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DESPAIR AND DISINTEGRATION IN AYI KWEI ARMAH'S *THE BEAUTYFUL ONES ARE NOT YET BORN* AND *FRAGMENTS*

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DEDICATION

This research work is simply dedicated to my late father Yaya K. Ayim and my mother Elisabeth Adjadohoun who gathered all lives sacrifices and resources for the triumph of their adorable little son.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Literature is a work of art, which is purely imaginative. But imagination is shaped by the reality of everyday life; in other words, imagination has reality as its framework. A well-endowed writer cannot make his art a success if there is no insight of reality in it. So some works of art are so close to reality that you almost forget that they are works of art. Literature, at its best, goes beyond ordinary story telling. It may grapple with small or big issues, but always good literature should give insight and provide enlightenment. Beyond its entertainment value, literature can also be a liberator of the mind and thus create a way for progress. It is undeniable that African literature emerged from the colonization period. Those who were forced into the early mission schools newly built by the missionaries became inevitably the first elite in modern Africa, by the sheer feet of independence in their respective countries. Among that elite, we had doctors, journalists, politicians, but also those who seemed to our mind to have been the most important ones: writers.

In fact, if Africa is strongly accused of not having any culture or history, this is due to the orality of African literature. That weakness, our literature started correcting by the first generation of African writers from the newly independent states. The years of independence then witnessed the coming out of a lot of writers who devoted their time and energy to recount various topics in their societies. The liberation of Africa, from poverty, blight and political bondage was part of the concern of African writers. And there has been no shortage of subject matter. The first challenge for literature in Africa, from this critical point of view, is coming to terms with the continent's heritage in slavery, colonialism and independence. Among the writers who dealt adequately with that subject matter are Chinua Achebe from Nigeria and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o from Kenya, but also Ayi Kwei Armah a Ghanaian novelist who attains international renown for his fiction in the late 1960 and early 1970's. Indeed, Ayi Kwei

Armah emerged as a member of this group in the later 1960's with his first novel, *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. In Armah's second novel, *Fragments* (first published in 1971), he continues with liberational theme with a story woven around a family and society caught in a trap of declining values and loss of meaning.

Ayi Kwei Armah's first two books are grouped together because their literary style and themes seem to reflect the writer and his exile's struggle to understand his homeland. In fact, *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments* are novels which are of particular importance and meaning for African societies during the early periods after colonization. The aforementioned provide an opportunity to study a confrontation between European and African patterns of thought. This confrontation and its effects especially the original confusion and disillusionment, followed by fragmentation and disintegration and then by compromise and consolidation is a principal thematic concern in the two novels. Both *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments* contain a dark humor that betrays Armah's less-than-favorable appraisal of what happened in Ghana after independence.

The theme of despair and social fragmentation seems to pervade in some of Armah's novels. The reason for this is not hard to find. The years immediately following the Second World War were years of hope and promise for Africa. Africa had fought on the side of the Allies and victory was won against Nazi Germany. This victory intensified Africa's struggle against colonial domination. African soldiers had watched their white counterparts die in the war, and they had also shown as much courage and bravery as white soldiers. The war thus served to demystify the notion of white supremacy, and, on their return to the black continent, many of these soldiers became active in the numerous protest movements and political parties in their countries. They saw this new struggle as an opportunity to regain their dignity and assert their freedom.

There were other, even more forceful, reasons that gave cause for hope and promise. One of these was the great economic potential of the continent. The potential for development was enormous. Africa looked to the era when her own sons and daughters would tap her vast resources and transform the continent into a great economic power. These were the days of great expectations in which people looked forward to the end of famine and disease in Africa and the beginning of a great social transformation. For many people in Ghana at the time, the period heralded Ghana's golden age.

In *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born,* Armah supports this claim by insisting that the decolonizing years offered real potential for radical transformation. *"The teacher" expresses the feeling of the people when he observes that they were ready here for big and beautiful things''*[1]. This general expectancy could be felt and even "the teacher" was thrilled. *"The promise was so beautiful", he says. Even those who were too young to understand it all knew that at last something good was being born. It was there. We were not deceived about that"*[2]. As Neil Lazarus rightly observes, this is how *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* gains its *"distinctive moral flavor"*[3]. It derives its moral intensity from the inability of the leaders to avail themselves of the opportunities presented at independence.

Armah's novels are not merely a lament over Africa's missed opportunities. Rather, the almost total loss of hope and the break-up of society presented, especially, *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments,* serve as a warning of a future social and political disaster in Africa, if efforts are not made to reverse the present trend. It is against this background that both *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments* should be understood. Both of them derive their power from the contrast between the expectations and

[1]Armah, Ayi Kwei.*The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. London: Heinemann educational Books Ltd. reset edition, 1975, p.81.
[2]*Ibid*., p.85.
[3]Lazarus,Neil. "Pessimism of the Intellect, Optimism of the Will: A Reading of Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*". Research in African Literature, Vol. 18, N°2, 1987,p. 141.

the waste; between what might have been and what actually is now. Nkrumah's Independence speech was both the culmination of the Independence struggle itself, and the beginning of a hope for a bright future:

> ''Today, from now on, there is a new African in the world and that new African is ready to fight his own battle and show that after all the black man is capable of managing his own affairs. We are going to demonstrate to the world, to the other nations, young as we are that we are prepared to lay our own foundation''[4]**.**

These are courageous words. They were also words of pride in achievement and words of promise. They were to be repeated in varying degrees over the next couple of years, throughout Africa: *"Guinea in 1958, Nigeria in 1960, Uganda in 1962, and Kenya in 1963…"*[5].

This is the framework within which our research work will be conducted.

The aim underlying any research work is to make the wheel move forward; it is also to bring light to the still darker and shadowy areas of knowledge.

This research work definitely follows the rule. Despite the fact that so much has been said and written on Ayi Kwei Armah and his writings, I still find some few corners where the sunbeams must go and shed light or at least, there remain some corners that need further polishing.

So through this work, I'm not re-inventing the wheel. Instead, I'm trying to bring forth some aspects that seem not to have been properly taken into account when considering Ayi Kwei Armah's first two novels.

Of course, it is undeniable that this work will carry a little quantity of subjectivity, despite all our effort to remain objective and impartial in our analysis. This research is to

[4]Lazarus, Neil. "Resistance in Post-Colonial African Fiction". New Haven: Yale UP, 1990, p.1.
[5]*Idem.*

examine the symbol of despair and disintegration in Ayi Kwei Armah's first two novels. The study aims at examining the elements in the stories that constitute the data. This work in fact tends to reveal the roots of Africa's development problems which need to be mastered before any action of salvation.

I have tried to put this research work as a whole in a historical perspective so that the main issues of despair and disintegration can better be understood. One reason for this method is that neither *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* nor *Fragments* gives extensive background information about the period of decolonization. In *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Armah does give some information on Nkrumah's meteoric rise to power and his subsequent betrayal of his supporters. But this information is sketchy, as the Independence struggle itself is not detailed. Moreover, apart from Nkrumah's own humble beginnings and his promise to gain Independence through mass action, nothing much is said about the expected economic and social transformations after Independence. In the same way, *Fragments* is located somewhere in the middle of Nkrumah's rule. So all we get in the greedis corruption and graft of the politicians and their unholy cohorts. Of course we do get a lot of stagnation, class domination, violence and all the other social ills associated with Nkrumah's rule. But the extent of the people's disillusionment with politics can better be gauged against the promise of the Independence struggle itself.

Another reason is that, with the disappointment of the people in the pioneer governments, bad leadership seems to have become a legacy for most African countries, including Ghana. People have lost all hope because one government merely takes off from where its predecessor left off. This explains why coup after coup in Ghana (and Africa, in general) does not really solve the problem. Worse, it also explains why the people fail to rejoice when a government falls a coup.

A third reason is that this is Armah's own method in nearly all his novels. Armah attaches great significance to the lessons of the past because he believes that the future of any society depends on its ability to learn from past mistakes. So, while dealing with contemporary issues in some novels, in others he reconstructs the history of Africa to serve as a guide to both his readers and African leaders present and future alike. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, for instance, Armah tackles the whole of the African past and seeks to show how African values and traditions have been debased and destroyed by Euro-Arabian imperialists and their African allies. He uses history to expose the root causes of Africa's problems, so that lasting solutions may be found. For instance, *The Healers*, his fifth novel, takes its theme from part of *Two Thousand Seasons*. After examining the cause of Africa's disunity, in detail, he is now ready to provide a curative vision to help attain its unity. The "healers" of the novel are Armah's answer to Africa's long history of strife and internal dissension; like all his other novels, *The Healers* is a story of the past, providing lessons to the present and the future.

Apart from the almost total lack of hope in the political process, what do the events in Africa today portend for its future? More than twenty years after its publication, the title of the first novel still seems appropriate: *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born.*

Many critics have described Ayi Kwei Armah as one of the greatest prose writers in Africa. In a screening of African writers as candidate from the nobel Award, Idang Alibi, a newspaper columnist says that Armah has shown in all his novels that he is a great prose stylist, a brutally, frank, socially committed African writer, a philosopher and an artist per excellence. Part of the comments on the back of the cover of *Why Are We So Blest?* Also reveals that Ayi Kwei Armah is the major prose stylist of the second generation of Anglophone African writers and the most significant Ghanaian novelist till to date.

The contemporary African writers now deviate from residual writings to the use of symbols to satirize the African people themselves. This is because the white man they were attacking had left them to themselves and the people who took over from them are, however, blacks in white colour. These so called liberalist writers came to expose the ills of the society as practiced by the capitalist. And this brings us to the reason for some symbolic writings that satirize the society.

However, many African literature critics attack Armah on various issues. Some find his reclusive attitude rather uncomfortable; others like Chinua Achebe and Charles Nnolim are disturbed by the sordidness of his scatological imagery and pessimism especially in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. Some critics with interest in source hunting even claim they defect foreign influence in his work.

Attention will be paid here to the following studies among others: Larson, Charles. The "Emergence of African Fiction". London: Macmillan, 1978. Chakava, Henry. "The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah". London: Heinemann, 1980. Armah, Ayi Kwei. "Ayi Kwei Armah and a commonwealth of souls". Chris Wanjala, Standpoints of African Literature Critical Anthology, Nairobi, East African Literature Bureau, 1973; and Ogungbesan, Kolawole. "Symbol and Meaning in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*". African Literature today No.7, 1975.

Charles Larson begins his appraisal of Armah's novels with a rather controversial note. He claims that on certain occasion, Armah has gone through great pains to make it clear that he is writing literature.

He goes on to say that with few exceptions, Armah's two novels end especially the second one would seem to support this theory; there are very few "Africanism" in those works. Larson concludes that Armah's novels fall into the main-stream of current Western

tradition and that is protagonist is very different from a whole line of Western literature anti-heroes.

However, Larson's claim of few "Africanism" in Armah's novels is what he says has been derived from what this novelist says about his work. He stressed further that he has never granted any interview about his person or his work, no matter how prestigious the publication asking for it.

Larson begins a textual analysis of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* by comparing it with Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. He says that like Ellison's hero, "the Man" in Armah's novel goes on a journey through hell, though unlike Ellison's protagonist who only slowly comes to the realization that it is his society that is out of joint.

Armah's "the Man" knows all along that his society has lost its values and that he is the only centre of values in a society which has long since traded its soul to the devil. This analogy is indeed appropriate. The essential isolation and endeavors of Ellison's unnamed narrator parallels the isolations and futility of the one which surrounds Armah's "the Man" in a society where social, political and corruption signal the atrophy of man; the critic locates the elements that dictate disintegration, failure and general rottenness in the society for instance, the bus in which we see "the Man" is almost turn apart, the money the bus conductor handles is old rotten. Larson also relates the physical decay that fills the pages of the novel to the moral decay of the society.

The society had elevated materialism as the new religion and money as the new god. The conclusion of discussions in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is somehow positive.

In spite of the unpleasant comment which Larson makes in relation to the source of the complexity of *Fragments*, his analysis of the chapter is somehow interesting. He explores the

major characters like Baako, Naana and Juana, bringing out the relationship between the characters.

Baako's futile search for employment, his frustration after he has secured the job at Ghana, his vision and his mental collapse are recalled with details. The society we presented in *Fragments*, Larson makes clear that it is as corrupt as that of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born.*

In *Ayi Kwei Armah and a common wealth of souls,* Henry Chakava observes that Armah is sensitive to all kinds of filth from the indecency of speech of that filth which is the natural result of decay, use and age. He maintains that Armah's hero is an anonymous, alienated and messianic figure who has been reduced to a soul while trying to raise himself above corruption.

Chakava further said that the whole of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born:*

> represents a process of self-examination with Armah as the enigmatic equivocation. The soul or psyche in him is that of philosophical and messianic quality which seek nothing less than the pore (or beautiful). While the body is the interior or less national part which welcomes immediacy and mundane pleasure.[6]

This observation creates the impression that Armah is a pessimistic writer. Charles Nnolim underscores this when he notes that Armah is a pessimist who extends the frontiers of his pessimism beyond Ghana. Chakava who has earlier or mentioned the bleak picture of things in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born,*contradicts himself when he says that Armah is not a pessimist but a revolutionary wondering why the world cannot be changed.

Kolawole Ogungbesan examines the symbols that serve to extend the meaning of the novel. He urges that in order to understand fully the power of Armah's imagination, we need

[6] Chakava, Henry. *Ayi Kwei Armah and a commonwealth of souls*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1973, pp. 197-08.

to have more than scattered insight into his use of symbols or mere impressions of his novel's symbolic structure.

He argues that:

> criticism ought to try to describe as succinctly as possible the total pattern of the symbolism which derive from central conflict for the work and extends to every detail, enriching, as well as determining the meaning of every word pattern in the repetition of a dominant image may be seen in The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born.[7]

He mentions the symbol of mad journey which recurs throughout the novel as one which lends unity to the novel.

Most of the main characters are symbolic in one way or the other for instance, the Ghanaian who has taken the foreign names of Rama Krishna is seen by Ogungbesan as a symbolic of his soul's painful longing to escape from his immediate surroundings for everything around him showed him the horrible threat of corruption to the development of the work, Ogungbesan makes it clear that:

> There is no certainty that the beautiful ones will be born, yet the novel keeps the option open, for they may be born suffice that even in such a depressing situation, it is not impossible for an honest man to keep his morality intact. Yet, there is no note of victory. The man does not feel elated for himself or for having at last won the approval of his wife for his style of living.[8]

There is no doubt that Ogungbesan's symbol interpretation provides useful interpretation of the text. The approach also offers an insight into Armah's creative imagination, his projection of ideas through deliberate integration of symbols, structure and language.

The Marxist theory will be adopted for the critical analysis of the text, out of all the theory, Marxism is a modern theory where dialectic materialism is emphasized.

[7]Ogungbesan, Kolawole. "Symbol and Meaning in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*". African Literature today No.7, 1975, pp.93-10.
[8]*Idem.*

Marxists tell us about past and present social relations and implications of an author's work; what they should have been or ought to be.

The research findings here revealed that there is despair and disintegration in the society after independence, but the problem in this research is the issue of how these vices of the society affect human society. The psychological and emotional trauma of Sigmund Freud of the effect of these channels of depriving the society of their rights is a major issue that this research addresses.

The methodology is descriptive and comparative; descriptive with regard to events in the books that will be described, interpreted and commented upon; Comparative because comparison will constantly be made with other writers' work and between fiction and African current events. Our objective here is to contribute to a better understanding of the two books, by determining the link between the theme and events. The study will be conducted in two parts. The first part deals almost exclusively with Armah's literary treatment of the botched-up political experiment of independence. The second part examines the likely social future of Ghana (and Africa) vis-à-vis current events.

PART ONE

INDEPENDENCE AS A SOURCE OF DESPAIR AND DISINTEGRATION

CHAPTER ONE- Ghanaian Leaders' Responsibility

A-The Loss of Hope Depicted in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments*

The hectic days of decolonization also had one very distinctive feature: the importance of leadership. A new breed of African leaders emerged to lead the Independence struggle. Everywhere in Africa, these leaders quickly became the embodiment of the promise, hope and expectations of independence. In *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born,* Armah presents a picture of the nationalists as collaborators with the colonial administration. Their ambition in the struggle was to take over from where colonial masters would leave off, and to preserve all the mystery and glory of power that they saw in colonialism. Armah variously refers to them as *"Black Englishmen"and "yes men"trying at all points to be the dark ghost of a European"*[9]. They were men eager to do the bidding of their white masters in return for recognition. They were motivated by a greed for power and the people quickly recognized it.

Armah's analysis of the decolonizing period is incisive. The nationalists came to the people as saviours, but spoke to them

> "in the legal English they had spent their lives struggling to imitate…and they asked us to be faithful and to trust them. They spoke to us in the knowledge that they were our magicians, people with some secret power behind them''[10].

The contrast between them and the broad masses of the people was obvious. The people recognized this gap only too well and were not prepared to put their destiny in the hands of what may be regarded as second-rate *"colonizers"*[11], a leadership crisis had been created.

[9]Armah, Ayi Kwei, *op. cit*., pp. 81-2.
[10]*Idem.*
[11]*Ibid*., p. 83.

It was in these circumstances that Nkrumah rose to power in Ghana. He broke away from the nationalist party, the United Gold Coast Convention (U.G.C.C.), to form his revolutionary party, the Convention People's Party (C.P.P) with its slogan "Self-Government Now". Nkrumah was a unique figure and quite literally appealed to the people. He came to them without any pretentions whatsoever. He was poor and hungry-looking like the people he offered to lead, and he made no bones about it. Through "the teacher", I get to know the real Nkrumah as the latter speaks to the people:

> I have come to you. And you see that I have nothing in my hands. A few here know where I live. Not much is there…I did what we all do, and I slept on other people's verandas. It is the truth, so why should I feel ashamed when proud men look down and say "veranda boy"? I am not ashamed of poverty. There is nothing shameful in it. But slavery…How long…Alone, I am nothing. I have nothing. We have power. But we will never know it; we will see it work. Unless we choose to come together to make it work[12].

This vision was the source of Nkrumah's popular appeal. He was the symbol of all that the people looked for in a leader; he could touch the deepest core of their emotions in a way others could not. He was the promise of Independence. He offered them the opportunity to take their destiny into their own hands, and fashion something meaningful out of Independence. He also taught them the power of united action and "rose to power on the basis of massive popular support.

In *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Armah also shows another aspect of Nkrumah's rise to power. It is what Lazarus describes as *"the existence of a rare and precious level of political awareness on the part of the masses"*[13].This political awareness is manifested in their repudiation of the bourgeoisie as their future leaders. The loss of hope depicted in the two novels stems not so much from the corruption itself, but from the loss of faith in any leader's promises or any politician actions. Nkrumah had been their own man. He was one of them, and he articulated their feelings, hopes and aspirations very well. They trusted him, so his act of betrayal was not only unpardonable; it was also a

[12]*Ibid*, p.87.
[13]Lazarus, Neil,*op. cit.*, p.143.

source of despair. If Nkrumah failed, who else could ever succeed, Nkrumah's "Juda's kiss" of Africa is all the more painful because of the promise it embodied. Again, through "the teacher's" consciousness, we share in the people's suffering:

> The beauty was in the waking of the powerless. Is it always to be the true that it is impossible to have things strong and at the same time beautiful? The famished men need not stay famished. But to gorge themselves in this heartbreaking way, consuming, utterly destroying the common promise in their greed, was that ever necessary?[14]

Nkrumah and his party men have proved to be not different from the educated elite the people rejected in their favour. This helps to account for the gloomy mood of the two novels. Armah has succeeded very well in capturing the shock of betrayal by Nkrumah, the people's most trusted leader.

Nkrumah's betrayal was to be repeated across the continent by virtually all the men who led their countries to Independence. In Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*, the shock of betrayal takes two forms. The first is in the discovery immediately after Independence that the betrayers of the Mau Mau cause are those now enjoying political power, while the fighters, like Abdulla and some others lost their limbs in the struggle, are destitute. The second closely resembles the Ghanaian situation. The most trusted leaders turn out to be as, or even worse than, their political rivals.

Freedom, it is said, has never been won on a silver platter. The Kenyan struggle, in which the Mau Mau played a significant role, is only one of the many examples. The fight in the forests, the hunger, disease, hardship, betrayal and death, are all faithfully recorded in *Petals of Blood*. The promise of a free nation in which human dignity and the potential for development; from one's own sweat were what kept the Freedom Fighters going, when all seemed lost. The betrayal of Dedan Kimati was shocking and a set-back in the struggle, but nothing prepared Mau Mau veterans, like Abdulla, for the surprises of independence.

[14] *Ibid*, p.85.

Nding'uri, a Mau Mau hero, is betrayed and hanged, while Abdulla barely escapes with his life during the struggle for Independence. After independence, it turns out that people like Kimeria, who actively collaborated with colonialists, and who betrayed Nding'uri, are now in position of power. He is a leading industrialist and one of the three *"directors of the internationally famous Thang'etta Breweries and enterprises Ltd."*[15]. Abdulla in post-Independence Kenya is reduced to selling oranges for his living.

Kimeria's betrayal and his subsequent elevation in politics of Kenya are discouraging, to say the least, to any African who wants to contribute effectively to Africa's development. But so are Chui's who, like Nkrumah, is the embodiment of promise for Africa. The drama enacted at Siriana is a microcosm of Africa's tragedy. Chui, the hero at Siriana, is expelled because of his leadership in a strike that calls for change, meaningful development and sound educational policy for the country. Several years later, he returned from successful studies abroad to a tumultuous welcome from the students of Siriana who have embarked upon yet another strike and are calling for a black headmaster. Their choice of Chui is both logical and understandable. Chui had been militant in his days at Siriana. He had also advocated changes in the school's curriculum to suit the African context. Chui would understand the students. He is one of them.

However, Chui's subsequent repudiation stands as a shock to the students. He turns out to be a black-white man in *"khaki shorts and a sun helmet: a black replica of Fraudsham"*[16],the man he has come to replace.

As the students slowly recover from this apparition, Chui delivers "the coup de grace":

> He spoke and announced a set of rules. He thanked the teachers for their high standards and world-wide reputation of the school. It was his desire, and his fervent prayer, that all the

[15]Wa Thiong'o, Ngugi.*Petals of Blood.* London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. 1977, pp 4-5.
[16]*Ibid*., p.171.

> teachers should stay knowing that he had not come to wreck but to build on what was already there…Far from destroying the prefect system, he would inject it with new blood.[17]

Chui's action strongly reminds one of Rehoboam, the man who succeeds Solomon as king of Israel. Asked by his people to lighten the burden and tyranny they suffered under his father, his words are anything but encouraging.This precisely mirrors the problem of Africa. Struggle of any king is doomed to failure, as the new leaders turn out to be worse than the old ones. The struggle, pain, disease and betrayals only form pattern of repetition, with no light at the end of the tunnel. In fact, the people are now even worse than before.

B-Disillusion Following Independence

The debilitating paralysis engulfing the worlds of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments* has occurred precisely because there is no longer any motivation for fighting. There can never be victory in any struggle again, only loss and despair. Ngugi tabulates the expectation of Independence and ends on a note of sorrow and despair:

> …memories of the search for a decent job or trade: the years of toil at the shoe factory; the years of awakening; with more dreams of black David with only a sling, a spear and a stolen gun triumphing over white Goliath with his fat cheques and machine-guns; dreams of total liberation so that a black man could lift high his head secure in his land, secure in his school, secure in his culture, all this and more …and below it all… the loss… the unavenged loss[18].

Independence for Africa, in the worlds of these novels, is nothing but a dream.

The notion of Independence in Africa is very much cherished and even the gloominess of Armah's novels does not diminish its aura. While Armah's visionaries, such as the Man or Baako, attempt to restore the glory and promise of Independence, the vast majority of the people are discouraged because of the lightning speed of deterioration that has come to be the mark of Independence. The headiness of the expectations of black freedom which Independence promised was short lived. In the extremely brief period between Independence in 1957 and Nkrumah's ousting as head of state in 1966, Ghana had

[17] *Idem.*
[18] *Idem.*

accumulated a foreign debt of 360 million.[19](This is all the more alarming as she started with such large reserves at Independence.) While this fact is well documented in both novels, the speed of its occurrence has an ethical significance that is bewildering. There is something very unnatural about it. In *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Armah regards the dizzing speed of "*such quick decay*"[20] as sickening, and invested with "*an irresistible horror.*"[21]

The main point I'm trying to make is that there is little cause for Africa's Independence to have gone sour. Quite literally, and strange as this may seem, Ghana's betrayal has been perpetrated by the politicians and senior civil servants in government. What could be the reason for this? Quite possibly, it was the sudden glory and lime-light that their positions have placed in them. It may also be due to the corrupting influence of wealth. We should remember that Koomson, for instance, has been just a poor dockworker with calloused palms. The sudden elevation to ministerial position may have gone to his head. Whatever the reason, Ghanaian politicians (and African politicians in general) have had their conscience seared by the hot rod of power and privilege, to the extent that social injustice, the correction of which was one of the reasons for which they fought to gain power, now means nothing to them. As a matter of fact, these leaders have seemed to derive some obscene satisfaction from seeing the misery of their people. How else can one explain Koomson's encounter with the bread-seller or Brempong's grotesque reception at the airport? Politics is seen as the shortest route to success, power and wealth.

The great expectation entertained by the people have come nowhere near fulfillment since Independence. Development has been illusive and the quality of life has not been much improved. Rather than the dignity and prosperity that Independence is

[19]Wright,Derek. "Armah's Ghana Revisited: History and Fiction". International Fiction Review, Vol. 12, No.1, 1985,p.27.
[20]Armah, Ayi Kwei,*op. cit*., p.62.
[21]*Idem*.

supposed to herald, all the people have as reward for their struggle are social fragmentation, violence, underdevelopment, economic stagnation and elitism.

The almost total lack of hope in the novels is largely due to the domino effect of the leaders' betrayal of the ideals of Independence. Corruption, for instance, becomes a national game as the people take the cue from their leaders. Consequently, traditional value and family life are traded for materialism. In the *Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, ancient customs such as the offering of kola nut and the boatman's formal welcoming ritual appear to be still moribundly alive and potent with their own corruption, like the still viscous, aged filth in the latrine tunnel. In *Fragments*, however, the commanding impression is that the customs have died and have been cynically resurrected in altered forms that have no kinship with their original spirit and, as if having ghostly lives of their own refuse to be denied, are ready to revenge themselves upon their violators. In *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* the traditional order fights a rearguard action from underneath a deadening weight of subversive subterfuges and obfuscations. Ghanaian Asante-Smith camouflages his sycophantic opportunism as traditional respect for elders, and the traditional group economics of the family system become a façade for parasitic dependence. Praise songs pass to toadying television technocrats, folk myths into neo-colonial propaganda. *"The myths here are good"* Baako tells Juana. *"Only their use…"*[22].Yet the sudden death of the past notwithstanding, the traditional order is given a dynamic continuity with the present through its living representatives and spokesman, Naana, and its dead values insinuate themselves as a living presence in the novel. Access to this order is especially available to the Akan reader, largely by way of particular reference but also at the level of a general implication. Prior to the "outdooring" ceremony's misplaced emphasis on the exhibition of private wealth and prestige, Naana issues a reminder of the communal importance of its

[22]Armah, Ayi Kwei. *Fragments.* London: Heinemann, 1974, p.172.

rite of incorporation that carries the child from one stage of corporate existence, among the spirits, to another, in the living society.

This, in turn has led to a loss of vision for Ghana, and the continent as a whole, leaving the people marooned on islands of individual self-interest. As the nation flounders and teeters on the verge of collapse, the leaders shore up their own images by hypocritically urging the people to tighten their belts and act in unity, for the end of the struggle is in sight. Part of the despair, as Armah shows in the two novels, is that no one believes the leaders any more. The people are living in the present, content merely to eke a living for now as the future seems to hold nothing in store for them.

C-Commentary and Criticism on Ayi Kwei Armah's Treatment of Events in his first two Novels

Part of the attraction of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is the sheer volume of criticism it has drawn from admirers and detractors alike. Western criticism have been more appreciative of Armah than have African critics, and where their criticism is both severe and adverse, some try to explain away Armah's peculiar writing by referring to such European influences as Sartre, Beckett and Kafka. In Africa and even in Ghana, Armah is not so "fortunate". Derek Wright tabulates some criticisms by fellow African writers, showing that the novel has been castigated for displaying:

> a private and westernized sensibility's rejection of the extended family(s "family's "family warmth"; an abject failure to differentiate between different kinds of Ghanaian speech and to realize Ghanaian settings; an impaired vision, depicting a falsified, unrecognizable Ghana, and betraying a long-expatriated author's failing insight into the drama of Nkrumah's political experiment; a general lapse into oversimplified opinions which account for African political failure entirely in terms of the personal selfishness of leaders, when "explanations must lie deeper in the complex process of history[23]

Fragments, Armah's second novel, has not evoked the same critical acclaim as *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Born*. Criticisms seem not to have recognized the sheer

[23]Wright, Derek, *op. cit.*, pp 23-27.

imaginative feat that Armah has performed in this sequel. Over two decades after the publication, it cannot be denied that *Fragments* is a major literary achievement. Its range and depth in dealing with the nominal freedom that Ghana has mistaken for political Independence gives it an appearance of reality that is more pronounced than that in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. The central situation is that of the sensitive individual caught up in the oppressive embrace of a greedy materialistic society. Ghana here is no different from the one encountered in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born.*

Fragments, however, is fundamentally different from the earlier novel in many significant respects. The portrait presented is that of an artist as a young Ghanaian. In fact, one of the central concerns of the second novel is the proper role of the artist in society. The hero's isolation and subsequent mental break-down stem from the impossible situation in which he is caught. Like the Promethean figure whom he resembles so much, Baako is caught between two worlds, neither of which is ready to accept him. Ogede's summation of this predicament in which Baako finds himself, is quite apt. His vain attempt to give up the social privilege which his education automatically gives him does not go down well with his own class. Yet he is isolated from the mass of the people by virtue of that special education. He thus becomes a kind of Judas to his class and yet remains a stranger to the oppressed on whose side he is fighting. Caught between these two mutually exclusive worlds, he becomes isolated, and, quite naturally, he is viewed by both with suspicion.

Fragments is also concerned with religion in a way that *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is not. One question that is implicitly asked in the novel is the extent to which the vulgarization of Ghana coincides with its secularization. Though the novel's title has a much broader interpretation, it is in the religious context that *Fragments* is best understood. The word refers not so much to the structure of the novel as to its vision of Ghanaian society. Ghana is presented as a society without purpose, quite literally; as a

society adrift. The basic reason for this is not hard to find: Ghana is spiritually dead as a result of sacrificing her traditional respect for life to materialism, her new god.

Though the above criticisms include Achebe's evaluation of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, it is pertinent here to pay closer attention to Achebe's objections to the novel. This is mainly because Achebe occupies such a prominent place in the corpus of African literature that his words carry authority. In his book *Morning Yet On Creation Day*, Achebe makes some observations on *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* which offer a useful starting point for discussing the novel. Achebe's major accusations against Armah are that: 1) Armah is too influenced by the mannerisms of existentialist thought, and this element tends to clash with the "pretence" that the novel is set in Ghana. In fact, says Achebe, Armah is an alienated writer, and no longer African. 2) Armah's subconscious would not allow him to squander his enormous talents on the useless task of writing a modern existentialist tale; hence he unconsciously introduces a few details which sick to convert his novel into a moral fable.

Some of these charges cannot be taken seriously. The claim, for instance, that the excremental metaphor is foreign is untenable. It is true that we tend to associate scatological images with non-African writers such as Swift and Rabelais, but there certainly is no limit to the store of images available to any writer, African and non-African alike. The excrement in Armah's writing is a metaphor which above all implies disgust, and it would be petty for Achebe to argue that an African cannot feel disgust for his own country, or that to feel disgust is somehow reprehensible. Nor is it true that Armah is not sufficiently local or African. In fact, Armah's description of Takoradi harbor area is documentarily accurate. As Wright points out, most of the major events take place at the Esikafo Estates, the harbor and in the Kansawora Railway Office.

But perhaps this is not Achebe's point. Perhaps Achebe means that the quality of life depicted in the novel, the aimlessness, cheerlessness, hopelessness and squalor is not an accurate representation of Ghanaian life. The novel, however, is primarily symbolic. It is exceptional in the sense that, while "the African Novel", with the outstanding exception of Camara Laye's The Radiance of the King and, perhaps, Soyinka's The Interpreters, has tended to be realistic, Armah on the other hand aims to reveal truths about Ghana and Africa by a different approach. He seeks, through symbolism, to reveal the deep significance of Ghana's corruption and social disintegration. His novel is therefore certainly about Ghana even if many of his details are not typically from Ghana.

Alienation is a loaded word Achebe uses rather loosely. Technically, it is linked with existentialism. In the existentialist view, man is essentially alienated, in other words, he has no basic purpose or essence. The phrase which sums up this notion is Sartre's "Existence precedes essence". *"This philosophy questions the very existence of man, who can be one of two things: he can be an aimless bored wanderer or an active dynamic creator of his own reasons for living."*[24]. The concept, however, of alienation is capable of other interpretations. For Christians, alienation is the result of "original sin", that pristine act of disobedience which caused us to be separated from God. There is also a Marxist view of alienation. It occurs when men are moved by capitalism from the fruits of their labour: when that labour is produced for the benefit of other people. In such a situation, men feel a loss of self-essence, ultimately, they do not feel that they themselves worth anything. Such a view is what Dickens portrays in *Hard Times.*

However, in so far as alienation is a theme in Armah's novel, in so far as the hero is seen to be suffering from a bewildering sense of his own unworthiness, this has a social and not an existentialist cause. Armah shows that it is the conduct of the powerful in

[24]Sartre, Jean-Paul.*Existentialism*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1947, pp.15-20.

society which brings about this problem. It is the Koomsons of Ghana (or Africa) who, by their corruption, engender all the moral bewilderment. But Achebe's use of the word is not even technical, when he says that Armah is an alienated writer. All he really seems to mean is that Armah no longer belongs to Africa, or perhaps does not really care about the people of Africa.

CHAPTER TWO- Political Experience of Independence

A- Influence of Westernization

Is this true, however, true? Is it, in fact, the case that Armah is any more westernized than any African writer who has a western education? On the contrary, a more careful reading of the novel shows that one object of Armah's most virulent satire is the cheap westernization which afflicts contemporary African society, and which he exposes at several levels. The famous passage in which Armah discusses the name of Africa's nouveau riche is one high point of this satire.

Armah ridicules the vulgar materialism which has beset Ghana as a result of its contact with Europe. Koomson's radio booms like thunder, while his sister-in-law, Regina, is specializing as a dressmaker in London. She has, in fact, fallen in love with a Jaguar and threatens to commit suicide if she is not able to buy one. Supposedly, Koomson will have diverted public funds to meet this new craving just as he did in the case of the scholarship for Regina's course. Armah's argument is that this kind of misplaced priority in the use of public funds adds to the sufferings and disenchantment of the people. This theme, the erosion of values, the erosion of African identity, is in fact central to Armah's thought. It is at the heart of *Fragments*, his next novel, in which the protagonist returns home from many years of studying in America to find that Africa has become nothing but a vulgar imitation of the West, with no value except materialism and the addiction to imported goods.

The situation in *Fragments* is the reverse of what happens in Achebe's *No Longer At Ease*, where the hero's westernization makes him unfit for Africa. In Armah, it is Africa itself which has become too westernized for his visionary protagonists. In *Fragments,* the voice of traditional Africa is Naana, but no one pays her any attention. She is, in fact, treated by her family, as an eccentric windbag that has lost contact with modern Africa. Thus the core of family life, respect for the aged and a belief in traditional values has been shattered and the individual, family and nation are left adrift, wandering aimlessly. Yet, it is to Naana that Armah gives some of the most beautiful prose to be found in contemporary African writing. There is no doubt that Armah attaches great values to the past and to the traditions of Africa. The charge, therefore, that he is alienated is very strange. What Armah is asking for, is that Africa should return to itself.

Achebe is, however, helpful in one observation. He makes a distinction between *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and what he calls the "Moral Fable" of Africa. It is the second kind of novel that Achebe describes as a European modern story, and he argues that there is profound sense in which Armah's novel represents a different kind of consciousness, perhaps a later stage in the evolution of the African novel. Hitherto African novels had tended to express or assume a shared outlook as to what is right or wrong. The individual might reject the social code but he does so with the awareness of his own guilt, or of himself as an outlaw. More precisely, the African novel assumed that traditional social values, social relations, survive even to the post-colonial period, providing a more or less acceptable value system. Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is among the first, perhaps accompanied by Soyinka's The Interpreters, to see African society as irrevocably fragmented and to face up to some of the implications of this vision.

To proceed to the other objections stated earlier, it is indeed true that in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* the extended family system is at the periphery of social

and family life, and not the core of it. With the exception of the Man, his wife, his children and his mother-in-law (and the Koomsons), every character is a lone wolf adrift in a world without meaning and purpose. This, however, is precisely Armah's point. Western culture has eaten into traditional family values and individualism has supplanted the cohesiveness of the extended family structure. The question of the "Africanism" is also swiftly dealt with. There is enough pidgin and local idiom of proverb in the novel to counter the charge that Armah's work lacks "Africanism". The conversation between the clerks in the railway Office, as well as the numerous latrine graffiti, are mainly in pidgin. So is the use of local proverbs. The boatman, for example, falls back on "*the ancient dignity of formal speech*"[25], when Koomson goes to him for help at the collapse of the Nkrumah regime.

These critical objections, then, are in the main frivolous. The crux of the matter in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is that Africa's prospects for a better life, for a better future, are very bleak on account of her leaders' inordinate greed and concupiscence. Moral uncertainties, the absence of any clear social goals and the near total disengagement of the individual, form the basic concern of the novel. Armah's world is one of the moral ambiguities and doubt. It is intensely pessimistic in that he presents no ultimate solution to the predicament he poses, whereas the moral fable always resolves its problem.

B- <u>Fragmentation of African Society</u>

The first of the five successful novels (within the space of ten years 1968-78), *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* centers on the despair and nightmare that is Independence for Africa. This is a subject that has been treated over and over again by African writers, including Achebe, Soyinka, Ngugi, Duodu, Amu Djoleto, Sembene Ousmane, Tchicaya U Tamsi, Okot p'Bitek, poets, playwrights and novelists alike. The

[25]Armah, Ayi Kwei. *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born.* London: Heinemann educational Books Ltd. reset edition, 1975, p. 174.

almost obsessive attraction that African writers seem to have for this subject underscores their concern and disgust about the betrayal of the continent's hopes in post-colonial Africa. However, it is Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* that gives the subject a detailed treatment which hangs on the memory long after the novel has been read and laid aside. In this novel, as in *Fragments*, there is a kind of debilitating paralysis that seizes everybody in the country, making it almost impossible for them to act or resist the system. Despair is distilled and handed to the reader in large doses of scatological imagery.

It is Armah's way of showing his repugnance for a system that exudes such moral filth.

Achebe and critics in his school of thought find this aspect of the novel objectionable and, hence, label it "sick" and "uncomfortable". To read the novel in this way, however, is to miss the essence of Armah's art. *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*is not a "sick" book, though it is certainly meant to be "uncomfortable" in a distinctive way. Because many people accept the gradual but certain decay and fragmentation of African society with a customarily complacent nod of the head, Armah decides to shock his readers to the reality of Africa's situation by piling up the image of filth, decay and rust.

Africa's history, a history of exploitation, poverty, corruption, betrayal, decay and, above all, the almost total loss of hope in her ability to reverse this tide is given a graphic presentation in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. Imagery and metaphor are central to our understanding of the theme of despair disintegration in this novel.The sixth chapter is pivotal to the structure and meaning of the novel, but the first chapter sets the scene for the symbolic exploration of its overall meaning. It is therefore relevant to treat this chapter in detail.

The picture that he has painted by this first chapter is neither pleasant nor optimistic. It is a picture of a nation and its people at the brink of total collapse. The bus seems to be Ghanaian institutions, rusted and decaying. Life is cheap, as the "crumpled packet of Tuskers" (the cheapest Ghanaian brand) testifies, while Ghanaian industries are too inefficient to make good products; witness the difficulty in lighting an ordinary cigarette. Armah presents the passengers as sleep-walkers, while the bus conductor attempts to escape from the reality of a harsh world through the symbolic gesture of closing his eyes. The hopelessness of the national situation is re-enforced by the darkness surrounding the bus. Not only are the people walking corpses, but there is a lack of vision about the national direction as the people have no sense of where they are going: *"The passengers shuffled up the centre aisle and began to lower themselves gently down, one after the other, into the darkness of the dawn"*[26].

Materialism is also busy at work, eating away the very fabric of a society that had at the centre of its code "I am my brother's keeper". The material importance of money to the people is stressed, and it is a common Ghanaian practice to offer money in denomination far above the price of what is being paid for. The possession of money in larger denominations gives people the illusion of wealth and power. This accounts for the exultant look on the face of the giver of the cedi: *"The eye had in them the restless happiness of power in search of admiration"*[27].The conductor, who is aware of this feeling, takes advantage of it to cheat his passengers. Wealth is universally courted, and rich men are not only important in society, but are almost venerated. Later, in Chapter 4, a bread-seller refers to Koomson in sweetened tones as *"My own Lord, my master, oh, my white man, come. Come and take my bread. It is all yours, my white man, all yours"*[28]. This may

[26]*Ibid*., p. 1.
[27]*Ibid*., p. 2.
[28]*Ibid*., p. 37.

seemgrotesque, but it nevertheless paints a very graphic picture of how people worship the rich in society, and themselves desire to be rich.

The description of the cedi and its smell gives us another aspect of the Ghanaian society. It is a society thoroughly decayed. Armah suggests that this decay had begun even before the colonial era, and hence it is appropriately regarded as an "ancient rottenness". Strangely, the conductor actually enjoys the smell. Why, one may ask? The answer seems to be that there is something in the people which compels them to court corruption, a kind of natural appetite for decay. Interestingly, however, though he enjoys the smell, subconsciously the conductor is aware that something is intrinsically wrong, hence his sense of shame.

The novel is to repeat this kind of moral ambiguity time and again, in the lives of several characters. The clearest sign of the hopelessness of Ghana's search for true Independence and meaning in life is found in the symbol of the man as sleep-watcher. His eyes are open, giving the impression of vigilance, but they are in reality empty: they lack moral focus. This is the case for Ghana, that even her watchers are asleep. It is interesting to notice how Armah develops his imagery of filth and decay. Out of the sleeper's open mouth, saliva quietly oozes as if his very being is so full of corruption that some is forced out of his mouth. It is the same with the bus conductor, who clears his throat and eats the phlegm. In both cases, we are shown the moral consequences of compromising one's principles.

Beyond this, however, decay is also pervasive, affecting every aspect of Ghanaian life, including her language. The short but telling description of the authorities' effort to keep the city clean shows the hopelessness of the task confronting the national leadership. The hitherto gleaming dust-bin is itself now covered with filth. The irony is that the dust-bin is supposed to cover filth and not the other way round. Armah seems to be suggesting

that brightness has a short-lived existence in Ghana. Where he mocks official jargon, Armah's prose is inflated. The very fact that the writing on the receptacle is no longer decipherable again indicates the loss of purpose of the leadership. The sleeper is no longer conscious of his surroundings or even his destination. Also, in the taxi driver's explosive invective, *"Your mother's rotten cunt!"*[29], the baseness of the society has finally affected its language too. The chapter is very symbolic and the images portray clearly a dramatization of the virtues and vices in the country.

Our objective in this chapter is primarily to examine the intense pessimism of the novel as depicted in the loss of hope, by the broad masses of the people, in their leaders, as well as in the disintegration of the individual, of family bonds and of society as a whole. It is also pertinent to note that the happenings in the world of the novel reflect the totality of the African experience, and not just a peculiar Ghanaian problem. Armah's concern with the bad leadership that has plagued Africa since Independence is obvious. There is despair, for instance, in the lament, *"How long will Africa be cursed with its leaders? There were men dying from the loss of hope and other were finding gaudy ways to enjoy power they did not have."*[30]. Political leadership has come to be associated with hypocrisy, graft, inordinate materialistic orientation and general corruption. As a result of this bad example set and perpetrated by the political leadership, corruption has become a way of life for the people. It is no longer limited to the Koomsons of Africa, but policemen, railway clerks, timber contractors and bus conductors are now all parts of this national game. It is this active and general participation in corruption that is responsible for the continent's endemic poverty, hunger and disease. The neglect of vital sections of the economy, the lack of clear social goals and the pursuit of individual selfish interests contribute to this problem.

[29] *Ibid*., p. 9.
[30] *Ibid*.,pp. 80-81.

At the heart of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is the impotence of the hero, resulting from the moral ambiguity in which he lives. "The Man" is caught in an impossible position, what Wright describes as being "*caught in the crossfire between family and gleam (the glamour of wealth) and unable to go forward or back…*"[31].Wright is, of course, right, but what he has failed to add is that "the Man" knows that his moral position is right, but the overwhelming condemnation of family and society makes him feel guilty all the same. It is significant that he remains anonymous throughout the novel. McEwen suggests that his "*anonymity might better suggest the manner of parables*"[32].

I think not. Rather, I think it stands for all the nameless and faceless people throughout Africa whose lives have been both demeaned and dehumanized by corrupt regimes. Charles Larson may be more accurate when he says that, in the first chapter of the novel, the emphasis is not at first on the protagonist but on the bus itself, the driver, the conductor and then other passengers (all nameless). He argues that this is so because the novel is not so much "*about a person as it is about a society: post-independent Ghana in the days prior to Nkrumah's fall.*"[33]

"The Man", then, is a representative figure. It is worthy of note that "the teacher", who is a kind of mentor to "the Man" and has some moral authority in the novel, is also nameless. McEwan is right when he suggests that "the Man" is untypical. His resistance is a passive one which he neither boasts about nor glories in. He even knows that this stand is not appreciated; in fact that it is somewhat ridiculous; but it is the right thing to do.

The novel is a dramatization of the agony, the futility and the threat of insanity, which are the consequences of holding on to moral ideas in a situation where morality is

[31]Wright, Derek. "Saviors and Survivors: The disappearing Community in the novels of Ayi kwei Armah". Ufahamu, Vol. 14, No. 2, 1985, p.142.
[32]McEwan, Neil. "Africa and the Novel". London: The Macmillan press Ltd.1983, p. 99.
[33]Larson, Charles. "The Emergence of African Fiction". London: The Macmillan Press Ltd. 1971, p. 259.

rendered irrelevant, and where considerations of gain have become the sole motive of society. The theme, then, of the protagonist's isolation from his countrymen is sounded quite early in the novel. Priebe's observation that "The Man" actually carries a tragic potential is right, *"for we are made to feel the dignity of his struggle with the forces that overwhelmingly contrive against human dignity."*[34]. Against these odds, *"he is the only person…who is struggling to maintain his humanity"*[35].

Yet "the Man" appears naïve. In his conversation with the messenger who has won some money in the lotteries, we get the impression that "the Man" does not know his Ghana well, when he advises the messenger to seek the police's help. The conversation between the two is very interesting, insightful and pathetic:

> You look happy," the man said to him. The messenger continued to be smile, in the embarrassed way of a young girl confessing love. "I won something in the lottery," he said."Lucky you, "the man said. "How much?"The messenger hesitated before replying. "One hundred cedis." "That's not very much," the man laughed. «I know," said the messenger. "But so many people would jump on me to help me eat it.""They'll come, anyway.""No. Nobody will know."You used a nickname?""Help me oh God." He smiled. "I hope you have a nice time," the man said. The messenger frowned. "I am happy, but I'm afraid," he said."Juju?" the man smiled. "No, not that," said the messenger. "But you know our Ghana.""Ah yes."And everybody says the Ghana lottery is more Ghanaian than Ghana. "You're afraid you won't get your money? "I know people who won more than five hundred cedis last year. They still haven't got their money. "Have they been to the police? "Forwhat? "To help them get their money.""You're joking," said the messenger with some bitterness. "It costs you more money if you go to the police, that's all. » What will you do?" the man asked. "I hope some official at the lottery place will take some of my hundred cedis as bribe and allow me to have the rest." The messenger's smile was dead. "You will be corrupting a public officer." The man smiled. "This is Ghana," the messenger said, turning to go.[36]

It looks as if "the Man" is very naïve in his idealism. The truth is, however, that he does not himself believe in the advice he is giving, and yet he is not ready to capitulate to corruption. Here in lies his predicament. The distance between him and his fellow countrymen is further increased by the general cynicism which is rampant everywhere. The messenger here may be ready to capitulate to corruption but he, at least, sees it as a lapse

[34]Lazarus, Neil. "Pessimism of the Intellect, Optimism of the Will: A Reading of Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*". Research in African Literature, Vol. 18; No. 2, 1987,p. 167.
[35]*Idem.*
[36]Armah, Ayi Kwei, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.

into the realm of impurity which is Ghana. For the majority of Ghanaians in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, corruption in whatever form whether is influenced with money, the allocation of railway trucks, the ownership of fishing vehicles contrary to what is permitted by the constitution, or whether it takes the form of seducing school girls from Achimota or Holy Child is a norm. The person who insists on morality is seen as eccentric, even insane.

It is interesting to note that after Amankwa has tried unsuccessfully to bribe "the Man", it is he, rather than the latter, who feels outraged and aggrieved. There is genuine bewilderment in his cry *"Why are you making everything so difficult for me?"*[37].But, even beyond this, Amankwa's outburst of impotent anger, *"But why? …why do you treat me so? What have I done against you? Tell me, what have I done?"*[38]gives a terrifying picture of a nation disintegrating. After all, it is exports like timber which earns for the country its foreign exchange; foreign exchange that in turn is used to import whiskey for people like Koomson, while important sectors of the economy, like the railroads, education, and mining are neglected. In his second encounter with the timber contractor later in the novel, the irony is that Amankwa is right.

The question arises, what kind of person would willingly remain poor? But the Man is not even allowed to withdraw into himself. The highest kind of isolation he suffers from is that of having to live with his wife's contempt and scorn. Estella lives a comfortable life because she has had the good fortune to be married to the shrewd politician Koomson; the very antithesis of the Man. Ayo calls "the Man" the *"chichidodo"*[39], a bird that hates filth but lives on maggots.The *"chichidodo"* symbolizes "the Man's" ambiguous position: living on maggots while scorning filth, and therefore condemning his whole family to a life of abject poverty.

[37]*Ibid*., p.28.
[38]*Ibid*., p.31.
[39]*Ibid*., p.44.

This brings us to the heaviest penalty which "the Man" endures for his moral position: the reproach of the loved ones. The sight of his children wearing threadbare singlets, condemned to eat only a tiny piece of sardine with their kenkey for supper, is painful for him. Even more so is his wife's quick moral degeneration. The most disturbing episode in the novel is when he tries to make love to his wife and finds his feelings checked by his inadequacy to provide for the family. There is the further reproach, a more direct one from his mother-in-law, who, in the presence of their father, speaks to her grandchildren: *"Have you all eaten this morning?"*[40]. A consequence of the protagonist's resistance to corruption is his estrangement even in his own home.

Family disintegration apart, there is also the breakdown in the individual's will. Brought to his knees at last, Amankwa recognizes the need to grease the palms of the allocation clerk in order to have his timber carted from the forest. The allocations clerk makes no bones of the fact that his little game with the timber Merchant is both very deliberate and profitable: *"Will you bring his timber?" (the Man asked) "Yes. He has learned his lesson.""What lesson?" asked "the Man". The clerk answered with a chuckle, nothing else"*[41]. This is what makes the situation so painfully hopeless. Corruption has become part and parcel of national life. It is in fact viewed as normal. As Priebe notices only too well, *"To refuse a bribe is not to fail corruption; there is always another waiting eager to take it."*[42]

There is the larger social breakdown in sterile relationships and unproductivity. There is a sense in which the physical decay of "the Man's" world parallels the moral decay in society itself. In the offices of the Railway Corporation, there are no serious personal attachments, and language itself is reduced to meaningless jargon. No meaningful work is done in the offices and nothing seems to work. The communication system with

[40]*Ibid*., p.122.
[41]*Ibid*., p.108.
[42]Priebe, Richard. "Ghanaian Literatures". New York: Greenwood Press, 1988, p. 235.

the other stations breaks down with a frequency that is alarming; especially as its efficient functioning regulates the movements of trains and reduces the risk of accidents. It is surprising that accidents do not happen more frequently. Pencil sharpeners do not work and the office is almost suffocating with hot, stale air. Clerks devise elaborate ways of passing the time, while the senior officers not only come to work as they like and when they like, but also fail to supervise their subordinates. "The Man" observes all this with quiet despair:

> …if some woman comes from the village wanting to know such things and asked them straight what exactly it was they spent their time doing, they would never be able to give a real answer. A job is a job. It did not matter at all that nothing was done on most jobs[43].

The important thing is no longer productivity, but consumption. We consume where we have not produced, and Armah's point is made when the observation is made not by a minister of state or a senior civil servant, but by a taxi driver (in Ghana most taxi drivers are barely literate): *"The way things are going, it seems everybody is making things now except us. We Africans only buy expensive things."*[44] Armah shows that the rat-race, this "chasing after the gleam", led by African politicians, helps in the break-up of ties and society..In their anger and frustration, the people turn on themselves and on each other, attempting to find a vent for their pent-up impotent anger:

> We blamed them, as we blamed ourselves and every other thing that was there to be blamed. What can people do when there remains only so much meaning in their lives and that little meaning is running so irretrievably away with every day that goes? What can people do? We were defending ourselves against our friends as if they were animals.[45]

The cohesiveness which was the strength of African societies is thus undermined as a result of frustration and what Armah calls *"victim anger"*.

[43] Armah, Ayi Kwei, *op. cit.*, p.156.
[44] *Ibid*., p.76.
[45] *Idem*.

All of this confuses "the Man". In his bewilderment, he begins to see moral degeneration as a natural process, a version of nature's inevitable march towards decay. Corruption begins to appear to him like a path of the natural order of things. His own refusal to participate in corruption appears not only futile but disgustingly hypocritical: a cover-up of the natural process, which, because it is concealed, develops into something grotesque. All this is tearing him apart.

Next to the theme of disintegration, one of the most outstanding qualities of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is its bleak vision of Ghana's future. The extensive scatological imagery in the novel not only reflects the widespread corruption and fragmentation of society but, even more significantly, it portrays the helplessness of those caught in this decay.

For the majority of people in the novel, there is no light at the end of the tunnel. There is no hope either in the present or in the future. The picture is not just bleak, it is hopeless. Even for Teacher, the hopelessness of the situation is galling. When he was asked whether he can discern any hope in the present state of affairs, his answer is a categorical:

> No? Not any more, Not hope, anyway. I don't feel any hope in me anymore. I can see things, but I don't feel much. When you can see the end of things in their beginnings, there's no more hope, unless you want to pretend, or forget, or get drunk or something. No. I also am one of the dead people, the walking dead? A ghost. I died long ago. So long that not even the old libations of loving blood will make me alive again.[46]

This, coming from "the teacher", one who is both wise and intelligent, besides being close to those in power, sounds indeed like the death-kneel for Africa. Even the traditional spirits of Ghana have abandoned her and do not any longer respond to the rites of libation and sacrifice. Ghana seems adrift, with no clear vision of where she is going, but certainly bent on a course of self-destruction:

> I see a long, long way, he said, and it is full of people, so many people going far in the distance that I see them all like little bubbles joined together. They are going, just going,

[46] *Ibid*., p.61.

> and I am going with them. I know I would like to be able to come out and see where we are going, but in the very long lines of people I am only one. It is not at all possible to come out and see where we are going. I am just going.[47]

This is the real tragedy of modern Africa, this inability to see where we are going, or to resist the current, or even to chart a proper course of where we want to go. Faced with this prospect, it is little wonder that people like Kofi Billy, who are weak-willed, take the easy option out in suicide.

C- The Shock of Betrayal by Africa's most Trusted Leaders

The shock of betrayal by Africa's most trusted leaders is in part, accountable for this strong sense of despair. Writers like Ngugi and Achebe are also concerned about this situation and have tried to deal with it in their works. Ngugi's treatment of this theme in his ambitious novel *Petals of Blood* is very illuminating. Admittedly, his novel is not as bleak as Armah's, but the despair, the betrayal, the frustration, the injustice and the social disintegration are all present. In a way, the politicians in Ngugi's novel are even worse than Armah's. They are villainous, hypocritical, vicious and murderous. His Ilmorog is the very symbol of despair. The wry humor of the novel partly disguises the pain, suffering, bitterness and frustration, best illustrated in this hell-hole and in his main characters. Munira, Wanja, Abdulla and Karega are all lonely, frustrated individuals vainly trying to hide from a hostile world. As in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the politicians in *Petals of Blood* are not interested in serious issues that affect the people, like the prolonged drought and famine in Ilmorog, the lack of roads, hospitals or good schools. The shameless exploitation of the poor, the corruption in high places and the breakdown in human relationships are all too pervasive. *Petals of Blood* also has its fair share of black white men: the Rev. Jerrod Browns, the Raymonds Chuis, are parodies like Armah's Mills-Hayfords, Plange-Bannermans and Attoh-Whites.

[47] *Ibid*., p. 74.

Whether it is *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born,Fragments, Petals of Blood,* Achebe's *A Man of the People* or the many African novels dealing with the same thing, the rule is the same: "Get rich on the misery of the people"[48], as Ngugi puts in *Petals of Blood.*

This is true of the general situation in post-Independence Africa. The political catch-words "freedom", "independence", "developments" and "revolution" are a fraud practiced on the people. Their despair and consequent lack of action are in part due to the fact that nothing really changes, according to *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, even with the change of leaders. This, of course, is enough reasons for despair; after all, *"the sons of the nation were now in charge, after all. How completely the new thing took after the old"*[49].This is what makes it difficult for the people to act. As Achebe sees it, the people can even afford laughing at themselves.

The situation is the same everywhere. In Ngugi, the despair is also mixed with genuine bewilderment at this sudden turn of affairs:

> …And mark you, and this is where it pains, it's their sweat and that feeds the catechist, the wardens, the deacons, the ministers, the bishops, the angels …the whole hierarchy. Still they are condemned …damned.
> "I am a priest, or father-confessor, and looking through the tiny window, I am really looking at the soul of a nation …the scars, the wounds, the clotting blood … it is all in their faces and in their eyes, so bewildered. Tell us, tell us before we confess our sins: who makes these laws? For whom? To help whom? I cannot answer the questions…
> "I ask myself: what happened? When happened?***[50]***

The basic difference between Armah's vision of Africa and that of Ngugi and Achebe is in term of degree. At least this is the case in regard to Armah's first two novels. They are thus disgusted with the kind of lust for materialism that is creeping into African society and the resultant breakup of family ties and social relationships. They are also concerned about the future of Africa, and are painfully aware that Africa took the wrong turn at independence

[48]Wa Thiong'o, Ngugi, *op. cit*., p.76.
[49]Armah, Ayi Kwei, *op. cit.*, p.10.
[50]Wa Thiong'o, Ngugi, *op. cit*., p. 164.

and that, unless the tide is stopped and reversed, destruction is both inevitable and imminent.

In *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the situation seems hopeless. Hope, if there is any, seems to be in the very dim future, a prospect that is far from encouraging. Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* is, however, different from *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* in one significant respect. It has hope. Galvanizing the people into a potent force to take over power from corrupt and insensitive politicians is no longer a probability, but a near certainty. At least, this is the impression one gathers from the novel's end, and Karega is the symbol of that hope:

> Tomorrow it would be the workers and the peasants leading the struggle and seizing power to overturn the system of all its preying bloodthirsty gods and gnomic angels, bringing to an end the reign of the few over the many and the era of drinking blood and feasting on human flesh. Then, only then, would the kingdom of man and woman really begin, they joying and loving in creative labour …[51]

The socialist vision of *Petals of Blood* is clear. But if Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is disturbing, Achebe's *A Man of the People* is perplexing. In both novels, corruption is a national game and the only reason anyone will enter politics. That's somehow what the esteemed village elder in *A Man of the People* asserts when he said that

> The village of Anata has already eaten (the Minister, Chief Nanga comes from Anata), now they must make way for us to reach the plate. No man in Urua will give his paper (vote) to a stranger when his own son needs it; if the very herb we go to seek in the forest now grows at our very backyard are we not saved the journey?[52]

The problem with *A Man of the People* is its neutrality. The satire is useful in its mockery of people, institutions and politicians, but the general cynicism and resignation offers no useful pointer for Africa's future; even in the coup that marks the end of the corrupt regime. At least, in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, there is resistance, even if it is passive. In *A Man of the People*, there is only the cynical acceptance of the inevitable.

[51] *Ibid*., p.344.
[52] Achebe, Chinua, *op. cit*., p. 125.

However, both *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *A Man of the People* clearly show that Africa indeed lacks the men of probity and conscience who can steer the continent away from greedy self-acquisition toward selflessness and national reconstruction. Just as the Common People's Convention (C.P.P) is no better than the Progressive Alliance Party (P.A.P.) or the People's Organization Party (P.O.P.), the military in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is no better than Nkrumah's Convention People's Party, which it ousts[53].The popular notion that politics offers opportunities for people to get their fair share of the national cake, even if it is at the expense of some other people, constituencies or villages, is repeated again and again; True, the satirical thrust is not as devastating or paralysis and despair is keenly felt, especially in the light-hearted way Achebe treats political corruption.

The bleakest picture painted by the African novel of Africa's political future is, however, not just in showing how corrupt her politicians are. The image of newly-independent African states destroyed at birth is at the heart of both *Petals of Blood* and *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. Indeed *Petals of Blood* derives its very title from this image. In Munira's Nature Study Class, one can make the startling discovery that Africa *"is a worm-eaten flower… It cannot bear fruits"*[54].This image of a diseased Africa suffering from stunted growth, or, more appropriately, from arrested development is given a full-blown treatment in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. Armah applies this picture in many ways. Birth, for instance, is no longer an occasion for joy, but for regret and despair, since the newly-born comes already exhausted and decayed. In the vision of Armah, Africa's new birth lacks vigour and freshness. It is a vision of"*…helpless messes*

[53]*Ibid*., pp.124-25.
[54]*Idem*.

of soft flesh and unformed bone squeezing through bursting mother holes, trailing dung and exhausted blood"[55]..

This image of old age and decay in infancy is given a grotesque twist in the character of Rama Krishna and the Man-child. In the incredibly short period of seven years, the Man-child:

> had completed the cycle from babyhood to infancy to youth, to maturity and old age, and in its seventh year, it had died a natural death. The picture Aboliga the Frog showed us was of the man child in its grey old age, completely old in everything save the smallness of its size, a thing that deepened the element of the grotesque. The man child looked more irretrievably old, far more thoroughly than any ordinary man could ever have looked.[56]

Armah seems to be suggesting that decay and corruption in Ghana have come to stay. Any changes in government, or any political innovations aimed at restoring equilibrium, have the strange effect of only perpetuating this decay.

It is this inability to ever reverse the trend that causes so much despair in the people. Things seem to be consistently getting worse. In the Attorney General's presentation of the stages of booze, we get a very frightening picture of Ghana. In what Armah ironically refers to as "*special knowledge*", Ghana has progressed from "*The wood jocose" to "The Mood Comatose"*[57] the final stage, the one of insensibility.While the politicians make a field day out of this situation, the net effect for Ghana is the loss of her skilled man-power. Ghana is left at the mercy of bumbling politicians like Koomson whose main interests are women and drink. Armah seems to share this general despair with his characters. The frequency with which the word "despair" itself appears in the novel is certainly not accidental. In chapter six alone, "despair" appears nine times, and this excludes words and phrases that express a similar meaning. The parable of Plato's cave be enlightening in showing the extent of resignation by the people of Ghana. The people in

[55]Armah, Ayi Kwei. *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. reset edition. 1975, p.62.
[56]*Ibid*., p.63.
[57]*Ibid*., p.133.

the cave are so accustomed to the dark that the bringer of light is considered mad. They cannot imagine how there can be anything but darkness in their cave, so they do not even bother to check out the claim there they exists light somewhere else. This is the position of Ghana, and even curiosity now seems to be dead. Yet the ultimate in despair is expressed by another nameless character: *"Aaah, contrey broke oo, contrey no broke oo, we decay inside"*[58]. It is the final despair, the end of the struggle, and the acceptance of fate.

There is a clear recognition of the futility that goes with "the Man's" isolation, his refusal to join the stream. This is best symbolized in "the Teacher". He is a wise man but he is also a drop-out. We first meet him sitting naked at his open window, reading or listening to music, sensitive but eccentric. His understanding and appreciation of hi-life music is very deep, but he shares this understanding with no one, except, occasionally, the Man. For all his intelligence, Teacher is barely alive. He represents the final stage of what is ahead of the Man himself if he persists in his stand. The emptiness of Teacher's position is underlined in his own admission of loneliness, sorrow, unfulfillment, puzzlement and resignation

The bewilderment, however, exists only for the protagonist. The author himself is not bewildered and stands firmly against corruption. It is in his symbolism, especially in the metaphors of ugliness, foulness of smell and excrement, that he makes clear his attitude towards corruption. Amankwa, for example, is given a wolfish and selfish aspect. Koomson, with his entire perfumed and well-tailored exterior, is finally compelled to lower himself into a latrine hole. In addition, he is vulgar and uncouth, and all his wealth fails to disguise this aspect. He is very characteristic of that general misconception which assumes that one's culturedness is measured in terms of one's material position. Finally, the fact

[58] *Ibid*., p.82.

that Ghana is enveloped in excrement intensifies Armah's condemnation of the moral decay which envelops his country.

The end of the novel, though it confirms its title, is both ambiguous and disturbing. The flower may be beautiful, but it is also ambiguous, especially with the accompanying inscription "*THE BEAUTYFUL ONES ARE NOT YET BORN"*. The question that remains is whether the beautiful ones will ever be born.

PART TWO

INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL EVENTS AND GHANAIAN MOST TRUSTED LEADERS' ATTITUDE ON SOCIETY

CHAPTER THREE: Loss of Traditional Values

A- Social and Spiritual Disintegration

The tragedy here is not that the old ways and customs have been completely abandoned for the new. If this was the case, it would perhaps be understandable. What has happened is that traditional practices have been marginalized and have become only gestural. This hypocrisy allows people like Foli and Korankye to contravene the ethics of traditional religion and gets away with it. In the ceremony marking Baako's departure for the United States, for example, Foli's greed leads him to endanger the life of his nephew.

Ironically, this voiding of traditional practices has the effect of protecting the offender while endangering the innocent. Two reasons may account for this. One of them is what Lazarus describes above. The superficial observance of the ceremony puts the offender outside the power of the vengeful spirits because all the rituals are apparently observed, and the spirits have no excuse for retribution. The other reason is that, since the spirits have not been properly appeased, vengeance of a sort is still expected. More often, the spirits exact thisvengeance on either the one for whom the ceremony is performed, or on most promising person in the family. Often this victim is one whois very closely related to the offender, and whose death will adversely affect the offender. The character who most clearly sees this is the blind old woman, Naana. She recognizes that Foli's words are externally beautiful, but devoid of meaning without accompanying action.

She remonstrates with him:

> You learned so well the words you spoke to the dead ones this night. Did no one also teach you the power of the anger of the departed? How did you forget then? Or was the present growling of your belly a greater thing than Baako's going and the whole stream of his life after that? The spirits would have been angry, and they would have turned their anger against him. He would have been destroyed.[59]

[59] Armah, Ayi Kwei.*Fragments*.London: Heinemann, 1974, p.12.

In Ghana, as in most parts of Africa, that belief that the living, the dead and the unborn share symbiotic life in a circular continuum is very strong. A violation at any end is bound to interfere with the process, and produce grave consequences at the other end. To avert any catastrophe, Naana takes the bottle from Foli and pours out the drink in generous doses to the spirits, as she believes is their due: *"Nananom drink to your thirst, and go with the young one. Protect him well, and bring him back, to us, to you."*[60].In this way, disaster is turned into blessing.

Armah's point is that if religion, which is both so sacred and so intimately bound with the individual's life in Ghana can be so easily set aside for material gain, then it should come as no surprise at all if people stop at nothing, including the exchanging of human souls, to arrive at that gain. If the erosion of human values and the social disintegration that this entails is given a frightening aspect in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*; in *Fragments* it assumes a harsh reality. This is mainly due to the fact that the events recorded in *Fragments* are common everyday occurrences, to which the reader with a Ghanaian or African background and experience can easily relate at a personal level. The love of festivities as occasions for the ostentatious display of wealth, or as opportunities for material acquisition, is against the tenets of traditional Ghanaian life. Yet this has become a prevailing characteristic of most parts of post-colonial Africa. The fantastic airport reception of Brempong which assails the beholders with a *"confusion heightening the eye-filling impression of an unending swirl of colored cloth and jewelry"*[61] is a case of point.Brempong's reception, with its display of rich kente cloth and the wasting of expensive imported drink, is a parody of a religious ceremony, and, hence, a travesty of all that is sacred.

[60] *Ibid.*, p.11.
[61] *Idem.*

In the same way, the celebration of the birth of Baako's young nephew profanes the concept of the outdooring ceremony. The original purpose of the ceremony is to welcome the newcomer, who is in fact still a spirit, to the world of the living; the spirit-child is, by tradition, expected to stay the mandatory eight days before outdooring. It is only after the eighth day that the spirits of the nether world will formally relinquish their hold on the child to the land of the living and to human care. Any contravention of this code will have fatal consequences for the child. Naana recognizes this fact very well. The spirits must first be satisfied by the strict observance of all the rules by the living. Otherwise, as Naana predicts, the child *"will run screaming back, fleeing the horrors prepared for him up here."*[62].

However, the lust for materialism has supplanted man's better judgment and human life means little to a society where wealth and position are rated above the human soul itself. So, rather than hold the outdooring ceremony on the customary eighth day, Efua and her daughter Araba decide to have it on the weekend following pay day. Their reason is logical enough: *"An outdooring ceremony held more than a few days after pay day is useless"*[63].

We are sharply reminded Passion Week in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, where the workers are the living dead because they can hardly make ends meet. This contrasts with "the days after pay day" when "the fullness of the month touches each old sufferer with a feeling of power."[64].The choice of the fifth day for the outdooring, then, is entirely dictated by expediency: in Efua's world everything is understood, and expressed, only in terms of material gain.

[62] *Ibid.*, p.139.
[63] *Ibid.*, p.125.
[64] *Ibid.*, p.89.

B- Balance between Material Success and Spiritual Values

The consumerist ethic in the novel helps to account for the social and spiritual disintegration of Ghana. Korankye's misappropriation of the drink meant for the gods, and his subsequent desecration of the family's mango tree with his blood-stained knife, are consistent with the drunken sacrifice of the ram as food for eating and not as an offering. So is the array of guests at the ceremony, with their *"long, twinkling earrings, gold necklaces, quick-shining wrist-watches, a great rich splendor stifling all these people in the warmth of a beautiful day"*[65].It is shocking the extent to which people will go, even at their own personal discomfort, to satisfy the new god of their materialism. In the midst of this obscene festivity, Efua guides literally bilks her guests. Meanwhile, in a grotesque display of wealth, the main celebrant is placed directly in front of a new electric fan, ostensibly to give him some fresh air, but in reality to show off. Naturally, the child dies of pneumonia. However, in the general scheme of the novel, the child's death is attributable to abuse of tradition which provokes the anger of the ancestors, and they withdraw their protection from the child.

Again it is Naana who recognizes the fact that the ceremony is a breach of decorum and tantamount to a death warrant for the child. She blames Baako, who, as uncle to the child, has more authority than anyone else, for allowing the ceremony to take place on the fifth day. It is not surprising that Naana should be the one to perceive this shattering of Ghanaian society. She is a relic from the past who still processes an ancestral and unified view of the old world:

> Each thing that goes away returns and nothing in the end is lost. The great friend throws all things apart and brings all things together again. That is the way everything goes and turns around. That is how all living things come back after long absences, and in the whole great world all things are livings are living things. All that goes returns. He will return.[66]

[65] *Ibid.*, p.259.
[66] *Ibid.*, p.1.

C- A Gloomy Vision

One has to agree with Wright that Armah's vision in *Fragments* has darkened. Wright argues that:

> The more aggressive and intolerant conformism of modern Ghana in this book demands offerings for the altar of its materialism and, since its sins against humanity are deadlier than the corruption of the first book, a heavier price than the Man's passive endurance must be paid for their purgation.[67]

The dog, the small boy at the sea shore and skido are all sacrificial victims, the purpose of which is to show that "only the traumas of madness and death can truly shock Ghanaians into a real sense of human worth and dignity." Baako himself is the central scapegoat in the novel. What Wright fails to add, however, is that the tragedy of the situation is even more unbearable because, in *Fragments*, Armah is dealing with what may properly be regarded as the intelligentsia of the society. Unlike the situation in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Armah is not concerned with uninformed politicians like Koomson, or humble clerks like the Man, but with the members of the educated elite like Brempong, Asante Smith, Ocran, Boateng and Baako. Armah's examination of the Ghanaian elite is very incisive. Placed in positions of power in the forefront of the struggle for the country's emancipation from neo-colonialism, the elite have become part of the problem rather than the solution. Their main interest is self-aggrandizement at the expense of their country.

It is in Baako, the main sacrificial victims, that the two central motifs of despair and disintegration are unified. The novel opens as Baako is about to return home after studying in America for five years. He has a pretty good idea of what his contribution toward the post-Independence development of his country ought to be. As an artist, he sees in Television the realization of his dream. The use of images, rather than words, for mass communication has

[67]Wright, Derek. Ayi kwei Armah and Significance of His Novels and Histories.International Fiction Review, Vol 7, No. 1, 1990, p. 33.

the power to touch the hidden recesses of the minds of his prospective audience. His reasons for electing Television over writing are thus simple. It is a collaborative art, bringing together the best talents and resources for the best production. Besides, in a country where about 70% of the population is illiterate, television's power to communicate is not dependent upon the ability to read and write. Yet Baako is very apprehensive about returning home because he is not sure if he will be able to contribute anything meaningful to his country. He arranges to slip in unannounced because he wants to avoid his family. He knows what his family expects of him as a "been to" and he also knows he will not play that role: as a material provider. It is an interesting case of a clash of interests: What Baako has (his great talent as an artist) neither his family nor his country is interested in. What his family wants, Baako will not give. It is a classic case of the misfit, and his consequent isolation and fragmentation are well on course.

Baako's situation in *Fragment s*is the opposite of what Obi Okonkwo experiences in Achebe's *No Longer At Ease*. He is not the conventional "been to" in the sense that his Western education ill-equips him to cope with life in traditional African Society. Neither, as Wright rightly observes, is he caught between Africa and the West. It is worse than that, for he is trapped between the West and a vulgarly Westernized Africa. The breakdown of the community and the failed hopes of Ghana are both graphically expressed in Baako's inability to complete the mansion whose foundations his mother has painstakingly laid. But the pressure is mounting, both from his expectant family and from his colleagues in Ghana vision.

The extended family system, the main bulwark against personal and social crisis in African society, is given an ironic twist in *Fragments*. Instead of providing the protective shelter for Baako in his fright against materialism and what Lazarus terms intellectual irresponsibility, so that the social cohesion and political consciousness may be restored, it literally hounds him into madness. This situation puts Achebe's criticism of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* in a new rather interesting perspective. In his essay on "Africa and her

Writers", Achebe attacks Armah on the grounds that his suggestion…of the hero's personal justification without faith nor works is grossly inadequate in a society where even a lunatic walking stark naked through the highways of Accra has an extended family somewhere suffering vicarious shame.

Fragments seems to have been conceived with this criticism in mind. The two key issues of the hero's "faith" and "works" and the suffering extended family have been effectively answered here. Achebe's biblical allusions apart, here is a hero who possesses faith and works as well as personal justification, and yet is as isolated as the Man in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. What is even more interesting, the protagonist's madness is the direct result of his family's action.

His education is seen in the light of an investment by his family. His return, therefore, is a sign that their premiums are ripe for the harvest. Baako is less than 24 hours in Ghana when his family's expectations begin. On his being introduced to his mother's head of department the principal's words are very illuminating: *"It's a blessed day for you, Mrs Onipa. Take the afternoon off to give him a fitting welcome."*[68].In anticipation of this blessedness, Baako's mother's first query is when Baako's car is expected, *"So that her old bones can rest."*[69].In the same way, when Baako rushes his sister to the hospital for delivery, she expects the V.I.P. treatment that goes to relatives of senior officers. When she is not accorded this right, her disappointment can be read plainly in her unsmiling face.

[68]Armah, Ayi Kwei, *op. cit*., p.101.
[69]*Idem.*

Chapter Four: Consequences of the Shock of Betrayal by Ghana's most Trusted Leaders in Armah's first two Novels

A- Frustration

If Baako still possesses any idealism in the face of the shameless greed and acquisitiveness of his family, he soon abandons it in his frustrating hunt for a job. Despite his obvious qualifications, and in a country where skilled personnel are hard to find, Baako fails to gain employment. He is given the now-familiar Ghanaian invitation to bribery, come tomorrow, a clear sign that he has failed to grease the palms of the Senior Assistant Secretary of the Ministry. It is humiliating for Baako, who has to fall back on Ocran, his former teacher, for help. Baako is beginning to learn the importance of having a well-placed god-father. When Brempong had earlier catechized him on the importance of having such a god-father, who will have a job ready waiting for him, Baako naively insisted that his certificates were enough to secure him a job.

Brempong, for all his vulgarity, knows his Ghana very well. He is a satirical portrait of the typical "been to" and, to give him credit, he plays his role only too well. The practice of gaining positions in government or the Civil Service by recourse to people in powerful positions is one of the curses of post-Independence Africa. One of its serious defects is the fact that it often succeeds in putting square pegs in round holes, and leads to brain drain as a result of frustration. Odili in Achebe's *A Man of the People* decries the practice and insists that he will not "*stop to lick any Big Man's bootsbecause he values his independence*"[70]. But Odili himself admits that "*A common saying in the country after Independence was that it didn't matter what you knew but who you knew*"[71]. He is even glad when he is offered the opportunity to do a post-graduate course abroad, through the good offices of Chief Nanga. In

[70]Achebe, Chinua, *op. cit*., p.17.
[71]*Idem.*

Petals of Blood, the prospect is even bleaker. There can be no employment without the help of *"a big brother"*[72]. The eternal question that is asked is often *"Who sent you?"* If the answer is no one, the response is *"No vacancy"*[73].

The situation is even worse when a foreigner is rated above a citizen on the grounds of the colour of his skin. This certainly does not augur well for the nation's manpower development, least of all when the foreigner in question may be less qualified than the citizen. Brempong's cool assertion, *"If you were an expatriate, a white man, it wouldn't matter. You'd have things easy, even without real qualifications"*[74] is quite chilling. This is the system Baako is forced to work with, and its sterility and incompetence are made explicit in the novel.

Baako's education through the Ghanaian experience is not yet complete. His futile attempts to put his learning to fruitful use is discussed later in this chapter. For the moment, we are concerned with the disastrous Ghanaian political experiment. Ghana vision presents Baako with the first big demonstration of the mess Ghana has made of her Independence. He has been previously warned by both Ocran and the Principal Secretary not to expect anything worthwhile at Ghana vision. In fact, he has been told that the place is a mess, that nothing works, that he can do nothing to change the prevailing situation and that the top brass know thing don't work, but they are happy to sit on top of the mess all the same. Still, nothing prepares Baako fully for his shock at the state of affairs in Ghana vision. The place is a quagmire of indolence, inaction and intellectual stagnation. There is no creativity, little innovation and plenty of ignorance. Engineers turn out in white-white suits, with no idea of how to fix broken-down machines, while producers prefer leisure and travel to work. Their chief activity is to make endless trips to embassies to beg for films and tapes. However,

[72]Wa Thiong'o, Ngugi.*Petals of Blood*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.1977, p. 104.
[73]*Idem.*
[74]Armah, Ayi Kwei, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

nothing is a more shattering blow for Baako than to be told a nation is built, not through *"socio-cultural and economic self-reliance"*, but rather *"through glorifying its big shots."*[75]

The picture in Ghana vision is meant to reflect the bigger picture of the nation at large. In effect, the country is run by time-serving sycophants like Asante-Smith, whose main aim is to make money at the expense of the nation. Again, this picture is a familiar one in post-Independence Africa. In *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Armah explains the nation's wealth is being exploited by the sons of the nation. Here in *Fragments*, the situation is even worse, for *"the external enemy isn't the one at whose expense the hero gets his victory; he's supposed to get rich, mainly at the expense of the community"*[76].The tragedy of Africa is that these thieves are glorified for their crimes. They are heroes. Both *Petals of Blood* and *A Man of the People* clearly present this disturbing view of African politics. In *Petals of Blood* the politicians and senior civil servants *"get rich on the misery of the people"*[77]. In *A Man of the People*, theft by politicians is actually seen as a reward commensurate with their bravery in driving the white man away from the land. Clearly Africa is on a course of self-destruction. All these problems weigh on Baako's mind, relentlessly driving him towards insanity.

B- Madness

Madness is a felt presence in *Fragments*. However, it is not so much the madness of Baako or the poor helpless dog, as the general madness of society itself. In a way Larson's contention that *"Baako is an island of sanity is an ocean of madness"*[78] is right. The action of the novel points towards an attempt at self-destruction. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, there seems to be good cause for the people's blind pursuit of self-destruction. At least there Armah presents the world of Africa in opposition to a Euro-Arabic fragmentary one. Such words and

[75] *Ibid*., p.190.
[76] *Ibid*., p.140.
[77] Wa Thiong'o, Ngugi, *op. cit*., p. 76.
[78] Larson, Charles. "The Emergence of African Fiction". London: The Macmillan Press Ltd. 1978, p. 274

phrases as *"destroyers", "predators", "zombies"* and *"ostentatious cripples"* are used to describe the fragmentary worlds of Arabs and Europeans. Their way of life is one of death:

> Springwater flowing to the desert, where you flow there is no regeneration. The desert takes. The desert knows no giving. To the giving water of your flowing it is not in the nature of the desert to return anything but, destruction. Springwater flowing to the desert, your future is extinction.[79]

The Arabs and Europeans also have "shattered hearing", "broken reason", and "unconnected sight". On the contrary, the African world is one of "the way, our way", "creators", and "reciprocity". It is springwater: life saving and regenerating. The clash of these two different worlds brings death to the people.

In *Fragments* this is not the case. If again and again we find a throwback to a westernized world or its cheap imitation, it is against the background of a wholly African Society. The European world is felt but not really seen. Yet the vision of *Fragments* is far bleaker than the picture painted in *Two Thousand Seasons*. In the latter novel, there is a determined resistance to the incursions of the foreigners. There is even a determined effort to revert to the traditions of the people. What we have in *Fragments* is the exact opposite. It is an equally determined effort to discard the traditions of Africa and to adopt those of Europe in their totality. As if this in not bad in itself, this dance of death is led by Africa's leaders.

It is this strange, larger, social madness that accounts for the great suffering of the mass of the people in Fragments. Their suffering is very real and their oppressors are a living presence throughout the novel. In fact one of the themes of *Fragments* is the divided world of the elite above and the masses below. Baako's abortive screen play, "The Brand", captures in graphic visual images the real meaning of Independence for Ghana and Africa. For the broad mass of the people in Ghana, Independence means suffering, pain, hunger, disease,

[79] Armah, Ayi Kwei.*Two Thousand Seasons.* London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. 1973, p. xi.

oppression, indignity and defeat. It is also significant that the oppressors were, not too long ago, among the oppressed. Baako's screenplay shows a

> Single dark circle filling screen, representing the weak periphery, large environment, habitat of the oppressed. On which a square is superimposed, white, the though concretized fortification…
> LS: Ladder leading from weak circle to strong square.
> CU: The ladder is made up of the shoulders of inhabitants of the lower level, the oppressed…[80]

The oppressed are both powerless and disenfranchised. They are numerically superior to their oppressors, yet they have been marginalized and their subjugation is complete. In Baako's own word, *"The inhabitants of the circle, (Are) a chorus of quiet, dance defeat"*[81].What is disgusting about Ghana's leaders is their hypocrisy and neo-colonial mentality. Baako pictures them as *"exhibitionist"* in *"White-white like perennial colonial school boys, hard with an exterior shine"*[82].Their hollow promises that the climb is only to find a means of liberating the oppressed, while at the same time they handpick prospective climbers and bask in self-praise, emphasize their hypocrisy.

In *A Man of the People*, Achebe examines the whys and wherefores of this problem. He attributes the African politician's lust for power to the fear of returning to the circle of the oppressed. The suffering and pain of his recent past is still too fresh in his mind to risk a return to the same humiliating circumstances. According to Achebe,

> We had been in the rain together until yesterday. Then a handful of us, the smart and the lucky and hardly the best had scrambled for the one shelter our former rulers left, and had taken it over and barricaded themselves in. And from within they sought to persuade the rest through numerous loudspeakers, that the first phase of the struggle had been won and that the next phase the extension of our house was even more important and called for new tacics…[83]

[80]Armah, Ayi Kwei.*Fragments*. London: Heinemann, 1974, pp.210-11.
[81]*Idem*.
[82]*Idem*.
[83]Achebe, Chinua. *A Man of the People*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.1966, p. 37.

Here there is not even the pretense of liberating those barricaded outside. Africa's political leaders are only concerned with entrenching their power and increasing their comfort at the expense of the rest of the people.

The anguish and frustration resulting from the indifferent treatment meted out to the masses helps to account for the vanishing of the community in *Fragments*. Outburst of violent destruction fill the city, and a sense of frustration is felt everywhere. The glee with which the syphilitic man butchers the helpless whimpering dog, while his poisonous, repressed desires slowly ooze out, is an indication of his entrapment and frustration. People are imprisoned in their own small groups: expatriates and citizens alike. Juana's desire to allow a *"sense of inner worth come between herself and those she walked among, so that there could be the human touching the hunger for which continued in her in spite of everything"*[84] shows the extent of the damage done to the human psyche. Society itself has become brutalized and the Psychiatry Ward, full of inmates with broken souls, tells the story. Even Juana sometimes questions the wisdom of mending such brokenness only to have the cycle repeated again and again.

The need for human contact and fellow-feeling is still strong, yet so many sterile and artificial structures make this impossible. Juana wants a more personal relationship with the nurse she works with, for instance, but the externals of rank status from forbidden barriers. Human relationships are both sterile and meaningless. In the midst of this brokenness, this desire for human contact and frustration, any possibility of salvation is welcome. It is such desperation that drives people into the exploitative arms of the chauffeur-driven false beach prophet. The distance between him and his congregation is measured by his gleaming Mercedes.

[84]Armah, Ayi Kwei, *op. cit*., p.19.

In the city, this brokenness and lack of fulfillment are also reflected in the several unfinished government projects. Schools and roads are quickly abandoned, distilleries are shut down and industrial rail trucks are defunct. Everywhere, the signs of general impotence are reflected in the under development that has become the mark of Independence. Efua's own architectural miscarriage is the central symbol of this pattern of unfinished hopes and frustrated dreams.

However, if the city presents a gory picture of poverty and pain, the countryside present an even more chilling one of neglect, disease and hopelessness. The general neglect of the countryside has led to an increase in urban migration, accelerating the process of societal breakdown that has been started by the greed and concupiscence of Ghana's leaders. Juana has been to the countryside and her impression of it is horrifying. What she has seen is a *"kind of destruction that made people look to the grinding town as if some salvation could be found there. In the countryside things were worse"*[85]. For the people in this area, urbanization has become a choice between the devil and the deep blue sea a necessary evil. Baako's own description of the countryside only serves to re-enforce Juana's earlier impression of a people in a living hell:

> The brown roadbeds up north with their dangerous gravelly sides and laterite dust had remained beautiful in his mind, and the villages on the way down from Tumu to Wa were now sounds, though there was no forgetting them as places where maimed people and sickness walked down every half-hidden path…[86]

No one with a first-hand experience of the North will contradict Baako's description of what he has seen.

Properly speaking, the world of *Fragments* is one inhabited by the wretched of the earth. The people are *"completely seized with danger and so many different kind of*

[85] *Ibid.*, p.22.
[86] *Ibid*., pp. 190-01.

loss"[87].There is the conviction, ingrained into their collective consciousness, that, in the struggle against their oppressors, hope of any kind is only a dream. This implicit acceptance of hopelessness is reflected in the many messages written on trucks and buses. In Ghana as well as in many other African countries, the practice of writing cryptic messages on the bodies of vehicles is very widespread. It is an attempt to express inner feelings and truths too deep to suppress. It is also cathartic in the sense that it cleanses the soul of the individual in an emotional relief.

The vision of life as a battlefield is, however, not an isolated case. The reality of life as it is lived is accurately depicted on the T-shirts worn by two men with cartoons of sweating wrestlers on them under the printed caption, *"Strugglers!"*. In Independence Ghana, self-expression, however, has its dangers. Consistent with the oppression of the already helpless citizens, the two men are arrested as provocateurs. The event is serious enough to warrant an editorial in the government newspaper, The National Time, the next day. The official charge is that the message on the T-shirts is too bold. What purpose, demanded the editor, could such images and words have, save to trouble the peaceful minds of hardworking citizens with a view to subverting the nation as a whole?

In Ghana, *"Truth"*, they say, is painful and no one likes it, least of all her leaders. The arrest of the two *"strugglers"* reflects the general suppression of truth in Ghana. *A Man of the People* deals with a more serious analogous situation involving senior cabinet ministers. The government has a severe financial crisis to deal with, resulting from an unexpected slump in the coffee market. The Minister of Finance, we are told, is "a first-rate economist with a Ph.D. in public finance". His plan to deal with the situation receives a *"No"* from the Prime Minister. With a general election around the corner, the Prime Minister is not ready to risk his position by cutting down the price of the coffee to the farmers. His solution is to instruct the

[87] *Ibid*., p.34.

national Bank to print more currency notes. As a man of integrity, the Finance Minister offers to resign, and he is joined by two-thirds of the cabinet. The Prime minister does not give them the chance and dismisses them, calling them *"conspirators and traitors who had teamed up with foreign saboteurs to destroy the new nation."*[88]

In an atmosphere of such overwhelming oppression, the wretched of the earth in Armah's *Fragments* are left with only one alternative to appeal to God. The despair in such acronyms as *"S.M.O.G."*, meaning *"Save Me Oh God"*, is very telling. For the perpetual "broke man" whose hopes of even one square meal a day are often not realized, there is the hope in God. As the driver of one such bus with just such a sign explains: *"Poor man never get bank account. But he looks far in the sky and he thinks in him head he get some last chance. In heaven"*[89].This, of course, helps to explain the unusual success of the phony beach messiah, who is not even ashamed to display the symbol of his ill-gotten wealth in the face of the general poverty of his converts. For the defeated inhabitants of the circle of oppression, rural and urban alike, there is only grinding hardship, toil and the bleakness of life. In *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, despair is expressed in the ability to see the end of things in their beginnings. In *Fragments*, it is worse, because both the beginnings and the ends are unknown. Life is

> A long stretch of danger with both ends unknown, the only certain things being the constant threat and the presence of loss on a way lined with infrequent, brief, unlikely hopes and once in a long while…unexpected miracle escapes from the edge of the unknown.[90]

C- Society's Attitude to Art

One of the most powerful portrayals of instances of sterility in *Fragments* is society's attitude to art. Again Baako serves as the perfect example of the embodiment of private grief

[88]Achebe, Chinua, *op. cit*., p. 3.
[89]Armah, Ayi Kwei, *op. cit*., pp.35-6.
[90]*Ibid*., pp.33-4.

and public despair. He has been trained as a writer and he wants to use his skill to help develop his country. Baako's commitment and idealism are disturbing Ocran, the more experienced artist, who advises him to forget his idealism because the people of Ghana do not like artists. Ocran's fear is that Baako's commitment in the face of the general malaise in the country may end up frustrating him and driving him crazy. In the ensuing discussing between the two on the role of the artist in society, two things are clear: Ocran believes that the only way to be a real artist in Ghana is to work alone. That, for Ocran, is the only way to express himself freely. Ocran finds it expedient to sacrifice his artistic ambitions concerning mass communication in attempting to maintain his artistic integrity. Baako counters this line of reasoning by arguing that the artist must serve society. It is the duty of the artist, he argues, to offer society an interpretation of itself, and extend people's understanding of their situation. Baako stands for the social utility of art, and any withdrawal on the artist's part may lead to his being cut off from the society he ought to be serving.

Ocran, of course, is experienced and mature. Having worked in Ghana for several years, he knows the constraints that militate against intellectualism in the country. However, his withdrawal does not prove as satisfying as he imagines. Like the enigmatic Teacher in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Ocran is marginalized, and frustrated. His private grief and internal anguish are given vent in his works. As Baako discovers in Ocran's studio, *"the walls were lined with rows of black heads in dozens of different attitudes from sweet repose to extreme agony"*[91]**.**From beginning to end, the tension captured in these sculptures grows progressively intense until the *"inward torture actually broke the outer form of the human face, and the result is …old anonymus sculpture of Africa"*[92].Ocran's work is a brief summary of Ghana's history, from sweet hopes to bitter anguish and despair. Ocran's marginality concedes too much, and more is the pity because, an artist, he does have a story to tell.

[91]*Ibid*., p.111.
[92]*Idem*.

But neither is Baako's vision of the role of the artist in society practical. His ambitions of politicizing and re-educating "the masses" are naively idealistic and immediately begin to backfire in his face almost before he can even implement them. He has failed to reckon with the crassness of officialdom, and the lesson's he is learning at Ghana vision are very painful ones indeed. He looks on with disbelief while Senior Officers scramble for television sets that were initially meant for the distribution in the hinterland. His dream of communication with the masses is effectively aborted once the sets have been withheld from the people. As if this is not enough, Baako is told that his type of drama is not essential in the nation's development. What is important, Asante-Smith asserts, is to glorify the nation's leaders, no matter how inane or counter- productive their speeches or actions.

Baako is soon to find out that the only artists who make it in Ghana are the fake ones. Indeed, one of the most powerful instances of satire in *Fragments* is reserved for Akossua Russel, the fake artist. Akossua Russel is totally untalented but succeeds very well in masquerading as a great artist all literary Soirees. She is especially good at attracting American patronage. Like Asante-Smith, she has special ability in catering to the taste of the rich and powerful.

CONCLUSION

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Here we are at the closing of our research work on *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments.*

The thesis explores the dominant themes of Armah's novels (despair and social fragmentation) that plague post-Independence Africa. These themes are treated in varying degrees in all of Armah's five novels: *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born, Fragments, Why Are So Blest?, Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers.* In each of them, however, the time, setting and focus are different. However, his conviction that Africa's vision has been impaired because she traded her traditional values for unsuitable alien ones, with the resultant tension in family and social relationships, is consistent. Because of length restriction, this thesis focuses on *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments*, Armah's first two novels. However, an attempt has been made to generalize the Ghanaian experience in these two novels to embrace the whole of Africa, by making comparisons with and drawing parallels to the rest of his novels as well as novels by other African writers, notably Achebe and Ngugi.

Through this work we can notice that though over two decades have passed since the publication of both *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments,* much has happened within this period. Africa has had its share of coups, wars and a host of abuses of human rights, which all tend to make life even more unpleasant for the broad masses of the people. Despite the crucial role that economics plays in the overall development of any nation, most of Africa's problems seem attributable to bad leadership and intransigent politics. In the past few years, Africa has been going through a whirlwind of political activities, aimed at redressing her political problems. The winds of democracy currently blowing across the continent bring us to another cross-road in our political development. We are nostalgically reminded of the years immediately preceding Independence from colonial rule over thirty

years ago. The question that seems to be gaining universal currency amidst the present euphoria is whether Africa is at the dawn of a new era, or whether the cycle is to be repeated all over again. In the natural order of things, one hopes that it is the former. However, in the general scheme of Armah's first two novels, this hope seems likely to be disappointed.

In all of Armah's novels, there is the explicit recognition of Africa's futile struggle in the existing situation of her consumerist ethic, her dependence on the West for this satisfaction, and the intransigence and lack of foresight of her leaders. This element of despair is central to Armah's art and his vision is to explore all the alternatives available to Africa. In both *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments*, but especially in the former book, almost every page is full of negatives. The natural and social worlds of these novels are both full of decay and corruption, and the despair of his protagonists speaks for itself.

One can make the claim, with some justification, for Armah that the almost overwhelming negativity in his works is in itself not a negation of life, or of any positive thinking, for that matter. The despair and social disintegration in the worlds of his novels do not mean the absolute impossibility of stemming the tide of decay, and beginning a new process of regeneration.

However, the novels do present a rather difficult, almost insoluble, problem that needs serious re-thinking by Ghanaian and all African leaders. Until the root of the problem is tackled and solved, all other attempts will be mere window-dressing, much like the ability of the wood in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* to absorb any new polish without any marked change.

In an interview in West Africa magazine with Robert Moss, Achebe is quoted as saying that "*the worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self-*

respect."[93].According to Achebe, the writer's duty is to help them recover from this loss. In both *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments***,** this has been Armah's task. His method is to shake the people out of their complacency by presenting a world that appears so irredeemably lost that there seems to be no hope for its salvation. The idea is to give society an awareness of what is wrong with it, and to challenge it into tackling the problems in a meaningful way. In other words, Armah is saying that the idea of defeat is mainly in the mind and once this is recognized and accepted, liberation is both possible and attainable.

[93]Achebe, Chinua. "Writing and Politics". New York: Anchor Press/Double, 1986, p.1676.

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