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CHAOS AND COMMOTION OF CORRUPTION: A STUDY OF AYI KWEI ARMAH'S  
*BEAUTYFUL ONES ARE NOT YET BORN*

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ABSTRACT

Ayi Kwei Armah's novel the *Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is a classic novel written in the years shortly after independence precisely 1968, it is a literary work that attempts to place within context the corrupt values that existed during independence either socially or politically. It is Based in Ghana formerly Gold Coast where Armah was born. This literary work uses the country as a symbolic representation of other African countries so it is meant that the issue of corruption is broadly discussed in the novel and should not be viewed as completely localized in Ghana but rather should be generally used as a mirror reflection of the experiences of other African countries. The novel is rich in its thematic approaches as well as the literary stylistic devices that have been put at the disposition of the author for ease of communicating the message. This paper tends to study the situation in which the protagonist changes himself unwillingly to survive in the society.

**Key Words:** Commotion, Corruption, Chaos, Social Evil, Struggle.

Corruption is a negative term that connotes general decay and moral laxity in the society. It thrives where there is no discipline and strong moral principles. Armah stands clear and obvious to the readers through criticizing heavily the rot and decayed values of the post- colonial period and specifically during Kwame Nkrumah's government. Ayi Kwei Armah's novel the *Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is a classic novel written in the years shortly after independence precisely 1968, it is a literary work that attempts to place within context the corrupt values that existed during independence either socially or politically. It is Based in Ghana formerly Gold Coast where Armah was born. This novel has a simple and straightforward plot that tells the story of the 'man' unnamed rail clerk and his relations with his wife and family his fellow workers and his few.

The novel's protagonist is revealed through his actions and his inner thoughts and encounters with various people that he is in search for understanding and wants to determine a place in a corrupt society under its simple surface, the novel is carefully plotted describing and dramatizing complicated issues. The novel is divided into three parts. The first Part describes a day in the life of the man and his encounters with various people such as a bus driver his fellow rail way workers, a timber merchant who attempts to bribe him and his

wife Oyo these various encounters are at length are described at length and in great detail. "Everywhere he goes the man encounters moral; physical and spiritual corruption for instance the bus driver steals from the company" (Killam 49-50).

Part two of the novel traces the history of the man's progress within a corrupt society, Ghana's post-colonial history is revealed as well as the birth, growth and death of Nkrumah's regime which is shown in the novel by the concentrated life span of the 'man child' who goes through a full cycle of birth, death and growth in nine years the period of Nkrumah's regime and finally the last part of the novel describes events leading up the military coup that overthrows the government and the reactions of the public to this event. A lengthy part of this section of the novel describes the escape of the corrupt minister Koomson. "Armah had written a novel that places characters in a historical context in order to display the conditions in which people live; conditions in which few prosper handsomely at the expense of those who create the wealth" (Kayode 5).

The novel is rich with illustrations of corruption, failing economic and social systems in Ghanaian politics also skepticism about the socialist ideology, declining public trust and morality among others. As poverty bites deeper in the Ghanaian society, there are certain baffling realities of many citizens going hungry. For instance, the man is unable to feed his family yet there are certain families whose dogs eat more meat than what an ordinary family eats in a month. It explores individual isolation, unequal development, corruption and wasted potential in newly independent African nations against a backdrop of centuries of colonial rule. There is no clear resolution in novel, and the outlook of it can be easily perceived as miserable. Armah mocks with great forcefulness and misshapen language all that is rotten in the world of hypocritical people, lost opportunities and the enormous gap between the few with all the money and power hence the theme that is Armah's main focus is corruption that existed in various form politically and socially through means either bribing or embezzling.

According to Gakawandi (1977) "In the world of the novel, wealth and power have become the principal pursuits and the inevitable result the situation is a complete disregard of any moral or social considerations in the drive to satisfy individual desires" (102). Throughout the novel it is clearly shown that corruption existed heavily in the society. Armah used the novel to show his unpleasantness and disagreement towards the political and social standards of Ghana during the post-colonial era; "his rejection of the current values I is seen in the protagonist's character that appears to struggle in the preserve of his clean soul in the middle of a dirty environment filled with rot and disgust" (Firtzgerrard 2).

Armah has stated that the African continent is drowned in corruption and in the carelessness of both its leaders and people, the phenomenon of corruption is considered as a need for prosperity and development as Armah says: "The rot which imprisoned every life in the effortless embrace" (4). Here Armah is clearly stating that corruption has been immersed in every aspect of the country's norms; each member of the society desires to prosper through involving in corrupt deed. Moreover the 'man' resists his wife's insistence for accepting bribery and pushes him to imitate his fellow 'Koomson' in offering his wife and children a prosperous life through engaging himself in corrupt activities, hence corruption is found everywhere in Africa as it is illustrated in the novel and those who are in better positions are the ones engaged in it the most. For example presidents and ministers i.e. "people who rule the country even after the countries gained independence, corruption never cease to exist. It accumulated more than before and those flourishing ideas for better society after colonization has disappeared and vanished i.e. none of the wishes Africans dreamed about came true" (Gillard 6).

Armah means that the black leaders after colonization wanted to imitate whites in the way they ruled their country; the way they treated blacks during colonization those blacks did not make any change by the contrary independent countries remained as if they did not gain their freedom. Furthermore, some modes of corruption are seen all over the continent and some individuals are promised some developments by their candidates and they never happen (Macheka15)

According to Gakwandi "We are presented in a world in which the sewage pipes of history have been exploded and everything is polluted" (140) This is evident in Armah's novel the *Beautiful Ones are not Yet Born* where corruption substituted morals and became essential in every aspect of the society .i.e. "the corruption of post-independent leaders triumphed and gained over morality of humans those rulers are misusing the power for the sake of prosperity and wealth" (15). 'The man' refuses the bribery offered from Amakwa but his fellow workers accept and those who rejects are being mocked by others. Amakwa says: "...you are a very wicked man you will never prosper" (107). It is meant that if someone holds on his morals and refuses to engage himself in corrupt practices such as accepting and taking bribery others will despise and ridicule on him. The individual will be considered as wick; also it seems that corruption among officials and politicians become an ordinary activity through which they gather money and own luxurious cars.

In the novel money arises constantly in the first chapter and it is obvious from the beginning of the plot when the man taking a trip from his house to where he works at the rail way administration. During his trip the bus conductor does not give a full change and the rest of the money belongs to him, the reader feels the humor of the conductor smelling the note and the coins and his observation that "... strange that a man could have so many cedi's pass through his hands and yet not really know their smell" (3). The conductor hopes that the rider will not ask for change, for he would profit more if he does not have to give any change in a time when currency is scarce, people would just do anything to obtain some.

In another incident where the mother of the man's wife when she was amazed by the luxury and wealth that Koomson lives so she said "Aah, Koomson has done well we must say it, he has done well for himself and his family" (139). The above quotation reveals that the woman was praising Koomson for being very rich, not paying attention in the way he gathered his wealth. This shows that ordinary people do praise those politicians for their achievements even though through illegal activities.

'The Man' and his family members shouted in amazement, claiming the money was too much, but Koomson said: "Twelve thousand pounds yes. But the money is not the difficult thing after all, the bank is ours and we can do anything" (136). Koomson is confident that he can do anything with the money he possesses and that he can lift cash from the government any time without being caught, those politicians are sure that the government funds are under their control without thinking that they can put the country's economy in jeopardy.

Furthermore, Koomson embezzling of government funds is pictured in his physical appearances; he represents the neo-colonial leaders who are fattened by the fruits of betrayal of their own people. The man ironically says about him and their likes The man says: "these were the socialists of Africa, fat, perfumed, soft with ancestral softness of chiefs who sold their people and are celestially happy with the fruit of the trade" (131).

To be successful in Ghana one needs to be a thief and corrupt since what Koomson has cannot be acquired from his salary. He is preoccupied with gathering money, he lives prosperous life at the expense of other fellow workers for instance, he uses the fishing boat plot to deceive Oyo the man's wife and her mother since he promised them that he is going to write the boat under their names yet the boat belongs to his daughter princess. Armah stated: "How long will Africa be cursed with its own leaders" (120)

Armah feels sorry for Africa since it is being destroyed by its own people. They are caring only about their benefits. Armah's novel is a careful depiction of the social, political and economic life that Ghana experienced in the years immediately after independence, it is a careful description of the great hope that Ghanaians had in their government and their institution and how their dream for a better life vanished and was depresses with their leaders, Ghana experience has at its center stage the reality of a ruling class that was struggling to acquire the trappings of power that would satisfy their desires to feel like European counterpart. This life has driven citizens to desire for attaining a 'good life' and to afford that they are forced to resort to corruption as well as other anti-social behaviors; "to the citizenry the reality much awaited charge with the coming of independence was definitely diminished" (Kayode 6).

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In another main incident from the novel in which a timber contractor tried to bribe "The Man", in order to get a space in the train to move his woods from the bush. "The Man" found the bribery act quite offensive and so rejected it. The discussion of the rich timber contractor and "The Man" goes, with the businessman saying: "Take one for yourself and give the other one to your friend. I myself will find fine drink for you. Take it. Take it, my friend" (30). "The man" responded saying: "I will not take it" (31). This shows the level of depravity of the entire people of the society in the world of this novel. It is a representation of how people in different African societies do engage in bribing their ways to get favors, which Armah considers to be awful and particularly detestable. The writer tries to tell the readers that it is indeed bad for the people to bribe their ways at whatever time, as this will not make any society grow.

As conclusion *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is Ayi Kwei Armah's weapon to highlight the misuse of power by the African leaders. He has criticized heavily the widespread of corruption in Africa; which destroyed the economy. Ayi Kwei Armah's main focus is to reveal the extensive spread of corruption in the highest levels .i.e. leaders and in the lowest levels as well, it means social groups, no one has prevented himself from these activities. Armah's nationalistic tendencies he pushed him to compose this prose, since he desires from the Africans to develop and live a clean life. Moreover for the sake of portraying corruption in newly independent countries the writer has used several techniques to highlight this theme to make the readers comprehend his message. Thus the message is that corrupt people won the battle against those Beautiful ones "The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born."

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