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The Individual and Society in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) and Albert Camus's *The Stranger* (1942)

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To the memory of my dear mother

The members of my family

My friends and classmates

Abstract

*This dissertation is concerned with the comparison of two novels written by two different writers and set in two different areas and eras, yet reflecting on the theme of individual and society. These novels are: **The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born** by Ayi Kwei Armah and **The Stranger** by Albert Camus. The purpose of my study is to show that the main character in Armah's novel shares some features in his behaviour with Meursault in Camus's **The Stranger**. These similarities are the result of the two authors' recourse to the absurd to focus on the difficult relationship that links the individual to his society. My aim is also to show that Armah's novel can be read in the context of the Akan traditional thought. This is shown through the conformity of the protagonist's behaviour to this culture in which a great importance is given to the moral values of the individual. The following dissertation has been divided into three chapters. The first is composed of method and materials sections. The materials section comprises the biographies of the two authors, whereas the method section is a dense explanation of the two theories that I have applied to my corpus: the philosophy of the absurd and the Akan traditional philosophy. The second chapter focuses on the study of the similarities between Armah's **The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born** and Albert Camus's **The Stranger**, by applying Camus's book **The Myth of Sisyphus**. The third and last chapter emphasizes the study of Armah's novel in relationship to the Akan traditional cosmogony. The results of my study are the affirmation of Armah's influence by Camus which is shown through the similarities between Armah's and Camus's works. I have also come to the conclusion that Armah is attached to his own culture which is obvious through his reference to the cleansing ritual and the conformity of the man's behaviour to the Akan traditional cosmogony.*

General Introduction

Introduction

The individual cannot live out of a social group and society cannot be constituted without individuals. This shows that the individual and the community are two important components and the one cannot exist without the other. Thus, many works in the world of literature deal with the theme of individual and society, especially modernist writers who focus in their writings on the individual and the relationship that links him to his society.

In this respect, Ayi kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and Albert Camus' *The Stranger* reflect much on the theme of individual and society. Both writers have treated this issue and tried to show to which extent the relationship between the two is a problematic one. The reason that pushed me to think about these two authors is that many critics claim that Armah is influenced by the philosophy of the absurd and existentialism, represented by the two French thinkers; Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. Among these critics; Chinua Achebe, Danièle Stewart and Tommie Lee Jackson. All of them have compared Armah's early works to those of Albert Camus and claimed the presence of some elements of the absurd in these works. Another reason that justifies my comparative study is that Armah has visited Algeria and worked as a translator in a French magazine. Therefore, he has probably read Camus's writings and got influenced by him.

Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and Camus's *The Stranger* are set in two different periods of time, but in two African countries that suffered from the European colonisation for a long time. For instance, Armah's novel is set in post-independent Ghana during the 1960's. Most of its events take place in Sekondi- Takoradi, Armah's hometown. The novel stretches over not more than a year and ends with the downfall of Kwame Nkrumah's government after the military coup in 1966. It is about life in post-independent Ghana under the supposed egalitarian government of Nkrumah. At that time the Ghanaians were suffering from different forms of corruption which are the result of neo- colonialism, a

new form of colonization in which the African governors and leaders replaced the colonizer and became the persecutors of their citizens.

The nameless protagonist, the man, clerk in the nation's railway office. Being honest, the man suffers in a society that is thirsty for money. He is considered by his wife, Oyo, and his mother-in-law as being a lazy and insignificant person because he refuses to play the same game as everybody else. He rejects the unfair and illegitimate ways to gain money and wealth. However, towards the end of the novel and after the fall of Nkrumah's government, Oyo recognises the moral qualities of her husband and for the first time, since their marriage, she judges him to be a good person and husband.

As far as Camus's *The Stranger* is concerned, it is set in Algiers, a town belonging to France then. When the novel was published in 1942, Algeria was still under the French colonization and France was engaged in war against the Germans who occupied many parts of France during the Second World War. At that time, natives, Europeans and Pied-noir (who are people from European origins born in Algeria) were living in Algeria. So, the tensions between these different peoples and the disillusionment of the Second World War are reflected through the novel, mainly through Meursault's killing of the Arab and his indifference.

The main character, Meursault, is a clerk who works in an office in Algiers. He is a good example of an alienated man who is indifferent towards everyone around him. His indifference costs him a difficult relationship with the members of his society who do not accept him as he is. Towards the end of the novel, Meursault is sentenced to death after he kills an Arab. In fact, Meursault is judged not for the crime that he commits, but for the neglect of his society's values and principles, especially because he does not cry the day of his mother's death and he does not conform to the social expectations.

Review of the Literature

My dissertation consists in comparing Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and Albert Camus's *The Stranger*, two important works that deal with the theme of individual and society. Both works have received a large bulk of criticism. This is due to the fact that Armah and Camus are considered as two influential writers and their two novels as classics in the world of literature.

Literary criticism on Armah's work is varied and has been carried out under different perspectives and viewpoints. *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) is read as a depiction of the despair and the disillusionment that characterized African countries after the independence. It is viewed by Ode Ogede (2000) and Emmanuel Akyeampong (2000) as a denunciation of the corrupted post-independent African society. For them, Armah criticizes harshly the unfair political systems in Africa generally and in Ghana particularly.

In his book *Ayi Kwei Armah Radical Iconoclast: Pitting Imaginary Worlds against the Actual* (2000), Ode Ogede claims that Armah in his *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* "blames the African elite for betraying the dreams of independence and, in equal measure, criticizes the underprivileged, impoverished majority for their acquiescence".¹ He also assumes that Armah's novel is an attack on the hypocrite African leaders.

Emmanuel Akyeampong in his essay 'Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*' (2000) views Armah's novel as "the most powerful novel written on political and moral decay in independent Ghana".² For him, the events that Armah describes in his novel are not only the outcome of the author's imagination, but the reflection of the real life in Ghana during the 1960's. He thinks that Armah explores how ordinary people are affected by their coping mechanisms for survival in a declining national economy in Ghana.³

Eldred Durosimi Jones and Marjorie Jones are more concerned with the aspect of self-exile in Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. For them, Ayi Kwei Armah is one of the African novelists who deal with the theme of self-exile in their works, one of which is *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. These critics claim that the main characters in Armah's novel (man and teacher) are physically present in their society, but are emotionally and psychologically absent (alienated).⁴

In his *The African Novel in English: An Introduction* (1998) M. Keith Booker considers Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* as a dystopian novel. He claims: "The book, in its focus on the disappointment of utopian dreams, has much in common with the western genre of dystopian fiction."⁵ He has even made reference to Gakwandi who compared Armah's novel to George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* which is one of the most powerful dystopian texts in western literature. Booker mentions the waste receptacle in Armah's novel which symbolizes the feeble and the unsuccessful efforts of the government to clean up Ghana from the widely spread corruption after the independence.⁶

In his essay '*The Theme of Alienation in Ayi Kwei Armah's The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born and Fragments: A Comparative Study Using Albert Camus and Frantz Fanon*' (1999) Hocine Maoui has treated the theme of alienation in Armah's two first novels and tried to explain '*both the causes and the undermining effects*'⁷ of it. He has done thus by referring to Frantz Fanon, a well known African psychiatrist. He has also relied on Albert Camus's existential ideas to show the different reasons behind alienation, especially in modern times.⁸ However; Hocine Maoui, in his essay, has neglected the fact that Armah is also influenced in his writings by his own culture and that his purpose is to try to redeem Ghana from its moral illnesses.

Concerning Albert Camus's *The Stranger* (1942), it is interpreted from different perspectives and is generally viewed as a reflection of the ideas of the absurd. Some critics like Harold Bloom viewed it as a novel of the absurd, focusing on the fact that the individual goes without any faith or direction. In his book *Albert Camus's The Stranger* (2008), Harold Bloom assumes: "*In The Stranger, Camus creates fiction that expresses his key concept, the absurd*".⁹ For him, Camus's focus on the absurd in his novel is the result of the historical context in which it was produced. He thinks that the novel is an answer to the horrors of the war and the disillusionment of the individuals who struggle to find their way in life. For Bloom, the absurd means that life has no meaning, in spite of people's wish to ascribe meaning to it.¹⁰

Patrick Mc Carthy assumes that *The Stranger* which belongs to the absurd and existentialist type of writing, can also be considered as a piece of pied- noir writing. For him, Camus shows in his novel the ways in which the French- Algerians or les pied- noir depicted themselves and how they used to live in Algeria during the French colonisation.¹¹

Carl Rollyson in his book *Critical Survey of Long Fiction* (2010) considers Camus's *The Stranger* as a novel that treats the issue of happiness in life and how man seeks to find the meaning of this life but in vain. For him, Camus's main character, Meursault, seems to be without any feelings or emotions as if he is grown in another planet different from ours. According to Rollyson, Meursault is a stranger in the fullest sense of the word. He claims: "*The Stranger is seen as a powerful depiction of man's divided soul, at once joyous for the gift of life and miserable at the absence of any discernible purpose in that life and at the indifference of the surrounding universe*".¹²

Issue and Working Hypothesis

From the review of the literature about Armah's *The Beautiful Ones* and Camus's *The Stranger*, I conclude that many studies have been conducted on both novels, but to my knowledge, no study has yet put the two works together in a comparative way to study the theme of individual and society in these novels. Thus, this will be the subject of my study.

I am going to relate the main character's behaviour in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* to both the philosophy of the absurd, as exemplified by the similarities the man shares with Camus' Meursault in *The Stranger*, and to the Akan traditional cosmogony. In the latter, the individual is seen as being a moral agent who should convey in his behaviour some moral principles. In the Akan culture, a lot is expected from the individual in terms of displaying moral values as one should act in conformity with the accepted values and standards. So, in which way does the behaviour of the main character in Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* resemble that of Meursault in Camus's *The Stranger*? And to which extent is he an epitome of the Akan traditional cosmogony?

I will show that the man shares with Meursault some features that make him an absurd man. These features are: alienation, estrangement, uncertainty, contradiction, and the routine of doing always the same tasks. I am also going to bear out that Armah borrows from another philosophy which is purely African. This philosophy is related to the Akan traditional thought.

Methodological Outline

My dissertation will be divided into three chapters. The first one contains the biographical elements of the two authors, Armah and Camus, and a profound presentation of the philosophy of the absurd as it is discussed in Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*. In addition, I will highlight the way in which the individual is perceived in the Akan traditional thought.

Then comes the analytical part which contains the second and the third chapters. In the second chapter, I will try to show the similarities between Armah's and Camus's two works. This will be done by applying Albert Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*. In the third chapter, which will focus on the differences between the two works, I will make reference to the Akan traditional thought and its perception of the individual as it is explained in the fifth chapter of Wiredu Kwasi and Gyekye Kwame's book *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies, I* (1992). In this part of the book, Gyekye Kwame gives some features of the individual's behaviour according to the Akan cosmogony. These features are appropriate to the behaviour of the man in Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*.

References

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- ² Emmanuel Akyeampong, 'Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*', in *African Novels in the Classroom*, ed. Margaret Jean Hay (USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 2000), 37.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Eldred Durosimi Jones, et al., *Exile and African Literature: A Review* (USA: James Curry Ltd, 2000), 44-45.
- ⁵ M. Keith Booker, *The African Novel in English: An Introduction* (Great Britain: James Curry, 1989), 103, 107.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Hocine Maoui, 'The Theme of Alienation in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and Fragments: A Comparative Study Using Albert Camus and Frantz Fanon', in *El- Tawassol*, ed. Brahim Benlakhlef (Algeria: l' Université d'Annaba, 1999), 58.
- ⁸ ibid.
- ⁹ Harold Bloom, *Albert Camus's The Stranger* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008), 13.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Patrick Mc Carthy, *Camus The Stranger: A Student Guide* (UK: Cambridge University Press: 2004), 9.
- ¹² Carl Rollyson, *Critical Survey of Long Fiction* (USA: Salem Press, 2010), 765- 766.

Results

The writing of my dissertation has allowed me to know more about the two well known writers: Ayi Kwei Armah and Albert Camus. The former is one of the African writers that are largely written about. Nearly, no book that dealt with African literature has forgotten to mention this writer. The second is a famous French writer and a winner of the Nobel Prize for literature. He is one of the influential writers of the twentieth century, principally associated with the philosophy of the absurd that he has introduced in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. I have also had the pleasure to discover two great novels that are classified as classics in the world of literature. These are *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *The Stranger*.

I have tried through my analysis to show that the Ghanaian writer, Ayi Kwei Armah is influenced by Albert Camus and the philosophy of the absurd. This is clear through the similarities between *The Beautiful Ones* and *The Stranger*. The study has been done in relationship to Albert Camus's collection of essays *The Myth of Sisyphus*. I have tried to show that the main character in Armah's novel shares some features in his behaviour with Meursault in Camus's *The Stranger*. In addition, I have studied Armah's *The Beautiful Ones* in the context of the Akan traditional thought by applying the fifth chapter of author's raw *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies, I* to make it evident that Armah borrows from another philosophy which is purely African.

Therefore, my study is meant to create a bridge between the French and west African Anglophone literatures. This was done through my comparative study of two important works from these literatures that have different historical and social backgrounds.

Chapter One

Method and Materials Sections

The following chapter is constituted of method and materials sections. The materials section contains the biographies of the two authors, whereas the method section comprises the dense summaries of both theories that I am going to apply in my analysis. The purpose of this chapter is to show the reasons behind the two authors' recourse to the absurd within their respective life circumstances.

I - Materials Section: Bibliographical Elements of the two Authors

1- Ayi Kwei Armah: Life and Times

Ayi Kwei Armah is an important and well known Ghanaian novelist and essayist who belongs to the second generation of African writers. Armah was born in 1939 to Fante-speaking parents in Sekondi Takoradi, on the coast of western Ghana. From his father's side, he is descended from a royal family in the Ga tribe. After his primary education, he attended the famous Achimota College (1952- 1958) which was considered at that time as one of the finest secondary schools in Africa.¹

In 1959, Armah received a scholarship and left Ghana to study in the United States. There he attended the Groton School in Massachusetts for one year, and then he entered the Harvard University where he studied for three years (1960-1963). He intended at first for literature; however, he changed his interest to social sciences. In 1963, he left Harvard University and the United States before even completing his final year at the university.² In fact, Armah "*grew up at a crucial period in Africa's history and witnessed the cultural confusion engendered by the colonial experience*".³

When he studied in the United States, Armah witnessed white racism, a fact that was reflected in his third novel *Why Are We So Blest?* through the character of Modin Dofu. In addition, he moved from the study of literature to social sciences as an attempt to understand

*“the interconnections between the economics of continents, the politics of nations, and the sociology and cultures of peoples”.*⁴

Armah devoted his career in writing to register his disillusionment with a society in which the birth of the beautiful ones has been totally aborted. For Neil King and Sarah King, Armah’s *“writings tend to reflect continuing African sufferings and disillusionment with independence, often employing imagery of decay and disease”*.⁵

When Armah left the United States in 1963, he took up residence in Algeria where he worked as a translator for a magazine called *Revolution Africaine*. The experience Armah lived in Algeria had a great impression on him and pushed him to set his third novel ***Why Are We So Blest?*** in this country where he noticed the emergence of neo-colonialism. In 1964, Armah returned to Ghana where he worked as a scriptwriter for Ghana Television. However, he has been frustrated and upset in that work because of the spread of corruption, which pushed him to leave the job to work as a teacher of English at the Navarongo School. This experience has been reported by Armah in his second novel ***Fragments*** (1969). Armah’s creative career began with his publication of short stories and poems in journals such as: *Okyeame*, *Harper’s* and the *Atlantic Monthly*. However, an important incident took place in Ghana during the sixties which provided Armah with the necessary substance for the writing of his first novel ***The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*** (1968). This event was the fall of Nkrumah’s government in 1966.⁶

Armah has published six novels, six short stories and a number of essays. His first novel ***The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*** (1968) is a story of a nation in which people are attached to the materialistic world; it is about a country in which honest people like the nameless protagonist (the man) are rejected and alienated from their society. The novel is viewed by Booker as being *“bitterly critical of the corruption of post colonial Ghanaian*

*society, at the same time attributing much of this corruption to the impact of the seductive “gleam” of western capitalism on the new nation”.*⁷

Armah’s second novel ***Fragments*** (1969) is considered by most of Armah’s critics as an autobiographical or semibiographical novel. Its story has a lot in common with Armah’s real life. For instance, just like Armah, Baako is a student who went to the United States to pursue his studies there. Coming back to his country, Baako, like Armah, is frustrated and disappointed by the spread of corruption, and by the members of his family who see in him the supplier of their demands and the answer to their wishes. Like Armah, Baako worked in Ghana Television where he has had a bad experience. Towards the end of the novel, Baako becomes mad which is a reflection of Armah’s hospitalisation when he was in the United States because he suffered from mental troubles.⁸

In 1972, Armah published his third novel ***Why Are We So Blest?*** which he set in Algeria. By the novel, Armah wanted to show how the post independent African societies betrayed the dreams of the revolution against the coloniser. This includes even the African anti-colonialist movements. Then comes his fourth novel ***Two Thousand Seasons*** (1973) in which Armah makes reference to the Akan traditional narratives to tell the story of Ghana from the migration of the Ashanti people to the area, till the contemporary Ghanaian society. ***The Healers*** (1979) is a historical novel which focuses on the events that led to the fall of the Ashanti Empire. ***Osiris Rising*** (1995) contains many of the themes of Armah’s previous works and the possibility of a better future for all African societies.⁹

Armah’s political view during the period in which he published his early novels was reflected in his essays. Among them, ***African Socialism: Utopian or Scientific?*** in which he expressed his disappointment after the failure of post- independent African societies to realize the utopian dreams of independence. He is especially critical of some African leaders that led African countries to independence such as the Ghanaian leader Nkrumah.¹⁰

Many critics view Armah as being influenced by the philosophy of the absurd and existentialism especially by the two French thinkers; Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. For instance, Chinua Achebe in his *Morning yet on Creation Day* (1975) explained that Armah's novels cease to be African because they are steeped in the alien philosophy of the absurd and existentialism. In addition, Danièle Stewart developed the same view concerning the presence of existentialist ideas in Armah's early novels including *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Fragments* and *Why Are We So Blest?*¹¹ Achebe regrets that Armah has turned Ghana into a modern existentialist no man's land. He states: "*Ayi Kwei Armah imposes so much foreign metaphor on the sickness of Ghana that it ceases to be true. Armah is clearly an alienated writer, a modern writer complete with all the symptoms*".¹²

In her book *The Existential Fiction of Ayi Kwei Armah, Albert Camus, and Jean Paul Sartre*, Tommie L. Jackson compares the early novels of Armah to the fictional and theoretical works of the French philosophers Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus and she claims,

the presence in Armah's early novels (*The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Fragments*, and *Why Are We So Blest?*) of ideas that seem to correspond to the notion of the absurd, the feeling of entrapment or alienation or "divorce" that "reduces man's hopes to nothingness."¹³

Ayi Kwei Armah lived and worked in different parts of Africa and the world including west, east, north, and South Africa, France, and the United States of America. He worked as a translator, as a teacher of creative literature and writing at Dar es Salaam which is a teacher's college. He has also taught at the Universities of Lesotho and Massachusetts.¹⁴

2 - Albert Camus: Life and Times

Albert Camus is a well known French writer and a Nobel Prize winner who was born in a century full of political events and spoiled by the two World Wars. He was born in Monrovia, Algeria, in 1913 to a poor family and was raised by an illiterate, half deaf and tyrannised mother, Catherine- Hélène Sintès who was of Spanish ancestry. He is the second son of Lucien Auguste Camus, a supervisor at a vineyard, who was of French origins. Camus's father was wounded in the first Battle of Marne during the World War I (1914) and died that same year. When he lost his father, Albert Camus was only one year old "*a fact which will oblige him to create a personal myth around this figure and transform him into fiction*".¹⁵ After her husband's death, Catherine Sintès moved with her two sons to live with her mother who was an authoritarian and a tyrannical woman. They lived in Belcourt, a district inhabited by the French poor working- class.¹⁶

Once adult, Camus discovers the circumstances of his father's death which made him aware about the painful consequences of the war. Therefore, the horror and fear of the war grew with Camus and influenced many of his decisions such as his opposition to the French re- armament during the 1930's. In fact, the psychological effects of his father's death are difficult to explain, but during his life Camus favoured friendship with old people like Pascal Pia. His father was present as a memory in his novels, one of which was *The Stranger*.¹⁷

Even though he has been raised by his mother who was his only sustain, the relationship that linked Camus to her was ambiguous. Camus has always expressed publicly his attachment and his great love for his mother. However, she was described in his writings as being silent, cold and distant from her son. For instance, in his essay *Betwixt and Between* the mother of the narrator is described as being cold because she does not know how to caress her son. In addition, in his famous novel *The Stranger* the main character says, after his mother's death, that there is nothing more to be said between him and his mother. In this

context, Patrick Mc Carthy claims: “a simple psychoanalytic reading would lead one to conclude that Camus was torn between an incestuous love for his mother and a hostility towards her coldness”.¹⁸

Camus’s infancy was full of misery and poverty which would influence his future life and his reflections in his writings. In 1930, Camus started to attend the high school, Bugeaud of Algiers, thanks to his teacher M. Germain who helped him to gain a scholarship. At that time, Camus caught tuberculosis from which he was never recovered and that pushed him to leave school for a few time. Mc Carthy says: “Tuberculosis must surely have sharpened his sense of death and, conversely, his appreciation of the human body as a fountain of strength and grace”.¹⁹

Later, he returned to finish his studies at the high school and started to attend the University of Algiers where he began his studies in philosophy after he obtained the Baccalaureate in 1932. In 1934, Camus married Simone Hié, a drug addicted girl, but the couple ended their marriage in 1940, an experience that added to Camus’s pessimism and anguish because he was deeply in love with her. However, that same year Camus married Francine who was his best friend when he was in Algeria.²⁰

Camus was interested in writing since his adolescence, and he tried his hands in different types of writings including: philosophy, essays, fiction and theatre. His first work *The Wrong Side and the Right Side* appeared in 1937, which is a collection of short fictions. In 1942, his first and famous novel *The Stranger* was published. This novel brought to Camus world wide recognition, to become later one of the most famous French writers of the twentieth century. In her book *Albert Camus: Life and Times*, Adele King claims:

With one of the most famous opening lines of modern French fiction, capturing the voice of a hero without intellectual pretensions or strong emotional attachments, *L’Etranger* (1942, translated as *The Outsider* or *The Stranger*), is the best selling and the most republished French novel of the 20th-century and has been translated into more than 40 languages. Usually

regarded as a classic, it is one of the few novels taught in schools and universities and found on most lists of the best modern novels. Both politicians and rock stars alike allude to it.²¹

Today, *The stranger* becomes a strong allegory against the death penalty. For Mairowitz and Korkos “*Camus simply could not reconcile the need for justice with his lifelong hatred of the death penalty*”.²²

Few months after the publication of *The Stranger*, Camus published one of his most known works *The Myth of Sisyphus*, a collection of philosophical essays, in which Camus established the theoretical foundations of concepts and ideas developed in his novel *The Stranger*. In fact, Camus viewed Caligula “*along with L'Etranger and Sisyphe, as belonging to his absurd works, which he saw as his first stage of thought*”.²³ In 1943, Camus moved to France where he worked as a journalist for the newspaper *The Combat* to which he became later an editor till 1947. Camus expressed his rejection of the World War II and his political position through this newspaper. Sarah King states: “*For many in Europe he was especially known for his courageous, ethical journalism in Combat*”.²⁴

Later, Camus became friend with the two well known French writers Simone de Beauvoir and Jean Paul Sartre and before the end of the World War II Camus was a part of their group. The three writers started to be seen in public places like restaurants, clubs and parties. Their friendship was strong enough that Sartre asked Camus to direct his first play *Huis Clos* or *No Exit*. In fact, Camus's friendship with Jean Paul Sartre pushed many thinkers to associate him with existentialism, a label that Camus has always refused. Later Camus and Sartre entered into an ideological conflict and “*time would reinforce their ideological differences, soon leading to one of the most scathing intellectual polemics of the modern times*”.²⁵

In his work as a journalist, Camus did not favour the Algerian independence from the French colonization, but he defended the rights of the Muslims and a limited freedom for

Algeria. His position cost him a constant conflict with the communist party of which he was a member at that time. In fact, Camus was always judged to be ambivalent in his position concerning the Algerian cause and the relationship between Algerians and the pied- noir. In this context, Mangesh Kalkarni claims:

...these contradictions arose from Camus's predicament as a pied- noir consciously frozen in historical immobility and incapable of directly confronting the problem of the European- Arab relation which continued...to surface in his fiction as an admission of historical guilt.²⁶

Just like Armah, Camus used his writings to express his feelings and attitude towards the historical events he witnessed in his life such as the two world wars, the political parties and their effects on the lives of people. In this respect, Camus says: « *Je ne suis pas un philosophe, en effet, je ne sais parler que de ce que j'ai vécu* ». ²⁷ For instance, *The Stranger* reflects much of Camus's real life including his work in part- time jobs, one of which was with the French Algerian civil service in which he suffered from a great deal of routine. Camus also made reference to another real event which is his father's attendance of an execution and the bad effect it had on him. In fact, the Algerian situation under the French colonization has been the source of inspiration for many of Camus's literary works. For this reason, Camus's famous novels *The stranger*, *The Plague* and many stories in *Exile and the Kingdom* were set in Algeria.²⁸

Camus's important works include three novels which are *The Stranger* (1942), *The Plague* (1947), and *The Fall* (1956). The essays comprise *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) and *The Rebel* (1951). Camus's known plays are *Caligula* (1944), *State of Siege* (1948), and *The Just Assassins* (1949). In 1957, Camus published the collection of short fictions *Exile and the Kingdom*. That same year, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Camus was killed in a car accident in January 1960 and in his car found the manuscript of an unfinished novel *The First Man*. It is assumed that,

Camus' work, and the political, religious, and ethical issues it deals with, remains controversial, but his writing endures because it expresses Camus's profound concern for human suffering and the philosophical and moral dilemmas faced by all individuals.²⁹

From what has been said in this section, I conclude that both Albert Camus and Ayi Kwei Armah were very attached to the social and historical events they witnessed in their lives. Even their reference to the absurd is a consequence of their personal and social proceedings. Both writers tried their best to reflect in their works the spreading disillusionment that characterized the individuals because of the World War II and neo-colonialism respectively.

II- Methodological Considerations

1- The Philosophy of the Absurd

The approach that I am going to apply to the first part of my dissertation is borrowed from Albert Camus' collection of essays *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942). In it, Camus discusses the value of life and the question of suicide, the 'absurd man' and the 'absurd creation', as well as the 'absurdity of the human condition'. Many thinkers claim that the philosophy of the absurd attracts more the existentialist writers. In these terms, Mark. T. Conard states in his book *The Philosophy of Martin Scorsese* (2007) "*While absurdity can be found in other types of philosophical writing, it is seen most frequently in the works of existential philosophers*".³⁰

Most of the existentialists such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Soren Kierkegaard, Jean Paul Sartre and Camus, among them, referred to the absurd and tried to explain this feeling, its reasons and consequences as well. However, it is with Albert Camus that the philosophy of the absurd was developed and Camus's name became referential to this type of philosophy.³¹

Even though Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus belong to the same category which is the secular or the atheist existentialism, there are differences in their perception of the absurd. In his well known book *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre explains absurdity as being a state of affairs and he relates it to contingency which means unnecessary. To say that life is contingent means that there is no purpose for living. For Sartre, it is with the discovery of contingency that one becomes aware about the absurdity of his life and then, "*all the guard rails collapse*".³²

Different from Sartre and all other existentialist philosophers, Camus describes the absurd as being a feeling. For him, "*the absurd is born of [the] confrontation between the human need [for order] and the unreasonable silence of the world*".³³

The absurd condition which Camus compares to a state of nausea, offers two solutions to man; either he escapes reality by suicide, or he chooses to live even though he knows that life is futile. According to Camus, the absurd man tries the second solution which calls for the confrontation with the present world, ignoring both the past and the future and struggling to death. In fact, Camus distinguishes between physical and philosophical suicide. By philosophical suicide, he means the disguising of the absurdity of the human condition by accepting “*a meaning- giving ideology of some sort, such as a religion, a cosmogony, or even a generalized political view.*”³⁴ In Camus’ view, both the ordinary experience and the philosophical analysis show and prove that life is meaningless.

At the very beginning of his *The Myth of Sisyphus* Camus states: “*There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy.*”³⁵ In fact, Camus believes that the absurd comes into existence out of the absence of any answer to man’s questions in a godless universe, and out of the silence of nature opposed to man’s distress. The answers that all religions offer are rejected. According to Styan,

Camus’s existentialist use of the term ‘absurd’ in *The Myth of Sisyphus* was ten years later vastly narrowed to connote man trapped in a hostile universe that was totally subjective, and made to describe the nightmare that could follow when purposelessness, solitude and silence were taken to the ultimate degree...³⁶

Camus thinks that the absurd is neither in man nor in the world, but it exists in their common presence and their confrontation. For him, feeling the absurd is provoked by the awareness of man’s spirit. All begins with awareness which is, for him, at the origin of everything. Camus claims: “*at any street corner the feeling of absurdity can strike any man in the face.*”³⁷ In addition, he thinks that the world does not oppose reason, but it is not based on its norms and criteria. Living the absurd, for Camus, “*means a total lack of hope (which is not*

*the same as despair), a permanent rejection (which is not the same as renunciation), and a conscious dissatisfaction (which is not the same as juvenile anxiety) ”.*³⁸

According to him, the absurd feeling shows some characteristics such as uncertainty, contradiction, insensitivity, chance, challenge and revolt. These features are well explained and illustrated in the Don Juan’s honesty, the actor who shows contradiction through the different characters that he represents, and the conqueror that looks for certainties. The absence of hope leads the absurd man to live his present time freed from any illusions of the future. This kind of the absurd man is well exemplified by Camus through the character of Sisyphus who struggles without rest, even though he is aware that his efforts will lead him to no peace.³⁹

According to the Greek myth, Sisyphus is condemned by the gods to a meaningless and never- ending task which is to roll endlessly a rock to the pick of a hill, only to have it fallen down when he almost reaches the summit. Sisyphus restarts each time doing the same task; that is rolling the stone to the summit. In fact, Sisyphus is punished by the gods for betraying them and enchainning death. Sisyphus hates death and has passion for life. He likes the beauty of the sun and water. In his book *The Myth of Sisyphus: Renaissance Theories of Human Perfectibility*, Elliott M. Simon states: “*Sisyphus rebelled against the gods; he aspired to break down the differentiation between the divine and the human and attempted to share their creative powers*”.⁴⁰

The myth says that Sisyphus dies and goes to the underworld. There, he is allowed by Pluto (a god) to come back to the earth to punish his wife for throwing his corpse publicly, but to return to the underworld after taking his revenge. However, Sisyphus is fascinated by the world especially by the sun and water. So, he decides to stay and enjoy this beauty. Consequently, he breaks his oath for the gods to return back after punishing his wife. In fact, the gods warn Sisyphus many times to convince him to return, but he ignores their warnings.

It happens that a god called Mercury forces Sisyphus to return back to the underworld where the gods have already prepared a labour for him; to roll a rock. So, for Simon “*Sisyphus challenged the ambiguous morality of the gods and attempted to assert his intellectual and moral excellence*”⁴¹

According to Camus, the gods have chosen this kind of punishment because there is nothing worse than a fruitless work. He claims that the absurd hero, Sisyphus, becomes aware of his fate the moment the rock falls down again. Then comes the time he accepts his destiny. What attracts Camus more is the moment when the rock falls down to the plain and Sisyphus follows it; even though he knows that his efforts are made in vain. Indeed, Sisyphus’s acceptance of his situation and his decision to start newly the same task makes him stronger than his fate, which is the stone. This also makes him the creator and the master of his destiny.

Camus relates the endless rolling of the rock to nowadays’ jobs when the workers do always the same tasks. For him, the feeling of the absurd can be born out of a mechanical and routine work which is judged interesting. Camus also compares Sisyphus when he returns back to his stone to a man who looks back to his past deeds which constitute his destiny. According to him, Sisyphus defeats the gods because he decides to go along with his punishment.⁴² He says: “*The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.*”⁴³

2- The Akan Philosophy

The approach that I am going to apply to the second part of my dissertation, which consists of the differences between Armah's and Camus's novels, is the Akan philosophy of the individual and his relationship to the community. To do so, I will make reference to the fifth chapter of author's raw *Person and community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies, I* (1992). In this part of the book which is entitled '*Person and Community in Akan Thought*', Gyekye Kwame discusses the importance of the communitarian life in African societies and the place of the individual in such societies, by focusing on the Akan traditional thought.

Generally speaking, in the African thought the individual is seen as being a communal one by nature, who grows in a context of social relationships and interdependence. He is never seen as an isolated and independent one. In addition, the members of a community share the same intellectual, ideological and emotional interests and they have the same goals and values.⁴⁴

Gyekye refers to this kind of thinking as being "*radical, excessive and unrestricted.. a view of communitarianism I find unsupportable*".⁴⁵ He asks the question whether the individual can be prior to his community and if it is not the community that borrows its existence and strength from the individuals and the relationships between them. Gyekye gives an example of the Akan maxim which says that "*one tree does not make or constitutes[sic] a forest*".⁴⁶ By this maxim, the Akans focus on the idea that the whole is the function of its parts. In this context, the author claims that the community should provide:

the individual person the opportunity to express his individuality, to acquire and develop his personality and to fully become the kind of person he wants to be (...) a person is by nature a social(communal) being, yes; but he is by nature other things as well.⁴⁷

In Akan traditional thought, personhood is not measured according to age, ritualized grief or the social status of the individual. Therefore, personhood "*may reach its full*

realization in community, but it is not acquired or yet to be achieved as one goes along in society".⁴⁸ Gyekye Kwame refers to some expressions that are used by the Akans to judge the life and conduct of people. One of them says: "he is not a human person".⁴⁹ The Akans use this expression to describe a wicked, selfish and bad conducted person. This shows that,

There are some basic norms and ideals to which the behaviour of a persons [sic], if he is a persons[sic], ought to conform, and that there are moral values that the human person is capable of displaying in his conduct. And because he is thought to be capable of displaying those virtues, it is expected that he would, when the situation arises, display him in his conduct and act in conformity with the accepted moral values and standards".⁵⁰

In addition, in the Akan culture a lot is expected from the individual in terms of displaying moral values. For instance, when a person acts in a good way, the Akan judgement on him should be "he is a person". It means that he has a good character and he is a peaceable person. This includes also kindness, respect for others, and simplicity. In return, this person should be treated as a morally responsible agent. All this shows the great importance given to the moral values of a person in the Akan culture. In the latter, a real human being is the one who has a moral sense and the capacity to make moral judgements.⁵¹

So, personhood is defined in this culture in terms of moral capacities including good character, honesty, kindness, generosity, the care for others' welfare and the rejection of greed, cruelty and selfishness. These attributes are not defined by the community but discovered by it,

It means that human nature is considered in Akan culture to be essentially good, not depraved or warped by some original sin; that the human person is basically good, can and should do good, and should in turn have good done to him/ her.⁵²

In fact, there is another type of judgements about a person that is not necessarily moral in nature. For instance, the social status of an individual in African societies is measured according to some conditions such as the feeling of responsibility, and the intellectual and moral achievements. In addition to the fulfilment of some social norms and principles like to

be married and to have children and a family. It is worth mentioning that the individual may fail in the fulfilment of some of these conditions; however, he fails in relation to some social status and not in his personhood. Gyekye Kwame claims: “*it cannot be persuasively argued that personhood is fully defined by the communal structure or social relationships*”.⁵³

According to the author, even though the individual is a part of a given society that has a specific culture and a set of shared values and purposes, he can find that some aspects of the social life are “*inelegant, undignifying or unenlightening and can thoughtfully be questioned and evaluated*”.⁵⁴ In this case, the individual amends and re-evaluates the existing values and norms, as it can result in the total rejection of these norms by him. He can also distance himself from his community and its members.⁵⁵

Gyekye focuses on the importance of autonomy and self-assertion. In this context, autonomy does not mean that the individual is self-complete, but that he owns a will that enables him to determine his goals and to try his best to realize them. Therefore, one’s individuality is only partly defined by his membership in community. At the end, the author suggests a moderate or restricted communitarianism instead of a radical and unrestricted one. This suggestion is due to the fact that the restricted one cares for both features of the individual; as a communal being and as an autonomous, self-determining and self-assertive one who has capacity for choice and evaluation.⁵⁶ He calls for a community which searches for a life lived in harmony and cooperation. The life which is free from hostility and confrontation and has respect and consideration for the individual’s talents and capacities.⁵

From what has been said, I conclude that both writers; Ayi Kwei Armah and Albert Camus were influenced in their writings by the historical and personal events they have witnessed in their lives. I also infer that there are similarities between Armah's and Camus's writings in spite of the completely different socio-political and cultural contexts in which they set their works. The next chapter will focus on the similarities between Armah's and Camus's novels that will be done in the light of the philosophy of the absurd as it is discussed in Camus's book *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

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Chapter Two

Similarities between Armah's

The Beautiful Ones Are Not

Yet Born and Camus's *The*

Stranger

In this chapter, as I have already mentioned, I am going to show the similarities between Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and Albert Camus' *The Stranger*. I will focus on the common points between the behaviour of the man and that of Meursault in relationship to Camus's book *The Myth of Sisyphus*. So, I am going to explain how the main character in Armah's novel can be included in the category of absurd characters. I will also show how the man seems to live in a world devoid of meaning and his efforts to assign meaning to life are seen lost in vain, which leads to his alienation and estrangement from his environment.

To achieve my purpose, I will apply on the two novels some aspects from Albert Camus's book *The Myth of Sisyphus*. I am going to show that the man in Armah's *The Beautiful Ones* seems, like Meursault, an absurd man. What makes the man and Meursault absurd characters is that both of them do not escape the absurdity of their life through hope. In addition, the two characters are confronted with situations marked by the presence of contradictions and meaninglessness, which push them to conclude that life is not worth living. However, they choose to carry on their life and to not choose suicide as a way to escape this absurdity. Also, being clerks, both characters are trapped in the process of doing always the same tasks.

According to Camus, the absurd is neither in man nor in the world; it is born out of the confrontation of these two elements and their common presence. He also thinks that the absurd is a state of divorce and it is the outcome of man's search to find answers to his questions, and the silence of the world before his agonies. For him, life has no rational or redeeming meaning. In fact, Camus was not the only writer who took refuge in the absurd; many other intellectuals came to similar conclusions about the worthlessness of life. Faced with the horrors of Hitler's Nazi regime and unparalleled massacres of the war, the meaning of life, for them, is reduced to only mean absurdity or insignificance.

This chapter will be divided into two sections. The first section contains the study of the absurd in Camus's *The Stranger*, while the second will focus on the study of some aspects of the absurd in Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. I will also show how the alienation of the two characters and their rejection of the teachings of their societies engage them in a constant conflict with the members of their communities, and put them in a state of weakness.

Section one: The Absurd in Camus's *The Stranger*

Before starting the analysis of the behaviour of Meursault and how the absurd is reflected in Camus's work, I see it necessary to give a brief summary of the novel and the historical context in which it is set. *The Stranger* is a story about a young man who clerks in an office in Algiers . His life is an absurd going and coming back from work. Meursault receives the news of his mother's death with indifference and uncertainty. Once at home, he refuses to see his mother's corpse and passes the night watching his mother's friends. One day after her death, he goes to the beach where he encounters Marie, whom he knows before. He goes with her to the cinema to see a Fernandel movie and he starts a relationship with her. Later, Meursault becomes friend with Raymond and helps him to write a letter to his mistress.

His friendship with Raymond takes Meursault to the shore along with Marie after they are invited by Raymond's friend. There, they encounter a group of Arabs with whom Raymond has already been in trouble. By chance, Raymond's revolver is with Meursault who goes out to have a walk along the beach. After a confrontation with the Arab, Meursault kills him with five shots. He is taken to prison to be tried and there he remains watching, hearing the events and waiting the day of his prosecution. The novel is set in Algeria during the World War Two. So, the disillusionment of the war pushed Camus to conclude through his archetype hero that life is meaningless and this is what we are going to discover through our study of *The Stranger*.

In fact, from the very beginning of the novel, it is clear that Meursault is an absurd man. This is evident from the opening lines of the story in which he seems to be uncertain about the exact day of his mother's death. He says:

Maman died today. Or yesterday maybe, I don't know. I got a telegram from the home: "Mother deceased. Funeral tomorrow. Faithfully yours". That doesn't mean anything. Maybe it was yesterday.¹

Meursault is not only uncertain about the day of his mother's death; he also does not know her exact age. For instance, when he is asked about her age, Meursault answers only by saying: "*Fairly*".² He says that he answers this way because "*I didn't know the exact number*".³ In addition, when the caretaker asks him if he wants to see his mother's face, Meursault answers by negation. When he asks him about the reason, Meursault says: "*I don't know*".⁴ Actually, uncertainty is an important feature of the absurd man and it is the result of his confrontation with a world which is devoid of meaning.

In addition to his uncertainty, Meursault is also indifferent and his indifference includes his mother, his girlfriend and the very fact of his killing the Arab. He is described by Camus as being a watcher throughout all the narrative. For instance, he takes permission from his boss to leave for two days because it is a custom for the bereaved to sit all night in vigil by the coffin of his departed one. During the night, Meursault smokes, drinks milk and coffee and passes his time watching his mother's friends. He says about this: "*I saw them more clearly than I had ever seen anyone, and not one detail of their faces or their clothes escaped me*".⁵ In his apartment, Meursault uses to observe the outside world through the balcony. Even during his trial, Meursault is watching and following the events, as if someone else and not him would be tried. He says: "*everything was happening without my participation. My fate was being decided without anyone so much as asking my opinion*"⁶ he also adds: "*I was even interested in seeing a trial*".⁷ In fact, Meursault is not the only watcher; Camus focuses also on the description of the look of the Arabs, that of the members of the court and that of the crowd

that Meursault wishes would be huge the day of his prosecution. These eyes represent Meursault's society and its resentment.

Being an absurd man, Meursault is very attached to the physical world around him. This is clear though his focus on the description of what his senses receive. When they are in their way to the cemetery, he starts to describe the landscapes, the colour of the clothes and the heat of the sun above him, but no mention of agony or sadness towards his mother's death:

I felt a little lost between the blue and the white of the sky and the monotony of the colors around me-the sticky black of the tar, the dull black of the clothes, and the shiny black of the hearse. All of it-the sun, the smell of leather and horse dung from the hearse.⁸

Meursault's attachment to the physical world is also reflected through his attraction to Marie's body. When the latter asks him if he wants to marry her, Meursault answers that it is all the same for him. When she comes to visit him in prison, Meursault is only attracted by Marie's beauty and he says: "*She looked very beautiful, but, I didn't know how to tell her*".⁹

Meursault, like Sisyphus, is fascinated by the beauty of the sea and the sun. For instance, Sisyphus betrays his oath for the gods to return back to the under world because he is seduced by the beauty of nature. Camus says in his *The Myth of Sisyphus*: "*But when he had seen again the face of this world, enjoyed water and sun, warm stones and the sea, he no longer wanted to go back to the infernal darkness*".¹⁰ It is the case of Meursault who dreams before his mother's burial of having a walk in the landscape. He says, as if the dead one is not his own mother, "*It had been a long time since I'd been out in the country, and I could feel how much I'd enjoy going for a walk if it hadn't been for Maman*"¹¹ In addition, he goes with his girl friend Marie to the beach only one day after his mother's burial.

Furthermore, Meursault's attitudes are contradictory. For instance, before his arrival at home, he wants to see the corpse of his mother immediately. He says: "*I wanted to see*

Maman right away".¹² Once there, he changes his mind and refuses to see it. This contradiction in Meursault's behaviour is the outcome of his inability to distinguish what is true or reasonable from what is not because the world, for him, is not based on reason. Camus says on what concerns the contradiction of the absurd man's behaviour: "*The mind's first step is to distinguish what is true from what is false. As soon as thought reflects itself, what it first discovers is a contradiction*".¹³

Meursault works as a clerk in an office and this is shown when he says: "*I worked hard at the office today*"¹⁴ and "*I worked all afternoon. It got very hot in the office, and that evening, when I left, I was glad to walk back slowly along the docks*"¹⁵, also "*I worked hard all week*".¹⁶ He spends his life between his work in the office, his apartment and Celeste's restaurant. In addition, being an absurd man, Meursault is alienated from his society. He finds harmony only within himself. The relationship with the members of his society (including his mother) is less important for him. This is obvious when he says at the end of the novel that he has nothing to do with his mother's love or that of God.

Besides, Meursault is honest and his honesty costs him his life. For instance, his answer to the prosecutor that he does not regret his killing of the Arab causes the members of the court to judge him as being a monster. Meursault can, if he wants, pretend that he regrets his crime so that the court would take that into consideration and lower his punishment. However, he prefers to be honest and to not say what he does not feel or believe only to satisfy his society. When he is asked about the reason of his killing of the Arab, he answers that it is because of the sun. Meursault also does not deny his indifference during his mother's funeral and when his lawyer asks him about his feelings towards her, he answers honestly: "*I probably did love her, but that didn't mean anything. At one time or another all normal people have wished their loved ones were dead*".¹⁷ Therefore, Meursault is condemned for his

behaviour and his excessive honesty and not for the crime that he commits. That is why Camus considers him as the real Jesus because he dies for the truth.

The behaviour of Meursault including his indifference, uncertainty, insensitiveness and honesty leads to his estrangement. If Meursault is not a member of his society, his actions and his indifferent behaviour can be pardoned. However, he belongs to a specific society that looks for answers and searches meaning behind the behaviour and the actions of its individuals. So, his prosecution would be the “*debt owed to society*”.¹⁸ It is only at the end of the novel that Meursault becomes aware of his guilt and his estrangement when he says: “*with such a triumphant look in my direction that for the first time in years I had this stupid urge to cry, because I could feel how much all these people hated me*”.¹⁹ The feeling of estrangement is explained by Camus in his *The Myth of Sisyphus* when he says:

A stranger to myself and to the world, armed solely with a thought that negates itself as soon as it asserts, what is this condition in which I can have peace only by refusing to know and to live, in which the appetite for conquest bumps into walls that defy its assaults?²⁰

Another evidence of the absurd is stressed by Camus through his reflection on the meaninglessness of life. Being an absurd man, Meursault believes that life has no meaning. This is stated clearly by him when he says towards the end of the novel:

But every body knows life isn't worth living. Deep down I knew perfectly well that it doesn't matter whether you die at thirty or at seventy, since in either case other men and women will naturally go on living-and for thousands of years (...) At that point, what would disturb my brain of thought was the terrifying leap I would feel my heart take at the idea of having twenty more years of life ahead me.²¹

However, he does not escape to hope or to suicide to flee the absurdity of his life. Camus explains in his *The Myth of Sisyphus* that when the absurd man is caught between two alternatives, whether to end his life or to carry on, he chooses the second one even though he knows that life is not worth living. For him, the absurd man never escapes to hope, but he chooses to revolt. Revolt is given a great importance by Camus in his *The Myth of Sisyphus*. This is shown in *The Stranger* when Meursault tells the chaplain that he is wasting his

prayers with him because he simply does not believe in God. He even insults the chaplain, hits him and calls him 'monsieur' instead of 'father'. Meursault refuses to be hypocrite only to satisfy his society and its members by conforming to their morals and expectations.

At the end, Meursault starts to develop an absurd reasoning by accepting his punishment. For him, the individual can be accustomed to any situation, but one has always to keep in mind that life is not worth living and that one day or another he is going to die. He says: "*I felt that I had been happy and that I was happy again*".²² In this, he is compared to Sisyphus who, for Camus, is happy in his task of rolling endlessly the rock.

These are the main attributes that make Meursault an absurd hero. He is indifferent, uncertain, honest and estranged. Through him, Camus reflects his disillusionment with the two World Wars and his pessimism as a result of his bad health. He also reflects on the difficult relationship between the individual and his society as a result of his alienation and indifference. Meursault prefers to be far from the everyday happenings in his society and he finds harmony only within himself. The relationship with the members of his society is irrelevant for him. At the end of the novel, Meursault is sentenced to death. He is judged for his behaviour and not for his crime. Meursault would be sentenced simply because he does not cry the day of his mother's death and he cannot show what he does not feel.

Section two: Aspects/ Elements of the Absurd in Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*

This section contains the study of the absurd in Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. Before starting my analysis, I want to remind that many of Armah's critics claim him to be influenced by western literature especially by existentialism and the philosophy of the absurd, a thing that Armah has always denied. For instance, Armah's well known critic Charles Larson states that: "*Armah's novels fall into the mainstream of current western tradition and his protagonists are not very different from a whole line of anti-heroes*".²³

Larson is not the only critic who claims Armah's influence by western literature. For instance, the Ghanaian novelist and critic Ama Ata Aidoo and Eldred Durosimi Jones focused in their studies of Armah's novels on the issue of influence. In addition, Achebe, Gakwandi, Kibera, Nnolim, Obiechina and Yankson followed in the foot steps of these critics and developed the same view about Armah's works.²⁴

Actually, the very fact that the protagonist in Armah's novel is nameless suggests that he is alienated and far from the everyday happenings in his society. It is worth mentioning that the man operates in the novel at two levels: he operates at the level of the European existentialist time and this is the source of his identity crisis and what makes him resemble Meursault. He also functions at the level of the traditional Akan time, whereby he acts as a ritual carrier who cleanses his society from its dirt. This second idea will be explained further in the coming chapter which is concerned with the study of Armah's novel in the light of the Akan traditional thought.

Armah introduces his protagonist at the beginning of the novel as being: "*A pair of wide-open, staring eyes*".²⁵ In fact, the man is not only anonymous; he is also reduced by the author into a '*sleeper*'²⁶, '*walker*'²⁷ and '*watcher*'.²⁸ He is described as being a watcher at the

opening and at the end of the novel. Armah says in the last page of his novel “*the driver must have seen the silent watcher*”.²⁹ So, Armah’s novel begins and ends with the man as a watcher, which signifies his passivity and the absence of active participation in what is going on. In this, he can be compared to Meursault who is depicted as a watcher all around Camus’s novel.

Armah goes further to describe his main character as being: “*the invisible man of the shadows*”³⁰ to emphasize his alienation, an important feature that the man shares with Meursault. Both characters prefer to be far from everyday happenings in their societies. In these terms, Avi Sagi claims in his book *Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd*: “*Absurd heroes are solipsistic, and their relationship with others is irrelevant to their existence as individuals. They attain harmony within themselves*”.³¹

Alienation is an important theme in Armah’s writings in general. His protagonists including, Baako in *Fragments*, Solo in *Why Are We So Blest?* and the man in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* are estranged from their surroundings. The man’s alienation is reflected through his loneliness which is shown through the excessive way in which Armah describes his protagonist as being alone most of the time. He says: “*The comforting loneliness again*”³², “*he felt lonely in the way only a man condemned by all things around him can ever feel lonely*”³³, “*a loneliness that corrodes his heart with its despair*”³⁴ and “*He was alone now. Whenever, he found himself alone and became aware of his loneliness*”.³⁵

Just like Meursault, the man also reflects on the difficult relationship that links the individual to his society and its members. The man finds refuge in nature and his only friend, Teacher, who lives far from everyone and everything. Teacher tells his friend that it is better for them to keep themselves far from their loved ones because they simply cannot fulfil their expectations. In this context Eldred J. Jones and Marjorie Jones say:

The 'great tension' in the lives of these two characters emanates from the conflict between their 'theoretical' wish for a changed or different society 'so that they can start belonging to it', and the insistence of their families and those around them that they function in society as it is presently constituted and tempered. This they refuse to do, and as a consequence find themselves on the edge of things: uninvolved spectators in the daily happenings around them, watching, agonizing, but not initiating any action to bring about change (...) One consequence of this man-society distance is the negative transformations it creates in family relationships.³⁶

The atmosphere of silence and stillness is reflected by Armah in many situations to focus on his characters' alienation. For instance, when he says: "*Silence. No voices, no sounds in the night, just silence*"³⁷, "*In the momentary silence following, the naked man on the bed sighs*".³⁸

Similar to Meursault, the man shows uncertainty when the timber contractor asks him why he refuses to take the bribe that he offers him. He answers that he does not know the reason. And when he asks him if he believes what he said, the man answers him that he thinks so. The man's uncertainty is also shown when he tells Teacher: "*But I do not know whether it is envy that makes me hate what I see. I am not even sure that I hate it, Teacher*".³⁹

What makes Armah's protagonist resemble Meursault is that he does not escape his meaningless life through hope which is an important attribute of the absurd man. This is explained by Camus when he says: "*Does its absurdity require one to escape it through hope or suicide- this is what must be clarified*".⁴⁰ The man flees from the struggle with his wife to his work in the office. He is a clerk in the railway office where he works everyday except on Sundays. This is clear since the beginning of the novel when Armah says "*With the climb up into the office, thoughts that might have struck desperation into him on other days came with a surprising gentleness*".⁴¹ Armah also says: "*at least the job itself was one of the few around which did not have a killing dullness*".⁴²

Camus explains in his *The Myth of Sisyphus* that the absurd can be born out of doing always the same tasks. In this, he compares the worker of today in his mission of doing the

same odd jobs everyday to the endless rolling of the rock by Sisyphus. Camus says on what concerns the emergence of the absurd from routine:

It happens that the stage-sets collapse. Rising, tram, four ours in the office or factory, meal, tram, four hours of work, meal, sleep and Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, according to the same rhythm –this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the ‘Why’ and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amassment (...) Weariness comes at the end of the acts of a mechanical life.⁴³

The feeling of the absurd and worthlessness of life are reflected in Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones* when, towards the end of the novel, the man recognizes the absurdity in which he lives. It is only now that he becomes aware that the absurd can also emerge from his work in the railway that he judges at the beginning as being a refuge from the tensions of his everyday struggles with his wife. The narrator says on this:

But then suddenly all his mind was consumed with thoughts of everything he was going back to- 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 own life could offer him.⁴⁴

The absence of hope is further explored by Armah in different situations including when he says “*Sometimes this death of hope would spread all over the world*”⁴⁵ and through the protagonist’s friend, Teacher. The latter, like the man, is anonymous. He is used by Armah as an irony on the African elects who are alienated from their communities because of the clash of principles between them and their corrupted surrounding. Teacher says to the man:

No. No any more. Not hope, anyhow. I don’t feel any hope in me any more. I can see things, but I don’t feel much. When you see the end of things even in their beginnings, there’s no more hope, unless you want to pretend, or forget, or get drunk or something. I also am one of the dead people, the walking dead. A ghost. I died long ago. So long ago that not even the old libations of living blood will make me live again.⁴⁶

This pessimistic view about the world is made known by Armah when he compares his protagonist’s life to a long tunnel that has no end. Also, when Teacher says that he can see the

end of things even before their beginning. Armah also compares the suffering Ghanaians to the living dead.

Besides, the man's honesty, like that of Meursault, costs him to be seen as a bad driver, a criminal, a wicked and useless man. For instance, when Koomson asks the man to take him to the toilet, he answers him simply: "*We don't have a toilet here*".⁴⁷ He says that they do not have a high class toilet, but only a latrine. His wife is shocked and astonished by the excessive frankness of her husband and the way he answers the party man without hesitation

In addition, when Estella Koomson says that the local drinks make one ill, the man answers that: '*as for me, they do not make me ill. Perhaps in the pocket, but nowhere else*'.⁴⁸ Unlike his wife, Oyo, who tries her best to make her dinner look like that of rich people, the man is honest and does not try to pretend that he is rich when he is in reality not.

The man's honesty and his refusal of posing results in the hatred and resentment of his loved ones. Armah says: "*the man saw his mother-in-law's face contract, oozing shame and hate missed together*".⁴⁹ This expression makes one remember Meursault who describes the prosecutor's stare at him as being full of hatred.

Therefore, the man, like Meursault, is estranged from his environment and finds himself in a position of weakness. This is shown in Armah's novel when he says: "*The man looked uncertainly into his wife's face. In such situations he felt like a stranger from a country that was very far away*".⁵⁰ He adds:

The terrible feeling of loneliness again come over him in his own home, and he walked out with a desperation that was no less deep for all its suddenness, groping through the night for the only human hand that could touch his and not make him feel a stranger to life.⁵¹

Furthermore, like Meursault, Armah's protagonist shows a paradox in his personality. This is shown when he tells his wife about his refusal to take a bribe from the timber contractor and goes in details to tell her about his meeting with the Koomson family and how

Estella's perfume remains in his hand. In fact, the man knows more than anyone else that the mention of the Koomson family would push his wife to mock at him, and that she would react in a negative way when she knows about his refusal to take the bribe from the timber contractor. However, this does not prevent him from telling her what happened and in details. After his wife mocks at him and calls him a *Chichidodo*, the man leaves towards his friend, Teacher, to ask for his advice. So, there is nothing more to be said between him and his wife. This is clear when Armah says:

There was nothing the man could say to his wife, and the woman herself did not look as if she thought there could be anything said to her about what she knew was true. But inside the man the confusion and the impotence had swollen into something asking for a way out of confinement and in his restlessness he roes and went out quietly through the door, and his wife sat there not even staring after him, not even asking where he was going or when he would come back in the night, or even whether he wanted to return at all to his home.⁵²

The very fact that the man has nothing to say to his wife and that she has nothing to tell him reminds of Meursault who says: "*Maman and I didn't expect anything from each other anymore, or from anyone else either, and that we had both gotten used to our new lives*".⁵³

Another instance of the man's contradiction in his behaviour is reflected through his refusal to take part in the business affair that his wife settles with Joe Koomson, concerning the buying of a boat, but he accompanies her to Koomson's house. Once there, he says to his wife that he cannot sign. Actually, the man knows since the beginning that he would not sign the boat contract, but he goes to the Koomsons' house and there he feels his manhood hurt when he sees the elevated way in which these people live. However, his refusal to sign the compact does not influence the running of the events because his wife signs even without his approval and participation. He is just like Meursault who says that the members of the court are deciding his destiny without his participation.

Akin to Meursault, Armah's protagonist also seeks refuge in nature. For instance, in many cases he is described as being walking along the sea. This is evident when the narrator

says: “*Far out, toward the mouth of the small stream and the sea, he could see the water already aging into the mud of its beginnings*”.⁵⁴ He also says:

When he awoke he felt very cold in the back, though already the sun was up over the sea, its rays coming very clean and clear on the water; and the sky above all open and beautiful.⁵⁵

Like Camus, Armah reflects in his *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* the worthlessness of life when the narrator says: “*How often had teacher tried to help by saying it was only life*”⁵⁶ In these terms Albert Camus asserts in his *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

But what does life mean in such a universe? Nothing else for the moment but indifference to the future and a desire to use up everything that is given. Belief in the meaning of life always implies a scale of values, a choice, our preferences. Belief in the absurd, according to our definitions teaches the contrary.⁵⁷

Revolt is an important attribute of the absurd man. For Camus, even though the absurd man knows that his life is absurd and that it has no meaning, he cannot think of suicide to escape its absurdity. Camus explains: “*That revolt is the certainty of a crushing fate, without the resignation that ought to accompany it*”.⁵⁸ This is the case of the man in Armah’s novel, who is against the spreading principles and morals in his society. In fact, the man revolts by his decision to carry on his life and to not commit suicide to escape his hopeless and gloomy life. Even though the man, like Meursault, does not try to change the existing morals and principles in his society, he does not submit to its members’ wishes and demands which necessitate him to deny his own principles. But this leads to his estrangement. Armah says on this:

The man walks into the hall, meeting the eyes of his waiting wife. These eyes are flat, the eyes of a person who has come to a decision not to say anything, eyes totally accepting and unquestioning in the way only a thing from which nothing is ever expected can be accepted and not questioned. And it is true that the air is filled with accusation (...) The children begin to come out of the room within. They are not asleep, not even the third little one. It seems their eyes also are learning this flat look that is a defence against hope, as if their mother’s message needs their confirmation.⁵⁹

Actually, the important characteristics that make the main character in Armah's novel an absurd and alienated man are summarized by Charles I. Glicksberg in his book *A Trinity of the Absurd* when he describes the man as follows:

The anti-hero is a character who is nameless, crawling somewhere in the mud, pre-occupied with his body and its needs but also reaching out for human contact, vaguely remembering the past. He suffers from the unremitting torment of existence, too overwhelmed by inner and outer confusion to say no to life.⁶⁰

From my analysis of the behaviour of Meursault in Camus's *The Stranger* and that of the man in Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, I come to the conclusion that they have some features in common. These characteristics are mainly alienation, honesty, estrangement, uncertainty and contradiction. Both Camus and Armah reflected in their works the meaninglessness of life, which is the result of the eras in which they set their novels which are characterized by the spread of disillusionment and despair. They have also shown the negative effects of the absurd on the relationship between the individual and his community. The next chapter is concerned with the study of Armah's novel in the context of the Akan traditional thought.

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- ⁴ Ibid., 6.
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- ⁷ Ibid., 83.
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- ¹⁴ Camus, *The Stranger*, 24.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., 26.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., 34.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 65.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., 109.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 90.
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- ²³ Larson, in Linus Asong, *Psychological Constructs and the Craft of African Fiction of Yesteryears* (Cameroon: Langaa Research & Publishing Common Initiative Group, 2012), 83.

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³⁵ *Ibid.*, 156.

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³⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

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⁴⁰ Camus, *Myth of Sisyphus*, 16.

⁴¹ Armah, *Beautiful ones*, 24.

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⁴³ Camus, *Myth of Sisyphus*, 19.

⁴⁴ Armah, *Beautiful Ones*, 183.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 34.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 132.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 134.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 131.

⁵¹ Ibid., 153.

⁵² Ibid., 47.

⁵³ Camus, *The Stranger*, 88.

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⁵⁵ Ibid., 180.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 85.

⁵⁷ Camus, *Myth of Sisyphus*, 59.

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⁵⁹ Armah, *Beautiful Ones*, 41.

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Chapter Three

Differences between Armah's

and Camus's novels, The

Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet

Born in the Light of the Akan

Traditional Thought

In this chapter, I will study Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* in the light of the Akan traditional thought. To do so, I am going to make reference to the fifth chapter of author's raw *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies, I*. Therefore, I will try to show that Armah's novel takes from another philosophy which is purely African. Differences between Armah's *The Beautiful Ones* and Camus's *The Stranger* will be inferred at the same time as the study is going on.

Actually, philosophy and ethics are two important aspects in African societies generally and in Ghana specifically. To be more accurate, the Ghanaian culture is a philosophical one. It uses philosophical concepts as a means to explain the actions and the behaviour of the individuals. "*Thus customs relating to procreation, work, leisure, death and sundry circumstances of life are based on and reflect doctrines about God, mind, goodness, destiny and human personality*".¹ This idea is well explained by Kwasi Wiredu in his introduction to the book *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies, I* when he says: "*Ghanaian philosophy, right from its origins in our traditional culture, has always been a speculative-theoretic effort at the understanding of experience and reality for the betterment of the human condition*".²

Armah like many African writers, such as Achebe, uses elements from traditional philosophy to reflect on the existence and life in modern times in African societies. His recourse to this philosophy is an attempt to highlight the problem of moral disorientation in Ghana resulting from the clash of culture with historical circumstances. This state is the consequence of colonial intervention within the African affairs which represents a challenge to the African identity. Whereas Achebe refers to oral tradition to answer back the colonial discourse and to celebrate the African past, Armah refers to tradition as an attempt to diagnose the moral illnesses of Ghana in the period after the independence and to suggest

remedies. In addition, Achebe and Armah are different in the way they refer to oral tradition.

Ode Ogede thinks that:

Achebe and Armah stand at different distances from their respective oral traditions; that, where Armah makes generic use of oral tradition relying on the superstructures of such oral forms as the epic which he rewrites and redeploys, breathing new life into the epic, as it were, so that it can achieve new ideological goals, Achebe has been mainly a faithful translator of oral Igbo forms- folk stories, proverbs, and aphorisms.³

Elements from the Ghanaian tradition are reflected in Armah's *The Beautiful Ones* through the plot and characterization. So, this chapter will be divided into two sections. At the level of the plot, I am going to prove that Armah refers to some rituals and practices from the ancient Ghanaian society such as the ritual of society cleansing by representing his hero as a ritual carrier. In characterization section, I will prove that the behaviour of the main character in Armah's novel conforms to the Akan traditional thought as explained by Gyekye in '*Person and Community in Akan Thought*'. The aspects that I am going to apply to my analysis of the behaviour of the man are related to judgements made by the Akans about the individual. These judgements include the fulfilment of some social conditions like to be married and to have children. In addition, the individual should be able to make moral judgements and to decide what is good and what is not, to be responsible and to help other people in distress. All these attributes are originated in the main character in Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*.

Section one: Plot

The following section aims to the analysis of some events and actions that take place in Armah's novel and that have specific significances in the Akan traditional cosmogony. One and the most important of these events takes place towards the end of the novel, when the man helps Koomson to flee and delves into the sea to clean himself and his society from dirt.

Before starting to study how elements from Ghanaian tradition are reflected through the plot, I am going to put the novel in its historical context during Nkrumah's ruling of Ghana to explain the reasons behind the man's alienation, which is the result of his opposition and antagonism to the existing values in his society. Armah's novel is set in post- independent Ghana during the 1960's. Most of its events take place in Sekondi- Takoradi, Ghana's gateway to the world at that time. The novel stretches over not more than a year and ends with the fall of Nkrumah's regime as a result of a coup in February 1966.

The story is about the anonymous man who tries to survive in the declining Ghana under Nkrumah's presidency. In fact, Nkrumah was one of the well known African leaders who led Ghana to independence. In 1957, he was elected as the first president of independent Ghana. The Ghanaians were then full of hopes and dreams that "*Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah's leadership would spearhead the unification of Africa and the closing of the development gap between the continent and the industrialized west*".⁴

However, they were disappointed and disillusioned to discover that they have only changed the rulers whereas the system remains always the same, as Armah says in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* "*New people, new style, old dance*".⁵ The period that follows Nkrumah's presidency is characterized by decline, the spread of bribery, poverty and fraud. The reason behind the deterioration of this regime was principally the bad management of the corrupt and dishonest leaders of Ghana. The depressed situation of the Ghanaians

reached its peak in 1965 which led to a military coup against Nkrumah's regime in February 1966. The falling of Nkrumah's government by a coup d'état is the most important event and the turning point in Armah's *Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. The ruling class including the president Nkrumah and his ministers were mocked at and personified through the character of Koomson who is the "symbol of the desire for materialism"⁶ and the imitator of his white masters.

In fact, Nkrumah, along most of the African leaders of the period after the independence imposed on people a radical communitarianism to give reason for their crimes and their oppression of the poor and the impoverished. These leaders justify that socialism is originated in the traditional African thought. For them, African Socialism is the descendent of communalism. Kwame Nkrumah says: "*if one seeks the socio-political ancestor of socialism, one must go to communalism...in socialism, the principles underlying are given expression in modern circumstances*".⁷ Armah's lonely hero was decried because he was seen to oppose this philosophy that leaves no room for the individual's freedom and rights.

The man is estranged by the members of his family and society because he refuses to conform to the spreading morality which is the morality of money and wealth regardless to the used means. For instance, his wife mocks at the man by comparing him to a *chichidodo* and the timber contractor describes him as being a wicked man. All this pushes him to wonder "*how can I ever feel like a human being*".⁸ He also finds it difficult to defend his honesty in a society where honesty is seen as "*a social vice*"⁹ and the refuge of "*the cowards and the fools*"¹⁰. However, toward the end of the novel and after the fall of Nkrumah's regime, the events of the novel are reversed and the man is judged by his wife to be a good husband. Oyo says to him "*I am glad you never became like him*".¹¹ She means Koomson.

In fact, the man helps the corrupted party man to flee to the sea through the hole of his latrine. This is the most important event in the novel because through it Armah realizes the ritual of sacrificial, purification and regeneration. This ritual is associated to West African societies where the excrement and the dirt of the dying year are expelled to the sea to purify society and individuals from filth and to mark the birth of a new community. In these terms, Mircea Eliade says: *“il existe partout une conception de la fin et du début d’ une periode temporelle (...) s’encadre dans un systeme plus vaste, celui des purifications périodiques”*.¹²

Whereas the man symbolizes, according to Derek Wright, the ritual carrier who *“cleanses the community by carrying its sins and subsequent misfortunes to wilderness”*,¹³ Koomson is an epitome of dirt because he symbolizes the morality of wealth, bribery and corruption. He was described at the beginning of the novel as being a wealthy man who exercises a great influence on poor people like Oyo and her mother who see *“Jesus Christ in him”*.¹⁴ He is also seen by them as being a good driver. However, at the end of the novel he becomes a symbol of filth and excreta. He can also be compared to the old child that symbolizes decay and downfall.

Armah is very clever and very attentive to make his description of this event seem more attractive. For instance, Koomson is helped by the man to flee to the sea through the hole of the latrine, the very one that Koomson refuses to utilize when he comes with his wife to settle a business affair with Oyo. In addition, the way the man helps Koomson to go out of the hole by expelling him makes him seem like dirt that is expelled to the sea in western societies. Koomson is expelled by the very man who is estranged and mocked at throughout the novel. In his estrangement and alienation, the man can be compared to *“a ritual effigy”*,¹⁵ that is bitten during the cleansing ceremony.

Therefore, the expelling of Koomson is a sign of the purification of society from its sins and the delving of the man into the sea is a symbol of rebirth. In these terms, Mircea Eliade says:

lors de cette coupure du temps qu'est l' "Année" nous assistons non seulement à la cessation effective d'un certain intervalle temporel et au début d'un autre intervalle, mais aussi à l'*abolition* de l'année passée et du temps écoulé. Tel est d'ailleurs le sens de la purification rituelle : une *combustion*, une annulation des péchés et des fautes de l'individu et de la communauté dans son ensemble.¹⁶

So, unlike Camus's *The Stranger* which ends with the judgement of Meursault to be sentenced by a guillotine, Armah's *The Beautiful ones Are Not Yet Born* ends with a hope that perhaps some day a new society will be born that will be different from that in which Armah sets his novel. A society based on truthfulness, kindness and honesty and which rejects corruption, sleaze and vice. Armah's hope, even a little, is reflected through the following passage in which he expresses his wish of a new society with different people and morals.

Armah says

Someday in the long future a new life would maybe flower in the country, but when it came, it would not choose as its instruments the same people who had made a habit of killing new flowers.¹⁷

Thus, the community that Armah suggests at the end of the novel and which is not yet born can be compared to the community that Gyekye proposes at the end of the fifth chapter '*Person and Community in Akan Thought*'. Gyekye suggests a restricted or what he calls a moderate communitarianism in which the individual can be recognized as being a communal and an autonomous, self- assertive one. Gyekye claims:

Moderate or restricted communitarianism gives accommodation, as has been shown, to communal values as well as to values of individuality, to social commitments as well as to duties of self-attention (...) Guided by the assumptions about the dual features of the self with an implied dual responsibility, it should be possible to deflate any serious tension between the self and its community.¹⁸

Nevertheless, there is a kind of vagueness and doubt in the way in which Armah expresses his hope in a new community. This is shown, at the end of the novel, through the "*single flower, solitary, unexplainable, and very beautiful*"¹⁹ that is drawn on the bus of a

corrupted conductor who offers a bribe to a police man. In addition, the expression itself that is written behind the bus suggests that the community of which Armah dreams is not yet born.

From what has been said, it becomes clear that Armah makes reference to the Ghanaian tradition which is revealed through his recourse to the cleansing ritual which is a ritual of expelling dirt, filth and excrement from society to mark the birth of a new one. However, this task of cleansing concerns only the man because the novel ends as it begins on bribery and immorality in his society.

II- Section Two: Characterization

As I have already shown in the previous chapter, the main character in Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* has some features in common with Meursault in Camus's *The Stranger*. These characteristics include alienation which is considered by many critics as being an important criterion in modern literature. The man in Armah's novel is alienated and his alienation is shown in different situations and through the very fact that this protagonist bears no name. In addition, the man, like Meursault, has contradictions in his behaviour, is uncertain about what he really wants and does not try to impose his morals and principles, but he sticks to his own values.

Furthermore, the man does not escape the absurdity and meaninglessness of his life through hope. He uses to go to his work in the railway office which he considers as a refuge from the abuses of his wife. He also remains silent and does not try to defend himself before his wife's wearisome and curses. These are the main features that Armah's protagonist shares with Meursault in Camus's *The Stranger* in relationship to Camus's book *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

It is true that Armah's main character, the man, has some characteristics in common with Meursault in Camus's novel; nevertheless his behaviour remains deeply steeped within

the Akan worldview. In fact, Armah's critics exaggerate the extent to which they associate his works with the modern alienated literature. Whereas Camus's main character is a colon who has a fragmented identity like Camus himself, a descendent of pied-noir, the man in Armah's novel is in his own country and within his original culture and tradition. So, this section will be focused on differences between Armah's *The Beautiful Ones* and Camus's *The Stranger* at the level of characterization. To achieve my purpose, I am going to make reference to the Akan traditional thought to show that the behaviour of the man conforms to this philosophy. I will show that the man is married, responsible, and is good by nature because he helps other people in need.

To start with, different from Meursault who is a bachelor and a man who prefers relationships that last short periods like Don Juan in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, the man is described as being married and having children. This is inferred from the beginning of Armah's *The Beautiful Ones* when the narrator says: "*The man walks into the hall, meeting the eyes of his waiting wife (...) The children begin to come out of the room within*".²⁰ To be married and to have children is a quality in the Akan traditional thought as it is explained by Kwame Gyekye in the fifth chapter of author's raw *Person and Community: Ghanaian Traditional Thought, I*. Gyekye claims that in the Akan culture the social status of an individual is measured according to:

his sense of responsibility, expressed, in turn, through his responsiveness and sensitivity to the needs and demands of the group (...) the extent to which he fulfils certain social norms, such as having marital life and bringing up children.²¹

The importance that is given to marriage in this culture is the outcome of the responsibility that the individual feels towards his family unlike the unmarried one. In these terms, the man's friend, Teacher, considers him to be brave enough because he chooses to marry, to have children, and to not flee from everything and everyone like him. Teacher says to the man who complains about his wife's dissatisfaction with what he offers her:

You will have to leave her to enjoy her own sorrow. Unless you are eager to destroy yourself to feed her desires. O you brave married men. In the end you have to see the redness of her gums. If it frightens you, you don't get married at all. You run away like a coward, like me. But you are brave. You have chosen to fight her. And the whole society is behind her.²²

The man is committed to his family even when it is corrupted by excessive consumption which shows his morality and good behaviour.

In addition to marital life, there is another form of judgements made about an individual in the Akan traditional cosmogony which is moral in nature. In fact, in the Akan culture a lot is expected from the individual in terms of displaying moral values. These moral judgements about the individual are originated in the main character in Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, and they are especially reflected through his refusal to accept bribes in a society which is full of corruption and immorality and through his help for others in distress.

For instance, when the messenger who works with the man in the same office wins some money in the government lottery, he tells the latter that he is afraid he will not get it because he knows that their country is full of dishonesty and treachery. So, he suggests cheating an official who works in the lottery office to help him to get his money. The man is against the idea and this is reflected through his answer to the messenger: "*You will be corrupting a public officer*".²³

Also, the man refuses to take a bribe from Amankwa, a timber contractor. Amankwa intends at first for the booking clerk, but he does not find him in the office and the man is the only one who is still in duty. The timber contractor offers him a sum of money and in return the man should send him a train to take his timber out of the forest. The man refuses to take the money even under the pressure of Amankwa who tries every way to convince him. The timber contractor even increases the sum of the bribe he offers to the man, but his efforts are wasted in vain.

The man's answer to the messenger and his refusal to take the bribe from the timber contractor show his moral values and his good behaviour based as it is on truthfulness and frankness, two important features in the Akan culture. In this culture, the individual should be capable of deciding and judging what is moral and what is not. In these terms Gyekye Kwame states:

The foregoing discussion of some morally significant expressions in the Akan language or judgements made about the conduct of persons suggests a conception of moral personhood; a person is defined in terms of moral qualities or capacities: a human person is a being who has a moral sense and is capable of making moral judgements.²⁴

What adds to the morality of the man and the value of his behaviour is his refusal to take bribes and to use illegitimate ways to gain money even though he lives in extreme poverty. For instance, he lives with his wife and four children in a one-room apartment in a tenement. They share a public lavatory with many other tenants in an old place full of dust, dirt and garbage thrown here and there. It is true that the man wants his family to have a better life; however, he cannot think of corrupted ways to achieve his purpose. However, the man's honesty and his rejection of duplicity engage him in a constant conflict with his wife, which is shown through the following conversation:

'Somebody offered me a bribe today,' he says after a while.

'Mmmmmmm!'

'One of those timber contractors.'

'Mmmmmmm. To do what?'

'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.

'Like a what?'

'On- ward Chris-tian Sooooooldier!

Maaarching as to Waaaaaaaar

With the Cross of Jeeeeeesus

Goooing on be-foooooore!'²⁵

This passage shows how Oyo stands as a representation of the ordinary people in Ghana who were seduced by easy ways to gain wealth and money and by long shiny cars and huge beautiful houses surrounded by gardens like those of the European ones.

Another feature that shows the conformity of the man's behaviour to the Akan traditional thought is his feeling of responsibility and the care for the welfare of the members of his family (society). In this feature, he is totally different from Meursault who is indifferent towards his mother, his girl friend and even towards his killing of the Arab. The man's feeling of responsibility is shown in many situations including when, towards the end of the novel, a trade unionist asks the men who work in the rail station to go out of the office to show their approval for the new government after the fall of Nkrumah's government as a result of a coup. The man refuses to join the demonstrators and when the commotion asks him why he does not join them, he answers: *"If two trains collide while I'm demonstrating, will you take the responsibility?"*²⁶

The man's answer shows his faithfulness in his work and his rejection of hypocrisy. In fact, he knows that the fall of Nkrumah's government would not change anything and that the new ones who come to power would play the same game as the old ones. The narrator of the novel says: *"How completely the new thing took after the old"*²⁷. Since he works as a regulator in the railway office, the man is a *"keeper of time"*²⁸. His duty is to keep the trains out of danger by being aware all the time and by organizing their timing to avoid their colliding with each other. The very fact that he works the day of the coup is sufficient to show the man's sense of responsibility.

Unlike the man who is responsible and who knows how to manage his work and time, nothing makes difference for Meursault. For instance, when his boss asks him if he wants to work in Paris, Meursault is undecided and ambiguous in his answer. He says about this incident:

He was planning to open an office in Paris which would handle his business directly with the big companies, on the spot, and he wanted to know how I felt about going there. I would be able to live in Paris and to travel around for part of the year as well. "You're young, and it seems to me it's the kind of the life that would appeal to you". I said yes but that really it was all the same to me. Then he asked me if I wasn't interested in a change of life. I said that people never change their lives, that in any case one life was as good as another and that I wasn't dissatisfied with mine here at all. He looked upset and told me that I never gave him a straight answer, that I had no ambition, and that that was disastrous in business.²⁹

Contrary to Meursault who is indifferent, the man's care about the needs and welfare of the members of his family is clear when he tells his friend, Teacher, about his fears and doubt about his wife's wish to buy a boat with the help of Koomson. The man is in a continuous trouble and grief because he cannot fulfil the wishes of his wife. This is shown through the following passage when he says:

But, Teacher, what can I want? How can I look at Oyo and say I hate long shiny cars? How can I come back to the children and despise international schools? And then Koomson comes, and the family sees Jesus Christ in him. How can I ever feel like a human being (...) you know it is impossible for me to watch the things that go on and say nothing. I have my family. I am in the middle (...) I don't know. When I speak of Koomson my wife looks at the children and I can see how sorry she feels for herself.³⁰

From what has been said above, we understand that the man cares about the well being of his family and his refusal of corruption and bribes is due to his good behaviour and not to his neglect of his family's needs as his wife and his mother-in-law use to tell him. For instance, when the man goes with his wife to Koomson's house, he is fascinated by their house and the way Koomson's daughter, Princess, is dressed. So, he starts to think and to feel pity towards his children who live in poverty. He wonders if it is possible to improve their situation if he remains honest and truthful in a spoiled and corrupted society. He also asks himself if it is legitimate to be immoral for the sake of his loved ones. The author goes on describing the inner thoughts and feelings of the man:

Like a sidelong refrain that phrase jumped to the mind, a remembrance of past conversations with men who had eventually come to the end of their resistance. For the children. Supposing Deede also could have beautiful clothes with their beauty crossing the seas from thousands of miles away, and supposing Adeley could have a machine to ride around on, to occupy her attention while she was growing up, what

would they know about ways that were rotten in the days of disappeared parents? What would they care? What, indeed, would anybody care?³¹

From this passage, it becomes evident that the man poles apart from Meursault in Camus's *The Stranger*. Unlike the latter who is indifferent even towards his mother's death, the man cares about the welfare of his family.

Another important moral quality of the man is reflected through his help for other people in distress. For instance, towards the end of the novel Koomson witnesses a difficult moment after the military coup and the fall of Nkrumah's government. In fact, all the followers of Nkrumah and the leaders of the old government are killed or sent to prison after the coup. The man helps Koomson to flee to Abidjan and without his help Koomson would be killed or arrested by the police. The man puts his life in danger in order to help Koomson; even though he is against all the leaders of Ghana whom he sees like apes who imitate their white masters. In fact, he helps the party man out of his humanity and his good behaviour and not as a result of his indifference like Meursault. Through his help for Koomson, the man fulfils the cleansing ritual.

In addition to his help to Koomson, the man asks the latter about Estella. He wants to know if she is alright and how she is going to sustain herself. The man worries about Estella, even though in their three meetings she was not kind with him. This is clear when Armah describes the way Estella shakes hands with the man:

Out through the window she holds out a hand and something glitters in the night light. 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 seems plainly to have forgotten about the man outside.³²

Besides, the man's second meeting with Estella happens when she comes with her husband to settle a business affair with the man's wife. When Oyo puts the dinner and starts to serve beer, Estella interrupts that she does not like local beer and that she prefers the

imported one. She says that the local one does not agree with her constitution. When the man asks her what she means by that

Estella Koomson had not bothered to listen to the question. She contemplated the diamond on her third finger, raised the hand itself, in the manner of a languid white woman in the films, to raise a curl that was obscuring her vision and push it back into the main mass of her wig, and continued as if no human voice had interrupted hers.³³

If not out of his humanity, the man would neither help Koomson nor assign himself to ask about Estella's situation. In the Akan traditional thought, as I have mentioned in the method section, the individual is seen as being good by nature, just like the man in Armah's novel. In this context, an Akan maxim or belief says: "*God created every man (to be) good*"³⁴ For Kwame Gyekye, this maxim is used by the Akans to mean that Man is

a being endowed with moral sense and capable of making moral judgements. Man can then be held as a moral agent, a moral subject.. not that his virtuous character is a settled matter, but that he is capable of virtue.³⁵

It is true that Meursault in Camus's *The Stranger* helps his friend Raymond to write a letter to his mistress to make her recognize her mistake and regret her betrayal of him. However, Meursault does that out of his indifference and not out of his humanity. He says:

But Raymond told me he didn't think he could write the kind of letter it would take and that he had thought of asking me to write it for him. Since I didn't say anything, he asked if I'd mind doing it right then and I said no (...) I wrote the letter. I did just as it came to me, but I tried my best to please Raymond because I didn't have any reason not to please him(...) He told me that I'd have to act as a witness for him. It didn't matter to me, but I didn't know what I was supposed to say. According to Raymond, all I had to do was to state that the girl had cheated on him. I agreed to act as a witness for him.³⁶

In fact, in the Akan traditional thought the individual who has the above mentioned attributes which are originated in the man should be respected and treated as a moral agent. In this context, Gyekye Kwame claims that:

the natural membership of the individual person in a community cannot rob him of his dignity or worth, a fundamental and inalienable attribute he possesses as a person (...)A person, being a child of God, presumably by reason of his having been created by him and regarded as possessing a divine spark called soul (*okra*), must be held as of intrinsic value, an end in himself, worthy of dignity and respect.³⁷

However, this is not the case of the man who is badly treated by his wife, his mother in law and everyone else in his society except his friend, Teacher. This is clear when his wife challenges his manhood by comparing him to a *Chichidodo*. By this, she means that her husband refuses to engage himself in corruption and bribery, but he does not care about his wife who lives in misery. The very reference to the *Chichidodo* shows that Armah takes from the old tradition because the *Chichidodo* is a legendary bird in the Ghanaian culture.

Moreover, the man's mother-in-law considers him to be useless and insensitive towards the needs of his family. For instance, when the man takes the children to his mother-in-law to ask her if she can take them so that he and his wife can prepare the dinner for their guests, and to inform her that she should come earlier, his son's toe is hurt by a piece of glass. When the mother-in-law knows about that, she starts to blame the man by telling her grand son: "(...) *You must know you have nobody, you are an orphan, a complete orphan. You mustn't run around, like people who have men behind them, to buy them shoes*".³⁸

In fact, the man feels himself estranged by his loved ones because of their demands and wishes that he cannot fulfil for them, and through their continuous criticism of him. This is shown through his conversation with his only friend, Teacher, to whom he complains his sufferings and asks advice. The man states: "*Oyo flung my uselessness at me again this night*".³⁹ He adds "*They will destroy me, Teacher*".⁴⁰

All these push him to question himself if he does something wrong to deserve this bad treatment and if the problem is within him and not within the members of his family and society. He says: "*They make me feel like a criminal*".⁴¹

In the Akan culture, the individual may fail in attaining a specific social position like the man in Armah's novel. However, he should always be respected and treated as a moral agent because the incapability of the individual to offer a better life to his family is not a reason to tease him and make him feel useless. For Gyekye:

All these strivings are aimed at attaining some social status. The individual may fail in his strivings and, in the Akan community, for example, may consequently be judged as a “useless person” (*onipa hun*), an opprobrious term. But it must be noted that what the individual would be striving for in all his exertions is some social status, not personhood (...) And even if at the end of the day he failed to attain the expected status, his personhood would not for that reason diminish, even though he may lose social respect in the eyes of the members of the community.⁴²

All the difficulties that the man encounters in his daily life, including his struggle with the members of his family and society, push him to feel himself a stranger in a polluted society that has morals different from his. At the beginning, the man is only evaluating the existing values and standards in his society. For instance, when he is arguing with his wife about the prosperous life in which Estella Koomson lives, the man answers her: “*We don’t know how she got what she has*”.⁴³ He adds: “*Some of that kind of cleanness has more rottenness in it than the slime at the bottom of a garbage dump*”.⁴⁴

The man’s evaluation of the existing values in his society is also reflected through Armah’s description of his feelings after the timber contractor leaves the office. The man is bewildered by the way in which an honest person can be judged to be unjust in a dirtied and polluted society. He is seen as a criminal simply because he refuses to play the same game as everyone else.

Later, he starts to feel need to distance himself from his community and its members. This is mainly shown towards the end of the novel when the author says: “*Now the town looked very far away, and the man felt achingly free from everything in it*”.⁴⁵ The man’s isolation from the members of his society is explained by many critics as alienation as I have already mentioned in the preceding chapter. However, it can also be seen as a legitimate reaction to the polluting and corrupting society in which the man lives. Perhaps, if he lives in another society different from the existent one, the behaviour of the man would also be different. For Kwame Gyekye:

The evaluation may result in the individual’s affirming or amending or refining existing communal goals, values and practices; but it may or could also result in the

individual's total rejection of them. The possibility of re-evaluation means, surely, that the person cannot be absorbed by the communal or cultural apparatus, but can to some extent wriggle himself out of it, distance himself from it, and thus be in a position to take another look at it.⁴⁶

Fortunately for the man, he does not submit to the demands of his society, especially those of his wife. The failure of Oyo and her mother to realize the richness they wish and to change the behaviour of the man is a reflection of his victory and therefore the victory of tradition over the western seducing capitalism. In fact, Ogede Ode views the man as an embodiment of the Ghanaian original culture. He says on this:

The greatest achievement of *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, however, is Armah's adept presentation of the man as a point of view, as an ideal abstraction, who is nevertheless the product of a remarkably original vision. The man stands for the indestructible African values threatened by imperial domination.⁴⁷

In fact, Armah is not the only writer who is concerned with morality and immorality in his society. Many African writers are concerned with these issues in their writings. Generally, they place on the elites the responsibility to correct society from moral ills and depravity. In these terms, the well known critic T. S Eliot claims that the "*the greatness of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards*".⁴⁸ For him, the prominent and outstanding literary works have been and "*probably always will be judged by some moral standards*".⁴⁹

In addition to his distinction from Meursault, the man also stands as a contrast to Koomson. Whereas the man is an archetype of the Akan traditional culture because of his honesty, kindness, and his help for others in difficult moments, Koomson is an evidence of ravenousness, corruption, dishonesty, and greed and stands as an epitome of the post-independence Ghanaian leaders. The man says that Koomson has been his classmate and that he was not brilliant enough to achieve the position that he owns. From the narrative, it is clear that Koomson has been a simple railwayman who used to work as a docker at the harbour. But no one knows, even though it is not difficult to deduce, how he succeeds to become a minister and to build all his wealth. The idea of Koomson's personification of corruption is

further highlighted when the narrator describes the air of the room where Koomson hides himself as being full of corruption. He says that the man cannot stand this smell and he feels that he is going to vomit. So, "*Hoping to steal a breath of uncorrupted air, he moved toward the window*".⁵⁰

Another central difference between Armah's protagonist and Meursault is the way they are judged at the end. For instance, Meursault is referred to at the end of the novel as being a monster without a soul. The judges ask Meursault if he regrets his deed and he answers that he does not. When they study his case and gather information about him, they know about his indifferent behaviour during his mother's funeral which would influence the course of events in Meursault's case. So, he is considered to be inhuman and soulless. This is shown through the following passage where the prosecutor describes Meursault's inhumanity:

He said that he had peered into it and that he had found nothing, gentlemen of the jury. He said the truth was that I didn't have a soul and that nothing human, not one of the moral principles that govern men's hearts, was within my reach. "Of course," he added, "we cannot blame him for this. We cannot complain that he lacks what it was not in his power to acquire" (...) And also according to him, a man who is morally guilty of killing his mother severs himself from society in the same way as the man who raises a murderous hand against the father who begat him (...) He stated that I had no place in a society whose most fundamental rules I ignored and that I could not appeal to the same human heart whose elementary response I knew nothing of.⁵¹

Different from Meursault who is judged to be a wicked person and a monster without a soul, the man is judged at the end of Armah's novel to be a good person. After the fall of Nkrumah's regime and the trouble in which Koomson finds himself, Oyo recognizes the moral qualities of her husband. Arriving home the day of the coup, the man sees in the eyes of his wife a great love and respect. This idea is reflected through the following passage,

He went back into the hall and stood quietly beside Oyo. She held his hand in a tight grasp. Then, in a voice that sounded as if she were stifling, she whispered, 'I am glad you never became like him.'

In Oyo's eyes there was now real gratitude. Perhaps for the first time in their married life the man could believe that she was glad to have him the way he was. He returned the increasing pressure of her hand, then left her to take a glass of water to the man inside.⁵²

It is clear from this passage that Oyo is now satisfied with her husband and it is the first time that she can see his real value and qualities. These qualities are not found in every person in the Ghanaian society of the period after the independence which was characterized by the spread of dishonesty, bribery and fraud. For Gyekye: “*The Akan, fully satisfied with, and profoundly appreciative of the high standards of the morality of a person’s conduct, would say of such a person: he/ she is a real (human) person*”.⁵³

Even Koomson who is described at the beginning of the novel as being a wealthy man who has not enough time to waste with wretched people like the man and his family becomes later grateful to him. When he is safe from the threat, Koomson thanks the man and expresses his gratitude to him. Armah says: ‘*The party man took his hand. ‘Thank you.*’⁵⁴He adds ‘*We shall meet again.*’⁵⁵So, at the end of the novel Koomson also judges the man to be a real person even though he does not say it explicitly like Oyo. In these terms Gyekye says:

Considering the situations in which that judgement is made about persons, these norms, ideals and moral virtues can be said to include generosity, kindness, compassion, benevolence, respect and concern for others; in fine, any action or behaviour that conduces to the promotion of the welfare of others. And the reason for that judgment made of an individual is that that individual’s actions and conduct are considered as falling short of the standards and ideals of personhood.⁵⁶

From what has been said, I conclude that the behaviour of the man in Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* conforms to the Akan traditional cosmogony. In this culture, a great importance is agreed to some features and morals which include generosity, kindness, the care for others’ welfare, and to be married and to have children. All these features are originated in the protagonist of Armah’s novel. Other features such as greed, cruelty, selfishness, and wickedness are condemned in the Akan culture. These characteristics are also rejected by Armah’s protagonist. For Ode Ogede

The man, who embodies traditional African values, comes to life as a human being, but he is ultimately intended as a pious ideal. The man thus serves as an inspiration for other Africans, who are asked to emulate his attitude in order to create a future society where the dignity of man will be restored.⁵⁷

Besides, in the Akan culture individuality or personhood is not totally defined by one's relationship with the members of his/ her community. Sometimes, the individual finds that some established principles in society are against his ethics and morals. Therefore, he starts to re-evaluate and to redefine them. But the constant conflict with the members of his society can push the individual to reject and distance himself from his community. It is the case of the main character in Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. However, at the end of the novel the man is judged to be a real person especially by his wife who sees him finally as a good husband. Armah also gives a little place for hope in his novel by suggesting, at the end, a future community which he wishes will be different from the actual one.

General Conclusion

From my study of the two novels, I conclude that Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* has similarities with Albert Camus's *The Stranger*. These similarities are the outcome of the two authors' recourse to the absurd to reflect on the disillusionment and the despair that characterised the world during the eras in which they set their novels. For instance, Camus's novel was published in 1942, during the Second World War. At that time, Algeria was under the French colonization and France was capitulated in war against the Germans. So, the fear of war and the despair that filled the individuals' hearts are reflected by Camus in his novel through the meaninglessness that he assigns to life and the indifference of the main character, Meursault, who has no feelings towards his surroundings.

Camus was also influenced in his focus on the absurd by his personal circumstances. Camus's father, as I have already mentioned in the material section, was killed in the First World War which created in him a trauma of fear of the war. In addition, Camus caught tuberculosis when he was young and he lived with this illness all his life. Therefore, Camus refers to the absurd to reflect on the disillusionment that was created by the war and his lifelong struggle with death as a result of tuberculosis. That is why in his *The Myth of Sisyphus* he asserts that even though life has no meaning and that it is not worth living, it is not wisdom that one kills himself with his own hands. Camus says that the absurd man should not escape to hope, but he also should not think of suicide as a way to escape the absurdity of his life. These features of the absurd man are applicable to Meursault in Camus's *The Stranger* and to the man in Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*.

Armah referred to the absurd as a means to describe the disillusionment that characterized the Africans generally and the Ghanaians specifically after the independence. In this context, Neil Mc Ewan says:

If Armah has been affected by western writers their influence has helped him to survey conditions of poverty-taunted-by-wealth, which are widespread in the contemporary world, and which are at their most acute in Africa.⁵⁸

After the success of the Ghanaians to free their country from the long British occupation, they were astonished to find that they have only changed the persons who ruled them. Actually, the new ones were simply the imitators of their white masters. Armah has attacked them harshly in his works, especially in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* in which he puts the downfall of Nkrumah's regime as an important event and a turning point. In these terms, Oyekan Owomyela views in his book *Columbia Guide to West African Literature in English Since 1954* that,

The failure of Nkrumah regime which fell in 1966 coup has left an indelible mark in the consciousness of Armah, but that was not his only disappointment. When he returned to Ghana in 1964 it was with an idealist's sense of mission, but he met with frustration at the hands of incompetent, self-important bureaucrats who for their part have no patience with his type.⁵⁹

Armah has always denied the ideas that were associated to his works concerning his influence by western literature.⁶⁰ The proof is that he refers always to the Ghanaian tradition as a way to confirm his attachment to his own culture. In this context, Ode Ogede says: "*Armah principally employs the style of a storyteller who regards his role as being that of a performer with a moral to teach, and a lesson to impart*".⁶¹ This is true and clear through the presence in his works of haloes, legends, proverbs and carnival rituals... For instance, he puts his *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* in an Akan ritual background by using the man as a ritual carrier who cleanses his society from its dirt. In fact, Derek Wright claims that Armah's protagonist functions in "*dual notions of time*"⁶²: in the western existentialist notion of time and this is what makes him resemble Meursault in Camus's *The Stranger*, and in a cyclical notion of time when he functions as a ritual carrier who cleanses his society from dirt.

Actually, Armah criticized Nkrumah saying that "*Nkrumah should have backed up his 'exhibition of self' by relying on indigenous technology instead of imported Eastern and Western technology*".⁶³ By this critique, Armah insists on the importance of self-reliance and

the necessity to go back to tradition as a means to clean Ghana from its illnesses. The reason that pushed Armah's critics to associate him with the modern alienated literature is his harsh criticism of the spreading values in his society. For instance, Achebe describes him as being a modernist writer in the full sense of the word. But Armah believes that the duty of a writer is to participate in reforming society using his pen. Armah wants to be part a of "*the song people sing as once again they take up arms to smash the neo-colonial state to complete the anti-imperialist national democratic revolution they had started in the fifties*".⁶⁴ That is why he claims: "*Literature to me is a creation at a very low level of intensity. I think it is absurd never to have been in practical participation*".⁶⁵

From what has been said above, I come to the conclusion that Armah is influenced by Albert Camus and the philosophy of the absurd. This is clear through the similarities between Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and Camus's *The Stranger*. The main character in Armah's novel has some features in common with Meursault. These features include alienation, estrangement, uncertainty, and contradiction. However, Armah's influence by Camus does not mean that he breaks ground with the African traditional culture. This is conspicuous through his reference in his works to elements from the Ghanaian and Akan traditional cosmogonies.

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