

Chapter Twenty Two

ACHEBE'S NOVELS AS A HISTORICAL DOCUMENTATION OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

The contact between Africa and colonialism has provoked the kind of interest which has dominated the thematic trends of African scholars. African literature has been at the forefront of this engagement and intervention. Today, there is hardly any novel written in the Africa that does not discuss this contact. As a matter of fact, the act of writing novel in English language in Africa began as a reaction and protest against what had been and continues to be done to Africans for many centuries. It is with this background that the paper looks at the Nigerian state from its early beginnings to the present state of chaos, anarchy and great backwardness and concludes that Chinua Achebe has aptly used his novels to reflect these historical movements. This paper shows clearly that imperialism is the basis of the crises and contradictions that have befallen the Nigerian state using the novels of Chinua Achebe. Almost all his novels capture a series of critical periods in Nigerian history since the advent of colonialism to the current period of great imbalances in Nigeria's political, social and economic system. This paper contends that writers like Chinua Achebe are simply using their fiction to document the historical stages of Nigerian state. The paper examines in great details how his novels have reflected and predicted the contradictions that have become the hallmark and identity of Nigerian state.

Introduction

The continent of Africa has gone through all kinds of exploitation, degradation, and humiliation for many centuries in the hands of Europeans. These were done through deliberately lopsided international economic policies as well as slave trade, forced labour and the imposition of a pliant class to oversee their activities and interest in Africa. This captures in clear term the real situation in Africa, which is most dismal. The continent has remained comparatively the least developed of all continents in terms of the production and sustenance of critically significant social goods such as physical infrastructure, telecommunication facilities, food supply, electricity, medical and health services, shelter, employment, and other vital materials for human, personal and social being. Africa as been subjected to various forms of naked slavery as a result trans- Atlantic to neo- colonization in the last four hundred years or so. The integration of the economics of atlantics slave trade, exploitation both from internal and external factors, colonization, Africa into the international capitalist orbit which began between 1450 and 1500 AD with its attendant consequences has created problems of development and survival for the peoples of Africa.

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The problems facing African society are multi-dimensional and in phases. Slavery is the worst and darkest experience in the history of African people. Colonialism immediately followed and now neo-colonialism through African dependent on the Western World for its economic and political stability. To promote and sustain their interests at the expense of African, the international hegemonic forces have ensured that their African collaborators remain in power to do their biddings. These agents consider and pursue policies that satisfy them and those of their masters even at the brink of economic collapse occasioned by the fictitious debt ostensibly owned the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and other Western Banks and financial institutions like the London and Paris clubs.

Day in Day out, the African continent is racked by afflictions, disasters, macro-economic crisis and dysfunctions, debt over-hang, corruptions, high level illiteracy, squalor, disease, hunger and negative and destabilizing conditions thrown up by imperialism in cahoots with greedy and unpatriotic ruling class. According to Ali Mazrui:

... these problems are brought about as a result of African being at the bottom of global heap, with the Western World at the top. African has the largest percentage of poor people, the largest number of low-income countries, the least developed economies, the lowest life expectancy, and the most fragile political system. More so, it is the most vulnerable continent with high incident of HIV/ AIDs (whatever relationship there must be between HIV and the collapse of immune system in African). (Ali Mazrui3).

And the continent appears to be in limbo and suspended animation as the received development paradigm from the West has failed abysmally in addressing the ravaging socio-political and economic problems that have engulfed it. Kofi Anyidoho captures this very aptly:

African is a home land that history has often denied and contemporary reality is constantly transforming into a quick sand; a land reputed to be among the best endowed in both human and material resources and yet much better known worldwide for its proverbial conditions of poverty, Africa the birth place of humanity and of human civilization now strangely transformed into expanding graveyards and battlefields for the enactment of some of the contemporary world's worst human tragedies.

[Kofi Anyidoho, 76]

These intractable problems that have befallen the continent of African and its people since the advent of European colonial masters and the myths with which they have been wrapped have

consistently provided reactions from notable African scholars who have undertaken the responsibility of re-writing, re-documenting, and correcting European stereo-types about African and distortions of its history by colonial powers. In attempting this task, African scholars and writers are also mindful of the fact that there exists internal colonialism, which of course is a direct product of the processes and dynamics of colonialism. Ben Turok acknowledges that Africa's malaise is significantly not its own making but a function of the world capitalist system in which the Third World is the main victim. He posits:

Whereas an external force exercised a colonial rule, neo-colonial is a function of the two powers: imperialism and an internal ruling class. It is the power of the latter and the way it has failed to defend the interest of the people indigenous people that have led the critics to argue that independence has not brought about self-determination or national liberation (Ben Turok 8).

Achebe's Novel's and the Nigerian State

From the foregoing, we can deduce from what Chinua Achebe whose work is the focus of this paper made earlier. According to him, African creative writer has found out:

The independence his country was supposed to have won was totally without content. The old white master was still in power. He had got himself a bunch of black stooges to do his duty work for his commission. As long as they did what is expected of them, they would be praised for their sagacity, and their country for its stability (Chinua Achebe 136)

The basic essence of imperialism is majorly the same with the interests of the African ruling class. Nzungola -Ntalaja reflects this vividly:

Both the imperialists and the African nationalist leaders gifted for the dismantling of the colonial empires into their constituent territories, as these would prove easier to manipulate and to control from the standpoint of the imperialist, and provide a more fertile terrain for the advancement of the economic and political interest of the petit bourgeois (Nzungola-Ntalaja 49).

As indicated earlier on, the contact between Africa and colonialism has engaged the attention and interest of African scholars. African literature has been at the forefront of this engagement and intervention. This essay dwells on Chinua Achebe's novels as they reflect the phases of the Nigerian life before and after colonialism and the continuing crises and contradictions of the Nigerian state. As has been indicated by Anyadike:

...novel writing in English in Africa began as a reaction and protest against what had been done, and continue to be done to a group, a race or a whole continent of people in the form of decades of deliberate misrepresentations and dehumanization ... (Anyadike 1).

The totality of Chinua Achebe's works revolve around his response to a series of critical periods in Nigerian history since 1980- the introduction and imposition of European culture and law in Nigeria (Specifically the Eastern part), the consequence of colonialism on the once organized vibrant and collective society that the white man met, the period just preceding independence the end of civil war, the series of military coups and counter-coups which have characterized Nigerian life. In the submission of C.L. Innes "throughout all Achebe's works, his continuing concern has been the trouble with Nigeria" (Innes 165). Achebe's point of departure was the fiction of Joyce Cary and Joseph Conrad whose works sought to a very great extent denigrate Africans and their culture. He was equally infuriated by their works, which extol the virtues of British imperialism at the expenses of African societies. It was in an attempt to correct these gross misrepresentations in Cary's *Mister Johnson* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* about African people and their culture that Achebe said informed his decision to write.

Achebe's life and art encompass the essential duality of human experience as embodied in the aphorism drawn from Igbo cosmology that "Wherever something stands, something stands besides it", His art represents a continuing effort to reconcile the disparate elements, essentially political, that alter and shape perceptions and therefore reality. Along these lines, Achebe has said:

I had to tell Europe that the arrogance on which she sought to excuse her pillage of Africa, i.e. that Africa was a primordial void, was sheer humbug; that Africa had a history, a religion, and a civilization. We reconstructed this history and civilization and displayed it to challenge the stereotype and the cliché. Actually it was not to Europe alone that I spoke. I spoke also to that part of ourselves that had come to accept Europe's opinion of us. (Achebe 56)

Achebe's novels reveal and chronicle two kinds of movement: the movement of time and the movement of place. The movement of time is from the late 19th century as reflected in *Things Fall Apart* through the 1920s as portrayed in the *Arrow of God* when colonialism had been fully entrenched in Nigeria to 1987 when *Anthills of the Savannah* was published which reflected the intricacies in postcolonial Africa. The movement of place is on the other hand, from the country side in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* when colonialism had just had its first contact to the urban setting in *No Longer At Ease*, *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of*

the Savannah although sections of the last three novels are set in the country side. It is important to note that the pool of the traditional society from which Achebe has taken his two most important characters, Okonkwo and Ezeulu, is so strong on his creative consciousness. Even the novel set in the urban society is greatly influenced by the traditional society and the characters in these novels are made conscious of the importance of the virtues inherent in the rural society of Nigerian.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe shows the solidity and vibrancy of the tradition and culture of the people of Umuofia where the novel is set. Victor Alumona has noted that the name of the dominant clan in *Things Fall Apart*, Umuofia (Which means bush people) as a pseudonym for the Igbo or African peoples is essentially a misnomer. He acknowledges that Umuofia's import has been reduced to absurdity by showing that the people to whom it is supposed to apply, possess all the social institutions, culture and reflective intellectual tradition and disposition and which should qualify it as a civilized society in the modern context (Alumona 77). Consultation, consensus, social cohesion and balancing and the spirit of republicanism. It is a society that operates within the context of the principles of democracy with inbuilt checks and balances. As Achebe himself has observed, even God does not have an absolute power:

He (the supreme creator) appears to work through *Chi* to create man. Simply, there are numerous suggestions in Igbo lore of him working with man to make the world or rather to enhance its habitability, for the work of creation was not ended in one monumental effort but goes on still, Chukwu and man talking things over at critical moments, sometimes agreeing sometimes not (Achebe 73- 94)

It is incontestable that the Umuofia society is one that places a lot of initiative in the hands of man and encourages the individual to feel free to shape his/her own life. Yet as Achebe points out:

The limit is not the sky; it is somewhere much closer to earth.
A sensible man will turn round at the frontiers of absolutions and head for home again (Achebe 163)

From the foregoing, we can clearly see the demonstration of the recognition of the freedom of the individual to shape his\ her life and the need for society to put a restriction on inordinate ambition and reckless individualism.

It is against this background that we must place Okonkwo the hero of *Things Fall Apart*. We first meet him as a young man, who in the best traditions of his people enjoys fame, which we

are told “rested on a solid personal achievement”. From a very poor background, he rises to become a great wrestler, warrior, farmer, and polygamist of note and respected member of the society aiming for the highest title of honour among the Umuofia people. He however, allows that fame drive him beyond the point of decorum and balance and consequently loses the sympathy of his community. The people of Umuofia abhor extremes of whatever sort and rewards a proper sense of balance. By trying to defend the tradition and culture of Umuofia, which the presence of the Whiteman has come to destabilize, Okonkwo in his rashness decides to fight the Whiteman alone and in the process runs foul of the ideals of the Umuofia society, which believes so much in democracy and communitarianism. Abandoned and powerless, he dies broken, alone and unmourned.

In his deep sense of patriotism Okonkwo fails to recognize the changes in Umuofia which were brought about by the presence of British imperialism before his one-man fight against the British forces in Umuofia, his friend Obierika who is a kind of philosopher in the novel had warned:

It is already too late. Our own men and our son's have joined the ranks of the stranger. They have joined his religion and they help to uphold his government. If we should try to drive out the white men in Umuofia we should find it easy. There are only two of them, but what of our own people who are following their way and have been given power? They would go to Umuru and bring the soldiers, and we would be like Abame (*TFA* 124)

Obierika, the perceptive philosopher further warned:

The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the thing held us together and we have fallen apart (*TFA* 124-5)

Two things become very clear from the above quotations: One is that at this point in the history of the peoples of Nigeria; British imperialism had gained a strong foothold as it had taken over places like the Gambia and Ghana in the West Africa. Two is that given the sophisticated nature of imperialism it had won over many of the people who become agents and die-hard supporters of imperialism. It was this group of people that took over the reins of power from the Colonialist on a negotiated basis without altering the structure put in place by the colonialist.

Things Fall Apart should not be seen as a personal tragedy of Okonkwo but as a collective tragedy of Umuofia (Nigeria). The authorial voice captures it correctly:

Umuofia had indeed changed. The church had become and led many astray. Not only the lowborn and the outcast but also sometimes a worthy man had joined it... But apart from the Church, the white men had also brought a government. They had built a court where the District commissioner judged cases in ignorance. He had court messengers who brought man to him for trial (TFA 123).

The church as represented by Mr. Brown grows from strength to strength as it sustains its links with the new administration. Frustrated by the humiliation of his society, Okonkwo strikes the leader of the white man's messengers. He becomes more frustrated and shocked with the new lukewarm attitude of members of his society who he erroneously thought would have killed the five remaining messengers. Finding himself alone he commits suicide.

Arrow of God is Achebe's third novel but it is closer in terms of its chronology with *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe's first novel. It has a traditional setting as *Things Fall Apart* but unlike the latter the forces of imperialism have fully settled their administration in the land. The society of *Arrow of God* is a newer one, which experiments with the possibility of accommodation. Ezeulu, the protagonist of the novel, is a personification of this new phenomenon in the society. Part of his problem stems from the secret wish to accommodate under one roof the traditional religion whose custodian he is by virtue of his office as the chief priest of Ulu, and the new Christian religion which he does not accept, but to which he sends his son as a representative of his eye. In his attempt to satisfy the white man, Captain Winterbottom and benefit from the new system introduced by the new forces, he incurs the wrath of his people leading to his down fall.

In Achebe's *Arrow of God*, he demonstrates as he does in his first novel, *Things Fall Apart* that "no man however great, was greater than this people: that no man ever won judgement against his clan" (*Arrow*, 221). Ezeulu, the protagonist of the novel and Okonkwo the protagonist of *Things Fall Apart* remain symbols in their different ways of contemporary Nigeria thrown into confusion in periods of traditional crises by strong external pressures and equally strong self-destructive personal and social forces. Ezeulu believes in and exploits the democratic processes of consultation and persuasion by his community unlike Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* but falls as a result of his proud and arrogant stubbornness which prevent him from listening and yielding to the superior arguments and points of view of the people.

As can be discerned from the setting of the novel, the society in question is an active society. By an active society, we mean a community that subscribes to a social contract with its

leadership but this contract is not signed once-and-for-all, nor does it entail the signatories resignation to a kind of passive tranquility. In fact, it is not a fixed agreement but one open to amendment, revision, and reformulation [Etzioni 14]. But in Ezeulu's megalomania he forgets the nature of his society erroneously thinking that the society must do his bidding instead of the other way round. By testifying against the people of Umuaro in their land dispute with the Okperi people; opposing the declaration of war against the latter; sending his son Oduche to the white man's school and religion and adamantly refusing to pronounce the date for the New Yam Festival as demanded by the people, Ezeulu loses all authority bestowed on him by the people. In the face of the impending starvation of his people, Ezeulu does not give serious thought to the grave economic and social implications of his refusal to save his people. Even the presence and appeal of ten highly respected elders could not influence Ezeulu; Ezekwesili speaks on behalf of the delegation:

Perhaps you can guess why we have come. It is because of certain stories that have reached our ears; and we thought the best thing was to find out what is true and what is not from the only man who can tell us. The story we have heard is that there is a little disagreement about the next New Yam Festival. As I said we do not know if it is true or not, but we do know that there is fear and anxiety in Umuaro which if allowed to spread might spoil something. We cannot wait for the to happen; an adult does not sit and watch while the she-goat suffers the pain of childbirth tied to a post (Arrow of God 206).

Ezeulu is not moved by this passionate appeal but instead prefers to indulge in the dubious logic and game of numbers with these elders and representatives of all Umuaro:

You all know what our custom is. I only call a new festival when there is only one yam left. Today I have three yams and so I know the time has not come. Three or four of the visitors tried to speak at once but the others gave way to Onenyi Nwanyelugo. He saluted everyone by name before he started.

"I think that Ezeulu has spoken well. Everything he has said entered my ears. We all know the custom and no one can say that Ezeulu has offended against it. But the harvest is ripe in the soil and must be gathered now or the sun and the weevils will eat it. At the same time Ezeulu has just told us that he still has three sacred yams to eat from last year. What then do we do? How do you carry a man with a broken waist? We know why the sacred yams are still not finished; it was the work of the white man. But he is not here now to breathe with us the air he has fouled. We cannot go to Okperi and ask him to come eat the yams that now stand between the harvest and us. Shall we then sit down and watch our harvest ruined and our children and wives die of hunger? No! Although I am not the priest

of Ulu I can say that the deity does not want Umuaro to perish. We call him the saver. Therefore you must find a way out, Ezeulu... It is for you, Ezeulu, to save our harvest. (*Arrow of God* 207)

That Ezeulu remains obstinate after this beautifully rendered passionate appeal by the brass of his community is a clear testimony of his arrogance and disrespect to his people. It also shows that there is more to his obstinacy than a faithful devotion to the wishes of the deity.

It is apposite to note that by confessing his friendship and admiration for the white man Ezeulu has also lost his leadership base and understanding of his people. Due to his lack of foresight he does not know that Captain Winterbottom is a pragmatist who is only interested in pursuing and promoting the policies and programmes enunciated by the colonial forces which he is a good representative of. At the crucial time in his life, Ezeulu loses both the sympathy of his people and that of his so-called "Friend", Captain Winterbottom. Nwaka's response to Ezeulu's information of Captain Winterbottom's invitation demands quoting:

But there is one thing, which is not clear to me in this summons. Perhaps it is clear to others; Ezeulu has told us that the white ruler has asked him to go to Okperi. Now it does not appear to me whether it is wrong for a man to ask his friend to visit him. When we have a feast do we not send for our friend in other clean to come and share it with us, and do they not also ask us to their own celebration? The white man is Ezeulu's friend and has sent for him. What is so strange about that? He did not send for me. He did not send for Udeozo; he did not send for the priest of Idemili; he did not send for the priest of Eru; he did not send for the priest of Udo nor did he ask the priest of Ogwugwu to come and see him. He has asked Ezeulu. Why? Because they are friends or does Ezeulu think that their friendship should stop short of entering each other's houses? Does he want the white man to be his friend only by word of mouth? (*Arrow of God* 143)

In the end Ezeulu's friendship with Winterbottom turns sour as the latter orders for his incarceration in prison to satisfy the British Administration, which he serves.

The detention of Ezeulu by captain Winterbottom for his refusal to accept the post of a Warrant Chief is Achebe's fictional articulation of the indirect rule system in the Eastern part of Nigeria during the colonial period. Given the republican nature of the Easterners (Igbos), the imposition of warrant chiefs was strongly opposed by the people. The same resistance was also felt in other part of Nigeria where centralized authority did not make any meaning to the people. As has been observed by Tamuno, the imposition of the indirect rule system on Tivland which had no centralized authority and had resisted Islam and the Emirs led to

protest in 1929, 1939, 1945 and 1949 (Ikime 1980: 399). In the Eastern part of Nigeria, the popular Aba women's revolt was against chief Okugo of Oloko division¹ in the present Abia state of Nigeria. Apart from the people's disagreement with the imposition of the indirect rule system, they were also opposed to the tax system introduced by the British Administration.

From the foregoing, it becomes clear to state that the presence of captain Winterbottom amount to a destabilizing factor in the affairs of Umuaro. His offer of a warrant chieftaincy to Ezeulu and the latter's refusal of the offer lead to Ezeulu detention thereby preventing him from performing his priestly duties to the Ulu. And so, in spite of Ezeulu's stubbornness, we hold Winterbottom responsible for the crisis and consequence collapse of Umuaro. We also hold Ezeulu culpable for his naïve acceptance of the white man's friendship. As a custodian of the people's traditions and culture he ought to have understood that the presence and activities of the new administration would spell doom to his people. It is a poignant and cruel irony that the place where the Christians have their place of worship is not far from Ezeulu's compound. Yet Ezeulu does not complain against the nearness of this institution to the people's source of life and power, which we later see in the novel as a very strong influence in the destabilization of the Umuaro society.

In *Arrow of God* Achebe brilliantly captures the capitulation of the Nigerian society to the ravaging forces of colonialism and imperialism. This reflects the period when our development was intercepted and seems to be permanently arrested by the forces of imperialism with the aid of their local agents masquerading as our political leaders. This phenomenon is what Chinweizu has ingeniously described as "Lugardism". As can be seen from the novel, the British forces have taken over Umuaro and other neighbouring communities. And to administer the conquered territories properly the like of Ezeulu are appointed as warrant Chief to serve the interest of the "British Empire" in conjunction with British officials like Winterbottom, Mr. Clarke, Wright etc. At the end of novel, we see a total take-over of the people and their consciousness by the new religion, which has pronounced its ascendancy. Again, as in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe implicates colonialism as the major source of friction and disintegration of a once robust, critical and organized society.

In *No Longer At Ease* Achebe presents Obi Okonkwo (the main character of the novel), a representative of the new elite as an anti-heroic character. Obi Okonkwo returns to a very corrupt society after his studies abroad and resolves to change attitudes in his family and the larger society. The clan was responsible for his education. The understanding is that when he comes back from abroad, he should pay back the money spent on him to the clan so that others will benefit as he has done. In addition, being in a well-placed social position as a result of his education, he is expected to advance the interest of the clan that made it possible for him to be in his new position. He is also expected to give personal gifts and to out rightly favour his people in the award of scholarships.

He also has to contend with his choice of Clara, an *Osu* whose family and the clan do not approve of. Meanwhile, he has to maintain a certain minimum standard of living in order to show Clara that he is of age. At the slightest provocation, he offers to begin paying back his loan to his clan even with his over-taxed earnings. This grave situation leads to his urge to engage in bribe taking and the consequent fall that we notice in the novel. He mismanages his relationship with Clara and the latter almost died via a botched abortion. In order to show his manly dispositions, he refuses to accept financial help from Clara, a girl who he claims he wants to marry. In the end, he loses both Clara and his mother, and worse still, his moral hold of himself.

It is instructive to note that *No Longer At Ease* is not a novel about the moral problems facing an educated Nigerian who has just come back from abroad after his studies but an attempt to show the corrupting and destructive influence of colonialism on the people. Much as the reader of the novel disapproves of the weak, unstable and whimsical character of Obi Okonkwo, the pervasive and rapacious influence brought about by colonialism is so much on him that in an attempt to balance this new influence with the traditional one, he collapses and becomes a subject of ridicule both to his people and the colonialists. No wonder “everybody wondered why...” This influence is felt by almost all the character in the novel including Obi’s parents. Before the end of *Things Fall Apart*, it is noticed that the crusading activities of the church have reached a feverish pitch, these activities continue in *No Longer At Ease* with Nwoye now Isaac as a Catechist. Obi’s mothers name is Hannah. It is ironical that in spite of their profession of Christianity and its values, the duo of Isaac and Hannah still look down on Clara because of her *Osu* status. Isaac advises against the impending marriage even though he agrees with his son that as Christians they cannot condone the injustice of the *Osu* system:

Osu is like leprosy in the minds of our people. I beg of you, my son, not to bring the mark of shame and leprosy into your family. If you do, your children and your children’s children into the third and fourth generation will curse your memory. It is not for myself I speak: my days are few. You will bring sorrow on your head and on the heads of your children. Who will marry your daughters? Whose daughters will your sons marry? Think of that my son. We are Christians but we cannot marry our own daughters (*No Longer At Ease* 133-4).

The above show clearly that despite the new status of Obi’s father in God’s kingdom, he still indulges in the past, which his new religion ought to dismiss.

Again, in the novel neither Obi nor Clara considers the morality of abortion, until it is too late, no other considerations than the cost and possible dangers Clara are brought to the surface of Obi’s consciousness. And as has been noted by Innes in the work cited earlier on,

“the question of immorality and illegality is raised by both doctors, but Obi does not reflect it. Western education is used to destroy life rather than save it” (Innes 61). Neither Christian nor Igbo morality troubles Obi’s mind. The implication of this is that with Obi’s Western-type education In *No Longer At Ease* as in the two novels earlier discussed in this chapter Achebe demonstrates the nature of the Nigerian society and how the society responded to the challenges thrown up by colonialism. It bears repeating that were it not for the Umuofia Progressive Union, perhaps Obi might not have been able to go abroad for further studies. The Umuofia Progressive Union represents and articulates the interests of its members in Lagos and those of other sons and daughters of Umuofia elsewhere with promise. The community is organized and works so hard to assist members. Obi is sent to “bring knowledge by his people, but in the end both Obi’s parents and, the Umuofia Progressive Union feel disappointed in Obi over what they perceive as his misconduct. This misconduct is not only in his choice of wife but includes other issues ranging but not limited to the course he studies in the University abroad, his inability to assist his people and parents and the case of bribery for which he is convicted. Obi becomes, in our view a total failure.

To show the responsive and communal nature of the Umuofia people even with their disappointment in Obi they identify and show concern to him during his mother’s death and his arrest. When Obi’s mother dies and when he is arrested and convicted for taking bribes, it is the same Umuofia Progressive Union, which he had rejected that comes to his rescue:

They had no illusion about Obi. He was without doubt a very foolish and self-willed young man. But this was not the time to go into that. The fox must be chased away first; after that the hen might be warned against wandering into the bush (No Longer At Ease 5)

Obi’s increasing alienation from the members of his clan and family is tantamount to the alienation of masses by the petit-bourgeois elements that have been in charge of the affairs of Nigeria since the British left. Obi’s fall therefore represents the predicament of the Nigerian elite who wants to live the life of luxury and splendor at the expense of the poor and hungry masses.

In Achebe’s fourth novel, *A Man of the People*, he deals with life in independent Nigeria. At this time in the history of the country the elite had properly taken over the reins of power. The society of *A Man of the People* represents the contemporary Nigeria. The novel is no doubt a ringing and vivid political satire with Chief Nanga, the genial, barely literate, corrupt man as “The man of the People”. There are many more Nangas in contemporary Nigerian politics. In fact, Nanga is a crude metaphor for elite deceit, corruption, political demagoguery, political manipulation and other forms of chicanery in Nigeria’s post-independence politics. The novel captures politics in Nigeria after independence as a form of

Mobutism, which has become the defining character of Nigerian politics in particular and African politics in general. It is important to note that barely six years after Nigeria's independence, the country's rulers ran the state aground and no wonder the novel appeared in Nigerian shortly after January 15, 1966 when the first Military Coup d'état occurred in Nigeria.

At the beginning of the novel we see Odili aloof, standing in the corner of his society and watching it with a mixture of pity and scorn. He has chosen to come and teach at Anata as a demonstration of his moral superiority and refusal to join in the rat and tribal race started off at independence. Indeed, he had been put off by that grotesque show of shame in parliament that day over the Makinde affair, the Minister of Finance who was removed with ignominy for daring to advise the Prime Minister correctly on how to handle the crisis of Coffee in the international market. The prime minister had dismissed him alongside the two-thirds of the cabinet that supported him. In *A Man of the People*, Odili in spite of his moral slip is an articulate moral opponent of Chief Nanga, his former teacher who has become a Minister. Odili slips along the way by choosing to fight Nanga on the frivolous ground of his loss of Elsie his girlfriend to Nanga.

Nanga, with an eye on political capital, and partly out of instinctual long-standing fondness for his old pupil, and also because of the need for equitable sharing of the national cake, proposes that Odili come to Bori, the capital to "take up a strategic post in the civil service". The post is strategic because it will place Odili squarely in the cake-sharing national preoccupation which governance has turned to. Another reason offered by Nanga is that Odili is really wasting his talent teaching in a village:

By the way, Odili, I think you are wasting your talent here. I want you to come to the capital and take up a strategic post in the civil service. We shouldn't leave everything to the highland tribe". (*A Man of the People* 12).

This is very ironical from a Minister who, only few moments earlier, was extolling the virtues of the teaching profession and copiously regretting his ever having left it.

Nanga is one of the foremost baiters and scorners of the educated people. Yet his incipient fixation on University degree remains, as witnessed by his childish excitement over his imminent trip to the U.S. to take an honorary degree, more in bribe than in recognition of any innate or social worth. A University degree is important to the like of Nanga because it confers on them social and material appurtenances. In spite of Nanga's education he is appointed a Minister. He has scant regard for experts' advice. The civil engineer has not rushed into executing Nanga's road-project because he wants to carry out soil tests. Nanga sees the delay as owing to the fact that the road is not in the other Minister's constituency.

The engineer is dismissed as an earthworm. In any case, he is a small boy “Whom we all helped to promote last year.

In this novel, Achebe introduces the reader to the crisis of governance and the directionlessness of the ship of state occasioned by corruption of all sorts at all levels of Nigerian life barely six years after independence and which has continued till today. According to Odili, the surrogate author: “A common saying, in the country after independence was that it didn’t matter what you know but who you knew” (*A Man* 17). The reader is revolted by both the antics of Nanga and Odili whose opposition does not appear as altruistic and redeeming as one would have expected under the circumstances the country has found itself. Placed in the same Ministerial position as Nanga, Odili will do the same thing. Hear him in his first night in Nanga’s Ministerial house:

All I can say is that no that first night there was no room in my mind criticism. I was simply hypnotized by the luxury of the great suite assigned to me. When I lay down in the double bed that seemed to ride on a cushion of air, and switched on that reading lamp and saw all the beautiful furniture anew from the lying down position and looked beyond the door to the gleaming bathroom and the towels as large as a lappa I had to confess that if I were at that moment made a minister I would be most anxious to remain one for ever (*A Man of the People* 37).

Both Nanga and Odili engage in sexual corruption as can be seen in the sexual affair between Nanga and Mrs. Akilo who visits Nanga in the absence of his wife and the sexual escapade between Odili and Mrs. Jean in the latter’s house. The author’s satirical barb also touches the journalism profession as can be noticed in the five Pound bribe given to the editor of the *Daily Matchet* by Nanga after the writer exhibition which had Nanga in attendance.

In the world of Faniran, *A Man of the People* “is, perhaps, Achebe’s most classical treatise on political corruption. The novel is the most bilious indictment of the Nigeria ruling class shortly after independence” (Faniran 25). The Peoples Organizations Party (P.O.P) and its opposition, The Progressive Alliance Party (P.A.P) is different in name but share the same ideological predilections and are enmeshed in corruption. This is a clear reflection of our present situation in Nigeria where we have fifty (50) political parties with no clear ideological differences. The party that would have cleansed the Augean Stable, the Common People Convention (C.P.C) is not allowed to take root by the reactionary elements who have hijacked state power to the exclusion of the people. The likes of Koko use public fund to create smaller political parties with sole aim of causing confusion and creating instability. Max the leader of the (C.P.C) is killed by chief Koko’s jeep thereby denoting and destabilizing the groundswell of opposition anchored by the party under Max’s leadership.

Max himself proves to be a big disappointment despite his professed ideological persuasion. He receives bribe from Koko to found and fund the so called opposition party. *A Man of the People* is no doubt Achebe's fictional representative of the self-interest and egocentricity of Nigeria's political class in its single-minded pursuit of individual fulfillment and power mongering. The leadership class is appropriately captured by Odili the narrator as "the fat-dripping gummy, eat- and –let eat regime".

Achebe's fifth novel, *Anthills of the Savannah* begins after a coup has taken place and end with another coup. The reader is not surprised with this turn of events given the pervasive corruption, which has spread thoroughly into the body politic of the land. The logical consequence is that something must give way but whether coup making is the antidote to irresponsible leadership or not is not the concern of this essay.

In this novel, Achebe subjects the leadership-both Military and Civilian to a moral test and finds them wanting. The major characters are the three friends, Sam, Chris, Ikem-and Beatrice the inimitable heroine of the novel. The three men were classmates and friends in Lugard College. But after a military coup Sam decides to perpetuate himself in office. He is seen as a symbol of brute force and naked power. In fact, the opening three chapters of *Anthills of the Savannah* focus mainly on the issue of state power. The novel is chiefly concerned with the dissection of the bestiality of authoritarianism in Nigeria.

Christopher Oriko moves from the editorship of the *National Gazette* to become a commissioner for information in the cabinet of Sam. Christopher is the first narrator. The second narrator is Christopher's successor as editor, Ikem Osodi, the crusading journalist and Kangan leading poet, Beatrice is the third narrator. Through this narrative structure, the reader is made to see and understand the nature and character of the head of state and the country he runs (ruins) in their fullness:

Days are good or bad for us now according to how His Excellency gets out of bed in the morning. On a bad day, such as this one had suddenly become after many propitious auguries, there is nothing for it but to lie close to your hole, ready to scramble in. And particularly to keep year mouth shut, for nothing is safe, not even the flattery we have become such experts in disguising as debate (*Anthills 2*).

A very interesting dimension of the novel is the fact that Sam in spite of the awesome power he wields in the government meets the resistance of his two friends: Chris and Ikem.

Ikem is opposed to naked power and resists it. He however, sees change as a slow process and not via a revolution as advocated by the students at the University of Bassa. He is a man who is not afraid to say what he believes in, and does not jettison his conscience for anything he sees as wrong. He is a dogged fighter who can fight any one, including the head of state. He opposes the head of state's sit-tight-syndrome, but Sam is not sure if Chris is on his side or not. But he does not fail to make his position clear when the situation demands it. He and Ikem are faithful to each other and may be said to represent the progressive forces.

For the Head of State himself, the only voices that matter, other than those of his cabinet who merely echo, or attempt to echo his own thoughts, are those of the Western media-he fears above all being portrayed satirically in *Time Magazine*, and it is Louise, the American journalist, who has his ear at the Presidential palace. Sam is greedy, selfish and self-serving. He became a soldier because it was suggested to him. He imitates an older African head of state in his megalomania. He is morally depraved as can be seen in his relationship with the white journalist, Miss Lou Cranford and even his sexual escapades when he was in school in London. Old relationships and human life mean nothing to him. No wonder he kills Ikem and Major Ossai, and seeks to kill Chris and Emmanuel Obeta too.

Beatrice represents the new force that Achebe wants to introduce in the novel: the force of womanhood. She is the string that ties the three friends together. The three friends find balance in Beatrice. She is there at every time in the novel to act as a cushioning effect to those who grieve and suffer in the novel. She is the "anthill" that survives inferno that raged through the whole "Savannah (State of Kangan). She even performs cultural male-designated roles in the novel. Achebe's seems to be saying that it is high time we changed our attitude towards women in Nigeria society:

When Elewa moved up to Beatrice and whispered into her ear what she has just come to suspect as the probable reason for her mother not been there yet: Beatrice decided to perform the naming herself and to do it right away. She called the little assembly to order and proceeded to improvise a ritual.

"in our traditional society", resumed Beatrice, "The father named the child. But thee man who should have done it today is absent..... stop that sniffing, Elewa! The man is not here although I know he is floating around us now, watching with that small – boy smile of his (*Anthills* 222).

The little boy born by Elewa for Ikem after his death represents the future society, which the like of Beatrice will be in charge of. After the death of the three friends, the society still has a future. No wonder Beatrice name him, Amaechina (may the path never close).

Achebe is in this novel commenting on the relay race, which has become the defining character of Nigeria's politics since independence. Coups and counter coups have been the order of the day. Military regimes have been sustained by the civilians who worked as experts and advisers. These civilians cringe and kow-tow before the military leaders in order to satisfy their selfish interests at the expenses of the people. In *Anthills*, Professor Okong explains: "We are like children washing only their bellies as our elders say" (*Anthills* 18). This is an apt description of himself and the Attorney General in Sam's Cabinet. Here, the irony is self-inflicted, and throughout the novel they behave like children. The Attorney General assures Sam, the President:

As for those like me, Your Excellency, Poor dullards who went to bush grammar schools, we know our place; we know those better than ourselves when we see them. We have no problem worshipping a man like you... (Anthills 24).

As Nwachukwu-Agbada has noted, "these two characters represent Achebe's cringing intellectuals who slander their way into the corridors of power, and are prepared to swallow fifth if only to keep their jobs" (Nwachukwu-Agbada 2002:190). But the Nigerian "path" will not be closed, what with the arrival of Amaechina and the doggedness and vision of Beatrice. A future Kangan (Nigerian state) led by foresighted and committed nationalists as Beatrice with the support of the Amaechina will not give room to palace intellectuals whose groveling and mercenary activities have undermined the country and its capacity to attain greatness.

Achebe believes in the importance of the tradition and belief of the past and the ways in which these may be valuable in tempering the excesses of the present. Circumscribed by a mythic structure, *Anthills of the Savannah* is a political novel and is pre-eminently about contemporary Nigeria. Achebe's position regarding political ideologies is neither doctrinaire nor simplistic. The core of his analysis of the Nigerian situation is found in Ikem's answers to the questions raised by students at the university meeting, and the targets Ikem identifies as impediments to the creation of a just society are various. Admitting that external factors have bearing on the conduct of public affairs, Ikem says that to blame all these things on imperialism and international capitalism as our modish radicals want us to do is, in my view, sheer cant and humbug... It is like going out to arrest the village blacksmith every time a man hacks his fellow to death". (*Anthills* 159). History repeats itself once more. But the novel also ends on a note of hope as Ikem's ideas live on through the voice of Emmanuel, the dissatisfied student leader who was with Chris when he died: 'It wasn't Ikem the man who change me. I hardly knew him. It was the ideas he set down on paper. One idea in particular that we may accept limitation our actions but never under no circumstance, must accept a restriction on our thinking" (*Anthills* 223). One problem with leadership that Achebe

identifies in *A Man of the People* and reiterates in *Anthills of the Savannah* is that leaders contact with the people has been all but lost. And this has therefore triggered off the kind of resistance culture in most African literature

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis has attempted to capture the concerns of Chinua Achebe, Africa's inimitable novelists, poet, dramatist and essayist whose works have mirrored the Nigerian (African) society since the late 19th century to the present. In his early novels Achebe tries to show that Nigeria like other African countries had a robust culture and sound value system even though they might not even have been perfect. The emergency of imperialism destabilized the society and all that defined its highest essential points of values. The later novels capture the early blasting of all the expectations of independence, and the consequent search for alternative means of salvaging the society. It is appropriate to conclude that the forces that took over the running of the state have not in any way demonstrated their capacity to run an accountable and responsible government. All these are reflected in the novels studied.

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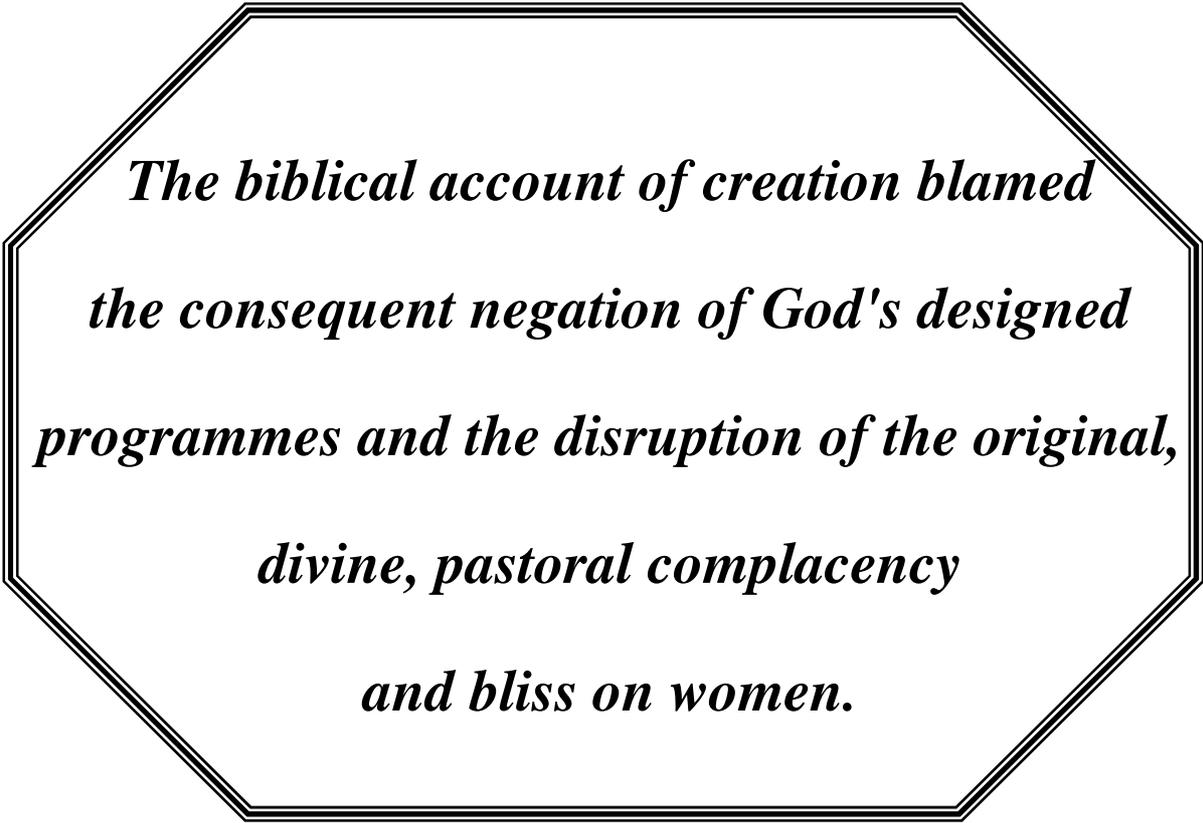
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*The biblical account of creation blamed
the consequent negation of God's designed
programmes and the disruption of the original,
divine, pastoral complacency
and bliss on women.*