

**KWAME NKRUMAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND
TECHNOLOGY, KUMASI**

**COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

**A PRESENTATION OF POST-INDEPENDENCE
POLITICAL DISILLUSIONMENT IN AYI KWEI
ARMAH'S *THE BEAUTYFUL ONES ARE NOT YET BORN*
AND KOJO B. LAING'S *SEARCH SWEET COUNTRY*.**

**A Dissertation Presented to The Department of English, College of Arts and
Social Sciences of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology,
Kumasi, In Partial Fulfilment of The Requirement For The Award of MPhil in
English.**

BY

ANITA ANNAN

SEPTEMBER, 2014

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work and that all sources used within this study have been properly acknowledged by means of complete references.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the James K. Annan Family.

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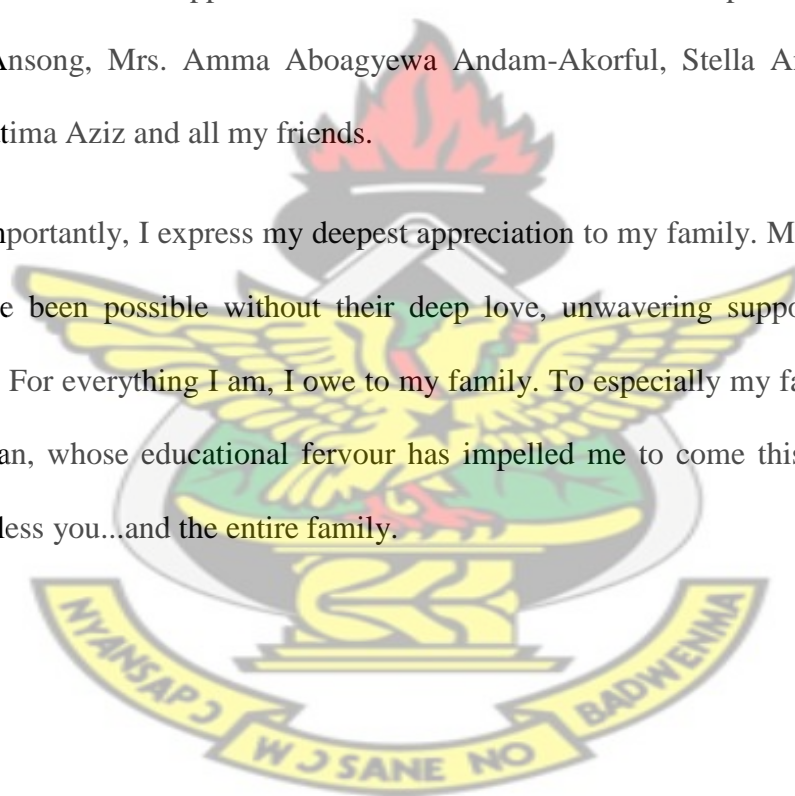
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ABSTRACT

This project evaluates political disillusionment in Ghana as presented in Ayi Kwei Armah and Kojo Laing's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Search Sweet Country*, respectively. Armah and Laing embark on a form of artistic awareness creation to help in the process of reconstruction.

The *Beautiful Ones* and *Search Sweet Country* are used in this project because firstly, both of them present political disillusionment. These texts validate the reality that disillusionment is in direct opposition to the exuberance and expectations of independence. In depicting the issues that plague post-independence Ghana, the authors express their disappointment with activities of political leaders that eventually stifle development.

Also, the two texts put political disillusionment in a historical context: while Armah's text represents the period immediately after independence, Laing's portrays Ghana in the mid-1970s. Essentially, *The Beautiful Ones* depicts civilian dictatorship under Kwame Nkrumah while *Search Sweet Country* gives a picture of the military regime under Colonel Ignatius Acheampong. Consequently, the project traces the beginning and depth of disillusionment immediately after independence to the Ghana of today.

The project comes to the conclusion that Ghana is grappling with socio-political issues decades after independence. This project probes the depth of the "Ghanaian situation", and hence creates the awareness of the possibility of social fragmentation.

EPIGRAPH

“Democracy should not be a toy for the elite to play with. It should involve even the so-called ‘ignorant people.’ Because only when you involve the bulk of the people can you have a real check to central.”

__Meles

Zenawi.

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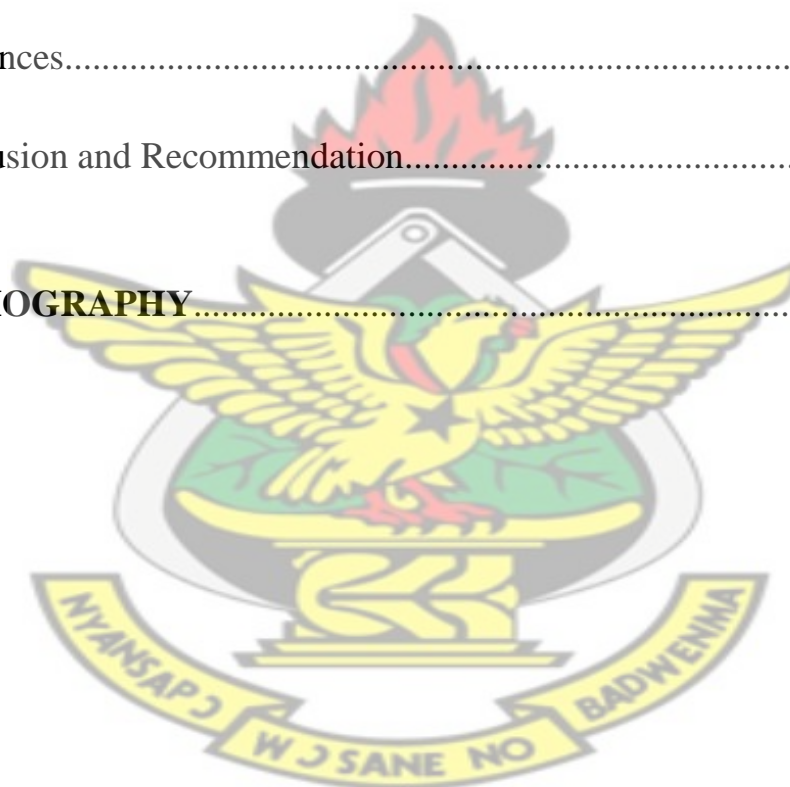
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

“The final hour of colonialism has struck, and millions of inhabitants of Africa, Asia and Latin America rise to meet a new life and demand their unrestricted right to self-determination.”¹ Undoubtedly, independence constitutes the end of colonialism, the return of political power and control of the country to the citizens. A newly independent country is left in a state of euphoria. Citizens throng the streets chanting victory slogans—the feeling of freedom is invigorating. The social-transformation bandwagon starts rolling almost immediately and there is a mammoth cooperation from everybody. Appointed leaders make huge promises of hope for their nations and citizens, stimulating and challenging their citizens towards unity and national development.

However, almost concomitant with the celebration arise rapacious leaders who have “contributed in no small measure to the grinding poverty, appalling human misery, and deterioration in social conditions that are evident across much of Africa” (Foreword to *Africa Betrayed*). Today, the plight of the masses in post-independence Ghana and Africa is incongruous with the promises made by their leaders. Providentially, disillusionment has been a subject of literary art and analysis and there is a great deal of literature available. Writers such as Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Wole Soyinka and Kofi Awoonor have produced texts in regard to the concept of disillusionment. Their works have and should continue to receive attention from literary critics and social commentators. It is without doubt that Africans have not exactly inhaled the wholesome air of freedom, of independence. Kwame

Nkrumah, the first President of Ghana, in *Address to the National Assembly*, is quoted as saying:

Countrymen, the task ahead is great indeed, and heavy is the responsibility and yet it is a noble and glorious challenge – a challenge which calls for the courage to believe, the courage to dare, the courage to do, the courage to envision the courage to fight, the courage to work, the courage to achieve – to achieve the highest excellencies and the fullest greatness of man. Dare we ask for more in life? ²

The fluidity of such a speech was sure to impel the hopeful masses to dare to dream and forge ahead. The first Prime Minister of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, also said: “My government is committed to clearing the stage and unleashing a vigorous attack on the evils of mass poverty, disease and ignorance.”³ Apropos that season of independence, Mugabe “demanded a spirit of magnanimity rather than that of arrogance, a spirit of national unity rather than that of division, a spirit of reconciliation rather than of vindictiveness and retribution.”⁴ Jomo Kenyatta also expresses the exuberance and hope of the Kenyans after independence in his *Suffering without Bitterness* when he says:

Our march to freedom has been long and difficult. There have been times of despair, when only the burning conviction of the rightness of our cause has sustained us. Today, the tragedies and misunderstandings of the past are behind us. Today, we start on great adventure of building the Kenya nation. (212)

Like Nkrumah, Mugabe and Kenyatta, many African leaders seemed to have the blueprint for their nation’s development, the panacea for their country’s social ills. It probably was a huge burden on these new African leaders to prove that the struggle for independence was a worthwhile cause.

What then informed the struggle for independence? Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa is fond of this joke: “When the missionaries came to Africa, we had the land and they had the Bible. Then they said, ‘Let us pray...’ and asked us to close our eyes. By the time the prayer was over, they now had the land and we had the Bible.” Even though this joke may sound funny, it is very revealing because it tells the story of colonialism, the phenomenon of subjugation. “Colonialism is, simply, the subjection of one population to another. It is most clearly seen in physical conquest, but in its more subtle forms it involves political, economic, and cultural domination” (Dobie, 186). Many African countries have experienced this phenomenon under European colonizers such as the British, Portuguese, French, and the Spanish. “During the nineteenth century, Great Britain emerged as the largest colonizer and imperial power quickly gaining control of almost one quarter of the earth’s landmass” (Bressler, 200). The fundamental task of these European colonizers was that of exploitation and subjugation. Colonizers subjected Africans to oppression as “many westerners subscribed to the colonialist ideology that all races other than the white were inferior or subhuman. These subhuman natives or ‘savages’ quickly became the inferior and equally ‘evil’ Others” (ibid). In *Mister Johnson*, Africans are depicted as “violent savages with passionate instincts and simple minds” (Cary, 1939). The insistence on the superiority of the Europeans over Africans is consistent with Alistair Bonnet’s assertion that “Whiteness is a centred identity” (146).

The colonial subjugation and dehumanization of natives on their own soil is vividly depicted in Jomo Kenyatta’s allegory, “The Gentlemen of the Jungle.” Describing the colonizers as beasts, Kenyatta highlights the extent of deception and exploitation during the colonial days. *Things Fall Apart*, the first novel of Nigerian author, Chinua

Achebe, when critically assessed illuminates the argument that the Europeans lorded it over the indigenous people, trampling upon the very core of the African society—its customs and beliefs. The Europeans “put a knife on things” that held the indigenes together, thereby causing their mores to fall apart. Also, Cameroonian author Ferdinand Oyono, through the main character, Meka, in *The Old Man and the Medal* depicts how colonizers exploited Africans. Like the Bible in Bishop Tutu’s joke, Meka exchanged his land and the lives of his sons for a medal, a medal of “honour” from the colonizer. But as Frantz Fanon said in his *The Wretched of the Earth*, “For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity” (34). How then will the colonized survive without their land, daily bread, employment, shelter? Owing to this subjection, indignities, inequality and loss of freedom, Africans waged war against these insensitive colonizers for their rights—the fight for independence in these African states was indeed an arduous task.

Kwame Nkrumah suffered political detention and imprisonment during the struggle for independence. His nationalist activities with the Big Six and his positive action affirmations were affronts to the agenda of the colonial government. Nkrumah’s belief in justice and dignity, and self-government got him into a lot of trouble as he strived to fight against the ills of colonialism. Anis Haffer reiterates the costly fight for freedom across the African continent when he says:

Africa’s freedom was not earned with striped suits, and cherries in crystal platters as some local elites tend to think. The struggle was deadly! In the hands of his collective imperial and native foes, Lumumba, for one, suffered a slow, barbarous, tortuous death. Steve Biko and countless others were beaten to death or hanged in apartheid prisons.

The defiant Mau Mau freedom fighters were hunted down from the East African hills. Jomo Kenyatta brandished his “burning spear” defying a ruthless imperial army. (27)

There is no gainsaying the fact that the various political leaders across Africa fought “deadly” battles to gain independence for their countries. Africa’s history was a nightmare and independence was very necessary indeed as it freed Africans from colonization’s subjugation and all its misfortunes. However, these leaders who championed the cause of independence have today championed the cause of political chicanery, elitism and the abuse of power. There is no doubt that “the pre-independence dream of a brave new world has turned into a nasty postcolonial nightmare” (Lindfors, 25) and Africa seems to retrogress as the years elapse. The dearth of infrastructure is unbelievable, economies cannot be maintained and yet some critics concentrate only on foreign influence. Would it not be safe to admit that post-independence Ghana has suffered in the hand of her political leaders and their compatriots? The widespread inequality, bribery and corruption, poverty, unemployment, filth and abject social despair in post-independence Africa are as a result of failure of leadership.

1.2 AIM OF STUDY

The aim of this study is to highlight the cause of the gloom and despair, decay and squalor in post-independence Ghana as presented by Ayi Kwei Armah and Kojo Laing in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Search Sweet Country* respectively. This study aims to highlight the depth of post-independence political disillusionment in Ghana, tracing its root cause to leadership failure in Ghana and Africa. The political and social situations in Africa decades after independence will be

analysed. Finally, this research will underscore the reality that the narratives of the selected authors - Ayi Kwei Armah and Kojo Laing - and their historical context reflect the socio-political realities of today.

1.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

This research does not exactly break new ground in the analysis of post-independence socio-political disillusionment because many researchers have also worked in this area. Post-independence disillusionment has been the theme of much criticism in the decade after independence. A reflection of the post-independence socio-political ills of Africa has been in the imaginations of many writers and critics. Just as many writers documented the throes of colonization and the joys of independence - for example, Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forest* and *Kongi's Harvest* respectively - research geared towards the failure of African leaders and the disillusionment that pervades independent African societies is also important. Inchoate writings and analyses of this area of research goes way back in the 1960's after the independence of many African nations. It is imperative to mention that fact in order to highlight the point that this research is an expansion of work already done.

Emmanuel Obiechina, in his essay titled, "Post-independence Disillusionment in Three African Novels" examines the political improbity on the continent. Obiechina succinctly depicts how resources vested in the hands of governments and their leaders motivate duplicity and lootings at the expense of the masses. However, his essay is rather at variance with this research because, among other reasons, he insists on the

vicious circle of power struggle for the national cake between politicians and the ordinary citizen and does not assert per se that the corrupt actions and social despair of the masses is as a result of leadership failure, which is the focus of this research.

Kofi Awoonor in *A Survey of the History, Culture and Literature of Africa South of the Sahara* examines Africa after independence from colonial rule. Awoonor asserts that the post-independence ills that bedevil the continent are a direct result of neo-colonialism. For him, the reason why African nations are struggling to survive after independence is because of the economic domination of western nations, “capitalism, and expansionist political systems” (32). There is no gainsaying the fact that independence and beyond should denounce colonialism and all its ugly ills, and neo-colonialism is indeed a challenge on the continent. However, after decades of political independence, Africans cannot move forward blaming their former colonizers and their post-independence foreign economic engagements for their own internal problems, not even under historical context. Conclusively, “[b]laming the Europeans sweepingly for the misfortunes of the present is not much of an alternative” (Said, 19). This research screams at leadership failure—the leadership failure of independent African leaders.

Megan Behrent in her thesis captioned, “No Sweetness Here: Disillusionment and Independence” gives a vivid critique of Ama Ata Aidoo’s collection of short stories, *No Sweetness Here*. Behrent traces Aidoo’s commitment to illuminate how material, social and economic disillusionment pervades neo-colonial Ghanaian society. In this critique, the failure of independence is brought to light as regards the penury and

despair of the common Ghanaian, and the ostentatious lifestyle of politicians and the elite. Behrent's critique is a solid indictment of abuse of power and malfeasance on the part of politicians, and corruption in post-independence Ghana. But this research differs from Behrent's in that the latter's analysis is limited to the disillusionment of post-colonial Ghanaian women. But the depth of disillusionment in post-colonial Ghanaian is beyond feminist sentiments. This research bridges that gap; it shows how disillusionment in a post-independent nation affected and still affects both men and women—everyone.

Another work that vividly portrays post-independence disillusionment is Ayo Kehinde's "Post-independence Disillusionment in Contemporary African Fiction: The Example of Meja Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick*." Kehinde examines the social anomalies of post-independent Kenya. His argument aptly portrays the depth of social decay; he depicts inequality, poverty, squalor and decadence in a manner that is almost painful to imagine. The imagery deployed is appropriate in depicting the gloomy nature of disenchantment of the masses, and also in failure of the government in providing a quality of life for the common man. Kehinde's critique comes close to portraying the political disillusionment of this research. However, it fails to insist on the failure of the leaders as the cause of all the anomalies and disenchantment. Kehinde appears more interested in the social relationships in post-independent African societies and the roles of the novelist and, the African, in his portrayal of the disenchantment masses. The work of Kehinde is not per se a prescriptive groundwork for the socio-political progress of the society. This research seeks to tackle such limitations.

In a cover story captioned, “Musicians and Society- a Snapshot from Two Countries” the role of the musician in highlighting the disillusionment that pervades the African continent is depicted. To these musicians, disillusionment in Africa is intense, hence their songs. The article analyses the music of popular musicians like Ivorian reggae, Alpha Blondy, Andy Brown and Nigeria’s Fela Anikulapo Kuti who insinuate that Africa needs independence again.

The above-mentioned literature provides a good foundation for this research. As already stated, this research is an expansion of works that have already been done and it is the hope that this particular research will shed more light on the political disillusionment and its concomitant social situation that permeates the Ghanaian society, and Africa as a whole.

1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This project is based on the theory of defamiliarization as propounded by the Russian formalist in the twentieth century. It was Viktor Shklovsky, a critic of the same period, who coined the word in his essay "Art as Technique."

In “Art as Technique” Shklovsky explains how defamiliarization functions in Leo Tolstoy’s literary works where the writer “describes an object as if he were seeing it for the first time, an event as if it were happening for the first time.” Shklovsky

declares that the technique of defamiliarization as the principle of poetic language where perception is hindered by roughening and retardation of form—in distinction from practical language of the everyday life. He further argues that defamiliarization is, more or less, the point of all art—art makes language strange, as well as the world that the language presents.

“For Shklovsky, then, art—while *always* a matter of conventional devices—demands that the artist resist automatic recognition by means of defamiliarization—that he or she make some unconventional employment of one or more of the artwork’s devices.” By artwork devices, Shklovsky means the totality of an artist’s language and style and everything that comes with it, provided it impedes recognition.

Shklovsky makes this profound assertion in his “Art as Technique”:

Habitualization devours work, clothes, furniture, one’s wife, and the fear of war. ‘if the whole complex lives of many people go on unconsciously, then such lives are as if they had never been.’ And arts exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects unfamiliar.

Accordingly, if a phenomenon appears familiar, the technique of art makes it appear unfamiliar, thereby causing renewal or awareness creation.

Apropos the theory of defamiliarization in this project, Ayi Kwei Armah and Kojo Laing employ it differently: while Armah uses vivid and vituperative language, Laing deploys sharp wit. In *The Beautiful Ones*, Armah uses symbols and images and these

are described graphically; readers literally see, feel and smell corruption all around the city. It can be argued that Armah somewhat “over-familiarizes” as the reader is compelled to appreciate political disillusionment with new eyes. With an angry tone, Armah over-familiarizes the phenomenon of political disillusionment to the extent that readers cannot escape its poignant ramifications.

Through the theory of “defamiliarization” Armah compels readers and critics to rethink the phenomenon of corruption. Contrarily, Kojo B. Laing defamiliarizes political disillusionment through humour in his *Search Sweet Country*. This style forces the reader to be discerning, to read between the lines. Thus, when a reader laughs, it should dawn on him that he is laughing at himself. Accordingly, a serious phenomenon such as corruption is presented, through defamiliarization, in a way that requires people to appreciate artistic language. The theory is a powerful tool to use as it alters the recognizable for the strange. The theory of defamiliarization, when appropriately depicted, helps literary artists to astound their readers as has been established by Armah and Laing in their texts.

Ayi Kwei Armah and Kojo Laing handle the familiar issue of disillusionment, a phenomenon that Ghanaians appreciate, in an unfamiliar way through their graphic and humorous use of language—the theme of disillusionment has been depicted in a way that appears alien because it forces the reader to rethink the phenomenon, thereby whipping one out of one’s complacencies.

The theory of defamiliarization helps put post-independence disillusionment in the right perspective. Thus, disillusionment, and its attendants despair and poor standards of living of the masses, is better explained. Leaders will be compelled to sit up since their actions affect the masses and also because all eyes are on them.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

This is a library research. A textual analysis of Armah's *The Beautiful Ones are not Yet Born* and Laing's *Search Sweet Country* is made to analyse the reality that Ghana and Africa has leadership deficits and how these deficits leave the ordinary citizen in gloom and doom. Complementing the primary sources are secondary sources which include other novels, essays, articles and other material relevant to the research.

1.6 JUSTIFICATION

Post-independence disillusionment is not a new phenomenon. However, critics or researchers before this research have mainly concentrated on mass disillusionment. This research goes beyond the detailed documentations of the causes of disillusionment and the depth of deprivation experienced by the masses, and actually brings to the attention of leaders and citizens alike that Africa is this close to an explosion. The possibility of this explosion informed this research.

Africa is ripe for an African Spring. The Arabs have celebrated the anniversary of the Arab Spring which overthrew their power-drunk leaders. The question is, are the

leaders of Africa not more power-drunk, greedy and more corrupt? Commenting on the activities of the “Boko Haram” movement of Nigeria, Alex Perry states: “The killing of more than 178 people by Islamic militants in a series of attacks on state buildings in the northern Nigerian city of Kano, underlines how one of Africa’s most corrupt nations is reaping the rewards of decades of misrule with a sudden and deep descent into violent chaos.”⁵ Ghana can easily reap this negative reward also.

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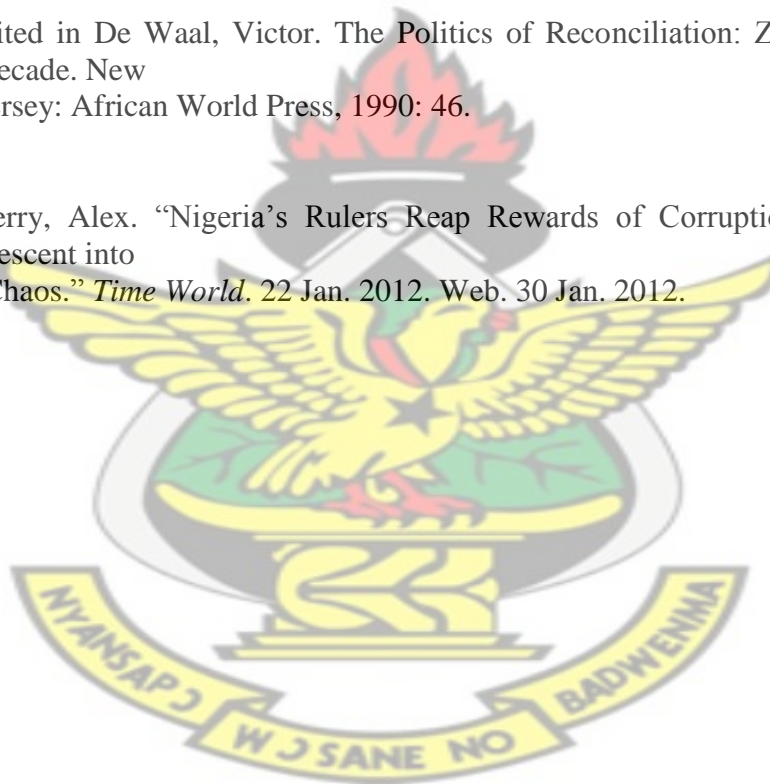
1.7 STRUCTURE

The primary texts for this research are Ayi Kwei Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, and B. Kojo Laing’s *Search Sweet Country*. Other relevant material that captures post-independence political disillusionment in Ghana and beyond will be used.

This research is divided into four chapters. Chapter One is the Introduction to the research. It presents the background to the study, literature review, theoretical framework, methodology, structure and justification. Chapter Two examines Ayi Kwei Armah’s depiction of post-independence political disillusionment in Ghana in his *The Beautiful Ones*. Chapter Three examines how B. Kojo Laing’s also illuminates post-independence political disillusionment in his *Search Sweet Country*. Chapter Four, the Conclusion will summarise leadership failure in Ghana, and for that matter, Africa as depicted by the authors, and also provides some recommendations.

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CHAPTER TWO

AN ANALYSIS OF AYI KWEI ARMAH'S *THE BEAUTYFUL ONES ARE NOT YET BORN*

In Chapter One, we delineated the aim of this research and gave a background to the study. Through the lens of Viktor Shklovsky's theory of defamiliarization we discovered that Ayi Kwei Armah over-familiarizes political disillusionment whiles Kojo Laing defamiliarizes it. Both authors, though different styles, depict political disillusionment in a way that is alien to readers, and thus readers cannot overlook the phenomenon. Post-independence political disillusionment in Ghana, and Africa by extension, has soared to its zenith and therefore Chapter One expressed the fear of social fragmentation or an explosion of some sort.

In this chapter, we shall examine leadership failure and its effects as shown in Armah's *The Beautiful Ones*. We shall examine general political disillusionment and social despair. The chapter examines how bribery and corruption of greedy political leaders affect the masses and also destabilises the political order. We shall also examine what happens when political leaders mimic the activities of former colonizers. Finally, we shall look at how the actions of these greedy leaders influence the actions of the citizens as they strive for survival.

Ayi Kwei Armah earned international acclaim after the publication of his first novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. The novel is fundamentally about life after Ghana's independence under Kwame Nkrumah's regime. In this novel, he boldly satirizes the political elite in post-independence Ghana. His vivid and densely symbolic language is intended to expose the corruption and filth that had submerged the country at that time. Ayi Kwei Armah, in his *The Beautiful Ones*, patently

describes the moral and physical decay and indiscipline in the Ghanaian society. Readers encounter Africans steering their own affairs, occupying positions that used to be occupied by their former colonial masters. Highlighting a society that is avidly materialistic, Ayi Kwei Armah depicts how mendacious leaders have disappointed the citizens, leaving them in a state of abject poverty and hopelessness. The novel is replete with filth, rancidness and faecal images directed at demonstrating the depth of decay and disillusionment of people in **independent** Ghana. A critic comments that Armah's novels are a "searing novelistic indictment of postcolonial society" (Brown 2009:41).

The Beautiful Ones are not yet Born narrates the story of the citizens of Ghana after their attainment of independence. Set in Ghana immediately in 1966, it is essentially about how the main character, The Man, and his compatriots battle poverty in a crooked and corrupt society. With a president who grows increasingly authoritarian with his corrupt cabal of leaders, the incidents in the novel reflect the ironies of independence in African states. Set against the backdrop of a coup d'état that overthrows Kwame Nkrumah, *The Beautiful Ones* draws parallels between the historical corrupt and rapacious political leaders and today's plight of the ordinary citizen. *The Beautiful Ones* is on one hand a political satire as it censures activities of political leaders, and on the other hand, it is an allegory since the characters give symbolic expression to life during Kwame Nkrumah's regime.

The Beautiful Ones is set in the initial optimism that pervaded the Ghanaian society immediately after independence. The narrator describes a rally addressed by Kwame Nkrumah. It was held at Asamansudo (Takoradi) and Teacher and Etse expressed

misgivings about the rally because previous rallies had been poorly attended. When they arrived at the grounds, they “were quite amazed to see how many people had come” (p.84) for the rally. The number of people indicated a people eager for a leader and the optimism that such a leader had emerged. Nkrumah delivered a powerful speech in which phrases such as, “... serving our own selves...,” “... not waiting till the white man tells us what job to do...,” “can we ourselves think of nothing that needs to be done? Why idle then...?” floated in the breeze and fired up the optimism of the people. The crowd was charged to gird themselves up for nation building. The speaker expressed the fact that they did not need the white man to set the national agenda. He continued: “We do not serve ourselves if we remain like insects, fascinated by the white people’s power. Let us look inward. What are we? What have we? Can we work for ourselves? To strengthen ourselves?” Nkrumah spurred the people on to assert their rights, to fight for their freedom. He asserted: “In the end, we are our own enslavers first. Only we can free ourselves. Today, when we say it, it is a promise, not yet a fact. ...Freedom!” Nkrumah allows us to enjoy the lyrical phrases of Kwame Nkrumah which captured the attention of the masses. These declarations incited the crowd to fight for emancipation, and indeed they saw in Nkrumah the capable leader to lead them to freedom.

The dialogue between this “veranda boy” and the masses was electrifying. Nkrumah said: “Alone, I am nothing. I have nothing. We have power. But we will never know it; we will never see it work. Unless we choose to come together to make it work. Let us come together.... Let us.... We.... We.... Freedom.... Freeeeeeeeedom!” The repetition of “we” and “us” involves the people in the process and on the road to

freedom, and by involving them he aroused their support and trust. All these quickened the pace towards the process and actual attainment of independence.

Nkrumah exuded power which compelled the narrator to stand there “staring like a believer at the man...” (p.86). Beyond the eloquence of Nkrumah’s speech, the narrator saw “something more potent than mere words. These dipped inside the listener, making him go with the one who spoke.” This power to draw people to listen to him is reminiscent of what many people have said about Nkrumah. Bankole Timothy, for instance, has this to say:

Nkrumah is at his best when addressing a political meeting. He is an effective spell-binder and rabble rouser. He can make his audience become incensed or sorrowful according to the effect he wishes to produce. As an orator, Nkrumah brings all his theatrical skill to play; he is a born actor, who plays on the emotions of his audience. For effect, he uses his hands while speaking; he shakes his head, paces along the dais and gives a captivating smile. His eloquence is fiery, [...]. (p.66)

Indeed, at the rally Nkrumah exhibited this oratorical dynamism that Timothy describes in the above quotation. The narrator wondered: “So from where had he got his strength that enabled him to speak with such confidence to us, and we waiting patiently for more to come?” (p.86). The narrator fittingly describes how the masses were moved by Nkrumah’s speeches and charisma, Nkrumah’s powerful promises of freedom. The crowd found hope in what he said and more hope in how he said it, and more importantly, in the one who spoke.

Nkrumah impressed the people with his simplicity and his poor background:

I have come to you. And you can see that I have nothing in my hands. A few here know where I live. Not much is there. And even what is there is not my own. It is the kindness of a woman, one of you now here. Before she saw me 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.... (p.87)

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The extract depicts a simple but powerful confession of Nkrumah's poverty. The sentences are short and the words are simple. His poor background (he was also emaciated and his "rather helpless-looking") endeared him to many. He was the man for the common people. The ordinary Gold Coaster could relate to this poverty of Nkrumah with the hope that when the latter was given the nod to lead them he would elevate their living standards having "slept on other people's verandas" himself. Again we note how like Jesus, Nkrumah was. Jesus said: "Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but I, the Son of Man, have no home of my own, not even a place to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20). Nkrumah was called The Messiah by his admirers to show the great hope they had in him as the one to free the people from the bondage of the colonizer.

He went on to explain the difference between poverty and slavery: slavery connotes subjugation and restriction but one could be poor and free. According to Nkrumah we could be poor in dignity but slavery was equal to bondage, hence the fight for emancipation. To the layman, all these promises of freedom meant economic bliss, food on the table, abundant riches and pleasure. These promises simply meant utopia

for them. That is what the masses understood and believed when Nkrumah preached: “Seek ye first the political kingdom and all other things shall be added unto you.” Nkrumah did not promise an end to only slavery but also an end to poverty. He created the myth of a paradise on earth. This “veranda boy” pulled the crowd. These were faithful and devout followers who believed in the “Verandah Boy’s Creed”:

I believe in the Convention People’s Party, the opportune savior of Ghana. And in Kwame Nkrumah its founder and leader, Who is endowed with the Ghana spirit, Born a true Ghanaian for Ghana, Suffering under victimization; Was vilified, threatened with deportation, He disentangled from the clutches of the U.G.C.C. and the same day he rose victorious with the “Verandah boys.” Ascended the political heights; And sitteth at the supreme head of the C.P.P. From whence he shall demand full self-government for Ghana. I believe in freedom for peoples, Especially the new Ghana; The Abolition of Slavery; The liquidation of Imperialism; The victorious ends of our struggle, its glory and it’s pride, and the flourish of Ghana, for ever and ever. (Pobee, 104-110)

The above rendering of the “Apostle’s Creed” is one of the many rhetoric thrown about at the time. As already mentioned, Nkrumah possessed the power to pull a crowd. His manner of speaking and his actual language, coupled with his charisma and “veranda boy” background did the trick in winning the support of the people. Nkrumah was thus a larger-than-life leader, who created a myth and united all Ghanaians around for the achievement of the paradise on earth.

However, after the struggles and after independence had been won, what happened in independent Ghana? At the beginning of the novel we learn of one of the early attempts to rebuild the nation—a campaign to “rid the town of its filth.” Indeed, after independence, a country has to rid itself of the debris of colonization. We are told:

Like others before it, this campaign had been extremely impressive, and admiring rumors indicated that it had cost a great lot of money. Certainly the papers had been full of words informing their readers that dirt was undesirable and must be eliminated. On successive days a series of big shots had appealed to everybody to be clean. (p.7)

The Principal Secretary of the Ministry of Health promised the provision of rubbish receptacles. He said they “would be placed at strategic points all over the city, and they would serve, not just as containers for waste matter, but as shining examples of cleanliness” (p.8). The campaign turned into a “shining example” of filth and corruption. The narrator is skilful in demonstrating what happened during Nkrumah’s regime and how the euphoria and promises made after independence were ephemeral through this particular campaign. “In the end not many of the boxes were put out, though there was a lot said about the large amount of money paid for them” (p. 6). This depicts how the new black leaders, the “big shots” used their positions for their personal gains. The few receptacles that were put out “had been a gleaming white sign when [they were] first installed.” After a short period, the receptacles were “covered over thickly with the juice of every imaginable kind of waste matter” (p.7). Ayi Kwei Armah uses this description to show how unsustainable the project was. By extension, this description suggests the neglect of this independent nation which has plunged it into the abyss of rot and further, stagnation. Perhaps it is the hope and expectation of Ghanaians that have gone rotten with neglect and apathy. This phenomenon is worse today. Unfinished projects are abandoned when new governments are sworn in, culminating in the wastage of state funds.

The narrator brings our attention to how Nkrumah encouraged a cult of personality during his regime. Nkrumah revelled in big appellations: “All the ritual bits of praise

that seemed to be all the news these days. Osagyefo the President bla bla, Osagyefo the President bla bla bla, Osagyefo the President bla bla bla bla” (p.127). Apart from the title, “*Osagyefo*” Nkrumah acquired many other titles: “*Kantamanto* (one never guilty, one who never goes back on his word), Teacher and Author of the Revolution, *Oyeadeeyie* (one who puts things right), Man of Destiny, Star of Africa, Deliverer of Ghana, Iron Boy, the Messiah, His High Dedication” (Omari, 2). His supporters and party men hailed him continually, flattering and currying favour with him. It must be pointed out quickly that the “we” and “us” involvement that Nkrumah asserted before independence got missing after independence. Revelling in the many appellations, there grew an increasing concentration of power in the hands of only Nkrumah. This obviously disillusioned the many people who supported and believed in him—they had been politically manipulated. Indeed, this personality cult was one of the reasons Nkrumah’s regime failed.

In *The Beautiful Ones*, the masses that had joined in the struggle for independence seemed to have done so under an illusion of hope, especially when the president (after independence, of course) was far removed from their lives and survival. The president resided comfortably in a “castle” (p.92) at the expense of the ordinary man who resided in squalid accommodations. Nkrumah’s position as the president appeared to reveal his true intention. His revels in the personality cult, and also his governance without the inclusion of the masses projected his authoritarian side rather loudly. Nkrumah’s C.P.P was the only party functioning. It was the C.P.P that made ordinary dockers, ministers, and many others affluent in the blink of an eye—“Yes, it’s the CPP that has been so profitable for [them]” (p.110). His single-party system made him more and more impossibly repressive. According to Ali Mazrui, “By a strange

twist of destiny Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana was both the hero who carried the torch of Pan-Africanism and *the villain who started the whole legacy of one-party-state in Africa*. To that extent, *Kwame Nkrumah started the whole tradition of Black authoritarianism* in the post-colonial era. He was the villain of the pieces” (pp. 3-4, emphasis mine). Undoubtedly, authoritarianism does not give ear to what the public think or say. Many have argued that Nkrumah’s authoritarian bearing was a cover up for the irregularities in his government.

Political opponents were thrown into jail under the preventive detention—“PRAY FOR DETENTION/JAILMAN CHOP FREE” (p.106). This statement has been used ironically to depict the excitement of hungry citizens who would rather be in jail because they would get free food to eat. However, the narrative hints at another phenomenon that was practised during Nkrumah’s regime that eventually led to the failure of his government. The Preventive Detention Act reposed in Nkrumah the power to detain people, and this essentially meant “*imprisonment without trial*” (p.157).

The novel is set against the background of Nkrumah’s socialism. According to *Wikipedia*, socialism “is an economic system characterised by social ownership and control of the means of production and cooperative management of the economy, and a political philosophy advocating such a system.” The Microsoft Student Encarta (2009) also defines Socialism as an “economic and social system under which essential industries and social services are publicly and cooperatively owned and democratically controlled with a view to equal opportunity and benefit to all.” Essentially, socialism projects the public and collective ownership of the means of

production and a fair distribution of the nation's resources to the benefit of all, especially the poorer citizens. Indeed, the type of socialism ventured into in Ghana under Nkrumah's regime is what some critics have termed "African socialism" or "Nkrumaism" which,

[a]ims at fighting to eradicate the evils of colonialism, tribalism balkanisation, etc. and replacing them with freedom, unity, dignity, social justice with higher living standards. And for the sake of freedom, justice and world peace, Nkrumaism supports the right of self-determination of all peoples, rejects imperialist domination everywhere and, in the present power block rivalry, emphasises positive neutralism and supports the forces peace in the world. (Omari,194)

Nkrumah's socialism in the world of *The Beautiful Ones* was not recognisable. To the masses, socialism, and indeed all of Nkrumah's promises of liberation, meant an economic paradise. And in this paradise, everybody was to have their share of the national cake. What sums up the common man's understanding of Nkrumah's socialism is the inscription on the latrine wall: "WHO BORN FOOL/SOCIALISM CHOP MAKE I CHOP/CONTREY BROKE." This inscription is "a curt summary of the socialist philosophy: Live and let live. Everybody is entitled to a share of the *chop*. Ironically, it is only the Koomsons who are able to *chop* at the expense of the others" (Okleme, 277).

Another hint of the failure of Nkrumah's socialism is the inequality between the elites and the ordinary citizenry. The contrast between the upper residential areas of the political leaders/elite and the poor accommodation of the masses cannot be overemphasised. Thus, failure of Nkrumah's socialism is illuminated when the narrator describes the inequality between the elites and the masses and the despondent mental disposition of the people, as well the filth and decay in the environment. This

phenomenon also made Nkrumah unpopular. The end result was the rejection of his socialist administration which appeared to be only theoretical assumptions. The ideals that were captured in his socialism were simply not translated into reality. In *The Beautiful Ones* the activities of the people around him are also exposed. Nkrumah's henchmen were virtual illiterates. These social climbers went about "believing nothing, but saying they believe everything that needs to be believed, so long as the big job and the big money follow." The narrative depicts how these political leaders and their activities also contributed to the failure of Nkrumah's regime. They exploited and pursued their materialistic inclinations at the expense of the masses. They were capitalists in disguise and indeed, one "can't build socialism without socialists" (Asante, 1944).

Joseph Koomson is a political leader in *The Beautiful Ones*. He is a symbol of greed and corruption. Koomson who was the classmate of the Man had risen so quickly:

Koomson we all have known for a long time here. A railwayman, then a docker at the harbour. Pulling ropes. Blistered hands, toughened, callused hands. A seaman's voice. Big rough man, a man of the docks well liked by men of the docks. Doing well, the only we do well here. Not spitting at any contreyman, only the fat merchants and their lawyer brothers and Lebanese gangster friends, and that is quite all right here. I still do not know how Koomson got to Accra (p,88-9).

This profile presents a background to the rise of political leaders under Nkrumah's regime. Undoubtedly, sometimes people rise quickly in life through honest means but as regards Koomson, the opposite is portrayed and one wonders how this middle-school railway man became a minister. The docker, Koomson, whose greed for "big money" has qualified him for the position of a minister "knows nothing about politics" and yet "have grown hot with ideology, thinking of the money that will

come” (p.89). Nkrumah’s Ideological Institute in Winneba is mentioned only as a place where untrained people are trained for political appointments: “The civil servant who hates socialism is there, singing hosanna. The poet is there, serving power and waiting to fill his coming paunch with crumbs” (p.89). Like Koomson, “everyone who wants speed goes there, and the only thing demanded of [these unqualified persons] is that they be good at fawning.” Through Koomson, Armah condemns the greed of political leaders. It is Koomson’s greed for money and power that pushes him to the “ideological thing” which eventually moves him from the status of a callused-hands docker at the harbour to a minister in Ghana. Our attention is drawn to the root of corruption in the political machinery—greed. Greed drives people to top positions –by hook or by crook – and so when these people achieve their aim, they try to accumulate wealth. Koomson is the arriviste who resides in a bungalow that used to be occupied by the former colonizer, in the Esikafo Aba Estates of the “UPPER RESIDENTIAL AREA.” He is “His Excellency Joseph Koomson, Minister Plenipotentiary, Member of the Presidential Commission, Hero of Socialist Labor” (p.56). Teacher’s long description of Koomson’s portfolio hints at the latter’s acquisitiveness. This category of people lives in the “blinding gleam of beautiful new houses,” and drive the “shine of powerful new Mercedes cars” (p.56). Undoubtedly, “many [have] tried the rotten ways and found them filled with the sweetnesses of life.”

Commenting on the acquisitiveness of Koomson, and indeed other African politicians, Robert Fraser describes their activities as “an intense focus of the cravings of a nation obsessively bent on the pillage of its newly acquired spoils” (1980). Thus the independence of Ghana and the new status of Koomson sum up the equation of the

greed of politicians. We get to know other activists like Koomson during a dialogue among some workers during lunchtime:

He is only a small boy

Yes, it's the CPP that has been so profitable for him

Two cars now

No, you're behind. Three. The latest is a white Mercedes. 220 Super.

You will think I am lying, but he was my classmate, and now look at me.

(p.110)

This description of the rise of ordinary people due to their affiliation with Nkrumah is reminiscent of one of the parodies of the C.P.P.: "Blessed are they who love C.P.P., for they shall be leaders in the years to come" (Quoted in "Nkrumaist Review", p.38). Thus the citizen who has not learned to "drive fast" like the Koomsons, will be left behind in their socio-economic status. The stark realization that Nkrumah's promises of economic bliss were mere rhetoric culminates in disillusionment. Today, corruption has trickled down to the ordinary Ghanaian

Corruption is a phenomenon that characterized Nkrumah's government in *The Beautiful Ones*. Ayi Kwei Armah allows us to see places where corruption is rife. Koomson engages in an illegal boat business in which a boat costs 12,000 pounds but according to him, "The money is not the difficult thing. *After all, the Commercial Bank is ours, and we can do anything*" (p.136, emphasis mine). Armah makes a pungent indictment on the corrupt activities of political leaders who use state property as their personal possessions, and also political leaders who engage in illegal businesses usually at the expense of the masses: "The way Oyo's mother tells it, [Koomson] is just going to buy a lot of fishing boats and give them to her." But from our knowledge of Koomson, we agree with the Man that "Koomson is just going to fool them" and he does. "What happened was that from time to time Koomson would

remember the ones who were supposed to be, for the eyes and ears of the prying world, owners of his boat, and send one of his drivers with some fish for Oyo's mother or for Oyo herself" (p.152).

There is also the smuggling of goods, "whiskeys [...] especially for men who make the law." We witness not only the corrupt activities of political leaders but also their lawlessness. They have the immunity to do anything. To these leaders, "everything is possible, it depends on the person." This short statement highlights the reality of the Ghanaian society. Everything is possible to those who have "learned to drive fast" like the Koomsons. For squirrels like the Man and "people who can [not] do manly things, and take the burdens of others too" their karma is perpetual poverty. "The foolish ones are those who cannot live life the way it is lived by all around them, those who will stand by the flowing river and disapprove of the current. There is no other way, and refusal to take the leap will help absolutely no one at any time" (p.108).

In a conversation with Teacher about Koomson vis-a-vis money, power and also corruption the Man says, "These days it is all coming together in the name of Koomson" (p.56). Then, in an argument with his mother-in-law about Koomson's salary since he joined the CPP Party, the Man says it is equal to "corruption. Public theft" (p.58). Essentially, Koomson is the epitome of corruption. In retrospect, in his *Autobiography*, Kwame Nkrumah asserts that:

I was not blind to the possibility of bribery and corruption in the country among Europeans and Africans. Things had moved fast, the feeling of power was a new thing; the desire to possess cars, houses and commodities that were regarded as necessities by the European population in the country, was not unnatural in people who were suddenly

made to feel that they were being prepared to take over from those Europeans; and money, the wherewithal to obtain these luxuries, was tempting. (Nkrumah, 213)

Perhaps this realization Nkrumah had was useless because he neither did anything to end bribery and corruption. It was useless because despite the Commission of Enquiry set up to deal with corruption in the society is compared with a net: “The net had been made in the special Ghanaian way that allowed the really big fish corrupt people to pass through [...]. The big ones floated freely, like all the slogans. End bribery and corruption. Build socialism. Equality. Shit” (p.154). The enterprise set up to “rid the country’s trade of corruption [and] De-uncorrupt themselves” only bolstered the canker. There was no sense of accountability for corrupt leaders and so continuity of the phenomenon was certain. A highlight of this “equality,” and a deepening of disillusionment lies in the fact that there was “a net to catch only the small, dispensable fellows, trying in their anguished blindness to leap and to attain the gleam and the comfort the only way these things could be done” (ibid). In their inability to fight this corrupt and inequitable system, some of them resigned themselves to fate, doing nothing and earning nothing. Some also resorted to corruption.

Again, through Koomson we witness the imitation of the white man by African politicians and the elite. The narrator explains the psychological background of this phenomenon:

[o]ur masters were the white men [...] and they who would be our leaders, they also had the white men for their masters, and they also feared the masters, but after the fear what was at the bottom of their beings was not the hate and the anger we knew in our despair. What they felt was love. What they felt for their white masters and our white masters was gratitude and faith. And they had come to us at last, to lead us and to guide us to promised tomorrows. (p. 81)

Looking back now the narrator points out the admiration the present African leaders had for the colonizers' positions. These leaders who led the country to independence are now imitating the white man. Quoting Lacan, Homi Bhabha says in his *Critical Exploration of some Forms of Mimeticism*: "The effect of mimicry is camouflage." The masses are disillusioned because these leaders seem to have disguised their true intention, and that is, to take over leadership from the colonizers, to be given power to rule by themselves. But Charles Dickens was right when he said in his *Our Mutual Friend*: "Power (unless it be the power of intellect or virtue) has ever the greatest attractions for the lowest natures" (489). The Western mentality of these leaders is succinctly captured in black men's "names trying mightily to be white":

In the forest of **white men's name**, there were the signs that said almost aloud: here lives a black imitator. **MILLS-HAYFORD... PLANGE-BANNERMAN ... ATTOH-WHITE ... KUNTU-BLANKSON**. Others that might have been keeping the white neighbors laughing even harder in their homes. **ACROMOND....** what Ghanaian name could have been in the beginning, before its Civil Servant owner rushed to civilize it, giving it something like the sound of a master name? **GRANTSON...** more and more incredible they were getting. There was someone calling himself **FENTENGSON** in this wide world, and also a man called **BINFUL**. (p.126, italics mine)

Such names for typical Ghanaians are not only hilarious but somewhat pitiful especially in the example of BINFUL: "The author's attitude to the owners of these Anglicized names is summed up by the last name - BINFUL, meaning **Shit-ful**. (**Bin** is the Akan word for 'shit'). (Yankson, 42). This demonstrates Armah's disgust at the attempt of Africans to imitate, nay to be like the white man. "It has been suggested that the name of the anti-hero of the novel, Koomson, is an Anglicized version of the Akan (or Ahanta?) name – 'Inkumsa', and that ACROMOND might come from 'akroma' an Akan word for the 'crow'" (ibid).

An extension of Armah's disgust at this mimicry is found in his *Fragments* in which one reads of names such as: "**Charles Winston Churchill** Kessie," "**Akosua Russell**," "**Asante Smith**" and "**Henry Robert Hudson** Brempong." (1969, emphasis mine). Indeed, there are many such names in the Ghanaian community today; Annan-Forson, Folson, Sekyi-Hughes, Enchill, Erskine, Biney, Kitcher, Orleands-Mends, Buckman, Palmer-Buckle, Atta-Grant, Duncan-Williams, Dowouna-Hammond, Odartey Wellington, Dawson-Amoah, Allen-Koufie, Baidoo-Williams, Aggrey-Fynn, Atta-Mills among others. Onomastics reveal a lot about the mentality of people. Thus, changing names in this way is an attempt to change our identity.

The "debasement of our culture" is also depicted in the manner in which the elite dress and speak:

Men who had risen to lead the hungry came in clothes they might have been hoping to use at Governors' Balls on the birthday of the white people's queen, carrying cuff links that shone insultingly in the faces of men who had stolen pennies from their friends. They came late and spoke to their servants in the legal English they had spent their lives struggling to imitate, talking of constitutions and offering us unseen ghosts of words and paper held holy by Europeans and they asked us to be faithful and to trust in them. (p.81)

Political leaders dress and talk with affectation. Their body language, their whole demeanour is in tandem with European ideals. And the reader wonders why leaders who claim to have been against the white colonizers exhibit the same characteristics in their attitudes. Essentially these leaders and elites are symbols of eurocentricism. In an attempt to describe the cultural shift and imitation of African leaders McKim Marriot is quoted as saying that:

Lying somewhere between these extremes of either *surrendering to European civilization* or *fabricating an African counterpart* are several alternative policies evident especially in the states of former British Administration. Instead of the full French dress of Sekou Toure and Felix Houphouet-Boigny, *one finds in the wardrobes of Kwame Nkrumah and Sir Abubakar Balewa a mixture of tribal robes and business suit*. Nigeria exemplifies a splitting of orientation between the *strongly European inclinations of the civil service elites* and the continuation of indigenous aristocratic traditions by the former agents of indirect rule—the native chiefs. (p, 49, emphasis mine).

The statement “and they asked us to be faithful and to trust them” engenders an uneasy sense of foreboding as regards their anglicised ways of dressing and talking—their European way of life. Indeed Marriot’s assertion, above, corroborates Armah’s argument that African political leaders and senior service men still have a “bit of leftover British craziness.” Even their dressing reinforces a colonial outlook. “*This was the thing for which poor men had fought and shouted*. [Freedom] This was what it had come to: *not that the whole thing might be overturned and ended, but that a few black men might be pushed closer to their [colonial] masters*” (p. 126, emphasis mine). One wonders if the masses would live and prosper under such leadership.

Even the minister’s daughter, called Princess, (against the traditional names of the Man’s children; Deede and Adoley) “spoke English like a white child, with the fearless, direct look of a white child” (p.144). A quick mention of the *oware* the Man’s children “dug in the ground” to play should be contrasted with the “machine” Princess rode at home. Children of political leaders and the elite today may not have knowledge of these traditional pastimes like *oware*, *ludo* or even *ampe*. Also for such “loved children” what would stop the political leaders from sending them “to

kindergartens in Europe? And if the little men around the big men can send their children to new international schools, why not?” (p.92). There is an obvious reinforcement of everything the colonial master had and represents. Conclusively, “[a]ll the shouting against the white man was not hate. It was love. Twisted, but love all the same” (ibid).

When the Man and his wife call on the Koomsons, Mrs Koomson, *Estie*, “sat languidly in her chair, and for some time she did nothing but stroke her wig from front to back in motions that were long, slow, and very studied”(p.148). The conceited posture of Mrs. Koomson gives a classic demonstration of how leaders and the elite look down their noses on the poor. Earlier in the novel when the Man meets the suited Koomson and his wife we witness how she shakes the Man’s hands, in greeting: “The man takes the hand. Moist like lubricated flesh. It is withdrawn as quickly as if contact were a well-known calamity, and the woman inside [the limousine] seems plainly to have forgotten about the man outside.” (p.38). As regards this attitude, the Man asks Teacher later: “How can Koomson return to us? What has he got to say to those he used to work with?” The dock worker Koomson is now a minister and on the basis of this new status he cannot mingle with his old poor friends. For the times that he passed by his old work place, Koomson had done so “only like a white man or a lawyer now.”

Koomson’s affected calling of “Atinga,” the steward boy, confirms the imitation of these white-black men: “It was a peculiar kind of shout, *the kind made by white men trying to pronounce African names without any particular desire to pronounce them well, indeed deriving that certain superior pleasure from their inability.*”

(p.147, emphasis mine). It was this same Koomson who had spoken in a similar earlier in the novel when he was buying bread: “The voice of the suited man had something unexpected about it, like a fisherman’s voice with the sand and the salt hoarsening it forcing itself into unaccustomed English rhythms. Why was this necessary? A very Ghanaian voice” (p.37). The narrator puts Koomson in an almost pitiful light; the interlacing of sand and salt creates an image of strain, which may even be painful.

The Koomsons also take pleasure in European goods and as such buy only European drinks. According to Mrs. Koomson, “the only good drinks are European drinks. These [local ones] make you ill” (p.132). Indeed, Mrs Koomson reiterates their European leanings when she says that local beer “does not agree with my constitution” (p.131). And that is why during a visit at the Koomsons, the Man is asked to choose from the German set: “White Horse, Black and White, Seagram’s, Gilbey’s Dry [and so on]” (p.147). The self-important and patronizing attitude of leader is a clear indication of the failure of Nkrumah’s government. Nkrumah, the “Veranda boy” who promised he would lift the living standard of the people when he was voted into power only revelled in hero-worship after he attained that power. Here, the Koomsons demonstrate this failure very well.

Close observation suggests that sometimes Armah depicts his disgust of this imitation humorously for us to see the absurdity and uselessness of copying the white man. One service man “has spent two months on what he still calls a *study tour of Britain*, and ever since has worn, *in all the heat of Ghana, waistcoats and coats*” (p.109,

emphasis mine). This humour is extended when we witness the shiny white things in Koomson's room:

It was amazing how much light there was in a place like this. It glinted off every object in the room. Next to each ashtray there were two shiny things: a silver box and a small toy-like pistol. The man wondered what the pistols were for. Light came off the marble tops of the little side tables. People had wondered what use a State Marble Works Corporation could be. They need not have wondered. There were uses here. (pp.145-6)

The comic absurdity, the craving for whiteness, is in tandem with the Koomsons' silliness. The shines of toy pistols, trays and boxes are obviously luxurious triviality. Koomson has in storage trash, trash that has found "uses" in his room. Perhaps Koomson's adoration with these items stems from the fact that they "must have come from foreign lands." However, "of what use they were [we can] not decide." *The Blinkards* appears to provide an answer to this: "We were born into a world of imitators, worse luck . . . and blind imitators, at that. ***They could not and cannot, distinguish cause from effect, so they have not been able to trace effect to cause, as yet.*** They see a thing done in England, or by somebody white; then they say we must do the same thing in Africa" (Sekyi, 7-9, emphasis mine). The unhurried scrutiny of each item in the room is reminiscent of Caryl Phillips' *Strange Fruit* in which he itemises the family's property to depict their penury. In *The Beautiful Ones*, however, we recognise the daftness of the Koomsons after scrutiny of their room. The items and the presentation of them evoke laughter but "even laughing satire is laughing-at, not merely irresponsible laughing. It invites not to let down our back hair and relax, but to lift up our eyebrows and mock" (Johnson, 7). Thus, Armah skilfully presents the leanings of his characters for us to mock their behaviour and also to form our own judgement. Behind the hilarity are serious political and socio-economic issues that

affect the growth and development of Ghana. When the leaders of a country are busy watering their own personal absurdities one can envision the condition of the citizens and the society as a whole.

Armah pulls our minds to the fact that lessons are to be learnt. Arguably, the aping of Western ways is not per se the picking of white names; it runs deeper than just the patronage and use of foreign drinks or items; it goes beyond dressing, talking or walking with affectation or the general bearing of political leaders. This mimicry projects European systems of governance, economically and socially. Indeed when Estella Koomson says, “This local beer [...] does not agree with my constitution” (p.131) we can infer that the constitution, the regime under Nkrumah was foreign. Nkrumah’s socialist regime was more capitalist than would be admitted. As discussed above, the governance style of the president and the motivation of the political elite were purely on personal basis. There was no distribution of power or wealth to the interest of everybody—power and the national resources were enjoyed by only the elite minority. “And yet these were the socialist of Africa, fat, perfumed, soft with the ancestral softness of chiefs who had sold their people and are celestially happy with the fruits of the trade” (p.131). The mention of the chiefs sends our minds back to the Slave Trade era when traditional chiefs joined forces with the European and sold their own people just for foreign useless items like toy guns, drinks and mirrors. The love for everything European goes way back. And after independence, the masses are disillusioned that “[t]his was the thing for which poor men had fought and shouted” (p.126).

Again, as a political leader, Koomson symbolises moral decadence in the society. Despite his wealth, morally Joseph Koomson is as hollow as the emptiness of the shiny things in his house. It is true, then, what the Man says about the life and apparent wealth of the Koomsons: “Some of that kind of cleanness has more rottenness in it than the slime at the bottom of the garbage dump” (p.44). Our attention is drawn not only to greed and corruption but the moral bankruptcy of leaders. When Teacher says that Koomson “swing[s] time at the Atlantic-Caprice,” we can see clearly what he and his kind do there. It is at this hotel that “young juicy vaginas wait for him” (p.89). One can tell that earlier when Koomson had said that it was a “busy night” it was indeed a busy night of his sexual escapades. When the narrator describes “women, so horribly young, fucked and changed like pants, asking only for blouses and perfumes from diplomatic bags and wigs...” he highlights the immoral activities of ministers who “*hire place[s] paid for by the government*” (p.90, emphasis mine). According to Emmanuel Obiechina: “Most of the available resources are government controlled [and] the distribution of these resources is vested in politicians or those who have replaced them as government” (135). These politicians use these resources the way they want it; they own the magnificent state houses, the posh cars, the lucrative businesses and, “ei and girls! Running to fill their cars. Trips to the Star for weekends in Accra. Booze. Swinging niggers, man./ Girls, girls. Fresh little ones still going to Achimota and Holy Child.../ These Holy Child girls!/ Achimota too!/ *He is cracking them like tiger nuts*” (p.110, emphasis mine). The indigenous Ghanaian who knows how tiger nuts are cracked knows that after the juice of the tiger nuts are chewed and sucked, it is spewed out. Thus the simile linking the sexual escapades with tiger nuts is fitting in describing how expendable these young girls are to the politicians. One can envision how they are used and discarded. The

morality of political leaders is brought under sanction. From the angle of *The Beautiful Ones*, political leaders appear to have carte blanche to do whatever they please, always at the expense of the masses and the general good of the country. This is simply a demonstration of leadership failure in Ghana, and Africa.

Armah lays emphasis on “the gleam” through its repetition in the novel. From the narrator’s point of view, the gleam which is the life of the Koomsons is disgusting indeed. The “gleam” is a symbol that captures the moral laxity of Koomson. The Man at the beginning of the novel perceives the Atlantic-Caprice as the epitome of the “gleam”. And in the description of the Atlantic-Caprice the narrator does not only call it a “useless structure” but he goes on to say that:

[s]ometimes it seemed as if the huge building had been put there for a purpose, like that of attracting to itself all the massive anger of a people in pain. But then, if there were any angry ones at all these days, they were most certainly feeling the loneliness of mourners at a festival of crazy joy. Perhaps then the purpose of this white thing was to draw onto itself the love of a people hungry for just something such as this. The gleam, in moments of honesty, had a power to produce a disturbing ambiguity within. It would be good to say that the gleam never did attract. It would be good, but it would be far from the truth. And something terrible was happening as time went on. It was getting harder to tell whether the gleam repelled more than it attracted, attracted more than it repelled, or just did both at once in one disgustingly confused feeling all the time these days. (p.10)

The Atlantic-Caprice (Hotel) is a colossal building. Its size engenders confusion in the masses; sometimes its presence is almost repulsive since it reminds them of their chequered history (their white-black leaders/elite patronise the hotel) and the fact that its towering presence aroused that feeling of humiliation, and also their present misery. At other times, it attracts them to the life and luxury that they all yearn for—

human need and desire for enjoyment. The anger expressed at the Atlantic-Caprice by the masses is informed by the fact that they could not afford and for that matter, have a taste of the life the Hotel projected—it is a twinge of envy aroused at the stark reality that they could not be part of the “gleam.” The Atlantic-Caprice gives a suitable contrast to the atmosphere in the novel. In a gloomy and dark society of *The Beautiful Ones*, the Atlantic-Caprice was “an insulting white.” A vivid description of the “gleam” is captured in the Man’s dream: “Blinding lights, wild and uncontrolled, succeeded by pure darkness [...]” (p.100). The illumination of this structure in a dark/gloomy Ghanaian environment engenders disillusionment among the masses. It is white, well-lit and set on a hill for all to see. The anger and frustration are, therefore, ever present with the masses.

As the plot unfolds the “gleam” projects a broader phenomenon; it is associated with speed, corruption, exploitation, wealth, power, all of which are concrete expressions of the life of the Koomsons—political leaders/elite. In what seems like a reverie, we are let into the mind of the Man:

In the past such moments had always come with thoughts of life and the usefulness of living persons, when it was possible to look again at everything that went on and to think that perhaps even this was the best there could be. Having the whiteness of stolen bungalows and the shine of stolen cars flowing past him, he could think of reasons, of the possibility that without the belittling power of things like these we would all continue to sit underneath old trees and weave palm wine dreams of beauty and happiness in our amazed heads. And so the gleam of all this property would have the power to make us work harder, and would come between ourselves and our desires for rest, so that through wanting the things for our own souls crave we would end up moving a whole people forward. At such times the man was ready to embrace envy itself as a force, a terrible force out of which something good might be born, and he could see, around close corners in the labyrinth of

his mind, new lives for Oyo; for the children with their averted eyes; for himself also. (pp.94-5)

The “gleam” has an attraction that arouses interest in the masses; it has the power to corrupt even the upright Man, that is, if he succumbs. Bungalows and cars are assets anyone would want to own. However, an inherent feature of the “gleam” is the adjective “stolen” that precedes these assets. The Man, like the masses crave for these luxuries for themselves and their families but one has to be as corrupt and greedy like the Koomsons to attain them:

That has always been the way the gleam is approached: in one bold, corrupt leap that gives the leaper the power to laugh with contempt at those of us who still plod on the daily round, stupid honest, dull, poor, despised, afraid. We shall never arrive. Unless of course, we too take the jump. (p.96)

For ordinary citizen “there would always be only one way to reach the gleam. Cutting corners, eating the fruits of fraud” (p.95).

Koomson is a symbol of political leaders and his profile arouses disillusionment in the masses. Political leaders have the power to take decisions and they are the custodians of the state resources. Thus misappropriation of state funds coupled with their greed and immunity from prosecution engenders hopelessness in the masses. Political leaders have failed as they pursue their own personal interests to the detriment of the masses. Hence, in order for people to survive they resort to illegal and sometimes dangerous measures. It is also for the same reason for survival that many people including Oyo and her mother admire the corrupt Koomson—they actually “see Jesus Christ in him” (p.93). It is perhaps a way Armah shows how deep-seated materialism is in post-independence Ghana.

Ayi Kwei Armah sets *The Beautiful Ones* in the early 1960s in Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah's regime, at a time when the society was avidly materialistic. In whatever argument one would attempt to make, the reality at the time was "MONEY SWEET PASS ALL." Materialism was elevated to its zenith during this period: "Money was not pieces of paper the farmers burned to show their wealth. *Money was life*" (p. 77, emphasis mine). During this period all the citizen of Ghana thought of was money. It was increasing difficult for the ordinary man to eke out a living hence the scribbling on walls—it was a projection of their mental unrest. Armah aptly describes the mental disposition of the people against the phenomena of greed and bribery and corruption that pervaded the country. It was during the time that politicians asserted that: "money [was] not the difficult thing" for "the Commercial Bank is ours"; a time when corrupt Ghanaian bursars "ma[d]e as much money" with the "school's finances"; a time when timber merchants "offer the bribe" for allocation space; a time when policemen openly claimed "kola" from drivers—"Even kola gives pleasure in the chewing." In *The Beautiful Ones* leadership failure condemned the masses to abject poverty and hopelessness. During this regime, the common man could not even afford street *fufu* because the exorbitant cost of meat would "crucify a man completely." Hence, "*gari* and *beans*" was the only option, and a "poor man must learn to suffer with his bottom also." Indeed *gari* and *beans* was "not called concrete for nothing." While the president resided in his presidential "castle" and the political leaders/elites also resided in the "Residential Areas," the masses struggled with their filthy accommodation, with "the bodies of the children" lying carelessly "on the floor" due to lack of beds. There was obvious inequality between the politicians/elite, hence their materialistic mental disposition. Undoubtedly, due to leadership failure and the

struggle for survival by the masses, corruption had trickled down to the citizens; policemen, allocation clerks, school heads and the general citizenry.

The setting also evokes the gloomy atmosphere in the society of *The Beautiful Ones*. Projecting the general mood of the citizens, the opening lines aptly create a despondent atmosphere:

The light from the bus moved uncertainly down the road until finally the two vague circles caught some indistinct object on the side of the road where it curved out in front. The bus had come to a stop. Its confused rattle had given place to an endless spastic shudder, as if its pieces were held together by too much rust ever to fall completely apart. (p.1)

Symbolising the Ghanaian society, this rickety bus captures the state of Ghana. The bus is a symbol of the rust in the Ghanaian society. Ghana seems to be standing on a single leg, ready to fall. This densely descriptive narrative highlights the fear of social fragmentation expressed in the Introduction of this research. The “light,” the political independence Ghana should be enjoying is shrouded in “uncertain[ty]” and insecurity. The movement of the light of the bus “uncertainly down the road” speaks volumes about the uncertain future of the Ghanaian. Armah suggests that independence does not elevate a country to socio-economic buoyancy. More has to be done. Here, “the bus had come to a stop” depicts the neglect of the nation. Just as a bus needs maintenance, so does a country. The narrative hints on the poor maintenance culture of Ghana. The adjectives, “confused,” “endless” and “spastic” rightly describe the disquieting (rattle) and convulsive (shudder) state of Ghana. The “rust” symbolises the decay and rot in the neglected Ghanaian society which will eventually compel the country to be “ever [ready] fall completely apart.” The gloomy atmosphere is heightened when we see the passengers alight “into the darkness of the dawn.” The

passengers who represent the citizens of Ghana plunge into the uncertain future on their “sleepy feet.” They are “only bodies walking in their sleep,” the “walking corpse[s]” (p.2). These metaphors evoke a picture of exhaustion, hunger and hopelessness. The Ghana under Nkrumah’s regime is shaky, with burdened citizens. Leadership failure and post-independence disillusionment is glaringly pictured in the description of the bus.

“The shimmering circles of dim light coming from the stationary bus, focused with opaque haziness...” (p.7) further depicts gloom and doom that has enveloped Ghana. It depicts the distorted identity of the country and its political ideals. Following the movement of the main character, the Man, we witness the “weak bulb” that hangs “over the whole staircase” (p.11) of the Railway Administration Block, where he works. “The dimness of the morning made all colors inside the office itself look very strange.” The narrator extends the description of gloom and uncertainty to the Man’s workplace, his office. The simile in the sentence “[f]rom the office floor the light came dully, like a ball whose bounce had died completely” (p.14) also describes the near deflation of the society. Even the sleeping night clerk “came up from his easy darkness” when he was woken up by the man. We feel the loneliness that these night clerks endure during “dead nights” (p.15). As we further sense the “inner struggle” of these “suffering sleepers” (p.20) we wonder if there is any hope left for such a country and its people. Outside on the streets from the sleepers at the office, we now see “a half-asleep seller” and a “night-walker” in the midst of “dying lamp[s]” and “weak lamps” (pp.35-6) giving a picture of the hopeless endurance of the ordinary person.

As the narrator continues with his description, we encounter how the birth of Ghana came with “exhausted blood,” and he further describes how the deterioration in Ghana also came with “dizzying speed” (p.62). When we finally perceive the vivid imagery of Plato’s Cave, we encounter the “impenetrable darkness” of this “lightless cave” which has captured “unfortunate human[s]” into “eternal darkness” (p.80). This allusion to Plato’s Cave is one of the crucial images in the story. It aptly describes the darkness that envelops the independent Ghanaian society. The “lightless cave” represents a country without a vision, and therefore its inhabitants, the citizens, are “unfortunate human[s].” The imagery gives a fitting picture of the slavery of Ghanaians in their independent country. Armah uses the caved/imprisoned humanity who suffer from an illusion of reality in the myth of Plato’s Cave to parallel the fact that Ghanaians are far from enlightenment. As a result of leadership failure and its resultant despair and wretched human condition (caved masses) Ghanaians live under illusion that is congruent with ignorance. Thus when Ghanaians become aware of the illusion of independence, they eventually become disillusioned. It is interesting how Armah draws parallels between Plato’s Cave and the Ghanaian society; perhaps Armah wants Ghanaians to rise and see beyond the cave, rise and fight for their rights and better standard of living—to rise and reconstruct their country.

This darkness is also felt in the “unnecessary heaviness and ugliness” of the Man’s house, in the “dark browns” of his furniture and the hall’s “depressing self” (pp. 117-8). For the Man and his compatriots, the “dry struggles” of life seem unending. Disillusionment cannot be overemphasised when one remembers Nkrumah’s promise of the end of slavery and better living conditions for the people of Gold Coast. After independence, the people of Ghana experience another form of slavery and misery.

Contrasting these images of the gloom of the masses with the lives and activities of the political leaders described earlier in this chapter, the failure of political leaders, and for that post-independence political disillusionment is vividly captured.

The physical environment also highlights the decay in Ghana. There is filth everywhere, from the bus to the streets. The waste boxes that had been provided on the “KEEP YOUR COUNTRY CLEAN/BY KEEPING YOUR CITY CLEAN” agenda “had been a gleaming white sign when it was first installed, and that was not very long ago. Now even the lettering on it was no longer decipherable. It was covered over thickly with the juice of every imaginable kind of waste matter” (p.7). Ayi Kwei Armah aptly describes the euphoria at independence in the description of the neat waste boxes when they were first installed, and post-independence decay and disillusionment when he describes nasty over-flowing waste matter. As regards the rubbish boxes:

[...] they overflowed with banana peels and mango seeds and thoroughly sucked-out oranges and the chaff of sugarcane and most of all the thick brown wrapping from a hundred balls of *kenkey*. People did not have to go up to the boxes any more. From a distance they aimed their rubbish at the growing heap. (p.8)

The overflow of rubbish describes the rot and squalor in the Ghanaian society. Indeed, the filth that abounds does not only suggest physical decay but it also symbolises moral decadence and disarray. There is an obvious neglect of the community, the country by its leaders and citizens alike. This description of the messy environment is reminiscent of Festus Iyayi’s *The Contract* in which the protagonist, Ogie Obala, as he drives into the city observes: “Everywhere there was dirt and filth and chaos. Chaos was there in the way the houses stood, in the way the refuse spilled into the

roads’’ (p. 7). Squalor and filth depict the state of mind and the attitude of a people; indiscipline, apathy obviously pervade this society. The independent Ghana Armah describes is not bursting with economic activities and job opportunities, selfless and proactive leaders, unity and nation building. On the contrary, Ghana is submerged in “unconquerable filth” which has been neglected by greedy and corrupt leaders, and disenchanted and apathetic masses. This is the Ghana the leaders swore to build, the Ghana that was screamed into being—“Freeeeeeeeedom!” There is still unconquerable filth in Ghana today. Not even the services of the efficient waste company, Zoom Lion, seem to rid Accra (the capital of Ghana) of rubbish/filth.

The spatial description also impels one to not only recognise actual parts of the city – which lends verisimilitude to the text- but also, one can trace the movements and activities of the characters, which illuminates their lifestyles and actions. As readers follow the “gloomy building of the Post Office” and read past the “U.T.C” with the “Yensua Hill” ahead; toward the “Atlantic-Caprice” and the “Railway& Harbour Administration Block” and later to the “Upper Residential Area, on the hills beyond the new Esikafo Aba Estates” of the Koomson’s, the reader perceives the lives of all the various characters. The description of “Upper Residential Area” and Esikafo Aba Estates (translated to mean, rich- people- have- come estates) speaks volumes about the social status of characters who live in that area—political leaders and the elite. Ayi kwei Armah’s description of the city as a place full of filth, shit, putrefaction, bribery and corruption brings out the themes of corruption and decay, and also depicts Armah’s own disgust at the physical and moral decay in post-independence Ghana, and subsequently his criticism.

It must be argued quickly that the setting also provides a sort of yardstick from which Armah's themes are highlighted. As the characters move from one place to another, corruption and decay, however, do not move. To wit: the physical decay in the Ghanaian society as described earlier and also later across this chapter is so pervasive that it runs through every corner of the society; from the bus, to the streets, to the workplace, to the house and everywhere. It is a potent force that is immovable because it has sunk deep into the fibre of the society. Indeed, it can also be argued that the setting could pass for a character in the story. We can then envision a filthy, smelly, malnourished, hungry, lanky and forsaken person. How long will such a person live? Such is the Ghana *The Beautiful Ones* attempts to describe—a physically and morally decayed country that has been neglected by its greedy and corrupt leaders. Armah aptly uses his characters to further depict his disgust at the rotten Ghanaian society.

The story revolves around the Man, the protagonist. Actually it revolves around a contrast of Koomson and the Man representing different statuses in the milieu. In the world of *The Beautiful Ones* the Man is nameless. This choice of leaving the main character without a name suggests that the Man represents any man—the ordinary man in the society, one of the numerous ordinary men who are disenchanted with the system. It may also suggest the dullness and emptiness of his life. On the other hand, he is not ordinary because he is the unflinchingly morally upright individual who insists on moving against the current in an avidly corrupt and materialistic society. “The foolish ones are those who cannot live life the way it is lived by all around them, those who will stand by the flowing river and disapprove of the current” (p.108). His presence in the novel smacks of unusual honesty which is almost painful

to relate to. The Man, as a Morse operator at the Takoradi station of the Ghana Railway and Harbour Corporation, works around the clock just to escape the tragedy of his society and also help his family survive. The degrading accommodation of the man and others like him speaks volumes about the class stratification. It reinforces the “us” and “them” dichotomy that Edward Said asserts vis-a-vis the salubrious Upper Residential area of the elite. When we are let into the house of the man we witness his property; we see books, “books from his school days” and also “textbooks for the School Certificate Exams.” We also see accumulated dust on the window sills, holes in the cushions, tattered linoleum, kerosene, polish on the floor that was “tired and menstrual,” and the “dark browns of the furniture managed to leave only an impression of great age and dullness” (p.118). Armah demonstrates the stark poverty of the masses through this look at the man’s room, and also their filthy latrine as well as a bathroom that compels him to wash “himself quickly” and to hold “his breath as long as he could” when he used it. When we witness children eating “single sliced pieces of *kenkey* with each a smear of sardine stew on it” our minds go back to Nkrumah’s promise of freedom, the promise of better living standard for the people. Sometimes, the Man gave up his food “so [his children] could have more meat. But if he really wanted to give them the food they needed, they would certainly have to go naked, or they would have to go hungry” (pp.119-120).

On the contrary, life at the Koomsons is different. They live in a plush residential area with available essentials and luxury. They have wealth, ample food supplies, time and other resources to spare. They have servants at their beck and call and other comforts that are far removed from the wretched lives of the Man and his family, the lives of the masses. The distinction between the politicians/elite and the masses is clear, and

Robert Young could not be more right when he says “poverty and starvation, then are not the mark of an absolute lack of resources, but arise from a failure to distribute them equitably” (135). Beyond the frontiers of Ghana, Kenya is also crawling with post-independence disillusionment:

The majority of Kenyan peasants live in a state of poverty. [...] The life of the urban poor is made worse by appalling housing conditions and poor urban services. The misery of the poor in Kenya is highlighted by the extravagance of the African nouveau riche. [...] the socio-economic position of the Kenyan masses is desperate. (Tamarkin, 314)

Armah is very skilful in portraying the economic situation of the masses in post-independence Ghana. Inequality between the elites and the masses is heightened when we see, feel and smell the poor living conditions of the majority of the population or when we witness the greed and the corruption of the politicians.

As the Man takes his children to their grandmother’s house, they pass by “the newer houses, middle-type estate houses built by the government for renting [...]” and get to know about life outside the Man’s house. “This house belong to Mike. / The wireless in the house we just passed is the biggest in the world” (p.121). These innocent comments come from the Man’s daughter as she beholds what is nice. Armah allows us to experience the dearth of basic needs of the masses also through the observations of the children. When she exclaims “Ei, look! There is television in that house. The middle one. Television is so beautiful!” their economic situation sounds impossibly pathetic. Even the child recognises their penury vis-a-vis the luxury enjoyed by the political elite. Commenting on the substance of literature, Ojaide observes: “Literature has to draw attention to the increasing gap between the haves and the have-nots. Literature has become a weapon against the denial of basic human rights”

(42). Armah has done that. He has drawn attention to the yawning gap between leaders and the masses, vehemently showing his disgust at the greed and the inefficiencies of leaders in independent African societies.

In the context of the novel, the Man is a nobody—just one of the living dead. Perhaps, it is not entirely true to assert that the Man is nameless because as the reader reaches pages of the novel, many descriptions of him surface. At the beginning of the novel, the bus conductor who notices that the man is oblivious to the former's corrupt practice calls him a “bloodyfucking sonofabitch!” To the conductor, the Man who has left a messy drool on the seat is an “[a]rticle of no commercial value!” (p.6) Then as the Man walks off, the taxi driver who almost hits him calls him “uncircumcised baboon.” To emphasise his point the taxi driver continues his insults; “Moron of a frog. If your time has come, search for someone else to take your worthless life” (p. 9). Armah hints at the exhaustion of the Man, which causes him to oversleep in the bus and drool, and which also causes him to sleepwalk on the road. Everything around the man screams futility and also evokes pity. It is, however, important to state that the vituperative language Armah employs also depicts the despair and frustration of the conveyors of the insults. It is not uncommon today to hear drivers and their mates hissing insults on passengers or pedestrians and fellow drivers who challenge them in any way.

The Man is not nameless, after all. When he tells his wife that he is not into how Koomson gets his money and also his refusal to accept a bribe that day, she promptly calls him a “chichidodo.” As we learn from her, the chichidodo is a bird that “hates excrement with all its soul. But the chichidodo only feeds on maggots, and you know

the maggots grow best inside the lavatory” (p. 45). This description of the Man, especially the one that is made by his wife is almost hilarious as it is serious. The man is christened with all these names because of his exhaustion, despair and also his apathy. He is a chichidodo because he is not as corrupt as his compatriots. The chichidodo hates excrement but feeds on maggots. Oyo means her husband hates corruption but would feed on the fruits of corruption. The irony Armah employs is very suitable in describing how the society is so decayed that the honest get insulted and are made to feel guilty. In the world of *The Beautiful Ones*, the honest are the foolish. In consequence, in the Ghanaian society “there [are] only two types of men who [take] refuge in honesty – the cowards and fools” (p.51). One may wonder the role of the Man in the novel because like the other characters, there is an intense feeling of the impossibility of real change around him. In this corrupt Ghana, a society where “its people accept corruption as a cultural norm” (Ogede), the Man “feels like a criminal” for staying incorruptible. The Man is a lonely fighter, and arguably, he is hardly a hero because he is not able to fully appreciate the issues around him nor is he assertive enough to effect change. He is just “pale and passive and nameless” (Achebe, 19). His answer to corrupt Amankwa’s question of “what is wrong?” is “I don’t know.” His dreary routine to and from his workplace where “[e]verybody seem[s] to sweat a lot, not from the exertion of their jobs, but from some kind of inner struggle that [is] always going on” (p.20) adds to the futility of life in Ghana. The Man is unable to change the system. That, notwithstanding, his presence provides some level of moral sanity into the society. His honesty or perhaps cowardice makes him true to his civic responsibilities. In a real life situation, Armah aptly describes a society in despair, a society whose ordinary people are on the edge of the cliff.

Another important character in the novel is Teacher. Only known as Teacher, which actually speaks volumes about how he teaches and educates the reader, he is the childhood friend of the Man. Teacher is the one whom the Man confides in constantly about his family troubles and more importantly about their Ghana. Teacher is the philosopher-recluse in *The Beautiful Ones*. Unlike the Man, Teacher is deeply aware of the corruption in the Ghanaian society and he, therefore, makes a choice to be morally detached from the corrupt Ghanaian society. His role in the novel is vital because his full knowledge of the socio-political issues in Ghana and his assertiveness (when chatting with his friend) offers us a deep and better insight into the social order. After resigning himself to fate, Teacher takes life so lightly that the Man says the former “reduce[s] everything to a joke.” As the I-narrator in the sixth chapter of the novel, critics claim his thoughts and account of pre- and post-independent Ghana reflect the author’s deepest sentiments about Ghana. Teacher is very philosophical and his views about “our Ghana” stems from his previous experience with the government and his disappointment with the system. And that is why he often wonders “why [...] we waste so much time with sorrow.” Teacher projects a defiant passivity of an intellectual who has resigned himself to books, to life and wants no contact whatsoever with his society and, for that matter, issues affecting it. Obviously, such passivity is not helpful to a society such as *The Beautiful Ones*; intellectual activism should be an important weapon in fighting Ghana’s political disillusionment. Activities of political leaders should be censured when need be. The Man and Teacher seem to have given up hope that nothing meaningful can be done about the Ghanaian situation.

Oyo is the Man's wife and she is as materialistic as her mother and the Koomsons. Koomson exhibits this trait on a larger scale, though. This is Oyo's philosophy about life as narrated by the Man:

life was like a lot of roads: long roads, short roads, wide, narrow, steep and level, all sorts of roads. Next, she let me know that all human beings were like so many people driving their cars on all these roads. This was the point at which she told me that those who wanted to get far had to learn to drive fast. And then she asked me what name I would give to people who were afraid to drive fast or to drive at all. I had no name to give her, but she had not finished. Accidents would happen, she told me, but the fear of accidents would never keep men from driving, and Joe Koomson had learned to drive. (pp, 58-59)

The comparison of life to people driving cars on the roads sheds light on the survival of the fittest where the strongest survive. In the world of *The Beautiful Ones*, the fittest were the greedy and corrupt individuals. As regards Oyo's philosophy, Teacher aptly adds that this not a philosophy about life but it is "Ghana." The Man's wife, Oyo, is definitely as corrupt as the Ghana in which she lives. She portrays her materialistic sentiments when she calls her husband a chichidodo following his refusal to accept a bribe. Through Oyo, Armah shows how poverty and social despair engenders marital squabbles – discord in relationships- and also topples the Ghanaian cultural structure. In the indigenous Ghanaian society, it is disrespectful for a woman to insult a man, much less a wife her husband. Oyo and her mother (the nagging mother-in-law) are blinded by their own desire to climb the social ladder to the extent that they exhibit a shameful disregard for cultural norms. It must be added that like the Man, Oyo is also an allegorical figure. Armah stereotypes her as a materialistic woman, one craving and demanding luxury and comfort. Indeed, a corroboration of Armah's concern for his female characters is depicted when the women are described

as, “so horribly young, fucked and changed like pants, asking only for blouses and perfume from diplomatic bags and wigs of human hair scraped from which decayed white woman’s corpse.” (p. 89). This categorization of women as materialistic depicts Armah unrelieved disgust for the moral and physical decay in the society.

Oyo, her mother and the other women in *The Beautiful Ones* belong to the petit bourgeois who try to have a taste of these comforts—the seeming panacea for their material/financial needs. Again, the promiscuity/prostitution of the young women speaks against the traditional Ghanaian society. Armah demonstrates how poor leadership and its attendant effect on the masses have destroyed the authentic Ghanaian culture where young girls are to stay chaste. The Fanti expression *akatesia* literally translates to mean, to hide or to be hidden. The Ghanaian culture asserts that young girls hide their virginity. That culture has long broken down. The young and old are in search of money, by hook or by crook.

Through Oyo, Armah shows how the poor masses yearn for the comfort and luxury of their political leaders. Oyo’s materialistic tendencies impel her to say and do things for appearances’ sake at the slightest chance. About Oyo, the narrator intimates that;

Travelling, even a short ride in a taxi, had a very noticeable effect on Oyo... she would sit there, in the train, in the bus, or [...] in the taxi, and the way she behaved, anyone seeing her for the first time then would think it was her life, this hopping into taxis and being spoken to like a *great woman*. And then she would talk, bringing up the few rich things that had happened to her all her life, and some that had not really happened, some that had not even almost happened, and she would talk about those things as if they were absolutely the only things that ever happened in her life, a string of fabulous happenings. (p.141 italics mine)

Oyo has seen the seeming wealth and glitz of the minister's wife, Estella: "It is nice. It is clean, the life Estella is getting." Oyo patently wants to experience the life Estella enjoys. Indeed the many squabbles between herself and her husband are due to their poor living conditions and most noticeably, his refusal to "learn to drive fast" as the Koomsons have. She expects her "chichidodo" husband to accept bribes as all the others do. However, referring to Koomson at the end of the novel when the coup comes she says: "How he smells!" Oyo's emphatic statement depicts her ultimate realization of the essence of a simple and incorrupt life, and for that matter, the futility of materialism and corruption. At this point she is happy and grateful her husband is who he is: "I am glad you never became like him." This is Oyo's first affirmation towards her husband. Interestingly, "in Oyo's eyes there was now real gratitude. Perhaps for the first time in their marital life the man could believe that she was glad to have him the way he was" (p. 165). Perhaps this cordiality between husband and wife projects marriage as one of the weapons needed in fighting bribery and corruption in the Ghanaian.

There is also vivid portrait of the minor characters. Through the first-person narrator we learn about the veterans who fought in World War II. "When the war was over the soldiers came back to homes broken in their absence and they themselves brought murder in their hearts and gave it to those nearest them" (p.64). These veterans came back home with the brokenness of war only to find that "still there is no sweetness here" (p.65). Neglected by their leaders and the system, these characters live a life of hopelessness: "...some went very quietly into a silence no one could hope to penetrate, something so deep that it swallowed men who have before been strong. They just plunged into the silence and died" (p. 65). According to the narrator some

of these characters “went simply mad, like Home Boy, endlessly repeating harsh, unintelligible words of command he had never understood....” Apart from the madness, there was a major unemployment situation during the Ghana of the 1960s. There were “a hundred men waiting too quietly to fill places enough for seven.” The disillusionment these men felt could not be overemphasised having come home to find no jobs. According to the narrator, they all “went with [their] hands in [their] pockets along the empty way from the harbour to the Employment Office knowing [they] would find nothing but others like [them] waiting for nothing [...]” (p.78). Evidently, without employment, there was no way of supporting themselves. Unemployment is still a major concern in Ghana today. Unemployment is no respecter of persons—graduates, the Senior High leaver or the school dropout.

“Kofi Billy was one of the lucky ones, picked to do work that was too cruel for white men’s hands. He did his work well” (p.65). However, after a work accident that culminates in his right leg being amputated, Kofi Billy gradually “hid himself from the world, and said nothing, in fact was not seen at all” (p.75). As regards the gloom in the Ghanaian society, this predicament was unbearable. However, “it was not only Kofi Billy who thought of hiding forever from an alien world impossible to hold” (p.78). The masses were all disillusioned about their independent Ghanaian society that had become “alien” to them. Eventually, Kofi Billy, unable to take the disillusionment and his own hopelessness, committed suicide.

According to the narrator, “Every one of us was uneasy after his death, because we knew there was no reason he should go alone like that, killing his own self. Each one of us must have thought of it: he was surely not the only one to go, only the first,

surely” (p.76). The narrator’s account depicts the general disillusionment of the masses—they were simply walking corpses:

Does the name Egya Akon say anything to you now? He was a happy man, accepting everybody’s jokes against himself, and at a time when money was something no one had, it was said that because he did not drink or smoke, and did not run after other people’s women, he was sure to have a lot of money somewhere. (p.77)

Egya Akon, the teetotal and decent man, was murdered because it was believed he had money. Through Akon’s death, the point that “money is life” for these masses is reiterated: “A few pounds, maybe, and that was all his killers could have found. *But a few pounds then were not things to disappoint men desperate with the disease of the time*” (p.77, emphasis mine). But it is true that “the evil that men do lives after them” because madness was Slim Tano’s comeuppance for being part of Akon’s murder: “Slim Akon by his own self went mad, went completely mad [...]” (ibid). Arguably, Akon’s death and Tano’s retribution are both pitiful consequences of a neglected country.

The beautiful Maanan who was broken for her unrequited love for Teacher also grew increasingly disillusioned with the system. Maanan had exhibited hope earlier before Ghana’s independence when she went about “wetting her womanhood over this new man” (p.87). Maanan had admired and believed in this new man, Nkrumah. She was indeed the woman in Nkrumah’s statement: “It is the kindness of a woman, one of you now here. Before she saw me I did what we all do, and I slept on other people’s verandas” (ibid). She, like other women, reposed a lot of hope in the political leader, Nkrumah, and he simply failed her and all the others. Maanan, the goddess, became the “troubled beauty.” Her beauty had been debased by the disloyalty and failure of

her political leaders, and the hopelessness of independent Ghana. Eventually she “found refuge in lengthening bottles” and later discovered wee which she introduced to the others —“wee is far less dangerous than beer” (p.70). Maanan became mad as the final effect of her disillusionment.

Even the seemingly sane characters were not sane after all. Tricky Mensah who through disillusionment had gone “on a voyage in a passing ship” came back “turned painfully good” and was heard eternally “singing low hymns and telling constantly of the coming of the black Americans with love and power and goods, coming to free us” (pp.76-7). Another Ghanaian, Rama Krishna, who also wanted to escape the desolation in Ghana, took “that far-off name in the reincarnation of his soul” (p.48). He found out that, “all around him showed him the horrible threats of decay.” And in order to “escape from corruption and of immorality” Rama Krishna “saved his semen to rejuvenate his brain by standing on his head a certain number of minutes every night and every dawn” (ibid). However, “it was of consumption that he died, so very young, but already his body inside had undergone far more decay than any living body, however old and near death, can expect to see” (pp.48-9).

There are yet other characters who remind us of how corrupt the system is. Zachariah Lagos, a Nigerian, who had forgotten his roots having lived in Ghana for so long, sold off healthy wood that he “in his wisdom had written off” (p.96). He was pitied by many when he was finally caught: “When he was caught people called him a good, generous man, and cursed the jealous man who had informed on him” (ibid). And there was Abednego Yamoah who sold government petrol for himself, “but so cleverly there is always someone else, a messenger, a cleaner, to be jailed, never

Abednego” (ibid). Despite the fact that these minor characters appear to play small parts in the novel, they are actually vivid in the portrayal of the despair of the masses in *The Beautiful Ones*. Their roles in depicting leadership failure and its attendant despair is more vivid than that of the protagonist, the Man. They provide an apt method for Armah to portray the effects of leadership failure. Failure by their political leaders culminated in deep disillusionment which informed the different choices these characters made.

The narrative technique Ayi Kwei Armah employs further sheds light on this decay. In *The Beautiful Ones*, Armah appears to experiment with a number of narrative techniques in his burden to satirize corruption and decay in the Ghanaian society. The combination of an omniscient third-person narrator and a first person narrator facilitate the presentation of the story and its themes. The omniscient narrator moves in and out of the minds of characters, takes us into and out of their privacy. He thus gives us a vivid account of the setting/surrounding that is choked with “unconquerable filth.” It is through the narrator that we are able to trace the poverty, filth and despair that pervade the society from the beginning to the end of the story, the entire country. Another important role of the omniscient third-person narrator is his introduction and description of the protagonist of the novel, the Man. This is important as we recognise the Man as the focal point from which the story unfolds. His unflinching moral uprightness casts a shadow on the entire country which is very materialistic and corrupt. Through the many insulting descriptions of the man, coupled with his personal challenge of providing a means of survival for his family, we get a deeper understanding of the mental disposition of the citizens and also the depth of poverty that has struck the masses.

The omniscient third-person narrator does not only give us an in-depth description of the filth and putrefaction in the Ghanaian society but he also explores the thoughts and actions of the Man and other minor characters like the conductor, the taxi driver, the timber merchant among others. Indeed, through this third-person narrative, the first hint of corruption is made on the opening of the novel when the conductor dupes passengers, and also attempts to bribe his way out of his fear of being caught in the act. We also witness the timber merchant trying and later succeeding in bribing his way for allocation space. With our prior knowledge of the Man through the third-person narrative, we know that the bribe attempt from the timber merchant will not materialize, that he would not be part of Koomson's corruption and deception, and we also can anticipate the greed and antics of politicians like Koomson from the outset of the novel. It is the omniscient third-person narrator who gives us a transparent account of the plot. We feel the disillusionment of the characters at the beginning of the novel and as the plot unfolds we experience the cause of the disillusionment—leadership failure.

Ayi Kwei Armah's skilful shifting of narrative technique from the third-person omniscient narrator to the first-person narrator succinctly describes the deterioration in the country. This style of narrative technique shocks readers out of their complacency as it does not limit readers in the activities and thoughts of the characters; we are better able to trace the account of leadership failure proper in the country. The first-person narrator gives us a historical account of the Gold Coast, we witness the emergence of a new breed of leaders—African leaders. Through the flashback technique, the first-person narrator recounts the philosophical root of the story. Through the first person narrator, the story takes a serious look at the past to

reveal the initial promises made by Nkrumah and also the hunger for independence “which poor men had fought and shouted.” Through this narrative, we learn of Nkrumah’s eloquence, electrifying rhetoric, his humble background and charisma which were driving forces in engendering trust in the public, all of which helped in the attainment of independence.

It is through the first-person narrative that we perceive the initial optimism that pervaded the country at independence and how the masses became increasingly disillusioned when the promises of liberation, better living standards and simply a utopia were not a reality. This narrative projects a better understanding of the third-person narrator’s description of the despair and hopelessness felt by the masses. Thus the two narratives combine fittingly to describe what has caused the gloom, the hopelessness and pessimism in the country—the latter narrative depicts leadership failure glaringly.

As a participant, the first person narrator also gives an intimate account of his views. If most first novels (which *The Beautiful Ones* is) are autobiographical then it is safe to presume that the account of the I-narrator reflects the author’s own. When the Man asked where the hope he once possessed was, the narrator’s answer was:

True, I used to see a lot of hope. I saw men tear down the veils behind which the truth had been hidden. But then the same men, when they have power in their hands at last, began to find the veils useful. They made many more. Life has not changed. Only some people have been growing, becoming different, that is all. (p.92)

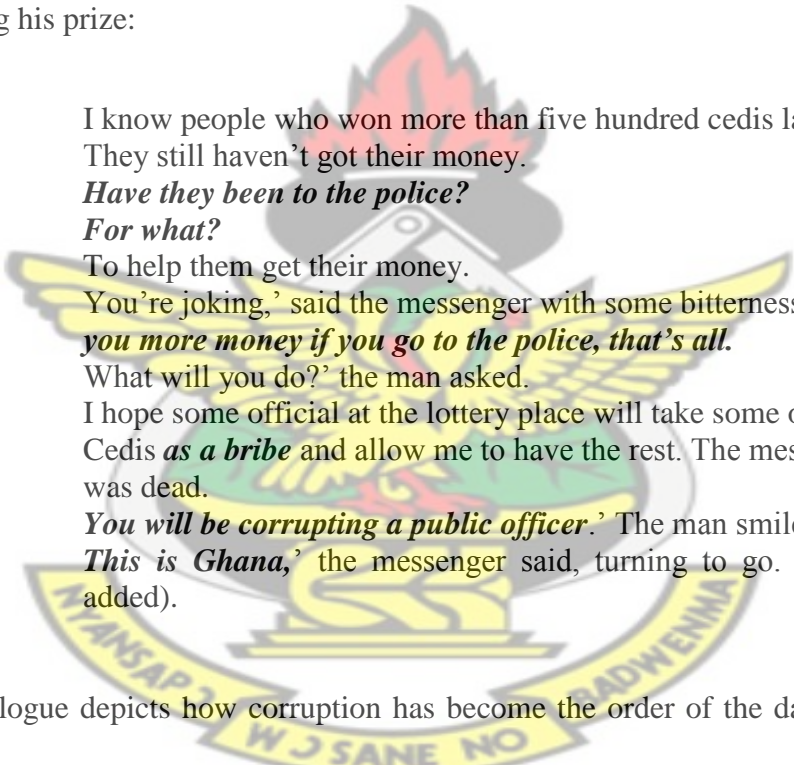
This well-woven personal account of the first-person is the epitome of post-independence political disillusionment. This account highlights the failure of independence to improve the living standard of masses except the politicians and the elites. We perceive these new leaders (black leaders) with white souls reinforcing the character, the deception and activities of their former leaders. Also after Maanan introduces them to wee, the first-person narrator recounts how he felt:

And then all of life changed in a moment. In the first flash I was sure I was about to vomit, but the fear went down and I saw it was the total newness of the feeling. For a moment things outside of me did not press in on me any more. They could not. I was too busy becoming aware for the first time of what my own body was about. (p.71)

In their disillusionment, the narrator, Maanan and Kofi Billy welcomed the illusion of “newness” of life in taking wee. From the account, we perceive a form of escapism in which “things outside of me did not press in on me any more. They could not.” In wee, the narrator and his friends found a comforting diversion from the destitution experienced in the Ghanaian society. The subjectivity in the account by the first-person narrator lends verisimilitude to the text since we are literally impelled to relate to him as a real person. Also, as the I-narrator shares his hopes and disillusionment, we concurrently learn about the lives of the other minor characters; Maanan, Este, Kofi Billy, Tricky Mensah, Egya Akon, Slim Tano—their lives represent the lives of the masses. Armah’s narrative technique undoubtedly gives a broad perspective into the issues in the world of *The Beautiful Ones*. However, this shift in narrative sometimes makes reading difficult to follow—perhaps it is one of Armah’s many

attempts to force the reader to focus on the events that took place during Nkrumah's regime.

Another technique Armah employs in the presentation of his themes is dialogue. Dialogues between the characters highlight the despair, decay, bribery and corruption in a believable way. The dialogue between the messenger, who has "won something in the lottery," (p.18) and the Man highlights corruption in the Ghanaian society. Having won "One hundred cedis" the messenger expresses the uncertainty of receiving his prize:



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?
For what?
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 a 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. (P.19 emphasis added).

This dialogue depicts how corruption has become the order of the day, so that even when somebody has genuinely won a lottery he wishes somebody would take some bribe in order to get a part of his money. The mention of "bribe" is almost shocking because the narrators have invariably presented the euphemistic substitute, "kola" during instances of bribery. Obviously, the Ghanaian is familiar with this phenomenon. Again, the Man's uprightness almost projects as naivety, and together with the messenger we can all scream "This is Ghana." Also we get a negative impression of the police through this dialogue. If the police cannot help in times like

this then one wonders if the rule of law works, if the entire Ghanaian political system works. The state of the ordinary man and his survival is captured and summed up in this quote: “It should be easy now to see there have never been people to save anybody but themselves, never in the past, never now, and there will never be any saviours if each will not save himself. No saviors” (p.90).

Also, the dialogue between the Man and his wife when he tells her of his offer of bribe earlier at the office highlights Oyo’s materialistic tendencies. When the Man tells her of Amankwa’s offer of bribe was “to get him an allocation” her spontaneous response was, “And like an Onward Christian Soldier you refused?” (p.43). Oyo’s apparently biting rhetorical question further heightens her materialistic and corrupt tendencies. The dialogue between husband and wife clearly shows the opposite views of life: an honest man and a materialistic and corrupt wife. Beyond their verbal exchange is Armah’s portrayal of not only a materialistic society, but more importantly, a society whose citizens have gone corrupt due to poverty/poor living conditions. The dialogue between the Man and Amankwa (pp.27-32); the Man and Teacher (pp.53-61); the Man, his wife and the Koomsons (pp.131-8,147-151) and the others offer us an opportunity to know the characters better; in these instances, the narrator removes himself from the narrative and allows us to form our own opinion. The materialistic, corrupt and patronising attitudes of these characters are exposed when they communicate with one another.

As a talented writer, Ayi Kwei Armah uses language to facilitate the development of the plot and more importantly, to provide adequate insights into the decay of the Ghanaian society. Armah’s use of language is the most potent weapon in his critique

of the ugliness, filth, decay and disillusionment that characterized Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana. The language employed in *The Beautiful Ones* is a combination of vituperative, disgusting and downright crude language. The language undoubtedly evokes descriptive imagery and one cannot miss Armah's abhorrence at the corruption and decay in Ghana after independence. At the beginning of the novel, when the conductor realises that the watcher of his corrupt actions was "no watcher after all, only a sleeper" he starts to hurl insults at the latter; "you bloodyfucking sonofabitch! Article of no commercial value!" the taxi driver who almost hits the man out of his sleepwalking calls him an "uncircumcised baboon." To emphasise his point the taxi driver continues; "moron of a frog. If your time has come, search for someone else to take your worthless life." In an explosion of the driver's "final access of uncontrolled ire," he screams, "your mother's rotten cunt!" at the man. As Okleme aptly observes, "In traditional society, verbal abuse of this kind is resorted to normally on provocation. In this changed [deteriorating society], however, the men continue to attack their victim even after he has rendered an apology" (277). The vituperations (bestial and body part/function) are a reflection of the rottenness of the society, the anger of the masses at their leaders, at the system, and towards their compatriots.

Later, the Man's wife calls him a "*chichidodo*" upon his refusal to accept bribe from Amankwa. From our understanding of the meaning of a chichidodo, we do realize the weight of that insult. That metaphor creates an image of excrement, an image of decay that points towards futility. Evidently, the Man's honesty is useless in his corrupt Ghanaian society after independence. In a neglected and corrupt country, the Man is a loner. Commenting on Armah's posture, Leonard Kibera says the former "cultivates

pessimism as meticulously as the undertaker touches up a dead face for the viewing process.”(99). Indeed, Armah’s pessimism is “meticulously” described to demonstrate the entrenched decay in Nkrumah’s Ghana.

Also his mother-in-law casts insinuations about his penury and his uselessness to her daughter and the society at large. The reader actually feels the Man’s uselessness when the corrupt Amankwa curses him that he will “never prosper. Da” after Amankwa had already called him “a very wicked man.” Armah portrays the disregard for anyone who tries to change the corrupt system of independent African societies. In avidly materialistic African societies the normal thing is bribery and corruption and filth and therefore his use of vituperative language in all these instances does justice to his concern about the rottenness of the Ghanaian society. Suffice to state that the Man in recounting how the dullard, Koomson, has risen to the position of a minister says, “*shit, he was actually stupid.*” What is remarkable is the fact that the seemingly cowardly Man made that insulting statement of his former classmate. That emphatic statement demonstrates Armah’s disgust at the greed of political leaders, leaders who are usually neither intelligent nor competent in anything except in matters of acquisitiveness.

In *The Beautiful Ones*, the reader also witnesses Armah’s gross language fills the environment with filth and human waste. At the outset of the novel, the reader experiences the decay when the driver of the rickety bus carrying the “walking corpses” “cleared his throat and spat out a generous gob of mucus against the tire....” With that mess still in the minds of readers, the conductor also then reveals his cedi notes which emit “a very old smell, very strong, and so very rotten that the stench

itself of it came with a curious, satisfying pleasure.” After he savours the rotten notes, and in the uncomfortable thought of having being caught from his corruptible actions, “conductor cleared his throat and ate the phlegm.” By then, the reader is warming up to the mess in the Ghanaian society. However, just like the conductor realises, the reader also sees the mess the man in the bus, the watcher who has supposedly caught the conductor, has left. The reader witnesses “a stream of the man’s spittle.”

Oozing freely, the oil-like liquid first entangled itself in the fingers of the watcher’s left hand, underneath which it spread and touched the rusty metal lining of the seat with a dark sheen, then descended with quiet inevitability down the dirty aged leather of the seat itself, losing itself at last in the depression made by the joint. The watcher was no watcher after all, only a sleeper. (p, 5)

The image evoked from the man drenched in his own spittle is revolting and that is Armah’s aim. He presents the revolting stage of the Ghana society, and indeed independent African societies. The images of filth allow the reader to see, smell and feel the rottenness of the Ghanaian society—the senses are evoked to witness this decay. The indiscriminate throwing about of mucus mentioned – also, after the driver “cleared his stuffed throat” he “collected his full force and aimed the blob far out in front of him”- depicts the moral decadence in the society. There is filth everywhere; people throwing mucus everywhere. Sometimes one wonders what the best decision is: to see the nauseating sight and avoid stepping, nay skating on them, or looking up to avoid the sight and actually stepping in it. Such dilemma!

The conductor is not only corrupt (the first hint of corruption in the novel) but there is a general air of neglect as the reader sees that the waste receptacle in the community is “covered over thickly with the juice of every imaginable kind of waste matter.”

The description of the wooden banister of the Railway Administration (where the Man works) corroborates the neglect and further deterioration of independent African societies:

It was so clear. Of course it was the nature of the wood to rot with age. The polish, it was supposed, would catch the rot. But of course in the end it was the rot which imprisoned everything in its effortless embrace. It did not really have to fight. Being was enough.

Apart from the wood itself there were, of course, people themselves, just many hands and fingers bringing help to the wood in its course toward *putrefaction*. Left-hand fingers in their careless journey from a *hasty anus* sliding all the way up the banisters as their owners made their trip from the lavatory downstairs to the offices above. Right-hand fingers still dripping with the *after-piss* and *stale sweat from fat crotches*. The calloused palms of messengers after they had *blown their clogged noses* reaching for a convenient place to leave the *well-rubbed moisture*. Afternoon hands not entirely licked clean of palm soup and remnants of kenkey. The wood would always win. (pp.12-3, emphasis mine)

Armah's disgusting language creates an image of the same kind—disgust. The government's neglect and lack of maintenance of facilities and official buildings, and the country as a whole, culminate in all the rot and "unconquerable filth." This language and subsequent imagery created also demonstrate the apathetical posture of the masses. In the event that "Nkrumah and his fat men" are solely concerned about fattening themselves with their greed, the masses have grown impossibly angry and apathetical. What will eventually happen to such a nation?

Also, "more than half-way now, the world around the central rubbish heap is entered, and smells hit the senses like a strong wall, and even the eyes have something to register" (p.40). The metaphors and similes employed here compel the reader to see

and smell the rubbish and its concomitant stench. “Past the big public lavatory the stench claws inward to the throat.” Undoubtedly, “sometimes it is understandable that people spit so much, when all around decaying things push inward and mix all the body’s juices with the taste of rot” (ibid). It is, however, shocking to find out that near the lavatory where “hot smell of caked shit” has soared in the heat of the day, “an old man is sleeping and his mouth is open to the air rushing in the night with how many particles of what?” (pp. 40-1). Armah’s disgusting language brings out the images of putrefaction which capture the decadence in the Ghanaian society. That the society unites their survival with filth, rot, bribery and corruption is the canker Armah seeks to bring attention to. Against the backdrop of this survival-cum-decay theory, “why should [the old man sleeping by the filthy lavatory] play the fool and hold his breath?” (p.41). This image also depicts the fact that many have resigned themselves to life; like this old man, some of the ordinary people go on with their life with the pitiful acceptance of leadership failure, and their poor living standards. Many critics have found Armah’s portrayal of the Ghanaian society shocking. Chinua Achebe calls *The Beautiful Ones* a “sick book. Sick, not with the sickness of Ghana but with the sickness of the human condition.” (19). Armah captures the human condition, the sickness of Ghana and by extension the sickness of independent African states with the hope of reconstruction. It is this same sickness that he wants Ghanaians states to rid themselves of. The fact that Ayi Kwei Armah presents the nasty/ugly without making the work per se nasty is a skill that is commendable. *The Beautiful Ones* is an obvious indictment on Ghana’s political system and its attendant social repercussions. Armah’s novel “takes[s] revenge upon the mother country” (D’haen, 16) by writing about the true situation of today.

Ayi Kwei Armah's language is not only vituperative and gross but it is also completely crude. In recounting the activities of African leaders who took power from their white counterparts, Teacher blatantly says asks; "how were these leaders to know that while they were climbing up to shit in their people's faces, their people had seen their arseholes and drawn away in disgusted laughter?" (p.82). Commenting on Armah's language, Kofi Awoonor asserts that:

Armah's view of man seems to be limited to the anal features of his non-characters; *The Beautiful Ones* is a work in which defecation and farts seem to triumph; he presents the affairs of men from the womb to the end. He sees only a world in which we enter trailing dung and bow out through latrine trap doors. (p.23)

In what seems like an answer to the criticism of Awoonor and others, Charles Nnolim says Armah "articulate[s] in bold language what others are too modest or too nice to put in print" (223). Armah's language which has caused much criticism from the literary world is undoubtedly his strength in driving home his themes. The crude language demonstrates how new African leaders exhibit the same imperialist/oppressive tendencies their colonizers had. It is true, then, what Edward Said says that, "dominations and inequalities of power and wealth are perennial facts of human society" (19). However, "there is something so terrible in watching a black man trying at all points to be the dark ghost of a European, and that [is] what we [are] seeing [these] days." This kind of betrayal is what George Ayittey submits in his *Africa Betrayed*. And indeed this betrayal by African leaders is worse than the activities of the colonizers. Armah's crude description demonstrates his disgust at how African leaders used their people to win power only to now "shit in their people's faces." Also captured on the wall of the lavatory is the inscription:

“VAGINA SWEET.” This crude description captures the moral decadence in the society.

Ayi Kwei Armah indeed uses his language and imagery for a purpose—through language and descriptive imagery, Armah projects his novel as a weapon to whip leaders and the populace of independent African countries out of their complacency. A very important example of Armah’s crude language is deployed after the overthrow of Nkrumah’s government. Eventually, politicians like Koomson are ensnared by their own greed and corruption. Armah uses the latrine event, Koomson’s passage through the “shit-hole” and his fear of being apprehended when Nkrumah was ousted, to depict the futility of corruption and power-drunkenness of leaders. Indeed, nothing is permanent, not even governments. In launching what seems like his final attack on the greedy and corrupt political leaders, we experience the stench around the party man, Koomson:

His mouth had the *rich stench of a rotten menstrual blood*. The man held his breath until the new smell had gone down in the mixture with liquid atmosphere of the *Party man’s farts* filling the room. At the same time Koomson’s insides gave a growl longer than usual, an *inner fart* of personal, corrupt thunder which in its fullness sounded as if it had rolled down all the way from the eating throat thundering through the belly and the guts, to end in further silent pollution of the *air already thick with flatulent fear*. (p.163, emphasis mine)

The image of stench and rottenness created through this earthy language depicts Armah’s aversion to these rapacious leaders. The idea is that since we cannot stand such stench and rottenness, they need to be gotten rid of. Just as Oyo “with a choking sound” of the stench emanating from the minister’s body “retreated into the hall,” we all need to wise up. Oyo who adored and hailed Brother Joe cannot stand anywhere

close to him now. Why? He stinks. The gross image of the minister depicts the repulsiveness of greed, bribery and corruption. The description of Koomson is very important because it presents the climax of the novel, when Nkrumah is ousted. Armah admonishes African citizens to be more discerning in choosing their leaders and to leaders, no political kingdom is forever.

Interestingly, Armah paints his themes in dynamic ways, sometimes even humorously. Ghana's young independence and the rise and fall of Nkrumah in the 1960s are aptly captured by Armah in the image of the Manchild:

It had been born with all the features of a human baby, but within seven years it 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 manchild in its gray old age, completely old in everything save the smallness of its size, a thing that deepened the element of the grotesque. The manchild looked more irretrievably old, far more thoroughly decayed, than any ordinary old man could ever have looked. But of course, it, too, had a nature of its own, so that only those who have found some solid ground they can call the natural will feel free to call it unnatural. And where is my solid ground these days? Let us say just that the cycle from birth to decay has been short. Short, brief. But otherwise not at all unusual. And even in the decline into the end there are things that remind the longing mind of old beginnings and hold out the promise of new ones, things even like your despair itself. (p. 63).

This account by the I-narrator vividly describes how Ghana's young independence quickly grew old, old with decay. We encounter how Nkrumah's government lost its popularity within a very short time and how disillusioned the masses are from "old beginnings." The image created by the metaphors of the "walking corpse[s]," "bodies walking in their sleep" among others suggests the gloom and hopelessness of the

masses of Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana. Armah stresses the futility of such an independent African state.

The image created when the joker Etse describes the sycophantic tendencies of African leaders during the colonial days is humorous. As we laugh we understand the betrayal of these leaders towards their countrymen. The meaning of satire comes to life around Amankwa the corrupt timber merchant. This wolf-shape mouthed man "with the many rows of teeth, this time *in a suit that made him look like someone's forgotten bundle*" bribes his way to get allocation for his timber. To the acceptor of the bribe he says, "take it as *kola*." Despite all the seriousness perceived in the novel, Armah actually has a sense of humour. The humorous image created of this Amankwa is not only grotesque but as per his appearance, Armah shows the uselessness of our copying the white man.

Another very important device Armah employs in *The Beautiful Ones* is irony. Armah's deployment of irony is also successful in exposing the stark realities of political failure and corruption in post-independence Ghana. As mentioned earlier, in this morally and physically decayed country of Ghana, the honest are the foolish—the chichidodos. The irony highlights the depth of decay, in that, one has to flow with the tide or gets drowned. And is it not funny how the use or address of "brother" presages bribery and corruption? Amankwa's insistence on calling the Man, brother, in order to compel him to schedule the shipment of his timber is very hilarious. When the Man refuses the fraternization and the bribe, Amankwa calls him "a very wicked man", a man who "will never prosper. Da." And we cannot forget all the other

descriptions the Man is taunted with because he decides to stay upright, in a decayed society.

Also, the economic situation in Ghana is so steep that people would prefer to be in jail than to be free because “JAILMAN CHOP FREE” so countrymen “PRAY FOR DETENTION.” Armah aptly describes the poverty and despondence in a way that is almost painful. This ironic description of a better life in jail because one gets fed is reminiscent of Meja’s interior monologue in *Kill Me Quick*: “If all one did in prison was eat and drink and get himself locked up and counted like cattle, things were not very bad. At least, that was better than living in a quarry and harrowing in the rock for the rest of one’s life” (Mwangi, 119). Under the current socio-economic situation, people seem to wonder which is/was better—rule under the colonizer or rule under greedy, selfish African leaders. Again, for a choice between home and outside home the people in *The Beautiful Ones* preferred the latter. The people cannot find solace in their own homes because their “inner struggles” seem to increase at home. Even the Man prefers to be at work than to go home “to the land of the silent ones,” into the drabness, to the flat countenances of his wife and three children. Armah captures how people seem to perpetually run from their problems but do not find solutions anywhere—not in their hot offices, filthy environment or their empty cold homes.

The police who are to bring sanity and order in the society are unfortunately a weapon of corruption in *The Beautiful Ones*. Ironically, the soldiers and police on the road are there not to prevent disorder or restore sanity but they are strategically positioned to extort bribes from drivers and the public. Undoubtedly, “even kola gives pleasure in the chewing.” In Ghana, especially up north, and even other parts of Africa, the

giving of kola welcomes a visitor to one's home; the giving of kola is a symbol of hospitality. Armah's reference to kola in this regard symbolises and exposes the corruption in the Ghanaian society. Quite interestingly, drivers and travellers have become preys to be pounced on, with little or no provocation, by these hungry policemen. Today, people avoid going to the police or the court for reasons of extortion or bureaucracy and red tape respectively. What happens when the police and the judiciary or rule of law are not sought after? Chaos, apathy and disorder are just a few of the repercussions of the inefficiencies of the government machinery.

In conclusion, the revolutionary style Ayi Kwei Armah employs is in tandem with his revolutionary stance against leadership failure and the corruption that has really eaten deep into the fabric of the Ghanaian society—indeed Armah seeks to bring “revolutionary changes in social, economic and political structures in a language that is as unambiguous as, though more refinely poetic than, Marx's explosively alliterative ‘expropriation of the expropriators’” (Armah, 2007). In presenting corruption and the various stances of the different categories of Ghanaians, Peter Omari unknowingly sums up the issues in *The Beautiful Ones* when he states that:

Beside corrupt politicians, there were also naive, weak and incompetent professional and other persons who contributed to the collapse and disintegration of morality and integrity in public life in Ghana. Either through connivance or avarice or inaction, men who could or should have stood up for the right and against Nkrumah, succumbed to bribery and corruption themselves, or failed to act against it. A few brave people took a stand, however, and some even died for their ideals. (p.5)

One significant proof of the failure of Nkrumah's regime is the ousting of Nkrumah from power. This reflects the displeasure and more importantly, the disillusionment

felt by the people. Bad leadership was booted out. The dramatic crescendo of the failure of political leaders and its repercussions is presented through the crude description of Koomson at the end of the novel. Koomson is simply in “shit.” He was submerged in “shit,” he passed through “shit-hole,” gave out “shit”—he is indeed the embodiment of “shit.” However, there is another cynical view of the unlikelihood of change in the Ghanaian society (the pessimism that many critics have written about) after Nkrumah is overthrown. The watchman at the harbour upon seeing Koomson who wants to cross over to Abidjan for refuge says: “*Ah sabe sey you be Nkrumah party man. You no fit pass*” (p.175). He defiantly and quite expectedly demands *kola*. When the boatman says, “Look, contrey fifty cedi. Fifty” the watchman responds, “put one more for top.” It is only after another note is added that the watchman says, “Pass.” This exchange highlights the cyclical view of the corruption in the country. Meanwhile, like we see at the beginning of the novel, we again see another bus at the end of the novel. This bus, however, is “new and neat” symbolising the beginning of a new regime. It almost foreshadows the next stage of Ghana, and we see why when the policeman at the barrier stops the driver who says, “My passengers. They’re in a hurry. / The people inside. They want to go” (p.182). With the accepted belief that “Even *kola* nuts can say ‘thanks,’” the driver leaves a cedi note in the license folder for the policeman to take out. It is only when the bribe is extracted that the bus leaves. Here, we see how the new regime has begun on bribery and corruption. Perhaps, the only hope of a change lies in the inscription on the bus:

THE BEAUTYFUL ONES

ARE NOT YET BORN

Thus, though the Man has to go back to his wife, “Oyo, the eyes of the children after six o’clock, the office and every day, and above all the never-ending knowledge that this aching emptiness would be all that the remainder of his life own life could offer him” there is hope that someday things might change. Hopefully, a new breed of political leaders, selfless and efficient political leaders would be born, would arise and redeem Ghana, and Africa from poor leadership and its resultant bribery and corruption, poverty and despair.

Ayi Kwei Armah evokes the following questions out of the reader: what would become of a continent in which “absolute power corrupts absolutely” and corruption has been entrenched? What is the future of a country that insists that “all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others”? What will happen to a nation in which the actions and inactions of her leaders only perpetuate the colonizer/colonised dichotomy? What would happen to Africa if the various leaders do not mend their ways and become selfless leaders with a sense of purpose towards the development of their nations? So is Ayi Kwei Armah a realist who boldly articulates what is happening in the society, for reformation and transformation? Or he is some sort of prophet of doom who sees the now and the future. Indeed, “Armah has taken the predicament of Africa in general, Ghana in particular, and distilled its despair and its hopelessness in a very powerful, harsh, deliberately *unbeautiful* novel” (Jones, 57). Conclusively, *The Beautiful Ones* is relevant to our society today.

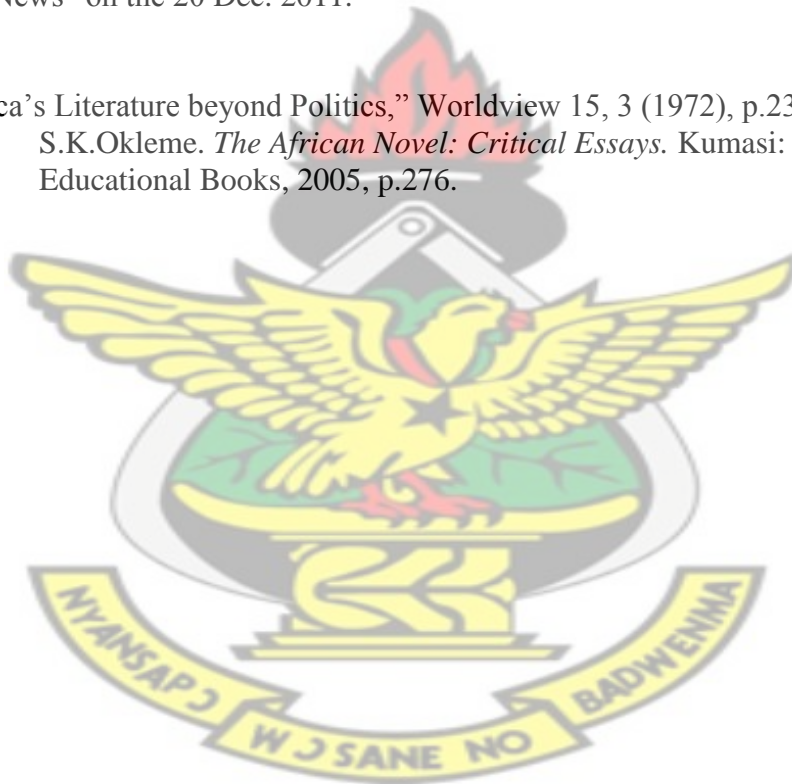
The next chapter will analyse how Kojo Laing also sees and presents the Ghana of today in his novel, *Search Sweet Country*.

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CHAPTER THREE

AN ANALYSIS OF KOJO LAING'S *SEARCH SWEET COUNTRY*

In Chapter Two, we explored Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones are not Yet Born*. In the analysis, it was revealed that leadership in Ghana prostitutes the country's independence; there has been the rise of greedy and corrupt leaders whose main aim has been to loot the nation's coffers at the expense of its citizens and also to the detriment of national development. We found out how Armah poignantly portrays political disillusionment, the wretched state of ordinary citizens and the squalor in the post-independence Ghanaian society.

In this chapter, we shall discuss Kojo Laing's *Search Sweet Country*. We shall analyse how he presents post-independence political disillusionment under the military regime of Colonel Ignatius Kutu Acheampong. We shall also examine how different Laing's style is from Armah's in their presentation of political disillusionment.

Kojo Laing, author of *Woman of the Aeroplanes* (1988), *Major Gentl and the Achimota Wars* (1992), and a collection of poems titled *Godhorse* (1989), is perhaps not as well known as Ayi Kwei Armah. That notwithstanding, his literary virtuosity cannot be overstated. On the blurb of Kojo Laing's *Search Sweet Country* is an appraisal by Robert Fraser: "A novel which many who have read it in typescript consider to be the finest ever written in Africa." Indeed Laing is a fine writer and his novel, *Search Sweet Country*, is relevant to the discussion of this research. *Search Sweet Country* presents the lives of an eclectic group of characters searching for meaning in their country, Ghana. The Ghanaian masses are disenchanted with their

country's political structures and the activities of their leaders. Under the leadership of General Acheampong, a military leader whose government is anything but scrupulous, the masses wonder and wander in Accra. The title of the novel provokes us to remember and search for the Ghana that had hope after the attainment of independence. Undoubtedly at the time the story is set, Ghana is not a sweet country. Contrarily, Laing could also be drawing attention to the fact that Ghana is blessed with a lot of potential; however, the leaders and the country as a whole must conceptualize freedom and nationalism in order to holistically harness the potential and resources effectively. It is important to state that *Search Sweet Country* lacks an organised structure. It is quite apparent that Laing chronicles the characters and the plot in a random way to show the arbitrary makeup of the system and the wandering nature of the lives of his characters.

In *Search Sweet Country*, the third-person omniscient narrator helps the reader to securely get to know everything that is happening in the lives and minds of the characters. The events of the novel unfold in Accra. Laing's mention of several suburbs –and varied characters - in Accra depicts widespread disillusionment. The setting indeed represents the whole of the country since Accra is the capital of Ghana, the centre of all activities in the country. The narrator at the beginning of the novel presents how Accra lays quiescent. In Accra, “the fruits ripened but the city did not” (p.2). The ripening of fruits in the extract depicts the resources of the nation, like land/soil and minerals. However, Accra is stagnant in growth and development even though it is blessed with the means. It is evident that the city is neglected by the society. Activities that go on at the top levels of the country do not reflect life at the

grassroots. Thus, the finality of this terse statement (the extract) depicts the futility of the life of the Ghanaian.

In Accra, “everything—from fresh water and churches to governments and castles—could fit so easily in reflection in the gutters. This city could not satisfy the hunger of gutters, for there was nothing yet which had not been reflected in them” (p.7). This extract sums up the different levels of rot: “fresh water,” “churches,” “governments,” “castles” are metaphors representing areas of decay. Water which is indispensable to all and sundry depicts the society, a “fresh” society (independent nation) which is fraught with rot. The church which represents the religious haven in any given society is also involved in shady activities. “Governments” which represents the executive arm of a country (policy makers) exude rot and decay. The plural form of government used here gives a linear account of Ghana’s governments over the years. Undoubtedly, they have all failed. Lastly, “castles” represents the seats of government, the presidency and this speaks eloquently about leadership failure. These mentioned phenomena which are reflected “in the gutters” highlight the widespread and spiral trend of the decay in Ghana. Indeed, anyone who knows Accra very well would corroborate the physical filth and heaps of rubbish in myriad gutters and everywhere. Thus Kojo Laing uses this common phenomenon to symbolise the depth of neglect and decay in Ghana. This abandonment and disregard for the country resonates with the Accra of *Fragments*: It is an “aborted town” and a “defeated and defeating place” (Armah, 17). In *Search Sweet Country* “Accra had one eye shut.” The personification employed in this statement helps one to perceive a person with visual impairment. How will he find his way? Laing draws attention to the point that Ghana lacks vision and also the fact that she is grappling with survival. Basically,

Accra is dead and this death is captured in Mustapha's "popylonkwe" which "no fit rise again" (p.17). "Popylonkwe" according to the glossary at the end of the novel means "male organ." Thus just as Mustapha's male organ is dysfunctional, so is Accra—a society that is impotent.

Search Sweet Country is set during Colonel Ignatius Kutu Acheampong's regime "in 1975" (p.1). After Kwame Nkrumah's regime was ousted in 1966 due to his "arbitrary dismissals, arrests and detention without trial, economic mismanagement, mal-administration in general and a host of other malpractices,"¹ it was superseded by the government of Kofi Abrefi Busia's. However, in 1972, the Ghana Armed Forces led by Colonel I.K. Acheampong in 1972 took over from "Busia's hypocrisy."² Subsequently, in what seemed like a burden to recover the financial status of Ghana, Acheampong and his NRC "decided to place the economy of Ghana on a war footing"³ and also waged war on bribery and corruption since "no single evil has sapped our resources and our energies to the extent that corruption has done to our society."⁴ *Search Sweet Country* is based on the events that took place in Ghana from 1975 to 1977 under Acheampong's National Redemption Council (NRC) which later became the Supreme Military Council. Colonel Ignatius Kutu Acheampong was the chairman of the Supreme Military Council and subsequently the head of state of Ghana at the time. In *Search Sweet Country*, we witness the activities of Acheampong's supposed right hands.

As a complex text, *Search Sweet Country* carries more than one theme. Laing's themes are extracted from his characters and their actions, and sometimes their inactions; thus themes are expressed concomitantly as the characters are presented. As

regards Laing's disillusionment with the sordid state of the Ghanaian political structure and its associated social repercussions, he brilliantly reveals the theme of leadership failure and the theme of searching to highlight the preoccupation of leaders and the condition of the masses, respectively. In *Search Sweet Country*, the all-important theme of leadership failure is highlighted especially through Dr. Sam Boadi, a major character who is an academic:

When Dr. Boadi sailed out of his mother's womb forty-five years ago, much like Vaseline presence, she almost did not realise that he had come out; nor did she know that he would retain this smoothness and his tortoise shape throughout his life, especially in the belly. His mother, as one of her many rewards, became a memory of fresh stew. Now, he was still led by this same belly—a sly, round pioneer—into the crowded bush of money, status, and power . . . all held in the strong current of flowing beer. (p.81)

The above extract depicts Dr. Boadi's guile all of his years, the kind of slyness the narrator asserts came right from birth. The comparison of Dr. Boadi's shape with that of a tortoise is not only grotesque but it brings attention to his pot belly! Dr. Boadi is the embodiment of gluttony for even his memory of his mother is "a memory of fresh stew." However, Boadi's natural propensity to fill his belly actually connotes his acquisitiveness. To highlight the permeating nature of this greed in the Ghanaian society, the narrator aptly provides the metaphor, "crowded bush." Like others in the society, Dr. Boadi will do anything to acquire money, status and power. Undoubtedly, Laing's inclination to humorously describe his characters and perhaps, the over descriptiveness of them, can distract one's attention from the theme. However, a careful reading reveals the personalities and leanings of the various characters. Dr. Boadi, the sly academic, is a good example of a crooked leader, and as stated in the

above extract, his main preoccupations are money, status and power. A feature article on GhanaWeb.com traces the fixation of Ghanaian leaders over the years:

We must admit that our leadership over the years has overwhelmingly been run along the lines of the ‘politics of the belly’ a primordial lust for wealth and power along crude racial, tribal, party, and familial lines. In this system, government officials and politically connected business cream of the crop use their positions and authority to enrich themselves, their families and kinsmen at the purse and expense of the tax payer.⁵

It is important to note that Laing’s style of presenting his characters sheds light on his literary virtuosity: his English is standard and the language is metaphorical, sometimes poetic. At other times the novel reads like a folktale. This unique style sustains the interest of the reader.

To further highlight Dr. Boadi’s greed and slyness, the third-person omniscient narrator recounts how Dr. Boadi joined “the crowded bush of money, status and power”:

As soon as Dr Boadi got his doctorate, he dropped his research and his reading, just like the pot that one threw away after finishing a hasty stew in it. Soon after, his body grew and his skin and eyes took on that carefully scrubbed, oiled look that certain chiefs and businessmen had acquired to bluff through life with . . . a flowering of ebony that was skin jazz, and that outshone the even brighter colours they wore. (p.83)

It is Dr. Boadi’s acquisitiveness which propelled him to drop his research and reading, subsequently drawing him into politics. The comparison between the pot that once contained stew and how Dr. Boadi dropped his research and reading shows not only the swiftness with which he did so but also the absolute abandonment of them—research was just a detour to his main preoccupation, politics. Also, the description of

his growth in shape and the smoothness and fineness of his skin after he joins the political bandwagon are the physical perquisites political leaders enjoy. The mention of “chiefs and businessmen” in this regard draws attention to the length and depth of greed in the Ghanaian society. If our traditional leaders and entrepreneurs grab and enjoy resources at the expense of the masses, what would happen to them (the masses)? Thus, in depicting the rot in the Ghanaian society, Laing adds traditional leaders to the list discussed earlier: the churches, governments and castles.

Indeed as a leader, Dr. Boadi epitomises greed: “For Boadi, for practical purposes, politics and economics were the same ampesi” (ibid). It is Boadi’s greed for wealth and status that “contoured his context front, so that Monday was money, Tuesday was money, while other days of the week were the colours of different types of cedi” (p.82). Laing draws a parallel between greed and politics. Undoubtedly, many a political leader has failed the citizenry because of their own selfish desire to possess wealth and power at the expense of the nation. Speaking against activities of leaders, the former president Jerry John Rawlings calls the incumbent Mills government as “greedy bastards.” Perhaps a response from any Ghanaian government would sound like Dr. Boadi’s lousy justification of his greed: “The Ghanaian is the most material being on earth. After these thousands of years, he still retains a material connection with his ancestors...” (p.82).

It is Dr. Boadi’s materialistic inclinations that pave the way for his attainment of the position of the assistant to the Commissioner of Agriculture, Lt Colonel Otoo. At a time when the Commissioner was somewhat “discouraged about the whole bankoshie” of his Operation Feed Yourself Campaign, “then Dr Boadi [sang] the song

of reason and ease, reminding him that there was only a few tried alternatives available, and that proportionally speaking, Ghanaians were eating more” (p.87). Of course these assurances were mere rhetoric since all Dr. Boadi was concerned about was the financial gains. “Dr Boadi was persuasive, was an expert in ironing out moral creases” (p.37). Failure of a project constitutes more money for rectification. Consequently, these monies go into the pockets of political leaders.

Now Dr Boadi could calculate in relative peace: failure, plus effort, plus money, plus Ghana, plus more money = MONEY! For some time his axioms and equations were kept, with high interest rates, in the bank of his mouth. (ibid)

The metaphor, “bank of the mouth” suggests he spent all the money on food. It also fittingly describes the fact that Dr. Boadi’s whole identity is money, literally eating money in his activities and rhetoric—he is downright greedy.

What happens when these leaders act selfishly? “The commissioner’s cap rose with the mist of success, he walked with new dignity much like a chief’s, and he started to build a house, a large house” (p.87). Dr. Boadi’s skin suddenly becomes “scrubbed” and “oiled” – the “rich-skin gentleman” (p.169). The repetition of the increase in size, and the smoothness of the skin of Dr. Boadi in the novel show one of the ways one can see what people enjoy when they become political leaders. The political leader, Dr. Boadi, drinks cool “political beer” (p.88) in “Supreme Military Council ice” (ibid); “Beer brewed in his brain. His Chevrolet, a fine ageing American tart, brought the ghetto to Ghana, and was usually crowded with friends and relatives, all of whom could smell the stews ahead. His ambitions were the umbrella for all and sundry” (p.37). The alliteration, “beer brewed in his brain” depicts his obsession with food and connotatively, possessions. Thus, it does not only show Boadi’s obsession with beer

but more importantly, his acquisitiveness and hollowness. Adding to these attributes is the fact that Dr. Boadi never forgets his silver “whaaaat jacket...even for ordinary occasions” (p.37). This humorous description of Boadi’s likes and inclinations engender dislike for him and all political leaders of his like. We witness what state monies are used for by leaders, but in this context, Dr. Boadi and the Commissioner cannot especially be bothered for after all the ministry’s “failure was lower than the caps of failure in the other ministries” (p.87).

Leadership failure in Ghana and other African countries is captured in the words of the politician, Dr. Sam Boadi: “The only time I walk fast now is when I’m after something beautiful—or money” (p.119). Dr. Boadi is downright avaricious and he flaunts this love of money to the disgust of characters like Professor Sackey.

What is more unfortunate about this leadership canker in Ghana is the fact that these so-called leaders have the boldness to goad others into engaging in the activities that they (leaders) do. Dr. Boadi tells his favourite students to “have only first and secondary thoughts: the first thought should be about money, and the second should be about getting the degree that would bring in the money. Am I being cynical? O no! 1975, you see, is not the year for youthful idealism” (p.82). Essentially, Dr. Boadi is seen as the embodiment of materialism, and one who is influential enough to bring other people on board. Also, Dr. Boadi’s obsession draws attention to the mental disposition of political leaders and the elite in 1975. Unquestionably, *Search Sweet Country* is relevant today because it underscores the main preoccupation and failings of leaders years after it (the novel) was written, decades after independence.

In *Search Sweet Country*, the birthing of leadership failure is revealed in the fixated ambitions of people to get on the political bandwagon. Like Professor Sackey, we also recognise, as intimated earlier, the fact that Dr. Boadi has “some political ambitions” (p.63). Boadi himself proclaims, “I am Dr Boadi—haven’t you seen me on the campus?—and I have one foot in politics, and one in the lecture rooms at Legon” (p.119). Laing draws attention to how contemptible politics has become; the phenomenon has been cheapened to mean a weapon for the acquisition of wealth by political leaders, and a forbidden fruit for the ordinary man. Politics has become a game played only by the shrewd. The narrator draws attention to the fact that “when Boadi lectured his students, he could see miles over their heads into Accra, into his own ambition” (p.82). Obviously an academic by default, Dr. Boadi asserts that “politics is life!” (p.169), a statement to which Professor Sackey gives a firm and profound rebuttal: “...but life is not politics” (ibid). Perhaps it is this philosophy of Dr. Boadi that compels the professor to call him “a wit! A presentable madman” and [one] let loose in academia too” (p.63). Dr. Boadi’s political ambition which transcends his duties as a lecturer and even a husband paves the way for him to meet the Commissioner for Agriculture:

And his words often leapt beyond students, threw excess verbs around the campus, sent adjectives rolling past Tetteh Quashie circle, where all circles wept, and were absorbed . . . moved in nouns in a daring fast crawl through the deepest gutters, gathered one full sentence in the defining pain of Korle Bu hospital, and then moved with a low political bow into the cool office of the Commissioner of Agriculture . . . who took words and finally sent for Dr Boadi’s mouth and talked to it of the possibilities of working together. (p.82)

The extract depicts Laing’s literary virtuosity (he mentions locations and situations – in Standard English – in a way that one can relate to). It is obvious from the extract that Dr. Boadi taught English. His political obsession propels him, through mere

rhetoric and pretensions, to reach his goal. The Commissioner buys Boadi's slyness and brings the latter on board his team. Like Ayi Kwei Armah's Koomson whose greed propels him to move from a railway docker to a minister, Dr. Boadi jumps from the lecture hall onto the political bandwagon. However, unlike Koomson, Boadi is educated and hence the latter becomes a means through which Laing launches his attack on intellectuals.

Important to note also is Laing's mention and repetition of many localities in Accra throughout the text. In this present extract, he mentions Tetteh Quashie Circle and Korle Bu hospital. These locations do not only help one to picture and relate to the story, since these are known areas in Ghana, but this style of providing these localities depicts the widespread nature of the greed of leaders and also the extent to which leaders would go to attain their lucrative dream of politics. When Dr. Boadi's wife, Yaaba thoughtfully asks, "Where is this commissioner taking us?" he asserts that, "Oh, he's taking us to greater responsibility, to [a life of wealth]" (p.84). The narrator reveals that in Boadi's "house, the commissioner was in the curtains, the commissioner was in the water, even though he had visited Boadi only once; his presence was hope to Boadi, was becoming the stroke that completed the visionary cedi sign: cedi in the eye! cedi in the sky!" (ibid).

Another way Kojo Laing depicts political disillusionment is through the phenomenon of bribery and corruption. Laing is skilful in employing this phenomenon to depict the exploitation of power for personal gain. In *Search Sweet Country*, the embodiment of this phenomenon is once again the political leader, Dr. Sam Boadi. Dr. Boadi

smuggles horses into the country through the Kotoka International Airport, which according to the narrator is fading away:

[T]he fading airport, where the front door of the country was really the back door. The concrete was being eaten by the roar of jets; the glass sometimes mirrored beautiful people, sometimes the decay of a whole country; the steps leading up to the departure lounge jumped on each with the same rush as the people; the chandeliers hung in baroque dust, like well-dressed thieves at a festival; and the staff, trained or untrained as symbols of Ghana 1975 [...] (p.37)

Laing employs descriptive words in the above extract to make a point: he draws attention to neglect and the rotting away (“fading airport”) of a significant facility of any country—an airport, which is the gateway to a country. The “roar” onomatopoeia employed in the sentence, “the concrete was being eaten by the roar of the jets” juxtaposes the loudness of jets/airplanes and the intensity of decay. The comparison between the grimy chandeliers and the “well-dressed thieves” is both oxymoronic and ironic in that a picture of camouflage is painted: as well-dressed thieves may look too presentable to be noticed as thieves, the chandeliers which are to produce light now embrace illegalities because they hang in dirt. Ghana’s poor maintenance culture cannot be overemphasised, and the airport becomes a microcosm of the entire nation, a decaying nation with stooges as citizens, and revellers leaders and drainers of the nation’s coffers. In Ghana today, among other items, hard drugs are smuggled into the country through the airport, the ports and other entry points of the country.

In *Search Sweet Country*, it is this decaying and fading facility that becomes a medium for corrupt activities by the country’s leaders, like Dr. Boadi. These contraband horses “deceptively padded in six high boxes, would be delivered safely to Dr Boadi and his Commissioner; no publicity no palaver. Boadi’s political ambitions

depended much on this operation” (ibid). These horses are brought into the country masquerading as a medium for facilitating government policies, in this case, the Commissioner’s Agricultural operation. However,

Boadi had hinted [to Pol, his stooge] that he and his masters wanted two of the racehorses, of a different breed from the rest, to start a private race club for themselves, ‘with bettings and things. For after all who in Ghana knows the difference between a racehorse and farmhorse like the Clydesdale?’” (ibid)

Political leaders purchase items, sign contracts and engage in other nefarious activities under the guise of government operations or policies. The last line of the extract is important as it highlights how leaders downplay and also take for granted the intelligence of the ordinary citizen. This lack of respect and honesty for the citizenry resonates with what is happening in Ghana. Among other examples, in election years, the electorate is invariably deceived with comestibles as a piece of electioneering. However, since these ordinary citizens cannot tell the difference between one crooked aspiring leader from another, the food provided does the talking for what Ghanaians would call *kokromoti power*.

Subsequently, when the airport operation falls apart and the boxes break to release the contraband horses to the glaring eyes of all present at the airport, Kojo Pol attempts to salvage the situation—with threats:

I must warn all of you that what you are seeing here is not true . . . the eyes have known to deceive . . . you must be interrogated to confirm this . . . the government needs your support in this hour of galloping, I mean, this hour of crisis . . . these are agricultural horses, to push on Operation Feed Yourself, and they will pull the plough . . . you are in the name of the law asked to remain here until further notice . . . you may continue to look but don’t pass water—I mean don’t pass judgment. (pp.40-1)

When government/political or even company secrets are in the public domain, threats are issued to people who have access to the information or material in order to shut them up. As regards the above extract, even though the revelation is glaringly obvious, Pol, representing Dr. Boadi, tries to conceal the facts. Beni Baidoo confirms this corrupt attitude of Dr. Boadi, when he speaks about his imaginary village: “You should be more like Dr. Boadi: he gives me beer to keep me quiet, but I have to talk to earn the beer first” (p.6). In real life, when Ghana’s ace investigative journalist, Anas Aremeyaw Anas, came out with a audio-visual captioned “THE ENEMIES OF THE NATION” in which he exposed deep-seated bribery and corruption in Tema port, Customs, Excise and Preventive Service (CEPS) and allied agencies, several threats were made on his life. To date, people still wonder how Anas protects himself from these “enemies.”

Also on the socio-political situation in Ghana, one of Ghana’s finest cartoonists, Akosua, of “Daily Guide” newspaper defines politics in Ghana today. In an edition captioned “**POLITICS: WORDS AND MEANINGS**” a cartoon character wonders “EBI SOMETIN OO../WE DEY GO OR WE DEY COME” translated to mean, is the nation moving forward or backwards? According to Akosua, “**IF YOU SEE/SAY... SHEEP SAY EBI COW/ CORRUPTION – INDISCRETION/ OPPOSITION CONCERNS – INSULTING PREZ/ FOTO JOURNALIST BEATEN – NOTHING HAPPENED/ PETROL INCREASE – DRASTIC DECREASE.**”⁶ As regards this excerpt, politics in Ghana, as played by leaders such as Dr. Boadi in *Search Sweet Country*, is a game of lies, a phenomenon of rhetoric and euphemisms deployed to deceive all and also to drain the nation’s coffers. It is no wonder when the witch, Adwoa Adde flies over her “spiritual children” and sees the wretched lives of

the characters, “for Dr Boadi, she only saw his belly heavy and political, sustained by Guinness...” (p.32).

In *Search Sweet Country*, Kojo Pol ultimately manages to save the day by shouting, ‘Beer is served, all you kind people that don’t see what you see, you can have free beer . . . Keep that a secret too . . . and those sitting on the boxes and controlling the horses will have something extra. Long live Ghana!’ (p.46). Indeed an important aspect of the text that makes it germane to the Ghana of today is bribery and corruption. Beer, like Ayi Kwei Armah’s kola, is the bribe offered to people to silence them. Many illegal activities have remained a secret because people offered and received bribes. The statement “Long live Ghana” is ironical considering the activities being engaged in. Clearly, bribery and corruption will gradually bring a developing country to its demise and not life. The theme of leadership failure cannot be overemphasized when leaders engage in bribery and corruption.

To further highlight the involvement of leaders in the canker of bribery and corruption, we see Kofi Loww being hounded by Dr. Boadi – through his Pol - after the former asserts himself, and indeed his rights at the airport. Kofi Loww is harassed because Dr. Boadi feels he “could feed [their] enemies with something dangerous” (p.121). By enemies, Boadi means “Counter-revolutionaries” (ibid). Dr. Boadi’s corrupt inclination is brought out when he attempts to offer Kofi Loww money: “How much money will you have to keep quiet? As for the rest at the airport we have traced them all and given them ‘drink’ already! But you are much educated, and so we are somewhat afraid of you, you see!” (p.122). Apart from depicting the gullibility of the masses and its attendant advantage to politicians, the repetition of “drink” in the text

suggests bribery and corruption is widespread in the country. It also goes to show Laing's own disillusionment with Ghana's socio-political affairs, Ghana's governance. When Kofi Loww sarcastically demands ten thousand cedis, the omniscient narrator makes us aware that "Dr Boadi felt a fine levitation that, after all, Kofi Loww was a good Ghanaian: full of greed and ready to please this greed!" (ibid). This extract is appropriate in revealing the depth of bribery and corruption, of decay. According to the text a good Ghanaian is the one who has embraced corruption and all the ills that bedevil a nation; a good Ghanaian is the one who would not divulge information against the incumbent government or party members. A nation crumbles with such citizens. The involvement of leaders in bribery and corruption is in tandem with leadership failure since it depicts the main preoccupation of leaders—such crookedness is always at the expense of the masses; thus leaders fail their compatriots when they act selfishly and dishonestly.

Also in the text, when two members of the police force, a corporal and a sergeant fail in their search to find evidence against Dr. Pinn, the Scotsman, they request for *no ko fio* from the suspect's wife, EsiMay, and Sofi Sackey: "[...] I believe suspect's wife is prepared to contribute voluntary beer and birds from her poultry at the back into the 'save the police small fund': no receipts available, eh? Hahahaha!" (p.70). Save the police small fund? In recent times, the police have come under intense criticism for allegedly extorting monies from people. A peculiar case in point is the acknowledgement by senior police officers of the extortion culture in police service: "some senior police officers claim that extortion of monies from police recruits is an endemic culture in the Ghana Police Service, which is difficult to deal with."⁷ This revelation follows recent allegations of extortion of monies from recruits at the

Kumasi Police Training School. The level of bribery and corruption has reached its zenith, so that both leaders and the masses engage in these illicit activities. Undoubtedly, bribery and corruption is a canker in Ghana. The caption, “Rot at ECG/ Anas catches corrupt officials on tape” of an edition of the weekly, The Mirror captures Ghana’s level of bribery and corruption. Among other examples cited, “some ECG employees with their official identity tags around their necks were clearly seen in the recording engaging in illegal meter sales and receiving monies from members of the public who appeared to be desperately in need of electricity billing meters.”⁷

Another phenomenon Kojo Laing deploys to expose leadership failure is abuse of power by leaders. For a start, Private Mahamadu and Sergeant Kwami of the police force who are to serve the country and its people end up serving Dr. Boadi as his personal body guards, nay stooges. It is Private Mahamadu who paves the way for the meeting between Dr. Boadi and Kofi Loww:

Private Mahamadu here, sah, under orders to beg you to meet officers outside; officers de for car, sah. Your name be Kofi Loww, I lie? No palaver, sah, officer want quiet talk. (p.118)

Mahamadu’s language, above, reveals a brand of pidgin that exhibits the lack of good education. Such half-baked police officers are easily deceived and used by politicians. The converse is what Dr. Boadi says of Kofi Loww: “But you are much more educated, and so we are somewhat afraid of you.”

On the other hand, Sergeant Kwami also tries to wrongly flex his police muscles: “Permit me, Dr, to arrest both of them on suspicions of sabotage! Long live the Supreme Military Council!” (p.122). Here, the two people Sergeant Kwami deems fit

to be arrested are Kojo Pol and Kofi Loww, and their crime is that they did not stoop to the demands and threats of Dr. Boadi, and for that matter, the Supreme Military Council. In Ghana today, the Bureau of National Intelligence (BNI) has turned into the property of incumbent governments where members of the opposition are sent for interrogation and other things oblivious to the public. More detail on Ghana's politics is revealed by Dr. Boadi: "You see, in Ghana politics, we don't usually try to be vicious. Bombs and killings are rare. We value consensus, provided we are holding the reigns! You can choose either the 'con' or the 'sense', and if you really want to count on us, choose the census! Hahaha" (p.169). One feels a deep sense of disillusionment with what has and is happening in Ghana where the term democracy is not a practised phenomenon—one is literally compelled to agree and support the views of the incumbent government and its leaders if one wants to live comfortably.

Again, like many leaders, Dr. Boadi is libidinous: "Dr Sam Yaw Boadi or Sam the Ram as his enemies called him . . ." (p.82) possibly "by way of tribute to his wanton lasciviousness" (cited in Dodoo, 103) is one of the many leaders who use their position for sexual exploitation. His sufferable wife, Yaaba:

lost somewhere in between, for the years of bending to his will ha[s] finally bent her angles away from the 180 degrees of his life. She now seems[s] to know only half his cloth, half his head, and half his heart . . . the other half of which, on the slimmest rents, **belonged to other women.** (p.83, emphasis mine)

Though he has a wife, Dr. Boadi's steps are quickened when he is "after something beautiful" (p.119). We are told that Dr. Boadi is interested in both Ewurofua and her daughter, Araba Fynn: "Dr Boadi, a regular customer [is] swaying between making a move to woo [Ewurofua], or her daughter" (p.97). When Ewurofua goes to Boadi's

house to discuss Pol's frequent visit to their house, Dr. Boadi tries his own thing: "I know you have come for something important to you, but I must charm you first, I must hold you" (p.104). Even though his wife is also at home, Boadi is only interested in fulfilling his sexual desires with another woman. "Manoeuvring his belly round the chairs" to catch and hold Ewurofua, he proclaims, "it's you, I'm interested in you, madam!" (p.105). We do not only witness licentiousness but also a lack of respect for women, further depicting Dr. Boadi's selfishness. Arguably, leaders without sexual inhibitions can engage in activities at the expense of others. Laing's disappointment with leaders and the political structure of Ghana is evident in his *Search Sweet Country*. Eventually, it is the nation's coffers that are drained on these several escapades by its leaders. In Ghana, there have been many allegations against ministers who dole out money to their numerous girlfriends from the various universities and sometimes the senior high schools. When allegations of ex-sport minister Muntaka came out about his using state money to sponsor his girlfriend to Germany, Ghanaians didn't wait for a court ruling before releasing their anger through various radio stations and newspapers. President Mills in his bid to save his minister's face is quoted to have said he wondered if Muntaka was the first minister to have taken a girlfriend abroad on an official trip. The president's interferences and especially the allegations made against the then minister made headlines in 2010.

Dr. Sam Boadi is in many ways like Ayi Kwei Armah's Koomson, a minister whose greed, corrupt tendencies and lasciviousness spell leadership failure at its zenith. Activities of such crooked leaders always have a toll on the masses. In describing Dr. Boadi's insatiable appetite for money, power and status, Professor Sackey highlights perquisites leaders revel in: "And you can't resist the march-past, the whiskeys, the

trekking, the durbars, the sirens, the women, the salutes, O God!” (p.90). In real life, in the midst of poor standard of living for the masses, we invariably hear the sound of deafening sirens paving way for motorcades, we hear the “Honourable” title of ministers and parliamentarians, we see ministerial bungalows and plush cars and other privileges that we may not hear of. Elsewhere in Zimbabwe, public service workers threatened to go on a strike following their allegation that government pays “MPs US 15,000 [dollars] each” (Sibanda) at their expense, especially “when teachers are so badly paid.” The rebuff from Dr. Boadi after professor Sackey expresses his sentiments further depicts the incorrigible nature of political leaders:

Now look, we are talking about the reality of Ghana politics . . . whoever told you that morality and subtlety are the moving passions! Surely a professor does not need to be told the difference between what is and what ought to be. I am for life, and you are for the ivory tower. (pp90-1)

Kojo Laing employs dialogue to show the difference in the characters of Dr. Boadi and Professor Sackey. The metaphor, “ivory tower” puts the professor in a position where he is oblivious of the “reality of Ghana politics” and therefore needs to be schooled by Dr. Boadi who is “for life”—Boadi’s philosophy is, “politics is life.” The irony here, lies in the answer professor Sackey once gives to Dr. Boadi: “life is not politics.”

Today, the sentiment of the masses towards their leaders is encapsulated in what Ewurofua tells Dr. Boadi when he tries his sexual antics on her: “And your behaviour has ruined your trust” (p.105). Indeed the people of Ghana are deeply disillusioned with their leadership decades after independence. Dr. Boadi unwittingly sums up the actual undertaking of leaders when Okay Pol threatens to stop working for him:

You know my plans, you know my girls, you know my bank, you know my commissioner. What else? Abua now, tomorrow and forever! And look at the money you've had all these months . . . for this operation, for that operation, and for all I know, you've been chopping me small. (p.108)

Kojo Laing's style makes it important to view these phenomena of avarice, bribery and corruption, lasciviousness and abuse of power as elements of leadership failure—the mentioned phenomena constitute leadership failure in Ghana. Separating them provides a platform for leaders to excuse their actions as part of human frailty, thereby not taking responsibility.

The other theme, the theme of search, presents Kojo Laing's burden to reveal how leadership failure, as portrayed above through the activities of leaders, triggers disaffection among the masses. Thus, it would be safe to infer that the masses are searching for the *Sweet Country* Ghana should be, a country with a national agenda. Laing deploys characterization that portrays the need for the awareness of poor standards of living of the masses; he uses his many characters to highlight deep political disillusionment in Ghana, through the dominant feeling of search by the various characters.

The varied collections of characters that are in the novel are all searching for one thing—hope and meaning in their Ghanaian lives. One major character in *Search Sweet Country* is Professor Kwesi Sackey. Professor Sackey is a perfect foil to Dr. Boadi. Idealistic, “Sackey, Professor of Sociology, could not manage the society of his house” (p.57). Professor Sackey's inclusion in the characterization is interesting and also important, in that he is in the category of the elite. However, for purposes that will evolve in the discussion, he is also searching for meaning and hope in Ghana.

Sometimes appearing like a recluse, Professor Sackey tries to dissociate himself from Ghanaian politics, especially the one that his colleague, Dr. Boadi, engages in. As is expected for “counter-revolutionaries” he is hounded by the revolutionaries, eventually becoming “a graduate of the special branch.” In an argument with his wife, Sofi Sackey, Prof shares his displeasure with the Ghanaian political structures and elite:

From institutions to personalities, I see all their actions so interrelated, and so lethal, that I can't bear it. You see, you can take institutions apart, criticise them till there is nothing left . . . but it is the great big egos behind them that make things unbearable: the entire country is performing badly enough, but when you see a fool rise up to defend himself with pompous words more foolish than himself, then you know there's no hope! How would you like to suffer the frustration every day of dealing with people that don't deserve respect? (pp.58-9)

The extract depicts Professor Sackey's frustration with both the political structures and the leaders of the nation. Indeed there is no hope for a nation when egoism is the personal philosophy of leaders. Professor Sackey's rhetorical question at the end of the extract depicts his disillusionment with his leaders, and his hope for the *beautiful ones to be born*. Leadership in Ghana has become a mere rhetoric when leaders act as lords at the expense of the populace, thus the populace is left searching for meaning. Professor Sackey finds this frustrating. Subsequently, he asks: “But how do you expect me to handle asses that will, like their forebears, ruin collectively and cumulatively all this country's wealth? (p.58). Professor Sackey is searching for hope for a better Ghana; presently, he finds this hope neither in the institutions nor the leaders who run the institutions; he finds it neither at home nor does he find at the Legon campus where he lectures. But he is one of the characters who show his disillusionment even when he is reticent. Sackey is “a mason of the mouth. He carried

himself by himself as he was fond of saying; some knew him as ‘Professor Carry Yourself’ (p.60). Professor Sackey trusts no one but looks forward to a changed Ghanaian society. In a discussion with Dr. Boadi where the professor calls the former’s “name three times in disgust” (p.89) the latter assertively expresses his disappointment with Ghana’s political leaders: “Those of us busy in different worlds have nothing but contempt for the type of politics you have been feeding us with over decades” (ibid). Indeed Professor Sackey clearly defines post-independence political disillusionment in his statement, and he reiterates it when he says “It’s a tragedy that eighteen years after independence, we’re still going backwards!” (p.91). The phrase “eighteen years” in the extract connotes freedom and maturity, taking into account the fact that the legal age of adulthood in Ghana is eighteen years. Professor Sackey’s dismal statement draws attention to his anticipation and search for a way forward for Ghana. Today, this statement would read: It’s a tragedy that fifty-five years after independence, we’re still going backward! Ghana’s political structure has deteriorated over the years, completely nullifying the slogan, “Forward Ever, Backward Never.” Ghana is actually two steps backwards.

What Dr.Boadi says of professor Sackey after he (Sackey) storms out of the former’s house speaks volumes about the latter, and for that matter the intelligentsia:

[T]he professor wants to solve Ghana’s problems from the sidelines, but I should have told him to solve his good wife first! Can’t you see that he treats Ghana the same way they say he treats his wife? Hahahaha! . . . but seriously Professor Sackey is wasting his voice, wasting his talent. In Ghana you do everything from the *inside*, and no pressure withstands this inside. Such a man should have built up his connections long ago . . . doesn’t he know? Professor Carry Yourself indeed! He won’t join any lodge, he won’t fraternise with those in power, he won’t flatter the chiefs! All he does is talk and think and write. Kojo, answer my question: who is more Ghanaian? (p.92)

Though we appreciate the fact that Dr. Boadi is a cynic, the extract above depicts Professor Sackey's distant love for his country. The comparison made between his treatment of his wife and that of his country captures the professor's uninvolved attitude towards his wife/family and his country. Undoubtedly, he expresses his opinions and disappointments confidently. However, he does nothing about what he sees and hears about his country. That indeed places him and others like him on the sidelines. In *The Promise of Leadership*, Professor Stephen Adei, the author, asserts that, "[...] it will be tragic if we fold our arms as corporate leaders, intellectual and relatively successful people, wait and just hope that one day the politicians will deliver on quality leadership" (48). The extract gives a deeper revelation of the activities leaders engage in: they join secret societies and political or intellectual fraternities; they associate with incumbent governments and the powers that be; they curry favour with chiefs, who are the highest authorities in our traditional areas and repositories of our culture.

All these activities and engagements are synonymous with building "connections" and pushing forward political ambitions. These are the "inside" activities people revel in with the intention of savouring the benefits of politics. In *Search Sweet Country*, the irony lies in Dr. Boadi's rhetorical question, "Who is more Ghanaian?" Professor's Sackey perpetual expression of his disappointment with Ghana is cold comfort to the struggling masses. Thus, true nationalism should produce results otherwise shady politicians like Dr. Boadi and Ayi Kwei Armah's Koomson will own the country. We appreciate the fact that though Professor Sackey is among the people searching for meaning in the Ghanaian society, he does nothing to solve the existing ills, thus he somewhat echoes the very thing he wants reconstructed. Kojo Laing, through

Professor Sackey, draws attention to the futility of a search for meaning and hope without ideas and industry.

We learn more about Professor Sackey when he goes to have a chat with his confidant, ½-Allotey. One cannot overlook the fact that it is Professor Sackey's mental despair that impels him to go see this friend who resides in the sinister environment of a "wild nonsense of trees" (p.144) in "the sudden gusts of harmattan" (p.141). After Professor Sackey arrives at this "inappropriate place" where he is being "swallowed by [...] valleys," he says to his friend:

We are all human, aren't we? We can't be hard all the time
. . . not when the consequences of our actions affect others.
You have never **heard me speak** like this before? All the
better, for Ghana is changing . . . for the worse! I am the
barometer for Ghana!" (p.145)

Professor Sackey's words are not only pithy but they capture the repercussions of the actions - and inactions - of leaders, as well as the deteriorating condition of Ghana. The metaphor of the barometer describes Professor Sackey exactly the way he is—he measures the changing culture of Ghana's political structure and he indicates these spiral changes with words.

It is true that Professor Sackey carries "all his energy in the chew of words in his cheeks, words scattering like doves surprised by other doves of the same feather" (p.144). The simile comparing Sackey's words with doves in the narrator's observation creates an image of flight—Professor Sackey is invariably hasty with his words, he says everything he sees...without doing anything about it. When he blatantly refuses to admit two unqualified students to the faculty despite intense political pressure, certain privileges and also some "development votes due [his]

wife's school" are cut off. Though these revelations speak a lot about Professor Sackey's personality, an important aspect of the Ghanaian system is also highlighted—freedom of speech. Obviously, under Acheampong's regime, freedom of speech was stifled. In Ghana today, citizens freely express their sentiments on various media. However, this is not without altercation or an invitation to the BNI should one's utterances go against a government in power; a cut down of privileges, a transfer, a demotion if not a job dismissal should one also stand against a dishonest head of an outfit or a school. Just as Professor Sackey is advised "to go and apologise to the military politicians" after saying no to their demands, so does it happen today to assertive people: "You see how ridiculous we are in this country! I'm right, yet I should apologise! You see how we turn things upside down in this country!" (p.146). The rhetorical question aptly emphasises disillusionment and also provoke critical evaluation from discerning Ghanaians. Ultimately, Professor Sackey draws attention to the harassment and brunt people bear due to their non association with the activities of bad leaders.

The theme of search indeed encompasses all the other characters. Another major character in *Search Sweet Country* is Kofi Loww. "Kofi Loww, now thirty and living on the wandering side of doubt" (p.6), is one of the searchers in the story. He is a quiet, thinking man who is searching for meaning in his boring existence. He is the searcher, the wanderer who "beg[s] the universe" (p.15) Kofi Loww symbolises the youth of Ghana, the many unemployed youth. Kofi is somewhat a hopeless Diploma graduate who does not know what to do, except wander the street of Accra. When his father, Papa Erzuah, expresses concern about the wasting away of his life, he replies by saying, "I will get what I want when I know what I want" (p.8). In Ghana today:

Arguably, one can say without cutting up words that our leaders have betrayed and despoiled Ghana and left us with despair and joblessness. I keep reminding my peers that: A nation has collapsed when the vast majority of its youth wake up in the morning with nothing to look forward to.⁸

Like Kofi Loww in *Sweet Country*, the Ghanaian “youthful population gad about the street without any meaningful job, hence the formation of Unemployed Graduates Association of Ghana (UGAG)” (ibid). In *Search Sweet Country*, the only government project mentioned is Commissioner Otoo’s Agricultural Project, which is also incontrovertibly fraught with fraud as regards the involvement of corrupt Dr. Boadi and the Commissioner himself. As can be found today, there is no particular thriving scheme that provides employment for graduates or the general populace. The Ghana Youth Employment Scheme is standing on one leg as it struggles with issues of remuneration, allocation and other setbacks. Thus intelligent and strong people eventually waste their talents to the loss of their communities and the nation as a whole.

Of Kofi Loww, Papa Erzuah says: “apart from your diploma, the only sensible thing you’ve done is to have a child” (ibid). He further states that: “If you keep on living the same way, someone can easily take over your spirit!” (p.9). Papa Erzuah’s words are profound in that they reveal the reality of youth unemployment and hopelessness in Ghana: indiscriminate procreation, and teenage pregnancies; criminal activities like robbery, burglary, drug trafficking, gambling, prostitution, and even murder. In recent times, there are also cases of suicide. When leaders are so high in their offices and bungalows and on treks, looting and grabbing the nation’s resources, the masses are left in a state of hunger, poverty and despair. In *Search Sweet Country*, Kofi Loww’s life screams futility, a clear indication of disillusionment. Apparently, “[e]ach time

Loww took a step, he lifted a whole country. It looked as if each space given to each person to walk in was a source of art: the movement of people was nothing less than a series of abandoned dances controlled marvellously in the most ordinary, in the most triumphant ways” (p.16). The metaphors and contrast in the above extract depicts the hopeless condition and the burden on the neck of Kofi and indeed the masses. The description resonates with the “walking corpses” in *The Beautiful Ones*. Psychoanalysis might reveal a dismal state of such a troubled being. Dr. Pinn unwittingly sums up Kofi’s existence when he converses with Professor Sackey in the latter’s Legon office: “Kofi Loww, a friend of a friend of mine, is a harmless even slightly depressed young man; you could say he sits in dream between his past and his present . . . the future hasn’t risen for him yet!” (p.62). Dr. Pinn’s observation pertains to the youth of Ghana today—the future has not arrived for them yet as they eke out a miserable existence while their leaders savour gargantuan sums of money.

Another character, Kojo Okay Pol, as his name ‘Pol’ may suggest is a rather tall man with a grotesque appearance:

His slanting eyebrows were two little steps of doubt leading up to a bewildered frown. His height suddenly ended up crowded at his hunched shoulders, with his head and neck almost irrelevant, until he smiled teeth shut yet with such light that his whole upper body glowed. (p.35)

Nana Esi called him “a laugh” (p.103), a “tall groundnut” (p.171) and advised her granddaughter, Araba Fynn, not to have any relationship with him:

That Kojo, that Kojo, that funny man. You can’t have him. He will turn into a rather vague man and he will be full of impulses, little ideas, and he will be far too open for you. He has no guile, he can’t bring up our type of children with his odd ways. (p.173)

Laing uses the impossible relationship between Pol and Araba to depict the yawning gap between the rich and the poor in the society—the gap highlights inequality in the Ghanaian society. The description of Pol is almost pitiful. For Okay Pol who is invariably feezed – adding to his “unnecessary complexities - “[t]he space between his hopes and his life stretched further than Navrongo” (p.35). Ironically, though, “Kojo Okay Pol was the optimist, was the monkey that believed he could climb his own tail in any emergency” (ibid). Hence, his enduring searches.

Kojo Pol’s hope “just to live and enjoy life a bit” (p.92) and “partly a little search of [his] own too” (ibid) sends him into the conniving arms of Dr. Sam Boadi. As we have already analysed Sam the Ram, we can appreciate what Pol represents and what he did for the Ram. Laing highlights how poverty and despair engender dishonesty among ordinary citizens. The relationship between Dr. Boadi and Pol constitute a tacit form of bribery that is prevalent in the society today.

Among other examples, there are cases of managers/owners of companies demanding sexual favours before giving employment. In *Search Sweet Country*, Abena Donkor, Kwabena Kusi’s wife, shares her sexual favours for flour. She confesses later:

You know me, Abena Donkor. We have been married eight years now, with two children; but because of my bread-baking I had to be unfaithful once. It’s bad, but I had to do it to get flour” (p.131).

We perceive the dilemma of the characters as they strive to choose between survival and principle in their *Sweet Country* where poverty is steep and the standard of living is low, against the lush lifestyle of leaders and the elite who have their “belly heavy and political” (p.32). When Kojo Pol recognises his own shady lifestyle, he exclaims

to himself: “Enough! Dr. Boadi must find another African donkey to chase his shadows; for after all couldn’t something better be done, even with a secondary education?” (p.36). However, as it is congruent with allurements, and the need to survive, “when [Pol] went back to Dr. Boadi, he was talked into renewing the security contract for another month” (ibid). Pol works extensively for Dr. Boadi but eventually, he learns to assert himself. He stands up to Dr. Boadi and also professor Sackey: It’s the lavender which I smell from both of you that is killing this country. This lavender is so powerful that any action, whether good or bad, takes on a fine smell, a neutrality . . .” (p.92). The metaphor used in Pol’s statement depicts the deception of political leaders and elite. And as Kojo Pol says, any country would rot in the hands of such leaders who throw dust in the eyes of the citizenry. Pol explains his statement further when he says, “What I really meant to say was that none of you as a group would give us any hope in the quality of your lives” (ibid). One wonders why Professor Sackey is placed in tandem with Dr. Boadi but our attention is drawn to the fact that the elite who do nothing to change the status quo are just like the devious leaders. Pol’s statement is rather despondent in that one cannot anticipate any help or hope from leaders. Perhaps, Laing is trying to encourage individuals to work hard to survive without depending on their leaders. The omniscient narrator draws our attention to the dormant posture of the youth, through Pol. After studying Kofi Loww, the silent one, for a while, Pol “had the chance to be vicarious about his own latent contempt for authority, a latency that he had seen in different forms in the young in every part of the country . . . especially when he trekked in the commissioner’s entourage” (p.88). In *Search Sweet Country*, Kojo Okay Pol eventually quits all the fraudulent jobs of Dr. Boadi, of the revolution and finds himself a decent job in photography. He also boldly moves on from his disappointment with Araba.

Other characters in the novel include Beni Baidoo, the “sprightly old man” who personifies the whole city and one who has a relationship with all the characters as he is constantly asking for money to build his imaginary village: “Beni Baidoo was Accra, was the bird standing alive by the pot that should receive it, and hoping that, after being defeathered, it would triumphantly fly out before it was fried” (p.1). Araba Fynn, another character, is also called Araba Quick; Like Kofi Loww’s, Araba Quick is a name that symbolises the acquisitiveness of the bearer of the name. She is only after quick easy money—materialism is her middle name as she drives her plush Vintage V. W. Golf car around Accra. Araba discontinues her sixth form education in order to thrive in business. ½ Allotey, somewhat like Professor Sackey, also lives a life of a recluse. Finding solace in farming in his mysterious farm, he also searches for meaning in his life—his is termed “traditional searching” (142). Osofo’s presence in the novel speaks of the confusion of the Ghanaian; he mixes God and herbs to form a unified religion. He wants things to speed up...he is deeply disillusioned with the system and also he is angry with his leaders, especially the president, hence his leading the march to the castle (54). (read p.136). Ebo, “the food,” lives for food. There is also Mustapha whose whole life is captured in the inability of his “popylonkwi” to rise again. The searching masses of this *Sweet Country* yearn for meaning in their lives, meaning that they are bereft of wherewithal and sustenance because their leaders are busy looting the nation’s coffers and establishing kingdoms for themselves. A line that aptly describes the condition of the masses of Ghana is what the omniscient narrators says of the people who go to see Osofo for help: “Then as the morning wore on, the sufferers came; suffering broken marriages, poverty, disease, witchery, shame and hopelessness” (p.135).

The style Kojo Laing adopts in his novel is in tandem with the theory of defamiliarization because the presentation of political disillusionment is alien to readers through his varied techniques. Firstly, he employs a literary genre that is not very common in African novels—magical realism. According to an article written by Adam Feinstein, “The term ‘magical realism’ has been attributed to the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier, who first applied it to Latin American fiction in 1949 to mean a method of expressing the specific, wondrous realities of the developing world.”⁹ He further states that, “works of magical realism mingled realistic portrayals of events and characters with fantasy and myth, creating a rich, often disturbing world that is both familiar and dreamlike.”¹⁰ According to the article, practitioners included Garcia Marquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes, Julio Cortazar and Jose Donoso. Magical realism is therefore portrayed by two opposing sides –the real and the supernatural - as one uniformed element in the society. Laing’s attempt to combine reality and the supernatural is somewhat unconventional. Presenting the visible presence of the supernatural as ubiquitous or normal is rather shocking, and one wonders if the text would not suffice without the presence of the flying witches and their bizarreness. However, Laing through this technique draws attention to the hopelessness of the Ghanaian society: to wit, Laing gives the searching masses an opportunity to release and share their fears and attain answers, and he also brings attention to the fact that the supernatural indeed exists though we may not perceive them in the physical. Consequently, apart from the land-dwelling characters, there is also the presence of witches, Adwoa Adde and Sally Soon.

When Adwoa Adde first finds out that she is a witch, she exclaims, “Some gods are making me their trotro” (p.26). After Adwoa becomes conscious of this revelation:

Her food sizzled with religion, with caring. Sometimes she saw herself only as knees . . . angled towards the skies. As she listened to traditional religious songs. Her eyes brightened like butterflies, and were as restless. When she felt her mind leaving her body, then her necklace shone and orbited round Accra. It was only when she was able to wear the daylight completely that she knew she had pulled into magic and witchery. (p.26)

Laing's presentation of Adwoa's realization and introduction to witchcraft appears contrived. This witch of Accra flies over the whole city communicating with the other characters who share their plights. The characters are familiar and comfortable with the presence of witches. However, we come to appreciate the fact that Accra needs help. During the recent launching of the Vice President, John Dramani Mahama's maiden book, *My First Coup d'état*, seasoned author Ngugi Wa Thiongo is quoted to have said this of the book: "The characters and the episodes are part of the everyday but one imbued with magic and suggestive power, that goes beyond the concrete and the palpable, to hit a history in motion."¹⁰ Magical realism is increasingly becoming a style that authors employ to link the past to the present in an attempt to develop the future. In truth, magical realism, and other features that will evolve as the discussion progresses, makes it possible for the novel to read like a folktale. Magical realism – flying witches, talking forests and others – is definitely an element that will sustain the interest of an *anansesem*. It is obvious Laing's interest is to incorporate some aspects of the Ghanaian culture.

Definitely, Laing's style and language are distinctive considering the blitheness with which he presents the gravity of his subject matter. One definite feature of *Search Sweet Country* is its light-hearted tone; the attitude the narrator conveys towards the subject of the text is carefree, and this assertion is corroborated by Ebo who asks the

brooding Kofi Loww, “Where do you get all this seriousness from? Are you not in Ghana?” (p.19). Undoubtedly, the novel is replete with humour and this comes as a refreshing change for readers who are used to the seriousness with which issues of leadership failure and/or disillusionment are presented. At the outset of the novel when one is introduced to Papa Erzuah and his son, Kofi Loww, one cannot help but have a good laugh:

The two beards crowded in one corner of Accra did not agree . . . under the shoeshine tree breeze polished both souls, in Mamprobi. [...] The father’s beard shifted and pulled at different angles, taking in the sun and folding its rays under the hair. This hair saluted from a chin too small for it. The son’s beard was soft and vast as vaseline, the hair parting ways at the middle, in confusion, and finally lying against its own big chin exhausted. Both beards were, in the brotherhood of hair, heavy with commas: and showed that full stops above the necks of father and son were rare, that permanence was scarce. Erzuah the father’s beard had more fluff, more earth, more answers, more Saturday-nite powder, more tradition, and more smoke than the other. And this other was Kofi Loww the son’s, which defined the face less clearly, the hair on in the pose of an afterthought . . . but this same beard being so still, could gather the whole city; and as it gathered it, the hair spoke to the five feet of space between his chin and foot, filling the talking with cassava, aimless wandering, long stares at worlds that would not stay still [...]. (p.2)

Though the extract above is funny, it also has a wretched dimension to it. Thus one of the ways Kojo Laing is seen as a fine writer is the fact that he is able to bring out his themes even in the most humorous circumstances. The metaphor used to describe father and son is hilarious but these “beards” are in despair. The narrator’s amusing description of Erzuah and Kofi Loww highlights their bushy lifestyle. The only property this father and his son own is their beards, beards which seem to divert attention from their inner emptiness and which at the same time draw attention to them due to their uniqueness. The extract facilitates our appreciation of the generation gap and the fact that father and son are not always of the same mind. Also in the

extract, we perceive the assertion that the old in the society are supposed to be repositories of wisdom. However, though “Erzuah’s beard had a web of wisdom” apparently, “the resident spider was missing.” Though Papa Erzuah is old, life has not been kind to him. Kofi Loww whose beard is described as “soft and vase as Vaseline” fits into the category of the youth of the country, the youth who like their older compatriots are also struggling to make ends meet. Kofi Loww’s “aimless wandering” and his “long stares at worlds that would not stay still” capture the despair and hopelessness of the youth. Thus, eventually, we appreciate the fact that, “[b]oth beards were, in the brotherhood of hair, heavy with commas.” The metaphor actually connects father and son together in the Ghanaian life of despair and search.

Another example of humour in *Search Sweet Country* is captured at the residence of Papa Erzuah. After the narrator, through flashback, describes Erzuah’s ex-wife, Maame, as “a proud tower of fat” – a metaphor and hyperbole depicting her overweight size - we witness a scene that perhaps broke the camelback of their marriage in those days. In an argument between the couple about Maame’s infidelity with Yaw Brago, her anger soars:

With her eyes searching the compound sky—the onion sky she looked at so often—she began to sing a song of supplication to God, showing her anger now only in the shaking of her big arms. Her brown cloth brightened with injustice, and her song was her twin. Then as she went on singing, her hand reached to her waist and loosened this cloth. As it fell onto the old concrete, she turned round with speed, pulled her underwear down, and completely bared her buttocks. She continued to sing, her eyes up high. Her beads defined her outrage, were the roundabouts of the utter confusion in the eyes of Erzuah. He could not move; Kofi wanted to borrow his father’s feet, but he could not move to do so either. .. four feet stuck in the depths of the world. (p.4)

The language the narrator deploys in this account is descriptive; the extract engenders mental and visual images that describe a typically cantankerous woman. It must be added quickly that this scene is one that audience of an *anansesem* can relate to; apart from the fact there are such women in real life Maame's display is full of life and gestures, as can be found in our folktales. Maame's shameless behaviour coupled with our knowledge of her "fat" frame creates a grotesque scene. For Maame to "bare her buttocks" to the world is a disgrace to womanhood as one woman observes: "You have made all women naked in Accra today" (p.5). But one is not exactly surprised at this performance because one realises, as her husband confirms, that she, at the time, "shook [her] buttocks at Yaw Brago" (p.3). When Erzuah tells his son, little Kofi not to behold his mother's nakedness because "she is mad, she's mad in the buttocks" we appreciate sadly that Erzuah's observations are correct. Beyond this sickening hilarity, our attention is drawn to the reason for Maame's infidelity and subsequent madness—money. Yaw Brago was rich and that verity lured Maame onto his bed. When the husband exclaims, "he's rich, though there's nothing between his legs. It's money, not manhood, that he has between his legs!" the wife also proclaims, "Yaw Brago wants to give me a cloth so what, so what, I'll take it . . . I'll take it at night lying down. So God help me!" (p.4). In the midst of all the hilarity, Laing draws attention to the fact that poverty can cause infidelity, and marital squabbles. This marital tension is also felt in Manager Agyemang's home. After work one night, he comes home to meet:

Three fish [sleeping] on his plate by the kenkey, each representing the graded silences of his wife; the gravy wore neat onions, shouted through its pepper; when he ate, his jaws were lonely, so he rushed out to a Lodge meeting, trailing her silence behind him and wishing she were dead. (p.30)

The personifications in the extract do not per se show the blandness of the meal, but they reveal the weariness of the Agyemang union, the despair in their lives.

Further humour is captured when Beni Baidoo meets Maame down the street. The former screams: “Maame-oooo, Maame! It’s me Baidoo. If you don’t want Erzuah now, why don’t you try me? We can lie down together, and whisper our skins to each other” (p.13). That extended ‘o’ sound is for emphasis, a language style that is used in Ghana, and also common in our folktales. In the extract, readers realise that since Maame’s infidelity has reached the ears of many, Baidoo also feels free to tender his proposal. When he says, “your thinness equals my bones, we can knock ourselves together, like old drums better with age” we perceive the sarcasm and irony, because with our previous encounter with Maame, we do know that she is nowhere near “thinness.” However, Baidoo’s words highlight the fact that Maame is struggling just like he is. Perhaps not in a suggestive sense, Kojo Laing unwittingly intimates that the masses should come together to solve their problems, each helping the other. The futility of the march to the castle at the end of the novel refutes this point; thus Kojo Laing does not seem to have the solution to Ghana’s leadership problem.

Moving on, it is funny, though, to find later how Kojo Pol and a dog “shared one wrapper of groundnuts, which the dog kept glancing suspiciously at . . . feeling that Okay Pol was having more than it was” (p.27). Though it might appear somewhat contrived, on a deeper lever, the feelings of the dog resonate with the feeling of the masses towards their leaders—cheated! Just as “all boys’ quarters stare so enviously and with such anger at the master’s main buildings” (p.19) so do the masses stare

helplessly as their leaders squander the nation's resources. The personification in the extract is apt in portraying the inequality in the Ghanaian society.

With our knowledge of deeper meanings beneath the humour in the text, we are able to appreciate the deeper meaning of Abena's humorous description:

One of Abena's eyes was constantly quarrelling with the other, For they could not agree on the angle at which the world should be looked at; so the crossing routes of her eyes made Adwoa roll in flight, made confusion among the stars; Abena's rubber frown was taken from her rubber bag which had no money; she was a tele-phonist but the only person she wanted to phone was God; she would draw a telephone in the dust and try to call God thus, but God's phone was always engaged; 'G—O—D ooo! God!' she would shout without answer [. . .]. (p.30)

The narrator describes Abena's squint in a funny way, a way that is almost unforgivable. Apparently, her unique eyes scare even the witch, Adwoa. However, her look is beyond tangible; the disharmony with Abena's eyes shows the confusion in her life. Laing sustains the interest of the readers with humour as he at the same time reveals his themes, the confusion and despair in the lives of the masses. Like her compatriots Abena experiences the feeling of fighting the system alone. It is no wonder then that she tries to phone God. In real life people search for God when they hit rock bottom. And again the extended 'o' sound on the penultimate line of the extract adds emphasis to her struggle for help, her helpless prayer for money in her "rubber bag," and principally, a search for meaning in her life. The fact that she calls God without an answer from him depicts the hopelessness of the masses. The third person omniscient narrator's account of the thoughts and deep feelings of the characters helps the reader to understand and identify with the characters, and also

question the political structures of Ghana. It appears Laing's celebrates individualism in the fight against leadership failure and disillusionment.

Another example of humour is the dialogue between Kofi Loww and Mustapha. With a pressing issue on his mind, Mustapha approaches Loww:

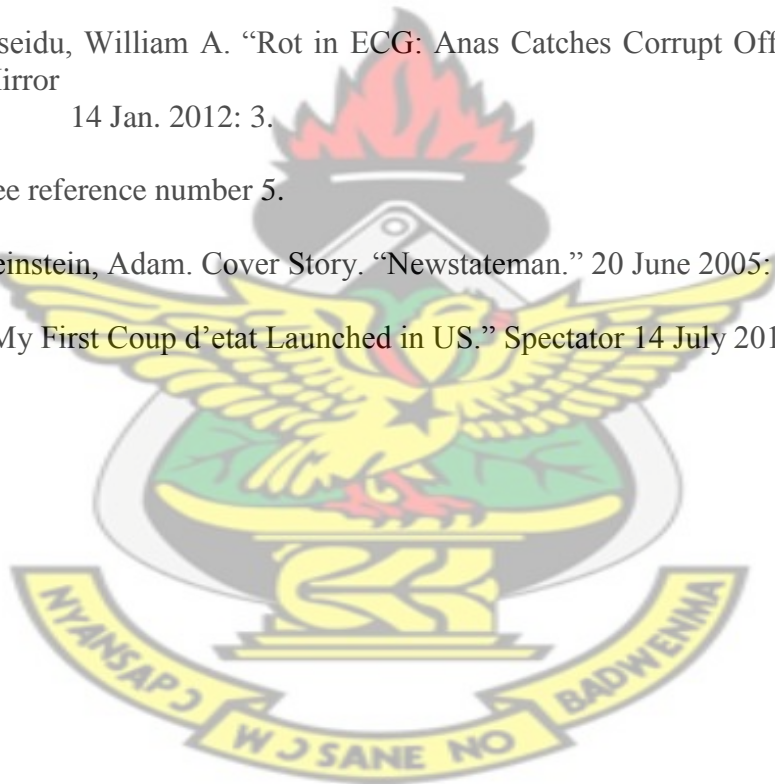
Masa, something de trouble me paaaa . . . you see, my t'in,
my Popylonkwe, I no fit rise again, I no fit commot my
wife. When she shake her big-big buttocks, I no make stiff
kora! I beg you, Help me! Take me for big doctor. (p.17)

The humour used in describing Mustapha's situation is sidesplitting as it is pathetic. With the meaning of "popylonkwe" provided in the glossary, one wonders what Mustapha would do if he does **not get help pronto**, especially when his wife tries to help by shaking "her big-big buttocks." Once again it is important to note that the humour lies in Laing's seriousness; thus Mustapha's "popylonkwe" is actually a symbol of his life. With that in perspective, it means that Mustapha's life is in the doldrums. Mustapha's type of pidgin like Private Mahamadu's – as seen earlier in the discussion – expands Laing's literary frontiers beyond the shores of Ghana; thus people like Nigerians can easily relate to Mustapha's predicament and indeed Mustapha's situation succinctly captures the situation of the masses in post-independent African societies.

Kojo Laing's disillusionment with the Ghanaian political structures and his hope for reconstruction perhaps compelled him to write *Search Sweet Country*. Undoubtedly, the activities of crooked leaders have a negative effect on the common people

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CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

One expects that independence and the period after its attainment would yield recognisable fruits but as expressed by the masses in *The Beautiful Ones are not yet Born* and *Search Sweet Country*, there is deep political disillusionment in the Ghanaian society. We have had a tour of the Ghanaian, and indeed African society years after independence and undoubtedly, we have seen leadership deficits. What has happened to all the promises made by leaders at the dawn of independence? Leaders have come and leaders have gone – some were forcefully uprooted – yet leadership failure is apparent in Ghana. Is it just a matter of “power corrupts and absolutely power corrupts absolutely”? This study has examined the exploitative and materialistic nature of leaders in Ghana, and by extension, Africa, and how this has taken its toll on the masses. We have analysed, against the backdrop of the theory of defamiliarization, that African leaders have betrayed their citizens. It is beyond doubt these leaders are downright avaricious. We have discussed constitutional governments under Nkrumah’s regime in *The Beautiful Ones*, and military governments under Acheampong’s regime in *Search Sweet Country*.

Ayi Kwei Armah and Kojo Laing hold up the mirror through which Ghanaians can assess themselves and their society. These two writers are not linked only by their nationality but more importantly, they have portrayed their disgust at political leadership failure, and also their concern for the masses that bear the brunt of this failure. Though their styles differ – Armah’s pungent satire and Laing’s light-hearted tone - both Armah and Laing express the common goal of a reconstruction of the

Ghanaian society. While Armah over-familiarizes political disillusionment in through his graphic presentation of it, Laing defamiliarizes political disillusionment through humour. Both writers embark on an artistic awareness creation to help in the process of reconstruction.

Also, the titles of their texts reveal this hope: Armah's *The Beautiful Ones are not yet Born* depicts the hope that Ghana can have good leaders, of course that is when the issue of leadership failure is critically addressed. Laing's *Search Sweet Country* speaks volumes about the sweetness Ghana should possess, as regards our culture and natural resources. Laing actually calls for a return of our true indigenous society which is rich in minerals for the country's general good. The characterization of both texts highlights the inequality in the society; while so-called leaders loot the nation's coffers, both Armah and Laing glaringly portray the hunger and despair of the general populace. Both authors give the novels a historical perspective – true regimes - that compels one to assess the Ghana of today. Assessment of Nkrumah's regime through to Acheampong's regime to date shows that Ghana has serious leadership deficits.

Ayi Kwei Armah is undoubtedly a revolutionary writer who has brought history to life in a way that projects the issues discussed as germane to the socio-political situation of Ghana today. In his *The Beautiful Ones*, Armah has given us the opportunity to relate to the plight of the common citizen. We have analysed the activities of mendacious new African leaders, through Koomson, in the horrifyingly corrupt and materialistic contemporary Ghana, and the sordid state and destitution of the masses. Neither the Man's moral uprightly nor the symbolic cleansing at the end

of *The Beautiful Ones* gives clear indications of a better Ghana, a developed independent Africa.

In a similar vein, Kojo Laing, though in a blithe manner, depicts how bitter his *Sweet Country* really is. Through leaders and intellectuals like Dr. Boadi who is the epitome of “crowded bush of money, status and power” we see how absurd the thought of transformation might sound. Eventually, the search of the characters, the masses for a better Ghana and a better standard of living proved futile; their march to the castle to see the president was thwarted as a group of policemen at the gate of the castle bribed them with food. The reason for their march was then made useless as they had food to fill their hungry stomachs. The reason for the march is however better presented in an article in “The Mirror” by William A. Aseidu:

My brothers and sisters, our government have failed us and we need to let our politicians understand that we know that they are eating far more than us, the ordinary people, and if they do not change their ways and begin to handle our little money better, we will not hesitate to throw them out of office any time we get the opportunity. (12)

Both Armah and Laing do not provide solutions to the political situation in Ghana. However, the reading of their novels offers us a deep insight into the post-independence Ghanaian society— a provision of a platform for transformation. We have witnessed the activities of political leaders and the elite, and the plight of the populace in *The Beautiful Ones* and *Search Sweet Country*—Armah and Laing demonstrate the relationship between leadership failure and the poor standard of living of the masses. After independence, the new breed of leaders has exhibited their chief preoccupation; these leaders do not arrive to save the masses from slavery and

poverty but to reinforce the phenomena. Like the masses, we are also deeply disillusioned when we come to the realization that the campaign for freedom, and for that matter leadership positions, was and is a camouflage for their fascination with the colonialist lifestyle and also their own materialistic pursuits. At the end of the novels we cannot miss the vicious circle of this canker, and we are left to almost anticipate other groups of such leaders. Neither the one upright man could change his society in *The Beautiful Ones* nor could the GROUP march do any good in *Search Sweet Country*—both novels have dismal endings. The recommendations are, therefore, left open to readers

It is recommended that further inter-disciplinary studies on leadership failure and post-independence political disillusionment in Africa be carried out. Additional research should attempt an in-depth and holistic analysis of the root(s) of leadership failure in African societies. Addressing the root of leadership failure will greatly help solve the socio-political challenges in Ghana and other African countries.

It is also recommended that writers challenge themselves to provide some sort of counsel or suggestions in their writings. Novels should be able to challenge readers to a better Ghana, Africa. Undoubtedly, if novels contain these practical guidance or solutions, novelists and/or novels will be repositories for knowledge and information on national issues and development. “Modern writers should do more than merely reflect the despair and ennui of late-bourgeois society; they should try and take a critical perspective on this futility revealing positive possibilities beyond it.” (Lucacs’ 1963:10). This was the standard criticism of Armah’s first novel. He went on in

subsequent novels to offer solutions. Achebe says in *Anthills of the Savannah*:
“Writers do not give prescriptions; they give headaches.”

It is also recommended that the phenomenon of intellectual activism should be embraced. A socio-political education that engenders consciousness in the common people about changing biased and crooked political structures is germane in keeping political leaders and elite in check. Thus this education will champion the masses against unscrupulous exploitation and its ills.

Another recommendation for leadership reform is the use of the media. The media should be free and fair. Indeed the attainment of independence and freedom decades ago should reflect in the reportage of the media. The television and radio stations and the print media should be non-partisan. The challenge lies in the fact that some programs on the various stations are sponsored by companies and organisations that may have political affiliations. How then will the stations broadcast cases of bribery and corruption and other misdeeds when the sponsors are involved? When the media, and for that matter journalists become neutral, issues of poor leadership and its concomitant problems can be put into the public domain, and this help constrain all involved. Indeed, “there can be no freedom if journalists exist in conditions of corruption, poverty or fear.”

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