

CORRUPTION AS A SOCIAL VICE IN AYI KWEI ARMAH'S *THE BEAUTYFUL ARE NOT YET BORN*

N'Dri Denis N'GORAN

Assistant Lecturer of African Studies

Department of English

Pelefero Gon Coulibaly University of Korhogo (Côte d'Ivoire)

denisngoran333@upgc.edu.ci

Abstract: After independence, many African political leaders hardly live up to their people expectations. Very great evils eroded their countries' rule and led to the deterioration of the relationship between political leaders and citizens. Ghana was not an exception in this spiral of misrule and as corruption under moral and physical forms became a selfish business that impacted the whole society. Through Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Are Not Yet Born*, we did a decryption of corruption in post-colonial Ghanaian society and propose some clues to curb it. Socio criticism (P. Zimma, 2000, p. 236) is the theory used for this analysis for it is essentially concerned with that which the text transcribes, it is to detect and interpret the social inscriptions within the text.

Keywords: Business, Corruption, Moral, Physical, Politics

La corruption comme vice social dans *The beautiful are not yet born* de Ayi Kwei Armah

Résumé : Après l'indépendance, de nombreux dirigeants politiques africains ont à peine été à la hauteur des attentes de leur peuple. De très grands maux ont miné la gouvernance de leurs pays et ont conduit à la détérioration des relations entre les décideurs politiques et leurs concitoyens. Le Ghana n'a pas fait exception dans cette spirale de mauvaise gouvernance et la corruption sous des formes morales et physiques est devenue une entreprise égoïste qui a eu un impact sur toute la société. À travers *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* d'Ayi Kwei Armah, un

décryptage de la corruption est fait dans la société post-coloniale ghanéenne et quelques solutions sont énumérées pour l'endiguer. La sociocritique (P. Zimma, 2000, p. 236) est la théorie utilisée pour cette analyse car elle s'occupe essentiellement de ce que le texte transcrit, c'est-à-dire de détecter et d'interpréter les inscriptions sociales dans le texte.

Mots-clés : Affaire, Corruption, Morale, Physique, Politique

Introduction

“Corruption is the intentional non-compliance with the arm’s-length principle aimed at deriving some advantages for oneself or for related individuals from this behavior, according to B. Begovic (2005, p.2). It means the use of public office for private gain or the use of official position for one’s own benefit. It includes bribery, extortion, fraud, embezzlement, nepotism, cronyism, appropriation of public assets and property for private use, and influence peddling. This scourge took shape in the daily life of Ghanaians after independence and became a routine in the whole country. Thus, almost everyone praised and adopted a corrupted attitude somehow. Ayi Kwei Armah devoted a deep satire about this tendency in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* by denouncing its different forms. Such attitude puzzled us and led to some thorny questions. What are those kinds of corruption? To what extent is their impact upon the whole society? Can anything be done against it?

This article is considered around three main parts. The first part is about ethics and moral corruption which affect mentality. The second one tackles effective and patent corruption and the last part consists of some recommendations which can allow to curb that social vice.

1. Ethics and Moral Corruption

Ethics is in connection with intrinsic values and life's conception. It goes along with the qualities of a person to face a situation and make some qualitative choices. A person of a good morality makes almost decisions in accordance with a certain probity. Such a person is used to caring about his personality within society and therefore is cautious about his actions. By definition,

"The word 'ethics' derived from the Greek word 'ethos' which means "custom". It shares an equivalent meaning with yet another word "mores", which means "customs" or "habits". The two words are used interchangeably to mean "customs, habits and acceptable ways of behaviour of an individual or a community sometimes" (Ochulor & Bassey, 2010, p.467).

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that deals with the rightness or wrongness of human action. It is for this reason that G. Ozumba (2004, p. 4) holds that ethics deals with judgments as to the rightness or wrongness, virtuousness or viciousness, desirability or undesirability, approval or disapproval of an action. Through one's ability to judge and appreciate things, it becomes easy to make difference between evil and good habits. People can freely make some decisions and act. The one who does so is aware of the action and knows the quality of the path he is taking. In short, ethics corruption takes into consideration the biased judgement of somebody before a situation and his agreement to go along with such a situation. So, that person deliberately flouts some moral principles for some potential personal gains. Such a reality is perceptible with the reaction of the messenger. "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 (...) you will be corrupting a public officer (...) this is Ghana". (A.K. Armah, 1968, p. 19)

The messenger accepts and incorporates kickbacks as a condition to get his own possessions. He hardly admits the possibility to be paid without bribing a public officer. He feels obliged to give a kickback to him whereas it is the job of this authority and he monthly receives his salary. It is in the mind of the messenger to do that for it has probably been admitted in the society like a legal action. He is ready to follow the country tendency despite the dangerous risks such action can bring about. The messenger is mentally prepared for he has seen a lot in the country.

Another symbol of moral corruption is Oyo (the man's wife). Her reaction to her husband work narrative confirms it.

The man looks at his wife and finds her eyes fixed on his face. (...)

Somebody offered me a bribe today. (...) to get him an allocation.

And like an Onward Christian Soldier you refused?

The sudden vehemence of the question takes the man completely by surprise (...)

the man took a long look at his wife's face. (A.K. Armah, 1968, p. 43)

Oyo is very categoric and disapproves her husband's sense of honesty. She condemns him because he did not reproduce a very spread norm throughout the country. At his stead, she would have done another way by following the majority opinion who easily accepts illicit enrichment. Religious values hardly get importance and consideration for her. She has inwardly adopted everyone conception of wealth by overriding whatever morality. That is why "She always disregards her husband and describes him as a "chichi dodo (p.43)". It means that she is not satisfied by her

husband, she wants him to be like Koomson, corrupt and wealthy" (Kayode, 2012).

We understand Oyo's reaction and discontent towards her husband. Her insults denote her blame-worthy upbringing and greed for money. She expects to break her husband pride so that he succumbs to the next temptations and illegal propositions at work. She wants her husband, the man, to make fortune rapidly by crook. So, she forces him to get involved on corruption for the progress and prosperity of the family. She dares explaining him how to proceed.

There is then Oyo's mother who somewhere personifies moral corruption. She really encourages an abnormal financial deal through Koomson for a personal interest. "it is about the boat you are talking? She asked apologetically. (...) So they won't allow you to buy the boats? The old woman asked, pained. (...) the old woman almost leaped up with indignation. And so as for ministers, don't they also eat? Foolishness, just foolishness" (A.K. Armah, 1968, pp.136-137)

Oyo's mother becomes indignant for there can be probably some obstacles to her profit of boat acquisition with the gratitude of Koomson. She hopes to get out from her poor social class through gravy. Her mentality accepts that fact for she no more perceives embezzlement illegal and even opposes herself to the potential law defender. Her old age is not a brand of wisdom to calm down Koomson. On the contrary, she participates in the plan of theft through encouragements. She is a key engineer of manipulation and the frontier of the boat treaty with the Koomsons. Her strategies are simple and "The commonest one is ... of appealing to the man's natural desire for material wealth in... form of a long car and a big house or a romantic effect of a sweet smelling perfume". (Ola, 1986, p. 1-15).

Oyo's mother expects to make a lot of profits with this business and get rid of poverty her daughter Oyo together with her grandchildren. She cannot no longer bear the idea of poverty undergone by them. She is doing her best for the success of that deal. She wants her daughter to live a life of opulence like Estella Koomson. The means for that life's style require few considerations, only the result is important. She wants to come out and make good impression in the public arena. Oyo's mother is the prototype of women with low morality who considers all opportunities to achieve her goals, above all with the help of somebody else.

Moral corruption finally externalizes in the mind of the lambda citizen. This one tends to accept abnormality. It is without inconveniency that immorality becomes a popular topic which does not shock anybody. Ordinary citizens seem to devote themselves to these scandalous practices and there is no shock wave. It is comprehensible in their mind due to numerous cases they have been submitted to. Adultery is part of those accepted practices and we perceive it from the mouth of the seller.

So buy for your wife, the seller sings back.

She has enough.

Your girlfriends. Young beautiful girls, no?

I have no girlfriends.

Ho, my white man, don't make me laugh. Have you ever seen a big man without girls?

Even the old ones; the seller laughs, even the old men.

(A.K. Armah, 1968, p. 37)

People no more consider adultery as an absurdity. They get so accustomed to such behaviour in the daily life of the society that they can't imagine a well accomplished person without a girlfriend. Their mentality accepts this sad reality and integrates it as a normal social fact. That is why the harassment undergone by Koomson to acquire the bread for

his probable girlfriend is easily understandable. He is viewed like everyone conducting an extra conjugal relation as it has become in the society. This conception spread all over Ghana and many men adopted it. Thus, there mentality was shaped to somewhere legalize adultery and incorporate it to existing social norms. It is no more a discomfort for people to talk about and even recommend it, above all a woman. In short, moral corruption makes sense because it is inside people. Those people cannot act due to lack of means, but their mind is very condemnable.

2. Effective and Physical Corruption

Physical corruption is a corruption in act. A type of corruption which includes the implementation of a preconceived plan. It highlights some actors who only think about their own interests. Unfortunately, those actors exist in all social classes with their corrupt behaviours. They do not hesitate to put completely out of mind republican values and prioritise their conception of happiness. This kind of corruption appears in the political sphere.

High level corruption refers to misconduct at the top and by leading politicians. Since these people are generally well-off and have a lot of privileges associated with their high office, their corrupt behaviour is not attributable to low pay and out of necessity to meet the living expenses of their families. Instead, greed is considered a main motivating factor. But there are other compulsions. To remain in office, for example, can also be an overriding motivating force. (Myint, 2000, p. 40)

Most of the time, politicians cannot starve to death. They can afford their basic needs without any worry. For them, it is necessary to store profusely to satisfy their greed. That is why they do not take into consideration any contradictory viewpoint in their rule. They call into question their

promised campaign to the detriment of the population. It seems they would like to make up for an existing lateness with other citizens. There is a confusion in the mind of those politicians who trespass on their authority. They embezzle public assets for personal use. This is the case of Joseph Koomson. "yes. But the money is not the difficult thing. After all, the commercial Bank is ours, and we can do anything, said Koomson. It's just a matter of signing some papers, and knowing what to do, that is all said Koomson" (A.K. Armah, 1968, pp. 136-137)

The social political leader is aware of his power to withdraw cash from banks. Thereby, Koomson is ready to hold the bank hostage for his proper will. The need of money leads him to take the ratepayer money at his preference. He does not think to render an account of anything to anybody. Koomson is in league in commercial activities, and corruption has become a normal activity. He considers the commercial bank like his private estate. So, he can proceed to its fund extortion and set them to his friends' disposal. This requisition of public assets is a common standard in the political area.

Physical corruption proves to be then existing in the state administration. There are some civil servants who cannot satisfy with their salary. They indulge by petitioners and accept compensations for their probable helps. Thus, those civil servants are not different of maggoty politicians facing the scourge of corruption.

The term "political corruption" thus tends to refer to corruption occurring at the policymaking stage or, (...), the input side of the political system, whereas "bureaucratic" or "administrative" corruption relates to the implementation of policy carried out by lower-level officials or the output side of the equation. (Bardhan, 2006); (Scott, 1972).

Administration corruption refers to civil servants and middle grade managements. They are exposed to all sorts of temptations with the rising rate of inflation. Their salary probably cannot allow to meet their exponential needs. All proposals appear like a godsend to thwart the difficulties of life and provide welfare to their families. Most of civil servants have got such mentally where the state interests come after their own ones. Most of time, they do it without contrition, it is a kind of revenge upon life for them. In the novel, the man's colleague is part of those workers with low morality.

The clerk answered with a chuckle, nothing else. It is so normal, all of this, that point of holding out against it escapes the unsettled mind. Everyone you ask will say the timber merchant is right, the allocations clerk is right, and you are a fool, and everyone is right the way things are and the way they will continue to be. The foolish ones are those who cannot live 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 the refusal to take the leap will help absolutely no one at any time. (A.K. Armah, 1968, p. 108)

We realise through him that the administration no more cares about its ethics and deontology. It refers to the doings of everyone and encourages the acceptance of all indecent proposals to be shelter from all needs. It is inconceivable to live near a river and wash one's hands with spit. It is the new fashion and when you oppose, people think you foolish and unambitious. The clerk is an irreproachable agent that can moralize his fellow worker. The clerk admits there is other alternative facing these seductive proposals and unfortunately, the whole administration is affected.

Physical corruption moreover reflects itself with business people. They arrange to preserve the interest of their

business by all means; even if these ways are not orthodox. The most important is to make profit, more profit and always profit. It is the logic of Amankwa who only dreams to protect his interests.

When he opens the office door there is a loud, pleased laughter inside, and a voice with a vague familiarity says, 'No. this is only your kola. Take it as kola'. another laugh. 'I was sure you would understand, if only I could find you properly. My friend, if you get the logs moving for me. I will see you again. Don't worry. I will take you to my own house. (A.K. Armah, 1968, p.107)

Corruption is fashionable with tycoons. They flout the different legal steps for having bargains. They are ready to invest money for being selected among their competitors. Such method is perceived as the best means to not go bankrupt. By insisting near the man and finally achieving with his colleague, Amankwa proves that transparency in business is only a theory and he can go forward with some maggoty civil servants. This type of corruption is not only manifest with salaried employee. It is also spread in liberal professions where employees rely on daily income to meet their needs. Thus, those practitioners need the favour of all the system to pull through. It is the case of transporters who adopted special relationship with policeman.

the driver understood. Without waiting to be asked for it, he took out his license folder from his shirt pocket, brought out a cedi note from the same place, and stuck it in the folder. Then, with his back turned to the people waiting in the bus, the driver gave his folder, together with the bribe in it, to the policeman. The policeman looked with long and pensive dignity at the license folder and at what was inside it. With his left hand he extracted the money, rolling it up dexterously into an easy little ball hidden in his palm, while with his right he made awkward calculating motions, as if

he were involved in checking the honesty of the document he held. (A.K. Armah, 1968, p. 182)

The transporter feels obliged to bribe the policeman with a note so that he does not hamper the journey. It is clear that his car is not in an acceptable position. Probably, his driving license is not updated or the car inspection has not been done. Anyway, the transporter solution was to bribe the policeman to avoid problems and the driver was allowed to go his way despite the risks.

Physical corruption is finally apparent in the field of illegal trade with the character of Abednego. "Abednego Yamoah, still free, perhaps never to be caught. Selling government petrol for himself, but so cleverly there is always someone else, a messenger, a cleaner, to be jailed, never Abednego. The whole world says he is a good man, and the whole world asks why we are not like him". (A.K. Armah, 1968, p. 96)

Abednego symbolises physical corruption in the framework of illegal trade. An ordinary citizen is not authorized to practice this business according to the government rules, but he does it with an unhidden face and no one can protest against and even attempt to arrest him. Whenever there are velleities of prosecution, only scapegoats are charged.

3. Curbing Corruption within Society

We realize that corruption strongly anchored in the Ghanaian society through different ways. People who do not have capacities to perpetrate such infraction hardly reject it and people who practice some jobs are influential actors of this cancer. Corruption affects all sectors of society under different forms. It involves embezzlement of huge sums of public funds and the mismanagement, wastage, inequity,

and social decay that come along with it. Therefore, corruption gives rise to habits that contribute directly to the rise of the underground economy and general frustration and “to Armah a corrupt society is a society where there is no room for morals; poor people cannot live freely without being abused by their leaders” (Charef, 2015, p. 28)

Through that corrupt system, the privileged and the well-connected enjoy economic rent. Most of the country wealth is concentrated in the hands of a tiny minority of the population where income distribution becomes uneven and the poor cannot afford to pay the required bribes for the different services. Corruption’s adverse impact proves to be particularly harmful for Ghana and immediate measures can help to curb it even if “everybody in Ghana (...) seems to have no hope of a better Ghana in future and so burry themselves neck-deep into corruption” Chukwueloka (2011, p.75). Thanks to the integrity and obstinate behaviour of the man, who refuses to take bribe from Amankwa (the thriving timber merchant) despite the pressures from the merchant himself, society’s change becomes possible. People must first accept to lead a modest and simple life. It is a quality developed by the man to be far from all types of avidities.

Oh, the steward boy, Koomson said, still playing with the loud noises from his huge toy. By the way, what will you drink?

Anything will do.

Oh, you must choose, said Koomson. There’s White Horse, you know. Black and white, Seagram’s, Gilbey’s Dry...

‘Anything will do,’ the man repeated, his voice deliberately dull.

‘well, I’ll let you choose, then.’ Said Koomson. ‘Atinga, bring the trolley, and put different drinks.

Put also ice, put glasses, four.’ (A.K. Armah, 1968, pp. 147-148)

The man leads a very simple and humble life. He is not pretentious and full of his own importance. This type of life allows him to be satisfied with little. He does not need to show his assets and does not bother to be authentic. Therefore, the exhibition of Koomson different qualities of drinks does not move him and he can easily refuse. The man is not under Koomson fascination who is full of material assets. Normally, every poor man would be impressed by such display of beverages and automatically indulges drinking. Through the insistence of Koomson, we perceive his desire of revenge on the man who has not been able to offer him such drinks during his visit to the man's. In fact, Koomson takes profit of all occasions to reveal his wealth to his visitors, and above all that he belongs to the upper class. Koomson's consumer goods do not move the man who is not influenced with material comforts.

Put an end to corruption then amounts to the respect of one's own values. It means people have to be tenacious and in accordance with one's commitments. The man follows such path as he refuses to be metamorphosed by the desires and pleasures of some corrupted characters. "I thought it was the old lady who was going to sign! He said. I don't think I can sign, said the man. I will sign it, said Oyo". (A.K. Armah, 1968, p. 150)

The man feels helpless when he realises that Koomson is trying to fool Oyo, his wife and his mother-in-law by involving them in the business of fish catching ship. He is inflexible and does not want to indulge into that dark bargain. He still keeps to some personal values and refuses to be associated to that forgery. He continues to follow ethically right path of the life. By resisting to his wife, he proves that perseverance in fairness is a noble way to overcome corruption. He stands firms and refuses to blame the responsibility of that ignoble practice. The man's

determination is an example to be highlighted for he is alone in such struggle. People do not share his opinion and even his close relatives oppose to him. Despite their attempts of influence, the man sets firmly in place. He is alone, but far from compromise agreements.

The combat against corruption can moreover be taken collectively, through political parties. It means political parties have to remember their electoral promise to population and implement them. The credibility of a political party is checked in its ruling policy, above all after taking power. The derelictions of duties and abuse of power can impair the existence of their mandate. Here, the ruling party is of the socialist ideology which is failing in his duty.

But they say we are socialist ministers, so we shouldn't do things.

(...)

So you are not allowed to own these things? Oyo asked.

'Don't mind them!' Estella's voice had climbed to its usual pitch. '

Do you know, they themselves, the ones who shout, own things, lots of things!'

Koomson gave his wife an under-brow glance, as if to say she was saying things that were not to be said. (A.K. Armah, 1968, p. 137)

It is important to respect the ideals and the establishing contract between the party and population. Thus, the campaign's promises are having priority and their enforcement is essential. The party will appear credible and each leader will not abuse his authority. If not, people will feel betrayed and disorder will set up. This is the reality where Koomson and his relatives seem to confuse public money with their personal interest. By the way, the

Social Democratic Parties economy should be capitalist, but well-regulated to protect the weak and disenfranchised in a

welfare state. The welfare state should be characterized by taxation and the redistribution of resources to create public social programs. The government should provide or subsidize certain programs such as education, healthcare, childcare, and infrastructure development. The interests of workers should be protected through unions or worker cooperatives, and enterprise should be regulated to prevent exploitation. (Simba, 2015, pp. 3-4)

A socialist party mission needs to be as such; it has to care about people welfare and not contribute to its exploitation as the ones of Koomson.

Curbing corruption can at last come from population if that population is aware that he is the real holder of power. Thus, population can denounce the monstrosities of its leaders and even bring about the ousting of the polity.

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? We knew then, and we know, that the only real power a black man can have will come from black people oily men were looking for support. (A.K. Armah, 1968, p. 82)

Population's realization will conduct politicians to be very moderated and not waste money for their personal interests like Koomson's. The crowd needs to be that kind of Damocles sword upon politicians' head to remind them that they are only servants for the wellbeing of everybody. So, people must no more be indifferent and quiet in front of these escapades. Their silence would be a sign of collusion which encourages continuity. It is urgent for people to wake up and call for change; this so expected change is still possible to be a reality.

Conclusion

Corruption has undoubtedly been a serious threat for post independent Ghanaian society. It has caused a lot of damages in many sectors of that society because of the responsibility of decisions makers and also lambda citizens. Such a common responsibility has laid the foundations of a social vice which spread over the society. Thus, different social classes emerged among populations with economic inequalities because politics' men and maggoty tycoons confiscated the country's wealth to the detriment of the other part of Ghanaian people.

Corruption has jeopardised the expected promises under the leadership and rule of Ghanaian authorities. It is emergent to establish a social justice so that no Ghanaian citizen be injured and the advantages of the State's rule be profitable for all. That is why the proposed solutions have to be implemented not only in Ghana but also in all African countries to struggle against all sorts of corruption for a bright future of oppressed classes. If so, corruption will disappear step by step from our current societies for establishing legality and promoting equity. In short, such restructurings will boost economic and social development of Africa.

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