

Political Corruption, Democratic Culture, Opportunism And Oppression As Portrayed In Achebe's Man Of The People And Anthills Of The Savannah: Universality And Relevance In Contemporary Times

Rafiu Ayinla Suleiman (PhD)

Tamale Technical University,
Languages and Liberal Studies Department, Ghana, West Africa

Abstract: Africa civilian politicians and military politicians are unpatriotic, oppressive and undemocratic. The tragic state of affairs in Nigeria (a miniature version) of Africa as portrayed in Achebe's Man of the People and Anthills of the Savannah is clearly unsustainable. Corruption and oppression serve as this paper's ferment conceptual framework. The Nigeria socio-political and economic milieu is characterised by charlatans, money politics, blackmail, moral regression and financial shenanigans.

In Achebe's novels, we see a society that had gone completely rotten and maggoty at the centre. We see the politicians as shameless, corrupt, uncultured Minister of Culture anxious to elbow his way to greater patronage and wealth. Anthills of the Savannah is a powerful political statement which gives clear and objective insights into the predicament faced by the oppressed class the workers, peasant farmers, students, women and other underprivileged citizens in African countries, and the antagonistic relations and social polarity which characterised neo-colonial African state since independence. Man of the People and Anthills of the Savannah can be rightly measured in both the African and universal evaluation of the ongoing complex struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed. Achebe makes use of the aesthetic effect of metaphors, allegories and proverbs in an attempt to consolidate the culture of oppression, terror, intimidation, neglect, frustration, absolute power and denial.

What is currently happening in Africa is another passing stage of material exploitation, "executhievery", a society that is sinking in the waters of history, (men without conscience). There is no difference between a diseased body and a diseased nation. There is definitely a sense in which deep feeling of disillusionment that is widespread in Africa with the current democratisation and development agenda threatens to undermine the moral values, humanness and political irredentism of Africa forebearers. African politicians are suffused with a stark vulgarity of consciousness. Corruption thrives in the rampant of the mob and of the trickster.

This paper, therefore, suggests that if African countries are able to tackle corruption effectively, they would be able to significantly enhance the standard living of their people. Or else, the poor, the vulnerable, the underprivileged and the disillusioned would continue to wallow in abject penury, and the continent like a raft would continue to float on the waters of history to an island of pains.

Keywords: Political Corruption, Democratic Culture, Opportunism, Oppression, Achebe, Disillusionment, Moral Rectitude

I. INTRODUCTION

The central theme in these novels is the corruption that has engulfed the political system of Nigeria. Every part of the

society is corrupt. Every institution is corrupt. Achebe weaves this theme on the police as an institution. The entire police force is corrupt. Common kola at the Cowrie Brige is able to buy Christ freedom. The soldiers having collected "kola"

allows Christ to pass. The numerous bribery scandal involving the bus drivers and the police of the Great North Road are so glaring.

In Africa and for that matter in Nigeria, corruption is like a pandemic among the political class. Achebe's novel *Man of the People and Anthills of the Savannah* just like Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* provided us with some of the most telling images of corruption and premature decay which presently afflicts African countries and the alienation and despair of which this corruption and decay are symptoms. As the Uganda critic, Gakwandi had said of Soyinka: in his first novel, *The Interpreters*, he captures vividly the decadence and sterility of the contemporary social and political set up in many African countries. There is extreme image of mutilation, degeneracy and atrophy (Nkosi, 1981).

Political corruption is this paper's ferment conceptual framework. The tragic image of Africa is a compelling one. It is for this reason that this paper contemplates and explores the democratic landscape which is punctuated by rising tensions, uncertainty, political corruption, mediocrity, greed, oppression, rascality, and inordinate appetite of the ruling class as portrayed in Achebe's *Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah* with a view to right the wrongs of Africa political adventurists and to bring sanity, succour and moral rectitude to millions of Africans who are wallowing in abject penury.

II. LITERARY CRITIQUE

Achebe cited in Suleiman (1995) brings a measure of personal bitterness to his meditations on the theme of power and corruption in modern African state. Achebe's thematic concern that is, the fragmentation of man's grip of reality together with a kaleidoscopic view of African society as it passes from colonial bondage to freedom and self determination, and finally from the hero's point of view at any rate- to a new form of bondage in the hands of its new African masters –the politicians of today.

Corruption is a subject of contemplation. There are strains and tensions in African societies. In novels like *The Interpreters*, *This Earth My Brother*, and/or *The Beautiful Ones Are Yet Born*, we see the objectification of the group split between the literary intellectuals and the ruling bureaucracies in Africa: That the basis of a close organic relationship between the individual and the rest of the community is being seriously undermined by new economic and social forces; that anxiety, alienation and the emergence of an anguished pessimistic vision so forcefully projected in Awoonor's, *This Earth My Brother*, a novel which actually ends in suicide, are indices of widespread dislocation and loss of equilibrium in Africa today (Nkosi, 1981)

There are feelings of strained discomfort and unease at the general sense of hopelessness in modern African societies. This depicts how vulgar, degraded and incompetent the present rulers of the important sectors of African society are. Corruption is no respecter of countries, of persons and of personality. It has spread like a malignant tumour. Achebe's *Man of the People* vividly and aesthetically captures the theme of gargantuan corruption in Africa then and now. He

juxtaposes the theme of hope, joy, euphoria, respite and fulfillment in *The Anthills of Savannah* that, in Africa women, there is hope, salvation, redemption in the character of women.

Achebe's theme is essentially on the socio- economic development, self- certainty, self – assertion in Africa. Literature like a blade is judged by its power to cut. In other words, literature can be regarded to reflect democratic rule only when it is meant to serve a purpose, purpose that is concerned with the social- political redemption of Africans (Suleiman, 1995).

Former Ghanaian President, Rawlings (1995) said:

For us, democracy cannot simply mean holding District Assembly elections or any other elections periodically whilst we continue to endure poverty, misery, illiteracy, hunger and poor health, facilities and whilst many of our able –bodied citizens are unable to find employment. We cannot divorce any discussion on structures or processes of government from the economic reality of providing for basic human needs for society (Daily Graphic, 1990).

Rawlings' assertion corroborates Achebe's position (cited in Suleiman, 1995) that an African who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant like that absurd man in the proverb who leaves his house burning to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames.

Today, this researcher argues that there is complete material exploitation and human sequestration by the ruling political class often terms the African "vampires". Thus the promise and attainment of self-rule crystallising on development, growth and urgent need to right the wrongs of colonialism never materialised. Various reasons have been given for this failure. Wilmot cited in Suleiman, (1995) in his study observed that of Ghana's fate was malintegration because structures of action were created to guarantee a stable pattern of communication between the base of the society and the top. The result was political apathy and cynicism (Suleiman, 1995). To the masses, therefore, politics has become a period of disillusionment, debasement and hopelessness. Africans are still forced to live in penuriously pauperised conditions without food, housing, accessibility to quality health care, affordable housing, quality but cheaper education at all levels of our education ladder. The elites have been contaminated with the canker of corruption and perpetuate the reign of corruption and slavish mentality which debilitate the people economically, socially and spiritually.

Pockets of unscrupulous, self- centred opportunistic and greedy politicians parade themselves as messiahs. African politicians are all scrambling for their share of the "national cake" and the try to out –do each other in their display of opulence. The title of Nwanko's novel, *My Mercedes is Bigger Than Yours* is an appropriate metaphor for the present state of affairs. Corruption seems to be a long- established pattern in most African societies, since many forms of it are generally accepted by the people. Achebe's novels *Man of the People* and *The Anthills of the Savannah* present an artist's view of many elements at work in post- independence Africa. They portray a writer's disillusion and disaffection which curious readers and students of literary studies share enormously (Suleiman, 1995). In Achebe's *Man of the People*

irresponsible, hypocritical and half educated politicians like Nanga on the ignorance of the community and the absence of societal norms to satisfy their private interest and animal desires, while well-meaning educated and perceptive men like Odili become frustrated, embittered and alienated by the activities of people like Nanga, and the ignorance and cynism of the populace.

Nanga, a privileged minister has built for himself three-blocks of seven-storey luxury flats at £3,000 each out of public funds. Not minding whether the country faces inflation, the government orders the bank to print £15, merely because it is facing an election. Nanga and the like of him is a person who was democratically elected by their people, but goes round to practice “democracy” (Suleiman, 1995).

There is a general feeling of anti-intellectualism, since semi-illiterates and thugs like Nanga find their way to the top and are bent on frustrating the efforts of Odili a democrat who apparently enters politics to try to counteract the fraudulence and hollowness so graciously revealed in the society, and though it might sound petty, also to avenge himself on Nanga who has stolen or snatched his woman from him.

Odili is seen trying to set up a code of conduct but his difficulty and dilemma are not appreciated by his society. The cynism an apathetic indifference of the masses is portrayed as they watch the acquisitiveness of Nanga and his class of elite without restraining such man.

The community thus acts as a catalyst in the corrupt practices of the elite who supposedly pose themselves the custodians of democracy. They believe that corruption is normal and continue to pay homage to Nanga and his group, so that they in turn will gain from the “big men”.

Even Odili’s father is of the view that people go into politics for personal gain and probably expects his son to adopt the same attitude. He asks Odili whether “a sensible man would spit out the juicy morsel that good fortune placed in his mouths, (Suleiman, 1995;37).

In this society, self-seeking and theft are tolerated as long as the owner does not see. The problem is that the older, practical and accepted norms are applied in a situation where they are no longer appropriate. This is basically due to the lack of proper understanding by the electorate of the present system of government.

Achebe cited in Suleiman (1995) has chosen the ‘starry-eyed idealist’, Odili, who is susceptible to corruption, as his narrator. Palmer sees him as unreliable narrator because of his double standards. Probably Achebe does not want to idealise Odili and feels that a character with failings should be a better judge of him-self and of society. It is ironical that most of the criticisms are directed at him-self.

Suffice to say that *Man of the People* is a story, then, of corruption in both the older and younger generation as told by one of the second group. Like Chief Nanga, Odili is committed to both financial and political power he believes in making the best of the situation of a morality which he has inherited. There is something of the idealist in him, or rather vestiges of the remembered idealism of his generation, though its ideological foundation is uncertain, as we discover in his arguments with Max. Odili has learnt to smother conscience with his rhetoric and hide his own corruption and ambition behind the moralising and high-mindedness of the so-called

new class. Even though Achebe does not offer solutions, it is clear that he wishes the old morality to be replaced by Odili’s type of ideal, for democracy to develop positively.

Infused by capitalism on the post-independence lives of Kenyans, Ilmorog is chosen as the mirror through which we see what is afoot in the whole theatre of modern Kenya, neglected and pauperised. Ilmorog is a symbolic microcosm of Kenya and Africa as a whole. The people had in the past not only mastered their fates and forced things “to happen the way we in Ilmorog wanted them to happen but also had during the period of colonialism staked their lives in pursuit of liberation. After Uhuru unfortunately, the freedom they had sought had turned sour for them. First, the city had magnetically drawn their children and second the M. P. they had elected had through the government actions pushed them into oblivion. The area is now haunted with drought, abject poverty and penurious toiling of the land for the means of existence (Suleiman, 1995).

Just like Wole Soyinka in *The Interpreters*, he attacks all institutions in relation to the Nigerian body politics. He feels that ‘Near to death, shit is the most vernacular atmosphere of our beloved country’. Corruption is expressed in faecal terms and everybody seems to be surrounded by waste material Soyinka cited in Suleiman, (1995)... Soyinka’s comment implies that the Nigerian body politics is incapacitated because it is full of ‘shit’ and waste is superseded only by complete obliteration by death. Even the name, ‘Renascent High school’ is ironic. It is used on purpose to point out that there is no rebirth anywhere, no progress but destruction. He uses the physical decay as a metaphor for moral filth. These two plague the Nigerian body politics and Soyinka implies that if Nigeria does not get rid of her wastefulness and corruption, then it will certainly ‘die’. He sees no difference between a diseased body and a diseased nation. The end of both is death and destruction Soyinka cited in Suleiman, (1995).

In *Man of the People*, Odili, the narrator and Chief protagonist is like Louis Aladai a nationalist who has nothing but contempt for the traditions of his nation. He does not care too much for our women dancing, he speaks as any foreigner might of the members of the hunters’ guild as ‘these people ‘, bush’ is the nastiest epithet he can think of; and he scornfully dismisses the people with whom he works and whose children he teaches:

Here were silly ignorant villagers dancing themselves lame and waiting to blow off their gunpowder in honour of one of those who has started the country off down the slopes of inflation. I wished for a miraculous festival and tell the poor contemptible people one or two truths. But of course it would be quite useless. They were not only ignorant but cynical. Tell them that this man had used his position to enrich himself and they would ask you-as my father did – if you thought that a sensible man would spit out the juicy morsel that good fortune placed in his mouth.

Odili who claims that his identification with a political party known as the “Common People’s Convention” is borne out of his desire to better the lots of the masses turns around to refer to these same people as “... This vast contemptible crowd...” (*A Man of the People*: 138) cited in (Afejoku and Eruaga, 2010; 148). What is deduced from his reference to the

people in such negative terms is utter deceit in his intent. This is so because whereas he claims a social and political affinity with them in theory, in practical terms, he is very far from them. This distance is easily deducible from his terms and as such he is not the right kind of person to fight for the masses. He is selfish and self-centred at heart (Afejuku and Eruaga, 2010).

There is equally a loaded irony in the title of *A Man of the People* which is Achebe's fourth novel. The phrase which refers to Chief Nanga implies a leader, a ruler or a guide. In his speech, Nanga portrays himself as a selfless ruler who is friendly with his people; he gives them the impression that he renders them great service and that he lives a life of self-denial, sacrifice and commitment:

Don't you know that minister means service?... Minister or no minister... a man who is my senior must still be my senior. Other ministers and other people may do otherwise but my motto is: Do the right and shame the devil. (*A Man of the People*: 9 & 11) cited in Afejuku and Eruaga, 2010: 148).

In actual sense, however, Nanga is a greedy, selfish, ruthless and ambitious ruler whose craving for power and wealth knows no bounds. He lives in a well-furnished mansion, has houses and streets all over the town and is indifferent to the sufferings of his subject (*A Man of the People*: 32, 54, 126) Rather than "service" what he offers to the people is disservice and is equally the wrong things that he does rather than the "right" ones as he claims his motto states (Afejuku and Eruaga, 2010).

It is this same vice we see in his Excellency whose negation of good leadership causes Ikem to assert that Sam is a name that no longer fits the object (*Anthills*: 48). The name of his Excellency is Major Sam. Sam is a short form of "Samuel" and Samuel is an archetypal image of a leader who possesses good attributes of leadership. In the book of First Samuel, Chapter Eight, verses ten to twenty-two, such positive qualities are seen in Prophet Samuel who is selfless, honest, loving, caring, kind and who places the interest of his subjects over and over and above his personal desire. Though his Excellency of *Anthills* bears this same name, he is on the contrary, a mockery of the name because he is a complete negation of all that the name stands for. He is callous as opposed to being kind, selfish as opposed to being selfless, and loveless in contrast to being loving (Afejuku and Eruaga, 2010).

Achebe said that the economic conditions in Africa were worse than in 1958 when he wrote *Things Fall Apart*. The story of Africa is a sad one with "executhief", famine and drought, with picture of skeletal victims shown on televisions. He added that African political system as articulated by so many African leaders were to blame for African failures, not the vast majority of African people.

He as well said that he objected to the 'one-eyed view' of looking at situation Africans had picked up from, the west the bad habit of going to extremes.

Much as politics is not disputing the negative effects of slavery and colonialism on the continent, we however begin to wonder if the so-called African leaders have not contributed ten-fold than Europe in underdeveloping Africa. Or how does one explain the determination of Korea to 'conquer' how Japan under-developed her from the first decade of the 20th until 1945. How will Africa classify such disasters as Emperor

Jean Bokasa, 'Papa' Houphouet Boigny (who built a \$20 million worth cathedral in his village, Yamassoukro) Emperor Haille Sellasie (the 419 Lion of Juda who spent 44 years in office) Kamuzu Banda of Malawi, Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire, Omar Bongo of Gabon, Said Barre of Somalia, "Sergeant" Samuel Doe of Liberia, Alhaji Idi Amin (the fake field Marshall and life-president of Uganda and Gaafar Elmeiri (the belligerent leader of Sudan). These are likes of Nanga and his Excellency Sam and their cronies. The supposedly custodian of democracy in contemporary Africa. Democracy in Africa at post-independence till date is punctuated by nepotism, corruption, mal-administration, party loyalty, political mediocrity, self-aggrandisement, egotism, rigging of election. What we witness today in Africa is reigns of capricious despots, whims and lust for power (Suleiman, 1995).

In fact, political distrust has been the scourge of this 21st century and analysed under many labels: political cynicism, disenchantment, dysphoria, normlessness and skepticism to name but few. Women, cars, landed property that is all they care for (Suleiman, 1995).

Max and some of his friends having watched with deepening disillusion the use to which our hard won freedom was being put by corrupt mediocre politicians had decided to come together and launch the Common People's Convention (CPC).

Indeed, in all his novels, Achebe has perceived power abuse and the negative application of power as a male vice. For instance, Major Sam of *Anthills of the Savannah*, we see that this vice assumes an alarming degree. Catherine Innes, in a paper entitled, 'The story of this Country: Language discourse and power in *Anthills of the Savannah*' cited in (Afejuku and Eruaga, 2010:142) confirms this when she observes the "*Anthills of the Savannah*" is chiefly concerned with the abuse of power, and particularly male power" This paper's view is in absolute agreement with Afejuku and Eruaga. The *Anthills of the Savannah* portrays the nauseating degree of abuse, exploitation, intimidation and oppression of "the very society and people to whose service power ought to be attuned, Power corrupts absolute power corrupts absolutely. This power abuse is reported in the government of His Excellency. In *Anthills of the Savannah* "Sun" is used by Achebe to demonstrate this inordinate craving for power as well the desire for self-perpetuation of power over other (Afejuku and Eruaga, 2010). His Excellency symbolises the same person as the Sun, connotes the rule of violence, injustice, authorisation and violation of human rights.

His Excellency is also guilty of suppressive authorisation command of his cabinet and the people of Abazon in *Anthills* for the latter's refusal to grant his wish of becoming life president. The word "Abazon" in Afejuku and Eruaga (146) can infer as coinage from the concept of setting ablaze. It is section of the country with its suffering people on whom the harsh impact of His Excellency's unjust governance is unleashed. As already mentioned, the suffering of the people of Abazon arises from their refusal to endorse the life-presidency wish of His Excellency. It is for this reason that they are punished as the old orator from Abazon says cited in (Afejuku and Eruaga: 146, 2010)

Because you said no to the Big Chief he is very angry and has ordered all the water boreholes they are digging in your areas to be closed so that you know what it means to offend the Sun.... So we came to Bassa to say our own yes and perhaps the work on our boreholes will start again and we will not perish from the anger of the Sun (*Anthills: 127*).

The above excerpt further affirms the callousness, apathy and abdication of duty represented by His Excellency's regime. As a people under the "wrath of the sun," the people from Abazon are subjected to all forms of suppression and human deprivations. Thus, for failing to support the life – presidency desire of Major Sam, the boreholes project in the district of Abazon has to be put to an end and all other social amenities in the area withdrawn. This is quite similar to the fate of Mr. Hezekiah Samuel and the people of his political party other than that of chief Nanga (*A man of the People*). In Achebe's *Man of the People*, one can see how democracy has been bastardized by the first generation of African leaders. One can see the immediate post – independence phase of social and political corruption and intellectual dishonesty which has now given way to a bleaker phase of dictatorship, victimisation, normlessness, kleptomania, squandermania and violence organised occasionally at the highest level and a prevailing atmosphere of fear. This situation provides a fertile ground for the emergence of military regimes in Africa (Suleiman, 1995: 52).

The timing and publication of Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, in the words of Tunde Fatunde (Suleiman:52) cannot be purely coincidental in the sense that this novel comes relevantly at an appropriate time when citizens both in Africa and the world over are rejecting power – drunk military and civilian tyrannical dictators, and at the same time are trying to define new and complex ways of achieving people – oriented democracy, for in the words of one of Achebe's characters (Suleiman: 1995.53) in *Anthills of the Savannah*;

This world belongs to the people of the world not to any little caucus, no matter how talented.

Man of the People ends with a military coup and *Anthills of the Savannah* begins after a coup has taken place and ends with another. In the *Anthills of the Savannah*, self – style 'saviour' calculatingly and predicatively metamorphosed into 'oppressor' that is the escalation of corruption, nepotism, personality cult, repression and tyranny, loss of civil liberties with each of these themes conspicuously identified. Kanga is a very thinly disguised Nigeria, although, as the name suggests, its politics, its problems, and its political/literacy debates are applicable to Ghana, Cameroon, Kenya, South Africa, Togo, Uganda and a number of other African states (Suleiman, 1995). The military came to power and was generally accepted by the civilian population, and Achebe using Chris Oriko as one of his authorial mouth – pieces affirmed that:

... Our civilian politicians finally got what they had coming to them and landed unloved and unmourned on the rubbish heap... (*Anthills*, cited in Suleiman, 1995).

Achebe informs us through Chris Oriko, more than once, that initially the military in power, including Sam, meant well and genuinely interested in defending the interests of the oppressed people of Kanga. Odun Balogun cited in (Suleiman, 1995) using the linkage theory sees an organic

relationship between Achebe's *Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah* just as he rightly suggested:

For while the former ended with a military coup d'état, the latter begins with a military government rapidly turning into dictatorship. The way the coup is presented in the earlier novel seems to suggest a belief in the possibility of a better government emerging. Odun Balogun cited in Suleiman, (1995: 57) states that:

Anthills of the Savannah reflects coup does not only fail to change things for the better but actually makes the situation even worse.

Making use of the aesthetic effects of metaphor, allegories and proverbs, the elderly leader in the Abazon delegation summarised in the following terms, the consolidating culture of oppression inflicted upon them by Sam-

I don't know whether the people we have come to see will listen to our cry for water or not. Sometime ago, we were told that the big chief himself was planning to visit our villages and see our suffering. Then we were told again that he was not coming because he had just remembered that we had said no to him two years ago, so we said, if he will not come, let us go and visit him instead in his house. It is proper that a beggar should visit a king. When a rich man is sick, a beggar goes to visit him and says sorry. When the beggar is sick, he waits to recover and then goes to tell the rich man that he has been sick. It is the place of the poor man to make a visit to the rich man who holds the yam and the knife (*Anthills: 127* cited in Suleiman, 1995).

Anthills of the Savannah is a powerful political statement which gives clear and objective insight into the predicament faced by the oppressed class (the workers, peasant farmers, students, women and other underprivileged citizen in African countries, and the antagonistic relations and social polarity which characterise neo – colonial African state since independence. *Anthills of the Savannah* can be rightly measured in both the African and universal evaluation of the on – going complex struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed (Suleiman, 1995).

This paper, therefore, stresses the fact that what people of Africa today experience are still the primordial enemies of mankind, abject poverty in the midst of spectacular wealth, incredible human degradation and denigration amidst brazen pomp and maddening heraldry, cold terror in the face of numbing impotence and the ignorance of ambition and arrogance. The truth of Nkrumah haunts us in the emaciated cadavers and the staring eyes of dying children and the mutilated bodies of hopeless father and the tortured faces of mothers who seek hope. For us, concepts and reality are one. They are joined in practice (Suleiman, 1995).

Come to think of it, the "Beautiful Ones Are Gone" Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana), Modibo Keita (Mali), Sylvanus Olympio (Togo), Patrice Lumumba (Congo) now Zaire, Prince Luis Rwangson (Burundi), Thomas Sankara (Burkina Faso), Sekou Toure (Guinea). Thank God for Nelson Mandela (South Africa) and Moummar Ghaddafi (Libya), Africa would have had no index of contemporary statesmanship (Suleiman, 1995).

In his book *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Achebe cited in Suleiman (1995) defines 'patriotism' and its concept as follows:

Patriotism is an emotion of love directed by a critical intelligence. A true patriot will always demand the highest standards of his country and accept nothing but the best for his people. He will be outspoken in his condemnation of their short-comings without giving way to superiority, despair or cynicism.

The decolonisation of African Literature is already in progress. Novelists are becoming less pre-occupied with cultural and sociological matters, *Man of the People and Anthills of the Savannah* like *The Interpreters*, *Petals of Blood* and *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* are more concerned about exposing the corruption and incompetence which are so widespread in African political and governmental circles. Achebe's fourth novel – *A Man of the People* is one of the most successful results of this exercise.

Literary texts such as Achebe's *Man of the People*, *Anthills of the Savannah* and Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, and Wathiongo *Petals of Blood* focus on fellow African's who have taken the opportunity of independence to satiate their selfish materialism desires. Wathiongo cited in (Suleiman, 1995) said that:

We must not become too fascinated by our gaze at the ruins of yesterday and forget the present.

The post-independence disillusionment gave rise to coup d'états with the hope to restore sanity, succour into the society and sustain people's interest, desires and hopes, but alas, the military 'cabals' or dictators are not better in any way than the civilian politicians. The Arab spring witnessed in Tunisia, Algeria, Libya and Egypt saw how the masses were deviant amidst soldiers' armoury and or arsenals to restore their plight and dignity. What is being witnessed today is the fluctuating tremour and major shocks of civilisation. For instance, all that is associated with political thuggery such as *Al-Queeda*, *Azoka Boys*, *Bolga Bulldogs*, *Delta Force* all kinds of vigilante groups with ferment for anarchy, mayhem, political rascality and lawlessness exist in the 21st century in Ghana.

Achebe's *Man of the People and Anthills of the Savannah*, Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, Okot Bitek's *Song of Lawino*, Okello Ocul's *Prostitute and the Orphans*, Wathiongo's *Petals of Blood* and Soyinka's *Interpreters are of disillusionment*, political rascality, gargantuan corruption and social dis equilibrium that today have bedevilled contemporary African politics (Suleiman, 1995). Wathiongo cited in (Suleiman, 1995) observed:

I believe that African intellectual must align themselves with the struggle of the African masses for a meaningful national development. For we must strive for a form of social organisation that will free the manacled spirit and energy of our people, so we can build a new country and sing a new song. Perhaps in a small way, the African writer can help in articulating the feelings behind this struggle.

In this 21st century, there has been a lot of concern in Africa to solve problems inherent in the current political space arising from "executhieves", inability of the political class elites and the bourgeoisies to bring sanity, hope and succour to millions of deprived, dispossessed, the vulnerable and the

disillusioned people of Africa after sixty years of nationhood. The abnormal is viewed as normal and the normal is viewed as abnormal.

There is self – inflicted mystery, hunger, poverty, malnutrition, needless ethnic cleaning, diseases, looting, Boko haram insurgency, siphoning and carting billions of cedis, of naira, of Cfa and so on and so forth. Fanon's book (1980): *The Wretched of the Earth* aesthetically fits the above epithets of political thuggery, rascality, subterfuge and gangsterism in contemporary African states.

In a similar thematic exposition of corruption, Reore a character in Osofisan's *Another Raft* (1988) said of corruptible, oppressive and "executhieves" class –

We toil and toil, nursing *Eledumare*'s precious earth tenderly. And one man we never see, who wines and dines in the soft fairyland of that Lagos City, we hear so much about, he first sends his agents down to collect our harvest, leaving us the chaff. I know I am nobody, Abore. But all the year round, we're toiling, that's all. Against the weather, against weeds and rodents, several nobodies like me. One long unceasing struggle, in spite of our fatigue, in spite of frequently falling ill. Working for thieves (Osofisan, 1988: 27).

Another character explains:

But broda ... deese your custom. Do your customs say that it is right for prince, chief and all dem big – big people to tief and rob and cheat every oder person as they do? (Osofisan, 1988:43)

Osofisan (1988) in his outburst said:

Forever our continent is doomed. We're the children born into the stream of an ancestral malediction, we will always be adrift... That's what I mean, it's our destiny – we of this continent, we're like a raft lost in the stream of history bound on an island of pain.

Osofisan (1988:54) unequivocally lampooned African leaders:

Can't you see? Like the night comes, and eats up the day. Does the moon complain? or do the stars fall to wink their consent? Men have always eaten other men of course. Look at history. So many cannibals suppers. And the screams of humanity, out of the throats of victims and revellers, blind the rafts on which our corpses float. Blood all around, look the red, red sea history ... Still, amidst that reeking redolence; we are the only race of animals with an insatiable appetite for the children of our own flesh. Black men killing black, feeding on black. Forever and ever, black men always slaughtering other black men.

Gbebe in his characterisation said:

You're a soldier. You accuse the politicians and the chiefs of exploiting the people and leading us to damnation. But what of you sir? What else do you do except milk the land.

Achebe's thematic radar on corruption and oppression like Wathiongo, Armah, Osundare, Osofisan, Awoonor, Soyinka, Oculi and Bitek transcends his individual socio – economic, political, cultural and literary milieu. These social satires with political undertones explore the post – colonial state's psyche by excavating "the maggot – infested underside of the composite heap" and "co – interaction of levels of power in practice" (Awosanmi; 2010:114)

Scholars have argued that the writer and politicians have certain things in common both trade in words. Often the writer and politician are the same person. The Greek philosopher Aristotle (cited in Suleiman, 1995) had said that the end of politics is not knowledge but actions. Thus, acknowledging the links between an academic approach to politics and practical political activity. One cannot therefore overlook what Achebe calls 'the burning issues of the day', since these issues concern every member of the community.

Today, what we witness in Africa is the perfidious activities of the black intellectuals or elites, who interpreted independence as an opportunity to grab the remains left by the colonialists, scramble to occupy the seats vacated by the white. The political theatre has become a centre stage for political and economic power in the hands of political shenanigans, unpatriotic and selfish individuals. Marxim cited Suleiman, (1995) believes in the potency of literature. In other words, literature is seen as a weapon that should attack the inordinate, rapacious and unequal gap in the social strata while still organising the psychology of the people. Literature is not a static mirror of the culture and traditions of the society but a reflection in a subtle manner of the forces that initiate social changes in the society (Suleiman, 1995).

It is evident that Achebe like many of his colleagues through his artistic expressions has changed from where the rain began to beat us to where the few privileged people at the corridor of power unleash terror and disposes the millions of helpless citizenry of Africa. Guevera, cited in (Suleiman, 1995) argued that we must not permit the world democracy used in apologetic manner to represent the exploiting classes to lose its deeper meaning and acquire the meaning of giving the people certain more or less minimum liberties *Man of the People*, and *Anthills of the Savannah* centre around the post – independence corruption in using Nigeria (a miniature version of Africa), that have universal relevance and their description fits contemporary African socio – political reality. They portray the theme of corruption and of oppression of the ruling class. The ruling class has a passion for the luxury of the developed world. Suffice it to say that public funds which should have been used for constructive ventures to improve the quality of life of their people are directed into the pockets of unscrupulous, self – centred, opportunistic and greedy politicians. They are all scrambling for their share of the national cake hence they try to out-do each other or one another in their display of opulence. The title of Nkem Nwawko's novel, *My Mercedes Benz is Biggest than Yours* is an appropriate metaphor for the present state of affairs in Nigeria, in Ghana, South Africa, in Zimbabwe, in Uganda, in Somalia, in Sudan, in DR Congo, in Cote D'voire but to mention a few. Corruption seems to be a long established pattern in most African societies which has created disillusionment, alienation, disaffection and nepotism which this paper enormously shares.

In Nigeria, there was this highly political importation of fertilizer and rice during the second republic, setting fire to public buildings to obliterate evidence of looting, the impoverishment of the rural masses and the merciless plundering of public treasuries, the importation of expensive gleaming luxuries cars, the selfish inflationary award of jumbo salaries and awards of contracts to preferred government

office holders, election rigging, unjust incarceration of political opponents, industrial pollution, political rascality and ineffective leadership (Olanipekun, *TELL Nigeria's Independence weekly Magazine*, 2007).

In a related development, Osundare cited by Olanipekun in the poem; *The Land of Unease*, for example condemns greed and other related vices in the society. He believes that the wealth of the nation is enough to cater for the basic needs of all the citizens "The Yam of this world is enough to cater for all mouth". The poet questions the validity of the system of distribution of wealth which is based on a materialistic arrangement that presupposes the inequality of "human figures". This philosophy provides that the wealth of the nation be shared not on equal basis but according to some feudal rights and privileges. He rejects a socio – political and economic system where a few individuals can feed fat on the common 'Yam' whilst others die of starvation. He criticises the politicians ("executhieves" for creating a scandalously higher standard of living for themselves out of proportion with the level of economic production in the nation.

The developing world in particular is littered with insatiable leaders whose greed virtually has no limit. The rogue's gallery includes Star performers like Democratic Republic of Congo president Mobutu Sese Seko who was adjudged to be wealthier than his country, Jean – Bedel Bokassa, the 'emperor' of the Central Africa Empire whose ambition was to become Africa's Napoleon Bonaparte; Haiti's Paps Doc Duvalier, who used a combination of murder and voodoo to sustain himself in power. Even Nigeria had its General Sani Abacha, whose determination to perpetuate himself in office was deceased only by the rapaciousness with which he looted the nation he purported to lead. Imelda Marco's obsession with 1,200 pairs of shoes is symbolic of the moral regression that affects many rulers and their families when they attain the heights of power. Nigeria in 2012 is eerily similar to the Philippines in 1986. There is the same ostentatious display of wealth by politicians and their cronies, the same contempt for public opinion, the same confidence in impunity. Only recently, it was revealed that the Nigeria elite rank among the most assiduous purchasers of private jets anywhere in the world. The populace is repeatedly assailed with tales of frauds involving the theft of billions of naira. Industrialists, bankers, traditional rulers and other wealthy Nigerians continue to breach the boundaries of good taste in their unending quest for ways to show off their ill-gotten wealth (*The Nation* 2012:19).

At a time when thousands were starving and denied access to educational, health care and other aspects social welfare, the Marco's family embarked on an orgy of conspicuous consumption that was almost unrivalled in contemporary history (*The Nation*, 2012). The ex- governor of Delta State in Nigeria James Onanefe Ibori stole over 10 billion naira of state money which he squandered on lavish estates and cars abroad while dumping huge sum of the people's money in coded and uncoded bank accounts all over the world. Ibori's case is so chronically symptomatic of the hopeless rot in the Nigeria system (a miniature version of Africa) (Osundare, 2012: 53)

Osundare (2012:53) asserts that if Nigeria does not kill corruption, corruption will kill Nigeria. Corruption he said

kills by blighting our blossom; frustrating new shoots while stunning new growth of the old stem. Like virulent weed, it does not just smother the good crop; it shoves aside its carcass and usurps its place. Thereafter, it starts reproducing itself in multiple folds carving out the entire terrain in its own image, developing new shells and shields against assault completely erasing every trace of the old virtuous order, and taking on a false originary aspect. Osundare agrees that its operational lackeys are degradation and decay; its ultimate harbour is death.

...fill the rest with your imagination and with no difficulty at all, you'll see a raft floating on the water's (Osofisan, 1988).

This is a provocative mind – boggling and powerful imagery of a sinking continent in the comity of continents because of misrule and seemingly political subterfuge by neo – colonialist's vampires. Europe underdeveloped Africa (Rodney, 1976) so are the African political elites voraciously looting, plundering and thereby underdeveloping Africa. For when the developed world is going into the moon, Africans are yet to reach the villages (Nyerere of Tanzania cited in Suleiman, 1995)

Image of Africa as a floating raft on water's aptly, dialectally and didactically corroborates Achebe's artistic expression in his *Man of the People*, and *Anthills of the Savannah* which portrays a world of political degeneration, deception and falsehood, Armah's theme of decay – everywhere is filth; the society is fast decomposing.

Adeyemi, a Senior Administrator at the Economic Commission of Africa (ECA, 2017) argued that one trillion US dollars (1 Trillion U.S Dollars) was stolen in Africa over the last 50 years. He observes that an estimated 50 billion dollars illicitly leaves the shores of Africa mostly for the western countries. He added that these figures were arrived at after decades of research and laments that this illicit financial flow has series of negative development impact on the continent. He challenged the destination countries to return these illicit assets to their countries of origin namely from Africa. In his argument, about 75% of these illicit flows are directly traceable to the behaviours or action or inaction of Trans – national trade, that invoicing is high and weighty. He however, concludes that only 5% of the flows can be traced to official corruption. Africa is the only region in the world that has African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). This is a governance mechanism where president tell themselves “You have been bad, go and improve yourself”

Africa is blessed with natural resources like gold, oil, cobalt, iron, copper, uranium, silver, diamond, bauxite, cocoa beans and petroleum. Unfortunately, the standard of living of many people in the continent is deplorable. This scholar has explained is largely due to corrupt governments ruling many countries in the African continent. For instance, although the government of Mozambique has taken steps to fight corruption, it is still a big problem corruption remains in both the public and donors who almost half of the nation's budget.

In Sierra Leone, systematic corruption has caused weak governance and widespread poverty. The anti – corruption institutions still lack resources, staff and expertise. Gambia's Judiciary is subject to pervasive political interference and there is corruption in many parts of the government.

Corruption in Togo is common and those involved are rarely punished. Corruption is more among prison and police officers and members of the judiciary. Madagascar is one of the world's poorest countries and has a negative growth due to corruption. In Cameroon for instance, many corrupt civil servants drive around in their expensive luxury cars. People who try to bring these corruption officers to justice pay a high price. Political corruption pervades in Nigeria. The rise of public administration and discovery of petroleum and natural gas have led to corrupt practices. Rampant corrupt in Guinea is hindering economic growth and increasing drug trafficking in Kenya. Political corruption in the post – colonial government of Kenya has had a history which spans the era of the Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel arap moi's KANU governments to Mwai Kibaki's PNU government. Experts estimate that an average urban Kenyan pays 16 bribes a month. In Zimbabwe for instance, corruption has become endemic within its political, private and civil sectors. In 2011, finance minister Tendal Biti claimed that at least 1 billion Dollars in diamond related revenue owed to the national treasury remains unaccounted for. Top ranking government officials are frequently involved in corrupt practice in Sudan. This has impacted economic growth negatively. In Eritrea, people are living in a fear – ridden environment. Corruption and greed are rampant among the members of the ruling party. Republic of Congo in spite of its oil wealth is one of the most indebted nations in the world. This is largely due to rampant corruption. The federal Republic of Somalia is located in the horn of Africa. Around 10 million people live in this country. It is the most corrupt nation in the world. There is lack of accountability in receipt and expenditure of public funds Machinegundammy (2005) Africa politicians are portrayed as greedy, selfish, pretensions, oppressive, stone – hearted and high – handed individuals who use their position for their own selfish gains (Afejuku and Eruaga, 2010).

For William cited in (Afejuku and Eruaga, 2010: 139) Achebe himself, expressing his disappointment at the abuse of power by Nigerian post – independence leaders, laments, in *The Trouble with Nigeria*, that “Nigerians are what they are only because their leaders are not what they should be”. He comments that a writer needs not to keep quiet in the face of injustice. He notes that “one of the writer's main functions has always been to expose and attack injustice (Afejuku and Eruaga, 2010).

Masses behold the profligacy of current political office holders. Politicians brazenly fritter away public funds, in most cases on self – serving interest, in many ways on massaging the ego of sycophants, traditional rulers and hungers on (*The NEWS*, 2010) while the nation's treasury is at the mercy of the politicians and they never lack, funds are always hardly available for execution of capital projects. Ever since Nigeria returned to democracy, infrastructure decay (roads, railways, power supply) has worsened, while all sectors (education, wealth, housing, and manufacturing) have further collapsed despite the several trillions naira budgeted each year to improve the nation. There is a kind of “feeding frenzy” a term that describes how predatory animals descend hungrily on preys, like when piranhas or sharks attack a school of fish. The presidency, federal, states, local governments, legislators, governors, ministers and democratic agencies like the

independent National Electoral Commission, for a fact, the entire Nigeria political class engage in a voracious consumption of the country's wealth and by implication the wealth of the Nigeria people.

Public office is like the honey to some of the governors. They so much enjoy it, such that they always want to lock their hands in the honey jar. The total remunerations of political office holders generally are a debilitating strain on the country's economic growth and development. The councilor occupies the lowest rung in the political hierarchy. In most states, councilors are barely educated. But their earnings dwarf those of university professors (*The NEWS*, 2010: 20). This nauseating scenario offers a microscopic representation of the larger practice across the African continent. In the words of Johnson (*The NEWS*, 2010), the Nigeria government operator of a brittle economy, resembles a child with acute learning disabilities.

III. CONCLUDING REMARKS

There is no gainsaying the fact that the brand of democratic culture political corruption, opportunism, oppression and rascality as evidently portrayed in Achebe's *Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*, putting his characters under a literary microscope has a didactic undertone and a universal application, and relevance in contemporary times. Regardless of countries, continent, political actors, political mediocrity and corruption is a worldwide subject of contemplation. There are strains and tensions in African societies. Corruption spreads like a malignant tumour and this is best described by Awosanmi (2010:114)-: "The maggot infested underside of the composite heap". Achebe's thematic concern in *Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah* like Ayi kwei Armah, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi Wathiongo, Niyi Osundare, Femi Osofisan, Kofi Awoonor, Oculi and Bitek transcends his individual socio – economic, political, cultural and literary milieu.

Corruption is just one tiny pimple in a body politic ravaged by a plagued of boils (Osundare, *The Nation*, 2012). The preposition that wealth, no matter how acquired is the measure of man, or woman. It preaches the supremacy of wallet over the mind. It proposes rejection, or abandonment of the intellect; and exhibits a profound contempt for education, even for the mere acquisition of utilitarian skills... it demonstrates, in action, a deep uneasiness with tested moral values. It suffused with a stark vulgarity of consciousness. It worships at the hitherto unfamiliar altar of opportunism and irrationality. It is ostentatious and egoistical. And it thrives in the rampant of the mob and of the trickster (Macebul, cited in Agulanna, 2010:30).

REFERENCES

[1] Achebe, C (1972). *Man of the People*. London: Heinemann. ----- (1987). *Anthills of the Savannah*. London: William Heinemann. Educational Blc Ltd.

- [2] Adeyenii, A. (2017). "One Trillion US Dollars from Africa in 50 Years" Retrieved www.adedafayehun.com 01/06/2017.
- [3] Agulanna, C. (2010). "Esigbo Mmadu: An Exploration of the Igbo Concept of a Good Person".
- [4] Umukoro. M.M. (eds) et al in *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies*. Ibadan: Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan.
- [5] Afejuku, T.E and Eruaga .A.O. (2010). "Feminism and Masculine Connotations in Achebe's
- [6] Novels" in Umukoro .M. M. et al (eds) in *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies*. Ibadan: Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan.
- [7] Suleiman, R.A (1995). *Democracy and The African Novels: A Case study of Achebe's Man of the People and Anthills of the Savannah*. Unpublished B.A English Dissertation to the Faculty of Department of Bayero University, Kano.
- [8] Awosanni, T. (2010). "Wole Soyinka's "Glocal" Cultural Legislation in Umukro.M. M. et al (eds) in *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies* Ibadan: Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan.
- [9] Commentary (2013). *Vanity upon Vanity... Imelda Marcos Legendary Shoe Collection Goes to Waste in "The Nation, September, 2013"*. Lagos.
- [10] Fanon, F. (1980). *The Wretched of the Earth*. Suffolk, Richard clay: The Chaucer press.
- [11] Johnson, B. (2010) "Lessons Nigeria Won't Learn". In *The NEWS Magazine*. Lagos.
- [12] Machine Gundammy (2015). *List of the 26 Most Corrupt Countries in Africa*. Retrieved from <http://www.nairaland.com/2674164/2015-list-most-corrupt-01/06/2017>.
- [13] Nkosi, L. (1981) *Tasks and Masks: The Themes and Styles of Africa Literature*. Harlow essex: Longman group Ltd.
- [14] Odunlami, T. (2010). *The World's Most Wasteful Democracy in The NEWS* November 29, 2010.
- [15] Olanipekum, (2007). *The Role of Literature in the Cultural and Socio – Political Development of*
- [16] *Nigeria – Niyi Osundare as a case study. A Lecture Delivered at Ikere – Ekiti. June 16, Under the Auspices of the National Association of Ikere Students. In Tell Magazine, 2007. Lagos.*
- [17] ----- (2007). *A Lecture on Osundare's The Land of Unease Delivered at the 60th birthday of Niyi Osundare, Renowned Poet and Professor of English, University of New Orleans, U.S.A in Tell Magazine, July 2, 2007. Lagos.*
- [18] Osofisan, F. (1988). *Another Raft Oford OXILO: Malthouse Publishing Ltd.*
- [19] Osundare, N. (2012). "Why We No Longer Blush a Text of the Lecture Delivered Under the Auspices of the Save Nigeria Group (SNG). Sheraton Hotel, Ikeja, in *The Nation*. Lagos
- [20] Rawlings .J.J (1990). In *Daily Graphic*, July, 1990 Accra: GCC, Ltd.
- [21] Rodney,W.(1976). *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. London: Bogle – L'ouvreture Publications.

[22] Soyonka W. (1965). The Interpreters. London: Heinemann.

[23] Wilmot P.F. (1978). In Search of Nationhood. Ibadan: Lattern BKS LTD

IJIRAS