison'.

<sup>27</sup> 'Ayi KweiArmah', Viewed 14 April 2014, <<http://www.answers.com/topic/ayi-kwei-armah>>.

<sup>28</sup> 'Ayi KweiArmah'.

<sup>29</sup> 'Ayi KweiArmah'.

<sup>30</sup> 'Ayi KweiArmah'.

<sup>31</sup> 'Ayi KweiArmah'.

<sup>32</sup> Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Penguin, 1987), 232.

<sup>33</sup> Anna Fischerová , 'Toni Morrison's Beloved: The Novel and The Film' (PhD diss., Masaryk University, 2006).

<sup>34</sup> Fischerová, 'Beloved: The Novel and the Film'.

<sup>35</sup> Fischerová, 'Beloved: The Novel and the Film'.

<sup>36</sup> Fischerová, 'Beloved: The Novel and the Film'.

<sup>37</sup> Festus U. Ohaegbulam, *Toward an Understanding of the African Experience from Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Maryland: University Press of America, 1990), 77.

<sup>38</sup> 'History of Ghana', Viewed 1 April 2014,  
<<http://www.modernghana.com/news/249409/1/arabs-mortal-hatred-and-enslavement-of-the-black-r.html>>.

<sup>39</sup>'History of Ghana'.

<sup>40</sup> 'History of Ghana'.

<sup>41</sup> 'History of Ghana'.

<sup>42</sup> 'History of Ghana'.

<sup>43</sup>History of Ghana'.

<sup>44</sup> History of Ghana'.

## Results and Discussion

The problematic we have raised in this research work centers around analyzing and comparing the shared ways in which the Ghanaian author Ayi Kwei Armah and the American Toni Morrison reconstruct the history of their communities. To put it another way, we have attempted to show the common ways in which the two authors defy the official historiography of their communities in *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Beloved* for the purpose of detecting the similarities between the two authors and their novels.

The method we relied upon to reinforce our arguments is borrowed from Michel Foucault's *The Archeology of Knowledge* and his theoretical concept of Counter-History. In the selected theoretical paradigm, Foucault makes it clear that a rewriting of one's history from that angle may help the recuperation of lost, misrepresented or occluded histories. Hence, Foucault's archeological method in dealing with the accounts of history as well as his helpful remarks on Counter-History have been of paramount importance to the analysis of the history presented in *Two Thousand Seasons* and in *Beloved*.

In the first part of our dissertation, we have studied the ways in which the two authors engaged in a process of "literary archeology", in which they tried to identify fragments of history left behind by the official historiography, making it clear that since history is something which is constructed by the dominant discourse, it can be reconstructed. We have also shown how the two authors used a subjective approach that can unveil the individual discourse of their communities, freeing it from the constraints of the official historiography.

In the second part which complements the first, we have examined the way in which Armah and Morrison in their reconstructing attempt formed a Counter-History aiming at revising the history of their communities which has been distorted by the dominant discourse. We have also shown how Armah and Morrison drew from the essence of African cultures in

their revision. With their endeavor, the two authors proved the importance of history and ancestral mythology in the quest of self-definition.

This last point is what has driven us to point out the divergence between the two authors' aims. Thus, Armah's use of the African oral tradition in his narrative reflects his quest for authentic and genuine writing with which he may make a purely African novel. We have seen how he incites his people to return to their culture and tradition which define them and give them strength and power. Morrison, however, makes use of different cultural matrices including the African, the American and the Caribbean one. Thus, even though she taps from the African oral tradition, she does it to correct the false assumptions of the Euro-American narratives which depict the Africans in the New World as "savages" brought from the fearsome jungles of Africa.

Throughout our comparison of *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Beloved*, we came to the conclusion that the alternative history found in the two novels seeks to revise and to correct the mystification and the misrepresentation of the African and Afro-American history by resorting to new and different signifiers. It reinterprets and reconstructs those histories by placing the lives, stories and experiences of Africans and Afro-Americans in a position of centrality.

## Discussion

### Chapter One: Archeological Reading of Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

The present chapter is devoted to an archeological reading of Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* borrowing from Foucault's archeological method in the *Archeology of Knowledge*. Our intention is to show how the two works can be read as a kind of a 'literary archeology' by revealing the intentions of the two authors in rewriting the history of their communities.

Michel Foucault compares the attempt to unearth the 'other history' which runs beneath the official one to the work of an archaeologist, hence naming his new history as a kind of 'archaeology' which is based on the questioning of the already-said <sup>1</sup>. After reading Morrison's and Armah's works, we have discovered that they have followed Foucault's principles in the *Archeology of Knowledge*; this is what drives us to describe their narrative strategy as a kind of 'literary archeology'.

The two authors borrow from two main points in Foucault's archeological method. The first one concerns the need to discard the old idea of the linearity of official history to identify its ruptures, hence being able to identify fragments of history left behind. The second point is to detach the discourse of the individual from the holistic and dogmatic one. This will give a voice and some power to the marginalized categories of people which were left in the shadows by the dominant discourse.

#### 1- Identifying Ruptures in Official Histories

To start with *Beloved*, Toni Morrison invites us to confront a different version of reality concerning the history of the Afro-Americans, the one that the official records have

strived to ignore. In an interview with Margaret Reynolds, Morrison says of her story-telling methods:

I want to scour the official history for the alternative history that exists, sometimes parallel to it, more often underneath it. It gleams through the official story in curious ways – a shot here, a facet there, and it’s the kind of thing you want to pursue, and when you cannot find all the data, you have to imagine it [...].<sup>2</sup>

It follows from the above quotation that Morrison’s aim in *Beloved* is to search for another history which runs beneath the official one, just as Foucault advises historians to do in *The Archeology of Knowledge*<sup>3</sup>. While reading her novel, we can easily remark how it shows that the history of the Afro-American community is not over and that the discourse which unfolds it is the one produced by the dominant groups, so it can be reconstructed.

Morrison’s novel fits Foucault archeological principles in the *Archeology of Knowledge*. First, it interrupts the linearity of the official History of the Afro-Americans to identify its other part left behind. The proof is that the writer opens her text with a missing number to inform her readers of something hidden or unrecorded in the official accounts of history “124 WAS SPITFUL full of a baby’s venom. The women know it and so did the children. For years each put up with the spite in his own way. But, by 1873 Sethe and her daughter Denver were its only victims.”<sup>4</sup>

The opening words of the above quotation indicate that the narrative is not likely to be linear. The number “3” is deliberately omitted in the sequence of the numbers just as the history of the Afro-American community was evicted and excluded by the Anglo-Americans from the historical accounts. Belinda du Plooy says that “the missing number, 3, belongs to the missing child who, as I have shown, also represents a missing people and a history much greater than her own short life.”<sup>5</sup>



In the case of our study, Morrison's interruption of the linearity of the sequence of the numbers "124" is done in order to challenge the linear and holistic view of history, just as Michel Foucault posits it in the *Archeology of Knowledge* "A discursive formation is not, therefore, an ideal, continuous smooth text that runs beneath the multiplicity of contradictions and resolves them in the calm unity of coherent thought."<sup>6</sup> In this context, the emphasis should be put on this number, since it represents the point of ruptures and discontinuity in official records of history that must be focused on to dig out the other fragment of history left behind.

In a similar way, the Ghanaian author Ayi Kwei Armah undertakes the same enterprise as Toni Morrison by reshaping the history of the Ghanaian nation in particular and the African one in general in delving deeper in its history to dig out what is evicted in Western and Arabic Historiography. *Two Thousand Seasons* takes the same direction as Morrison's novel *Beloved* since it questions the already said in traditional historiography about Africa's history "We are not a people of yesterday. Do they ask how many seasons we have flowed from our beginnings till now? We shall point them to the proper beginning of their counting."<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, Ayi Kwei Armah tries to give an alternative facet of the official history of Ghana and Africa in general. Therefore, he projects in his writings a claim against the overawing menace of Arabic and Western hegemony that tended to negate, distort or demonize Africa's input in the official historical records "Leave the killers spokesmen, the predators' spokesmen, leave the destroyers' spokesmen to cast contemptuous despair abroad. That is not our vocation. That will not be our utterance"<sup>8</sup>.

Armah indicates that the history of the African people is the one propagated by the Arab and Western discourses. Therefore, he tries to resist these discourses by criticizing the mediated history of Ghana and Africa. Derek Wright said that "The prologue's rhetoric of

*fragmentation and dismemberment issues a reminder that it is the fragmented part of Africa's history, the colonial period which cut the continent off from its past--that, until recently, has alone constituted 'African history' in Western study*<sup>9</sup>.

Like Morrison in *Beloved*, Armah in *Two Thousand Seasons* looks at the discontinuities in traditional historiography to show that there remain fragments of history beneath the official ones. The proof is that he reduces the official records of the African history to "pieces cut off"<sup>10</sup> and attributes them the quality of "dead fragments" as stated in the following quotation of *Two Thousand Seasons*:

Pieces cut off from their whole are nothing but dead fragments. From the unending stream of our remembrance the harbingers of death break off meaningless fractions. Their carriers bring us this news of shards. Their message: behold this paltriness; this is all your history.<sup>11</sup>

Armah's reducing of the official accounts of history into "*pieces cut off*"<sup>13</sup> signifies that there remain fragments of history left behind by the official history. Armah's objective in this context is to look for the other "pieces" or "*forgotten fragments*"<sup>14</sup> as he calls them in his novel to provide an alternative history since emphasis should be put as outlined in *The Archeology of Knowledge* on the other fragments of history that the official one wishes to ignore "*The analysis of the discursive field is oriented in a quite different way; we must grasp the statement in the exact specificity of its occurrence [...] and show which other statements it excludes*"<sup>15</sup>.

Armah in distrusting the official accounts which moulds the traditional historiography, challenges its linear view, just as Michel Foucault posits it in the *Archeology of Knowledge* and joins Morrison's archeological procedure in *Beloved*.

## 2- Giving Voice to the Silenced

In focusing on the fragments of history left behind by the traditional historiography, Morrison and Armah intend to liberate them since these excluded fragments refer to the individual discourses that have often been silenced in the official accounts of history. These individual discourses for Foucault need to be freed from the constraints of the dogmatic and global ones. Therefore, he suggests a subjective approach that can help unveil the history of the marginalized categories of people as stated in the following quotation from *The Archeology of Knowledge*:

To undertake the history of what has been said is to re-do in the opposite direction, the work of expression: to go back from statements preserved through time and dispersed in space, toward that interior secret that preceded them, left its mark in them, and (in every sense of the term) is betrayed by them. **Thus the nucleus of the initiating subjectivity is freed. A subjectivity that always lags behind manifest history ; and which finds, beneath events, another, more serious, more secret, more fundamental history, closer to the origin** [emphasis added]. This other history, which runs beneath history, constantly anticipating it and endlessly recollecting the past, can be described [...] as the evolution of mentalities<sup>16</sup>.

In their archeological investigation of history, Morrison and Armah try to articulate the “voice” of their people “reduced to silence” in the official historiography to make their readers discover the “other history” of their communities that “runs beneath” the official records.

In the case of *Beloved*, Morrison puts forth the idea of the Afro-Americans reduced to silence by the white oppressors during the long years of slavery by showing how the blacks do not have the right to voice their opinions and indignation as their only task is to obey their masters. We are told in the novel that when the schoolteacher accuses the slave Sixo of stealing some meat from Sweet Home, the latter explains in a very wise way “*Sixo plant rye to give the high piece a better chance. Sixo take and feed. Sixo give you more work.*” Schoolteacher answers: “*definitions belonged to the definers not—the defined.*”<sup>17</sup>

Also, as a way of showing how the blacks were deprived from their linguistic faculty, we are given a description of the “Negroes” in the novel as being “*Silent, except for social courtesies, when they met one another they neither described nor asked about the sorrow that drove them from one place to another. The whites didn’t bear speaking on*”<sup>18</sup>. The whites do not bear the blacks speaking on by putting an “iron bit” on their mouth. Sethe realizes: “*how offended the tongue is, held down by iron, how the need to spit is so deep you cry for it. She already knew about it, had seen it time after time in the place before Sweet Home. Men, boys, little girls, women*”<sup>19</sup>. We are given another instance when Sethe asks Paul D Garner why he could not tell Hall about the men who tortured him:

“Did you speak to him? Didn’t you say anything to him? Something!”  
“I couldn’t, Sethe. I just...,couldn’t.”  
“Why?”  
“I had a bit in my mouth.”<sup>20</sup>.

It follows from the above quotations that Morrison makes it clear that most of the slaves could not speak because they hold an iron bit on their mouth. This “Iron bit” strengthens Morrison’s argument on the fact that most account of history are written by the Euro-Americans who manipulated the truth concerning the life of the black community and its anguishes.

Morrison’s challenging of the official records of history and of the whites’ discourse is reinforced when Stamp Paid shows Paul D Garner a story in the newspaper about Sethe’s infanticide “*He had made up his mind to show him this piece of paper—newspaper—with a picture drawing of a woman who favored Sethe*”<sup>21</sup>. Paul D refuses to admit the authenticity of the news by repeatedly saying: “*Uh uh. No way. A little semblance round the forehead maybe, but this ain’t her mouth.*”<sup>22</sup>. Paul D keeps on repeating many times that the picture that appears on the newspaper is not that of Sethe “*I know Sethe’s mouth and this ain’t it.*” He smoothed the clipping with his fingers and peered at it not at all disturbed. From the solemn

*air with which Stamp had unfolded the paper, the tenderness in the old man's fingers as he stroked its creases and flattened it out.*"<sup>23</sup>.

For Paul D, a black face cannot appear in the media:

There is no way in hell a black face could appear in a newspaper[...]since the face was not there because the person had been killed, or maimed or caught or burned or jailed or whipped or evicted or stomped or raped or cheated, since that could hardly qualify as news in a newspaper"<sup>24</sup>.

This echoes Morrison's idea about the marginalized position that holds the blacks in the whites' discourse. Through these words, Morrison shows again the inauthentic nature of official records of history as we cannot find any reports in the official history about the brutalities perpetrated on the Afro-Americans by the white enslavers.

The publicizing of Sethe's infanticide in the newspaper is also a way of dirtying the Blacks' image and presenting them as "savages" and "criminals" in the whites' discourse, otherwise nothing appears about them in the media. Sethe says: "*That anybody white could take your whole soul for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forget who you were and couldn't think it up*"<sup>25</sup>.

In challenging the white media, Morrison defies the traditional historiography and seeks to give a voice to her fellow Afro-Americans. In proceeding so, she depicts the hideous role of the whites' discourse in reinforcing slavery, and the dehumanizing effects of the American media that were entirely controlled by the Euro Americans up to the last decades of the twentieth century"<sup>26</sup>.

Morrison at the end of her novel coins the word "Disremember" by which she intends to show how the history of her community was excluded by the dominant historical discourse. Therefore, she refers to her people by the expression "Disremembered and unaccounted for" slaves whose history shouldn't be forgotten as stated in the following quotation from *Beloved*:

Everybody knew that she was called, but nobody anywhere knew her name. Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her, and even if they were, how can they call her if they don't know her name? Although she has claim, she is not claimed.<sup>27</sup>.

The quotation indicates that *Beloved* refers to this forgotten and unrecorded part of the Afro-American past, evicted from the realm of history. It also shows that even this community claimed its existence; it was not claimed by the dominant discourse. Therefore, Morrison's archeological novel recounts the story of those slaves whose voices were silenced by the Euro-Americans.

By providing an authentic account of the history of the Afro-American community and its real anguishes, Morrison tries to accomplish the very task Foucault asks "new historians" to do, the uncovering of the other history that runs beneath the traditional historiography:

Archeology does not try to restore what has been thought, wished, aimed at, experienced, desired by men in the very moment at which they expressed it in discourse[...] It does nothing more than a rewriting: that is, in the preserved form of exteriority, a regulated transformation of what has already been written<sup>28</sup>.

In a similar way, Armah from the prologue of his novel makes it clear that it is aimed at a retelling of a historical experience that may help to save the integrity of Africans alienated from the "way" by centuries of Arab and European destruction "*A thousand seasons wasted wandering amazed along alien roads, another thousand spent finding paths to the living way*"<sup>29</sup>.

Like in Morrison's *Beloved*, Armah in *Two Thousand Seasons* shows the marginalized position that holds his people in the white-centered discourse. Therefore, he puts forth the idea of the African reduced to silence by the hideous institutions of slavery brought by the Arabs and the Europeans intruders. This point can be illustrated in the novel by the "*pieces of brass*" inserted in the mouth of the African slave in the desert:

We have been handed down a vision of a slave man roaming the desert sand- a perfect image of our hollowed chiefs today. Language he had not, not ours, and not his own. It had been voided out of him, his tongue cut out from his mouth. He pointed to the gaping cavity. Thinking he still had a soul, even mutilated [...] they who had destroyed his tongue, they had put pieces of brass in there to separate the lower from the upper jaw”<sup>30</sup>.

The brass put in the mouth of this slave symbolizes the absence of the African people’s voice in traditional historiography. In this case, we remark how Morrison and Armah resort to the same symbol to show the marginalized position that their people hold in the official historiography as well as the unreliability of the dominant discourse. (The “iron bit” put on the mouth of the slaves in the case of Morrison and the “brass” in the case of Armah). It also shows that most accounts of history are not objective as they are written by the dominant groups.

It is through this interrogation, rejection and reconstitution of truth that Armah confirms Foucault’s ideas in the *Archeology of Knowledge*. In the following quotation, the narrator carefully explains that it is pointless and impossible for any people to trace their genesis with certainty and that what is said about the Africans are not more than mere fables:

How the very first of us lived, of that ultimate origin we have had unnumbered thoughts and more mere fables passed down to us from those gone before, but of none of this has any of us been told it was sure knowledge. We have not found that lying trick to our taste, the trick of making up sure knowledge of things possible to think of, things possible to wonder about but impossible to know in any such ultimate way<sup>31</sup>.

The quotation can be interpreted as a refusal of dogmatic truths before the unknown, paralleled by a rejection of the origins frozen in writings imposed by Arabic and Western historiography. It follows from this that Armah believes that there is no such thing as an absolute history which can represent the past as truly it was: “*Everything that was revealed, everything is fragmentary, much was lost when the links were broken by the memory isolation.*”<sup>32</sup>. By questioning the already said in the official history, Armah echoes Foucault’s

archeological method based on the questioning of “*those ready-made syntheses, those groupings that we normally accept before any examination*”<sup>33</sup>.

Following Armah’s endeavor in *Two Thousand Seasons*, we have deduced that his major concern is to reconstruct the history of African. The author tries to divulge what has fallen into oblivion in the official history of his community and narrate a different version that can help the recuperation of the lost history of Ghana and Africa in general.

Indeed, what we have deduced in this part is that Ayi kwei Armah and Toni Morrison attempt to write their novels as a kind of “literary archaeology” which seeks to offer a recounting of the history of their communities that has often been ignored by the official one. Both authors focus on the discontinuities in the traditional historiography to show that there remain fragments of history left behind to be brought to the surface and have their truths unveiled. Once these ruptures are identified, they tried to give a voice to their people who were ignored and reduced to silence by the dominant discourse.

In this context, the two authors intend to give an alternative version to the official history of their communities by making conscientious efforts to accomplish the very thing Foucault asks new historians to carry out, “the uncovering of the ‘other history’ that ‘runs beneath’ the traditional historiography, hence the instigation of ‘literary archeology’”<sup>34</sup>. In line with such point of view is the concept that history is something which is constructed by the dominant discourse, so it can be re-constructed. The main purpose of this reconstruction is to form a Counter-History.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Sima Farshid, ‘Foucauldian Archaeology of Slavery in Morrison’s *Beloved*’ (Tehran: Islamic Azad University, n.d).

<sup>2</sup> Sheenadevi Patchay, ‘The Struggle of Memory against Forgetting: Contemporary Fictions and the Rewriting of histories’ (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2008).



<sup>3</sup>Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. Smith Sheridan (Great Britain: Routledge, 2002), 136.

<sup>4</sup>Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Penguin, 1987), 1.

<sup>5</sup>Belinda du Plooy, 'Can't Nothing Heal without Pain': Healing in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*' (M.A diss., University of South Africa, 2004).

<sup>6</sup>Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 173.

<sup>7</sup>Armah Ayi Kwei, *Two Thousand Seasons* (London: Heinemann, 1973), 1.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, xvii.

<sup>9</sup>E A Thomas, Decolorizing the Mind In Culture and Imperialism in: shodhganga. Inlibnet.ac. in/.../ 546/9/09\_chapter 3.Pdf.

<sup>10</sup>Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, 1.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>12</sup>Sima, 'Foucauldian Archaeology of Slavery in Morrison's *Beloved*'.

<sup>13</sup>Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, 12.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>15</sup>Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge*, 30-31.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>17</sup>Morrison, *Beloved*, 174.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>26</sup> Sima, 'Foucauldian Archaeology of Slavery in Morrison's *Beloved*'.

<sup>27</sup> Morrison, *Beloved*, 247.

<sup>28</sup> Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge*, 156.

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

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>33</sup> Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge*, 24.

<sup>34</sup> Sima, 'Foucauldian Archaeology of Slavery in Morrison's *Beloved*'.

## Chapter Two: Counter-History as a Counter-Discourse

To unveil the untold history of their communities, Toni Morrison and Ayi kwei Armah use Counter-History as a main narrative device in their novels. While reading *Beloved* and *Two Thousand Seasons*, we have noticed that the two authors reveal a concern for African and Afro-American history and cultural memory with which they may communicate and reconstruct the misrepresented history of their communities.

The purpose of the present chapter is to show how Armah and Morrison use Counter-History as a process which allows readers to have access to another history which runs beneath the traditional historiography. We use in this study the concept of Counter-History to explore some historical facts as they appear in the two authors' selective narratives. A particular emphasis will be put on both form and content of *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Beloved*.

In our comparison of the two author's procedures, we will focus on some similarities between their respective attempts to revise and reconstruct the history of their communities. In this respect, we will see which sets of texts the two authors seek to revise and how they revise them. To achieve our aim, we will appeal to Michel Foucault's theoretical assumptions of Counter-History which according to him aims at returning to the texts that have come to be seen as being foundational of one's history and revising them "*We return to those empty spaces that have been masked by omission or concealed in a false and misleading plenitude.*"<sup>1</sup>.

# I-Toni Morrison's Counter-Discourse

## 1- Morrison and the Euro-American Hegemonic Discourse

Our analysis of *Beloved* shows that Toni Morrison tries to reactivate the history of her fellow Afro-Americans that has fallen into oblivion in the Euro-American narratives and media. In an interview with Bonnie Angelo, Morrison affirms:

I thought this has got to be the least read of all the books I'd written because it is about something that the characters don't want to remember, I don't want to remember, black people don't want to remember, white people won't want to remember. I mean, it's national amnesia."<sup>2</sup>.

Morrison's aim in *Beloved* is to provide her readers with a version of history that defies the one set by the Euro-American account which legitimized the enslavement of the "blacks" by considering them as naturally and intellectually inferiors to whites. Thus, even with the abolition of slavery, the "race Scientists" of the ninetieth century with their so-called field "Nigrollogy", had "pushed a basic idea that slaves were biologically subhuman"<sup>3</sup>. This point can be illustrated in Morrison's novel when Sethe told her daughter Denver how the schoolteacher teaches his pupils to take notes on the slaves' animal-like qualities "No, no. That's not the way. I told you to put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right. And don't forget to line them"<sup>4</sup>.

Such claims were used to disregard the anti-slavery movement in the United-States to justify the enslavement of the blacks. Therefore, the slaves have to be subdued to their masters, who were considered as morally and intellectually superior. We are told in the novel that Sethe while talking to her daughter about the blacks says that even the educated colored, the long-school people, the doctors, the teachers, the paper-writers and businessmen are considered morally and intellectually inferior to the whites as they "had the weight of the whole race sitting there"<sup>5</sup>.

The era of slavery portrayed in *Beloved* is the one in which the belief that to have people from African descent out of the white men's restraints could pose a danger for the American society as those people were considered as "*allegedly prone and misconduct to social drift without guidance*"<sup>6</sup>. This infantilization of the Afro-Americans can be illustrated in *Beloved* by the comments made by the white Sheriff on Sethe's infanticide and on slaves in general as being "*people who needed every care and guidance in the world to keep them from the cannibal life they preferred.*"<sup>7</sup>

The declaration made by this sheriff about Sethe's infanticide can be also interpreted as an expression of the innate savagery which the slaves bring with them from Africa. Indeed, Schoolteacher's position echoes the racial discourse which reduced the act of Margaret Garner to an act of barbarity and cannibalism that the slaves bring with them from Africa.

In addition, the slave-holder portrayed in the novel seems to be in favor of the postulate that it is dangerous for the white society to have people from African descent among them because they brought with them savagery and brutality from Africa. The character Stamp Paid, a slave at the plantation where Sethe and the other characters were enslaved, declares:

White people believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle. Swift unnavigable waters, swinging screaming baboons, sleeping snakes, red gums ready for their sweet white blood [...] But it was not the jungle blacks brought with them to this place from the other (livable) place. It was the jungle white folks planted in them. And it grew. It spread. In, through and after life, it spread, until it invaded the whites who had made it <sup>8</sup>.

In *Beloved*, Morrison tries to revise and correct all what has been announced in the white media and narratives on the Afro-Americans by focusing her novel on the true account of Margaret Garner. Therefore, she attempts to narrate a different version, one hidden in the silence of the oppressed. To achieve such a task, she tries to justify the act of Margaret Garner by interpreting it as an inevitable act that slavery may cause. This point is shown in the novel

when Sethe tries to justify her act of killing: *“I couldn’t let her nor any of em live under schoolteacher”*<sup>9</sup>.

It follows from this that Sethe tries to show that the atrocities inflicted upon black people can justify even the killing of one’s child. In a conversation with her daughter Denver, Sethe comments on her suffering in bondage as a way of justifying her act of infanticide *“Those white things have taken all I had or dreamed”, she said, “and broke my heartstrings too. There is no bad luck in the world but whitefolks”*<sup>10</sup>. She also reveals all along the novel how she was turned into a sexual plaything by the white enslavers and was beaten in the most inhuman ways to show how such experiences are harmful and can deprive one’s individual from the control of his/her actions: *“After I left you, those boys came in there and took my milk. That’s why they came in there for. Held me down and took it. I told Mrs Garner on them. She had that lump and couldn’t speak but, her eyes rolled out tears. Those boys beat me and I was pregnant”*<sup>11</sup>.

It follows from the above quotation that the images of torture, rape and the brutality of the white men, pushed Sethe to kill her daughter rather than giving her back to slavery. Harold Bloom asserts that Sethe killed her daughter to avoid her the atrocities that she herself endured as a slave woman *“for Sethe, being brutally overworked, maimed, or killed is subordinate to the overarching horror of being raped and “dirtied” by whites, even dying at the hands of one’s mother is subordinate to rape”*<sup>12</sup>.

Morrison in a conscious attempt to justify Sethe’s act, shows how the Fugitive Slave Act which was passed as part of the Compromise of 1850 in order to maintain the balance between the Northern “Free” states and the Southern “slave” states, is nothing more than a conventional law which serves the whites' interests. This law reduces the blacks to no more than properties, as it provides slave owners the right to recapture fugitive slaves even after its

prohibition in Northern states. Therefore, unaccounted northern blacks tried to escape and lived in constant state of fear and unease.

Such hostile environment harmed the psyche of the slaves and pushed them to commit follies, and it is in such circumstances that Margaret Garner killed her infant. Morrison by providing her readers with an insightful description of the life of those slaves tries in a way or in another to justify Margaret Garner's act, mediated in the novel through Sethe's infanticide. Hence, in order to adequately address the issue of the distorted history of her community, Morrison in her work returns to this historical event as a dark history of those people who have been kept in the shadows and treated in inhuman ways. Therefore, one may deduce that Morrison accuses the Euro-American narratives and Media for keeping silent on their hideous institution of slavery while constantly trying to justify their enslavements of the blacks.

*Beloved* is not only a story of a mother who killed her infant, but it is also about the millions of people who perished during the Middle Passage and the remaining ones who suffered from its pernicious Aftermath's effects once in the New World. In the epigraph of her novel, Morrison announces with a very firm tone that she renders homage to “*sixty million and more*” slaves, the estimated number of Africans transported to the New World. She refers to them in her novel while saying ‘*no one's ever assumed responsibility for [...] Nobody knows their names and nobody thinks about them*’<sup>13</sup>. The author evokes this perilous journey to give an account of this horrific experience that she thinks was not well recorded or put in the margins in the official historical records.

Yet, Morrison's text tries to dispel the prevailing popular belief that blacks were brought from the fearsome jungles of Africa and have no culture to exhibit in the new world except their “savagery” and “brutality”. As a way of correcting these assumptions, the author embraces the African oral tradition. Hence, the African captives portrayed in the novel carried

with them key aspects of their indigenous culture to show that they are not savage people and have a rich culture to be proud of.

## 2- Morrison's Vindication of the African Oral Tradition

Morrison in *Beloved* taps from the repertoire of the African oral tradition in reconstructing the history of the Afro-Americans. She does so to correct the wrong assumptions of the Euro-American discourse which depicted the Blacks as "savages" brought from the fearsome jungles of Africa and whose enslavement was therefore justified. The indigenous cultural aspects portrayed in *Beloved* are what connects the readers to Africa.

The African cultural aspects and beliefs portrayed in *Beloved* include the beliefs in the supernatural as the novel centers on a ghost story. We are told that Sethe killed her two-years-old daughter, and eighteen years later, her spirit comes to Sethe's house and communicates with her. Sethe: "*Tell me the truth. Didn't you come from the other side?*" Beloved answered: "*Yes. I was on the other side.*" Sethe: "*You came back because of me?*" Beloved: "*Yes*"<sup>14</sup>. In addition, all the characters of the novel communicate with Beloved, even though they know she is a spirit.

By invoking this idea, Morrison is enlarging the category of "history" to include the African one. Thus, the belief that spirits of the dead linger, particularly if death has been traumatic, and that communication between the living and the dead is possible is mainly a west African Belief of the "Yoruba" people, called "Vodun". Its roots may go back 6,000 years in Africa<sup>15</sup>.

Furthermore, Morrison borrows in her novel some dances and songs that belong to the African cultural matrix. In the following quotation, she evokes an African ritual dance as a way of recalling her ancestors. This dance concerns that of the antelope evoked during the



ceremony of marriage of Sethe with Halle. Sethe goes to the clearing where Baby Suggs usually dances in sunlight and realizes:

**Oh but when they sang. And oh but when they danced and sometimes they danced the antelope [emphasis mine].**The men as well as the ma'ams, one of whom was certainly her own. They shifted shapes and became something other. Some unchained, demanding other whose feet knew her pulse better than she did. Just like this one in her stomach.<sup>16</sup>

While referring to this dance, Morrison evokes a famous African myth known mainly in West Africa. This myth concerns that of the “Antelope” called “Chiwara”. The Bambara people of Mali attribute the invention of agriculture to this animal, half antelope, half human figure.<sup>17</sup> Its image is used in ritualistic dances to remind the young Bambara farmers of Chiwra’s sacrifice and to insure germination of the seed, and a good harvest<sup>18</sup>. This antelope bears the name the goddess of fertility as well as of an earth goddess, that is why Morrison evokes this song and dance during a wedding ceremony, as it is a symbol of fertility for the newly married in West African beliefs.

The African oral tradition is also exploited by Morrison in her novel at the level of the form. She based her narration on an oral story-telling method that evokes the African epic bards to preserve the oral mode of narration that prevails in the African world. These bards frequently use repetition. In the following quotation, we will see how *Beloved* endorses the oral tradition of the African epic bards by focusing on repetition:

I have found you again; you have come back to me.  
You are my Beloved  
You are mine  
You are mine  
You are mine<sup>19</sup>.

All along the novel, we feel that the narrator is here to tell us stories of the past to ensure their transmission from one generation to another. Morrison by focusing on the real story of Margaret Garner wants to make it eternal and heard thousands of years later by the

future generations of Afro-Americans. This is why we think that she draws on these “bards” or “griots” who assure the engraving of such stories in the hall of the collective memory of any given community as well as their transmission from generation to generation.

Morrison in her novel does not rely only on the African cultural heritage but also on the American and the Caribbean ones. The epigraph of her novel is a celebration of the Christian faith, and many other examples in her novel reflect her praise for the different cultures which exist in the United-States to show that it is a land of freedom and liberty where people from different cultures and races should live in peace and mutual respect.

## **II- Ayi kwei Armah’s Counter-Discourse.**

Like the American writer Toni Morrison, the Ghanaian Ayi Kwei Armah uses Counter-History strategy to rewrite “*the truncated tales*”<sup>20</sup> of his people’s origins because he knows that they “*are not a people of yesterday*”<sup>21</sup>. In *Two Thousand Seasons* as in *Beloved*, Armah tries to communicate the history of the African people which has been misrepresented by the traditional historiography. Armah forms a Counter-History that aims at revising the texts written about Africa’s history and offering the readers a new possibility for having access to another history which differs from the one produced by the dominant discourse just as Foucault posits it in his theoretical concept of Counter-History.

Like Morrison in *Beloved*, Armah in *Two Thousand Seasons* revises two sets of texts about Africa’s history that he thinks contributed to its distortion. The first set of texts concerns that of the Arabs who according to him invaded Ghana under the guise of bringing to the blacks a pure religion, “Islam”, as they considered the natives pagans. The second set of texts is that of the Westerners who infiltrated the African continent under the guise of a civilizing mission.

## 1-Ayi Kwei Armah and the Arab and Western Historiography

### a- Armah and the Arab Muslim Discourse

Armah in *Two Thousand Seasons* challenges the Arab historiography and provides his readers with an alternative discourse. His reconstruction of the African past starts with the Arabs Muslim who perceived West Africa including Ghana as a primitive land populated by the infidels. Armah names the Muslims in his novel “*the predators of the desert*” and says that “*they grew yet stronger*”<sup>22</sup>, referring to the spread of their conquests and religion throughout West Africa.

Annals of Muslim historians assert that enslavement in general, especially of the allegedly barbarian blacks, is a matter of pride. It is also deemed as an act of generosity toward curing them of their barbaric nature and sinful religions by bringing them into the true faith and civilized world of Islam<sup>24</sup>. This contradicts the Islamic faith that is against racial discrimination as declared, respectively, by the prophet Mohammed in the following “hadith”: “*All of you come from Adam, and Adam is of dust. Indeed, the Arab is not superior to the non-Arab, and the non-Arab is not superior to the Arab. Nor is the fair-skinned superior to the dark-skinned nor the dark-skinned superior to the dark-skinned: superiority comes from piety and the noblest among you is the most pious*”<sup>23</sup>.

Ibn Khaldun, one of the well-known philosophers and scientists in Islam asserts that Blacks are “*only humans who are closer to dumb animals than to rational beings.*”<sup>25</sup> Ibn Sina (Avicenna 980–1037), in his turn, describes Blacks as people who are by their very nature slaves. He wrote: “*All African women are prostitutes, and the whole races of African men are abeed (slave) stock.*”<sup>26</sup>. It is on the basis of such beliefs that Armah in his novel tries to revise what these texts said about blacks and their religious quest in West Africa. Therefore, he unveils the false pretention of the Arabs Muslim who entered West African lands under the

guise of enlightening the Blacks and liberating them from their pagan practices by reducing their religious quest to no more than a “fable”.

Armah makes it clear in *Two Thousand Seasons* that the aim of the Muslims was to capture black slaves and to discover and control the source of gold especially after it was advertised to them by emperor Mansa Musa I during his famous pilgrimage to Mecca as stated in the following quotation: “*Have we forgotten the stupid pilgrimage of the one surnamed-o, ridiculous pomp-The Golden: he who went across the desert from his swollen capital twenty days’ journey from where we lived; he who went with slaves and servants hauling gold to astonish eyes in the desert*”<sup>27</sup>.

We are also told in *Two Thousand Seasons* that this emperor attracted the attention of the Arabs while crossing the desert and the Aftermath of this pilgrimage is the rush of Arabs Muslim to West Africa to discover and to benefit from the gold advertised to them by this emperor: “*The Aftermath of that moron journey was the desert white men’s attack on us.*”<sup>28</sup>.

Armah shows how the Muslims perceived his people as pagan with “dark” practices to justify their intrusion into Ghana. This point can be illustrated in the novel when the “predator” Abdallah told the native Edusei that only the Islamic faith can liberate his people from darkness and tries to convince him of the necessity of converting his people to Islam:

Put yourself completely at the service of him whose road is the one sure road away from the way of your people[...]Your people-don’t you see it yet?-they walk in darkness. They are blind. Further: they are cursed, they who have rejected you, you who will be blessed among all the servants of our master Allah [...] It alone will bring you peace. It alone will fill your days with blessedness. Learn, accept, and wait, you who have been chosen<sup>29</sup>.

The author of *Two Thousand Seasons* ridicules in his novel “Allah” as portrayed by the Koran, respectively, by attributing to him the quality of the “*slave-owning god*”. He also ridicules Islamic faith, respectively, by giving to it the quality of an “*imbecile religion*” and a

“poison” which caused the disintegration of the African people and contributed to their distancing from their “way”.

The author of *Two Thousand Seasons* is convinced in the fallibility of the Koran and puts its divine origin into question. He satirizes the Koran which permits sex with female slaves<sup>30</sup> and portrays the Arab predators as beggars, who introduced decay and sexual depravation to the African land exploiting native women for sexual pleasure: “our woman, the predators from the desert turned into playthings, for their decayed pleasure.”<sup>31</sup> He also satirizes the Muslim’s religious practices “Ramadan” as being a month of hypocritical self-denial since the Arabs after this holy month, return to their shameful practices:

Came a Ramadan, the predators’ season of hypocritical self denial. Followed the time they call the Idd, time of the new moon of their new year. After a month of public piety and abstinence, the predators again threw themselves into their accustomed orgies of food, of drugs and of sex<sup>32</sup>.

We are also told in *Two Thousand Seasons* that the life of the Arabs, who train the slaves to become askaris, turn them into sexual playthings and instead of teaching them principles of their supposed pure religion, they push them into shameful and dark practices. The life of the askaris is ridiculed in the author's description:

From morning till sleep they were either at some sport, eating, drinking, copulating, smoking or defecating [...] The new-found end of their lives was how to keep from doing anything different from the hollow cycle of shitting, smoking, fucking, drinking, eating, playing.<sup>33</sup>

Armah continues his ridiculing of the “Islamic faith” by pointing out its violence and the way it encourages killing other people under the name of Allah to show the true face of the “predators” and the fallibility of their supposed pure religion. This idea can be illustrated in the following quotation where Armah shows how his people were killed:

In the Alchemy of the desert, the white predator’s religion he turned these bitter frustrations into a bloody hope. To the converted craving blood he gave one firm

promise: They would be fighting for their god, that same slave-owning god he himself called his master, Allah<sup>34</sup>.

Armah in his work reveals the real deeds of the Arabs and their mistreatment of the Blacks to unveil their true mission in West Africa and their false discourse when invading the land. He then accused the Muslims and their religion for having introduced sexual and mental servitude to the African world. However, he suggests the superiority of the belief system of “the way” with its moral values and communal way of life over “*the fables of children*” that Islam propagates.

#### **b- Armah and the Western Discourse**

Armah revises the texts of the Western narratives which tried to justify the colonial rule in Africa. The annals of Western historians and philosophers propagate the belief that slavery must be gradually abolished in Africa, as it is the only institution which could civilize the Africans. David Hume and Georg. F Hegel, are among the Western historians and philosophers who reinforced such claims in their writings. Hegel declared: “*Africa is no historical part in the world*”<sup>35</sup>.

In *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah challenges such assumption in the very first pages of his novel by asserting that the Africans are not a people of yesterday but have a long and rich heritage before the Advent of the Arab and western colonizers. As the novel progresses, he tells us that the true mission of the Westerners was to control the source of gold that was advertised to them by Mansa Musa’s the first during his famous pilgrimage to Mecca:

The further Aftermath of that moron journey was the desert white men’s attack on us. In the further aftermath of that stupid crossing other white men, their eyes burning with uncontainable gluttony, came roaming the sea, searching to find a road to the source of the wealth the ostentatious traveler had displayed hundreds and hundreds of seasons back<sup>36</sup>.

The narrator of *Two Thousand Seasons* reveals the real deeds of the Europeans to whom he attributes the name of the “destroyers” who came from the sea. He tells us that they settled among the African people and built for themselves strong stone houses and fortifications, as if it was their own land. Little by little, and thanks to the help they received from the African corrupt rulers, they expanded their power over the natives and start to take profit from the richness of the African soil. From the following quotation, we comprehend that the true mission of the European invaders is far from bringing light to this continent, as what they are concerned with is to benefit from its riches:

The first wish of the white men is this: they have heard of our land, of the beauty of the mountains and the plains’ fertility here, and of the metals our earth contains-iron in abundance, gold, silver, and our pure, red copper. These metals it is the white men’s wish to take away from us, to take them from their home beyond the sea.<sup>37</sup>

Armah continues his demystification of the African history by illustrating the different horrors and sufferance caused by the Western colonizers to his people in a conscious attempt to rip the veil of the hideous institution of slavery they implanted in Africa ‘*they have planted their cruelty all around us*’<sup>38</sup>. In addition, the narrator tells us about the evil strategies of the destroyers which seek to dissolve the African unity to extend more and more their power and facilitate their destructive mission:

These white destroyers, they searched among us with shrewd eyes, took whom they needed and offered us a choice [...] You can escape the worst sufferings of slavery if you will become askaris for us.” ‘Do you now see the white destroyers’ kindness? “Help us in the destruction of your people. That will be your individual salvation from destruction.”<sup>39</sup>.

In addition to the physical servitude that the destroyers introduced to the African world, Armah accuses them for introducing a mental one as well. Therefore, the African way of life and beliefs referred to in the novel by the ‘way’ was the target of the Europeans, as they consider its destruction as the most viable option that can break the African identity and

destroy all what belongs to the Africans “*all around us, they put a lot of things for forcefully denying the reality of our identity*”<sup>40</sup>. This idea is more illustrated in the following quotation:

It is a wonder we have been flung so far from the way? That our people are scattered even into the desert, across the sea, over and away from this land, and we have forgotten how to recognize ourselves? [...] Killers whose from the sea came holding death of the body in their right, the mind’s annihilation in their left, shrieking fables of a white god and son unconceived, exemplar of their proffered senseless, suffering<sup>41</sup>.

The above point is extended in the novel when Armah portrays the negative consequences of the mixing of his people with the “destroyers”, as some Africans, “the parasites”, as portrayed in the novel, followed the alien way and abandoned theirs. Therefore, the cultural damages that resulted from such fusion are revealed in the novel. The native Isanusi realizes: “*When we [will] have lost our way completely, lost even our names; when you will call your brother not Olu but John, not Kofi but Paul; and our sisters will no longer be Ama, Naita, Idawa and Ningane but creatures called Cecilia, Esther, Mary, Elizabeth and Christina.*”<sup>42</sup>.

The narrator of *Two Thousand Seasons*, therefore tells his people that to preserve their purity and nobility, they cannot do better than returning to their origins and rejecting all what has been brought by the Europeans. He exhorts then the Africans to exterminate the “predators” and the “destroyers” and resist their incessant attempts to distance them from their way “*Monsters they were, and even if we didn’t have in us the courage of truth to execute them outright as punishment for their crimes against all people of the way, we should at least have the wisdom not to welcome them among ourselves.*”<sup>43</sup>.

### **3- Armah’s African Oral Tradition as a Quest for Authenticity**

Unlike Morrison who depends on the African oral tradition to challenge the Euro-American discourse which stipulates that the Africans are bought from the fearsome jungles of Africa and have no culture to exhibit in the New World, Armah embraces it to make a



purely African novel. Therefore, he re-examines and reevaluates the African culture in his novel to display its richness and importance in restituting the African identity and history. Emenyonu asserts that Ayi Kwei Armah is among the postcolonial writers who “*sought to raise the level of consciousness of their fellow Africans about the harm done by the European colonisers to African cultural values and sense of self*”<sup>44</sup>.

After a deep and careful reading of *Two Thousand Seasons*, we have noticed that the author exhorts his people to stick to their own way of life and return to their culture which gives them more strength and power: “*A people losing sight of origins are dead*”<sup>45</sup>. We have also deduced that he endeavors to give a sort of remedy to the disillusionment, the corruption and the continued neocolonialist practices of post-colonial Ghana that he thinks are the fabric of the European and the Arab heritage in his country. Therefore, he exhorts his people to get rid of this heritage and to return to their ‘way’:

Our way is reciprocity. The way is wholeness. Our way knows no oppression. The way destroys oppression. Our way is hospitable to guests. The way repels destroyers. Our way produces before it consumes. The way produces far more than it consumes. Our way creates. The way destroys only destruction”<sup>46</sup>.

As a modern African writer, Armah searches for a kind of genuine and authentic writings with which he may make a purely African novel. The narrator in his quest for self-definition, tried to unite the Africans and to “*establish an African perspective to their own history*”<sup>47</sup>. Therefore, he taps from the rich repertoire of the African oral tradition to tell his people that their traditions and culture are of paramount importance in the restitution of their true identity and self-definition: “*the linking of those gone, ourselves here, those coming; our continuation, our flowing not along any meretricious canal but along our living way, the way: it is that remembrance that calls us*”<sup>48</sup>.

Armah shows that the African oral tradition plays a pivotal role in the reassertion of the social order and wholeness of the African societies. However, colonialism, as the Nigerian

critic David Udoiwang asserts, came with *“its imposition and in the process turned Africans into strangers of their own ways with the attendant lingering crisis of adjustment which left devastating and long-lasting repercussions on the consciousness of the colonised and subjugated societies”*<sup>49</sup>.

The above point is largely developed in Armah’s novel. Thus, he portrayed the pre-colonial African society before the Arabs and European invaders stepped in as being an idyllic one: *“Our clearest remembrances began with a home before we came near the desert of the falling sun”*<sup>50</sup>. However, he accuses the Arabs Muslim and the European colonizers for robbing them this through their intrusion which caused the loss of the African ideals as well as the confusion and anarchy among the people of “Anoa”. In the following quotation, Armah exhorts his people to be faithful to their “way” and resist the foreign attempts of denying the African identity:

We who hear the call not to forget what is in our nature, have we not betrayed it in this blazing noonday of the killers? Around us they have placed a plethora of things screaming denial of our nature, things welcoming us against ourselves, things luring us into the whiteness of destruction. We too have drunk oblivion [...] We cannot continue so. For a refusal to change direction, for the abandonment of the way, for such perverse persistence there are no reasons, only hollow, unconvincing lies<sup>51</sup>.

To create a purely African novel, Armah makes appeal to the African oral tradition that he exploits at both form and content. Thus, his work displays many elements of orality such as proverbs, tales, myths, community festivals and traditional ceremonies. While referring to the period which preceded the Arab and the European intrusion to “the fertile time”, he evokes a mythic figure which is that of “Anoa”; the Akan priestess who is endowed with the power of predicting visions of the future. “Anoa” predicted two thousand seasons of suffering to her people as they welcomed the foreign culture and abandoned theirs: *“Two thousand seasons: a thousand you will spend descending into abysses that would stop your heart and break your mind merely to contemplate [...] Two thousand seasons: a thousand*

*dry, a thousand moist*”<sup>52</sup>. Armah relies on this mythic figure as it recalls the ancestors; the dead sages whose ideals stay in the hall of memory of their communities.

Adding to Myths, Armah embraces the ancient tradition of the “Griot”, the master of memory and speech, “rememberers, utterers”, who had the task of recording the facts of the past to ensure their survival in the collective memory as well as their transmission from one generation to another. Hence, the narrator of *Two Thousand Seasons* shows from the beginning of his text that winning against the Arabs and the Europeans “*depends on the unending stream of a people’s remembrance*”<sup>53</sup>. Through this remembrance, he evokes the ancient tradition of the “Griot” to whom he gives many appellations in his novel including the seers, the hearers and the utterers:

The eyes of seers should range far into purposes. The ears of hearers should listen far towards origins. The utterers’ voice should make knowledge of the way, of heard sounds and visions seen, the voice of the utterers should make this knowledge inevitable”<sup>54</sup>.

Armah’s communal voice through this “Griot” provides us with a kind of a window that permits us to look into earlier times in the African history. Here, Armah reveals through this bard stories that were passed on by word of mouth from generation to generation and a history which can testify against the distorted written versions.

To sustain the appearance of an oral storytelling method, Ayi Kwei Armah exploits the African oral tradition at the level of the form of his novel as well. To achieve this aim, he resorts to many literary devices such as repetition, parallelism, transliteration of African vernacular expressions and so forth. Among these techniques, we find repetition. The “way” which is repeated successively in many paragraphs in the novel echoes the author’s intention of inciting his people to stick to their own way of life and restore their lost African Eden. The use of this device in Armah’s novel is also done to defy western traditional chronological

narration and emphasizes historical facts that are necessary for the formation of the African history.

Adding to repetition, Armah's text is engrained with Akan words like "twapea," and "poano" which certainly reflect the author's process of "decolonization". Thus, he uses them to resist the dominance of the English language in the post colonial literary sphere and give a value to the Ghanaian vernacular language with which his people can identify themselves. Therefore, his novel demarcates from the Western form of the novel which represents a "*Western ideological formation and, therefore, a representation of Western thought*"<sup>55</sup>.

In addition, the communal "We" point of view in *Two Thousand Seasons* is also used to challenge the Western "*World which is based on the Cartesian injunction that I think, therefore I am. A world grounded in individualism, believing strongly in independent actions as opposed to co-operation*"<sup>56</sup>. The narrator of *Two Thousand Seasons* tells us at the end of his novel that "*[t]here is no beauty but in relationships. Nothing cut off by itself is beautiful. Never can things in destructive relationships be beautiful. All beauty is in the creative purpose of our relationships; all ugliness is in the destructive aims of the destroyers' arrangements*"<sup>57</sup>.

What we have deduced in Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, is that the author's main objective in his novel is to challenge the Arab and Western historiography and most of all to provide his readers with an original way of reading the African novel. Thus, in his quest for authenticity, he attempts to "*create an independent narrative space for the African novel, and challenge the dominance of the English novelistic forms in the Post-Colonial world*"<sup>58</sup>.

We have also deduced through our analysis that the two authors' potential to unveil the distorted history of their community forms a critical battle against the monopolization of knowledge and serves the two author's main objective of resisting the omissions and

manipulation of traditional historiography by forming a Counter-Discourse, and this is exactly what the Foucauldian notion of Counter-History offers.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> José Medina, *Toward a Foucaultian Epistemology of Resistance: Counter-Memory, Epistemic Friction, and Guerrilla Pluralism* (U.S.A: Vanderbilt University, 2011.), 16.

<sup>2</sup> Danille Kathleen and Danille T. Guthrie, *Conversations with Toni Morrison* (U.S.A: Mississippi University Press, 1994), 257.

<sup>3</sup> Ronald A. Reis, *African Americans and the civil War* (U.S.A, Chelsea House, 2009), 79.

<sup>4</sup> Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Penguin, 1987), 67.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>6</sup> Kevin D. Roberts, *African American issues* (U.S.A: Greenwood Press, 2006), 138.

<sup>7</sup> Morrison, *Beloved.*, 135.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>12</sup> Harold Bloom, *Toni Morrison's Beloved* (U.S.A: Chelsea House Publishers, 2004), 73.

<sup>13</sup> Morrison, *Beloved*, .11.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>15</sup> Philip M. Peek and Kwesi Yankah, *African Folklore, An Encyclopedia* ( New York: Routledge, 2004), 783.

<sup>16</sup> Morrison, *Beloved*, 210.

<sup>17</sup> Kwami A. Apriah and Henry L. Gates, *Encyclopedia of Africa* ( n, p. n, d), 128.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>19</sup> Morrison, *Beloved*, 46.

<sup>20</sup> Ayi Kwei Armah , *Two Thousands Seasons* ( London: Heinemann, 1973.), 1.

- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.,
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., 19.
- <sup>23</sup> Briand D. Lepard, *Hope for A Global Ethic* (U.S.A, 2005), 70.
- <sup>24</sup> M. A. Khan, *Islamic Jihad: A Legacy of Forced Conversion, Imperialism, And Slavery* (U.S.A: iUniverse rev, 2009). 232.
- <sup>25</sup> Sani Shehu , *Hatred for Black People* (U.S.A, 2013) , 92.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., 169.
- <sup>27</sup> Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, 62.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.,
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid., 36.
- <sup>30</sup> Mona Siddiqui, *The good Muslim* ( U.S.A: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 47.
- <sup>31</sup> Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, 19.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid., 20.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., 66.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid., 47.
- <sup>35</sup> Africa Before Slavery', Viewed 5 May 2014, <[www.africanholocaust.net/.../africa/news\\_ah/africa before slavery.htm](http://www.africanholocaust.net/.../africa/news_ah/africa%20before%20slavery.htm)>.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid., Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, 62.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid., 82.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., 146.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., 147.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid.,xii.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., 2.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid.,66.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid., 78-79.

<sup>44</sup> David Udoinwang, *Myth, Memory and the Nation State: Ayi Kwei Armah's Two Thousand Seasons and Ben Okri's The Famished Road* (Abuja: National Productivity Centre, n.d ), 10.

<sup>45</sup> Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, 2.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*,xiv.

<sup>47</sup> 'Postcolonial Literature', Viewed 25 August 2014, <[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postcolonial\\_literature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postcolonial_literature)>.

<sup>48</sup> Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, 62.

<sup>49</sup> Udoinwang, *Myth, Memory and the Nation State: Ayi Kwei Armah's Two Thousand Seasons and Ben Okri's The Famished Road*, 3.

<sup>50</sup> Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons.*, xiv.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>55</sup> Edward Sackey, *What is Africa doing with the Novel* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 2010.), 14.

<sup>56</sup> Sackey, *What is Africa doing with the Novel*, 14.

<sup>57</sup> Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, 206.

<sup>58</sup> Kofi Anyidoho and James Gibbs, *Fon Tom From: Contemporary Ghanaian Literature, Theatre and Film* (Amsterdam: Atlanta, GA 200, 2000), 176.

## Conclusion

Our dissertation has attempted to draw parallels between the narrative of the Ghanaian author Ayi Kwei Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons* and that of the American Toni Morrison, *Beloved*. We have shown how the real intention of the two authors in rewriting the history of their communities serves their ultimate purpose of reconstructing it and offering an alternative one that sheds light on black life, history, culture and genealogy. We have assumed that the selective narratives can be read as a kind of a “literary archeology”, as the two authors accomplished the very thing Foucault asks new historians to do in his outstanding work, the *Archeology of Knowledge*; the uncovering of the ‘other history’ that ‘runs beneath’ the traditional historiography.

To unveil the alternative history presented in the two novels, we have shown how Michel Foucault’s theoretical assumption of Counter-History served this objective. Throughout our analysis of Armah’s and Morrison’s procedure, we have deduced that they resorted to Counter-History as a main narrative device in their texts. With this literary device, the two writers communicate the history of their communities and challenge the pacifying discourses of the official historiography of their communities.

Armah and Morrison drew from the essence of the African oral tradition in their reconstruction of the history of their communities. We have seen that Morrison draws from the African oral tradition with which she may contradict the Euro-American assumptions of the backwardness of the Afro-Americans to liberate her people from the state of “inferiority” and “savageness” given to them. In the other side, we have seen that Armah made use of the African oral tradition as a quest for authentic and genuine writings to make a purely African novel.



Throughout our analysis, we noticed that both narratives can be read as twin classics sharing many similarities. They both try to provide authentic records of slavery and show how the worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of one's dignity, self-respect and identity. Therefore, the theme of quest for identity is very vivid in their novels. The characters in *Two Thousand Seasons* are described in constant search for ways of regaining their lost identity through the implementation of the "way" and in *Beloved*, the characters too are described searching for ways to affirm their identity in a world that reduced them to silence and treated them in inhuman ways.

The last point shows how the two writers worry about African and Afro-American identities. This cultural problem in *Beloved* and *Two Thousand Seasons* can open new doors for further researches such as the quest for identity.

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