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African postcolonial fiction and the poetics of eco-cultural decadence: Re-reading Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and Sembène Ousmane's *Xala*

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Abstract

In the depiction of post-independence Africa, the collapse of traditional moral values is a major preoccupation. This concern is often represented in the form of despicable behaviors exhibited by characters, often influenced by Western ideologies, and also in metaphors of decay or decadence. Decadence, from the literary sense of the word, could be interpreted as the moral or cultural rottenness of a community and in the literal usage of the term, it can be understood as an environmental uncleanness. Morally, a society is decayed if its moral principles and philosophies of living are weak while in the physical manifestation of the sense of the term, a decayed environment is associated with filth, pollution and physical rottenness. This paper examines the deployment of decadence as symptomatic of moral collapse and of environmental defacement in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and Sembène Ousmane's *Xala*. We read these texts in a theoretical

context drawn from insights in postcolonial ecocriticism. While our analysis will concentrate on the ecopolitical force of the narratives, we will also examine the aestheticization of decay as a narrative device – a metaphor that foregrounds humans' role, either by their complacency or collaboration, in destroying their environment. A critical attention will be paid to how the degradation of the environment results in the degradation of the humans as well. We conclude by pointing out that the representation of physical and moral decadence in postcolonial African literature is one way of indicting humans for degrading the environment in their quest for material acquisition.

Keywords: Africa, Postcolonial, Environment, Pollution, Corruption

Introduction

In the study of post-colonial literature in Africa, emphasis on the representation of the continent's socio-political problems has attracted so much attention that it would be unnecessarily repetitive to begin to make belated speculations on the role of literature in historicizing the continent's realities. There is virtually no substantial contention about the view that African post-colonial writers deploy the art form to depict the problems of Africa.

At the beginning of African literature in European languages, the pioneer writers took on the task of narrating Africa from the inside, redeeming the image of the continent from colonialist distorted narratives. The generation of writers after them came with a Marxist outburst. Disenchanted with the failure of the political class, to actualize the ideals of independence, these writers focus their creative energies in criticizing, among other issues, the wanton corruption of the elites and the growing alienation and subjugation of the masses. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Wole Soyinka, Sembène Ousmane and Ayi Kwei Armah, among others, have produced works that depict the alienation of the masses by the political class. Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, for instance, depicts the height of corruption in postcolonial Ghana, as a microcosm of Africa

in general, by using scatological motifs. The newly independent Ghanaian nation was completely subjugated by the colonial way and people's lifestyle was in effect, shaped along European lines. Evidently, Ghana had fallen prey to renewed forms of exploitation and dependence on the 'West', forms which were structured around economic ties, and Armah's early novels – especially the first one – specifically dwell on the betrayed ideals of post-colonial freedom (Gobergia, 2016).

In his quest to sanitize this menace, Armah relies on satire that is more embedded in environmental rottenness, mixed with instances of covert humour to convey his message. The novel's major character, the Man, vows not to engage in corruption in order not to contaminate his soul. He refuses to take bribes at work and also refuses to yield to his wife's desire for materialism. However, his attempts fell through when he eventually succumbs to corruption by supporting his corrupt friend, Koomson, to escape. In framing this postcolonial narrative, Armah makes use of various ecological motifs and images that suggest decay, rot or filth.

Sembène Ousmane also highlights the issue of environmental decay in *Xala*. Xala is a Wolof word that can be loosely translated as a temporary erectile dysfunction (Derek, 2000). The novel chronicles the life of El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye, a polygamous businessman and a post-colonial Francophone elite. In the text, El Hadji takes a third wife because his Muslim orientation allows him and this was also as a way of displaying his political status and affluence. However, El Hadji's business success comes at the backdrop of cheating and engaging in shoddy business deals. On the night of the consummation for his third marriage, El Hadji experiences erectile dysfunction and begins to think that a spell has been cast on him by his other wives. El Hadji's quest to remedy his erectile problem leads to the fall of his business empire, and his expulsion from the league of the Chamber of Commerce. Like Armah, Sembène uses

ecological motifs to depict the moral decay in his Senegalese society. Filth and pollution are prominent motifs in Xala.

Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and Sembène's *Xala* are primarily a response to the betrayal of the independence ideal by Africa's elites. However, we argue that embedded in their criticism of corruption and abuse of trust are environmental issues which call for critical attention, particularly in the light of the relevance of environmental discourse in African narratives.

Drawing insights from a theoretical perspective informed by studies in Postcoloniality and Ecocriticism, we read Armah's *The Beautyful Ones* and Sembène's *Xala* in the light of their engagement with environmental degradation that occurs synchronically with the degradation of human life after independence. The environment in both texts is presented not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human culture is implicated in the history of the environment. Both texts have employed metaphors of pollution and decay to hold human beings accountable for the decline of the environment. This ecological praxis forms part of the texts' ethical orientation. Toker and Jega (2019) establish how man has perpetually been associated with the collapse of the environmental scenery leading to uncalled for consequences that humans become victims of. They further note that man's failure to maintain the serenity of the environment results in depletion of the conducive environment man has. Hence, the study on man and the environment is timely as in the present age, our world is undergoing serious crises of environmental issues. For literature to provide a medium for addressing some of these environmental issues, it functions as a social tool for intervention and further promotes a path for subsequent positive outcomes (Toker & Jega, 2019). Buell's "Environmental Imagination" provides four criteria to determine whether a text is environmental. One of them is that "the non-human environment is present not merely as a framing device". Second, "the human interest is not the only

legitimate interest"; third, "human accountability to environment is part of the text's ethical orientation" and lastly, "there is one sense of the environment as a process" (Buell, 1995).

Postcolonial ecocriticism: A theoretical framework.

The focus of postcolonial ecocriticism is binary; it is a combination of postcolonial criticism and ecocriticism. Postcolonial ecocriticism emerged as a response to the excesses of Anglo-American ecocriticism which started in North America in late twentieth century (Goodbody, 2007). While early work in ecocriticism concerns itself with the fate of nature in the wake of industrialization, it fails to recognize the plight of indigenous peoples whose lives and livelihoods are tied to nature, especially in the face of technological modernity (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010). Postcolonial ecocriticism, thus, expands the boundary of ecocriticism by underscoring how "nature and culture constantly influence and construct each other" (Armbruster & Wallace, 2001, p.4). Consequently, the imbrication of the ecological and the social, alongside how literature in postcolonial societies resist the power structures that affect both humans and nonhumans, form the basis from which postcolonial ecocriticism is often theorized (Slovic et al., 2019). It is within this notion of the intertwining of the social and the ecological that postcolonial ecocriticism incorporates the principles of ecocriticism and postcoloniality to conceptualize how writers from postcolonial, settler colonial and decolonizing regions have imagined and inscribed the environment (DeLoughrey & Handley, 2011; Huggan & Tiffin, 2010).

Fundamentally, postcolonial ecocriticism explains how postcolonial states attend to environmental issues through their literature. Considering the two texts for this study, one can realize that the portrayal of man's activities in contributing to the rottenness in society has empowered authors of "literature of waste" to associate the decay and rot to the problems of formerly colonized nations such as Africa. For instance, the

setting that is presented in novels such as *Waste Land, A Walk in the Night, The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* suggests an environment that is completely buried in garbage and filled with filth. These presentations of filthy environment serve as metaphor to represent the level of decay and corruption in the postcolonial African society.

According to Huggan and Tiffin (2015), the proper subject of postcolonial ecocriticism is colonialism, and to look accordingly for the colonial / imperial underpinnings of environmental practices in both 'colonizing' and 'colonized' societies of the present and the past. The understanding therefore is that since there is an element of "coloniality" in postcolonial ecocriticism, the subject renders itself into interrogating the deeper concept – colonialism – in an ultimate attempt to understand the general ramification of the phenomenon. By exploring the ramification of colonialism on the physical environment of the colonized space, postcolonial ecocriticism examines how environmental change is entwined with the narratives, histories and material practice of colonialism and globalization. It also emphasizes how experiences of environmental violence, rupture, and displacement are central ecological challenges across the postcolonial space, and identifies possibilities for imaginative recuperation that are compatible with anti-colonial politics (DeLoughrey, 2011). These views show that although both Ecocriticism and Postcolonial Ecocriticism explore the relationship between literature and the environment, Postcolonial Ecocriticism offers a theoretical context for examining and critiquing environmental issues as an organic part of socio-political and cultural issues in postcolonial narratives. It also interrogates how colonialism has influenced the previously colonized states' perception and attitude towards the environment. This does not necessarily mean that prior to the arrival of the imperialist, the colonized states did not have an appreciation of environmental issues. Contrarily, the colonized states appreciated environmental issues, however, the advent of

colonialism also influenced the perception of the colonized states' appreciation of the environment. For example, ancestral groves, forests, and water bodies were revered and protected prior to the arrival of the imperialists and their arrival brought a change to the perception of the people's appreciation of environment.

Postcolonial Ecocriticism within the African Literary Space

The idea of ecocriticism, despite its novelty especially in the African context, has not been much of a new phenomenon to the indigenous African and the African literary writer. This idea probably stems from the fact that contrary to the Eurocentric perception about Africans and their relationship and attitudes towards ecological units (cf. Martin, 2012), the African has always been environmentally conscious. There is some available literature that substantiates this assertion (cf. Traore, 2019a; Traore, 2019b; Mwangi, 2019; Huggan & Tiffin, 2015; Iheka, 2015). Although this literature partly demonstrates the current environmental issues bedeviling the African state, it inherently also suggests the environmentally conscious nature of Africans. Toker and Jega's analysis of Armah's novel *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Born* through ecocritical lenses enable readers to identify man's behaviour that leads to injustice to the environment and in the wider sense, serves to provide a representation of man's behaviour towards the retarded growth and development of the protagonist – the Man's country, Ghana to be precise. In their work, *"*Crimes Against Nature: Ecocritical Analysis of Ojaide's *The Activist* and Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born"*, they posit that there is the need to study literature from the perspective of the environment and nature because the study of the environment enables us to understand how human activities have collapsed the environment. They note further that the focus on issues of the environment and nature in literature is because of the functionality and essence of literature to humanity. (Toker & Jega, 2019).

Similarly, Giobergia's paper "A Path through Landscape of Waste" generates a discussion that adds to the "literature of waste". Giobergia specially unearths the Sub-Saharan landscape which offers a bleeding site for neocolonial processes. He points out that 'waste' is used as a metaphor to establish the link in the setting employed in the text and the contemporary society of Africa. Using a comparative approach, Giobergia (2015) analyses the subject of waste in "*A Walk in the Night* and *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*". One could observe that Giobergia's use of 'waste' takes over from Ryan (2013) whose writing on "Regimes of Waste: Aesthetics, Politics, and Waste from Kofi Awoonor and Ayi Kwei Armah to Chimamanda Adichie and Zeze Gamboa" avers that 'waste' as used by postcolonial writers serves as the entity that helps to clearly reimagine the link between Africa's independence and post-colonial novels of disillusionment. To Ryan, the portrayal of waste in Armah's novel is described in these words "an ambiguous symbol of both the uncertainty resulting from national and social integration…" (p.51).

In furtherance of the above, Harrison (2016) discusses in her paper *"*Waste Matters: urban margins in contemporary Literature*"* the various ways contemporary authors attend to the urban waste using Postcolonial Literary Theory in reconceptualising urban margin. She conceptualizes urban waste as "discarded things", "degraded environment" and "devalued humans". Waste representations in literary works of postcolonial writers reflect a reassessment of our notions of nationalism, the distribution of wealth and value in society, the goals of political emancipation, and legitimate means of political participation.

Despite African literary writers' engagement with the environment and its related issues, the ecological preoccupations have been different and diverse. Traore (2019a), for instance, discusses ecocritical motifs in the poems of the Anglophone and Francophone poets, Kofi Anyidoho, Kofi Awoonor, David Diop and Birago Diop. Focusing on ecocritical symbols in

some selected poems of these authors, Traore shows that the motifs, "trees" and "lands" are symbols of "life, survival, and nostalgia". These ideas are premised on the effect of colonialism on Africa's land and people. For, as Traore mentions, the arrival of the colonialists led to considerable alteration of the indigenous fauna, such as replacing trees with a cathedral which is an act that signifies a substitution of the ancestral belief with a foreign one. On the part of the Negritude poets like the Diops, the idea of the "land" was almost always synonymous with nostalgia for the past.

In this regard, Traore's analysis re-enforces the view that colonialism had a profound impact on the relationship between Africans and their environment; this is a discussion that Mwangi (2019) further extends, considering a wide range of contemporary African fiction. Mwangi contends that Africa's relationship with the environment can be looked at from specific angles. For example, he examines the interface between postcolonial writings and ideas like the relationship between humans and animals. Although his primary attention is on human-animal relation, he provides an insight into the general relationship that ensues between Africans and their environment – an environment that the African shares with the other ecological units. Similarly, Huggan and Tiffin (2015) had earlier provided the basis on which Mwangi makes his discussion for they examine Africans' relation with the environment by using a number of postcolonial texts from writers like J.M. Coetzee and Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

Iheka (2015) in his work, "African literature and the Environment", discusses environmental justice in Achebe's *Arrow of God*. He contends that in Achebe's novel, the snake – the royal python – is a sacred deity that connects the people and their gods. Thus, the killing of the snake by Oduche, under the influence of his Christian belief, is tantamount to the disruption of the hegemony of the communal living. As such, there is the need for justice for the snake. The deep-seated environmental logic in this conceptualization of the snake is that the survival

of the community is culturally dependent on the survival and functionality of the snake. Such an analysis underscores the symbiotic relationship that existed between humans and non-humans in the pre-colonial society. In addition to that, scholars have examined the representation of other environmental issues bedeviling the postcolonial African state. For instance, Traore (2019b) engages the adoption of recycling, within an African context. Basing his argument on Camara Laye's *The African Child*, Traore proffers a practical solution to tackling the menace of waste management within an African context. In the discussion that follows, we shall examine Armah's *The Beautyful Ones* and Sembène's *Xala*'s engagement with environmentalism, particularly with pollution and waste. We argue that Armah and Sembène, in the tradition of postcolonial ecocriticism, approach environmental issues in connection with social issues, such as corruption and alienation, and in terms of their effect on society. The scholarship on *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* has examined Armah's novel for the way it exposes political, historical and socio-economic forces, and also in terms of the individual's struggle within and against society (Jilani, 2020).

Cleanliness: Ayi Kwei Armah's Treatment of Environmental Preservation in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*

One of the predilections of Ayi Kwei Armah and his writings has been to engage with the urgency of environmental issues in the African postcolonial state in general and the Ghanaian space to be more specific. Pollution and waste of all kinds (liquid and plastic) continue to be a major problem facing most African states and part of the reasons for the inability of the continent to remedy this problem has been both institutional and individual reluctancy (as 'the watcher' is perceived only as a sleeper).

In *The Beautyful Ones*, Ayi Kwei Armah deploys environmentally-oriented register and descriptions to depict

the filth that has engulfed postcolonial Africa, in general, and Ghana in particular. The filth in this sense is twofold: first, as a metaphor, and second, as a non-metaphor. As a metaphor, the filth mentioned here is linked to the moral decadence that is prevalent in the postcolonial African space. In addressing this sense of the term, Armah gives descriptions of filth in the society. One first instance of such filth description is the "oozing freely, the oil-like liquid" (p. 6) that effortlessly flows from "the watcher's" mouth. This is the first time we are introduced to filth, uncleanliness and dirt in the text. Armah vividly describes this scene to paint the image of the personal filth that has engulfed the postcolonial citizen as a result of unhealthy governmental systems and discomfort. To Kakraba (2011), Armah employs this vulgar description as an "electroconvulsive tool to draw the reader's attention to the decadence that Armah seeks to draw attention to".

Armah draws our attention to the problem of pollution. In *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Armah unearths man's contribution to the decay and environmental degradation in the society. Such deliberate activities of humans include refusal to dump refuse in the bins provided and refusal to abide by the environmental laws (Toker & Jega, 2019). He portrays the government's insincerity with resolving pollution through the provision of waste bins without evacuation measures. On The Man's way to his work place is the waste bin with the emboldened relic of the inscription:

> KEEP YOUR COUNTRY CLEAN
> BY KEEPING YOUR CITY CLEAN (p.8)

These waste bins are meant to be a campaign to get rid of the filth in town. However, these projects are nothing but avenues to siphon money from government coffers by inflating the cost of execution of this project. Government officials responsible for waste management rather exploit the society for their selfish gains at the detriment of the environment and the wellbeing of

both human and non-human beings, as this passage shows:

> In the end not many of the boxes were distributed, though there was a lot said about the large amount of money paid for them. The few provided, however, had not been ignored. People used them well, so that it took no time at all for them to get full. People still used them, and 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…from a distance [people] aimed their rubbish at the growing heap, and a good amount of juicy offal hit the face and sides of the box before finding a final place upon the heap. (p.9)

The above excerpt exemplifies the way in which environmental issues are tied to social issues. The crooked and dishonest ways of the government officials lead the people to also finding alternative means of discarding their waste. The situation even becomes more glaring when it rains. The heap of rubbish produces a horrible odor while it also serves as a breeding space for insects like mosquitoes who in turn feed on the poor vulnerable people leading to disease outbreaks like malaria and typhoid. The outbreak of such epidemics is a subtle yet an important way by which the environment fights back at the society that does not preserve it. Additionally, as this waste spreads over streets and into gutters, blocking the water ways, it ultimately results in perennial flood. This has become an annual occurrence in Accra, the nation's capital.

The other instance of environmental and moral filth mentioned in *The Beautyful Ones* is the graffiti in the lavatory at The Man's work place. At the physical level, the inscription "VAGINA SWEET" defaces the wall of the lavatory. Morally, such an inscription is a verbal taboo (Agyekum 2002) especially among the Akan ethnic group. Such description of the genitalia

of the female is despicable. However, this cultural purity of the female genitalia is openly desecrated as it is seen boldly written in the lavatory at The Man's workplace. This speaks of the cultural and moral decadence that the postcolonial African state has assumed. On the micro level, these moral decadences suggest the level of cultural rottenness that the postcolonial African space has become since what is culturally revered as sacred – the vagina – is reduced to a public display of mockery.

Another serious instance of moral filth expressed in Armah's *The Beautyful Ones* is African cynicism where Armah spitefully criticizes the postcolonial African as seen in the passage:

> …but the same old stories of money changing hands and throats getting moistened and palms getting greased. Only this time if the old stories aroused any anger, there was nowhere for it to go. The sons of the nation were now in charge, after all. How completely the new thing took after the old. (p10)

The coprophilic motifs in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones* consequently demonstrate the pessimistic tone of Armah's bigger vision for the postcolonial African states' inability to achieve environmental and cultural sanity and this is implicitly niched in the "Not Yet" expression in the title of his work.

Although Armah later revisits this vision in *The Healers* and creates a more positive and forward-looking environmental consciousness of postcolonial Africa, in *The Beautyful Ones*, he sets the unapologetic tone of the visionlessness of African leaders and the African towards environmental cleanliness. This, he shows through infiltrating and portraying everybody as a victim of contributing to environmental uncleanness in the postcolonial African state as the following passage shows:

> Judging by the volume of words printed and spoken, it was indeed, as the Principal Secretary to the Ministry

> of Health stated at the durbar held to round it off, the most magnificent campaign yet. It was at the durbar that the little boxes had been launched… in the end not many of the boxes were put out (p. 8)

The Beggars: Parasites and Agents of Sanity in Sembène Ousmane's *Xala*

The beggars are the most prominent ecological motif in Sembène's *Xala*. They are portrayed as parasites. Having no work, they invade the streets feeding on the sweat of others. Yet, the parasite is also important to the balance of the ecosystem. In ecological terms, the parasites "influence host behavior...regulate population size with profound effects on trophic interactions, food webs, completion, biodiversity and keystone species" (Wood & Johnson, 2005, p. 425). This means that parasites play an important role in the functioning of the ecosystem. Furthermore, the term "parasite" is adopted here as explained by Busia (1986). According to Busia, "the parasitic human" is the dependent individual whose life and survival is tied to another person. Moreover, to Busia, parasite is understood as the minority groups whose survival is preconceived to be dependent on a majority group in the society. Yet, the majority group needs the minority group, as Sembène shows in *Xala*. From the beginning of the novel, the beggars are introduced in as "parasites" whose survival is predominantly dependent on the benevolence of the bourgeoisie in society. They are introduced as the others, sitting at the edges of the street, their living is fueled by the coin offered to them by the well-to-do in the society.

The likes of El Hadji and his compatriots from the league of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the leaders of the neo-colony, see the beggars as their burden for they (the beggars) depend on them. The understanding of the term "the beggars" in the novel encompasses not only the league of disabled men but all the people that depend on the members of the Chamber of

Commerce for survival. So, the wives of El Hadji, the driver, and the young boy who occasionally washes El Hadji's car are all parasites because their living is dependent on the financial benevolence of El Hadji. Their existence is in turn important as they constitute "the other" of the upper class to which El Hadji belongs. Even more revealing is the fact that these "parasites" played an important role in the resolution of the novel – only they, have the solution to El Hadji's xala.

The dominant presence of the beggars on the streets sullies the landscape. They are uncannily described as "undesirables" (p.116). Meanwhile, the supposedly leader of these same "parasites" happens to be the kin of the Kader family who is short-changed by El Hadji, leading to his arrival in the city (Dakar) to beg for survival. The postcolonial illusion becomes glaring for people like the beggars who in their quests for a better life, become destitute at the mercy of the postcolonial exploiters like El Hadji as seen in the passage below:

> The beggar was part of the décor like the dirty walls and the ancient lorries delivering goods. He was well-known in the street. The only person who found him irritating was El Hadji, who had him picked up by the police on several occasions. (p30)

The ecocritical issue fundamental to the condition of the destitute is that they turn the streets into their living space which in the words of El Hadji "frightens tourists" and impedes tourist activities. For their presence on the streets "dirties the street". For this reason, El Hadji advises the president of the league of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry to order for the arrest of all the beggars on the streets. But when El Hadji searches for the cure for his xala, it is the expelled beggars that cure him by spitting all over him. In that instance, El Hadji becomes the dumpsite, the gutter as he is covered with saliva and mucus from the throats of the beggars.

Sembène uses the beggars to expose the cause of El Hadji's xala, and to cure him from it. The leader of the beggars tells El Hadji: "what I've become is your fault…You appropriated our inheritance. You falsified our names and our property was seized. I was thrown in prison because of you. I arranged your xala" (p.113). This shows that it is the action of the rich that sullies society. El Hadji's greed and fraud drove the man to the streets. He is, in this instance, responsible for the presence of the beggars, and the attendant pollution that they produce, on the streets. El Hadji, symbolizes the postcolonial African bourgeoisie. These African elites are the [c]overt cause of the majority of the environmental issues facing the states due to their actions or inactions. Action-wise, because of their quests to amass wealth and live in affluence like imperialists do, these neocolonial African elites tend to get involved in shoddy deals that have long term consequences on the environment. Deductively, had El Hadji not falsified and sent his kin to prison, he (the kin) would not have ended up on the streets after returning from prison, becoming an environmental threat. On the other hand, the indecision and selfishness on the part of the postcolonial African leader doggedly continues to contribute to the environmental mess that the African continent as a whole is facing. Government policies on the climate or the environment as a whole are rarely implemented, and a state machinery somewhere sits on what is meant to benefit everyone.

It is further argued that the return of "the beggar and his friends" as the narrator calls the league of beggars into El Hadji's house at Adja's villa is a sign of the environment fighting back the people. This is because these same "undesirable people" of the society who once lived on the streets are now seen and described by Rama – the eldest daughter of El Hadji – as "father's guests" (p.111). They become El Hadji's guests in his house to first haunt him for sending them to prison. This return is ecologically symbolic for they migrate from the street as "frighteners of tourists" to specifically frighten the person

who exploits them. This has been the ultimate ramification for ecologically polluting the postcolonial African space. The person who causes pollution either faces the consequences of his/her action or – and that is unfortunately the most common alternative – the effect befalls the entire community. Evidence of such a scenario is the case where an entire community suffers from flooding through the action of a single person who throws waste into gutters which subsequently leads to flooding. In the case of El Hadji, he does not suffer alone the consequences of his exploitation of the beggars. His immediate family whom he becomes closer to after his fall suffers from his actions.

Conclusion

In the forgone discussion, we examined Ayi Kwei Armah and Sembène Ousmane's engagement with the physical environment in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Xala* respectively. The discussion reveals that inherent in the thematic depiction of postcolonial disillusion and corruption is the criticism of pollution and decadence. Armah uses scatology as a linguistic tool in portraying the level of decadence in Ghana. Sembène, in *Xala*, portrays an image of Africa that is not entirely different from that of Armah's in *The Beautyful Ones*. For Sembène, the disillusionment that comes with independence is depicted through themes and setting. The setting of *Xala*, characterized by filth, rubbish piles, and stinking gutters, reveals the failure of the newly-independent state. Sembène also uses the environment to show the polarization of the post-colonial city along class divide. While the neighborhood of the affluent is clean and fresh, the atmosphere on most streets is contaminated by dirt and decay. Although *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Xala* may not be classified as exclusively environmental narratives, they do call attention to the ways that environmental problems are conjoined with human culture in the depiction of postcolonial Africa.

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