THE AFRICAN NOVEL AS A POLITICAL MANIFESTO: A Comparative Study of Selected Themes in the Writings of Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'O

By

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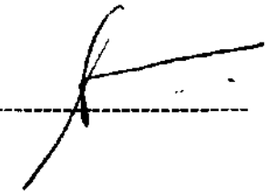
DECLARATION

I, Sa'idu Hassan Adamu, do hereby declare that this thesis is my own original research work and that it has not been presented elsewhere. I further declare that all works referred to in the thesis have been gratefully acknowledged in the notes and the bibliography. I also accept full responsibility for the views expressed in the thesis.

Declared this day: 30th June, 1997

Signature: 

CERTIFICATION

This thesis entitled, "The African Novel as a Political Manifesto: A Comparative Study of Selected Themes in the Writings of Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'O", meets the regulations governing the award of the degree of Master of science, Political Science, and is approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary presentation.

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To A'isha and the Children.

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ABSTRACT

Our proposition is that literature is all about politics and literary writers, like all other artists, are partisans who try to persuade their audiences to take sides with them in maintaining or changing power relations in line with, and on behalf of, the interests of certain classes in the society. In this sense, the African novel, as represented by selected writings of Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'O, can be regarded as a powerful and effective medium for the dessimination of political manifestos which condition people to act in defence of, or in opposition to, certain forms of the distribution of power in the society.

Our findings indicate that Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'O present in their novels two contrasting, but partisan, manifestos. Achebe's political manifesto is a bourgeois-nationalist and reformist one, which insists that it is possible to have in Nigeria (and, implicitly, the rest of Africa) an efficient, working, capitalist system which could provide for all and take the country to greatness, so long as it is led by a well-educated, decent and responsible elite. Our analyses, however, indicate that Achebe's political platform is untenable because it fails to address the contradictions in the social relations of production, exchange and

distribution which are at the roots of the country's problems of exploitation, domination and underdevelopment.

Ngugi, on the other hand, presents in his novels a more persuasive and powerfully argued proletarian manifesto which indicates that the neo-colonial capitalist system of exploitation and domination in Africa is diseased and dying, and the neo-colonial ruling classes presently in charge are not only incapable of creativity and industry, they cannot visualise any future for their countries and peoples beyond their own stomachs and pockets. The way forward to a free, just, productive and creative Africa is, therefore, according to Ngugi, through the organised struggle of workers and other oppressed classes to overthrow neo-colonialism and the system of imperialist exploitation and domination which it represents.

Our findings thus demonstrate that the African novel is a rich data source which can usefully complement the African political scientist's conventional data sources as well as contribute new information and correct biases in existing knowledge.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK:

Literature As Political Science Source Material

1.01 The problem

Our proposition is that literature, like all other forms of art, is all about the ceaseless struggle between "opposing forces and tendencies"[1] within society, and literary artists are partisans who seek to persuade their audiences to take sides with them in maintaining or changing power relations in line with, and generally on behalf of, the interests of certain classes in their societies. In this sense, the literary artist performs an essentially ideological role of influencing people's consciousness and nurturing in them a certain world view with the aim of inducing them to act together in a certain way.

Thus, although 'common-sense' associates the struggle for power more with conventional politicians who climb platforms and employ oratorical skills to mobilise mass audiences and attempt to convince them to accept the nature of power and its distribution as defined in their parties' manifestos, the African writer is also a political activist who performs an essentially similar role. It may be true that the writer's medium-the novel-does not allow for direct, physical contact, with all the demonstrative and emotion-whipping opportunities it avails the 'platform politician'. Yet, it is our contention that the African novel provides a powerful and effective framework for the

dissemination of *manifestos* which condition people to act in the defence of, or in opposition to, certain forms of the distribution of power in society.

However, while African novelists, poets and playwrights are involved with politics in their creative writings, political science scholars in Africa have largely ignored the literary world. Apart from occasional attempts by a few to liven up their discourses by decorating them with literary quotations, and incorporating references to literary texts as illustrations of political behaviour,[2] it is rare to find African political scientists turning to literature with a series of research questions and using literary texts as source material.[3]

Similarly, even though it may occasionally be admitted that literary writings could have political appeal, and that writers, as part of the intelligentsia, do play political roles in the society[4], political scientists in Africa rarely venture into literature to make new discoveries about the nature, forms and ever changing dimensions of power in African societies. Even the adventurous Ali Mazrui, one of the notable exceptions, seams to have approached his allegorical work, *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo*,[5] with the misleading notion that it was a literary past-time *outside* of his political science scholarship. Thus, Mazrui advocates in the novel the thesis that the African literary writer who does not place self and art *above* partisan political commitment (i.e. pursue art for its own sake) has "turned his back on art"[6] and is guilty of an unforgivable professional 'sin'.[7] As far as Mazrui is concerned, so it appears, art must be pursued for its beauty of form and not for it's content.

Mazrui's misleading thesis is hardly surprising, in view of the prevailing political attitude towards literary studies amongst many African literary practitioners themselves. This attitude which, like Mazrui's, amounts to a tacit acceptance of political arrangements as they are, seeks to confine artistic, especially literary, creativity to an imaginary world *outside* of real social existence and to which people, in their individual experiences, only sensuously relate to. As we shall try to show, this approach to literary studies was deliberately created and nurtured by the imperialist educational system established during the colonisation of Africa.[8]

In the same vein, the approach typical of conventional political science scholarship in Africa-and elsewhere-has been to observe and describe individual and aggregated *political behaviour* and elaborate laws, tendencies and theories based on the description of the observed regularities of behaviour.[9] In this, so-called *behavioural*, approach, *power behaviour*, which is regarded as the essence of political behaviour and the focus of analysis[10] is studied as an empirically measurable and verifiable phenomenon manifest only in the overt attitudes of individuals as they seek to dominate or influence one another in social life.[11]

Viewed from this perspective, *politics* becomes a process restricted to the exercise of control, constraint and coercion in the society's *public* arena,[12] and data sources for political science research largely limited to survey materials and historical documents of both primary and secondary nature, which usually describe events and ideas pertaining to governments, or pursued

by organisations, or reported by prominent individuals, and which have joined the stream of public discourse in the wider political process.[13]

Clearly, this approach overlooks certain fundamental factors in the understanding of politics. Most significantly, by uncritically accepting the observable political process as the *sole* focus of study, the behavioural approach takes for granted the real nature of power. As Mahmoud Mamdani correctly observed, behavioural political science erroneously elevates description to the status of explanation: "like the journalist, the [behavioural] political scientist assumed that to *explain* was to describe with the utmost detail and the greatest accuracy, with the precision of mathematical figures rather than the ambivalent flow of words...regardless of its methodological rigor [however], empiricist political science had reduced explanation to the level of description".[14]

The point is, politics is much more than just behaving; more significantly, politics is '*acting*.' Political acts have meaning: people behave politically for certain identifiable reasons, are propelled by definite *motives*, pursue set *goals* or seek to satisfy concrete *interests*. Thus, a holistic understanding of politics must necessarily involve *explaining* the crucial factor, why people behave as they do politically. Obviously, the *why* factor of politics can never be satisfactorily explained in terms of description, i.e. in terms of '*how*' people behave.

By ignoring the inner motives and goals of political action and focusing only on the formal, observable, political process, the behavioural

approach to political science is thus unable to make use of the very rich source material for the study of politics available in literature and other forms of art. For, as we shall attempt to show, literature, by embodying ideology and class interest, is a veritable source of political ideas and beliefs, as well as a motivating influence on political action.

A more useful approach which can lead to an adequate understanding of politics is therefore one which will help bring out the material context in which politics is carried out, or, to put it differently, the conscious-or unconscious, but nonetheless latent - motives, interests or forces which propel people to behave as they do, politically. Such an approach, which can help us understand what motivates people to act the way they do as well as find out the concrete objectives they wish to achieve when they seek to dominate or influence one another in social life, is realisable within the analytical framework of *dialectical materialism.*

1.02 Our Premises: A Dialectical-materialist approach to the Study of Politics.

Dialectical materialism-or *materialist dialectics*- is a philosophical-scientific method of conceiving and explaining phenomena which is based on the premises that all things and processes in nature and society must be understood as they are, that is, in their *actual interconnections and movement.*[15] Thus, the world around us is to be understood not as a ready-made, unchanging entity, but as a complex of interconnected phenomena in continual process of change and development. By the same token,

development is to be regarded not as a smooth and uninterrupted process, but "as a process in which phases of gradual evolutionary change are interrupted by breaks in continuity, by the sudden leap from one state to another".[16] Most importantly, in seeking to explain the source of this universal movement, materialist dialectics does not resort to some immanent, "idealist fantasy", [17] but focuses "within the material processes themselves-in the inner contradictions, the opposing conflicting tendencies, which are in operation in every process of nature and society."[18]

Thus, materialist dialectics urges the researcher not to stop at the surface of phenomenon, or rely on pre-conceived notions, but go deeper and uncover the underlying reality. This way, when we contemplate people's wants, the ideas in their heads, the objectives they set to achieve as well as the passions that excite them, we should seek beyond their professed aims and motivations to find out what inspires their choices and determines the outcome of their actions.[19] For, materialist dialectics also indicates that although human beings may "choose what to do and act with certain intentions, the results of their actions are often not what they intended"[20]

Indeed, as K. Marx and F. Engels stated in *The German Ideology*, human intentions do not emanate from abstract 'ideas' or aims: they spring from the real conditions under which people live, "both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity."[21] Thus, in studying social phenomena, the dialectical materialist method urges us to focus on the *material conditions of existence* under which people live and reproduce

themselves because it is these conditions which determine not only the social, cultural and religious views of people, but their political behaviour as well. In other words, when people act politically they do so because they are motivated by real material reasons.

Now, what are these material conditions of existence which determine political and others forms of behaviour? To begin with, *existence* refers to how people live and reproduce themselves in society. In order to live and reproduce, people need certain basic necessities-food, water, shelter, medication, clothing, fire, etc.-as well as the tools and other means of obtaining these necessities. However, these necessities are not provided by nature in a ready-made form for use by man: people have to act on nature in order to *produce* them. In acting on nature, people-whether they like it or not-must also enter into certain relations with each other. In the marxist dialectical-materialist method, such necessary relations amongst humans in the process of creating the material means of existence are referred to as *social relations of production.*

When the social relations of production are combined with the tools and techniques people use as well as the objects towards which they direct their labour (i.e., with the *means of production*), a *mode of production* is said to have been formed.[22]

Now, in dialectical materialism, the key to comprehending any society is to find out its dominant mode of production. This is because it is the mode of production which, ultimately, provides the material conditions under which

people sustain their lives and reproduce society with all its ideas, theories, political views and institutions. F. Engels has put this "fundamental proposition" of materialism more succinctly in the preface to the *Manifesto of the Communist Party:* "....in every historical epoch, the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organisation necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which is built up, and from which alone can be explained, the political and intellectual history of that epoch...."[23]

More significantly, however, by determining the particular way production is organised in a given society, we can know the society's class structure. According to Marx, the term 'class structure' refers to the basic pattern of social and economic relationships which binds a society's constituent groups.[24] Marx argued that since the transition of the primitive commune, production has been socially organised in ways which have divided society into opposed groups or 'classes' with contradictory interests and with one class always dominating the rest through economic exploitation.[25]

Thus, what distinguishes a 'class' is how it stands in relationship to other groups in the way production is organised in a given society. As lucidly put by Lenin, another proponent of the dialectical-materialist approach, classes

> *"Are large groups of people which differ from each other by the place they occupy in a historically definite system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organisation of labour, and, consequently, by the dimensions of the*

social wealth that they obtain and their method of acquiring their share of it. Classes are groups of people one of which may appropriate the labour of another, owing to the different places they occupy in the definite system of social economy".[26]

Class relations are thus not only relations of material inequalities; they are so rooted as to fundamentally structure and shape a society's social and political arrangements. As Mamdani argues, the class which appropriates the larger share of the society's social wealth has in effect "dual control" over the other classes:[27] It has both *economic supremacy* (through its ownership of the means of production and its seizure of a disproportionately large share of the social product), and *political power* (through its control over the social organisation of labour and the actual producers).

It is to be understood, then, that economic power and political power are inextricably linked: the possession-or lack-of political power is primarily a direct outcome of a group's relationship to the means of production.[28] Thus, the class which controls the means of production (or the economic resources of the society) is the class which wields decisive political power and is in effect also the society's ruling class. Approached this way, power becomes a *class resource* concentrated in the hands of a particular class, and generally utilised by (or on behalf of) that class in the service of maintaining and enhancing its domination of the rest of the society.[29] In the same vein, politics is to be understood generally as a phenomenon which deals with the sphere of relations among classes.[30] Also, as Burlatsky correctly observed, a materialist

approach to politics means studying politics specifically as "the form of interrelations among classes, social groups [individuals] and nations [which is] directly or indirectly connected with the manifestation and implementation of power".[31]

Subsumed under the broad umbrella of politics is therefore any activity or social movement aimed at, directly or indirectly, propagating or enforcing the interests of a class, or a strata of class, or a combination of classes, especially in a way which is likely to achieve general social impact.[32] In this sense, Mamdani is right when he concludes that all forms of class organisation are political organisations; any form of class consciousness is political consciousness, and all class conflict is political conflict.[33] Indeed, Marx had also observed that ".....the struggle of class against class is a political struggle"[34].

However, if politics in class divided society is chiefly characterised by one class, the appropriating class, usually monopolising effective political power, how is it possible for this class to continue to maintain its domination over the rest of the society and at the same time keep the other classes in check?

Lenin argued that the appropriating class is able to effectively dominate the society because it possesses and controls *the state*, which he defined as "an organ of class rule...., an organ for the repression of one class by another." [35] It is this special, coercive organisation, noted Lenin, which makes it possible for one class to enforce its will over the rest of the society,

keep the political struggles of the other classes within bounds of 'order', and generally appear to maintain social stability.[36] In the perspective of dialectical materialism, therefore, the state is not, as is extant in conventional political science literature, an organisation of the whole society, a sort of impartial referee standing above all classes, and a guardian of the general interest.[37] Rather, the state unambiguously stands out as a machine for the satisfaction of the interests of the dominant class in the society.

According to Lenin, the state is able to perform this partisan role wherever, and in whatever form, it has existed because it has among its component parts the following distinguishing features: (i) the means of exercising compulsion, usually made up of special bodies of armed soldiers, police, etc., who posses instruments of inflicting pain and death, and who can physically enforce the orders of the state by their possession of arms, strong buildings and prisons with locks and chains; (ii) a machinery of administration, made up of a corps of officials; (iii) a legal system, complete with trained officials for enacting laws, and judges to interpret and administer the laws, and (iv) a means of controlling people mentally through various types of ideological and propaganda agencies.[38]

1.03 Class, Ideology and Political Power

Sole reliance on naked, coercive, power is, however, not an adequate assurance that the subordinate classes will willingly submit to the will of the ruling class. Thus, the most effective means of social control possessed by the

state are its ideological agencies which it uses in subtle ways to manipulate people's ideas with the aim to prevent the growth of dissent and opposition.[39]

Ideology, which can be defined as a coherent and systematic action-related pattern of ideas, values and assumptions that underpins political relationships, and which is used to explain, justify or attack an existing distribution of power,[40] is, indeed, a most powerful weapon of class action. For, by means of ideological manipulation, the ruling class is able to manufacture the illusion that the state is a non-partisan organisation which serves the whole of society, thereby conning legitimacy for its power in the eyes of the subordinate classes.[41] As Bilton *et al* argued, by claiming that the existing "distribution of power has always traditionally existed, [or] that it is a divinely ordained arrangement, [or] that the holders of power possess intrinsic ruling skills or superior social status, or whatever"[42], the powerful in the society are able to persuade or cow their victims into believing, and accepting, "that those who dominate them have a *right* to do so, and that those who have great material advantages have a *right* to it".[43]

This way, the ruling class is able to control not only the society's material forces and thus, effective political power, but ideological power as well, through its control of society's ideas and beliefs[44]. It is this reality which Marx and Engels recognised when they wrote in the *German Ideology* that "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas [,for,] the class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production."[45]

Such ideological control is exercised by means of the dissemination by the ruling class, through a number of key social institutions, of a set of *dominant values* which justify and legitimate the existing state of affairs and, thus, its own dominant position in the society.[46] According to Parkin, as reported by Bilton *et al*[47], the "dominant value system" in class society is:

> *"a prevailing set of values and ideas subscribed to and propagated by members of the dominant class which are successfully disseminated by the major ideological institutions, such as the educational system, the mass media, and religious organisations, and which....provide and sustain an 'official' interpretation of class inequalities, endorsing them as the legitimate arrangements of...society, and members of all classes will subscribe to these values unless they find themselves in circumstances which act as a buttress against their influence".*[48]

As the 'meaning system',[49] underlying ruling class ideology, the dominant value system (DVS) aims to shape the perceptions and expectations which members of subordinate classes have of their relations with the ruling class. Thus, not only does the DVS nurture the political consciousness of subordinate classes, it also help explain their understanding of the rationale for the existing distribution of power and how they perceive their political roles.[50]

However, members of the subordinate classes may be persuaded to questions and even reject the DVS and adopt an 'oppositional' or 'revolutionary' consciousness[51]. This occurs when, as Parkin has suggested,

members of these classes are exposed to a "*radical value system*".[52] According to Parkin, a radical value system is one which, under capitalism for instance, "emphasises the constant recognition of a division of society into inevitable conflicting classes and an unequivocal commitment to eliminating the existing capitalist structure."[53] The radical value system thus seeks to counter the process of ideological manipulation by the ruling class through the systematic propagation by 'oppositional' organisations such as 'the radical socialist party"[54] of a coherent alternative revolutionary strategy aimed at rectifying inequalities and restructuring society.[55]

It is clear from our discussion so far that, as Bilton *et al* have correctly observed, "the key to understanding political events and the effects of political decisions [is] to relate politics to class interests."[56] However, since, as we have also attempted to show, ideology is the main vehicle through which politics is mediated, a proper understanding of ideology and the 'meaning systems' which underpin it throws a great deal of light on the sources of political ideas and beliefs and their impact on political action, whether this be in the form of casting a vote, taking part in a public demonstration, or rising up in revolt.[57] It is in this context that we must situate the political role of the creative artist in general, and the writer in particular.

1.04 Art and Politics

Since the early beginnings of society, art had always developed hand-in-hand with politics and even religion.[58] As the Soviet literary critic, Yuri Barabash, has observed, "inherent to the very nature of art are its ties with

social life, with the ideas of the age and with political conflicts."[59] Thus, over 3500 years ago in Ancient Egypt, the young Pharaoh Akhenaton,[60] intent on destroying, and supplanting, the power and privileges of the old establishment which was dominated by priests and maintained with the aid of certain fossilised and sacred images, found a most effective strategy in identifying himself with a new aesthetics represented by the works of the best writers, sculptors, architects and musicians of his time.[61] Relying on the book, *Pharaoh Akhenaton*, by Geogi Gulia[62], Barabash noted that the Pharaoh's struggle for power with the old theocracy was prosecuted as a "struggle for a new, just and profoundly humane art....and the artists close to the Pharaoh, above all the sculptor Jekhutimes, [were] in the very centre of the political and religious intrigues of the day"[63].

The point is, properly understood, creative art-including literature-is not indulged in for its own sake; it is a *social obligation.*[64] As Arnold Hauser has argued, art constitutes a profound intervention in the world of social relations, since it is a means by which human beings express the totality of the nature of their social existence in relation to the natural world.[65] Put differently, art is an attempt by individuals to interpret their social existence by adopting certain attitudes to this existence, with the aim, as Hauser pointed out, "to evoke: to awaken in the observer, listener or reader emotions and impulses to action or opposition".[66]

Thus, in considering literature and other works of art, it becomes imperative to identify the meaning system-or the *world view*[67] which shapes

the artist's attitude to his social existence. This requires that we must situate the artist's interests, beliefs, experiences and the limits of his imagination within the context of the real world of social relations which influences, and is in turn influenced, by his art.[68] Put another way, works of art must be examined within the context of the particular classes in society whose interests and aspirations they serve because art is by nature a partisan activity: it interprets collective social existence-i.e., social reality and its attendant tensions and conflicts-largely through the activities, experiences and aspirations of only a part of the social community.[69]

Artists may perform this partisan, political, function in one of two ways. As Hauser has found out, an artist could declare his preferred class interests and aspirations in an explicit and openly committed manner; in this case, his work can be said to "have the character....of open propaganda"[70]. On the other hand, an artist may choose to hide the true identity of his class interests and aspirations by presenting his work as a 'neutral' representation of reality. In this case, we can say that the work of the artist contains "a masked, disguised and repressed ideology".[71]

Indeed, in a large number of cases, artistic creation may, at first sight, appear 'neutral' and 'passive' to the reader, listener, or observer. In this instance, the artist may appear to be merely attempting to present a 'faithful' picture of reality, without consciously passing any judgement on the phenomenon. For instance, the artist may be a painter, who had simply tried to capture a scenic picture of Abuja, Nigeria's new Federal Capital. Let us

assume, the artist had presented a true-to-life painting titled, "*Abuja 1996*", which tried to capture the city's central districts of Garki, Wuse, Asokoro Maitama and Apo, showing the 'Aso Rock' Presidential Villa and the exquisite hotels; the modern conference facilities and office blocks, the broad, well-kept avenues and the lush green vegetation, and the trendy housing estates and the numerous construction sites.

Neutral and politically passive as the painting may at first appear to the unsuspecting beholder, the artist is in fact making a profound political statement on behalf of definite political interests. For, in choosing not to let us have a glimpse of, say, Gwagwa, one of the unplanned, sprawling, outer city ghettos where a large number of the city's workers live, the painter is subtly trying to persuade Nigerians and other beholders of his art to take sides with him in accepting that Abuja, the new Federal Capital city north of the river Nigeria, is a reality which has come to stay, contrary to the opinion held especially by some people with financial, industrial, landed, shipping or other vested interests in Lagos, that Abuja is a profligate, unrealisable fantasy, forced on Nigerians by the sheer intimidatory might of a northern-dominated army.[72]

Whatever view we are persuaded to side with, the important point is, to borrow from Hauser, the artist has touched off in us, the beholders of his creative imagination, certain "emotions and impulses to action or opposition" on behalf of, or against, for example, either those for whom Abuja represents easier access to federal jobs, wealth and power, or those whom the movement

of federal power out of Lagos ousts from vantage positions on the honey pot of lucrative contracts, top-flight jobs, fabulous rents and sleazy deals. Thus, concealed, but implicit, in our apparently 'passive' and 'neutral' painting, "*Abuja 1996*", is the artist's partisan commitment to a political point of view, expressing definite material interests of a section of society. Arnold Hauser puts it more powerfully: "even in its apparent neutrality and passivity....[art] speaks for somebody to somebody and reflects reality from a social standpoint so as to be seen from that standpoint"[73]

On the other hand, works of art can openly and explicitly propagate a political cause, and seek to persuade the listener, observer, reader or viewer, to look at reality from that political platform. Such a standpoint is the case with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)-sponsored film, *The Squandering of Riches*[74] by the Nigerian erstwhile television reporter turned musician, Onyeka Owenu, which received a lot of excited reviews by sections of the Nigerian and the Western press.

By carefully selecting and shooting scenes which depict squalor, poverty, suffering and neglect amidst vigorous economic, especially oil-related, productivity in southern Nigeria, and contrasting these with carefully orchestrated shots of corruption, opulence, sloth and idleness in an arrogant, over-pampered and unproductive North, Owenu and her British sponsors are explicitly and openly propagating in the film the point of view that Nigeria is an unbalanced and an unjust federation where the Southern nationalities, which posses most of the skills, capital, business entrepreneurship and

productive natural resources, are being oppressed, exploited and politically held to ransom by a more populated but unproductive North, which also controls the army. Reading in between the lines, it may also not be far-fetched to decipher the message that the federation should be dismantled to make way for seperate ethnic 'republics'.

Opponents of this point of view may very well dispute these claims by painting a different picture of Nigeria, showing that squalor, poverty and suffering, on the one hand, and corruption, sloth and arrogant opulence, on the other, are not region-specific but national and class-based indices of the country's exploitation and underdevelopment.

Whichever opinion the viewer is persuaded into believing, however, the point is that by adopting certain attitudes to the Nigerian reality in her creative work, Owenu has provoked the viewer into taking sides on the platform of either imperialism in alliance with one of the various sections of the Nigerian bourgeoisie locked up in combat over the looting of the national wealth, on the one hand, or of those Nigerians determined to rectify class inequalities and restructure the country's economic, social and political institutions, on the other.

1.05 The Novel As A Political Manifesto

Although written literature has existed in West Africa in the form of the Arabic script since the 13th Century,[75] and many Africans, such as the leaders of the 19th century Islamic Jihad in Northern Nigeria - Shehu Usman Danfodio, Muhammed Bello and Abdullahi b. Fodio-were accomplished

scholars who wrote outstanding literary tracts which were said to "reveal....a ruthless logicality of thought, keenness of wit and an outstanding mastery of figurative language"[76], the colonial imposition by the British of the Roman alphabet as the medium of instruction in schools and of English as the language of government business early in the 20th century subverted the slow but steady process of the popular spread and the blossoming of this genre of literature. Thus, what is known today as the novel is its genre written in European languages, which, properly speaking, according to E.N. Obiechina, first appeared in the English language in West Africa only in the early 1950s with the publication of Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) and Cyprian Ekwensi's *People of the City* (1954).[77] Our reference to the "African novel" is thus restricted to prose fiction written by Africans in European languages, which first emerged after the colonisation of the continent.

Inspite of its recent emergence, however, it can still be argued that the novel is one of the artistic genres produced in Africa which have been most deeply permeated by political currents. For, unlike poets, playwrights and other literary artists whose artistic forms tend to dictate a relative economy of words, the novel allows the writer almost unlimited space for prose, hence greater room for manipulation and persuasion. Obiechina, for instance, has inadvertently revealed that many of the literary works of the leaders of the Islamic Jihad in Northern Nigeria were written in prose-verse form which made them easily committable to memory, thus ensuring their popular spread and influence amongst the majority, un-lettered, population.[78]

Moreover, it is in the novel that we see the most effective attempt by writers to influence both the readers' perception of society and its power structure, as well as how to respond to this power structure, through an ideological process which Parkin has referred to as one of simultaneous propagation "and dampening [of] certain conceptions of the existing social order and of the theoretical and practical solutions necessary for its [preservation or] reconstruction".[79]

It is in this dialectical sense that the novel can be said to closely resemble a *Political Manifesto*. A political manifesto proper, as exemplified by the famous Manifesto of the Communist Party, [80] is an elaborate statement issued by a political party in which it sets out, from the point of view of a particular class or alliance of classes, its own perceptions of the nature of the existing social order and the ways in which power is distributed, as well as the concrete specific and general political measures the party is urging the people to take in order to preserve or change the social order and the distribution of power.

However, as Bamikunle correctly observed, the novel tends to be a more effective means of political persuasion than the party manifesto:

> *"[the novel] has a unique way of influencing the thinking of man in a way that even political pamphleteering cannot do. While it is easy to realise the political position of the pamphleteer and thus his apparent design on the reader, it is usually not realised or suspected, except where the title is so explicit that it gives the*

author's views away, that the writer had a "design" to make the reader think in a particular way on social issues. A good writer embodies his ideas and issues in the lives of "real life" characters, giving an impression that the story actually happened, even where the story is "his own making". A good writer assumes the image of the [historian] even when he is not using materials from actual historical events: the more he can hide his personality in the work the more he can sustain his image...[thus] literature, by embodying whatever it has to say in "real life" drama, has the advantage of entertaining while instructing but also of instructing in a subtle and unobtrusive way.[81]

It is this subtle potency of the novel as a veritable weapon of political struggle which Mao Tse Tung realised long ago when he wrote that literature was a powerful weapon which could be used to educate and motivate the people to attack and destroy "the enemy"[82] Of course, Mao was well aware that "the enemy" depended on the side the writer was on. Thus, a writer could use his art to defend the interests of the ruling class, in which case the writer "must of necessity represent the ruling class interpretation of history [,an interpretation which] serves the interest of a minority against that of the majority....of peasants and low-income workers"[83].

On the other hand, a writer could choose to throw his weight on the side of the masses and against the ruling minority, in which case the writer "must of necessity represent an interpretation of history based on

the...experiences of the masses and their understanding of history as created, sustained and recreated through [their] labour." [84]

It is thus not only possible, but quite exciting and rewarding, to begin to analyse the African novel in terms of the *political manifesto* the writer is attempting to persuade his/her readership to subscribe to. Put differently, political science researchers can begin to approach the African novel with a set of questions asking, among other things, about the value system shaping the writer's interpretation of his people's historical experiences and the particular class or classes in society whose interests and aspirations the writer appears to be promoting with his or her art.

1.06 Analytical Technique

The analytical technique we shall employ in this inquiry is *content analysis* of literary texts. Content analysis is a research technique which was first developed in the field of communications research, and later found applicable to problem - solving by historians, social scientists, students of literature, etc[85]. There are different forms of content analysis but, according to Berelson, a leading authority in this area, content analysis can be said to be done "whenever someone reads a body of communication content and then summarises and interprets what is there".[86]

According to Berelson, a major use of content analysis in communications research is to identify the intentions and other characteristics of communicators or 'producers of content'. In this case, wrote Berelson, "the basic logic of [the] application of content analysis is this: the content has such

distilling from the texts "the kind and amount of power men, as compared to women, possess".[93] O'Barr's analysis revealed a social order which disadvantaged women and encouraged them to believe that things could not be changed. However, the study also showed how women woke up and went around this obstacle by using an array of devices to acquire political influence. O'Barr's study thus demonstrates how literary texts could permit us

> *"To see how women conceptualise power issues and how they act in accordance with those undertakings long before they translate their views into public acts chronicled in accounts of politics. It is this ability of literary texts to convey and analyse the dynamics of power at their inception that makes the study of literary texts a valuable tool in the study of power."*[94]

O'Barr's study also showed that, for political science researchers interested in gender and power in contemporary Africa, the conventional data sources -historical documents and survey materials- are of very limited value because, according to O'Barr, "women's control over societal resources and the distribution of that control with men are issues rarely discussed in historical documents and collections of survey data". O'Barr therefore concluded that "[t]he literature of a nation-its novels, poems, and short stories that are already written and available-is a particularly useful alternative source [for] answering questions, testing hypotheses, and exploring policy issues" regarding the nature and distribution of power in society.[95]

Like O'Barr, we shall, in this thesis, also employ the use of qualitative content analysis in the study of political meanings in selected writings of two African literary artists, Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'O. As discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, our technique will, essentially, involve close reading of the texts followed by summary and interpretation of content. Our objective is to try and find out, from a comparative study of selected themes in the novels of the two authors, the kind of political manifestos which African writers disseminate.

The themes we have selected for study are: (a) the colonial experience and the anti-colonial struggle; (b) the perceptions of independence and the politics of neo-colonialism; and (c) the deepening crises of neo-colonialism and the vision of the future.

Selection Criteria.

The two writers and the themes were selected for two important reasons. In the first place, Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'O are, perhaps, the two most prominent, and most widely read and discussed, of all African writers.[96] Moreover, the authors' works are published by Heinemann, a multi-national with both the power to influence the selection of educational texts for schools as well as a very extensive marketing network in Africa. Apart from the regular featuring of their works in the literature and other syllabi of schools, colleges and universities in many African countries, these works are also popularly read for light entertainment, all over the continent, and are thus "likely to have produced...quite considerable social and political

impact" [97] Secondly, the works of the two authors which we have selected adequately cover the most important thematic concerns of African literature from the 1950s to date. For, as P.A. Egejuru has correctly observed, "thematically, African literature has this far spanned three important historical periods-pre-colonial Africa, colonial Africa and post-colonial Africa".[98] However, not only do the two authors adequately cover the most important thematic concerns of African literature, their handling of the subject-matter is regarded as outstanding in terms of both literary skills and socio-historical interpretative power.[99]

Finally, the novels which we have selected from the writings of the two authors are, in our opinion, adequately representative of the authors' general attitudes regarding the relevant themes.

1.07 Theoretical Assumptions

Our main assumptions, as is implicit in our discussion so far, are as follows:

Literary texts in general, and the novel in particular, are a rich data source for African political scientists, especially when the texts are studied and analysed in terms of what they reveal about social, political and economic relationships. Specifically, we propose that a study of selected themes in the novels of Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'O will reveal the kind of political manifestos which African writers disseminate with the aim of conditioning their audiences to action in the defence of, or in opposition to, the forms of the distribution of power in African societies.

We further propose that literary texts are a useful complement to the conventional data sources of the political scientist (ie., historical documents and survey materials) and have the potential to contribute new information, correct biases in existing knowledge and enrich or modify the understandings arrived at by other methods.[100] We shall test our assumptions through a comparative study of selected novels of Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'O.

Specifically, on the theme of 'the colonial experience and the anti-colonial struggle', we shall be interested in what answers the novels will reveal to the following inquiry: a) What was the nature of society, the economy and politics in pre-colonial Africa? b) In what ways did colonialism change the nature of the society, the economy and politics of African countries? c) What were the social origins, nature and major concerns of nationalist thought? d) What was the nature of independence envisaged by different classes within the society?

Similarly, on the theme of 'the perceptions of independence and the politics of neo-colonialism', our inquiry will address the following: a) What did independence come to mean to different classes, strata and groups within the society? b) What was the nature of the distribution of power? c) Who were the winners, and who were the losers, of independence? Who felt betrayed, and by whom? d) How did different classes, strata and groups within the society conceptualise the problem of neo-colonialism, and what did they resolve to do about it?

On the theme of 'the deepening crises of neo-colonialism and the vision of the future,' we shall attempt to find out from the novels what the authors say about the following: a)What are the origins, causes, nature and dimensions of the contemporary social, economic, cultural and political crises facing African societies? b) Who is to blame for these crises and what is to be done, and by whom? c) What are the visions of Africa's future proposed by the authors?

1.08 Structure of the Thesis

In this introduction (chapter 1), we have outlined a conceptual and analytical framework in which we have tried to show that all forms of art, particularly the novel genre, constitute a rich source material which African political scientists who are keen to discover fresh perspectives on the nature, forms and ever-changing dimensions of power in African societies can no longer ignore. We have also proposed that a comparative study of selected themes in the writings of Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'O will reveal perceptions of the politics of African countries which can usefully enhance our understanding of power relationships and greatly complement the data obtained from conventional political science sources.

In chapter II, we critically review the methodological approaches often employed in the study of literature in Africa and outline our method of approach.

Chapter III is devoted to our analyses of what the texts we have selected-Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ngugi's *Weep Not Child* - reveal

about the theme of 'the colonial experience and the anti-colonial struggle.' Our textual analysis takes into account the actual historical experiences of the African societies in question and is supplemented by an examination of published written commentaries on the texts, as well as the authors' relevant, published, essay writings.

Chapter IV contains our analyses and findings on the theme of 'the perceptions of independence and the politics of neo-colonialism', as revealed in Achebe's *A Man of the People* and Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*. The pattern of our analysis is the same as in chapter III.

In chapter V, we take up the theme of 'the deepening crises of neo-colonialism and the vision of the future', as contained in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* and Ngugi's *Devil On the Cross*, and pursue the same analytical strategy as in the two previous chapters.

In Chapter VI, our conclusion, we sum up the contrasting political manifestos of Achebe and Ngugi and indicate some of the implications they have for the people of Africa.

Footnotes

1. Yuri Barabash, *Aesthetics And Poetics*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977, p.9.

2. See, for instance, S. Egite Oyovbaire, "The Context of Democracy in Nigeria", paper presented at the *5th Annual Conference of the Nigeria Political Science Association*, University of Ife, 1978, p.19, where the author cites Achebe's *A Man of the People* in a footnote as an example of "fictional presentation" of the failure of the Nigerian "democratic experiment" of 1960-1966. A.D. Yahaya, arguing for a community-based rural development strategy, also cited in passing Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Jabiru Abdullahi's Hausa novel, *Nagari na Kowa*, as good illustrations of the high honour and respect accorded hard work amongst Nigeria's rural inhabitants. See A.D. Yahaya, "Local Government as An Agent of Rural Development: An Evaluation", in *Nigeria Journal of Political Science*, volume I, No.1, 1979, p.25.

3. Jean F.O'Barr, "Studying Power in Literary Texts." in C. Kramarae, *et al, Language And Power*, Beverly Hills and London: Sage publications, 1984, p.218, made a similar observation about contemporary political science practice in general.

4. *Ibid*,

5. Ali A. Mazrui, *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo*, London: Heinemann African Writers Series, 1971.

6. *Ibid*, P.143; see also p.41: "Okigbo's case concerns the distortion of values. He is to be charged with the offence of putting society before art in his scale of value". This charge is further amplified on pp.67-8.

7. *Ibid*.

8. See Sa'idu Adamu, "The Creative Writer And the Struggle for Liberation in Africa", paper read at the *International Conference on Popular Culture and the Media*, sponsored by the Department of English, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria, 16-19 April, 1984,p.1. See also, Ngugi Wa Thiong'O, *Writers in Politics*, London: Heinemann, 1983, p.6. The political implications of this approach to literature are discussed in the next chapter.

9. See Robert A. Dahl, "The Behavioural Approach in Political Science: Epitaph for a Monument to a Successful Protest" in *American Political Science Review*, vol. Lv, 1961, pp.673-72; R. Dahl, *Who Governs: Democracy And Power in an American City*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961, and R. Dahl, *Modern Political Analysis*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1963; Worsley, P., "The Distribution of Power in Industrial Societies," in P. Halmos *(ed) The Development of Industrial Societies*, London: Sociological Review Monograph No.8 1964; M.R. Davies and V.A. Lewis, *Models of Political Systems*, London: Pall Mall Press, 1971.

10. R.A. Dahl, "The Behavioural Approach...", *op cit*.

11. *Ibid*. See also R. Dahl, *Who Governs*; P. Worsley, "The Distribution of Power..."; and M.R. Davies and V.A. Lewis, *op cit*.

12. The term "Public arena" is borrowed from Jean F. O'Barr, *op cit*.

13. *Ibid*, p. 219

14. Mahmoud Mamdani, *Politics And Class Formation in Uganda*, London: Heinemann, 1976.p.2.

15. Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and The Dialectical Method*, Volume 1 of *Dialectical Materialism: An Introduction*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, Third (Revised) Edition, 1976, p.41.

16. *Ibid*. P.53; pp.68-72.

17. ***Ibid***.

18. ***Ibid***.

19. *Ibid*,.p.21

20. ***Ibid***.

21. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, in K. Marx, F. Engels and V. Lenin, *On Historical Materialism: A Collection*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972, p.17.

22. See Karl Marx, *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, in K. Marx, F. Engels and V. Lenin, *Ibid*, pp.136-140.

23. K. Marx and F. Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, Sixth Revised Edition, 1979, p.8.

24. K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, Moscow, 1965, pp.270-71 in F. Burlatsky, *The Modern State And Politics*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978, p.17.

25. *Ibid.*

26. V. I. Lenin, *What the "Friends of the people" Are and How they Fight the Social Democrats*, in K.Marx, F. Engels and V. Lenin, *op cit*, pp.363-4.

27. Mamdani, *op cit*. p.7.

28. *Ibid.*

29. See Tony Bilton, *et al, Introductory Sociology*, London: Macmillan, 1981,p.180.

30. F. Burlatsky, *op cit*., P.16.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid*

33. Mamdani, *op cit*, p.11

34. K. Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, p.150, quoted in Mamdani, *op cit*
V. Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, in V.I. Lenin, *Selected Works In Three Volumes*, vol.2; Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975, Revised Edition, p.242.

36. *Ibid.*

37. See Robert A. Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory*, Yale University Press, 1965, pp.135-140.

38. Lenin, *op cit* pp.241-252.

39. See Tony Bilton, *et al, opcit*, pp.172-173.

40. *Ibid*,

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid*, p.173

43. *Ibid*,p.30

44. *Ibid*,p.182

45. Marx and Engels, *op cit*, p.44

46. Bilton *et al, op cit*, p.230

47. **Parkin, F.**, *Class Inequality and Political Order*, London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1971, in Bilton *et al, ibid.*

48. *Ibid*, p.230

49. Parkin, *loc cit*, p.82.

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*p.97

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*

54. ***Ibid***

55. *Ibid.*

56. Bilton *et al, op cit*

57. *Ibid*, p.183.

58. Yuri Barabash, *op cit*, p.10

59. *Ibid.* p.11

60. Also known as Pharaoh Amenhotep, see Thomas Mann, *Joseph and His Brothers*, Berlin: 1956, s.107, cited in Barabash, *ibid*, p.10.

61. Barabash, *ibid.*

62. Faraon Ekhanaton *(Pharaoh Akhanaton)*, Moscow: 1969, cited in Barabash, *ibid.*

63. Gulia, *ibid*, p.333, cited in Barabash, *ibid.*

64. See Arnold Hauser, 'Propaganda, Ideology and Art' in Istvan Meszaro's (ed.) *Aspects of History and Class Consciousness*, London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1971.p128.

65. ***Ibid.***

66. *Ibid.* p.131

67. S. Adamu, *op cit*, p.2

68. ***Ibid***

69. *Ibid,* see also, Hauser, *op cit.*

70. Hauser, *ibid*, pp.128-129.

71. *Ibid*.

72. This view was regularly propagated by a section of the Lagos-Ibadan press, especially in the decade starting from 1980. See especially issues of the *Nigerian Tribune*, *The Punch* and the *National Concord*, between October 1983 and January, 1984.

73. Hauser, *op cit*, p.129.

74. This film was released in late 1984.

75. See E.N. Obiechina, *Language and Theme: Essays on African Literature*, Washington: Howard University Press, 1990, p.7.

76. *Ibid*, p.6

77. *Ibid*, p.17.

78. See Obiechina, *op cit*, pp.7-8. After making the observation that, inspite of its very early introduction into West Africa, "proficiency in the use of Arabic writing has remained at all times the prerogative of a small section of the population-the scribes and the learned men[,as] it was never diffused among the entire population"(p.6), Obiechina arrived at the following, contradictory, conclusion: "[t]his .....explains why much of the literature of the Arabic tradition has to be put into verse and made as easy to commit to rote as possible-there is in this tradition a blending of the literary and the oral impulses. We notice, for instance, the passage in Abdullahi Dan Fodio's autobiography, *Id al-nusukh man 'akhadhtu anhu min al-shuukh*, in which, after enumerating the large number of Sheikhs "from whom I have acquired knowledge", he proceeds to turn his composition to verse in order to make the memorising of it easy...,"(p.8). Surely, even if the Arabic script was the preserve of a small intelligentsia, did not the fact that "much of" the literature was "put into verse and made as easy to commit to rot as possible" ensure that the literature spread easily and widely amongst the majority of the unlettered population?. We therefore believe that the interpretation we gave Obiechina in this sentence, while going against the grain of

his general argument, is substantially supported by the evidence he himself has presented.

79. Parkin, in Bilton, *op cit*, p.173.

80. K.Marx and F. Engels, *op cit.*

81. A. Bamikunle, "Of Revolutions through Literature: Looking At Recent Nigerian Works of Literature", Paper Presented at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Seminar Series, Saturday 3rd May, 1986, p.8.

82. Mao Tse-Tung, *On Literature and Art*, Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967, p.2, cited in Bamikunle, *ibid*, p.9.

83. Bamikunle, *ibid*, based on Mao Tse-Tung, *ibid.*

84. *Ibid.*

85. See Bernard Berelson, *Content Analysis*, New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1971, p.9.

86. *Ibid.*

87. *Ibid*, p.72

88. *Ibid.*

89. *Ibid*, p.114

90. See Lasswell, H.D, *Analysing the Content of Mass Communication: A Brief Introduction*, Washington D.C: Library of Congress, Experimental division for Study of War Time Communications, Doc. No.11, 1942. pp.99-105.

91. See Berelson, *op cit*, p.66.

92. Jean O'Barr, "Studying Power in Literary Texts," in C.Kramarae, *et al*, *op cit*, pp.218-226.

93. *Ibid*, p.218.

94. *Ibid*, pp.218-219

95. *Ibid*, pp.219-220

96. See S. Gikandi, *Reading Chinua Achebe*, London: Heinemann, 1991, p.1, and also, S. Gikandi, *Reading the African Novel*, London: James Curry, 1987, p.2.

97. David Maughan-Brown, *Land, Freedom and Fiction: History and Ideology In Kenya*, London: Zed Press, 1985, p.14.

98. Egejuru, Phanuel Akubueze, *Towards African Literary Independence: A Dialogue With African Writers*, Westport Conn. Greenwood Press, 1980, p.6.

99. See Gikandi (1991) *op cit*, and Maughan-Brown, *op cit*.

100. Partly adapted from O'Barr, *ibid*.

Chapter Two

APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF AFRICAN LITERATURE

2.01 Early Approaches: Studying Art For Its Own Sake

The earliest attempt at critical commentary on literature in European languages written by Africans decidedly separated literary writings from politics. In this approach, which had its roots in mainstream European and American literary thought of the late 1950s,[1] the literary text was to be studied closely in-itself, "as an artifact",[2] because it was assumed "that there was some special virtue in isolating the text from its social and historical setting".[3]

Accordingly, as Landeg White has observed, literary criticism was largely limited to "simple exposition-a mixture of plot summary and praise".[4] Thus, as White further observed, "it became part of critical strategy to.....set up such status-claiming parallels as that Soyinka uses language like Joyce, and that Laye is Kafkaesque...[and] to take...images[s] of Africa from the literature itself and then praise the literature for its truth".[5]

What all this amounted to was that creative works written by Africans were simply studied and analysed in terms of a content-form matrix,[6] by which emphasis is placed on plot construction, character portrayal, theme exposition, stylistic skills, language mastery, generic structure, etc. This

approach, which Udenta Udenta[7] has characterised as "lacking [in] historicity, clearly indialectic... acutely philosophical [and showing] a remarkable paucity of deep, profound thought and an over-emphasis of the apparent in works of art"[8], is most evident in writings such as Gerald Moore's *Twelve African Writers* and *African Literature and the Universities*; Eustace Palmer's *Introduction to the African Novel* and *Growth of the African Novel*; Adrian Roscoe's *Uhuru Fire*; James Olney's *African Literature: A Critical View* and David Cook's *Tell Me Africa: An Approach to African Literature*, etc.[9]

As Udenta has correctly observed, " this dull, uninteresting and hackneyed tradition" was warmly embraced by later Euro-American and African commentators, who faithfully reproduced it in their literary criticism[10] . Taiwo's *The Writings of Wole Soyinka*, Eldred Jones' *The Emergence of African Fiction*, and Charles Larson's *The Literature and Thought of Modern Africa*, belong to this group.[11] To this group also belong the Ibadan "Formalists" and "New Critics", who, as Joseph Stephen has pointed out, constituted the dominant voice amongst the founding lecturers and students of the department of English, the University college, Ibadan. According to J. Stephen , the main preoccupation of this latter category was the faithful reproduction of the colonial British literary tradition which emphasised the idea of producing and studying literature "for its aesthetic value only".[12]

It is clearly in keeping with this colonial, formalist, literary tradition of creating, and appreciating, art for its own sake that Kolawole Ogungbesan, an Ibadan graduate and the first Nigerian head of the Department of English at

Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, wrote in 1973 admonishing African writers to "restrain" and "discipline their emotions" if they wished to "write well".[13] In a paper titled, "Politics and the African Writer: The Example of Chinua Achebe", Ogungbesan wrote:

> *"There is a very strong temptation for the writer within a young literary tradition to embark on a crusade, either on behalf of or against his society, to attempt to educate the world about his people's civilisation or to teach his own people how to behave. This crusading spirit can damage his art as irretrievably as any governmental or party control in totalitarian states.* ***In order to criticise his society most effectively he needs to be detached from it....alienation is a much abused word. But the African writer needs at least to be disengaged, if he does not necessarily need to be alienated, from his society, if he is to produce a lasting work of art.***"[14] (Emphasis added).

The lesson in Ogungbesan's essay is pretty obvious: politics and creative writing are two distinct intellectual vocations which, as much as possible, must not be allowed to mix, for, the mark of a good work of art is that it obeys certain universal precepts which specify that all forms of art have their own "internal laws of development" and must therefore be looked at in their own contexts, as ends-in-themselves, without any extraneous purposes or meaning.[15]

However, the very act of isolating the literary text from its social and historical setting, and focusing merely on its form - i.e., the content-in-itself and the craftsmanship of the writer-which all these foregoing approaches to literary criticism share, is itself a political act. As the Soviet literary critic N. Shamota has observed, "the soil which nurtures artistic talent is the culture of the people, the tastes, spiritual demands and life of the artist's contemporaries"[16]

Thus, even when the writer sits alone on his table with his pen and paper, thinking that "everything depends on him, on his talent and mastery"[17], he is not alone, because he cannot extricate himself from the soil that nurtures him. Indeed, as Yuri Barabash has also observed, the writer necessarily, and always, speaks "for many, about many [therefore] his talent and his mastery, as well as his life experience, his view of the world, his way of evaluating people and things, his tastes, sympathies and antipathies-do not exist in a vacuum; the artist is indebted not only to himself, but...to society, to the people"[18]. To mystify this reality and pretend that art exists for -its-sake is thus a cover up for the tacit acceptance of social and political arrangements as-they-are, or, worse still, a license for unrestrained falsification and distortion of reality.[19]

2.02 Materialist Approaches: the Utilitarian View of Literature

In opposition to the idealist vulgarisation of literary creativity by the arts-for-arts-sake school of thought is the materialist view which insists that art is not done for its own sake; it fulfils certain social function for both its creator

(the artist) and the society. Thus, in studying literature, the key question to ask is, what social function does it serve? Chernychevsky, a nineteenth century Russian materialist philosopher of art put the argument this way:

> *"The idea of 'art for art's sake' is as strange in our times as 'wealth for wealth's sake'; science for 'science's sake' and so forth. All human activities must serve mankind if they are not to remain useless and idle occupations. Wealth exists in order that man may benefit by it; science exists in order to be man's guide; art, too, must serve some useful purpose and not fruitless pleasure".*[20]

This point of view is presented even more powerfully by G.M. Gugelberger when he wrote that "all literature is political, even when it condemns politics as thematically irrelevant. The crucial question is always the Brechtian one: for whom does a writer write? Whose political interests are affirmed?"[21] Fanon, too, was clearly thinking along these lines when he wrote that

> *"The native intellectual who wishes to create an authentic work of art must realise that the truths of a nation are in the first place its realities. He must go on until he has found the seething pot out of which the learning of the future will emerge.*[22]

This focus on the social responsibility of the African writer is also echoed by G.D. Killam, when he wrote in his *African Writers on African Writing* that:

"African literature, like all literature...reveals a human need to create....Nevertheless, most African writers have felt from the beginning... a special obligation to societies in which they function; they have determined that literature is a social function, to interpret and educate the society....African literature speaks primarily for and to the people of its own country, and their own hopes and fears and aspirations."[23]

The positions taken on this issue by Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa thiong'O, two of Africa's best known writers, give credence to Killam's summation. According to Achebe,

"The worst thing that can happen to a people is the loss of their dignity and self-respect. The writer's duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost...The writer's duty ....is [also] to explore in depth the human condition...The past needs to be recreated not only for the enlightenment of our detractors, but even more for our education....The past with all its imperfections never lacked dignity. We cannot [however] pretend that our past was one long technicolor idyll. We have to admit that like other people's pasts, ours had its good as well as bad sides".[24]

Ngugi also shares the view that there are social, historical and political imperatives propelling the writer in Africa. In his first collection of essays titled *Homecoming*, Ngugi wrote:

"Literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum; it is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society. The relationship between creative literature and these forces cannot be ignored, especially in Africa, where modern literature has grown against the gory background of European imperialism and its changing manifestations: slavery, colonisation, neocolonialism".[25]

Further on, Ngugi added that:

"A writer responds with his total personality, to a social environment which changes all the time. Being a kind of sensitive needle, he registers, with varying degrees of accuracy and success, the conflict and tension in his society. Thus, the same writer will produce different types of works, sometimes contradictory in mood, sentiment, degree of optimism and even world view. For the writer himself lives in, and is shaped by, history".[26]

However, while not disputing that literary writing in Africa serves a social function, some critics of the structuralist school of thought such as Lewis Nkosi and Paul Rich [27] insist that the social function can only be determined from within the text itself, not imputed from outside of it. Nkosi, for instance, argued:

"Although a literary work is linked both to history and its author, its ultimate meaning and significance cannot be determined by factors outside the text itself"[28]

The point at issue here, as Tanimu Abubakar correctly observed, is the weight that should be given to aesthetic principles in the study of literature.[29] It is, of course, true that a lot of materialist criticism, in attempting to evaluate literary works from the standpoint of their social functions, tends to "ignore the paradigms of literariness" and to over- simplify and even distort these works, through "a mechanical application of materialist theory"[30]. However, to attempt to correct this weakness, as Nkosi does, by elevating the text to a sacred status[31] completely divorces literature from the social and historical processes which shape it, and cannot " account for the dynamics of [African] writing and [fully appreciate] its signs, images, diction, and symbolism".[32]

2.03 **Our Approach**

A more useful approach- and the one which we adopt in this thesis- is the marxist-materialist, critical, approach which, while focusing on the social content of literature and rejecting vulgar aestheticism with its fetishism of the text, nonetheless pays due attention to artistic mastery which conveys the content of art. Feng Hsueh-Feng, a Chinese marxist literary critic, has referred to this method as the "unified approach"[33]. According to Feng,

> *"Political value, or more generally speaking, social value understood not in a narrow but in a broad sense, must be realised through artistry in literature...[Literature] must be brought to birth through art's method, mechanism and power. If a work of art*

does not produce social value, then what 'artistic value' will it attain?"[34]

Our acceptance of Feng's "unified approach" also implies that we accept both Arnold Kettle's "critical realism", with its emphasis on finding out from literary texts the "important truths" they reveal about class society[35] , as well as Yuri Barabash's concern for paying attention to artistic mastery and the avoidance of over simplification.[36]

.Our main analytical strategy is that, while our primary focus is learning what the texts will reveal to us about power relationships with reference to our selected themes, we shall situate and study the texts within the context of the actual historical experiences of the societies which the authors are mirroring in fiction. Thus, we shall cross reference, and compare the texts with actual accounts of the historical experiences of the societies they are writing about, which have been published by historians, political scientists, etc. In the case of Achebe's novels, this backgrounding will include accounts such as J.S. Coleman's *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, Richard Sklar's *Nigerian Political Parties*, etc.[37] In the case of Ngugi's novels, our secondary historical sources will include: B. Kaggia, *Roots of Freedom*, J.M. Kariuki, *Mau Mau Detainee*, Oginga Odinga, *Not Yet Uhuru* and Maina wa Kinyatti, *Mau Mau: The Peak of African Political Organisation in Colonial Kenya*, etc.[38]

There are two other categories of secondary sources which we shall use in our analyses. The first category is made up of published essays, talks and

interviews by the two authors. We assume that these writings will help in illuminating the writers' motivations, aims, beliefs and visions. This category of writings includes Achebe's *Morning Yet On Creation Day*, *The Trouble with Nigeria, Hopes and Impediments* and *Nigerian Essays*.[39] For Ngugi, we shall consult his *Homecoming: A collection of Essays; Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary; Writers in Politics; Decolonizing the Mind, Barrel of a Pen* and *Moving the Centre: the Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*.[40]

The second category of other secondary sources we shall consult is made up of commentaries by other writers on our selected texts. These sources have been included in order to place our analyses in the context of the ongoing debate on the interpretation of the texts. These sources include: C.L. Innes, *Chinua Achebe*; Simon Gikandi, *Reading the African Novel* and *Reading Chinua Achebe*, Peter Nazareth, *The Third World Writer: His social Responsibility*, E.N. Obiechina, *Language and Theme: Essays On African Literature*, P.A, Egejuru, *Towards African Literary Independence: A Dialogue with Contemporary African Writers*, David Maughan-Brown, *Land, Freedom and Fiction: History and Ideology in Kenya*; G.D. Killam, *African Writers On African Writing*, and James Booth, *Writers and Politics in Nigeria*.[41]

Footnotes

1. See Landeg White, 'African literature and history', *Journal of African History*, 21(1980)p.539, quoted in Yakubu Nasidi, "Hegemony And the Cultural Process: Towards a Historical Revaluation of "African Literature", In *Saiwa*; a Journal of Communication, Issue 4(1987) Department of English, A.B.U, Zaria, P.28.

2. *Ibid*

3. *Ibid*

4. *Ibid*

5. *Ibid*

6. See Udenta O. Udenta, *Revolutionary Aesthetics and the African Literary Process*, Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Company, 1993. p.ix

7. *Ibid*

8. *Ibid*

9. *Ibid*

10. *Ibid*

11. *Ibid*

12. See Joseph Stephen, "Literature and the Idea of Development: A Study of the Selected Poems of Okigbo, Clark and Osundare," Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Department of English, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, June 1996. Stephen's remarks are based on N. Osundare, "The Writer As A Righter", Ile-Ife, Department of Literature and English, University of Ife, 1988.

13. Kolawole Ogungbesan, "Politics and the African Writer: The Example of Chinua Achebe", *mimeo*, Zaria, 1973, p.11. A revised version of this essay was published under the same title in *Work in Progress* Zaria,2 (1973), pp.75-93; *African Studies Review* 17(1974) 43-54, and in *Critical perspectives On Chinua Achebe*, ed. Innes and Lindfors, London, Heinemann, 1979.

14. *Ibid*

15. See Sa'idu Adamu, "the Creative Writer and the Struggle for Liberation in Africa", paper presented at the *International Conference On Popular Culture and the Media*, sponsored by the Department of English, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria, 16-19 April,1984, p.1.

16. N. Shamota, *On Artistic Freedom*, Moscow: 1966, pp.106-7, quoted in Yuri Barabash, *Aesthetics and Poetics*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977, p.45.

17. Yuri Barabash, *ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*

19. See Georgi V. Plekhanov, *Art and Social Life*, in G.V. Plekhanov, *Collected Works*, Vol.V, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1981, pp.631-688, for a fuller statement of this view.

20. N.G. Chernychevsky, *Collected Works*, vol.1, pp.33-34, quoted in G.V. Plekhanov, *ibid*, p.631.

21. G.M. Gugelberger (ed), *Marxism and African Literature*, London: James Curry, 1985, p.ix.

22. F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Hamondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963, p.181.

23. G.D. Killam, *African Writers on African Writing*, London: Heinemann, 1973, p.xii.

24. Chinua Achebe, 'The Role of the Writer in A New Nation' (1964), in G.D. Killam, *ibid*, p.9.

25. Ngugi Wa Thiong'O, *Homecoming*: A collection of Essays, London: Heinemann Educational books, 1972, p.xv.

26. *Ibid*, p.47

27. See Lewis Nkosi, "The Discordant Voices of African Criticism", Third World Book Review, vol.1, No.3, 1985, and L. Nkosi, *Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles Of African Literature*, London: Longman, 1981; Paul Rich, "Romance and The Development of the South African Novel", in T. Couzens and L. White, *Literature and Society In South Africa*, London: Longman, 1984, cited in Tanimu Abubakar, "Cinema Verite or Art? The State of Critical Polemics on Black South African Literature Since Sharpeville: The Example of Prose-Fiction"

a paper presented in the Faculty Seminar Series, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 18th March, 1989.

28. See 'Preface', in L. Nkosi, *Tasks and Masks...ibid*, quoted in Abubakar, *ibid*.

29. *Loc cit*.

30. *Ibid*, p.27.

31. *Ibid*, p.1. Nkosi wrote that "My main thesis [on textuality] seems to me...unassailable" (*Tasks and Masks*, 'Preface') T.Abubakar referred to this position as "an enraging elevation of textuality" *ibid*, p.1.

32. T. Abubakar, *ibid*, p.27.

33. Feng Hsueh-Feng, 'A Digression', from *Hsin Hua Daily*, Chungking, January 23, 1946, quoted in Peter Nazareth, *The Third World Writer: His Social Responsibility*, Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978, p.xxiv.

34. *Ibid*.

35. Arnold Kettle, 'Dickens and the Popular Tradition', in David Craig(eds) *Marxists On Literature: An Anthology*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975, p.214.

36. Yuri Barabash, *Aesthetics and Poetics*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977, p.160.

37. C.L. Innes, *Chinua Achebe*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1990; A .S. Gakwandi, *The Novel and Contemporary Experience in Africa*, London: Heinemann, 1977; S. Gikandi, *Reading the African Novel*, London: James Curry, 1987; S. Gikandi, *Reading Chinua Achebe*, London: Heinemann 1997; P. Nazareth, *The Third World Writer: His Social Responsibility*, Nairobi, Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978; E.N. Obiechina, *Language and Theme: Essays On African Literature*, Washington: Howard University Press, 1990; P.A. Egejuru, *Towards African African Literary Independence: A Dialogue With African Writers*, Westport Conn: Greenwood Press, 1980; D. Maughan-Brown, *Land, Freedom and Fiction: History and Ideology in Kenya*, London: Zed Press, 1985; G.D. Killam (ed), *African Writers on African Writings*, London: Heinemann, 1973.

38. B. Kaggia, *Roots of Freedom*, Nairobi: East Africa Publishing House, 1975; J.M. Kariuki, *Mau Mau Detainee*, Nairobi: O.U.P.,1963; O. Odinga, *Not Yet Uhuru*, London:

H.E.B. 1967; Maina Wa Kinyatti, 'Mau Mau: The Peak of African Political Organisation in Colonial Kenya', *Kenya Historical Review*, V,2(1977) pp.287-311.

39. Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet On Creation Day: Essays*, London: Heinemann, 1975; *The Trouble With Nigeria*, Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1983; London: Heinemann, 1988; *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays, 1965-87*, London: Heinemann, 1988; *Nigerian Essays*, Ibadan: Heinemann, 1988.

40. Ngugi Wa Thiong'O, *Homecoming: A collection of Essays*, London: H.E.B.1977; *Detained: a Writer's Prison Diary*, London: H.E.B. 1981; *Writers in Politics*, London: H.E.B. 1981; *Decolonizing The Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, London: James Curry, 1986; *Moving the Centre: The Struggle For Cultural Freedoms*, London: James Curry and Heinemann, 1993.

41. James Booth, *Writers and Politics in Nigeria*, London: Hodder and Stoughton: 1981.

Chapter Three

THE COLONIAL EXPERIENCE AND THE ANTI-COLONIAL STRUGGLE:

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*[1] and Ngugi's *Weep Not Child*[2]

3.01 The Nationalist Imperative.

As he explained in one of his earliest essays published in 1964, Achebe's main motivation for writing *Things Fall Apart* and the rest of his earlier works was to recover the integrity of African culture and return the African people to their history:

> *"As far as I am concerned the fundamental theme must first be disposed of. This theme-put quite simply - is that African peoples did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African Peoples all but lost in the colonial period, and it is this dignity that they must now regain....The writer's duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost.*[3]

environment within which they grew up in the 1940s and 1950s. On the one hand, they were confronted by a hegemonic, colonialist and racist rhetoric which denied the African both his humanity and his history as part of a strategy of total subjugation. This imperialist literature, which Achebe has referred to in 1975 as "the sedate prose of the district-officer-government-anthropologist of sixty or seventy years ago,"[7] was represented in works such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*; Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson*; Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*; Robert Ruark's *Something of Value*; Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa*, etc. In these works, Africans were made to appear either as primitive savages or clowning idiots; at times they were even likened to pet animals.[8] Commenting on these works, Ngugi wrote in his essay, "Literature and Society":

> *"In all these [the] European emerges as the hero, the Superman, Batman, Tarzan, who can wipe out a thousand thick-lipped, big-nosed, curly-haired blacks. The blacks, especially in Rider Haggard, are always of two kinds: the evil ones, who are so described that a picture of a devil forms in a reader's mind, and whose one characteristic is an insane hatred of white benefactors out of sheer spite and motiveless envy; or the good ones who are always described in terms of greening teeth and who always run errands for the whiteman, tremble in fear when the white man frowns in anger, or show an 'uncle Tom' face of humility and gratitude for any favour bestowed on them by the European master"*[9]

This literary assault was supported by a battery of so-called 'scientific' reports of colonial anthropologists in which the African was represented as someone who, as Simon Gikandi has observed,

> *"Has no character because he or she exists solely as a projection of European desire. Secondly, the African has no sense of history: as the famous British imperial historian, Margery Perham, writes in her study of Lord Lugard and the invention of Nigeria, the Igbo and other groups in south East of Nigeria 'have no history before the coming of the Europeans"*[10]

The other political and intellectual current which Achebe and Ngugi were confronted with was militant African nationalism, which itself grew in the nineteenth century to combat the acquiescence to racist, colonial myths about Africa by sections of the emerging African intelligentsia, as well as to resolutely fight for independence from colonial rule.[11] This militant political and intellectual current is best represented in the writings of Dr. Edward W. Blyden, a West Indian who immigrated to Liberia and campaigned extensively in West Africa[12]. In his writings and public lectures, Blyden attacked the tendency by the emerging colonized intelligentsia to ape the whiteman and his ways, urged educated Africans to go to the toiling people to learn poetry, philosophy and history, and also consistently argued "in favour of the African social system, emphasizing its socialistic, cooperative and humanistic aspects" and contrasting it with the European individualistic system which gave rise to "poverty, criminality and insanity".[13]

The nationalist tradition started by Edward Blyden and others in the nineteenth century profoundly influenced the thinking and activism of the leading sections of the Nigerian nationalist movement, initially represented by the Nigerian Youth Movement and the Nnamdi Azikiwe-led National Council of Nigeria and the Camerouns (NCNC), and later by the Zikist Movement, a nation-wide association of revolutionary youth which was founded in 1946[14]. In the words of its president, Mallam Habib Raji Abdallah during his trial for sedition by the British colonial government, the Zikists were resolved to fight imperialism to the end:

> *"This iniquitous British government is determined to keep us slaves for ever and the only way out....is for every one of us to declare himself free and independent and be resolved to stand by that declaration and damn the consequences...I hate the crown of Britain with all my heart because to me and my countrymen, it is a symbol of oppression, a symbol of persecution, and, in short, a material manifestation of iniquity".*[15]

Although the primary objective of imperialism was the same all over the African continent, in the case of Kenya, it took the form of settler colonialism. Thus, unlike the case in Nigeria and the rest of West Africa, land, its ownership and use, was central, and in a fundamental sense, both shaped the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized as well as defined the nature of African nationalism, whose primary aim became to fight to take back control of land

from the settler, the missionary and the colonial government[16]. As Jomo Kenyatta, one of the pioneer leaders of Kenyan nationalism wrote in 1938,

> *"A culture has no meaning apart from the social organisation of life on which it is built. When the European comes to the Gikuyu country and robs the people of their land, he is taking away not only their livelihood, but the material symbol that holds family and tribe together."*[17]

However, although the specific forms that colonialism took in Kenya and Nigeria were different, it is clear that, in their different ways both Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* and Ngugi in *Weep Not Child* were responding to a political and intellectual debate started by their compatriots earlier on. As Achebe aptly put it:

> *"The Nationalist Movement in British West Africa after the Second world War brought a mental revolution which began to reconcile us to ourselves. It suddenly seemed that we too might have a story to tell. **Rule Britannica** to which we have marched so unselfconsciously on Empire Day now stuck in our throat".*[18]

It is to this attempt to re-present the story of pre-colonial Africa and Africans, and turn imperialist rhetoric on its head, that we shall now focus attention.

3.02 Perceptions of Pre-Colonial Igbo Society in *Things Fall Apart*

The novel opens up to a description of the social structure, the system of exchange and the beliefs and other cultural practices of Umuofia, a typical pre-colonial Igbo village community. We learn that the family household -with the husband at its head, together with his wives, children, goat sheds, chicken pens and barns for storing yams- is the basic unit of production. The division of labour is simple, taking place generally within the household, and the little surplus that is produced by the household is used in simple commodity exchange during market days. We are told that wealth , which an individual acquires through "personal achievement" (p.1), is made up of the size of one's compound; the number of farms and yam barns one possesses; the number of wives one is able to marry as well as the number of children one has and, above all, the number of titles one is able to acquire (p.13;p.19).

In Umuofia, there is a correlation between wealth and social status, because the wealthier a man is, the more titles one could acquire. We notice that there are poor peasants like Unoka, Okonkwo's father, but there are also rich "lords of the clan" (p.19) such as Okonkwo, and Nwakibie, "who had three huge barns, nine wives and thirty children" (p.13). But Nwakibie is more than just a wealthy peasant: he is rich enough to be able to loan out, at a price, yam seedlings to unfortunate young men like Okonkwo, whose fathers did not leave behind any yam seedlings or barns for them to inherit. We learn that out of this

share-cropping arrangement, the poor peasant gets "only... a third of the harvest" (p.16).

Thus, although on the whole, the social formation presented to us exhibits typical characteristics of communalism where the social surplus is small and generally controlled by the household, it is significant to note the beginning of the private appropriation or the exploitation of the social surplus, in the form of share-cropping and (as we later learn on p.33) slave labour.

Unlike fully developed class societies, however, wealth and high social status translated into political power indirectly. True, titled men sit together with elders as the *ndichie* to take decisions on behalf of the community, as happened in the case of the boy (Ikemefuna) and the virgin given the people of Umuofia by Mbaino as compensation for a murdered kinswoman. However, the parameters within which such decisions are taken are known, having been decided at a previous general meeting of all male members of the clan (pp.7-8).

This is, however, not to under-rate the power of the *ndichie* in directing the affairs of the community in a very firm manner. In pre-colonial Igbo society, we learn that every man has his personal god or his *Chi*, which is subordinated to his ancestral spirits. Each clan, however, has an oracle (such as Umuofia's *Agbala*, the Oracle of the Hills), to whom is subordinated everybody's *Chi*, all ancestral spirits, and intermediary gods such as *Ani* ("the owner of all land") *Ifejioku* ("the god of yams") etc. However, apart from *Agbala* and *Chukwu*, the supreme god with whom the community does not interact directly, "the most powerful and most secret cult in the clan" is the *egwugwu*, or the masked spirits

of the ancestors of the clan (p.63). We learn that these masked spirits are actually members of the *ndichie* who have been selected by their own colleagues to perform the role of ancestral spirits (pp.63-40). Apart from taking decisions on behalf of the community, these elders and titled men of the *ndichie* also constitute the society's high council of justice, before whom all family, marital, land and other cases were brought for adjudication.

Aside from the ingenious use of ancestral spirits to ensure justice, order and social cohesion were further enhanced through the institution of gift giving and taking, as well as through participation in free, cooperative labour during celebrations. Thus, during the feast of the New Yam (pp.26-7), we are told that households invited "large numbers of guests from far and wide" (p.28). We encounter such exchanges during Obierika's daughter's wedding (pp.770-83). We are made to see that the exchange of gifts was the cement which kept the bond of kinship strong in the clan. As the elder educated us during Okonkwo's thanksgiving feast on the eve of his departure from Mbanta after his seven-year exile:

> *"A man who calls his kinsmen to a feast does not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their own homes. When we gather together in the moonlit village ground it is not because of the moon. Everyman can see it in his compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so".*

In *Things Fall Apart*, we are thus presented with a pre-colonial African society in which power is held on behalf of the clan by a group of elders and the

wealthy in society who are trusted by the people in the belief that their use of power will be regulated by commonly accepted democratic norms of behaviour and limited by societal conventions as represented in the authority and decisions of the oracle. We are also made to see that pre-colonial Igbo society had its own system of values which was logical and which was based on a well established history "of showing concern for others and the welfare of the community as a whole"[19]. Achebe thus successfully exposes the bankruptcy of the claim made by colonial anthropologists such as Basden, who wrote in his *Among the Igbos of Nigeria* that, unlike the European, the African lacked logic:

> *"Let not this be thought strange, for the black man himself does not know his own mind. He does the most extraordinary things, and cannot explain why he does them. He is not controlled by logic: he is the victim of circumstances, and his policy is very largely one of drift".*[20]

3.03 Perceptions of Pre-Colonial Kikuyu Society in *Weep Not Child*

In *Weep Not Child*, Ngugi also explores the history of the contact between his people, the Kenyan people, and British colonial occupation. However, unlike the case in *Things Fall Apart*, we are not treated to an elaborate presentation of the pre-colonial social order; it is left for us to reconstruct from brief accounts such as the bedside story told by Ngotho to his children (pp.23-4) and from Kiarie's recounting of history at the meeting on the first day of the strike (p.57).

From these accounts, we are able to reconstruct the legend that God (*Murungu*) created the land, animals, plants, and the sacred living tree, *Mukuyu*. God then created the first two human beings, a man named *Gikuyu* and a woman named *Mumbi*, and put them on the land under the *Mukuyu* tree. The animals now settled and paid homage to the creator and to man. God then took *Gikuyu* and *Mumbi* and showed them all the land with its mountains, ridges and valleys, and declared to them, " This land I hand over to you O man and woman. Its yours to rule till in serenity sacrificing only to me, your God, under my sacred tree..."[21]. Over the ages, *Gikuyu* and *Mumbi* had multiplied and formed a tribe. Like was the case amongst the Igbos of Umuofia, here too, the social formation was communal, the household was the basic unit of production, the division of labour was simple, the tribe worshipped ancestral spirits and decisions involving the community were reached by consensus (p.75).

However, land was the centre of the Kikuyu cosmology, and everything else revolved around it; it was the source of all value: "A man who had land," we are told, "was considered rich. If a man had plenty of money...but no land, he could never be counted as rich. A man who went with tattered clothes but had at least an acre of red earth was better off than the man with money" (p.19).

The attachment of the Kikuyu to their land is thus, according to Ngugi, historical and deeply spiritual. It defines, as we see in the case of Ngotho, a Kikuyu's whole existence-it is the source of life, the basis of community, the foundation of culture,[22] and what is worth living and dying for.

We can therefore say that, whereas the social organization of production and the cosmology of the pre-colonial African societies presented in *Things Fall Apart* and *Weep Not Child* are generally the same, land, its ownership, use and control as the focal point of African autonomy, receives greater emphasis in *Weep Not Child.*

3.04 The Impact of Colonial Rule and The Nature of the Anti-Colonial Struggle in *Things Fall Apart*

We have seen that in pre-colonial Igbo society, the main pillar of the social order was the clan, and what kept the clan united and strong were the values of kinship built around a belief system which put kinship solidarity before everything else. When the British colonial forces first entered Igboland they were quick to realise this, through intelligence information obtained for them by the Christian missionaries. Their strategy of pacification thus involved, first of all, attacking the foundation of communal solidarity.

The Christian missionaries were able to make an in-road into Igbo society by exploiting the clan belief in the "evil forest". The missionaries had asked for a plot of land to build their church at Mbanta, and the rulers of the clan had thought it wise to get rid of the missionaries by offering them the "evil forest", a place the clan believed to be "alive with sinister forces and powers of darkness...which nobody in his right senses would accept"(p.105). The belief was that the missionaries would die within four days. They did not, and the incidence was the first blow at the basis of the society's belief system. As the narrator put it, "it became known that the white man's fetish had unbelievable

power. It was said that he wore glasses on his eyes so that he could see and talk to evil spirits" (p.106). Thus, the missionaries not only came out of this spiritual contest on top, they were able to win their first converts and begin to build a congregation.

One of the first converts to Christianity was Nwoye, the first son of Okonkwo, who personifies the defence of the values of pre-colonial Igbo society. We are told that the new religion appealed to Nwoye because he saw it as an escape from what he considered as the violence of traditional Igbo society as represented in his father. Earlier on, he had known that his father had participated in the sacrificial killing of Ikemefuna, someone he had come to regard as a brother and very close companion. He also knew that in his society, twins were cast away in the forest and left to die, because the birth of twins was regarded as a bad omen(p.43). Thus, the narrator reports:

> *"It was not the mad logic of the Trinity which captivated [Nwoye]. He did not understand it. It was the poetry of the new religion. Something felt in his marrow. The hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul - the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed. He felt a relief as the hymn poured into his perched soul"(pp.103-4).*

It was also not surprising when we learn that Nneka, the pregnant wife of a rich farmer who have had her four sets of twins killed, had also joined the Christian congregation (p.107). Soon after, the *Osu*, who were regarded as the

outcasts of society and who could neither marry, nor attend an assembly of the free-born, also became converts (p.111). The consequence of these cracks in community solidarity was aptly expressed by an elder during Okonkwo's farewell feast at Mbanta:

> *".....I fear for you young people because you do not understand how strong is the bond of kinship. You do not know what it is to speak with one voice. And what is the result? An abominable religion has settled among you. A man can now leave his father and his brothers. He can curse the gods of his fathers and his ancestors, like a hunter's dog that suddenly goes mad and turns on his master. I fear for you; I fear for the clan"* (p.118).

Having attacked the foundation of clan solidarity by winning converts, the missionaries followed up with a soft paw-the school. We are told that Mr. Brown, the head of the new religion, had by now acquired enough knowledge about Igbo society to realise that "a frontal attack" would not succeed; so he built a hospital and started a school at Umuofia:

> *"He went from family to family begging people to send their children to school. But at first they only sent their slaves or sometimes their lazy children. Mr. Brown begged and argued and prophesied. He said that the leaders of the land in the future would be men and women who had learnt to read and write. If Umuofia failed to send her children to school, strangers would come from other places to rule them....In the end Mr. Brown's arguments began to have an effect.*

More people came to learn in his school, and he encouraged them with gifts of singlets and towels" (p.128).

Mr. Brown thus succeeded in killing two birds with one stone: on the one hand, he succeeded in training new recruits for the colonial army of occupation - more court messengers, clerks and teachers; on the other, he was able to produce more priests and establish more churches and still more schools. But the school was just one side of the soft paw of the colonial predator. The other side was the "trading store". The store is the harbinger of the new capitalist economy: we are told that many men and women in Umuofia were excited about the trading store because, "for the first time palm-oil and kernel became things of great price, and much money flowed into Unuofia" (p.126).

Thus, by the time the colonial District Commissioner and the rest of the colonial state apparatus - the courts and court messengers, the prisons and prison guards, and the soldiers - decided it was time to take on the leadership of Umuofia clan, they already had recruited pockets of followers and sympathisers within the clan: they had snapped the knots that had kept Umuofia together; now it fell apart.

The unmistakable impression that the reader gets at the end of *Things Fall Apart* is the seeming ambivalence of Chinua Achebe towards opposition to colonial rule. On the one hand, he makes us at least sympathise with, or at worse appreciate, the position of budding petit-bourgeois collaborators of colonialism such as the Nwoyes, the court clerks, the school teachers and the palm oil and palm kernel sellers in the new market economy. These new

occupations are made to appear to us as natural extensions of pre-colonial Igbo society's emphasis on the materialistic values of hard work and individual achievement. On the other hand, the biggest losers in the power game - the rulers of Unuofia or the *ndichie*, are made to appear unresolved, divided or even unwilling fight, thus leaving Okonkwo virtually alone.

For instance, when we are first told of the arrival of the colonialists at Abame, and how three white men, leading a large group of soldiers, had wiped out the entire community on a market day, Okonkwo had immediately urged for resolute action:

> *"They [the people of Abame] were fools...they had been warned that danger was ahead. They should have armed themselves with their guns and their matchets even when they went to the market"(p.99).*

However, Okonkwo found himself alone. Uchendu, his uncle, had pronounced earlier that the Abame people were wrong in killing the lone white colonialist who came on a bicycle, because the clan belief system had decreed: "Never kill a man who says nothing" (p.98).

Obierika, Okonkwo's friend and a leading elder at Umuofia, also took a line of inaction: "but I am greatly afraid. We have heard stories about white men who made the powerful guns and strong drinks and took slaves away across the seas, but no one thought the stories were true"(p.99).

Again, when an Osu convert was alleged to have killed a sacred python at Mbanta, Okonkwo had led a militant voice amongst the rulers of the clan

which demanded for a declaration of war, warning, "until the abominable gang was chased out of the village with whips there would be no peace". The majority opinion had rejected this course of action choosing, instead, to hide behind the clan gods and proverbs:

> *"If a man kills the sacred python in the secrecy of his hut, the matter lies between him and the gods. We did not see it. If we put ourselves between the god and his victim we may receive blows intended for the offender. When a man blasphemes, what do we do? Do we go and stop his mouth? No. We put our fingers into our ears to stop us hearing. That is a wise action" (P.113).*

Okonkwo, who was quick to see the cowardly logic behind the majority position, was reported to have come to the conclusion that "this [i.e. Mbanta] was a womanly clan...such a thing could never happen in his fatherland, Umuofia"[p.113).

Thus, when Okonkwo returned from his seven-year exile, believing that he had rejoined a 'manly' community which would put up a fight against colonial invasion, he was shocked to find his Umuofia under the heels of the *Kotma* (court messengers-cum-police). "What is it that has happened to our people?" Okonkwo had wondered; "why have they lost the power to fight?" (P.124). Again, Obierika had expressed total resignation: "It is already too late...our men and sons have joined the ranks of the stranger. They have joined his religion and they help to uphold his government" (p.124). Apart from

Obierika, we are also told of "many men and women in Umuofia who did not feel as strongly as Okonkwo about the new dispensation" (p.126).

Finally, Okonkwo, in a last act of desperation, had attacked and killed a *Kotma*. The *Kotma* had come on the order of the District Commissioner to disperse a meeting of the clan called to discuss the great abomination of a *Kotma* unmasking an *egwugwu* in public. Earlier on, six of the leaders of Umuofia had been detained and humiliated on the orders of the District Commissioner. But the village Assembly had allowed the other *Kotma* to get away:

> *"The meeting was stopped. Okonkwo stood looking at the dead man. He knew that Umuofia would not go to war. He knew because they had let the other messengers escape. They had broken into tumult instead of action. He discerned fright in that tumult. He heard voices asking, why did he do it?" (P.145).*

3.05 The Impact of Colonial Rule and the Nature of the Anti-Colonial Struggle in *Weep Not Child*

As we saw in the case of pre-colonial Igbo society in *Things Fall Apart*, the Christian missionary "paved the way for the sword"[23] in the British occupation of Kenya. The missionaries had come armed with only the Bible, and had asked for a place to stay. In their generosity, the Kenyan people had welcomed them with open arms and had allowed them to say. Soon after, soldiers, with guns, had followed the missionary intelligence agents and had taken over the land[24].

As we soon learn from *Weep Not Child*, however, taking control over the land was not merely a symbolic act, it came to mean actual physical occupation of the land. Kenya had been regarded by the British colonialists as "a big trace of wild country to conquer" (p.30), and, soon after the first World War, large numbers of disbanded British soldiers were settled on the land.

These white settlers, such as Mr. Howlands in *Weep Not Child*, were encouraged by the colonial government to take for free, as much land as they wanted. The African owners of the land, such as Ngotho's father, were thrown out of their ancestral lands. The lucky ones amongst them became *Muhois*-farm labourers - on starvation wages on the very lands they used to own.

Historically, this outright seizure of land by British ex-soldiers and the large-scale land speculation which accompanied it is regarded as "one of the most sordid scandals in colonial history"[25]. The case of Lord Delamere, one of the pioneer white settlers, is often cited to illustrate this point.

Lord Delamere had, in 1903, applied for a 99- year leasehold of 156 square miles of land at half-penny per acre, and had also requested to be given the option of outright purchase at eight pence an acre. The Kenyan colonial authorities instead granted Delamere 100,000 acres on lease.[26] Walter Rodney summed up the situation aptly: "While Lord Delamere controlled 100,000 acres of Kenya's land, the Kenyan had to carry a *Kipande* pass in his own country to beg for a wage of 15 [shillings] or 20 [shillings] per month"[27].

At first, Kenyans refused to go and work for white settler farmers as labourers on the land of their ancestors. The colonial government responded

by forcing Africans, including women and children, to work for the settler farmers. When forced labour did not produce rapid results, heavy taxation on households, including taxes on wives, was used as an instrument to force people to look for the means to pay.[28]

Realising the potentially explosive nature of the situation, however, the colonial government actively pursued the well-known policy of divide-and-rule amongst the African population. African collaborators - *homeguards*-like Jacobo were identified and allowed to own farms, so as "to set [black people] fighting amongst themselves instead of fighting with the whitemen"(p.77). Later, as Africans began to seriously organise to resist colonial occupation and fight for their rights, prominent homeguards such as Jacobo were appointed chiefs by the colonial government and given the task of spying and reporting on their black brethren (p.68).

There is also a racial dimension to the divide-and-rule policy. We notice in *Weep Not Child* that the colonial government had encouraged Indians to settle in Kenya in order to play an intermediary role in the economy. These Indians were used by the whites to further deny the Kenyans any real stake in the new capitalist economy, and the Africans knew and resented this:

> *"The Indian shops were many. The Indian traders were said to be very rich. They too employed some black boys whom they treated as nothing. You could never like the Indians because their customs were strange and funny in a bad way. But their shops were big and well-stocked with things. White settlers, with their wives and children,*

often came to the rich Indians and bought all they wanted. The Indians feared Europeans and if you went to buy in a shop and a white man found you, the Indian could stop selling to you and, trembling all over, would begin to serve him".

There were a few African-owned shops, but they were poorly stocked because of the low capital base of their owners. Thus, the African population was generally very poor, landless and unemployed; the few employed were poorly paid. These were the conditions which set the stage for the strike, the first organised nationalist act of resistance against colonial domination in *Weep Not Child.*

As we learn from the narrative, the strike had both short-term and long-term objectives. In the short term, the strike was to demand for better wages by demonstrating to the government (the *Serikali*) and the settlers "that black people were not cowards and slaves. They too had children to feed and to educate. How could people go on sweating for the children of the whitemen to be well-fed, well-clothed and well-educated"? (pp.50-1), Kiarie, one of the strike leaders, further elaborated on the strategy of the strike:

"All the black people will stop working. All businesses will come to a standstill because all the country depends on our sweat. The government and the settlers will call us back. But we shall say, No, no Give us more money first. Our sweat and blood are not so cheap. We too are human beings. We cannot live on fifteen shillings a month..."(p.51).

The long-term objective of the strike went beyond the issue of fighting for higher wages: it was to demand the return of all the land which had been robbed the African by the white settler. Declared Kiarie:

> *"All the land belonged to the people - black people. They had been given it by God. For every race had their country. The Indians had India. And Africans had Africa, the land of the black people...our fathers were taken captives in the first Big War to help in a war whose cause they never knew. And when they came back? Their land had been taken away for a settlement of the white soldiers...when the people rose to demand their rights they were shot down...when the second Big War came, we were taken to fight Hitler...We were killed, we shed blood to save the British empire from defeat and collapse....Today, with one voice, we must rise and shout: "The time has come....let my people go. Let my people go! We want our land! Now!"(p.57).*

The strike was crushed with the might of the empire and the collaboration of *homeguards* such as chief Jacobo. The leaders of the strike, led by Jomo "the Black Moses"(p.58), were all detained, and a State of Emergency was declared all over Kenya (p.63).

The reference in the narrative to Jomo, "the black Moses", and his leadership role in the strike, has an actual historical correlate. For, in 1946, Jomo Kenyatta had returned from studies in Britain and founded the Kenya African Union (K.A.U.) With the objective of fighting to regain control over the

seized lands and winning independence for his people on the basis of majority rule (there is reference in the narrative to the formation of K.A.U. by Jomo on p.64). Kenyatta had immediately won a mass following.

In the narrative, we are made to realise that the arrest, trial and imprisonment of Jomo and the simultaneous unleashing of a reign of terror on the African population under the State of Emergency had taught the Africans an important lesson: the colonial government and the white settlers would not give up through peaceful means. This realisation marked the beginning of the armed Mau-Mau nationalist struggle.

In *Weep Not Child*, the Mau-Mau militants who went into the forest are represented by Boro. Boro had fought for the British during the second World War, had lost a brother and had returned home with no job and no land to settle on. After the crushing of the strike, Boro took the Mau-Mau oath of allegiance and went to join the Land Freedom Army led by the legendary Dedan Kimathi (p.73). We learn from the narrative that the years of the Emergency were years of terror. Thousand of Africans were killed in the colonial government's brutality against Mau-Mau suspects; we are told for instance, of the murder in cold blood of the Barber and five others(p.85).

Of course, the Mau-Mau too unleashed its own terror on the colonial establishment and its African collaborators. For instance, we learn of the day-light assassination of a prominent chief who was close to the colonial government on p.63. The incident has an actual historical correlate: on October 7, 1952, Chief Waruhiu, "one of the most influential of government paid chiefs

who opposed the nationalist cause" was gunned down in daylight while driving in his car near Nairobi."[29]

Ngugi tells us, however, that, whereas the vast majority of Kenyans were opposed to settler colonialism and wanted their land back, there were many aspiring petit-bourgeois young men and women who were apprehensive of the Mau-Mau, choosing, instead, to place their hopes for a better tomorrow in acquiring Western, colonial education. Such is the case with Njoroge, the hero of the narrative and the young man through whom we see the action.

Njoroge, we are told, is "a dreamer, a visionary who consoled himself faced by the difficulties of the moment by a look at a better day to come" (p.120.) Thus, right from childhood, Njoroge had been fired by the imagination of getting well-educated so as to become rich enough to take his family out of poverty. At the very beginning of the narrative, he had told Kamau, his brother who was training to be a carpenter, that " I think Jacobo is as rich as Mr. Howlands, because he got education. And that's why each takes his children to school because of course they have learnt the value of it"(p.4). Later on, the narrator says of Njoroge: "education for him, as for many boys in his generation, held the key to the future"(p.48). After the crushing of the strike and his father's sacking from his job as a labourer on Mr. Howland's farm, Njoroge became even more convinced than ever that education was the key to winning back what the white man had taken from his family.

In the end, it was only after Njoroge had been dragged out of school by *homeguards* on the orders of Mr. Howlands, now a District Officer, and

tortured on the false allegation that he was a Mau-Mau collaborator, that his petit-bourgeois dream became shattered, and he came to the rude awakening that the real world of colonialism was a cruel and unjust world which one had to stand up to and face squarely.

3.06 The Contrasting Perceptions of Colonialism And The Anti-Colonial Struggle in *Things Fall Apart* and *Weep Not Child.*

We have seen that both Achebe and Ngugi have attempted, in different ways, to capture important moments in the history of their peoples: the forms of intervention of European colonialism. Both writers, by approaching their art with "a proper sense of history", have succeeded in great measure in achieving what they had set out to do, i.e. - rescuing what they regarded as the true nature of the African pre-colonial past from the distortions and deliberate misrepresentations it had suffered in the hands of the ideologues of imperialism, and re-presenting this in fiction.

There are, however, important differences in approach, emphasis and vision between the two writers, which need to be point out. In terms of method, for instance, Achebe's objective appears to be satisfied with a mere a presentation of a credible socio-historical framework[30] for the story of his people's rich cultural past, rather than exposing "the economic aspect of the confrontation with Europe"[31]. Ngugi's approach, on the other hand, de-emphasises the socio-historical account of the pre-colonial past, while "openly parad[ing] historical and economic data, [and] using them all as props and material"[32] with which to vividly demonstrate the impact of colonial occupation

on the lives of African producers as well as the nature, and the objectives of the nationalist response.

Some literary critics, such as Ime Ikiddeh, have attempted to excuse Achebe's seeming ambivalent attitude towards the anti-colonial struggle by arguing that "there is little in Nigerian history before independence to compare with the protracted life-and-death struggle that marks the colonial history of Kenya"; therefore, "more than Achebe then, Ngugi who grew up in the shadow of the Mau-Mau war, is at pains to tell the story of an exploited peasantry and their heroic struggle."[33]

It may be true that, unlike the Kenyan peasantry, Nigerian peasants did not lose their land to a band of colonial settlers; yet, they did lose their autonomy and the power of self-determination, and Okonkwo's heroic response in *Things Fall Apart* demonstrates that losing political autonomy is indeed a life-and-death affair. Achebe's contrasting of Okonkwo with Obierika, who is presented as an astute, level-headed elder, and his portrayal of Okonkwo as a tragic hero who fell out of tune with the cultural and political rhythm of his people is thus a clever device to hide the writer's real bourgeois nationalist sympathies for the likes of Obierika, who chose the path of non-confrontation and adaptation to colonial rule, and Nwoye, who was quick to see the opportunities for the Igbo-cherished value of *individual achievement* which were opened up by the missionary school in the new colonial order. For, according to M.J.C. Echeruo, like Nwoye, Achebe

*"Grew up at a very crucial period in the definition of the intellectual and moral character of the modern Igbo man. It was with his generation that the average Igbo boy of scant means was able to have university education and at home, too. That generation .....**Chose or learnt to face life with both innocence and shrewdness, with a jovial but serious attitude which enabled it to face modernity without anger** and without equivocation. Achebe's first roots have to be sought in that milieu"*[34] (emphasis added).

Thus, Achebe's lack of proper representation of the militant and popular nationalist response to colonialism is a question of conscious, deliberate, political choice which cannot be explained away, as Ikiddeh and others have tried to do, in differences in the historical realities of Nigeria and Kenya. For, surely, Achebe also grew up in the shadow of, but failed to represent, the militant anti-colonial struggles of the market women of Aba and Owerri in 1929[35], of the Michael Imoudu-led COLA agitations of September 1941; of the fifty-two day general strike of June-August 1945[36] and of the Mokwugo Okoyes and Sa'adu Zungurs in the Zikist Movement in 1946-51[37], e.t.c

What is even more serious is that Achebe, writing at the end of the 1950s, could not have claimed ignorance of the simplistic but popular and militantly anti-colonial literature which flourished in the late 1940s at Onitsha market[38], very near Ogidi, his birth place.[39] According to E. Obiechina, these popular writers:

"Devoted many of their works to the heroes of the [nationalist] struggle. There are works on Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, and Patrice Lumumba of the then Congo-Leopoldville. They are treated as folk heroes, vested with supernatural and apocryphal powers, while the colonial persecutors are thoroughly abused. The pamphlets are a storehouse of popular sentiments on the struggle".[40]

FOOTNOTES

1. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, London: Heinemann, 1958.

2. Ngugi wa Thiong'O, *Weep Not Child*, London: Heinemann, 1964

3. Chinua Achebe, "The Role of the Writer in a New Nation", in G.D. Killam (ed.) *African Writers On African Writing*, London: Heinemann, 1973, p.8. Originally given as a talk to the Nigerian Library Association and published in *Nigerian Libraries*, 1,3 (1964), 113-19; Reprinted in *Nigeria Magazine*, 81(1964), pp.157-6 (see C.L. Innes, *Chinua Achebe*, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p.180).

4. C. Achebe, 'The Novelist As Teacher', in G.D. Killam (ed) *ibid*. Originally given as a talk at the University of Leeds in 1964 and published in the *New Statesman* (London), 29 January 1965 (see C.L. Innes, *ibid*).

5. See Ngugi wa Thiong'O, *Homecoming*; A Collection of Essays, London: Heinemann, 1972, especially pp. xiv-v and pp.39-48.

6. *Ibid*, p.41

7. Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet On Creation Day*: Essays, London: Heinemann, 1975, p.5. It is, however, questionable whether the adjective "sedate" is the appropriate word to use here. According to the Oxford Dictionary, 'sedate' could mean "flowing like a river at the end of its life". I wonder if it was Achebe's intention to associate such dignity with rabid racism?

8. *Ibid*. See also Ngugi, *op cit*, and Ngugi wa Thiong'O, 'Literature and Society,' in his *Writers and Politics*, London: Heinemann, 1981, pp. 3-33.

9. 'Literature and Society,' pp. 16-17, *ibid*.

10. S. Gikandi, *Reading Chinua Achebe*, London: James Curry and Heinemann, 1991, p.27. The reference to M. Perham is in relation to her book, *Lugard: The Years of Authority, 1892-1945*, London: Collins, 1960.

11. Emmanuel Obiechina, 'Perceptions of Colonialism in West African Literature,' in his *Language and Theme: Essays On African Literature*, Washington: Howard University Press, 1990, pp. 68-9.

12. *Ibid*, p. 71

13. *Ibid*, p.72

14. R.L. Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties*, Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1963, p.73. For a comprehensive account of the Nigerian nationalist movement, see J.S. Coleman, Nigeria: *Background to Nationalism*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1958; for an excellent account of the Zikist Movement, see Ehiedu, .E.G. Iweriebor, *Radical Politics in Nigeria, 1945-1950: The Significance of the Zikist Movement*, Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1996.

15. R. L. Sklar, *Ibid*, p. 75n.

16. See Ime Ikiddeh, 'Ngugi Wa Thiong'O: The Novelist as Historian,' in Bruce King and Kolawole Ogungbesan(eds.), *A Celebration of Black and African Writing*, Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press and Oxford University Press, 1975, p.210.

17. Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1996, p.xv; first published 1938, quoted in Ikiddeh, *ibid*, p.211; p.215n.

18. Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet On Creation Day*, London: Heinemann, 1975, p.70.

19. C.L. Innes, *op cit*, p.25

20. G.T. Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, London: Frank Cass, 1966, pp. 9-10; First published 1921, quoted in S. Gikandi, *opcit*, p.28.

21. *Weep Not Child*, p.24

22. See Ime Ikiddeh, 'The Novelist As Historian' , p.210.

23. *Weep Not Child*, p.57

24. *Ibid.*

25. See Ime Ikiddeh, *loc cit*, p.210.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Dar-es-Sallam: Tanzania Publishing House, 1972, p.165, quoted in Ikiddeh, *ibid.*

28. *Weep Not Child*, p.57

29. *Ibid*, p.viii

30. See, Ikiddeh, 'The Novelist As Historian' *op cit*, p.212.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*

34. M.J.C. Echeruo, "Chinua Achebe", in B. King and K. Ogungbesan (eds.), *A Celebration of Black and African Writing, op cit.*

35. See, *People's Liberation Party: Mission, Principles, Programme, Constitution, Code of Conduct*, Lagos: 1989, p.9.

36. See Bala Usman, 'Nigeria: Independence on A Gold Platter?' in *The Analyst* vol.iii, No.3 May-June 1988, p.10

37. See, L. Sklar, *op cit*, pp.72-83

38. See E. Obiechina, *op cit*, p.85

39. Ogidi is "Situated just a few miles from the market town of Onitsha on the River Niger". See C.L. Innes, *Chinua Achebe*, p.5.

40. E. Obiechina, *loc cit.*

Chapter IV

THE PERCEPTIONS OF INDEPENDENCE AND THE POLITICS OF NEO-COLONIALISM:

Achebe's *A Man of the People*[1] and Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*[2]

4.01 Expectations and Disillusionment: The Negation of the People's Aspirations and the Rise of the Neo-colonial Bourgeoisie

From our analyses of *Things Fall Apart* and *Weep Not Child* in the last chapter, we have seen that, as far as Achebe and Ngugi are concerned, the most important values that African peoples lost as a consequence of European colonial occupation were the values of autonomy, democratic self-determination and control over the soil and the fruits of their labour power. Viewed from this perspective, the people's expectations about independence were quite clear and straight-forward: the liberation of their autonomy, self-determination, land and the fruits of their labour. In short, independence from colonial rule was expected to usher in *national liberation.* This was, essentially, the same kind of expectation which Amilcar Cabral appeared to have had in mind when he wrote that:

> *"[Since] the essential characteristic of imperialist domination [is] the negation of the historical process of the dominated people by means of violent usurpation of the freedom of development of the national productive forces... We can state that ... national liberation is the*

phenomenon in which a given socio-economic whole rejects the negation of the historical process. In other words, the national liberation of a people is the regaining of the historical personality of that people, its return to history through destruction of the imperialist domination to which it was subjected ... National liberation [thus] exists only when the national productive forces have been completely freed from every kind of foreign domination."[3]

However, it soon became clear to the people in most African countries that what was achieved after the handover of the reins of government from the colonial powers to indigenous rulers was a mere change of guards which `transferred into indigenous hands the means of domination and exploitation which hitherto had been controlled by foreign agents of imperialism. Fanon, writing on "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness", summed up the situation very cogently:

"Before independence, the leader generally embodies the aspirations of the people for independence, political liberty and national dignity. But as soon as independence is declared, far from embodying in concrete form the needs of the people in what touches bread, land and the restoration of the country to the sacred hands of the people, the leader will reveal his inner purpose: to become the general president of that company of profiteers impatient for their returns which constitutes the national bourgeoisie."[4]

Indeed, for the vast majority of the people, what independence came to mean was nothing more than a new flag and a national anthem - in short, *flag*

independence. The people continued to live in abject poverty while they see their new rulers, the *national bourgeoisie*, wallowing in opulent wealth. Like was the case under the *ancien* regime, the presence of government is felt not through the provision of social services, land and jobs, but through "the strength of the police force and the power of the army."[5] As the people's anger is kept in check through repression, "ministers grow rich, their wives doll themselves up, [and] the members of parliament feather their nests[6] .

Fanon further correctly observed that the new situation is one in which the "caste" of the new rulers behave very much like members of a gang of robbers[7] : they are very "greedy...avid and voracious, with the mind[s] of ... hucster[s]"[8]

However, while it is busy robbing from the people and feathering its nests, the national bourgeoisie has no real control over the economy of the nation; real control remains in the hands of the former colonial power. According to Fanon:

> *"The national bourgeoisie will be quite content with the role of the Western bourgeoisie's business agent, and it will play its part without any complexes in a most dignified manner. But this same lucrative role, this cheap-jack's function, this meanness of outlook and this absence of all ambition symbolise the incapability of the national middle class to fulfil its historic role of bourgeoisie. Here, the dynamic, pioneer aspect, the characteristics of the inventor and of the discoverer of new worlds which are found in all national bourgeoisies are lamentably absent... the spirit of indulgence is dominant at the core of the bourgeoisie; and this is because the national bourgeoisie identifies with the Western bourgeoisie,*

from whom it has learnt its lessons. It follows the Western bourgeoisie along its path of negation and decadence without ever having emulated it in its first stages of exploration and invention ... because it is bereft of ideas, because it lives to itself and cuts itself off from the people, undermined by its hereditary incapacity to think in terms of all the problems of the nation as seen from the point of view of the whole of that nation, the national middle class will have nothing better to do than to take on the role of manager for Western enterprise, and it will in practice set up its country as the brothel of Europe."[9]

What Fanon has so brilliantly described in this passage amounts to a new colonial situation in the supposedly independent states. This new phenomenon is what both Fanon and Nkrumah have referred to as *neo-colonialism*. In Nkrumah's famous definition, "the essence of neo-colonialism is that the state which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system, and thus its political policy is directed from outside[10] . This new phenomenon of neo-colonialism - the negation of the people's hopes and aspirations and the tightening of the grips of imperialist control over their lives and resources in the new nation - is what Achebe and Ngugi are concerned with in *A Man of the People* and *Petals of Blood*. Thus, in 1967 Achebe had declared:

*"**A Man of the People** wasn't a flash in the pan. This is the beginning of a phase in which I intend to take a hard look at what we in Africa are making of independence... The point I want to make.. is that the creative*

writer in independent Nigeria found himself with a new terrifying problem on his hands. He found that the independence his country was supposed to have won was totally without content. The old white master was still in power. He had got himself a bunch of black stooges to do his dirty work for a commission. As long as they did what was expected of them they would be praised for their sagacity and their country for stability."[11]

Referring to a similar situation in his own country, Kenya, Ngugi had also observed:

"The Kenyan bourgeoisie is a classic case of what Fanon describes...[he] accurately describes the infantile imitative mentality, the crass world outlook which like borrowed robes sits uneasily on them, and the total lack of any originality... Their vision of society, be it economic, political or cultural, is derived from the only experience they know and care to know - the colonial economic, political and cultural order... Hence in industry and finance... they see themselves no more than as an attachment of the Western bourgeoisie, their mission, to quote Fanon, being "the transmission line" between the nation and imperialism. They are happy, content really, to be only the agents for international tractors, motor vehicles, pharmaceuticals, textiles, boots, canned foods and fruits, every little thing manufactured abroad... In agriculture,...[a]fter independence, there was the rush to Africanise the inequalities of the colonial era. The state bought out the settlers. Many of the huge farms were then handed over to a few top officials in the civil service, the army

and the private sector. A number of European settlers and multi-nationals still own huge coffee, sisal, fruit, and sugar plantations. Land hunger, the very basis of the Mau-Mau struggle, haunts the vast majority of Kenyans."[12]

It is against the foregoing background of expectations and disillusionment that we shall attempt a comparative analysis of Achebe's *A Man of the People* and Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*.

4.02 Flag Independence And the Politics of Neo-Colonialism in the New Nation: Achebe's *A Man of the People*

In *A Man of the People* Achebe puts on the mask of a persona - Odili Samalu - to present to the reader a satirical account of events early in the life of a "new nation" just emerging from colonial rule. From the narrative, the reader is left in little doubt that the "new nation" refers to Nigeria.

From Odili's account, we are able to sketch an outline of the political economy of the new nation. We gather that the new nation is supposed to be a parliamentary democracy with two main political parties - the People's Organisation Party (P.O.P) and the Progressive Alliance Party (PAP) - contesting for power. Presently, the P.O.P is in power and the P.A.P. is in opposition. We are soon made to realise, however, that the 'parliamentary democracy' being practiced is just a sham, as parliamentary seats carry price tags (p.2) and the parliament is just a caricature where any attempt at rational debate is violently suppressed (pp.3-7).

From the little glimpse we have of parliament, we are able to know that the economy of the new nation is propped on coffee, its production, marketing and

export, and the bulk of the coffee growers are supporters of the ruling party, the P.O.P. However, since both demand as well as the pricing of coffee are externally controlled in the West, a financial crisis in the West sets in motion a slump in the international coffee market and the price of the commodity falls.

Suddenly, the P.O.P government had a serious political crisis in its hands. The Minister of Finance, a Ph.D. holder in Public Finance, suggested to the cabinet what appeared to be the most rational course of action: cut down the prices paid to coffee farmers even though this may entail the political risk of loss of some support amongst coffee planters. The prime Minister rejected the suggestion, although it was supported by a two-thirds vote, and, instead, instructed the National Bank to print fifteen million pounds. The finance Minister and all those who supported him were sacked from the cabinet and branded "conspirators and traitors who had teamed up with foreign saboteurs to destroy the new nation" (p.4) Meanwhile, inflation is fueled, prices of (mostly imported) commodities steep up and the real incomes of the primary producers and the workers diminish.

While the farmers and the workers suffer the consequences of the farcical theatrics in parliament, Odili takes us into the inner circle of the new ruling class to observe the intimate details of how they go about governing the new nation. We are introduced to a typical representative of the new helmsmen: Chief the Honourable M.A. Nanga, who had become Minister of culture by "yapping" and "snarling" "so shamelessly for the meaty prize" (p.7)

The image of a voracious dog is used to good effect, as the reader is cued up to closely scrutinise the actions of Nanga and his type, to find out whether indeed they behave like a pack of hounds.

Chief Nanga soon confirms that the new rulers are indeed a pack of vicious dogs. For, we learn through the "Honourable" Minister that power in the new nation is like a *national cake*, and politics, or the struggle for power, is all about "sharing" and "eating" this cake amongst the representatives of the various tribes in the country (P.13). This image of a "pack of hounds" snarling and tearing up each other in order to grab their own *private* share of the national cake permeates the whole narrative. From the parliament to bedrooms and from cocktail parties to campaign rallies, the talk amongst the new rulers is all about the fight over "eating" and "sharing" the resources of the new nation.

The image of a pack of hounds which is used to describe the national bourgeoisie becomes sharper when we realise that they are only fighting over the crumbs that are thrown at them by their neo-colonial masters who sit at the table. The real masters, we are told, are the representatives of European and American companies such as the British Amalgamated, Antonio and Sons, etc., who cart away the resources of the new nation, leaving the Nangas, the Kokos and the Suleiman Wagadas to fight over the 'ten-percent'.

For instance, we see Chief Nanga quarrelling with Hon T.C. Kobino, the Minister of Construction, ostensibly over the delay in the tarring of a road in Nanga's constituency. We soon realise, however, that Chief Nanga's concern was not so much the expectations of his constituents as his anxiety over the ten luxury

buses he had acquired at six thousand pounds each, which were waiting to "ply the route as soon as it was tarred." The buses were part of a kick-back he got on the road contract from the British Amalgamated (p.48). Later, we learn that the Minister of Construction, too, is well taken care of: we are told of his "row of ten houses" in a "high-class area" of the capital city, which are "let to different embassies at three thousand a year each" (p.60).

A better illustration of the neo-colonial relationship between the new rulers and imperialist companies is the case of the relationship between the new nation's Ministry of Foreign Trade and the British Amalgamated Company. According to our narrator:

> *As the whole world now knows, our Minister of Foreign Trade, Alhaji Chief Senator Suleiman Wagada, announced on New Year's Day a twenty percent rise in import duties on certain types of textile goods. On January 2nd the opposition progressive Alliance Party published detailed evidence to show that someone had told the firm of British Amalgamated of the Minister's plans as long ago as October and that they had taken steps to bring in three shiploads of the textiles by mid-December. The cabinet was split overnight into the savage warring camps of those who wanted the government to resign and those, like Chief Nanga, who said that the matter concerned the Minister of Foreign Trade alone and if it came to resigning he should resign by himself. And then the filth began to flow. The* ***Daily Matchet*** *for instance carried a story which showed that Chief Nanga, who had himself held the portfolio of Foreign Trade until two*

years ago, had been guilty of the same practice and had built out of his gains three blocks of seven-storey luxury flats at three hundred thousand pounds each in the name of his wife and that these flats were immediately leased by British Amalgamated at fourteen hundred a month each." (pp.111-2)

Having thus seen how entrenched the Western multinational companies are in the new nation, we are no longer surprised to learn that "British Amalgamated has paid out four hundred thousand pounds to P.O.P. to fight" the coming election; or that "the Americans have been even more generous" (p.142) or even that Chief Nanga had put up a "very modern four-storey structure" in his home village, out of "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." (p.108).

But where does all this 'sharing-and-eating' leave the other classes in the New Nation? According to the narrator, the 'eating' politics promoted by the national bourgeoisie has permeated the whole of society and has become a national culture. Thus, early in the narrative we come across a member of the petit-bourgeoisie, Jonathan Nwege - the proprietor and principal of the Anata Grammar School - who is said to be "always grumbling because his services to the P.O.P. had not been rewarded with the usual prize-appointment to some public corporation", such as "the proposed new Corporation which would take over the disposal of all government unserviceable property (like old mattresses, chairs, electric fans, disused typewriters and other junk) which at present was auctioned by civil servants" (p.7).

Later, we come across another member of the petit-bourgeoisie, Odili's father: a retired District Interpreter and the chairman of the P.O.P. in his locality. We are reminded that under colonialism, District Interpreters were like small gods, "very powerful, very rich, widely known and hated." (p.32) Thus, by virtue of his office, Odili's father regularly received "gifts of yams, pots of palm-wine or bottles of European drink, goats, sheep [and] chicken" (p.33). We are therefore not surprised when we learn that his personal philosophy is the belief "that the mainspring of political action [is] personal gain.." (p.128). This is, obviously, also the philosophy motivating Mr. 'Couple', the retired corrupt police corporal who is now a politician and a local councillor at Urua. The narrator informs us that Mr. 'Couple' "was at the moment very much involved in supplying stones for our village pipe-borne water scheme and was widely accused (in whispers) of selling one heap of stones in the morning, carrying it away at night and selling it again the next day; and repeating the cycle as long as he liked." (pp.138-9). The crass opportunism of Mr. Jalio, the President of the Writers Society, and the inordinate greed of the editors of *The Daily Chronicle* and the *Daily Matchet*, also put them in this philosophical mould.

Even the masses of ordinary peasants and workers are said to be either indifferent to, or cynically collaborative with, the eat-and-let-eat regime. Thus, at the very beginning of the narrative, Odili had expressed in disgust:

> *"As I stood in one corner of that vast tumult waiting for the arrival of the Minister I felt intense bitterness welling up in my mouth. Here were silly, ignorant villagers dancing themselves lame and waiting... in honour of one*

of those who had started the country off down the slopes of inflation I wished for a miracle, for a voice of thunder, to hush this ridiculous 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 has used his position to enrich himself and they would ask you ... If you thought that a sensible man would spit out the juicy morsel that good fortune placed in his mouth". (p.2)

The same kind of cynicism, indifference and tacit complicity is again expressed during the launching of the Common People's Convention (CPC) campaign at Urua. We are told that, after the crowd had been given instances of how leaders who were paupers five years ago had become millionaires, "many in the audience laughed. But it was the laughter to resignation to misfortune. No one among them swore vengeance; no one shook with rage or showed any sign of fight. They understood what was being said, they had seen it with their own eyes. But what did anyone expect them to do?" (p.139).

Seizing the moment, an elderly councillor who had sensed the mood of resignation in the crowd cynically intervened to urge the villagers to support their son to go to the parliament and bring their "share" of the loot: "The village of Anata has already eaten, now they must make way for us to reach the plate." (p.141)

What alternatives are there to the looting and the all-pervasive corruption which have engulfed the new nation? By persistently drawing our attention to the low level of educational attainment of Ministers like Chief Nanga (Nanga was called "an empty-headed ass," p.25; "barely literate", p.53; somebody who knew "just

enough English", p.76, etc.) as well as to the hostile anti-intellectualism of the ruling class (the dismissed Minister of Finance, "a first-rate economist with a Ph.D.", along with his sacked cabinet supporters who "were all university people and highly educated professional men", were referred to as "miscreants", "stooges", etc., p.4), Achebe seems to believe that if the reins of state power were in the hands of well educated professionals who had a high sense of moral integrity, the affairs of the new nation would have been run on a fair and efficient manner.

It is apparently on the basis of such Weberian, bourgeois-technocratic, assumptions that the Common People's Convention (CPC) - a party almost entirely made up of intellectuals and professionals (p.87) and supported by shadowy interests (p.193) - is given the moral high ground in the narrative and tipped as a credible alternative to the corruption and sloth of the P.O.P. regime. However, since "a given organisation of material interests dictates its own morality",[13] we are not surprised to see Max, the leader of C.P.C, justifying graft in the name of advancing party interests (pp.141-2)

It can also be argued that Achebe must have been operating from the same bourgeois-technocratic premises when he puts in the mouth of his narrator - Odili - a contemptuous disdain for the masses. The people are presented as gullible, silly, ignorant, ridiculous, apathetic, cynical and totally lacking in initiative to change their circumstances. Thus, when the corrupt regime is toppled through a *coup d'etat*, the narrator commented:

> *"No, the people had nothing to do with the fall of our Government. What happened was simply that unruly mobs and private armies having*

tasted blood and power during the election had got out of hand and ruined their masters and employers. And they had no public reason whatever for doing it. Lets make no mistake about that" (p.162).

But were the people so apathetic and so cynical? Were they just merely victims of the Nangas and Co, totally lacking in initiative and unmindful of their circumstances? Were they not the same ordinary people who organised the 1964 general strike which successfully demanded increases in wages, gave workers a sense of confidence based on their realisation of their own strength, and provided the urban unemployed with a sense of hope? Can we not therefore say that Achebe has described the contradictions of a neo-colonial society without properly rooting them in their origins in the exploitative social relations of production engendered by capitalism? For, if the Nangas and Co. are corrupt because they take ten percent from the multi-national companies, will the problem be solved by having a different set of leaders who merely refuse to take the commission? Would this refusal solve the perennial crises of a primary-commodity producing economy which is controlled by, and dependent on, external forces? If the parliamentary democracy were to work properly without seats being bought at a price, etc., would this by itself lift the people out of the conditions of squalor and filth in which they live? Indeed, how would military intervention in the affairs of the state correct the ills of the new nation? One may search and search, but the answers to these questions will not be found in *A Man of the People.*

4.03 Flag Independence and the Politics of Neocolonialism: Ngugi's Petals of Blood

In *Petals of Blood*, Ngugi imaginatively traces the history of Kenyan peoples prior to colonial conquest, and in the process reconstructs for us viable, simple-commodity producing societies which were quite capable of defending themselves, their lands and their wealth against foreign invaders. However, the coming of the Christian missionary, the imperialist soldier and the land settler completely changed the shape of things. The pre-colonial social order which was based on peasant freehold of land and the simple exchange of commodities was replaced by a settler economy based on white, capitalist, ownership of over eighty percent of the best arable land. The peasantry was displaced and turned into a large reserve army of cheap, and often forced, labour under a white supremacist social, cultural and political order.

Determined to fight to the end for their land, labour and independence, Kenyan peasants set up the Mau Mau Land Freedom Army to oppose settler capitalism. *Petals of Blood* is largely an account of how a tiny group of Kenyan traitors colluded with the imperialist enemy to subvert the Uhuru ideals of Mau Mau in post-colonial Kenya. Thus, for the vast majority of the people, instead of independence coming to mean a society in which "many might live fully wherever they live", it came to be represented by a society in which "a black few, allied to ... interests from Europe, . . . continue the colonial game of robbing others of their sweat, denying them the right to grow to full flowers in air and sunlight." (p.294)

However, while imperialism was creating its own classes of traitors in neocolonial Kenya, at the same time and in the same process, it was creating the conditions for the emergence of the working class and other allied classes whose

interests were diametrically opposed to the interests of imperialism and its surrogate classes.

With remarkable clarity and convincing ability, Ngugi presents, through the characters in the narrative, the nature of these contending class forces, the various tendencies and fractions to be found amongst them, as well as the ideological weapons with which they use to fight their battles for the maintenance or abrogation of the neo-colonial *status quo* in Kenya.

In presenting the Kenyan national bourgeoisie, for instance, Ngugi traces not only the origin of part of its membership in the parcels of land it acquired as pay-off for betraying the Uhuru struggle, but also in the deep, fraternal relationship that binds it with multinational companies in the form of directorship and shareholding. Ezekiel Waweru, the father of Munira, the central character in the narrative, is a good illustration of this fraction of the national bourgeoisie.

With the arrival of the colonialists in the 1890s, Waweru had promptly betrayed his family and joined the missionaries, in whom he saw the promise of power and wealth (pp.89-90). Waweru's betrayal paid off, for we are told that

> *"with a mixture of tinkling coins and trickery of the pen and the law he was able to buy whole lands... from individuals who needed money to pay their [taxes because they] did not want to turn into workers on European settlers' land... They sold their lands bit by bit to those like Waweru who could get the coins through bringing more souls to Christ." (p.90)*

Again in 1952, when the Land Freedom war started, Waweru not only defied the Mau Mau, he even preached against it (p.92). This second betrayal

bought shares in companies and invested in land, in housing and in small business. He suddenly dropped out of circulation in small places. Now he could only be found in special clubs for members only... As if to reinforce his new social standing, he took a huge farm in the Rift Valley. But his most lucrative connection was with the tourist industry. He owned a number of plots and premises in Mombasa, Malindi and Watamu and had been given shares in several tourist resorts all along the coast. Soon he began talking of 'the need for people to grow up and face reality. Africa needed capital and investment for real growth not socialist slogans'. But he remained a strong advocate of African culture, African personality, Black authenticity.. He insisted on most of the companies of which he was Chairman or director dropping their European names and taking names like Uhuru, Wananchi, Taifa, Harambee, Afro, Pan-African, which would give the enterprises a touch of the soil." (pp.174-5).

Apart from Waweru and Riera, there were other members of the national bourgeoisie who benefitted from the betrayal of Uhuru, such as Kimeria, "who made his fortune as a Homeguard transporting bodies of Mau Mau killed by the British." Kimeria, along with Chui and Mzigo, both of whom became wealthy through the bureaucratic looting of public resources, are now Kenyan members of the board of directors of a breweries company controlled by an Anglo-American combine.

However, because it is a class without roots in its own people, we see the national bourgeoisie continuously, but without much success, seeking to find some

measure of security in dividing Kenyan people along ethnic lines, in religion and in naked terror.

One of the ploys used by the ruling class in the attempt to divide and control the people was the Mass Tea Party, during which workers and peasants were asked to swear to an oath of allegiance to defend the tribe against its enemies. In the words of Ezekiel Waweru,

> *"Now all [our] property.. is threatened by Satan working through other tribes arousing their envy and jealousy. That is why the oath is necessary. It is for peace and unity... and harmony between all of us, the rich and the poor, and to end envy and greed." (p.95).*

The people, however, easily saw through this cynical attempt to bastardise the solemn Mau Mau oath of allegiance by those who have accumulated property by betraying the oath, and generally, refused to cooperate. In the words of Munira, the oath-taking Tea Party was "a gigantic deception ... played on a whole people by a few who had made it, often in alliance with foreigners... [it was] an oath of national betrayal".

When the Mass Tea Party gimmick failed to quieten the restless masses of workers and landless peasants who had began to organise and demand for their rights, recourse was made to police repression, and then to religion. Ngugi shows that in its attempt to manipulate religion, the national bourgeoisie finds unintended, but strong, support from certain sections of the petit-bourgeoisie. Munira is a good example of this type.

Munira, the son of Waweru, is a primary school headmaster who believes that, because he has not measured up to his father's bourgeois expectations, he is a failure, a coward. Munira therefore goes through life unconfident and afraid to ask questions because confronting awkward questions about contradictions in nature and society increasingly pushed him towards understanding the causes of the people's suffering, including his own, but he would prefer not to take sides. Thus, Munira would look reality in the face, and then turn it upside down. At the end, he opted out for a fanatical spiritual utopia which leaves the bourgeoisie materially comfortable in the real, living world:

> *"I was on the verge of a decision... And then suddenly I saw the group. They were dressed in white kanzus and they were drumming... I stopped to listen ... it was Lilian... leading a group of men and women in prayers and sermons and speaking in tongues.. She talked of a new earth, another world, that knew not classes and clans, that levelled the poor and the wealthy, once they accepted the eternal law of God. Not churches; not learning, not positions; not good works; just acceptance, in faith, and behold: a new earth and a new heaven. I trembled... I accepted the law." (pp.298-9).*

The argument Ngugi seems to be making is that although the petit-bourgeoisie is also, generally, a victim of the rapacious greed of the national bourgeoisie and therefore has everything to gain by challenging exploitation and oppression, it is unable to do so because it is, by nature, a class split by the contradictions of its own existence. A further illustration of this argument can be

made with the case of Wanja. Wanja is presented as a double victim: a victim as a woman whose body has been taken advantage of and misused by the rich and powerful, and also victim as a citizen who has been denied the benefits of Uhuru. Wanja was forced by circumstances to become a big-time prostitute after she had tried in vain to get a straight job with which to earn a living, because men always saw her as a potential sex victim. when, eventually, Wanja was able to scrape a small capital, start a brothel and restaurant business and acquire a few houses, she decided to pitch camp with the oppressors - because, according to her, you either eat, or you are eaten:

> *"As for me, it's a game.. of money... you eat or you are eaten.. No, I will never return to the herd of victims .. Never ... Never..! (pp.293-4).*

Who will therefore lead the people against the man-eating predators? Ngugi suggests that the peasantry, which in the past had fought heroic wars against external invaders and against settler colonialism, is presently incapacitated by mysticism, landlessness and the sheer enormity of state power against which it has no organization to confront:

> *"... a whole lot of peasants and herdsmen of Old Ilmorog who had been lured into loans and into fencing off their land and buying imported fertilisers... were unable to pay back... Without much labour, without machinery, without breaking with old habits and outlook, and without much advice they had not been able to make the land yield enough to meet their food needs and pay back the loans. Some had used the money to pay school fees. Now the inexorable law of the metal power was driving*

them from the land... Nyakinyua, the old woman, tried to fight back. She tramped from hut to hut calling upon the peasants of Ilmorog to get together and fight it out. They looked at her and they shook their heads: whom would they fight now? The government? The Banks?... Those whose land had not yet been taken looked nervously aloof and distant. One or two even made disparaging remarks about an old woman not quite right in the head.. But she said: I'll go alone .. my man fought the white man. He paid for it with his blood. I'll struggle against these black oppressors.. alone... alone." (pp.275-6)

With the peasantry weak and divided, Ngugi shows that the only class which is organised, united and motivated enough to lead the victims in a protracted struggle against imperialism and its local class allies is the working class. Through Karega, we see how the developing political consciousness of this class prepares it for a vanguard role. After his dismissal from the position of untrained teacher at Ilmorog primary school, Karega had worked in several places, from the Mombasa docks to a sugar milling company. It was at the sugar company that he learnt the lesson that when workers were well organised, they were capable of standing up to fight for their rights irrespective of whether the management was African or whether the directors came from their own tribes or regions (p.290).

Thus, when Karega eventually joined the Theng'eta Breweries at Ilmorog and found the workers divided into linguistic, clan, gender and regional groups he was able to immediately draw up a strategy to deal with the problem, and organise

the workers into a union. The unionisation of the brewery workers had an immediate demonstration effect on the hitherto docile environment:

> *"Suddenly even barmaids wanted their own union. The women dancers formed themselves into A Tourist Dancers Union and demanded more money for their art. The agricultural workers followed suit. Something big was happening in Ilmorog and the employers were shaken and worried." (p.305)*

At the end, the message Ngugi is putting across is clear: Change will come only when the organised working class, leading an alliance of other oppressed classes, choose the side of waging a concerted struggle to dislodge imperialism and its internal "hordes of round bellied jiggers and bed bugs" and install in their place "the kingdom of man and woman, joying and loving in creative labour." (p.344)

4.04 The Contrasting Perceptions of Achebe and Ngugi

We have seen how, in both *A Man of the People* and *Petals of Blood*, Achebe and Ngugi not only succeeded in demonstrating the sham nature of the independence achieved but in effectively exposing the real character of the neo-colonial bourgeoisie which took over from the white colonial predators. Achebe, for instance, through the personality of Chief Nanga, was able to show us the "venal, corrupt, irresponsible, hypocritical"[14] and visionless manner in which the new bourgeoisie, acting in an intermediary role to its foreign masters, expropriated from the people the fruits of independence. Achebe also succeeded in showing us how the national bourgeoisie was able to infect other groups in the society - especially the middle classes - with the deadly virus of "sharing-and-eating" the people's wealth.

Having succeeded in presenting such a powerful picture of neocolonialism, however, Achebe failed to properly locate the root causes of the problem and leaves us with only a superficial picture. Thus, capitalist exploitation - the expropriation of the surplus produced by the peasants and workers of the new nation - is regarded not as an economic, therefore a *political*, issue (i.e., involving relations between classes) but a *moral* one. We get from the narrative the very distinct impression that if the Nangas were better educated, more technocratic and professional, and had a higher sense of honour and integrity, the new nation would have run efficiently. The simple fact that what the Nangas and CO scramble for is a mere *ten* percent of a *hundred* percent which is carted away by imperialism, seems to be completely missed, or ignored by Achebe. Otherwise, Achebe would have realised that, since morality is a reflection of material reality, honesty, personal integrity and education may make a difference in the operations of government, but would never make neocolonialism deliver to the people the promises of independence.

Having missed, or chosen to ignore, the roots of the problem by seeing nothing basically wrong with the socio-economic system, Achebe turned around to blame the masses - the victims - for complicity. It may be true that the people, seeing the very few feasting on what belonged to all had become apathetic, but the exaggerated cynicism and complicity which Achebe associates with the masses is not only unconvincing in the context of the narrative, it looks more and more like an apology for, and a letting -off of anger at, the dismal failure of the national bourgeoisie to operate an efficient capitalist system, as its masters did for Western Europe.

It is against this background that Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* can be seen not only as a refreshing alternative, but a profound, even though fictional, analysis of Africa's neo-colonial reality, seen in the context of the past, as well as the post-independence struggles of its peoples against internal and external forms of domination. Ngugi not only makes a powerful presentation of the ways in which the Uhuru ideals of the independence struggles were betrayed, he demonstrates in a most effective manner, how the different paths of betrayal have created the different types of predators which formed the national bourgeoisie, and how this group of predators, unified through their common preoccupation - theft, ceaselessly tried to keep the people divided. Also, through Ngugi's more effective characterization, we are able to see how the bulk of the petit-bourgeoisie, split to the core by the contradictions of its very existence, is unable to lead the confrontation against the forces of the people's (including its own) domination.

Ngugi's narrative, unlike Achebe's, also succeeds not only in exposing the roots of the problems of neocolonial domination in capitalist exploitation, but in clearly indicating that the struggle for freedom is a task which the *victims themselves are fully capable* of *executing* under the leadership of the organised working class.

Chapter V

THE DEEPENING CRISES OF NEO-COLONIALISM AND VISIONS OF THE FUTURE:

Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*[1] and Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross*.[2]

5.01 The Deepening Crises of Neo-Colonialism

In *A Man of the People* (1966) and *Petals of Blood* (1977) Achebe and Ngugi had, within ten years of each other, taken hard, retrospective, looks at the quality of independence in Africa during the early post-colonial years, and had come out with damning assessments which showed how the new indigenous rulers betrayed the people's hopes and aspirations and installed a neo-colonial system of oppression. By the beginning of the third decade of independence, the neo-colonial system had began to experience very severe social, economic, cultural and political crises, on a scale which, at moments, threatened the bases of the continued existence of the new polities as corporate entities.

In the case of Nigeria, for instance, the type of voracious, dog-eat-dog, fights waged between members of the national bourgeoisie over the "national cake" as depicted in Achebe's *A Man of the People*, led to a very bitter 30-month civil war in 1967/70. The British, the French and the Americans saw this as a great opportunity to balkanise the country into small warring mini-states which would be easier to control, especially as huge quantities of crude oil and natural gas had already been discovered in the country's coastal region[3] . Patriotic forces in Nigeria,

with the support of like-minded forces in the rest of Africa, the Soviet Union and elsewhere, successfully defeated the forces of disintegration.

However, instead of vigorously directing the reunified national energies released by the successful conclusion of the war into the building of a more solid foundation for national independence and development, the opportunity was squandered. As the People's Liberation Party (PLP) observed in 1989,

> *"The neo-colonial ruling class took advantage of the massive increase in revenue from oil exports, and the general expansion of the economy, to transform itself into a dependent bourgeoisie proper - with vast property holding and bank balances in Nigeria and abroad."*[4]

By 1987 when Achebe wrote *Anthills of the Savannah* Nigeria had gone through four military regimes and two civilian governments, and all their promises had proved to be meaningless and empty: the people had remained more impoverished and the nation "more enslaved to foreign interests than it [had] ever been."[5] Thus, whereas between 1977 and 1986 the country exported goods worth N95 billion (approximately $95 billion), by 1988 Nigeria was "said to be completely bankrupt and sinking into a debt ... estimated at about N210 billion."[6] What was even worse, "transport, health services, and education virtually collapsed," and unemployment rose to over 60 per cent.[7]

The net effect of all this, as the PLP observed, is that

> *"not only are the great majority of the people of Nigeria getting poorer, but a large number - increasing every day - cannot find any employment at all. Not only are millions of hectares of fertile soil left*

fallow, but massive quantities of water -with great fishing, irrigation, hydro-electric, and shipping potential are allowed to drain away into the Atlantic Ocean, just as are billions of cubic feet of natural gas wastefully flared at the oil wells".[8]

According to the PLP, the source of this stark contradiction between the great potentials of the country and the abject poverty of its people is the neo-colonial system of domination, which has continued to be based on the export of raw commodities from Nigeria and the import of manufactures from Western European and Far Eastern capitalist countries. In this process, the wealth produced by the labour of Nigerian people is expropriated and taken out of the country "through private companies and public corporations, owned or managed by Nigerian business tycoons, technocrats, military officers, traditional rulers, and civilian bureaucrats and politicians. These parasites, collectively and individually, are agents of Western business corporations, banks, and governments..."[9]

The experience of Kenya also provides a good illustration of the deepening crises of neo-colonialism in Africa in the third decade of independence. Under President Jomo Kenyatta in the early 1960s, the myth was created by Kenya's imperialist masters in the West, of a prosperous, stable, multi-racial and liberal sanctuary for capitalist investment.[10] At that time, the emerging neo-colonial bourgeoisie allied to the Kenyatta-led Kenya African National Union (KANU) controlled both economic as well as political power.[11] As Victoria Brittain noted in a revealing article in 1982,[12]

"It was a time when economic buccaneers flourished, and new, corrupt ways of making money were devised by ingenious brains unchecked by the state, because they were the state. The world coffee and tea price boom, and a successful import substitution programme of industrialisation fed this expansionary period. Kenya became "a country of 10 millionaiares (sic) *and 10 million beggars", as the MP J.M. Kariuki... put it just before his assassination in 1975. The income inequities between the top 10% and the rest have become more marked each year... At the same time the economic realities of the invisible Kenya became gradually inescapable. A desperate land hunger worsened every year. With no ceilings on land holdings, multinational companies and a handful of individuals were able to maintain vast ranches and plantations with the complicity of those in power. Kenya still has 100 farms of over 800 acres and 13 of over 40,000."*[13]

By the time Ngugi published *The Devil on the Cross* in 1982[14] the seething anger of landless peasants had began to erupt in violent riots targeted at their oppressors, and urban discontent by the unemployed had also mounted to an unprecedented level.[15] This anger was fuelled by the fact that real wages had not only fallen considerably, but every year, about 250,000 graduates from the country's schools and universities trooped into the cities looking for non-existent jobs. Thus, "violence, theft, prostitution and despair" became "the everyday lot of those who live in the great sprawling shanty towns and squatter areas, a safe few kilometres

away from the prosperous world of central Nairobi, Mombassa or the isolated tourist lodges shown to foreign visitors"[16].

It was no wonder, therefore, that the large reserve army of the unemployed trooped out into the cities in their thousands in an orgy of celebration and violence when a radio broadcast on August 1,1982 announced the military overthrow of the Moi regime.[17] Although the *coup* did not succeed, it threw the regime into panic and greater repression, with over 1,500 killed and hundreds arrested and detained.[18] But the regime's alienation from the people only deepened, as the people themselves got more and more united and organised to oppose neo-colonial oppression.[19]

It is against the foregoing background that we shall proceed to analyse how Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'O have represented the deepening crises of neo-colonialism and how they perceive the future of their societies in *Anthills of the Savannah* and *Devil on the Cross*.

5.02 Achebe's Perceptions of the Deepening Crises of Neo- Colonialism and His Vision of Nigeria's Future in *Anthills of the Savannah*

In the opening chapter of his 1983 political manifesto[20], titled *The Trouble With Nigeria*, Achebe presented a thesis which was later to take the centre stage in *Anthills of the Savannah*:

> *"The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to*

the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership."[21]

Achebe further argued that the problem was not that Nigeria was incapable of producing responsible leaders who could lead the country to greatness by example; he cited the cases of General Murtala Muhammed and Mallam Aminu Kano as leaders who met up to the challenge. Rather, Achebe, argued, the problem was that the Nigerian educated elite, which was best placed to lead, had chosen to stay for "too long on the sidelines" and had therefore betrayed its "historic mission":

"Arduous as the task [of leadership] is, Nigeria's educated elite must understand that they have no choice but to address themselves to it or receive history's merciless indictment. All those enlightened and thoughtful Nigerians who wring their hands in daily anguish on account of our wretched performance as a nation must bestir themselves to the patriotic action of proselytising for decent and civilised political values. We have stood too long on the side-line.. Our inaction or cynical inaction are a serious betrayal of our education, of our historic mission and of succeeding generations who will have no future unless we save it now for them."[22]

These two related issues - of the quality of leadership and the role of the intelligentsia - are the central themes around which the complex narrative of *Anthills of the Savannah* revolves. Thus, the novel opens with a cabinet meeting chaired by a military Head of State, His Excellency, General Sam. The opening circumstances suggest that Sam had only recently become Head of State (by the grace of a military

coup) of a West African Country (there is mention of the harmattan) called Kangan, which is almost certainly Nigeria. The setting is the 1980s.

We immediately become aware of the problem of leadership which Achebe has emphasised in *The Trouble with Nigeria*. Both General Sam and the younger officers who overthrew the civilian regime and made him the Head of State, had absolutely neither a political agenda, nor an economic programme of action. Thus, Sam had to rally his intellectual friends and old boys at "Lord Lugard College" - Chris Oriko (graduate of the London School of Economics) and Ikem Osodi (graduate of the University of London) - and ask them, "What shall I do?" (p.12)

One of the courses of action Chris had suggested to General Sam was to appoint intellectuals into his government. At the cabinet meeting we see eleven of these "intelligent, educated men... the cream of our society and the hope of the black race" already, after two years in office, worshipping at the feet of His Excellency and behaving like spineless sychophants who are mortally afraid that they may say or do something which might cost them their positions. Chris, also a member of the cabinet with the portfolio of information, observed of his colleagues:

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

Encircled by courtiers, Gen. Sam gradually became a dictator, intolerant of contrary opinion. Thus, when Chris suggested that the Head of State should pay a visit to the Abazon region to see for himself the devastation drought had caused the people, Gen. Sam had refused, taking the irrational position that paying a visit to the region was going to create the image of a weak leader who easily gave into pressure. Even though this was a matter which had serious implications for the security of the government, none of the other cabinet members dared support Chris.

As Sam became more dictatorial and less dependent on either his friends or the cabinet for advice, he relied more and more on naked coercion, and the terrorist State Research Council (SRC) - a kind of secret police - became the major instrument of policy. Thus, we are told that striking railway workers and demonstrating students were shot by the police, and independent trade unions and co-operatives were banned (p.141). It does not come to us as a surprise, therefore, when we see the dictator acquiring a new circle of friends, referred to in the novel as "the new power brokers" (p.76)

One of the new power-brokers is the American girl, Miss Lou Cranford of the American United Press. We are introduced to Miss Lou at a dinner party at the Presidential Retreat, which was built by the overthrown civilian administration and refurbished by Sam's government at an "irresponsibly extravagant" cost (p.73). We are told that Miss Lou's "manner with His Excellency was .. outrageously familiar and domineering" (p.78). It was no wonder, therefore when Lou, with the obvious encouragement of the Head of State, gave the dinner party "a lecture on the need for the country to maintain its present (quite unpopular, needless to say) levels of

foreign debt servicing currently running at slightly more than fifty-one percent of total national export earning.. [a]s a *quid pro quo* for increased American aid in surplus grains for [the] drought provinces..." adding that "what .. must [be remembered] is that [Western] banks are not houses of charity. They are there to lend money at a fair and reasonable profit. If you deny them their margin of profit by borrowing and not paying back they will soon have to shut down their operation..." (pp 78-9)

Thus, apart from the regime's massive corruption which has been suggested by the extravagance in the contracts over the Presidential Retreat, we are now clearly being made aware of the regime's degrading subservience to very lowly placed representatives of Western capital.

It is significant to note, in this respect, the presence at the exclusive presidential dinner of Alhaji Abdul Mahmoud, the self-effacing, but very rich, powerful and ruthless Chairman of Kangan/American Chamber of Commerce. We are told by Chris, the Minister for information, that

> *"Rumour has it that [Alhaji Mahmoud] has in the last one year knocked all other Kangan millionaires into a cocked hat. Eight ocean liners, they say, two or three private jets; a private jetty... No customs official go near his jetty and so... he is the prince of smugglers. What else? Fifty odd companies, including a bank. Monopoly of government fertiliser imports... he may be fronting for [the Head of state]" (p.117)*

The bankruptcy of the new military leadership is thus complete. A dictatorship totally lacking in legitimacy and increasingly relying on its secret service to repress the people's legitimate demands finally comes out in its true nakedness as a vicious gang of looters who are being manipulated by international finance agencies.

If, as we have seen, the military is incapable of leading Nigeria to greatness, who would steer the ship of state? Achebe indicates in the *Anthills of the Savannah* that, even though a few, such as the spineless psychophants in the cabinet, have adopted "the cynical attitude that since you cannot beat them you must join them",[23] salvation for the people and the state still lies with the "educated elite", and he uses the medium of his intellectual characters in the narrative to make his point. These characters, three of whom are graduates of British Universities and one a students union leader, are: Ikem Osodi, the editor of the *National Gazette*, Chris Oriko, the Commissioner for Information; Beatrice Okoh, a Senior Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Finance, and Emmanuel Obete, the president of the Students Union of the University of Bassa.

Of these, however, it is through Nkem that Achebe chooses to make his strongest case for a leading role for the "educated elite", as well as present a vision plan for the future. Nkem is presented to us as the country's leading writer, the brightest boy in his class at secondary school and somebody whose opinion of himself is of a passionate defender of the poor and oppressed (p.141). Upon closer look, however, we see Nkem as a non-conformist, at times cynical and eccentric,

radical who leads a hedonistic and carefree life-style and who sometimes exhibits a patronising and condescending attitude towards the poor and the oppressed.

In some ways, Nkem can be said to have been cast in the image of Achebe's alter ego. Thus, when he was asked to speak at a lecture organised by the students' Union of the University of Bassa, Nkem took up issue with people who have criticised him as a bourgeois reformist (p.155) and elitist (p.157) writer. Talking very much in his master's voice, Nkem argued:

> *"The charge of elitism never fails to amaze me because the same people who make it will also criticise you for not prescribing their brand of revolution to the masses. A writer wants to ask questions. These damn fellows want him to give answers. Now tell me, can anything be more elitist, more offensively elitist, than someone presuming to answer questions that have not even been raised, for Christ's sake?... I cannot decree your pet, text-book revolution. I want instead to excite general enlightenment by forcing all the people to examine the condition of their lives... As a writer I aspire only to widen the scope of that self-examination. I don't want to foreclose it with a catchy, half-baked orthodoxy. My critics say: There is no time for your beautiful educational programme; the masses are ready and will be enlightened in the course of the struggle. And they quote Fanon on the sin of betraying the revolution. They do not realise that revolutions are betrayed just as much by stupidity, incompetence, impatience and precipitate action as by doing nothing at all."*

However, having attacked his critics for their stupidity in mouthing "half-baked" orthodoxies, and having pronounced that the duty of the writer is only to ask questions and not provide solutions, Nkem nevertheless proceeded to outline a vision plan based on what he called a "new radicalism" which should be embraced by the youth of his country:

> *"First and foremost, this radicalism must be clear-eyed enough to see beyond the present claptrap that will heap all our problems on the doorstep of capitalism and imperialism... please don't get one wrong. I do not deny that external factors are still at the root of our problem. But I maintain that even if external factors were at the root of all our problems we still must be ready to distinguish for practical purposes between remote and immediate causes." p.158)*

One of the immediate causes of the problems of the nation, according to Nkem, are the urban workers who "sabotage the nation by their unproductivity and fraud, and that way ensure that benefits of modern life will ever remain outside the dreams of the real victims of exploitation in rural villages." (p.159)

Nkem used the case of workers in public corporations to further illustrate his point:

> *"Let's take the Electricity Corporation of Kangan as one example out of many. What do we see? Chaotic billing procedures deliberately done to cover their massive fraud; illegal connections carried out or condoned by their own staff; theft of meters.. To blame all these things on imperialism and international capitalism as our modish radicals*

want us to do is, in my view, sheer cant and hamburg.. It's like going to arrest the village blacksmith every time a man hacks his fellow to death" (p.159).

Nkem cited other "immediate causes" such as the refusal of certain Youth Corp members to serve in remote villages which had no electricity; the buying and selling of votes during students union elections; tribal pressures on university authorities in order to secure irregular admissions; etc.

What is the solution? Nkem believes that the road to national "self redemption" lies in getting rid of "these things" through holding leaders to "responsible performance" (pp.150-1), probably as he *singly* tried to do and lost his life in the process. Thus, the question is, how would "these things" be gotten rid off? Achebe does not say; or, to put it differently, Achebe does not believe it is the duty of the writer to provide the answers; only to ask the questions.

However, a closer look at Nkem's lecture will reveal to us the kind of answers which Achebe is hiding behind the questions. For instance, when Nkem attacks urban workers for being unproductive and fraudulent, and thus constituting themselves into the real oppressors of rural villagers "who are the real victims of exploitation", what does it mean? The correct interpretation of this statement is clearly that, it is diversionary to heap the blame for Nigeria's underdevelopment on the neo-colonial capitalist system of exploitation and on imperialism because it can be shown that capitalism does work elsewhere, where the system is not clogged by so much fraud and indolence.

An extension of the same argument is, if the system were really made to work efficiently, and without fraud and with increased productivity, urban workers will get their fair wages and the surplus which they used to steal will be released to compensate the true victims who live in the rural villages. Now, even though it may, indeed, be true that many urban workers are fraudulent and unproductive, in what way does this make them the real exploiters of rural peasants? For, basic economics indicates that both workers and peasants are *producers* of wealth - the one inside factories and other capitalist enterprises and the other on land. There is nowhere in the capitalist system of production, distribution and exchange where any of the two classes is placed in a position to directly appropriate, i.e. *exploit*, the surplus of the other. It is therefore ridiculous to suggest that urban workers are the oppressors of rural villagers. The real issue, clearly, is that Achebe is angry at the Marxists who attack him for being a *bourgeois reformist*. Yet, what is bourgeois reformism if not the belief that if workers were less corrupt and more hardworking, if leaders such as General Sam were held down by followers to "responsible performance", etc., etc., we could have a decent capitalist system which works?

Again Nkem has said that it is escapist to blame the lack of performance of the Electricity Corporation on "imperialism and international capitalism" *(sic)*; that the reason for the lack of performance has to be sought in the large-scale corruption which takes place amongst the staff of the corporation. This argument sounds quite reasonable, except that it forecloses the real possibility that even if the workers were to imbibe high moral values and therefore discontinue their stealing, the Electricity Corporation could still be grounded, or held to ransom for *imperialist* reasons - i.e.,

for economic, political or geo-strategic interests of the home countries of the multinational companies which produce and sell the turbines, transformers, spares, etc., which the corporation requires to keep functioning.

What clearly comes out of all this is Achebe's reluctance or inability to look at the basic social relations of production, distribution and exchange which provide the foundation upon which is built politics, morality, etc. Thus, Achebe seems to believe that the phenomena of imperialism and capitalist exploitation are basically *ideological* issues. Thus, even though he sees, and represents very well, the neo-colonial relationships that exist between African leaders and their Western European masters, he locates the problem only at the *formal* level; he tends to believe it is one of the weakness, purposelessness, or poor moral quality, of leadership. Thus, if Nigeria were to have good leaders, i.e. well-educated, motivated, and selfless individuals such as Chris, Nkem, Beatrice and apprentice-intellectuals like the students' leader, Emmanuel, it would become a great power in the next millennium.[24] But the *infrastructure* of *social relationships* which would make it possible for such a leadership to take the country to the promised land, Achebe's vision takes for granted or simply fails to see.

5.03 Ngugi's Perceptions of the Deepening Crises of Neo Colonialism and His Vision of Kenya's Future in *Devil on the Cross*

In his latest collection of essays titled, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*[25] Ngugi brings to the centre stage the twin issues of both the role that language plays in the continuing imperialist domination of Africa, as well as

the role it could play in the liberation of African peoples from this system of domination.

Writing in the 'preface' to the book Ngugi argues that if it was the gun which made possible the take over of Africa's natural resources by colonial invaders and which "effected the political captivity" of the owners of these resources, "it was language which held captive" the cultures, values and thus the minds of Africans. This is the case because, Ngugi further explains, language has basically two functions. The first, is that language acts as a means of communication; but the second and vitally more important function is that language is "the repository of a people's culture and history". Thus, if a people can represent themselves only by using someone else's language, then their own distinct identity and particular historical experiences become irrelevant, and the people become "irrelevant to themselves", and begin to see themselves only through someone else's mirror. The net result is that the people become mentally dependent on foreign culture. It is this most pernicious form of dependence which Ngugi has termed mental imperialism.[26]

If, as Ngugi has shown, language has remained the most effective weapon of domination in the arsenal of imperialism, then the most effective means by which the dominated can become aware of the real nature and the full extent of their own domination and mobilise themselves to fight against this domination, must also be language - *their own* language:

> *"I believe that African writers must ... return to the roots in the lives of peasants and workers. Doing so means that we shall necessarily be confronted with the issues of language... of how we can meaningfully*

> *join hands with the [peasants and workers] to transform the social conditions of our being... [for] if our audience is composed of peasants and workers, then it seems to me that we must write in the languages of the peasants and workers of Africa. We cannot write in foreign languages unspoken and unknown by peasants and workers in our communities and pretend that we are writing for, and somehow communicating with, those peasants and workers...*[27]

Devil on the Cross is an attempt by Ngugi to face the problem squarely, by writing the story of moribund neo-colonialism in Kenya and suggesting a vision of the future in Gikuyu, one of the languages of Kenyan peasants and workers. Thus, originally written as *Caitani Mutharab-ini*, the novel adapts the form of the oral narrative, with its rich and effective stock of anecdotes, sayings, proverbs and double-imageries.

The "Devil", for instance, is a double-imagery. In all religious systems, the Devil is the mythological Lucifer, Satan, the Beast the One-Eyed Ogre: he is a demon whose stock-in-trade is evil and whose main pre-occupation is to waylay men and women, debase their humanity and generally build hell on earth. In *Devil on the Cross* the peasants and workers came to discover that the Devil is not a myth, it is real. They realised that the source of all evil is the international capitalist system and it had its own disciples in their midst: men and women who worship at the shrine of the god of money, and whose sole profession is the stealing of the product of the people's collective sweat and blood.[28]

Similarly, we learn from the narrative that the imageries often used in stories told to the young in the fields at day time or by the fireside at night - imageries of the witty young man or woman pitched against the man-eating, one-eyed Ogre; of the weak but clever hare against the brutish lion; of the tiny but crafty spider against the oppressive king, and the poor but hardworking producer against the wicked thief - that all these imageries contain a subtle political message: they reflect the good, as well as the evil, in society, and are intended to teach the young to hate and resist evil.

Thus, "good" is used in the narrative to refer to collective well-being, and 'Evil, to indicate destructive, anti-social behaviour. For Ngugi, good and evil are not abstract attributes but concrete earthly phenomena. Muturi, a worker character in the story, argues:

> *"the nature of God is the image of the good we do here on earth. The nature of Satan is the nature of the evil we do here on earth. The question is this: What are evil actions, and what are good actions...? There are two kinds of man: he who lives by his own sweat and he who lives by the sweat of others" (p.57)*

In another passage, Muturi uses the images of the heart to graphically represent the central crisis of neo-colonialism in Africa:

> *"there is a difference between ... a good heart and an evil heart.. Our lives are a battlefield on which is fought a continuous war between the forces that are pledged to confirm our humanity and those determined to dismantle it; those who strive to build a protective wall around it,*

and those who wish to pull it down .. those whose aim is to open our eyes, to make us see the light and look to tomorrow, asking ourselves about the future of our children, and those... encouraging us to care only for our stomachs today, without thinking about the tomorrow of our country. It is a war without spectators. For each man is part of the forces that have been recruited for creating, building, making our humanity grow and blossom in order to... create our own Heaven, thus taking on the nature of God - these are the forces of the clan of producers; or he is part of the forces of destruction, of dismantling, of harassing and oppressing the builders and the creators, the forces that seek to suppress our humanity, turning us into beasts in order that we should create our own Hell, thus taking on the nature of Satan - these are the forces of the clan of parasites... Therefore there are two hearts: the heart built by the clan of parasites, the evil heart, and the heart built by the clan of producers, the good heart" (pp.53-4).

Thus, peasants and workers, who toil with their hands, bodies and energies to create commodities and cultivate crops thereby nurturing society, belong to the clan of producers who have good hearts. The ungodly, corrupt, rich and powerful oppressors in the society belong to the evil clan, the fellowship of the Devil.

Appropriately, the plot of the narrative is centred around a Devil-sponsored competition in a "Thieves and Robbers Den" in Kenya. The competition is organised to choose "seven Experts in Modern Theft and Robbery" with prizes guaranteed in bank loans and directorships of finance houses, and the occasion is "to

commemorate a visit by foreign guests from an organisation for the thieves and robbers of the Western world, particularly from America, England, Germany, France, Italy, Sweden and Japan, called the International Organisation of Thieves and Robbers." (p.78)

Ngugi uses the character of each of his seven competitors to illustrate different aspects of the crises of the diseased and dying neo-colonial system in Kenya. The case of Gitutu wa Gataanguru, the first competitor, is a good example. From his description, we are made to visualise a disease infested, Jigger-like, man-eating Ogre:

" Gitutu had a belly that protruded so far that it would have touched the ground had it not been supported by the braces that held up his trousers. It seemed as if his belly had absorbed all his limbs and all the other organs of his body. Gitutu had no neck - at least, his neck was not visible. His arms and legs were short stumps. His head had shrunk to the size of a fist...He panted as he talked, like a person carrying a heavy load." (p.99).

From his testimony, we learn that Gitutu learnt the principles of theft from his father who, as a black member of a native tribunal during colonial rule, had manipulated the law and used it to grab other people's land. It was therefore not surprising that Gitutu was convinced that the most cunning way to steal was through land speculation:

"I looked this way and that, and I saw that the greatest appetite in the country was thirst and hunger for land. I asked myself this: Hunger

multiplied by thirst - what's the answer? I took out the pen and paper of the heart, and I calculated thus:

> *Hunger and thirst = famine. Famine among the masses = wealth for a man of cunning... The loss of the masses is the gain of the few. One portion and another portion, seized from this and that hand, become a whole meal in the belly of him who grabs from the poor" (pp.104-5)*

Having made a few millions by selling "acres of stones and thorns" to the land hungry poor and engaging in smuggling, Gitutu's ambition is to trap air, send it abroad for packaging and return it as "*imported air*" to be sold to the masses:

> *"... because the technology of foreigners is very advanced! And then it would be sent back to us here labelled made in U.S.A.; made in Western Europe; made in Japan; This Air is made Abroad: and other similar ads!" (p.107)*

Farcical as it seems, the message Ngugi wants to put across is to show us a neo-colonial bourgeoisie which is not engaged in the production of anything of value, and which is also bereft even of viable ideas about how to continue robbing the people.

Kihaahu wa Gatheeca is another member of the band of robbers and blood suckers - but of a slightly different cast from Gitutu. Soon after setting out on his journey on the highway of self-seeking individualism, Kihaahu realised that holding public office in the state is the surest ticket to theft and robbery, so he bought his way into a local government council and arranged to become the Chairman of its Housing Committee:

"I can remember one time when the council demolished some shanties at Runwa-ini. The plan was to erect a thousand houses there instead. The money was loaned to the council by an Italian bank. But, of course, it has first given one a small backhander of about 2,000,000 shillings. I put the money in my account and knew that the campaign money had been repaid. Now... for the returns on my investment in the elections... Anybody who wanted a council house first had to buy me a cup of tea worth 2,000 shillings. I made another 2,000,000 that way... These days I don't wait for the council before I pocket titbits. I have teamed up with some Italian foreigners and have formed a construction company... It is my company that usually wins tenders from the council".p.116)

Kihaahu's long-term ambition, we further learn, is to one day build and hire out to the masses "houses the size of a nest", which would be constructed in such a way that they can be folded and carried about on shoulders. Again, absurd as Kihaahu's future plans are, the point Ngugi is putting across is the same as in the case of the first competitor: a neo-colonial bourgeoisie which is not, and is not capable of becoming, a captain of industry; a bourgeoisie which is so lacking in self confidence that it cannot even run a housing construction company without the helping hands of its masters.

However, even amongst this decadent band of land speculators, smugglers and contractors, there are to be found characters like Mwireri wa Mukiraai, who

advocate self-reliant theft, or the doctrine of "patting your stomach alone in a corner". A believer in national capitalism, Mwireri argues:

> *"... Modern theft is of two kinds. There is the kind of theft that is domestic or, lets say, a national affair. In this case, expert thieves and robbers of a given country steal from the workers and peasants of their own country. But there is another kind of theft that involves foreigners. In this case, the thieves and robbers of one country go to another country and steal from the masses there and take the loot back to their own country. This means that such thieves and robbers steal both from their own workers and peasants and from the workers and peasants of other countries. Such foreigners are able to feed in two worlds. Theirs and other people's ... these foreigners are, of course, aided in their enterprise by bands of local thieves and robbers."*
>
> *(p.165)*

It is Mwireri's firm conviction that they, the "national experts in theft and robbery", "should not join hands with foreigners to help them seize our national wealth and carry it back to their own countries, leaving us only a few crumbs." Rather, the "national" experts should be given a free hand to exploit their "ten million poor [and] plant the roots of ten national millionaires" (p.167).

However, Mwireri's own attempt at starting factories for manufacturing skin lightening creams and condoms in competition with foreign made goods proved a failure, as foreign firms and their local agents ganged up against him and threw him out of the market through the use of several tactics including underselling his

products, dumping out-dated machinery on him or refusing to sell him spares. At the end of the day he had to go back to becoming an agent of the foreign companies.

Inspite of the fact that from his own testimony, Mwireri has shown that national capitalism was not an option the neo-colonial bourgeoisie was capable of handling, he was all the same to pay for this effrontery with his life. Apologising on behalf of Kenyan thieves to their foreign guests for Mwireri's `insolence', the Master of ceremony declared:

> *"Distinguished guests, we are your slaves. You have come back to see what we have done with the talents you bequeathed to us in grateful recognition of the services we rendered you in suppressing those of our people who used to call themselves freedom fighters. That is good. I would like to remind you that even today we have continued to hoodwink our people into believing that you did actually leave the country. That is why we don't call you foreigners or imperialists, or white robbers. We call you our friends. Therefore I beseech you please.. Don't worry about Mwireri Mukiraai. We shall take care of him." (p.174)*

As the competition proceeded, it became very clear to the workers and peasants that the Devils are really not mythical beings; they are real people, those people with barren bellies, swollen not by disease, but fattened by the fruit of the sweat and blood of producers. The real Devils, the workers further realise, are those who occupy the houses built by workers, leaving the builders out in the rain;

they are those who eat the food grown by peasants, while these peasants sleep with their stomachs gnawing through the night; they are those who put their children in exclusive schools built by workers while the workers' own children go struggling for food with pigs and goats on rubbish heaps and in dust bins.

As the narrative draws to a close, we see the workers, peasants, the unemployed and students determined to join hands to chase away this Devils, but they realise that fighting the predatory band of robbers was going to be a long and difficult task. First of all, the rich are also powerful: they have the coercive forces of 'law and order' on their side. Thus, fighting against neo-colonial oppression calls for great personal sacrifices, including the sacrifice of lives. Muturi, one of the leaders of the worker put it this way:

> *"... I will not run away. We shall not run away. For us workers, there is no turning back - where could we run?... I'm sure that the system of theft and robbery will never end in this country as long as people are scared of guns and clubs. We must struggle and fight against the culture of fear. And there is only one cure: a strong organisation of the workers and peasants of the land, together with those whose eyes and ears are now open and alert." (p.205)*

Another obstacle which the workers saw on their way was that the abilities and potential of their womenfolk, so crucial for success in the fight against oppression, are locked up in the kitchen and the bedroom. However, already, we could see through the transformation of Wariinga (the heroin of the narrative) from

a self-pitying sex-victim to a confident, self-reliant and highly competent automobile engineer who throws her lot with the workers, that this obstacle was surmountable.

Ngugi's vision of the future of Kenya is thus decidedly proletarian. He has painted for us the picture of a moribund neo-colonial system which is so impotent that it cannot survive. We see a neo-colonial bourgeoisie which neither invests in agriculture, nor in manufacturing or other sectors where real values are produced. Instead, we see a class of agents, smugglers and speculators who depend entirely on the commissions that they receive as gate keepers for foreign companies. On the other hand, we see the peasants and workers increasingly getting united and determined to fight to end the neo-colonial system of oppression and take power themselves directly.

5.04 The Contrasting Perceptions of Achebe and Ngugi

In the *Anthills...* we see Achebe once again returning to the theme of leadership in the neo-colony, which to a large extent, had pre-occupied his mind in *A Man of the People.* This time, however, his argument is clearer and more forcefully put: there is nothing *basically wrong* with the socio-economic formation in Nigeria; the problem is only the absence of quality leadership and the inability of the people to `hold down' leaders to "responsible performance."

However, Achebe tried to show that the problem was surmountable as long as the Nigerian educated elite, whom he regarded as best placed and best equipped to lead, are willing to make the sacrifices which may be necessary in fulfilling their "historic mission" of 'saving' Nigeria and taking it to greatness *on behalf of the people.*

In placing the problem "squarely" on "leadership", Achebe made it very clear in the narrative that it is infantile and diversionary to heap the blame for Nigeria's underdevelopment on the neo-colonial capitalist system of domination and exploitation because the massive scale of theft and fraud and the low productivity of Nigerian workers have prevented the system from functioning properly. Thus, were the system to be operated on the basis of honesty, hardwork and responsible performance, all the "trouble with Nigeria" will be solved.

We have tried to show that Achebe's argument is mere wishful thinking, built on top of an inability or reluctance to look at the basic social relations of production, distribution and exchange, which constitute the basis of morality, politics, etc. Thus, we concluded that, indeed, the critics he had so bitterly attacked for calling him a bourgeois reformist are, on the basis of the evidence, quite correct. For, even though he sees and tries to represent the neo-colonial relationships that exist between African leaders and their Western masters, he locates the problem only at the formal level of morality, not at the crucial level of the infrastructure of social relationships which produce exploitation and encourage immorality.

In *Devil on The Cross*, on the other hand, we see Ngugi, using the form of the oral narrative and writing in the language of the people, effectively communicating the story of a diseased and dying neo-colonialism in Kenya. In a society where the rich and the powerful regularly and cynically appropriate the discourse of the scriptures and use it as an instrument of deception and domination, Ngugi turned the tables and came out with an interpretation which associates evil, darkness, sorcery, theft, dishonour, disease and avarice with the possessor of wealth,

and good, righteousness, honour, generosity, vitality, productivity and beauty with the producers of wealth and victims of the wealthy.

As he had argued in *Petals of Blood*, Ngugi has remained clearly well-focused and unequivocal about where and with whom the solution to the problems of the diseased neo-colonial system lies. With a bourgeoisie which, as Fanon described with such prophetic vision, has remained cynically and contemptibly underdeveloped and completely dependent on commissions from its masters in the West, the way forward to a free, productive, creative and just future for Africa lies with the organised working class. Ngugi indicates that although the struggle will be long, painful and hard, victory will be assured through *collective* determination, collective sharing of tasks and greater unity with all other progressive class forces.

Footnotes

1. Chinua Achebe, *Anthills of the Savannah*, London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1978.

2. Ngugi wa Thiong'O, *Devil on the Cross*, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1982.

3 *People's Liberation Party*: Mission, Principles, Programme, Constitution, Code of Conduct, National Headquarters, Lagos, 1989, p.8

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid., p.7*

10. Victoria Brittain, *'Preface'*, in Ngugi Wa Thiong'O, *Barrel of A Pen*, London: New Beacon Books, 1983, p.iv.

11. *Ibid.*, pp.iv-v.

12. *ibid.* The 'Preface' originally appeared as an article in the November 1982 issue of *Le Monde Diplomatique*; see *ibid.*, p.ixn.

13. *Ibid.*, p.v

14. The original Gikiyu edition was published in 1980 by Heinemann Educational Books (East Africa).

15. ***Ibid.***

16. ***Ibid.***

17. ***Ibid.***

18. *Ibid.*, piii

19. Ngugi, *loc.cit* p.3

[20] Achebe leaves no one in any doubt that his book is directed at the Nigerian electorate on the eve of the 1983 presidential election. Urging the electorate not to vote for Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo, whom he referred to as "a couple of tired old men who apparently see the Nigerian presidency in the 1980s as a pension and gratuity for services they rendered to the nation thirty years ago", Achebe argued that "the electorate should find the courage to tell them that...they must not be allowed to block our vision of the present, or mortgage our children's chances of success in the twenty-first century." See *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co., 1983, p.60.

21. *Ibid., p.1*

22. *Ibid.*, p.53

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*, p.8.

25. Ngugi wa Thiong'O, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*, London, James Currey and Heinemann, 1993.

26. *Ibid.*

27. `Ngugi: Literature in Africa,' Interview by Amootiwa Irumba, in, *Staffrider*, vol. 4 No.2, July/August 1981, p.36.

28. In this section, I have relied heavily on Sa'idu Adamu, *'The Devil Crucified'*, review article in *The Analyst*, vol. III, No.5, September-October 1988, pp.31-33.

Chapter VI

CONCLUSION: THE CONTRASTING POLITICAL MANIFESTOS OF ACHEBE AND NGUGI

6.01 Assumptions

In the introduction, we argued that literature is all about politics and also that writers, like all other artists, are partisans who seek to persuade their audiences to take sides with them in maintaining or changing power relations in line with, and generally on behalf of, the interests of certain classes in their societies. Thus, even though the novel deprives the writer of direct physical contact with the audience, and all the theatrical and emotion-whipping opportunities such contact avails the conventional politician who climbs a platform, we contended that the African novel still provided a powerful and effective framework for the dissemination of *manifestos* which condition people to action in defence of, or in opposition to, certain forms of the distribution of power in the society.

Basing ourselves on these premises, we proceeded to make the assumption that literary texts in general, and the novel in particular, were a rich data source for African political scientists especially when the texts were studied and analysed in terms of what they revealed about social, political and economic relationships. We assumed further that, studied this way, literary texts would usefully compliment our conventional data sources and potentially contribute new information, correct biases in existing knowledge and enrich or modify what we learn by other methods.

Accordingly, we proposed to test our assumptions through a comparative content analysis of selected novels of Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'O to find out what the novels would reveal about the political platforms of the writers with regard to the colonial experience and the anti-colonial struggle in Africa; the perceptions of independence and the politics of neo-colonialism, as well as the deepening crises of neo-colonialism and the vision of Africa's future.

6.02 Approach

In chapter II, we reviewed the two major approaches to the study of literature in Africa. We showed that the earliest attempts at studying African literature, the arts-for-arts-sake school of thought, separated literature from politics and the literary text from its social and historical setting. According to this approach, the study of literature should concentrate on the text itself and the assessment of the mastery of the artist in such things as plot construction, characterisation, theme exposition, stylistic skills and language mastery. We argued that, contrary to its own epistemological assumptions, the very act of isolating the text from its social and historical setting and focusing merely on its *form* and the *craftsmanship* of the writer was itself a *political act* because, try as he would, the writer could not extricate himself from the cultural environment which nurtured him and his creative talent: he would necessarily speak *for* somebody *to* somebody.

Opposed to the arts-for-arts' sake school is the materialist, utilitarian, school which emphasises that in studying literature we should try to find out the social and *political* function that it serves for both the writer as well as the society. We showed that many African writers themselves - including the two under study - have adopted

this approach because it allowed them to respond to important issues about the historical, political, cultural and economic circumstances of their societies.

In concluding chapter II, we indicated that our own approach in this study was the 'unified approach', essentially an adaptation of the materialist, marxist approach. In this approach, we focused attention on the social content of literature and also paid due attention to artistic mastery and emphasised on finding out from the texts the important revelations they would make about class society. Similarly, our analytical strategy was to focus on learning what the texts would say about power relationships with reference to our selected themes and at the same time situate and study the texts within the context of the actual historical experiences of the relevant societies as well as the ongoing debates on the interpretation of the texts.

6.03 The Contrasting Manifestos: On Colonialism and the Anti-Colonial Struggle

In chapter III, we began to see in outline form the differences in the political perceptions of Achebe and Ngugi. From our analyses of how the two authors approached the theme of colonialism and the anti-colonial struggle, we first of all noticed that both writers have succeeded to a large extent in rescuing what they regarded as the truths about their peoples' pre-colonial history which had hitherto been falsified by the ideologues of imperialism. They both demonstrated that African

peoples had distinct identities and a rich cultural past which were trampled upon and distorted by colonial conquest.

However, we also noticed significant differences in approach, emphasis and vision. In Achebe's approach, we noticed that he seemed satisfied, in *Things Fall Apart*, with a mere socio-historical presentation - telling the story of the past as credibly as possible. We learnt that pre-colonial Igbo society was culturally rich, it had poetry and it was beautiful - with all its imperfections. But Achebe only vaguely suggested, but did not dwell on, what Ime Ikiddeh had referred to as "the economic aspect of the confrontation with Europe".[1]

Ngugi, on the other hand, de-emphasised the socio-historical account of the pre-colonial past in *Weep Not Child* (although he took up this issue in some detail in *Petals of Blood*) and went, head-long and well-armed with historical and economic data, into demonstrating the impact of colonial occupation on the lives of African peasant producers and showed why the issue of land, its ownership and control, was central in defining both the nature of the colonial occupation as well as the nationalist response. Although still only hazily formulated, we could clearly see that Ngugi's sympathies were with the militant peasant struggle for land and freedom.

On the other hand, we saw that Achebe's attitude towards militant anti-colonial struggle was ambivalent at best, and unsympathetic at worst. We also observed that some critics, such as Ime Ikiddeh, have attempted to excuse Achebe's ambivalence by arguing that the nature of colonialism in Nigeria and Kenya were different; that in Kenya the land issue was a life-and-death affair, and Ngugi grew up in the shadow of this life-and-death (Mau Mau) struggle by Kenyan peasants to

reclaim their land and independence. In the case of Nigeria, the argument went on, colonialism did not take a settler form, and the peasants were allowed to keep their land. This may be true, but then, Nigerian peasants *also lost* their autonomy and the power of self-determination which, as we saw in Okonkwo's heroic response, was also a life-and-death matter.

Achebe's contrasting of Okonkwo with Obierika, who was presented as an astute, level-headed elder, and his portrayal of Okonkwo as a tragic hero who fell out of tune with the cultural and political rhythm of his people is thus a clever device to hide the writer's real bourgeois nationalist sympathies for the likes of Obierika, who chose the path of non-confrontation and accommodation with colonial rule, and Nwoye, who was quick to see the opportunity for the Ibo-cherished values of individual achievement which was opened up by the missionary school.

According to M.J.C. Echeruo, like Nwoye, Achebe himself grew up at a time when having a university education was regarded as the highest ambition of the "modern Igbo man of scant means." Those who succeeded in acquiring this education, we were told, developed the attitude of facing "modernity without anger".[2] What was "modernity" in the 1940s and 1950s if not colonialism?

In any case, we argued that it could be shown that Achebe also grew up in the shadow of, but failed to represent, the militant anti-colonial struggles of the market women of Aba and Owerri in 1929; the workers agitations of September 1941; the general strike of August 1945 and the activism of the Zikists in 1946-51. More seriously, Achebe, writing at the end of the 1950s, could not have claimed

ignorance of the militant and popular anti-colonial Onitsha market literature which flourished very close to his place of birth a decade earlier.

Thus, in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* we began to see the clear outline of a bourgeois nationalist manifesto, more concerned with meticulously teaching the facts-as-they-are, but failing to see the crucial meanings behind the interconnections of the facts. On the other hand, in Ngugi's *Weep Not Child*, we began to see the outlines of a militant nationalist agenda sympathetic to the struggles of peasants and workers.

6.04 The Contrasting Manifestos: On Independence and the Politics of neo-colonialism

In chapter IV, we saw how both Achebe and Ngugi succeeded in very effectively demonstrating the sham nature of the independence achieved as well as exposing the decadent character of the neo-colonial bourgeoisie which took over power from the white colonial masters.

Achebe, for instance, used the character of Chief Nanga to great effect, and succeeded in showing how predatory, irresponsible and visionless the new ruling class was. Achebe also showed how the neo-colonial ruling class promoted a culture of corruption which permeated sections of the wider society.

We argued, however, that having succeeded in making such a powerful presentation of the *form* of neo-colonialism, Achebe failed to penetrate to the roots of the problem; at the end, we were left with only a superficial picture.

Capitalist exploitation, which was the objective of colonial domination and the main root cause of the problems of the new nation, was presented as an issue of

moral choice. The impression came through very strongly in the narrative that if the Nangas were better educated, more technocratic and had a higher sense of honour and integrity, the new nation would have run efficiently and manoeuvred through its problems. The simple fact that what the Nangas so voraciously fought over were mere commissions out of the chunk of the surplus expropriated and taken out by imperialist companies, was largely ignored by Achebe. Achebe also failed to see that morality was a reflection of socio-economic, material, reality. Thus, whereas personal integrity and education may make a difference in the operations of government, they would never make neo-colonialism deliver the promises of independence to the people.

Having failed to see the roots of the problem, Achebe turned around and blamed the victims - the masses - for allowing themselves to be exploited, debased, etc., through their apathy, cynicism and even complicity. We concluded that Achebe's characterisation of the masses as cynical and collaborative was, in the circumstances of the narrative, not only dubious, but more like an apology and a cover-up for the dismal failure of the neo-colonial bourgeoisie to operate an efficient capitalist system, as its masters did for Western Europe.

Ngugi, on the other hand, provided us with a powerful alternative analysis of the betrayal of the nationalist struggle for independence by a band of parasites, local and external. Ngugi painted a picture in which we saw how the different paths leading up to this betrayal had created the different strata of the neo-colonial bourgeoisie. We also saw how the different strata of the bourgeoisie, all united in

their betrayal, ceaselessly tried to keep the people divided through the deployment of different strategies, including tribalism and religion.

Through Ngugi's more effective characterisation, we saw how the bulk of the middle classes, chained by the contradictions of their existence, could not see the problem clearly and thus provide oppositional leadership against the forces of domination.

In the end, we saw that Ngugi was able to convincingly show that only the oppressed themselves could free themselves from neo-colonial and imperialist domination through the leadership of the organised working class.

6.05 The Contrasting Manifestos: On the Deepening Crises of neo-colonialism and the Vision of the Future

In the *Anthills of the Savannah*, we saw Achebe once again returning to the theme of leadership in the neo-colony, which, to a large extent, had pre-occupied his attention in *A Man of the People*. This time, however, the argument was less ambiguous and more forcefully put: there was *nothing basically wrong* with the socio-economic formation in Nigeria; the problem was "simply and squarely" the absence of quality leadership and the inability of the people to 'hold down' leaders to "responsible performance."

Achebe argued, however, that the problem was surmountable as long as the Nigerian "educated elite", whom he regarded as the best placed and best equipped to lead, was willing to make the sacrifices which may be necessary in fulfilling its "historic mission" of taking Nigeria to greatness.

In placing the problem "squarely" on "leadership", Achebe made it very clear in the narrative that it was infantile and diversionary to heap the blame for Nigeria's underdevelopment on the neo-colonial capitalist system of domination and exploitation because the massive scale of theft and fraud and the low productivity of Nigerian workers never gave a chance to the system to function properly. Thus, were the system to be operated on the basis of honesty, hard work and responsible performance, all the "trouble with Nigeria" would be solved.

We tried to show that Achebe's argument was mere wishful thinking, built on top of an inability or reluctance to look at the basic social relations of production, distribution and exchange, which constituted the foundation of morality, politics, etc. We therefore concluded that, indeed, the critics Achebe had so bitterly attacked in the novel for calling him a bourgeois reformist were, on the basis of the evidence, quite correct after all. For even though he saw and tried to represent the neo-colonial relationships which existed between African leaders and their Western masters, he located the problem only at the formal level of morality, not at the crucial level of the infrastructure of social relationships which produced exploitation and encouraged immorality.

In *Devil on the Cross*, on the other hand, we saw Ngugi using the form of the African oral narrative and writing in the language of the people, effectively communicating the story of a diseased and dying neo-colonialism in Kenya. In a society where the rich and the powerful regularly and cynically appropriate the discourse of the holy scriptures and deploy it as a weapon of deception and domination, Ngugi brilliantly turned the tables and came out with a refreshing

interpretation which associated evil, darkness, sorcery, murder, theft, dishonour, avarice and disease with the possessor of wealth, and good, righteousness, humanity, honour, generosity, vitality, productivity, beauty and sharing with the producers of wealth and victims of the wealthy.

As he had argued in *Petals of Blood*, Ngugi remained clearly well - focused and unequivocal about where and with whom the solution to the diseased neo-colonial system lay. The neo-colonial bourgeoisie was incapable of producing things of value; indeed, its predisposition rejected any suggestions that it should attempt to begin to transform itself into a real bourgeoisie. The way forward to a free, just, productive and creative Africa was therefore, according to Ngugi, clear: the organised struggle of the oppressed classes to overthrow the neo-colonial system of exploitation and domination. Achebe and Ngugi have thus presented us with two contrasting, but partisan, political manifestos. Achebe's platform is clearly bourgeois nationalist and reformist, insisting that it is possible to have an efficient capitalist system which can provide for all and take Nigeria to greatness in the next millennium, so long as it is led by a well educated, morally principled and responsible elite. We have, however shown in our analyses that this position is untenable because it ignores the roots of the problems of exploitation, domination and underdevelopment at the basic level of social relations of production, distribution and exchange.

Ngugi's manifesto, on the other hand, is clearly based on the class interests of workers and peasants, and is aimed at mobilising these classes to rise up, organise and overthrow neo-colonialism and the system of imperialist exploitation and

domination which it represents, and construct in their place a democratic and productive socialist system based on the principles of creative sharing, caring and joying.

Footnotes

1. Ime Ikiddeh, 'The Novelist as Historian' in B. King and K. Ogungbesan (eds.) *A Celebration of Black and African Writing*, Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press and Oxford University Press, 1975, p.212.

2. M.J.C. Echeruo, '*Chinua Achebe*', in B. King and K. Ogungbesan, *ibid.*, p.158.

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