

Purposeful Portrayal of Ghanaian Society in A.K. Armah's "*The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*"

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Abstract

Ayi Kwei Armah was a well-known Ghanaian novelist, short story writer, essayist, poet, and scriptwriter. His works typically explore postcolonial Africa and focus on human alienation. His writing is both an exploration of the African historic and cultural universe. Armah's writings bear the mark of novelists with the power of approach and sense of priority to his nation. His return to Ghana in 1964 was marked by a deep sense of loss and disillusionment with the Ghanaian situation which was the aftermath of independence.

Keywords: Ghana, Western Colonization, Corruption, Alienation, Bribery, Regime

African literature is closely linked to its soil and society in nature. A study of the three phases of African history – pre-colonialism, colonialism, and post-colonialism could be very helpful for the proper understanding of the works of any African writer. This article deals with the portrayal of Ghanaian society during the 1960s and aims to portray the decayed society during this period. Corruption and many controversies which inflicted the minds of people are well-depicted in the debut novel of Armah.

Ayi Kwei Armah was a well-known Ghanaian novelist, short story writer, essayist, poet, and scriptwriter. Armah is considered one of Africa's leading prose stylists writing in English. His works typically explore postcolonial Africa and focus on human alienation. Armah, a Ghana writer and author of seven novels, has written many other books about African and African American identities and what remains from it after the forced crossing of the Atlantic Ocean and the Western Colonization. These two historical phenomena are strongly connected to the problem of cultural alienation which strikes not only African Societies but also the whole Black Diaspora.

Like, most of the writers of the former English colonies, his writing is both an exploration of the African historic and cultural universe and an attempt to restore the inheritance which gradually crumbled off and deteriorated in the contact of imperial cultures. His return to Ghana in 1964 was marked by a deep sense of loss and disillusionment with the Ghanaian situation which was the aftermath of independence

He always speaks on behalf of his community. He plays a role of a teacher, curator, and therapist for a whole community. With his knowledge regarding the African community, Armah's writings bear the mark of novelists with the power of approach and a sense of priority to his nation. This makes him a predominantly unique writer when compared to his contemporaries. Armah's earlier novels represent a longingness for a completely lost culture and traditional values because of Colonialism. His later novels were a powerful attempt to make his culture a definite one.

African culture and history's complexity are profound in Armah's novels. The future of Africa is illustrated in the glow of the present and the past. It led the way by an acknowledgment on the part of Armah that the current circumstances are rotten with its corrupt system of the glorious traditional convention whereas the past covers the way for a long journey ahead.

Ayi Kwei Armah's first novel, "*The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*" marked the arrival of a major ability in the African literary canon. Many people desire to develop the genre of novel in African literature by using its unique traditional forms and terms. Initially, this novel received many negative reviews and then everything came to the limelight. Critics and Reviewers were very confrontational about the novel and doomed it as an utterance of distress and depression. After taking a closer look into the novel reveals the thoughts and ideas of Armah. Later, critics understood how Armah conveyed his societal responsibility through his writings. This novel in particular has a variety of themes like poverty, exploitation, class consciousness, corruption, bribery, etc. Armah's major concern is the degradation of social values.

Corruption and Bribery play a vital role in major characters' lives. Ghanaians do not indulge in such illegal activities which were later infused by Westerners. Even after the Independence of Ghana, people were not living their original life they were all adopting

Western habitual lifestyles. Armah's concern for the survival of social norms and moral values coupled with his extensive use of symbols and images and his poetic use of language became the subject of discussion for a long time.

In this novel, Armah has shown his deep concern for greed and political corruption in a newly independent African nation, Ghana. Even the title of this novel is an irony, which means it does not give direct meaning, but rather depicts that in his society beautiful ones are being born every day. They are all being destroyed by their societies by engaging in filthy activities. The word "Beautiful" is wrongly misspelled to symbolize evils in society. Every time those who were thought to be the beautiful ones (leaders of the nation) themselves again indulge in corruption and threaten common people. They earn a very big sum of amount and lead a very luxurious lifestyle, unwanted materialistic products which were adopted from westerners, and purchase fully furnished houses. Hence the masses (commoners) are left to suffer poverty as a sign they wear ripped clothes, are illiterate, and hardly get sufficient social services. According to Armah, the blame is on the leaders. Hence good leaders have not yet come and been elected. Therefore, the author has used the title to summarize the present condition of independent (dependent) Ghana.

The future of Africa is portrayed in the light of the present and the past. It is guided by an awareness on the part of Armah that the contemporary situation is rotten with its systematic demolition of the traditional institutions whereas the past paves the way for a long journey ahead. What Fanon observed in respect of the colonized writers is also applicable to Armah who is engaged in the task of decolonizing the mind.

"The colonized man who writes for his people ought to use the past with the intention of opening the future as an invitation to action and a basis for hope" (22).

The plot of this novel takes place during Passion week in 1965 and also on February 25, 1966. This novel particularly focuses on the political life of Ghana which was changed upside down during the regime of Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president. Kwame Nkrumah became the first prime minister and president of Independent Ghana. Nkrumah led an authoritarian regime in Ghana, as he repressed political opposition and conducted elections that were not free and fair. In the year, 1966 he was overthrown by the National Liberation Council.

Armah portrayed the current political situation by representing the characters like the Man (unnamed Protagonist), and Koomson resembles the corrupted politician in the novel. These two characters have contradictory characteristics in nature. The Man was working in Railway Station as a clerk. He was a very genuine and humble person and he refuses to get bribery from his workplace. Koomson and the Man were old classmates.

Armah's vision of the world is certainly better than 'what exists' and he sees infinite possibilities of man 'rising higher' than at the present moment. What prompts him to portray decay and degeneration with all its allusory motifs is a deep-rooted feeling of pain and hurt. As a result, we are compelled to see that African history is a continuous story of exploitation and betrayal first by one master (Colonizers), and then by another (Corrupt politicians). Fanon describes in the title of his treatise as "Black Skin, White Masks" and whom Armah himself terms as "Black Masters, White Shadows". Fanon's theory of neo-colonialism has far-reaching implications and his perceptive comments help us put the novel in its proper perspective. He says:

“The national bourgeoisie of underdeveloped countries is not engaged in production, nor invention, nor building, nor labour; it is completely canalized into activities of the intermediary type. Its innermost vocation seems to be to keep in the running and to be part of the racket. The psychology of the national bourgeoisie is that of the businessman, not that of a captain of industry (15).”

One day when the Man was returning from his duty, he met his old friend Koomson, who is now a very powerful person in the ministry, and also a corrupted politician. Oyo, the wife of the protagonist is always fond of money and well-settled life. Even she scorns her husband for not getting enough money for the family. Oyo also forces the Man to indulge in the discussion which takes place in the Koomson’s place. Oyo was also once involved in some sort of filthy action (fishing boat deal) with the help of Koomson to earn some money. Oyo’s action made the man regret and he feels guilty because of his wife. Despite this deal from Koomson, Oyo urged the Man to host a small dinner party at their home. Koomson and his wife Estie, return the dinner invitation because that deal will not be a profitable one for the men’s family also there is another reason for not accepting the invitation. Koomson is now very famous and leading a luxurious life, he refuses to use the latrine which is in Man’s home.

Armah has portrayed the decayed Ghanaian society through the character Koomson and his fellow people which is a true depiction of the politician Kwame Nkrumah. When Nkrumah becomes the first president of independent Ghana, he doesn’t care for the welfare of his nation and people. His only focus is money and fame.

The Man was not interested to sign but Oyo signs the deal and later they get into trouble because of the boat deal. Koomson’s official ministers and those who were involved got arrested and supervised under custody. Koomson reaches Man’s home to seek his old friend’s help. The Man was returning from his routine work home. The Man helps Koomson to escape through the latrine to crawl down which he initially declined to use. They both took a boat with the help of Oyo. When they reach the harbour, the Man jumps from the boat and reaches the shore, and falls asleep. When he was way back home, sees an inscription that refers to the title of the book. He leaves home with the feeling of hope for the future generation. Thus, through this novel, Armah has used many symbols to discuss the evil and corruption that degrades and pollutes the country. At the end of the novel the protagonist, Armah witnesses some hope for the future generation. Armah is also early waiting to see the beautiful one to be born in Post-independent Ghana.

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