

## **CORRUPTION AND GOVERNANCE CRISES IN AYI KWEI ARMAH'S *THE BEAUTIFUL ONES ARE NOT YET BORN***

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### **Abstract**

*The attainment of independence and self-rule by any nation is to afford it the opportunity to benefit from the abundant human and natural resources it is endowed with. The Africans were not comfortable with the leadership and service of the colonial masters characterised by exploitation of resources, slavery, deceit, and other forms of negative tendencies. This gave rise to agitation for independent and self-rule by some African elites; hoping for better and satisfactory service for sustainable development until the late 1950's when the dream started manifesting. This paper examines the state of African continent after independence. It also examines the high level of corruption and governance crises in Africa perpetrated by our African leaders such that it derails the continent of progress and development. The paper identifies some of the major causes of governance crisis aligning to maladministration, ethno-religious crisis, political thuggery, terrorism and other leadership problems in our text of study. It further seeks for positive change to give the Africans a sense of belonging and compete with their counter-parts globally as it has all the needs for such competition and development.*

**Keyword:** Corruption, Governance, Resources, Development, Exploitation, Deceit.

## **Introduction**

Leadership has been described as the capacity to mobilise resources, especially human, towards the attainment of set goals. It is the ability to harness the best qualities of the individuals towards the common good. In doing this, the leaders must provide the enabling environment or be able to use the power of cohesion to distil those qualities in their followers that translate to national achievements. For the socio-economic and political development of a society, the possible approach for utilising the immense positive African factor is to provide a level playing field for development, unfortunately, this is lacking in African leaders.

Africa is in a painful state of suffering in the hands of its leaders. The continent is at the lowest point of its social and physical development. Though African leaders that emerged after independence are real Africans by identity but on the other hand, are like western in their fatherland. We can also say that western countries and their institutions, which try to model Africa to their desired image, have made themselves leaders of Africa through their African agents. Indeed, western leaders have contributed in ruining Africa. They support corrupt African leaders by accepting to save their looted funds and resources. Hagher states:

Yet African leaders must also accept the blame for the pain, anguish and death, which Africans suffer and continue to suffer. There is a view gaining popularity that, after all, Africa works as a rational entity where leaders maximize returns on the state of confusion, uncertainty and chaos which, political instability, societal divisions, violence, crime and bring. This view sees no hope for democracy, as leaders are merely patrons and followers clients (7).

It is observed that African leaders are always getting rich and more comfortable than their led, while high level of disorder, violence, crime, war and famine become pervasive daily. This, in effect, shows that Africa is modernising without development. If this is allowed to continue unchecked, Africa might become the ultimate destination for criminality and terrorism as a result of failure in leadership and governance characterised by corruption and other forms of social vices.

Corruption is a social problem that has drawn concern globally. Swamy, Lee and Azfer, assert that: Corruption in Africa is a problem of routine deviation from established standards and norms by public officials and parties with whom they interact (178). They also identified the types of corruption in Africa as bribery, private gain, and other benefits to non-existent workers and pensioners referred to as ghost workers. The dishonest and illegal behavior exhibited especially by people in authority for their personal gain is termed corruption. Furthermore, Agbaje, quoting the ICPC Act (Section 2), states that:

Corruption includes vices like bribery, fraud and other related offences. Also, corruption is the abuse or misuse of power or position of trust for personal or group benefit, monetary or otherwise.

Consequently, corruption is symptomatic of numerous difficulties within contemporary societies. This dangerous phenomenon usually involves two or more parties. Wraith and Simpkins asserts that: corruption is contagious. An analysis of the anti-graft/anti-corruption laws in Nigeria shows that corruption will continue in spite of the laws because the perpetrators do not fear any consequences. This is reflective of other parts of the countries in Africa. This phenomenon cuts across all segments of development such as award of contracts, promotion of staff, dispensation of justice, misuse of public offices,

embezzlement of public funds and other negative tendencies that hinder the progress and development of the continent.

The failure of our leaders in emancipating the workers and peasants from economic deprivation and the adoption of capitalist political – economic system also led to the emergence of a literature that protest against capitalism and offers socialism as the solution to the continents’ problems. Festus Iyayi, Kole Omotosho, Festus Iyayi, Ngugi Wa Thiong’O, Chinua Achebe and other literary writers have attempted to utilise literature as an instrument of change. They assert that the problem of Africa is that of the productive lower class. In essence, the dehumanising condition which majority of our people find themselves has been brought about by insecurity of our leaders due to leadership problem for selfish interests.

Killam, commenting on the leadership, social ills and moral decadence in our society, joined Achebe in saying that if one takes the example of Nigeria, which is the place he knows best, things had got to such a point politically that there was no other answer or way that you can resolve this impasse politically. The political machine is so abused that whichever way one passed it, it produces the same results and therefore another force that come in. The possibility of change is projected when the central character is capable of confronting and triumphing over obstacles. This approach to people’s ability to liberate themselves from oppressive forces of society is confined to all Africa writings.

Ayi Kwei Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is a clear example that handles such issue. The Man who is a symbol of virtue in a corrupt Ghanaian society is depicted assisting a corrupt minister to flee from the country during the coup, thereby aiding a corrupt leader to escape the wrath of the law. The man compromises his position as a beacon of hope in the society.

## **Corruption and Governance Crises in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born***

*The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is one of the classic works that depicts the post independence or post colonial experience of most African countries. The use of Ghana is just a symbolic device to represent the African countries, as almost all African countries are bedeviled with this negative tendencies characterised by corruption, bad governance, and other social vices. The issue of corruption and bad governance are broadly discussed in the novel and should not be viewed as completely localised in Ghana but rather should be generally used as a minor reflection of the experiences of other African countries.

While some critics commended him for his literary approach, others like Frederksen (1987), Wright (1959), condemn him for his accusations of the prevailing values in post-colonial society. On the other hand, Achebe sees Armah as too pessimistic due to his extreme monopoly of the language. Despite all these controversies, Armah's quest for good governance and sustainable development and the equality of Africans are desirable. Armah's message to the public is resistance to all the obstacles that stand against the vision of Africans and also to liberate themselves to develop and prosper.

*The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* captures the wide spread of corruption among Africans and attendant problems, this shows Armah's main perspective on harsh image of corruption and selfishness of both the leaders which hinders the African countries from development. Corruption still remains the major social, ethical and political economic challenge for which a lot of attention and emphasis has been focused. The novel is Armah's disillusionment with the post-colonial experience of Ghana and demonstrates the wasted hopes of Africans due to Nkrumah's misuse of power and wealth through corrupt activities.

Nkrumah and his corrupt government were overthrown in a military coup d'état. It is a period in Ghana's history and its atmosphere of disillusion and despair, its unlimited corruption that Armah portrayed in the text. The 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...(Killam 9).

This leader leads the British colony of the Gold coast to independence in 1957 which is the first African country to gain autonomy from the British control. Ghana, the home of the writer represents one of the African counties where corruption existed extensively and high level of fraud. The novel is Armah's means to illustrate the variety of issues that exist in African countries mainly the wide spread illegal practices by both the lead and the led (low class) themselves, that is, due to their ignorance or nonchalant attitude to ask for their rights. This made the leaders to loot, siphon and divert resources as much as possible (49). 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 the bus driver, his fellow railway workers, a timber merchant who attempts to bribe him and his wife Oyo, these various encounters are described at length. Everywhere The Man goes, he encounters moral, physical and spiritual corruption. For instance the bus driver steals from the company (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 as depicted in the novel by the life span of the "Man Child" who goes through a life cycle of birth, death and growth in nine years of the period of Nkrumah's regime. Finally, the last part of the novel describes the events leading to the military coup that terminates the corrupt civilian

regime and the reactions of the public. This section also describes the escape of the corrupt minister Koomson.

In the *Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, African leaders are depicted as highly corrupt. In the novel, we see Koomson who represents the example of corrupt leaders. He exhibits how politicians steal public funds and other resources for the sake of enriching themselves at the detriment of the ordinary people in the society. Armah explores how Joe Koomson, the minister, uses his political status to collect wealth for himself. When “The Man” visited Koomson’s house with his wife, Oyo, when he enters the house, he couldn’t believe what he saw filled with high qualitative and expensive furniture.

Specifically, The Man was surprised at those things he saw in Koomson’s house, psychologically concluded that such properties can only be acquired through corrupt means. Furthermore, the mother of The Man’s wife was also carried away by the luxury and wealth that Koomson live in, and she states: ‘Aah, Koomson has done well, we must say it. He has done well for himself and his family’ (139). This is reflective of the ignorance of the masses who, rather criticizing and commending the ill-gotten. No minding the source of the wealth, but praising and commending him for acquiring such wealth. Development and progress have eluded Africa due to the political corruption and bad governance exhibited by African leaders, causing disappointment to the newly appointed government officials with little salaries as take home pay. Koomson who changed from a low class worker to the position of leader in the country is the depiction of the bad leadership that have exploited the masses through their loots.

Furthermore, Armah depicts the African politicians in such a way that they own and manipulate every bit of African resources. This can be seen from the visit of The Man and his family to Koomson’s house, when he (Koomson) ordered for drinks to be served to the

visitors. He says thus: “Atinga, bring the trolley and put the drinks. Put also ice and put glasses four” (140). This shows the luxury and avalanche of which the African leaders behave while the ordinary citizen could not afford an ordinary drinking water, not to mention such drinks such drinks. Also, the discussion with respect to the purchase of one boat for fishing business that can be bought for twelve thousand pounds, while the Man and co were amazed at the cost of the boat as Koomson shows no concern. He states: “Twelve thousand pounds, yes. But the money is not the difficult thing after all, the bank is ours and we can do anything” (136).

The above scenario shows how our African leaders control the banks not minding not minding the consequences. Government money is their money, not for projects and development. Armah explores as another form of corruption; he reveals the social life of Ghanaians that shows government leaders like Koomson, Zacharias Legos and Abednego Yamoah who enjoy life meaning characterised by possession of quality and expensive properties. This is arising from the embezzlement and looting of public funds and resources. The abuse of power is seen in the character of Koomson and his government officials while the character of conductor, boatman, watchman, clerk and drivers remain at a sorry.

Koomson is tempted with the fruits of office; The Man knows that he (Koomson) is successful as a result of public theft. He steals the money that belongs to the state coffers and abuses the public trust bestowed on him. He and his family enjoy luxurious life and in possession of expensive cars, houses, furniture and play a life, meaning British way of life while the followers are languishing in abject poverty. Even their daughters eats, walk and talk like Britons (17). Armah explores Koomson’s embezzlement of government funds through his physical appearances, such that he represents the neo-



colonial leaders who are fattened by the fruits of betrayal of their own people. The Man ironically says about him:

These were the socialists of Africa, fat, perfumed, soft with ancestral softness of chiefs who sold their people and are celestially happy with the fruits of the trade (131).

For our African people to become rich, one needs to be in government for easy accumulation of wealth. Every African leader sought only for himself and his family. They are the same people that accused the colonial masters of lip service and exploitation of our resources. The colonial masters gave us the independence and left, yet, our leaders are worst than them. They are preoccupied with abuse of power, deceit, breach of trust and other negative practices. Armah worried by their acts, states: “How long will Africa be cursed with its own leaders” (120). He feels sorry for Africa since it is being destroyed by its own people.

There are other corruption devices such as denial of social amenities, frustration of the downtrodden and denial other necessities of life. These and other issues formed the basis of corruption and bad governance in African. Armah uses various techniques such as satire, obscene language, filthy atmosphere, flash back characterization among others devices that enriched his work in exploring his message. He uses corrupt practices in order to illustrate his disgust and hatred to the government of Ghana during the post-colonial period and to achieve his goal. He also uses several techniques to explain in details the wide spread of corruption in the novel, the techniques are used to demonstrate the corrupt environment after independence. Some of these techniques include flashback, ellipsis, characterisation and other devices that enriched the work.

## Conclusion

*The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* focuses on post-independence period of Ghanaian society; it is a symbolic of many African countries where corruption and bad governance remain a major problem at all levels, this attack is used by Armah to satirise and awaken the Africans, the population as a whole to see the truth and work hand in hand in the dismal of any evil issue that can affect the country. The work examines the issue of corruption and the total embrace by each member of the society who did not do their best to overcome this issue.

Armah mocks with great forcefulness and distorted 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, and the masses without anything at all. It depicts the sad surroundings of filth and corruption, but there are also moments of laughter in his observations. Good can be found in the vitality of his characters, which are prepared to search for something beyond that of everybody else. So, the paper answered the question raised before about Armah's main focus in the novel, that is, the writer's only and prominent intention is to reveal the facts that corruption caused to African societies.

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