

THE IRONY OF ACHEBE'S LITERARY THEME OF CORRUPTION IN A MAN OF THE PEOPLE

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ABSTRACT

This paper takes a critical look at one of Chinua Achebe's literary themes which preoccupied him during the post-colonial period of Africa in general and of the Nigerian society in particular. In order to achieve this purpose, a survey of the role of a writer in society, the socio-political background of Nigeria at its post-colonial years, aspects of corruption in the text *A Man of The People*, and the literary techniques employed by the author, were carefully examined. Also, the title of the novel under study, the structure, narrative methods of the author, language use by different characters, and use of ironies and symbolisms, were painstakingly sorted out and carefully accounted for. *A Man of the People* was set in a fictional African country as Achebe sought to write African literature on the condition of the continent in more general terms. The novel does not include any specific ethnic or cultural groups. The problems portrayed in the novel, such as bribery, incompetence and governmental apathy, were experienced by many West African nations in the neocolonial era. From these, it is been concluded that the literary work presents a realistic portrayal of the posture of corrupt contemporary Nigerian society by reason of generalization and therefore remains the most thorough-going exposé of corruption in African literary fiction and a literary experience which will not be deleted from the sands of time and the memory of generations yet unborn.

Keywords: Corruption, Post-colonial Nigeria, Nigeria experience, Socio-linguist, Post-colonial Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Literature, according to *The Encyclopedia Americana* (599) is "one of the greatest creative and universal means of communicating the emotional, spiritual

or intellectual concerns of mankind.” Also, *The Encyclopedia Britannica* (1041) sees it as: “the art of organizing words to give pleasure”. Udondata (5) states that: “It is the sum of the world’s past experience, present and future theories and at the same time an anthology and history of the multifarious characters which the world embodies.” With specific regard to function, literature instructs, informs, entertains, and expresses personal joy and pain. It may also reflect religious devotion, glorify a nation or hero and even advocate or predict a particular development- whether it be political, social or aesthetic over a period of time.

Achebe, in fulfilling his role as a literary writer, preoccupies himself with the realistic experiences of Nigeria shortly after the colonists left the seat of governance. This is because the literary works in Africa during the period reflect a larger state of alienation in the society as a whole, a clear case of colonial legacy which has left scars on the body, heart and mind of the continent. It is therefore, very possible for one to see that literature is ultimately concerned with man and society. In the light of this therefore, literature has to do with reality, and has to be useful to man and the society within which it functions (Enang, *The Theme of Corruption* 1).

There are varied and complex factors which make literature a *sine qua non* for man and society. It is not only invented and created but highly stylized and traditional. Any piece of writing has its own theme. It may seek to create cultural values like Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* or reform of religious documents of a community like John Dryden in *Absalom and Achitophel*. It may also be of bitter criticisms like Soyinka pouring his vengeance on corrupt leadership in *The Man Died* and *The Interpreters*, and Armah and Achebe in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *A Man of the People* (which spots the thematic concern – corruption – that this paper preoccupies itself). It was such painful experiences that dominated the pages of the literary works that emerged from African continent during the post-colonial years, and which made Ngugi wa Thiongo, for instance, to describe the socio-linguistic situation of the time as realistic, since they were full of imageries. *The Man Died*, *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, *The Beautiful Ones are not yet Born*, *From a Crooked Rib*; and many other novels in Africa speak clearly of the alienation, corruption, or dismemberment of parts that could have made a whole.

This study aims at using Chinua Achebe’s *A Man of the People* to bring to the fore contributions of first generation of Nigerian politicians to political destiny of the country. It describes how the politicians made a mess of the socio-political, economic and cultural dignity of the country shortly after independence in 1960.

THE ROLE OF A WRITER IN SOCIETY

No writer writes in a vacuum. Every writer comes from a society – a family, a community, a country, and continent – where he or she operates or

functions as a writer. The society, therefore, has a profound influence on his or her thoughts, feelings and indeed, imaginative and creative potentialities. Chinweizu *et al* (253-254) see the betterment of a society as the duty of a highly perceptive artistic undertaking, which is achievable by any literary artist who cares. To them, the role of a writer in his society is "...a matter of orientation, a matter of perceiving social realities and making those perceptions available in works of art in order to help promote understanding and preservation of, or change in the society's values and norms" (253). Commenting on obscurity and commitment in literary work, Nwoga (15) says that a writer has as his or her role to integrate his work of art to the event in his or her society. This is succinctly expressed as "our literature must be seen as part of the struggle for liberation of Africa politically and morally...any creative writing by an African where the writer is motivated not by the desire to speak his mind about the African dilemma but the desire to please a foreign audience deserves nor to be classified as African literature" (Nwoga 26).

A writer should serve as a mirror to his society, reflecting the ills and the morally unaccepted developments that are perennial in the society in which he functions. P'Bitek, observing the role of a writer in his society informs that "the poet is the agent of his society. He has the talent which other members of his social group may not possess, of distilling the thoughts, joys, fears, anger and sorrow, not only of the individuals but also of the group..." (9). The writer and the society should function as one whole. It is the members of his or her society that make up his audience and his or her focus covers the goings-on about his or her people who constitute the audience. Indeed, the writer's concern about the events in the society is aimed at recording these events one by one, putting them together in sentences and pushing them back to his society to see. A writer who does this does not intend to detach his audience from his writing. In so doing, he is able to carry his audience-members of his society along.

The role of the writer must never be depreciated. Where a writer fails to establish and maintain real contact with his society, he or she is sure to fail in fulfilling the mission expected of him or her. There is no end to a writer's role or the awareness of his duty to his people and society. A writer speaks in the name of his or her people and society who never elected him or her and does not consider him or her as an authority in the role of speaking for them. It is in this regard that Mohamadu Kane says that "a writer sings of the wealth and the soul of the society's culture and praises the hundred qualities in it but is careful not to delve into tradition and illustrate such treasures" (68). A writer who takes a retrospective look at his society is able to offer a contemporary analysis and is thus better placed to give a panoramic view of such a society. As a torch-bearer for the society, the writer plays the role of watching what goes on in the society, informs the society about any happening that had/is or will affect their welfare and takes pain to advocate what is likely to be the outcome of such happening. Enang (Ancient Ghost 4) cites Kane (53) on what role an African writer ought to play per time, where he emphasizes that "when the Negro Writers and Artists

held a congress organized by Présence Africaine in Paris and Rome and a Colloquium in Dakar, it was resolved that African writers must as a matter of thematic concern, join in the struggle against colonialism and neo-colonial designs by putting their art at the service of the people". This explains why Achebe went neck-deep into the struggle to expose the bastardization of the political destinies of the young African states coupled with post and neo-colonial designs perpetrated by indigenous political zealots shortly after independence. His works had so clearly depicted his satirical intention, a result of his determination to work towards a literature that would bear witness to the time, place and event. Soyinka sees the indictment of political corruption in Africa by African writers as a form of nationalism in itself. He regards African art as an integral part of a social conscience in its primordial form. In his own words, Soyinka says:

When the writer in his own society can no longer function as conscience, he must recognize that his choice lies between denying himself totally or withdrawing to the position of chronicler and post-mortem surgeon...The artist has always functioned in African society as the record of mores and experiences of his society and as a voice of vision in his own time. It is for him to respond to this essence of himself (89).

Every contemporary African writer rises to the task of keeping the values of the African society. They now take a look at how their society had been badly presented in books by Western Writers, bearing in mind that "the worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their identity, dignity and self respect" (Achebe, *The Role of the Writer* 8). It is in the light of this that Achebe further urges African writers to help their societies to regain their images by showing them in human terms what happened to them, and what they lost. Challenging African writers to this role, Achebe says: "there is a saying in Ibo that a man who can't tell where the rain began to beat him cannot know where he dried his body. The writer can tell the people where the rain began to beat them... in Africa, he cannot perform this task unless he has a proper sense of history" (*Morning Yet* 19). Therefore, a writer who feels the need to right this wrong cannot escape the conclusion that the past needs to be recreated, not only the enlightenment of our detractors, but even more for our own education because according to Achebe himself "the past with all its imperfections never lacked dignity" (*Africa and Her Writers* 19).

THE POST-COLONIAL SOCIO-POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF *A MAN OF THE PEOPLE*

The socio-political realities of Nigeria form the background of the novel *A Man of the People*, which this essay explores. This novel identifies with the interests and ideals of the people of Nigeria, featuring characters that are recognizable to their immediate audience, while still being universally relevant.

Much of its popularity therefore, is based on its wide range of relevance and applicability.

Independence, for most African countries, ushered in a period of conflict and disillusionment soon after the euphoria of self-governance. This African country called Nigeria has witnessed political chauvinism, social disorder, thuggery, deceit, financial mismanagement, misleading of the people and suffering under oppressive yoke of corrupt, greedy and intimidating leadership. The text presents characters that want to effect a change and are ground under the vicious power machine, leading as a consequence to military intervention. Nigeria and Ghana happen to have shared a common socio-political posture shortly before and after their political independence. And as literary prophets of their society, Achebe and Armah present the story of the continent from the traditional society of colonial period to the post-independence era and the influence of urbanity. The corruption in high places and the marginalization of the people socially, politically are all gathering clouds of the revolution storm. The worlds of the two novels – Ghana and Nigeria – are identifiable as very relevant. That is because the two countries were under the British colonial designs.

Nigeria attained its independence in 1960 and became a Republic in 1963. The military intervention of 1966 resulted from rigging and unfair practices coupled with the high-handed manipulation of election results. The results of the said election did not only generate discontent to many Nigerians, but served as pointers to the level of corruption, indiscipline and lack of direction in the highest cadre of the country's political set up. The politicization of every sector of government resulted in tribalism, nepotism and regionalization. No criminal act was ever committed in the secret, it was so open that everyone could see how a few Nigerians, who took over from the colonial masters, could afford to toy with the socio-political and economic destiny of their country. Disclosing why the army took over in 1966, Late Major C. K. Nzeogwu, one of the three majors, who struck, had this to say: "we seized power to stamp out corruption, tribalism, nepotism and regionalism that was apparent in high and low places" (8). Achebe, who had been a close observer of the political mess in Nigeria at that time, was able to capture in *A Man of the People* what Nigerians made of their country when the imperialists left. The novel's publication in 1966 almost coincided with the military coupe d'état of that same year. It is worthy of note, at this juncture, that despite the fact that Nigeria is very specifically mentioned in the story, the events in the story are also true of any other African nation.

Finally, to fulfill the role of a writer to his society, Achebe carefully writes a critique of his country's political, economic, moral and social decadence perpetrated by Nigerians (Africans) who took over from their colonial predecessors. Achebe, based on what he sees in and around the country, advocates military intervention. But unfortunately, even the military men themselves could not stop the mess which they came in to eradicate.

ASPECTS OF CORRUPTION IN *A MAN OF THE PEOPLE*

In an essay in Newswatch of March 9, 1992, Dan Agbese – Deputy Editor-in-Chief – devoted five pages to seeking an operational definition of ‘Corruption’ and found that the term is an amorphous nomenclature, adding that it “... is not ‘dash’ or ‘gift’ or ‘bribe’. It is the consequence of any or a combination of these things. The culture creates several faces of the word ‘Corruption’ and it reflects the moral decay in a society” (8). Also, in a paper presented at the 2nd International Literary Conference in University of Ibadan, Soyinka (2) enlightens that “...we must understand corruption to mean not just an ‘offer’ and/or ‘accepting bribe’ but it refers to those activities that are not in line with the universally accepted principles of refined conduct. It is multiform and transcends the daily life traffic of African leaders. Our writers must now address themselves to this issue.”

The continuous treatment of pre-colonial and colonial themes seems to have beclouded the literary vision of African writers to the more immediate problems of contemporary Africa. Soyinka therefore used the forum at conference to sound a clarion call for necessary departure by the African writers from the pre-colonial and colonial literary concerns and styles. According to Soyinka (240), “an unduly prolonged pre-occupation with the sins of imperialists’ and allies might lead to African Writers to neglect the chaotic state of the continent in contemporary times and to ignore the responsibilities of the Africans themselves for its present state.”

Achebe, for one, has turned his eyes inward, looks within the Nigerian society and notices the numerous problems created by the post-independence political leadership. The true subject of his *A Man of the People* is not political corruption *per se*, but the corrupting power of the privileged few as a result of position and money. The hero of the novel is not Chief M.A. Nanga (the man of the people), but the narrator-Odili. Achebe uses Odili to laugh at certain institutions and people, and also laughs at Odili in turn. The interest does not lie so much on Chief Nanga’s corrupt activities, but in the process whereby the supposedly idealistic Odili gradually succumbs to the temptations of political success of Chief Nanga and starts to behave like the Chief himself. The novel opens with the visit of Chief, the honourable M.A. Nanga M.P. (Member of the Parliament) to Anata Grammar School, where he is due to address the staff and students whereas Odili-the narrator is a teacher in that school.

The first consequence of corruption in the body-politic of the country is inflation and Odili tells the reader about the turn-out of villagers to the school to welcome Chief Nanga; spending their time, energy and hard-earned money to buy gun powder, in spite of its high price, to receive him. Apart from coming out to welcome Chief Nanga, the cost of living is fast becoming unbearable as the prices of goods and services are getting higher while the political leaders,

who are causing the inflation are not affected. Yet, in spite of this, the people have to suspend every lucrative business of the day to see Chief Nanga. According to Odili:

...here were silly, ignorant villagers dancing themselves lame and waiting to blow off their gun powder in honour of one of those who had started the country off down the slopes of inflation...The price of gun powder, like everything else...doubled again and again in the four years since this government took control ...and wished for a miracle, for a voice of thunder to hush this ridiculous festival and tell the poor contemptible people one or two truths (*A Man of the People* 2).

Another aspect of corrupt practices portrayed in the novel is when the Prime Minister, for fear of losing the next election as a result of financial crises, becomes opposed to the proposal by the Minister of Finance - Dr. Makinde, who recommends the cutting down of the price of coffee to coffee planters as a measure to tackle the sharp fall in the price of commodity which the country was experiencing at the International Coffee Market. To this, the Prime Minister objects and instructs the National Bank to print Fifteen Million pounds for use at the electioneering campaigns as a punitive measure, sacks the Minister of Finance alongside all other ministers who support the Finance Minister in his proposal. In a broadcast to the nation, he calls them "traitors and conspirators who had teamed up with foreign saboteurs to destroy the new nation". Odili informs readers further:

I was in the public gallery the day the Prime Minister received his overwhelming vote of confidence... the dismissed minister of finance was loudly booed by members...that week, his car had been destroyed... his house stoned... Another dismissed minister pulled out of his car, beaten...dragged along the road, he tied hand and foot, gagged and left by the roadside... (*A Man of the People* 5).

In order to perpetrate financial mismanagement, we see thuggery, violence and self aggrandizement clearly shown. We also see how the mass media - radio and newspapers - are used to disseminate false news to the masses. This shows the extent to which the truth is hidden from the governed and how cynical members of the public could be in the face of bitter truth. Odili further complains that "the newspapers and radio carried the Prime Minister's version of the story...The Daily Chronicle, an official organ of the P.O.P had pointed in an editorial the Miscreant Gang, as the dismissed ministers were now called, were all university people and highly educated professional men" (*A Man of the People* 4).

In addition, the role of the mass media in politics becomes heightened when the national radio suppresses every bit of information, regarding the newly formed Common Peoples Convention (C.P.C.), which the incumbent government party (P.O.P.) sees as an opposition. The C.P.C. is formed by Odili and his barrister friend- Maxwell after watching with deepening disillusionment, the use of which "our hard-won independence" was being put

by corrupt mediocre politicians. Therefore, with the use of its corrupt political machinery, the incumbent party (P.O.P.) would not allow any rival party have publicity about its existence. Odili, in disappointment says:

I wanted to keep a close watch on the antics of our national radio system which incidentally had not so far said a single word about the existence of our party even though we had fully informed them of our activities ...but once more I listen in vain. Instead, they announced Chief Nanga's inaugural campaign which had not even taken place...I was duly thinking about this when my father's name coming out of the radio... that Mr. Hezekiah Samulu, chairman P.O.P. in Urua, had been 'ingnominiuously removed from his office for subversive', anti-party activities' (*A Man of the People* 147-148).

To crown it all, Odili keeps monitoring news from radio and papers largely because of the tacit support given his candidature by his village which, according to him, "ought not to go unrecorded" (*A Man of the People* 148). But he was pushed to the wall when, instead of hearing news about his party, news about the victimization of his father, for 'subversive, anti-party activities' is aired. There are many other instances of Chief Nanga's corruption throughout the novel. The audience knows of the block of luxury flats he builds out of the share of the bribe offered him for an important government contract. One of his towns-men and Odili express their disillusionment to further show the extent the image of the country has been tarnished as portrayed in the novel:

Look at the new house he is building. Four storeys! Before, if a man built two storeys, the whole town would come to dmire it. But my kinsman is building four. quickly adds: The house in question... was as we were to learn, a 'dash' from the European building firm of Antonio and Sons whom Nanga had recently given the half -million pound contract to build the National Academy of Arts and Sciences (*A Man of the People* 108).

The audience further knows that Chief Nanga presses for the construction of the road between Giligili and Anata because he has already ordered a fleet of buses to ply the route. His telephone conversation with the Minister of Public Construction confirms this: "Look T.C., we agreed that this road should be tarred. What is this dallying and dallying...? What? Don't worry about the Press, I will make sure they don't publish it" (*A Man of the People* 47-48). Thus, when Chief Nanga finally puts down the phone, he informs Odili that he was talking to Hon. T.C. Kobino, the Minister of Public Construction, adding that the Cabinet has approved the completion of the road since January but this 'foolish man has been dallying and dallying' because the road is not in his constituency.

Achebe carefully paints a horrible picture through this on the degree to which acquisitiveness and unrestrained corruption have come to dominate

Nigerian life. Commenting on the fraudulent political behaviour and dishonest means by which Nanga has achieved prominence, Achebe himself has this to say: "But in those days, wealth meant the strength in your arm. No one became rich by swindling the community or stealing government money...today, we have materialism and thrown away the spirituality which should keep it in check" (*A Man of the People* 11). Literarily, Achebe does not only intend to satirize Chief Nanga's political misdemeanor or the various instruments employed by him and his likes to perpetrate the gross misconduct apparent in the Nigerian society as shown in the novel, but also to show how infectious the characters of such people would be to the present generation and the generation yet unborn. In fact, it is also Achebe's intention to bring to light the genuine fact that the time has come for us to accept responsibility or responsibilities for our present sad state of things and not to blame the imperialists for even the ones we create.

While writing to expose the corrupt posture of Nanga, politically, socially and economically, Odili's susceptibility to Nanga's endearing influence does not escape Achebe's sight. Thus, we see how the once so high-minded and idealistic Odili succumbs to Nanga's enticement and gets ruined by it. The process begins when Odili accepts an invitation to be Nanga's guest at the Capital City-Bori. There, he sees at first hand, the extravagant life lived by senior members of government, an extravagance supported by defrauding the people through bribery, corruption and nepotism. Odili is nevertheless, overwhelmed by his host's charisma and seduction to his opportunistic way of thinking and acting. Of his experiences gained through this brief but intense association with Chief Nanga, Odili says:

I must always remain grateful to him for the insight I got into the affairs of our country during my brief stay in his house...Years before... I had felt like so many other educated citizens of our country, that things were g seriously wrong... we complained about...lack of dynamism...listened to whispers of scandalous deals in high places, sometimes involving sums of money...But sitting in Chief Nanga's feet, I received enlightenment...(*A Man of the People* 44-45).

Apart from the 'insight' and 'enlightenment' which Odili has received about the way things go in the country, it is materialistic comfort and luxury which he enjoys that change his previous stands and idealistic posture and then prepare him to defend the Prime Minister against those critics who have idealistically believed that Ministers should resign voluntarily from office, as a point of principle. Therefore, Odili was determined to exploit the opportunity offered him while with the Minister at the Capital City-Bori to his own advantages. He is prepared to liaise with Elsie - the 'pretty girl' he had met at the university. He does not hide his feelings when he says: "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 a new...the gleaming bathroom and the

Soweto remain one for ever... Most of the night my mind was on Elsie..." (*A Man of the People* 41- 42).

Gradually, but surely, Odili begins to share the Minister's point of view. As if these were not enough and all, he also comes to share the point of view of the crowd he had once detested, and so endorses their cynical morality. The views he expresses here and now are not very different from those he had attributed to the crowd, and in fact, treated with such withering contempt and disdain. Odili's attitude to women is similar to the Minister's. He is lecherous and this trait comes out forcefully while he is at Bori. Later, we see him enjoying the deference and respect accorded him when he turns up at the hospital in the Minister's Chauffeur-driven Cadillac and boasts openly "...The hospital gateman had promptly lowered up the Iron barrier and saluted. The elderly male nurse I beckoned to had sprinted forward... although it was against all the laws of the hospital they had let me into the female nurses' quarters and woke Elsie to see me" (*A Man of the People* 63). Equally, we find it shocking to know that while Chief Nanga goes off to sleep with Agnes - the young lawyer to whom he pays twenty-five pounds (£25) a time because the money is there and of course, not his - Odili stays behind and sleeps with Jean, the beautiful wife of an American expert. Odili swoops tales of conquest of women with Nanga. Coupled with this, the way they discuss women shows vulgarity and characteristic coarseness. It is this woman-issue that has brought about the final clash between him and the minister. Again, Odili would wait for the Minister to go to his own room so that he (Odili) can sneak upstairs and make love to Elsie only to be out-witted one day by Chief Nanga who slips calmly to the girl's room and seduces her.

When Chief Nanga snatches Elsie from him, Odili turns to politics. It is not out of high minded idealism. His primary motive in joining politics is to revenge and so returns to Anata not only to contest Chief Nanga's seat at the parliament, but also to seek out Edna, the Chief's intended Parlour-wife. If Odili once felt the need to join politics in order to rid the country of parasites and to expose their corruption to the world, this feeling had disappeared long ago. On the contrary, he gloats with such greed and aviaries over party funds and the party car, that the public and of course, the reader wonders how far he would degenerate if he were elected and appointed a minister. He openly asserts that: "I returned to Anata with a brand new Volkswagen, eight hundred pounds in currency notes and assurance that more would be forthcoming" (*A Man of the People* 113).

To further explain how skeptical Odili had been towards his success in the election, we are aware from his forecast of the possible outcome of the election result, coupled with the poor preparation he makes. Odili pursues the election with little hope of winning. If he is not entirely certain of what the defeat of Chief Nanga and the likes would produce, he is confirmed in his belief that they must go. With such cynical posture, Odili finds it difficult to believe if the

people would reject Chief Nanga or give him full support at the polls. Indeed, Odili has little chance of beating Chief Nanga even though the latter fears him for what he stands for. But Odili's cynicism is heightened when Max accepts bribe from Chief Koko so as to withdraw from the race. To further truncate matters for Odili, Max informs him that the P.O.P has received solid financial backing from British Amalgamation and the Americans to fight the elections while the C.P.C. has no way or place to lean on. Maxwell further wonders how Odili proposes to fight the elections with success without soiling his fingers a little. Maxwell, therefore, advises Odili that if another money is offered to him, he should accept it; he has this to say: "Do you know, Odili that British Amalgam has paid out four hundred thousand pounds to P.O.P to fight the election...and...the Americans have been more generous...If the offer comes again, take it. It is as much yours as is his" (*A Man of the People* 142).

On the other hand, what Max tells Odili now is to confirm Nanga's observation of Odili when he refuses to accept Chief Nanga's offer of money and scholarship to train overseas. Telling Odili's father about his son's ignorance of the state of things in the country, Chief Nanga has this to say:

Leave him alone, sir, when he finishes advertising his ignorance I will educate him. (Turning to Odili, he further explains to him boastfully that) Every goat and fowl in this country knows that you will fail woefully...lose your deposit and disgrace yourself. I am giving this money because I feel after all my years of service to my people, I deserve to be elected unopposed... (*A Man of the People* 131-133).

When all the strategies employed by Chief Nanga fail to discourage Odili from contesting against him, the Chief unleashes his thugs on Odili and they mercilessly give him the beating of his life in the public. This landed him in the hospital, where he stays till the election is over with Chief Nanga re-elected unopposed.

We also see the intensity of politics with heartlessness, bitterness, violence and thuggery on the election day when Barrister Maxwell, leader of the C.P.C, is killed by Chief Koko's gang of thugs. Chief Koko, himself, is in turn killed by Eunice, Max's fiancée. The political atmosphere in the country is so tensed up and chaotic because the people are so disenfranchised by the privileged group of Chief Nanga, Koko and others who rigged the elections and become re-elected and returned to their post.

THE LITERARY TECHNIQUES USED BY ACHEBE IN *A MAN OF THE PEOPLE*

Our explications here embrace the novel's title, structure, narrative methods, language, images and analogies, symbolisms and ironies.

The Novel's Title

The title of the novel epitomizes any Nigerian who has posed himself as the

'man' who would solve the people's social, economic and political problems, but has turned round after his victory at the elections to pursue personal gains. 'A Man of the People' therefore, represents the new class of Nigerians who have made a mess of Nigeria's political system after taking over from the British colonial officers after political independence.

Structure

The novel is structured in two parts. The first part - chapters one to seven (1-7), concentrates on exposure of the fraudulent, corrupt and extravagant activities of the first republic Nigerian politicians as represented by Chief M. A. Nanga- 'the man of the people' and his likes whereas the second part of the novel shows the effect which the corrupt life of such politicians could have on a once so high minded and idealistic Odili. For instance, during Odili's brief stay with Chief Nanga at the capital city-Bori, he had seen how a one-time school teacher, then Mr. M. A. Nanga, has made a dramatic rise to his present position as Chief, the Honourable Minister of Culture. The result is that Odili drops his earlier idealistic posture and joins a new and rival political party with the motive of revenging Chief Nanga by contesting his seat and also to seek out the Chief's intended parlour-wife - Edna.

The second part of the novel which consists of chapters 8 till the end presents the various processes involved in the corrupt practices and how it affected Odili in such a way that he drops his earlier idealistic posture and joins a new and rival political party with the motive to revenge Chief Nanga by contesting his seat and also to seek out the Chief's intended parlour wife - Edna. It also provides the conceptual framework for denouncing the state of affairs in the society.

These, Achebe achieves by using the first person narrative acumen of Odili to champion the denouncement of the state of affairs with the language use which is predominantly deflationary and condemnatory in nature. It should be noted that the term, "Denunciation" refers to "public condemnation: a public accusation or condemnation of something or somebody. It is an open or subtle rejection of what is considered an affront to public morality, legality and socio-cultural, economic and political integrity" (*A Man of the People* 65).

Narrative Methods

Achebe uses the first person narrative technique as a vehicle for conveying his vision of the contemporary Nigerian societal experience. To do this effectively, the author uses the hero-narrator, Odili, to effect his satire at certain institutions and people as well as laugh at Odili himself. The author applies a great technicality, virtuosity and control; using Odili both as his mouth-piece against corruption and also to expose Odili's own susceptibility to corruption. Considering the complexity in the author's narrative style, one notices the halting and clumsy sentences, the purposeful grammatical errors and

the inept punctuations such as 'who you knew 'bush, private school', 'civil service job' and 'free housing' etc. (*A Man of the People* 19).

Language

Achebe makes use of English language that is highly modulated. Apart from fulfilling Nwoga's view that "a writer should modulate his language...if he is to reach not only a handful of fellow writers and a tiny elite, but millions of his fellow countrymen...illiterate or semi-illiterate..." (26), Achebe's language suits each character and event as well as shows the level of each character's intellectuality. Sometimes, the language Odili uses is vulgarized to indicate how undisciplined he is. The language used by other minor characters such as Boniface the thug, the minister's cook, Peter (Odili's House Boy) and Elsie is substandard English and or pidgin. The author also uses language device to show the hollowness of Odili's mind. The way Odili tells his story: he recollects things haphazardly, digressing too often and not dwelling long in one event before going into another, a butterfly mind which flirts from subject to subject, anecdote to anecdote.

Irony

This is another device that is found in almost every page of the novel. Achebe resorts to the use of some fine and powerful ironies whenever he wants to expose his hero's weaknesses. For instance, during Chief Nanga's visit to Odili's school at Anata, Odili does not want to remind the Minister that they had once known each other, showing that Odili takes no pride in the acquaintance, but after the Minister has recognized and embraced him (Odili), he is filled with delight and thereafter basks in reflected glory and increases his reputation in Anata for being the only person recognized by the Minister. Again, it is ironic that after Jean and Odili have made love together, Jean takes Odili on a tour of Lagos to show him the difference between where the common people live and those in affluence, he (Odili) out of annoyance, wonder what right such an American woman had in the inequalities that existed in Nigeria whereas She (Jean) would not do this in America. Despite the annoyance, Odili arranges to see her again.

Symbolisms

Achebe uses varying symbols in driving home vision of contemporary Nigerian experience. The title of the novel itself is symbolic in a way, for Chief Nanga - 'the man of the people' - represents any Nigerian who is capable of exploiting the country's political office and succeeds by corruptly enriching himself. Odili is equally symbolic, for he represents the new breed Nigerian graduates, who succumb to the drive for materialism and by the meteoric rise from poverty to affluence. Odili's father, Mr. Hezekiah Samalu represents the

ignorant, cynical and indifferent common people in Nigeria who look on politics as a lucrative profession. The Masked Figures that entertain the Christmas guests at Chief Nanga's compound are equally symbolic. They are symbols of religious elements in the community. But the brevity of their entertainment shows that the spiritual and religious uprightness in the society which should have kept materialism in check is gradually disappearing while materialism thrives and is preserved.

CONCLUSION

We observed that Achebe has fulfilled a greater part of his role as a commentator on social problems. His effort in handling the issue of corruption in contemporary Africa in general and Nigeria in particular is quite commendable. There is the Achebe's biting satire on the Nigerian experience as vividly portrayed in the novel. It is on the basis of this involvement in the issue of contemporary Nigeria and Africa that ranks this novel very high in African literature. It is in this regard that Adams (614) observes that "the more a book represents important sentiments, the higher is its place in literature; for it is by representing the mode of being of a whole nation and a whole age, that a writer rallies around him sympathizers of an entire age and entire nation." Achebe has achieved a great success in his literary trip across the main stream of the Nigeria's post-colonial experience by carefully recollecting the mess made of the socio-political and economic destiny of Nigeria. The author has indirectly made a prediction which a great many readers, in the one hand, and indeed, Nigerians on the second hand come to realize when the only positive action that follows the coup is the ban on politics, destructions of political structures and the arrest and detention of corrupt politicians. Additionally, critics' opinions on the work were painstakingly sorted out and carefully accounted for.

From the foregoing, we conclude that the literary work – *A Man of the People* – presents a realistic portrayal of corrupt contemporary Nigerian society. By reason of generalization, it also remains the most thorough-going exposé of corruption in Africa. The novel is a literary experience which will not be deleted from the sands of time and memory of generations yet unborn.

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