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**Corruption in The African Novels: A Study of Helon Habila's
Waiting for An Angel and Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful
One's Are Not Yet Born***

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Abstract

The study is on Corruption in the African Novels: A study of Helon Habila's *Waiting for An Angel* and Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful One's Are Not Yet Born*. The study deals with the problem of corrupt leaders in West Africa, who embezzle public funds, oppress the masses, neglect duties and stop press freedom. Sociological criticism is the theory that informs this work. It is a theory in which the writer encourages the masses to rise up and defend themselves. The motive of the writer is to correct the social vices in the society. It was discovered from literary and non-literary sources that West Africa has the problem of corrupt leadership. The aim of the study is to x-ray the problem of corrupt leadership so that the next generation of leaders will not emulate bad leadership style from older leaders. The study will be of benefit to students, politicians and other people. The study will sensitize students to know that such evil existed in the past and should not be emulated.

Introduction

In West Africa, people no longer require a soothsayer or diviner to confirm that we have corrupt leaders occupying leadership positions in most West African countries. Leaders in West African countries borrowed a leaf from the colonial masters. This view is supported by Ngozi Chuma-Udeh who asserts thus:

It turned out that a group of 'black power' elite cult had stepped into the vacated seat of the colonial masters. These leaders started where their masters stopped. Theirs was the same, if not worse than the colonial pattern of politics. The ruling class were the products of the same evil they fought against (p.131).

From the ongoing discussion, it is clear that Africans in general, chased away the white men during the nationalist struggle in order to step into their shoes. Some of the West African nationalists who took over became worse than their predecessors. A few became dictators. As a result, West African people became disillusioned because, all the promises made to them during the nationalist struggle became a mirage. Hence Chinua Achebe cries out: "the independence his country was supposed to have won was totally without content. The old master was still in power. He had got himself a bunch of black stooges to do his duty work for commission (p.136)."

The peoples' hopes and expectations were shattered after independence. Neo-colonialism replaced colonialism. Literary artists were forced to pick up their pens to write in order to address the ills found among the leaders. As novelists write in order to proffer a solution to the problem of corrupt leadership in West Africa and Africa as a whole, the military juntas equally feign to fight corrupt leadership by seizing power.

The West African experience had shown that the military was worse than the civilian regime they feign to correct. This is because they are corrupt. They embezzle public funds with impunity. They indulge in all kinds corrupt practices without being probed. Their guns are their shield of defence. They are above the law. No wonder Helon Habila wrote that we are still waiting for an angel to come and rule the country. Helon Habila implies that we are waiting for leaders who are not corrupt to take over the leadership of our country. In Ghana, Ayi Kwei Armah wrote that the beautiful ones are not yet born in Ghana.

It is clear that West Africa has continued to grapple with the problem of corrupt leaders. Whichever type of leaders we get; it is always the same old story of corruption, embezzlement of public funds, oppression of the masses, inhibition of press freedom and neglect to tackle pressing needs.

As a result of the aforementioned problem, there is the need to study corruption in African novels, using Helon Habila's *Waiting for An Angel* and Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*.

Statement of the Problem

This study looked at corrupt leadership in Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* and Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*.

Purpose of the Study

The study contended that writers like Helon Habila and Ayi Kwei Armah used their novels to discuss the problem of corrupt leadership in Nigeria and Ghana respectively. The study examined in great details how the two novelists reflected corruption, embezzlement, oppression, negligence of duty and inhibition of press freedom in their novels.

Significance of the Study

This study will be of benefit to Nigeria, Ghana and other West African countries whose leaders need new orientation about leadership. If the leaders imbibe the new orientation on leadership, the pursuit of personal gains will stop. Also, most West African countries will advance economically. Funds for development will no longer be misappropriated. The money which some of our leaders keep in foreign banks will be channelled towards development. Increase in crime rate will stop because the money which ought to be embezzled will be used to create jobs for the teeming population roaming the streets without jobs. Also, the study will help to mould the character of students who will read the paper not to emulate the example of bad leaders. The study will also enhance students' literary needs.

Operational Definition of Terms

Corruption in this study was seen from the perspective of corrupt leaders at various leadership positions whether military or civilian who embezzle public funds, oppress the masses, inhibit press freedom and neglect their duty to the masses.

Theoretical Framework

Sociological criticism is the literary theory that informs this study. It is a literary criticism directed to understanding literature in its larger social context. It believes that literature relates to the society and that the writer draws from what is happening in the society of his time in order to write. The writer writes in order to correct the ills found in the society of his time.

It examines literature in the political, economic and cultural context in which it can be either written or received. It equally examines the sociological status of the author to look at how the group of people that the author lived with or worked among. It also examines the role of the audience in shaping the society.

Activities of Corrupt Leaders in *Waiting for an Angel*

Corruption and embezzlement of public funds were the order of the day during I.B.B and Abacha's regime as portrayed in the novel. Nigeria as a nation was amassing wealth through the oil boom yet; this wealth was not properly utilized. This was why students' needs at the Universities were not met. There was incessant closure of Universities because students resorted to protests and riots. The Student Union President summoned all the students at the University for a meeting. Bola, Lomba's friend went for the students' meeting. They wanted I.B.B who wanted to continue in power to step down. Lomba did not attend the meeting but he wanted to know what happened at the meeting through Bola's report. At the student union meeting, Sankara, the student union President told the students: "we are tired of phantom transition programmes that are nothing but grand designs to embezzle our money? Down with the juntas (pg.41)". This excerpt revealed that the national coffer was being looted through embezzlement by the military leaders. As Bola was reporting what happened at the meeting, he told Lomba:

"Yesterday, they changed the transition date again. I.B.B is deceiving us, he has no intention of leaving. It is our duty to push him out. We decided to boycott lectures from tomorrow, all Federal Universities ... Until I.B.B and his Khaki-boys get out of the Presidential Villa (pg.41)".

Later on, I.B.B left the Presidential Villa and handed power to Ernest Shonekan. Abacha ousted him out of power and began to rule. When Abacha began to rule the country, corruption and embezzlement of public funds continued. The Dial Newspaper had to write to expose this evil. They published an article captioned: "ABACHA: THE STOLEN BILLION"! As a result of this publication, The Dial Newspaper was burnt down. James Fiki the owner of Dial Newspaper was haunted. His passport was seized and he had to go on a self-imposed exile.

Oppression of the masses was so rampant during military regime. Lomba, one of the characters in the novel was oppressed by the military junta at the beginning of the novel. Lomba was in the prison cell as a prisoner. He was caught with wraps of papers which he was using to write down his prison experiences. He was caught and butted to the point of losing consciousness. After torturing him, the superintendent called him "saboteurs" and "anti-government rats". Lomba was blindfolded and thrown into a solitary cell.

Dele Giwa's case is another instance of oppression highlighted in the novel. He was sent a letter bomb. The bomb exploded and he died.

To conclude this section, an attempt had been made to look at the activities of bad leaders. It was discovered that the national coffer was looted through

embezzlement. Any Newspaper house that dared to criticize the government would be burnt down. The owners of such Newspaper houses would either become political prisoners or end up in exile. The Universities were closed down without thinking about the effect such closure would have on the nation in future. There were long queues at the filling stations. Prisoners were beaten and kept for a long time without trial. Such was the case with military regime that people were either waiting for an angel of death or that of liberty. The angel of Liberty came down when the military President died.

Activities of Corrupt Leaders in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*

Koomson, one of Nkrumah's party men was a replica of what was happening among the men in Power at that time. Corruption from Ayi Kwei Armah's perspective was so putrid that the whole environment was stinking with the foul smell of corruption. The man, a nameless character in the novel was going home after work. He boarded a bus in order to go back to his house. Inside the bus, he closed his eyes but the rotten stench of corruption from several locations told him where they were. Corruption in Ghana was so infectious that the masses were involved. It permeated every section of their economy. A discussion between two Ghanaians on what happens when one wins the Ghana lottery revealed that corruption permeated the Ghana lottery, the police outfit, the civil service and all other sectors. The phrase, "This is Ghana" implied that corruption was the order of the day in Ghana. The masses wanted the good things of this life which they saw the corrupt leaders enjoying. Most of them resort to make both ends meet by collecting or giving bribes. The man was working in his office when a timber contractor entered. Amankwa is the name of the timber contractor. He wanted his timbers in the forest to be delivered where it ought to be delivered. The booking clerk deliberately left Amankwa's timber in the forest. The booking clerk wanted Amankwa to give him bribe. Amankwa decided to give bribe to the booking clerk so that his timber could be booked. He thought that the man was the right person to be given the bribe. The man rejected the bribe and Amankwa was annoyed with him. When the allocation clerk came, he collected the bribe, booked the timber and shared the bribe with his supervisor. When the man returned home, he told his wife that he rejected bribe in his office. His wife called him "Chichidodo" (a bird that abhors excrement but feeds in maggots). Bribery was so common among the people that those who refuse to partake were given names. This was why the man had to be nicknamed a "Chichidodo".

To conclude this section, there is evidence from literary and non-literary sources that corruption, bribery, embezzlement, oppression and negligence of duty existed in Ghana during Nkrumah's regime and the regime of those that ousted him out of Power.

Conclusion

Here, attempts have been made to summarize all that has been done in this research adventure. From the previous sections, enough has been said to prove that a novelist involves himself in correcting the ills in his society. From the efforts made in this study, and from the viewpoints of all the scholars whose works were reviewed, it is clear that a novelist is the moral consciousness of his society. As a social crusader, the novelist stands out among the crowd to write and preach against corrupt politicians occupying leadership positions in the society (Nnolim, 62). The novelist as a social crusader preaches against bribery and corruption, embezzlement of public funds, oppression of the masses, inhibition of press freedom and negligence of duty among leaders. The novelist is also an artist, a social crusader and an eye of the society whom the people look up to for inspiration, hope, motivation and direction.

Helon Habila picked up his pen to write so that the future generation would bear witness to a time in Nigeria when leaders turned into despot leaders to oppress the people they were leading. He expressed how the hopes and aspirations of the people were shattered and buried underground. It was this situation that made characters in the novel to wait for an angel. Those that died during military regime met the angel of death. The angel of deliverance came when Abacha died and his death brought to an end the military regime in Nigeria.

The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born on the other hand can be seen as a message of optimism or pessimism by the novelist. The novelist keeps the option open because it is possible that they may be born tomorrow (Owonoeyla, 22). The man, who was despised by his wife, later won the approval of his wife. The man's wife had learnt a lesson through what happened to Koomson. Koomson was being haunted by the new government in power. Koomson escaped with the help of the man. While the man was coming back after escorting Koomson, he saw the policeman collecting bribe in spite of the fact that there was a change of leadership. In other words, a new set of corrupt leaders had seized power.

The two novels studied have shown that West African countries lack good leaders. The literary and non-literary sources confirmed this fact. This lack made the masses to suffer. It has also set the nations involved backwards.

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