



Freedom And Justice: A Post-Colonial Analysis Of Ayi Kwei Armah's Fragments

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Abstract

Ghana is a West African country which had been colonized by European rulers for centuries. The first president of the independent Ghana was Kwame Nkrumah and he designed the motto of the nation as 'Freedom and Justice'. Ayi Kwei Armah's second novel Fragments expresses that the motto is contradictory to the reality that are happening in Ghana. In this paper, the researcher focuses on various aspects by which the motto 'Freedom and Justice' has been corrupted by the people of post-colonial Ghana. Most specifically, it reveals the injustice rendered to the people who return from abroad.

Keywords: Injustice, Ghana, colonisation, society.

INTRODUCTION

Ghana is a West African country. It had been colonised by European colonisers from 1870 to 1957. Though they came to Ghana for the purpose of trade, they enslaved Ghanaians under their imperialistic rule. Ghana is the first country which got its independence in the African continent. It got independence in 1957 and Kwame Nkrumah became the first president. After the independence, the president designed the motto of the country as, 'Freedom and Justice'. The period which comes chronologically after colonisation can be mention with the term 'post-colonial'. The paper focuses on freedom and justice experienced by the Ghanaians in post-colonial Ghana.

Ayi Kwei Armah is a contemporary writer of Ghana, who was born in 1939 in the coastal city, Sekondi-Takoradi which is at the southern part of Ghana. He has gone abroad for his education in 1959 and returned to his native land in 1963. He is fond of writing novels depending on the political background and sufferings of Ghanaians in their native land after colonisation. His second novel, Fragments published in 1970 with the post-colonial aspects, gives different perspective to the motto of the nation. Though Ghanaians have the motto to make the people experience full freedom

and justice, the incidents that take place in the novel makes the readers feel the motto remains passive in the post-colonial nation.

The protagonist of the novel is Baako who is called as been-to by his family and the society. Been-to means a person who has come from abroad. Baako returns to Ghana after his studies from United States. The society expects been-to to bring some gifts from abroad and live as a rich man in the society. But things happen in a different way, as Baako undergoes sufferings and fail to live as society expects. He witnesses the events happening around him, which stands as the symbol of the corrupt society of Ghana. He is eager to bring change in the society but his inability of doing brings nervous breakdown to him. Finally, for his inability the protagonist is considered as a mad man by the society. Juana, a psychiatric doctor, supports Baako in all his chaotic situations and comforts him by staying with him during his difficult times.

The novel has the essence of injustice and slavery in different dimension. From the beginning of the novel the protagonist Baako is considered as 'been-to' by his family. But the expectations of the society force him to live as they wish. When Baako consults the psychiatric doctor Juana, Baako says "the family is always there, with a solid presence and real demands" (Fragments 149). These lines show the belief that the native people of Ghana have with the persons who has gone abroad. Such demands force the been-to Ghanaians to live in the way they expected, which alienate them from the native people and restrain their freedom. The society constructs the frame that the been-to should live rich with costly car. The been-to who does not come under that frame will be considered as mad person by the society. The justice framed by the society restricts individual freedom to live.

Baako meets another been-to, Brempong in the flight and Brempong insists Baako to buy some foreign thing from abroad while he returns to his country. It is the only expectation of the people who are waiting for him in his native land. During his return Baako does not buy anything but Brempong does it, and for the foreign goods, Brempong is celebrated by his family and the people. No one wishes to care for Baako as they do with Brempong. This is the treatment of injustice that has been experienced by the been-to Ghanaians.

The injustice practices become familiarised among the people of post-colonial Ghana. Baako approaches the secretary of Civil Service Commission to join as junior assistant to him. The secretary neglects him by saying that he is busy with works and he goes out. Baako notices him smoking and chatting with his colleagues outside. The reason for his negligence is explained by an artist, Ocran to Baako. Ocran says, "That's what they say when they want a bribe" (121). It is from Ocran's point of view, Baako is portrayed as an ignorant man, who fails to accept the common thing in that society, bribery. His ideas expose that Ghanaians are familiar with corruption. It is vivid that injustice pertains in the post-colonial nation.

Though they are familiar with injustice, it enforces the Ghanaians to undergo psychological sufferings. Juana sees that a little dog is surrounded by many men with weapons to attack it. They kill it and rejoice in their killing as victory. When the author mentions about the men and the dog he tells, "... a fear could be seen in them whose strength was strange, seeing that the source of it was such a powerless thing" (33). Here, the dog is mentioned as powerless thing and the strength of the men are extreme to kill it. The suppression face by the working-class men in that society under people in power makes them to do brutal killing of a powerless dog. The authoritative people create a frame, in which working-class people should obey the authoritarians though it is unfair order. This triggers the anxiety of the people against their moral ideology.

The general mindset of working-class people is expressed in Juana's meeting with a psychiatric lab assistant, Bukari. Where Bukari talks about the patients in the lab that they live against the current of suppressed life style of the Ghanaian people. Bukari describes his patients "Fish out of water, yes. Boiling water" (44). The boiling water represents the society which obeys all the rules framed by the capitalists without questioning. The society accepts it as a sort of justice even after getting freedom. The people who are other than the capitalists are living as oppressed in an independent nation. Before getting freedom, the people did it for British authorities and now for the corrupt post-colonial leaders. This signifies that the freedom they got becomes meaningless. The people who resist the ideologies of the capitalists are considered as mad people by the society. At the end of the novel the protagonist undergoes such circumstances and meets the same destiny for being fish out of boiled water.

The economic status of the people measures the value of people in the society. A driver helps Baako to admit Baako's bleeding pregnant sister Araba in the hospital. The nurse asks and understands that Baako is not the member of Civil Service Commission, so she asks them to admit Araba in old maternity ward as the new one is only for VIPs. In the old ward, no nurse can be easily approachable. So Baako and the driver search for the doctor and nurse and find them after long time. This too shows the treatment of injustice rendered to the poor native people. The lives of the people of Ghana are fragmented depending on the economic status of the society.

The people who showcase themselves as public servants never work for the welfare of common people. The editor of a famous magazine, Akosua Russell arranges a private meeting for the writers. At the end of the meeting a young boy from the audience asks whether they conduct the workshop for the higher education of students. Akosua avoids him with an answer, "That's really a question of normal routine, ... All such questions will be dealt with afterwards" (166). This shows that she has arranged the meeting not for the benefit of the writers, instead to get money out of it. Her assistants beats Lawrence Boateng for justifying the young boy's question. So even as a skilled writer, Boateng struggles to express his ideas under the powerful person in the meeting. The scene is contradictory to the motto of the nation 'Freedom and Justice'.

In all dimensions, the reality of Ghanaian lives is contradictory to the motto freedom and justice in the post-colonial Ghana. Very few people like Juana are more sociable with the people in post-colonial Ghana. European colonisers controlled the native people of Ghana before independence, but after getting independence, people live under the control of the local party leaders. Their mind is corrupt with the ideas of Europeans and the policies they made to control the people. As Damodar Rao mentions in his book, *The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah*, "The society is fragmented in the absence of a just social order and valid ideology" (Rao 56). The freedom of the Ghanaians is exploited by the corrupt leaders and the ideologies made by the leaders persists slavery in the nation. The freedom and justice are framed by the rich people and political leaders, and are just blindly followed by the Ghanaians as their motto in post-colonial Ghana.

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