

Review

An evaluation of post-colonial African leadership: A study of Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, and Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People*

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This paper centers on how post-colonial African leaders in Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and Achebe's *A Man of the People* have shifted from democratic leadership to an autocratic type of governance. The paper denotes a form of corruption that departs from cherished values and ideals of post-colonial Africa. The key method of this paper is textual analysis. The paper seeks to show the socio-economic disillusionment of an independent African society. The leaders abuse their posts to enrich themselves at the nation's expense. The paper seeks to show how the black people's quest for shared power and freedom has been thwarted by the post-colonial African governments. The paper also dwells on how the misuse of power causes the offices of African leaders to be sources of evil and wealth creation for a few selected individuals.

Key words: Post-colonial African leadership.

INTRODUCTION

Chinua Achebe and Ayi Kwei Armah (Fraser 1980), generally subscribe to the notion that independence is a source of disillusionment to most black Africans because it has failed to deliver on the key objectives that spurred the quest for independence. The two authors introduce a paradigm shift from the culture of blame shifting which characterized most polemics (defending by attacking) against colonialism towards a culture of internal focus. The sad aspect of current African politics is blaming colonial encounter as responsible for misgoverning, yet mostly the blame lies on endogenous factors behind that such as corruption, nepotism, manipulation of media, mass apathy, politics of lies, demonization of democratic values, politics of deception and self-aggrandizement, ethnicisation of politics and naturalization of election violence. In a sense, it is not a fulfillment of expectations but a nightmare, an illusion that generated a false sense of arrival.

Fage and Roland (1970) assert that the post-colonial elite of independent Africa championed the first movement

of African nationalism, which coerced its political demands in terms drawn from European nationalists' thought. In light of this assertion, people in post-colonial Africa are still yearning for independence. The coming of independence to Africa was marked by euphoria and great expectations. Independence was envisaged as a new era to bring and deliver a human rights culture and a democratic dispensation. However the celebratory mood of independence in Africa evaporated because of the problems of cynical leadership, mass apathy and despair.

The colonial encounter left the legacy of capitalism and its related system of exploitation. After independence, some Africans thought that they were welcoming victory in its fullness but their fellow blacks use their power improperly, replicating the colonial forms of repression. Africa has slipped off the noose of colonialism but then their governments are not different from colonial governments because at independence, it was realized that black oppressors replaced colonialists and there was mere substitution. According to Mbeki, it has also been

argued that Africa was re-colonized at independence by black oppressors. According to Ngugi (1982) in Duerden and Pieterse (1972), African leaders run their economies according to the American standard and the governments have been taught the system of self interest and told to forget the ancient songs that glorify the notion of collective good. African leaders in positions of authority are cushioned in extravagance, yet the majority is suffering. In post-colonial Africa' cultural dislocation is coupled with political betrayal by the indigenous crop of African leaders. Leaders betray people in that independence in many African countries remained in the hands of the founding fathers and there was negation of power sharing thereby undermining democratic principles. Nationalist leaders at independence engaged in politics of violence, exclusion and inclusion, hence independence brought nothing but suffering. The high hope attendant to the dawn of independence is frustrated by the corruption of the political leaders. Bingu wa Mutharika (1995) also postulate that it is socially unacceptable or morally degrading for a leader to reap huge profits from swindling his people or hijacking the economic development machinery for his personal benefits. Needs of the people become secondary because resources are spent on military hardware for oppressing the very masses for which government came into power and negation of human rights became absolute.

Gakwandi (1977) suggests, 'we are presented with a world in which the sewage pipes of history have been exploded and everything is polluted.' This is evident in the two primary texts which the author is using that African leaders are essentially not or more humanist than the imperialists they have replaced. The poverty-stricken Africans decide to get rich whilst the peasants and the unemployed are not convinced that anything has really changed in their lives. The corruption of post-independent leaders triumphed over morality of humans; the majority are thus relegated to the periphery.

A MAN OF THE PEOPLE-CHINUA ACHEBE

Achebe's *A Man of the People* is an indictment on post-colonial Africa, where people worship materialism and have thrown away spirituality. The country, Nigeria is corrupt, thus independence is meaningless. Achebe comments on the degree to which unrestrained corruption has come to dominate Nigerian life and his text reflect the horrors of the status quo in African independent countries. The repressive machinery was not only retained in Africa but was adopted and perfected. Achebe argues that the political machine had been so abused that whichever way one pressed it, it produced the same results and therefore another force had to come in. He is suggesting that the legacy of colonialism is apparent in post-colonial African leadership. *A Man of the People* ironically presents 'a man of the people' who detaches

himself from the society and seeks to meet individual interests. The leaders had wielded power and had been misusing it by pursuing personal interests.

The leaders had voted for the expulsion of competent ministers who were intellectuals. *A Man of the People* is a reflection of the African leaders who have perfected the biting draconian pieces of legislation to politically castrate and silence their critics. Repressive machinery in many African countries were perfected and made razor sharp to slice all fingers of all those who dared to criticize them. African dictators at independence personalized powers and displayed a passion and intention to die in power. Many dictators in post-colonial Africa declared themselves life presidents for example Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana. African dictators as Ahmadou Ahidjo of Cameroon, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Sekou Toure of Guinea, Kamuzu Banda of Malawi etc created one party state and advocated for a one country, one leader and one party doctrine.

Achebe argues that the worst elements of the old are retained and some of the worst of the new are added on to them. His argument has been strengthened by his text *A Man of the People* that depicts an African society betrayed by its own people. The assumption that the colonial government is responsible for the sufferings of the society has been weakened. Chief Nanga, who has come to power through rigged elections and oppressing his opponent Odili, is a reflection of independent African societies which is characterized by rigged elections. A good example is of the rigged elections in Dafur in April 2010, where the National Congress Party manipulated census results and voters' registration, drafted election laws in its favour in order to win elections. In light of these malpractices independent African politics is characterized by rigged elections which normally lead to election violence.

The government ministers use bribery, force and thugery as well as finance to enable Nanga and his kind to return to power unopposed. For example Chief Nanga comes to bribe Odili to step down for him by offering him a scholarship to study overseas, garnished with a personal cash gift for two hundred and fifty pounds sterling. Chief Koko bribes Max to withdraw and end up killing him on Election Day. The rigged elections thus reflect how political leaders use their positions to gain what they want.

Achebe portrays a post-colonial African society that has come to accept institutionalized corruption and nepotism. The society realizes the hypocrisy of its leadership but it is silent about it. Nepotism and corruption become familiar problems of the African society. Achebe is suggesting this in his text '*A Man of the People*', for nepotism is cheered at public meetings; people use positions to enrich themselves. Nanga offers Odili a privilege:

By the way Odili, I think you are wasting your talent here, want you to come to the capital and

take up a strategic post in civil service. We should not leave everything to the highlands tribes-our people must press for their own share of the national cake (Achebe, 1966)

This reflects that leaders use nepotism in their politics. Odili is given a strategic position because he is of Nanga's tribe.

The idea that Chief Nanga views the nation as no more than a cake is an indication that politicians think that each group should scramble for power and position so as to get as large a share as possible. Thus, senior members of government misuse public funds for self-aggrandizement. They live a luxurious life through defrauding the people by the system of bribery, corruption and nepotism.

Chief Nanga lives a luxurious life at the expense of the country. His life contrasts the general poverty in the country where the majority of peasants and workers can only live in shacks and afford pails as lavatory; Nanga lives in a princely seven-bath roomed and bedroom mansion. Killiam (1969) in the same vein argues that corruption of perhaps the most responsible and influential minister next to the Prime Minister is affecting the masses.

Achebe's *A Man of the People* reflects that the post-independence corruption has been naturalized and beneficial to office bearers, thus those in power regard those who do not practice corruption as unnatural. Achebe also portrays leaders as being self-centred and they work with foreign companies to rape the nation's economy. Nanga is pressing for the tarmacking of the road before the elections because he wants to gain political mileage and not to serve the citizens. This is a portrayal of the hypocrisy of African leaders who only assist the society if that help would benefit them in the long run. Nanga would invest in foreign banks the profits he would make. This is a reflection of Kahari's (1990) comments. Nanga is unsympathetic towards the concept of progress in the country; he purports to serve, and he is just engrossed in personal gain and self-importance. Africa is considered among the world's most corrupt places. An African Union (2002) study estimated that corruption cost the continent roughly \$150 billion a year (Hason, 2009).

Achebe's text also shows that almost everyone in independent African society is engrossed in corrupt practices through trying at all costs to be perfect. Odili, who appears to be an anti-thesis of Nanga, is hypocritical and corrupt. He uses C.P.C money to cover his father's case of the Tax Assessment Office and pays the bride price for his promised wife. Max, the colleague to Odili who is also in a dilemma, is trying to rid the country of corruption but finds that he has to accept money from a communist party and from Chief Koko and he rationalizes the act by telling Odili, 'now you tell me how you propose to fight such a dirty war without soiling your hands a little' (Achebe, 1966). This is a reflection of how everyone in

post-independence Africa abuses his office and it shows the impossibility of eradicating bribery and corruption in independent Africa. Corruption is accepted as inevitable because the authorities carry on their corrupt practices easily since corruption has been legalized as a means towards riches.

THE BEAUTIFUL ONES ARE NOT YET BORN

The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born conveys a sense of resentment with the way in which corruption and bribery are universally accepted in Ghana as the only way to prosperity. The central character, he is not moving with the world. The anonymous here, a clerk in the administration, is suborned by his ambitious wife and powerful friends, such as the Minister Koomson, to pursue the search for 'shiny things' which wealth can bring and to use his position to aid their crooked get-rich schemes.

The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born discusses the harsh and uncompromising picture of corruption and self-interest in Ghana and mirrors the people in independent Ghana who believe that power is the only salvation and for one to be successful one has to be a liar and a thief. The book is characterized by the selfishness of leaders who took over from the colonial government. According to Gakwandi (1977) in the world of the novel, wealth and power have become the principal pursuits and the inevitable result of the situation is a complete disregard of any moral or social considerations in the drive to satisfy individual desires.

The abuse of leadership is mainly seen in Koomson and his government and even from the people of low positions in life like the conductor, boatman, watchman, clerks and drivers. Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* as Cameron Duodu's, *The Gab Boys*, 1967 tends to attack not only politicians but also all those who hold influential positions in society. Armah makes use of the messy environment, phlegm, filth, putrefaction and excreta to depict the intensity of the various levels of corruption. The bus conductor is used to corrupt practices but the Passion Week seems to be the stumbling block to his ways. But against all this, he gives the wrong change to the man who has given him a cedi. The conductor cheats the clients in order to satisfy his own desires and fatten his pocket. The man who had given him a cedi was fast asleep in the bus with eyes wide open, showing his withdrawal from the social world, but the conductor assumed that he had been seen. In fear of exposure and in a desperate bid to save himself, the conductor attempts to bribe the man with a cigarette, 'You see we can share' (Armah, 1969). According to Palmer (1979), the bus is like a country or a nation, which is in a state of decay. The passengers represent the ordinary citizens while the driver and conductor are authorities conniving to defraud the citizens and, if caught, bribe them into silence.

Armah also articulates the theme of political betrayal and cultural dislocation where the people such as Koomson and his kind are well known for taking their positions as means of getting girls. This is as good as Pfende in Musengezi's *The Honourable M.P.* (1984), who sexually abused Sabina, his office cleaner. Musengezi also shows corruption of leaders when MP Pfende after being voted into power, there was a persistently threatening drought and he began to desert his people in pursuit of the wealth that power has placed. The South African analyst in 'YonakeYona' (February-March, 2005) argues that Armah deflates 'weakness of the flesh'. Maanan is typical of all Ghananian women who have been betrayed by their husbands and politicians. Maanan has been in love with the new Member of Parliament and was exploited and disappointed. Those in power who wish to satisfy their desires sexually abuse girls. The woman who is selling bread expects to see Koomson with a girlfriend because it is the order of the day, 'Have you ever seen a big man without girls. Even the old ones?' (Armah, 1969).

Armah stresses his view by the use of symbols of sexual drawings on the toilet, which signifies that corrupt men are associated with sexual activities. Young women were sexually abused by party men for only blouses and perfumes from diplomatic bags and wigs of human hair 'scraped from decayed white women's corpse' (Achebe, 1966). A very pathetic example of sexual abuse by politicians is when the government is paying for hired places for prostitution.

Alfred Ndi in Emernyonu and Uko (2004) argues that ministers snatch girlfriends of poor intellectuals and there is endless seduction of women, married and single alike. This depicts that post-colonial leaders use their material possessions to win favours from women. In Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross*, girls are employed in the Modern Love Bar and modern problems are resolved with the 'aid of thighs'. This abuse of office is also evident in *A Man of the People*, where Nanga sleeps with Elsie, Odili's mistress only because of his position as a minister. Nanga pays for Edna to go to college and despite his old age, wants to marry her as a reward. In this regard, Pieterse and Munro (1969) reflect Chief Honourable Nanga M.P as the corrupt uncultured Minister of Culture in a corrupt regime of a newly independent African State.

Armah, in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, like other West African writers, reflects the sense of dismay with which writers confront the corruption and divisions in the new post independent regimes. In Ghana, there is rotteness; everyone is swimming towards what one wants. People are using their positions to aid their crooked 'get-rich' schemes and to pursue wealth. Independence in itself does not prove a solution to the social problems of the people. To be uncorrupt was as good as a crime, as the Teacher in the text says, 'You have not done what everybody is doing and in this world that is one of the crimes' Armah (1969).

The intelligentsia are the ones who are prospering. Fanon (1976)'s comment on the African leadership is, 'the national bourgeoisie strung to defend its immediate interests and see no further than the end of its nose, incapable of bringing national unity'. Koomson, for instance, has risen from being a humble office cleaner to a pampered government minister; thus he is seduced by the fruits of office. The man, Koomson is successful as a result of public theft; power is his salvation. Koomson is used to stealing the money that belongs to state coffers, hence he abuses the trust that the public places in his responsibility. To be successful in Ghana, one needs to be a liar and a thief. Koomson's salary cannot cater for all the material things he has. Koomson's mind is preoccupied with money making schemes. He flourishes at the expense of other fellow men. For instance, he uses the fishing boat scheme to win Oyo and her mother since he promises them that he would make them rich by giving them the fishing boat yet the boat is in the name of his daughter, Princess. The women are just used and only occasionally do they get few fish.

For Armah, the most terrible thing is to watch a black man trying by all means to be a dark ghost of a European. Africans themselves help to facilitate the abuse of their fellow black men, 'How long will Africa be cursed with its own leaders?' (Armah, 1969). Koomson has succeeded by taking the path of corruption. He destroys his people's destiny for the sake of a luxurious life. Koomson is driving stolen posh cars and owns luxurious properties.

CONCLUSION

The two authors do agree that decolonization and independence have not brought real autonomy to African nations. The aspirations of the poor remain unsatisfied. The colonial encounter leaves the legacy of capitalism and its related system of exploitation, thus the black man abuses power, replicating the colonial forms of repression. The African society's expectations of shared power have been betrayed. The independent African leaders portray a handful of people who profit from the suffering of the majority, the sorrow of many being the joy of a few. The new men in power are not governing the country well. The general feeling in post-colonial country is that the mainspring of political action is personal gain. The leaders had abused their political position to enrich themselves by using the nation's resources. The greed of the few leaves the majority in want. The African world is giving itself the wrong impression that the people are effectively sharing in the national issues yet the real power is in the hands of the few people. African leaders have tended to seek fame and riches at the expense of the collective social concerns.

According to Achebe and Armah, independence was only a boon to the elite who under the banner of

Africanisation grabbed all leisurely goods. Achebe and Armah register the black people's quest for a government and community based on collectivity not on the voice of the individual. The two works of art denounce the highest echelons of the society. The 'intelligentsia', who are in power, have allocated all social and material comforts to themselves and closed doors to further entry into their class. Cultural nationalism sounds noble but it is an inadequate platform to address the socio-economic challenges of the post-colonial paradigm. Power is being abused at political, economic, social and religious levels. The highest echelons of the society misinterpret the concept of power and they take it as having direct influence and control on people and resources.

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