

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Anthills of the Savannah* and Postcolonial Authenticity

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ABSTRACT

Authenticity is raised by Sartre as a fundamental issue in human existence. It becomes greatly complicated for human existence under colonialism, a situation which is not automatically remedied by political independence. Countries that have passed through colonial tutelage typically have a double inheritance: the cultural tradition which predated colonization and persisted alongside colonialism as the latter was setting up a formal sector aligned to its own interests, and the value system of the colonizing power which becomes diffused in a variety of ways within the indigenous group. Hybridity is one of the consequences of this dual heritage, creating uncertainty as to where and how to ascertain authenticity among the subjects. In Chinua Achebe's *Things fall apart and Anthills of the savannah*, colonialism yields characters who affiliate to the outsider, as they see in the newcomers an access route to power. It also unveils subjects who cling to the cultural tradition and become definable by opposition to the newcomer. There are others who may be said to be in the middle, effectively rendered rootless by colonialism. It is shown in this paper that the possibility of a synthesis and formation of a new and autonomous identity is expressed within this last group, since they are much more willing to take whatever they need from any source for the formation of this new identity. For these authenticity is evolving and may only be predicated upon the identity autonomously constructed.

Keywords: authenticity, cultural tradition, identity, moderation, prereflective unconscious, symposium

INTRODUCTION

Some of the issues familiar in sociological and protest theories commonly applied in discussion of Chinua Achebe's works also occur in the theory of Postcolonialism; for example, ethnic identity and colonial restructuring of indigenous communities and consequent resistance. But those older methods of criticism of African literature should be kept apart. Postcolonial theories rather 'deconstruct and reimagine personal, cultural and national identities' (Bohata, 2004, p. 2), while the sociological and protest approaches tend to search for patterns of correspondence to socio-political realities. Postcolonial theory also recognizes that changes under colonization and its immediate aftermath create an ethos and a moral environment which may shape a production without calling attention to itself. This is an aspect that sociological/protest studies typically give no attention to, and freely cite the works published around the time of independence and the struggle for independence for their purposes. But they seem to have difficulties with works

like *Anthills of the savannah*, as is highlighted in 'Need that throbs at the heart: Solidarity in Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the savannah* (Akwanya, 2013, p. 487). Such a difficulty is not observed in the postcolonial approach.

As a political discourse Postcolonialism is more or less contemporary with the mainly technology-driven worldwide phenomenon called globalization, or 'new internationalism' as Bhabha calls it (1994, p. 5), but it seems to be committed to the affirming of difference. It not only aims to bring to the surface a contrast between north and south, between the rich and powerful nations of the world and the poor and powerless, but also to show that the disadvantaged position of the south and recently independent countries is as a result of impositions put into effect and maintained through force which facilitated expropriation and exploitation of the colonial powers, mainly in Europe. As Fanon observed long ago, 'the colonial regime owes its legitimacy to force and at no time does it ever endeavour to cover up this nature of things' (1961-2004, p. 43).

However, 'north' and 'south' and such 'geopolitical binaries' (Bohata, p. 1) are not used here in absolute terms, as examples of 'colonization' can be illustrated in either part of the world. Postcolonial theory argues that although 'formal decolonization' has largely been attained in many of the formerly colonized countries, nevertheless the 'unequal relations of colonial rule are reinscribed in the contemporary imbalances between the 'first' and 'third' world nations' (Loomba, 1998, p. 7). Thus the achievements of the twentieth-century liberation movements, some of which involving the sacrifice of millions of lives, had in significant ways been overturned, with the result that some like McClinrock and Loomba are uncertain that 'once-colonized countries can be seen as properly 'post-colonial'' (p. 7). Building on structures put in place in the colonies – cash economy and interlinked financial institutions, educational, cultural, and language bonds – a pattern of dependent development was quickly established, reducing the newly independent former colonies to client states depending on the paternalism and patronage of the mother countries. Under Postcolonialism, it is understood that a frontal attack on these structures is not likely to be any more effective in changing things fundamentally than the liberation movements of the twentieth century. They can only be dismantled at the level of ideas; accordingly,

'post colonial theory' involves a conceptual reorientation towards the perspectives of knowledges, as well as needs, developed outside the west. It is concerned with developing the driving ideas of a political practice morally committed to transforming the conditions of exploitation and poverty in which large sections of the world's population live out their daily lives (Young, 2003, p. 6).

Western concepts in regard to formerly colonized people is said to involve an 'epistemic violence' (Bhabha in Kanneh, 2002, p. 150). Conceptual reorientation is therefore deemed to be necessary, and means exploring the knowledge systems of the formerly colonized cultures for their concepts and insights towards the world and reality wherever these concepts may be found, whether in philosophy, political theory, literature and literary criticism, art, religion, history, and so forth. Along with this must be a systematic deconstruction of concepts like 'development' (p.2) seen under

Postcolonialism as having a racial, 'west–non-west' innuendo. It therefore calls for a language that is non-western.

Postcolonialism is an accent that 'the critique of imperialism' received in the late 1980s (see Loomba, 1998, p. 17), but African intellectuals have been exercised by some of the key issues since the early 1960s. One such issue is the language of the mother country which became the official language of the former colonies. Obi Wali (1961) was among the first to demand the abandoning of the language of the colonists and substituting local ones, to begin with, in the writing of literature (see Chukwukere, 1969, p. 15-16). This issue has not been comprehensively dealt with; and it continues to be raised in different contexts, including the fields of education and economic development. Achebe reacted as follows when it flared up in the early 1980s in terms of the relevance of an African novelist writing in a non-African language:

Despite the haunting problem of identity that beset our contemporary society we can see in the horizon the beginnings of a new relationship between artist and community which will not flourish like the mango-trick in the twinkling of an eye but will rather, in the hard and bitter manner of David Diop's young tree, grow patiently and obstinately to the ultimate victory of liberty and fruition (1988, p. 41).

Liberty is a shared goal with the theorists of Postcolonialism; and Achebe thinks it should be worked for patiently and doggedly. What seems to matter for him really is to aim and work for this objective, and let the change occur when it will. In his two novels we are studying here, *Things fall apart* and *Anthills of the savannah*, the desirable state of affairs is not seen in the same way by the characters. Consequently, they tend to work at cross purposes, undermining themselves and one another. On the face of it, therefore, these novels do not appear to be particularly suitable to the purposes of postcolonial theory. But the critics who apply political readings to them generally take a one-sided view. Accordingly, Okonkwo's viewpoint is commonly followed in *Things fall apart* and Ikem's in *Anthills of the savannah*.

Postcolonial literary studies often follows the path of historicism and examines the work in terms of what the author is doing thereby to further the cause of anti-colonial, anti-imperialist struggle. As Bohata puts it, postcolonial 'literary criticism directly engaged

with post-colonial writing in any language, but most commonly in a European language; and revisionist projects which force a reassessment of the literature of colonialism and the metropolitan "centre" (p. 2). In this paper, I shall be looking at it as a textual generator, accounting directly or indirectly for the sequence itself and in many cases directly for the patterns of reaction by the characters. It is especially enlightening to explore in Chinua Achebe's works in which characters often bear deep resemblances in their underlying traits and functional roles in the articulating of the mythological image of the respective texts. For example, on the surface the three friends ('three green bottles') in *Anthills of the savannah* appear to have nothing in common with characters elsewhere in Achebe's corpus. But I intend to show in this paper that they do have much in common with characters found in *Things fall apart*, have an identical origin as products of colonialism, and connect to the mythological image which articulates in their respective narratives in the same way. I shall argue that the attitudes these characters exhibit reflect individual responses to colonialism and modes of being in a colonial and postcolonial world.

COLONIAL PRODUCTIONS

Nigeria and most of sub-Saharan Africa, having gained political independence during the second half of the twentieth century from Europe-based colonial powers, went on with nation-building along the paths set by the departed colonists, and never stopped to examine the premises of their political cultures. During the colonial period, various cultural, religious, educational, social, political and administrative institutions had been introduced and had been changing the lives, attitudes, and worldviews of the local people. This change was taking place in a different world than the much more open world of the twenty-first century in which various technologies are working to overcome space and isolation in all aspects. Colonialism enjoyed a fairly closed environment, in which contrasts were sharp, and things were readily seen in black and white. The contrast is in high relief in a remark by Obierika in *Things fall apart*, discussing with Okonkwo the adjudication of a land dispute by a colonial court. Okonkwo is surprised that this court should claim competence in the matter since the judge could not know the tribal customs concerning land:

'Does the white man understand our custom about land?'

'How can he when he does not even speak our tongue? But he says that our customs are bad, and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart' (p. 57).

The white man's negative judgment about the local customs may be dismissed as presumptive, but Obierika is concerned that the local people who have joined the white man's religion are also saying the same thing. Okonkwo would rather have liked 'to take up his machete, go to the church and wipe out the entire vile and miscreant gang' (50), but Obierika is worried about the possibility of blood guilt; and since his confidence is already shaken on the question of the rationality of some of the customs (p. 41), he is not ready to dismiss the negative judgement of the locals out of hand. He has seen, moreover, that the 'clan can no longer act like one': the very presence of the white man has the effect of 'a knife on the things that held us together'. Some of these *things* are undoubtedly the tribal customs, and also the religion.

Obierika's assessment of the impact of exposure to colonization is plausible for any situation where an outside power is in control and has furnished its agents the means to exercise power in a direct manner. Once the old strings have been slashed, and the individuals are reacting in their own ways to this outsider, group identity begins to break down. Individual identity may appear to be still intact, but subtle changes are taking place depending, possibly, on what emotions, whether fear or hope, had been awakened at the level of the 'prereflective unconscious' – according to Stolorow, 'psychological structures (organizing principles, meanings, schemas, thematic patterns) that operate outside conscious awareness' (2005, p.1307). In his assessment, Obierika identifies one group: those who accept the perception of the colonizer about themselves and their culture, and seek escape from the colonizer's

disapproving gaze by identifying with the colonizer, accepting his value systems, worldview, and thought processes. The colonists draw their most dedicated servants from among these. In *Things fall apart*, their zeal in the service is often excessive, creating undesirable complications for their master. In Abame, however, on the day of reprisals for the killing of a white explorer, they appear to be doing exactly the master's bidding, since he is there among them:

'Anyway,' resumed Obierika, 'they killed him and tied up his iron horse. This was before the planting season began. For a long time nothing happened. The rains had come and yams had been sown. The iron horse was still tied to the sacred silk-cotton tree. And then one morning three white men led by a band of ordinary men like us came to the clan. They saw the iron horse and went away again. Most of the men and women of Abame had gone to their farms. Only a few of them saw these white men and their followers. For many market weeks nothing else happened. They have a big market in Abame on every other Afo day and, as you know, the whole clan gathers there. That was the day it happened. The three white men and a very large number of other men surrounded the market. They must have used a powerful medicine to make themselves invisible until the market was full. And they began to shoot. Everybody was killed, except the old and the sick who were at home and a handful of men and women whose *chi* were wide awake and brought them out of that market.' He paused.

'Their clan is now completely empty' (p. 45-46).

Obierika emphasizes that the mass slaughter in Abame involves troops of 'ordinary men like us'. Attachment to the colonist has given them the right to exercise direct and lethal force against other human beings; and the local people will have learned from this to fear the servants of the colonist even more than the colonist himself. In other words, the system of indirect rule and indirect exercise of violence by the colonist is in place.

Okonkwo is paradoxically the one in whom at the pre-reflective unconscious level, fear is awakened. It is not to be forgotten that he is 'one of the lords of the clan', having risen 'from

great poverty and misfortune' to achieve this (p. 8). He may have sensed that the successful imposition of colony is at the expense of his prerogatives as 'one of the lords of the clan'. So he can find no grounds of accommodation with the outsider. In Mbanta, where he has taken refuge for the accidental killing of a kinsman, the colonists eventually make their appearance. A church has been set up and friction is occurring. At a public meeting to try and deal with the situation, Okonkwo makes contribution, but there is much that he prudently keeps to himself:

'Let us not reason like cowards,' said Okonkwo. 'If a man comes into my hut and defecates on the floor, what do I do? Do I shut my eyes? No! I take a stick and break his head. That is what a man does. These people are daily pouring filth over us, and Okeke says we should pretend not to see.' Okonkwo made a sound full of disgust. This was a womanly clan, he thought. Such a thing could never happen in his fatherland, Umuofia (p. 52).

Okonkwo is the kind of colonized person who contests this domination by active resistance (Young, 2003, p. 3). However, finding the detestable outsider at home in Umuofia at the end of his period of exile, it turns out that his simile about a man defecating on his floor who would have his head broken for him is rather difficult to apply in practice, because a decision has to be made, not by himself alone, but by the whole community.

Apparently the two contrary attitudes towards the outsider are usually motivated by the same object: power – the (hope of) access on the one hand, and the (fear of) loss on the other (Grant, 2009, p. 168). Those who suffer psychologically from colonization, who are plunged into doubt about themselves and their past because deeply held beliefs have been shaken are the likes of Obierika. In *Things fall apart*, the rocking of Obierika's world actually predates exposure to colonization. He has seen the contradictions in the traditional system – according to Marx, all social systems have these, but are able to carry on if there is developed 'a *modus vivendi*, a form in which they can exist side by side. This is generally the way in which real contradictions are reconciled' (*Capital*, Part 1, Ch. 3, sec. 2). For example, Okonkwo has trouble working out a *modus vivendi* with the contradiction involved in killing a child that *calls* him father, but he makes it by citing the fact that he had earlier

killed five men in battle; and if he could live with this, adding 'a boy to their number' should not be enough to overturn his world (*Things fall apart*, p.20). Talking with Obierika who is unable to reconcile the situation and is showing his unease over this, he observes:

'You sound as if you question the authority and the decision of the Oracle, who said he should die.'

'I do not. Why should I? But the Oracle did not ask me to carry out its decision.'

'But someone had to do it. If we were all afraid of blood, it would not be done. And what do you think the Oracle would do then?' (p. 22.)

This conversation brings into the open Obierika's sense of the contradiction in Umuofia's traditions. In the privacy of his consciousness, there is real turmoil, the contradictions unfurled in sharp detail:

Obierika was a man who thought about things. When the will of the goddess had been done, he sat down in his obi and mourned his friend's calamity. Why should a man suffer so grievously for an offence he had committed inadvertently? But although he thought for a long time he found no answer. He was merely led into greater complexities. He remembered his wife's twin children, whom he had thrown away. What crime had they committed? The Earth had decreed that they were an offence on the land and must be destroyed. And if the clan did not exact punishment for an offence against the great goddess, her wrath was loosed on all the land and not just on the offender. As the elders said, if one finger brought oil it soiled the others (p. 41).

In Obierika, therefore, we have a third kind of colonial subject who has lost his footing and ends up with an unsettled existence, neither at home in traditional society nor in the new one developing under the supervision of the colonist.

On the side of the colonial administration, actions are being performed which impact on the local people; these actions are premised on 'knowledge'. On the trial, condemnation, and hanging of Aneto, for instance, what the colonist knows, apparently, is that the Umuofia customs are *bad*, and are therefore inadmissible in determining a case in court. The white man's attitude to the available knowledge has

something to do with the tensions and crises of *Things fall apart*. For example, we read that among the achievements of the colonists in Umuofia is the building of a church,

But apart from the church, the white men had also brought a government. They had built a court where the District Commissioner judged cases in ignorance. He had court messengers who brought men to him for trial. Many of these messengers came from Umuru on the bank of the Great River, where the white men first came many years before and where they had built the centre of their religion and trade and government. These court messengers were greatly hated in Umuofia because they were foreigners and also arrogant and high-handed (p. 57).

In judging cases 'in ignorance', the District Commissioner shares the markings of his court messengers: arrogance and high-handedness. What one chooses to do or not to do with available knowledge 'is not innocent but profoundly connected to the operations of power' (Lomba, p.43). Choosing to discountenance the available knowledge in the community actually connects to the colonialist ideology, which was racist, *superior*, and Eurocentric. Nothing created by the local people could have any value in his eyes – which was why colonization was really a favour being done them, instead of an imposition achieved through violence exercised on a vast and global scale. One kind of knowledge available in the colony is alone worth noting: whatever may arouse the curiosity of 'the student of primitive customs' (*Things fall apart*, p.68). Here we see the colonialist's 'fetishistic attention to the fascinating bit' (Rooney 2005, p.75). Colonialism thus 'locked the original inhabitants and the newcomers into the most complex and traumatic relationships in human history' (Lomba, p.2). The tensions in *Things fall apart* build up dangerously in a character like Okonkwo for whom the very presence of the colonist is an offence. When the arrogance and high-handedness of the Administration begin to be visited upon him personally, he is driven increasingly to thoughts of personal revenge (p. 65).

Colonialism in Africa also created new political realities, rounding up different linguistic, cultural, and religious groups and constituting them into a single political entity, with the result that the end of colony did not allow a period of

healing and rehabilitation, but only introduced more pressures and stress factors which complicated identity problems further. The mass societies resulting from these amalgamations impacted not only the identities of the linguistic/cultural groups, but also the individuals struggling under multiple loyalties. Thus 'hybridity and multiple belonging' are inevitable in postcolonial situations (Kokot, Tölölyan, and Alfonso, 2004, p.2); and it is to be noted that as Young has observed, far from 'a single process' hybridity is wont to 'create new social spaces to which new meanings are given [enabling] the articulation of experiences of change' and 'consequent demands for social transformation' (Young, pp. 78-79).

Postcoloniality complicated by the political states emerging out of colonization having several ethno-linguistic groups is reflected in *Anthills of the savannah*, with the resultant tensions making themselves felt just below the surface. It is implicated in the speech of the Old Man of Abazon. In General Sam's plebiscite for a life presidency, Abazon had voted against the proposal:

'When we were told two years ago that we should vote for the Big Chief to rule for ever and all kinds of people we had never seen before came running in and out of our villages asking us to say yes I told my people: We have Osodi in Bassa. If he comes home and tells us that we should say yes we will do so because he is there as our eye and ear...

'More shifting-eyes people came and said: Because you said no to the Big Chief he is very angry and has ordered all the water bore-holes they are digging in your area to be closed so that you will know what it means to offend the sun. You will suffer so much that in your next reincarnation you will need no one to tell you to say yes whether the matter is clear to you or not.... So we came to Bassa to say our own yes and perhaps the work on our bore-holes will start again and we will not all perish' (pp. 126-127).

Abazon had voted as a block against the proposal; now they have sent a delegation to the capital to say *their own yes*. Other groups had obviously said theirs at the time they had been asked. There are several different groups in the country. Ikem Osodi, one of 'the three green bottles' is of Abazon. The roots of the other two, Sam and Chris Oriko, are much more difficult to

establish. The three had been trained in Lord Lugard College, and the purpose had apparently been achieved, which is to focus the pupils away from their ethnic groups and their group interests. Even though the Abazon people claim Ikem as their own, there is very little of the group consciousness traceable in him.

Sam is utterly lacking in local roots. But he does have a loyalty; and that is to the former colonists. We read that,

To say that Sam was never very bright is not to suggest that he was a dunce at any time in the past or that he is one now. His major flaw was that all he ever wanted was to do what was expected of him especially by the English whom he admired sometimes to the point of foolishness. When our headmaster, John Williams, told him that the Army was the career for gentlemen he immediately abandoned thoughts of becoming a doctor and became a soldier. I am sure the only reason he didn't marry the English girl MM [Mad Medico] found for him in Surrey was the shattering example of Chris and his American wife Louise whom he married, if you please, not in New York which might have made a certain sense but in London (p. 49).

Sam has no mind of his own, being in every sense of the word a colonial production or creature. His attitude is the same as that of the servants of the colonists in *Things fall apart*. The colonists are the source of power and privilege: being connected to them is having access. To them also rightness consists of whatever their masters approve or condone. To them the colonist stands for power in all its forms, including law and morality, norm and propriety. John Williams, Sam's school headmaster has told him what was a gentleman's profession; so a soldier he becomes. He then 'grew naturally into the part'. 'But after Sandhurst he was a catalogue model of an officer. *His* favourite expression after he came home was: *it's not done*, spoken in his perfect accent' (ibid.). His military training at Sandhurst is in fact a form of rite of passage. From it, he emerges not only as 'a model of an officer', but also the articulator of colonialist values, the kind of individual the departing colonists would have considered a safe pair of hands to entrust the colonial heritage with. His curriculum vitae is briskly provided by his former schoolmate and friend Christ Oriko, who

is serving as a commissioner for information in his military government:

From school to Sandhurst; the first African Second Lieutenant in the Army; ADC to the Governor-General; Royal Equerry during the Queen's visit; Officer Commanding at Independence; Colonel at the time of the coup; General and His Excellency, the Head of State, after (p. 67).

There is little evidence that he knows what to do as a Head of State, beyond keeping things the way they are and promoting himself to new honours he has seen others with: he hardly thinks of himself as a leader – he needs to have a vision for that; he 'was never very bright', as Chris says of him. Beatrice, a senior civil servant in his government and Chris's intended, has occasion to task him with a signal failure to live up to his status as 'the sacred symbol of my nation's pride', to which his response is, 'Oh don't be such a racist, Beatrice. I am surprised at you. A girl of your education!' (p. 81).

Ikem has the markings of Okonkwo, as already noted, as he comes to signify opposition to Sam. But he is also the only one among the 'three green bottles' who has sound roots in the cultural tradition. He is in the very awkward position of figure of resistance to outside influence and at the same time a kind of spokesman for Sam's Administration as the editor of the *National Gazette*, a government-owned newspaper.

LEVELS OF NARRATION

Anthills of the savannah fully develops only one aspect of the sequence that opens the narrative. There is a cabinet meeting broken off because Commissioner Chris has brought up the question of a visit to draught-stricken Abazon despite that the Head of State had earlier ruled against it. But most members of the Cabinet appear to be in support. And so, making allowance that the Head of State 'is not in a good mood today', the Chief Secretary promises, 'We'll bring it up again next Thursday, Chris. Don't worry' (p. 8). The matter does not come up the following Thursday, because that very day the crisis begins unfolding over that matter of Abazon. It is this crisis that is followed through as it engulfs and destroys first Ikem, then the Head of State and Chris. The driving process in this crisis is arbitrary rule by the Head of State, which we have already seen in the ruling against visiting Abazon and the

absolute refusal to consider reasons to the contrary.

The way arbitrary rule works out in General Sam's Kangan is that he demands acquiescence in every decision of his. Any expression of opinion is fiercely borne down upon, as it gives him the sense of the absoluteness of his power being contested; and possession of power to him is inseparable from what is called in Nietzsche 'the will to enjoyment' (p. 397). The upshot is that governance in Kangan is simply celebration of the rituals of power: hardly anything else is seen to be going on. There is lack of movement or activity at the level of governance, but intense activity at the level of (Sam's one-sided) struggle for power. Two modes of reaction are activated in this narrative by Sam's monopoly and irrational exercise of power. One is containment; the other is confrontation. Both are pre-signified in remarkable ways.

In the speech of the Old Man of Abazon, there is an epic simile in which a 'battle-cry' is mentioned. But he excuses himself for it: 'I don't know why my tongue is crackling away tonight like a clay-bowl of *ukwa* seeds toasting over the fire' (p. 126). At this point, unknown to him and to anyone else outside General Sam and his secret police, the story has taken a new turn in which the driving force is Sam's will to pursue and destroy all perceived enemies. So the simile has a prophetic quality, the Old Man hardly in control of what he is saying about the battle cry and the one who hears it:

If he is a farmer who means to prosper he will not challenge the bush-fowl; he will not dispute her battle-cry; he will get up and obey.

'Have you thought about that? I tell you it is the way the Almighty has divided the work of the world. Everyone and his own! The bush-fowl, her work; and the farmer, his.

'To some of us the Owner of the World has apportioned the gift to tell their fellows that the time to get up has finally come. To others He gives the eagerness to rise when they hear the call; to rise with racing blood and put on their garbs of war and go to the boundary of their town to engage the invading enemy boldly in battle. And then there are those others whose part is to wait and when the struggle is ended, to take over and recount its story (p. 123).

In the 'real' world outside the simile, the battle cry is heard by two persons, Ikem and Chris; but of the two Ikem is the one who rises 'with racing blood'. Chris is in fact the first to hear the battle cry, but he reacts in a totally different way – for there is indeed another way, according to this narrative, to deal with power on the rampage. This way is also instructed from the numinous realm, by Idemili, Daughter of the Almighty, namely to try and wrap 'around Power's rude waist a loincloth of peace and modesty' (p. 102). This is Chris's approach. He has worked it out without knowing about the instruction from the Daughter of the Almighty. That is also Beatrice's instinctive approach, which she applies in the incident already cited, when she has opportunity to see that Sam is being a playboy; that being a head of state is for him opportunity to indulge without restriction this impulse in his personality.

Chris does not react by instinct. He is first to see the direction that Sam is intent on going, has considered the available options and deliberately chosen containment, along with careful nudging of the Head of State towards what he considers to be more politically sound decisions. He has also tried to bring Ikem with him on this path, as he confides in Beatrice:

'I have considered [political exile] and believe me it's far less attractive than this charade here.'

'So?'

'So I will stay put. And do you know something else; it may not be easy to leave even if I wanted. Do you remember what he said during that terrifying debate over his life presidency? I told you, didn't I? For one brief moment he shed his pretended calmness and threatened me: If anyone thinks he can leave the Cabinet on this issue he will be making a sad mistake.'

'Anyone walking out of that door will not go home but head straight into detention. Yes I remember that. So?'

'I am not saying that such a ridiculous threat is what is keeping me at my post. I mention it only to show how tricky things can become of a sudden. That's why I have said a hundred million times to Ikem: Lie low for a while and this gathering tornado may rage and pass overhead carrying away roof-tops and perhaps ... only perhaps ... leave us

battered but alive. But oh no! Ikem is outraged that I should recommend such cowardly and totally unworthy behaviour to him' (p. 119).

What suits Ikem's temperament and corresponds to what he defines as courageousness is resistance, using all the force at his command. His biggest weapon is his newspaper, the *National Gazette*; there he publishes his 'crusading editorials', which he believes are scoring many 'bull's-eyes' but Chris judges to unnecessarily 'antagonize everybody', but in the end no more than 'essays in overkill' (p. 38). However, Sam is as much offended by Ikem's open challenge as by Chris's behind the scenes pressure and dogged pursuit of moderation. As far as he is concerned both 'find it ... difficult to swallow [his] ruling. 'On anything' (p. 1). In Friedrich Nietzsche's terms, the 'will to power' is present in either strategy, the very thing that rouses Sam's will to crush.

Ikem is carrying on active resistance in the tradition of Okonkwo with no 'coherent political movement' behind him (Young, p.3); and there is a fatal error in judgement here. He correctly discerns that in general terms the problem in Kangan 'is the failure of our rulers to re-establish vital inner links with the poor and dispossessed of this country, with the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation's being' (*Anthills of the savannah*, p.141), but this is at a time the crisis had been triggered off. The ground on which he had been acting, triggering off the crisis in the process is contained in the following reflection:

But the real irony of the situation is that my own method is more successful even on Chris's own terms. How many times now have I managed to read the Big Shot's mind better than all the courtiers? Who knows, I may soon be suspected of witchcraft or of having a secret hot-line to the palace! For it does not stand to reason that from my hermit's hut in the forest I should divine the thoughts of the Emperor better than the mesmerized toadies in daily attendance. But it is quite simple really. The Emperor may be a fool but he isn't a monster. Not yet, anyhow; although he will certainly become one by the time Chris and company have done with him. But right now he is still OK, thank God. That's why I believe that basically he does want to do the right thing. Some of my friends don't agree

with me on this, I know. Even Chris doesn't. But I am sure I am right; I am sure that Sam can still be saved if we put our minds to it. His problem is that with so many petty interests salaaming around him all day, like that shyster of an Attorney-General, he has no chance of knowing what is right. And that's what Chris and I ought to be doing – letting him glimpse a little light now and again through chinks in his solid wall of court jesters; we who have known him longer than the rest should not be competing with them. I have shown what light I can with a number of controversial editorials. With Chris I could do much more. If Sam were stronger or brighter he probably wouldn't need our offices; but then he probably wouldn't have become His Excellency in the first place. Only half-wits can stumble into such enormities (p. 46).

He has defined the issue in terms of failure by Sam's entourage to give proper advice. Therefore he was going to show as much *light* as he could with his editorials. His mistaking the situation for a conflict of ideas with Chris in his sights is as fatal a misreading of the situation as Old Okonkwo imagining that the problem facing him is the missionaries in Umuofia, and that it would be solved if only he could visit them with his machete. He fails to grasp even the lesson of Abame where the killing of one solitary white man has so far from solving the problem had drawn in a few more white men accompanied by an armed troop. In Ikem's case, the interest is to give his former friend helpful advice, only to set the man thinking of the existence of a will to power he must crush to secure his monopoly. Ikem was to give him a welcome platform to carry out further search for other traitorous individuals who had been harbouring the intolerable will to power. Chris who had once been accused of finding it difficult to swallow his rulings was therefore also in his sights.

Ikem had also judged Sam to be not very bright; considering his ingenuousness in orchestrating the testing of Chris's loyalty to his person, this activist may be wrong to think that this should be assessed in terms of whether or not 'the Emperor [is] a fool'. A *fool* he is not, but vision as a leader is what he lacks. Sam's decision to pursue and destroy is even staged with an eye on due process; therefore, Chris who as commissioner for information has the *National*

Gazette in his purview is ordered to suspend Ikem from office:

I am sorry Your Excellency but I will not write a letter suspending the Editor of the *National Gazette* simply because some zealous security officer has come up with a story ...'

'I see I have been wasting my breath ...'

'If they think they have a case against him let them send him a query themselves or suspend him if they have no patience for such bureaucratic niceties as queries. I don't see how I come into it.'

'Listen. The way I see it this matter is not likely to end with mere suspension for conspiring with thugs to invade the Presidential Palace. That may be only the merest tip of the iceberg. There is some indication that Ikem might have colluded with these same people to sabotage the presidency referendum two years ago. I don't mind telling you that your own role in that fiasco was never cleared up satisfactorily either and may well come up for further investigation.'

'What on earth are you talking about ...?'

'So I sincerely hope – and pray – that you will not make your own position ... you know ... more difficult at this stage. It would be most unwise I can assure you. If I were in your shoes I would go and issue the letter as instructed and await further developments'

'And if I refuse?'

'I shouldn't if I were you.'

'Well, Your Excellency, for once I am turning you down. I will not carry out this instruction and I hereby tender my resignation.'

'Resignation! Ha ha ha ha ha. Where do you think you are? Westminster or Washington DC? Come on! This is a military government in a backward West African State called Kangan ...'

'We wouldn't be so backward if we weren't so bent on remaining so ...' (p. 144).

Power exercised with no accountability is an aspect of the colonial heritage which we have seen reflected in *Things fall apart*. It is also reflected in *Anthills of the savannah*, as in the

above dialogue. Those who serve the colonist give themselves the right to unlimited power in his absence; in short, in his name, they give themselves the right to unlimited power; and those who see themselves as having taken the place of 'the white man [as] the masked spirit' of the day (*Arrow of God*, p.154), exercise it without limitations of time and space. Accountability might happen in Westminster or Washington DC, but Kangan is not any of those places: here different rules apply; and as Sam makes clear in further response to Chris, the rules are whatever the boss says they are: 'some day you will have a chance to change all that when you become the boss', but not until the present boss ceases to be in charge.

THREE AUTHENTICITIES

It is not known how Sam *reveals* himself to himself 'under the call of conscience', as Sartre elucidates, but it is doubtful that in his public actions he raises 'others along with [himself] toward the authentic' (*Being and nothingness*, p.246). Chris who has seen him so often in action thinks him 'basically an actor', acting out 'scenes from his repertory to which he may have no sense of moral commitment whatsoever' (*Anthills of the savannah*, p.50). What is clear is that he absolutely demands to be taken seriously in claiming 'entitlements' which have no constitutional or customary basis, and is prepared to use any means whatever to obtain them. Authenticity is apparently decided for Sam by the role he has assumed, taking his cue from other 'African tyrants' (p. 50). These tyrants have sprung up since the departure of the colonist and inserted themselves where the colonist used to be. They see this position as giving them power not to guide their countries to overcome backwardness and lead them to higher levels of social development, but to indulge any whim of theirs and be unaccountable for anything they may choose to do.

At the other extreme is Ikem whose kind of authenticity involves continuity with the cultural tradition. When he speaks of 'the failure of our rulers to re-establish vital inner links with the poor and dispossessed of this country, with the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation's being' (p. 141), it is as if there are in fact two social classes, the 'leaders' and the 'poor and dispossessed', separated by a large gulf. In postcolonial theory, this kind of divide is traced back to the subjugation of previously free peoples and their incorporation into a

colonial system which was already in place. The leaders are in possession of power and other things associated with power, wealth, education, access to social amenities – the very things the colonists had controlled and enjoyed and parcelled out in various measures to those they favoured or who had earned their favour. Ikem is not asking that these poor and dispossessed people should become equally entitled to these privileges; it is a question of re-establishing 'vital inner links'. The body of the people is where the threads of life have remained: the movement to reconnect is to be made by the leaders – the people are the constant. As far as Ikem is concerned, authenticity is with the people: for the leaders to be authentic is to re-establish links with them. They are the ones who have lost something in becoming detached as a class. The real impact of colonization is the change it has worked on the people who had opened up to it and had received its values. These are the leaders, especially those advising Sam, 'that shyster of an Attorney-General [who] must have given free lessons to Chris' (p. 50), and others of that ilk. He does not think of himself as belonging with these 'leaders': his habits of thought, as is reflected in his Hymn to the Sun, are entirely consistent with the cultural tradition. It is from this tradition that he draws inspiration, and he is deeply attached to it – not in a conscious way: it is the ambient of his thought, and not something to think about. The females who attract him are from the same ambient; thus Elewa, the newest among 'his string of earthy girlfriends' (p. 119), is seeing in Mad Medico 'any white man at close quarters for the first time, for that matter' (p. 55).

Chris's sense of authenticity is different from that of Ikem and that of Sam. He is not attracted to the West, whether in the sentimental way that Sam sees them or in the way he had experienced them during his sojourn among them, presumably as a student, and not even as a place of refuge to flee to after it becomes clear that Sam is on his trail for elimination. He does not see authenticity for himself in inserting himself in their value system; authenticity for him is in an identity autonomously constructed, with full deployment of his intellectual resources in interaction with the moral environment in that evolving society which his critical reason is helping to shape. So, as we shall see shortly, he does not rule out any kind of experience or mode of representation as long as it enlarges his consciousness, even if they arise from the cultural tradition. But unlike Ikem, this is not

where he would seek authenticity: his identity is 'deteritorialized' (Coly, 2010, p. 37) – not by reason of 'uprootedness' (p. xii), but by resemblance to Obierika, with his critical turn of mind apt to uncover contradictions and fault lines in social systems.

There are only the merest hints as to his cultural roots. One such occasion is in chapter sixteen when he boards a bus to try and escape from Bassa, where Sam has set the secret police on his trails. This 'unaccustomed bus in which he now sat nervously was actually his father's property' (p. 202) – he was to make a pretence of this *actuality*. He has not been challenged nor has hitherto acknowledged a tribal group identity. But we have just learnt that the vernacular of Bassa is known to him at a depth in which he could analyse its deepest significations. The owner of the bus, *Luxurious*, in the middle language of urbanizing Bassa, belongs by origin to tribal Bassa; the bus belongs to Bassa and is Chris's 'father's property'. The inscriptions on this bus set him thinking:

So those body decorations and beauty marks on *Luxurious* rose to occupy his mind. The Christian and quasi-Christian calligraphy posed no problem and held no terror. But not so that other one: *Ife onye metalu*, a statement unclear and menacing in its very inconclusiveness. What a man commits ... Follows him? Comes back to take its toll? Was that all? No, that was only part of it, thought Chris, the most innocuous part in fact. The real burden of that cryptic scripture seemed to turn the matter right around. Whatever we see following a man, whatever fate comes to take revenge on him, can only be what that man in some way or another, in a previous life if not in this, has committed. That was it! So those three words wrapped in an archaic tongue and tucked away at the tail of the bus turn out to be the opening segment of a full-blooded heathen antiphony offering a primitive and quite deadly exposition of suffering. The guilty suffers; the sufferer is guilty. As for the righteous, those whose arms are straight (including no doubt the owner of *Luxurious*), they will always prosper! (p. 203)

No one else in Achebe's oeuvre but Chris could pronounce the ancient thinking of peoples

formerly colonized as 'heathen'. Even in *No longer at ease*, where the word occurs several times, it is used under the sign of irony, for the narrator comments that 'such was the confidence of the early Christians that they called the others' demeaning names of the kind. But even if Obierika would not have used the word, his mental apparatus is quite germane to the unsentimental way of thinking about aspects of the cultural tradition.

The overall narrator who has pieced the many strands of the story of *Anthills of the savannah* together is Beatrice; and she has the last word on this matter of authenticity and other things too. She may be the emanation of Idemili, Daughter of the Almighty, or the one who would have been in a work like *Things fall apart* 'the village priestess who will prophesy when her divinity rides her abandoning if need be her soup-pot on the fire, but returning again when the god departs to the domesticity of kitchen or the bargaining market-stool behind her little display of peppers and dry fish and green vegetables' (p. 105). But there seems to be something about her that is unaccountable in terms of normal human existence. Ikem senses this (ibid.); Chris experiences on one occasion of intimacy a dimension of her 'he had never seen her exercise before. Clearly this was her grove and these her own peculiar rites over which she held absolute power. Priestess or goddess herself? No matter. But would he be found worthy? Would he survive?' (p. 114.) Bearing in her person these strong memorials of the cultural tradition, bearing them without knowing what she is required to do with them is part of her authenticity. Yet she is able to stand away from this tradition and do something new – or able to do something new despite her long and vital roots in the cultural tradition, something which at the surface seems to undermine that very tradition. The occasion is the naming of Elewa's and Ikem's daughter, when she takes over as Elewa's uncle delays in arriving to lead in the ritual naming. In doing this, however, she finally forges a new synthesis out of the traditional and the incoming cultures which had been so in tension. At the naming ceremony, Elewa is the one who opens the door to the breaking of the norm:

'Na you go name am.'

'OK. You just saved a false step, anyway. Thanks. I will start afresh ... There was an Old Testament prophet who named his son *The-remnant-shall-return*. They must

have lived in times like this. We have a different metaphor, though; we have our own version of hope that springs eternal. We shall call this child AMAECHINA: *May-the-path-never-close*' (p. 222).

CONCLUSION

There are levels of ambivalence in *Anthills of the savannah*. Sam is swept away in the turmoil he has created, but the succession is like the situation in *A man of the people*. The new reality passing for a government is worse by far than what had gone before. But also as in *A man of the people*, there is an opening to a new beginning at the human level. In *Anthills of the savannah*, a new child has just been given a name, a name both storied and charged with the hopes of the survivors of a national crisis, particularly the hopes embodied by Ikem. But even though the final gathering is for the naming of a little girl, it is really a *symposium* – which in literary terms belongs to high mimetic comedy instead of tragedy, as it 'moves toward an integration of society' (Frye, 1970, p.286). *Things fall apart* is a tragedy in which an individual has found once again that despite his *racing blood*, the impersonal forces that shape events are really unchallengeable. The human beings that gather around Okonkwo's dead body are not one group, but two: one, the victor, the District Commissioner, with his men mustered behind him; the other, the vanquished whose spokesman is Obierika. They parley:

'Which among you is called Okonkwo?'
[The District Commissioner] asked
through his interpreter.

'He is not here,' replied Obierika.

'Where is he?'

'He is not here!'

The Commissioner became angry and red in the face. He warned the men that unless they produced Okonkwo forthwith he would lock them all up. The men murmured among themselves, and Obierika spoke again.

'We can take you where he is, and perhaps your men will help us' (p. 68)

This exchange is a demand for surrender by the victor to which the vanquished acquiesces (under protest).

In *Anthills of the savannah*, by contrast, we have one coherent group. This new group summoned in the name of Ikem, as it were, is sustained by

Chris's spirit. The two are achieving in death what had eluded them in life. Here now is a group of Kangans who for one reason or another have been drawn into the struggle just ended and in the process have glimpsed something profound, especially in Chris. His vision is what sustains this gathering and is shared and *imbibed*. The shift from the conviviality of the naming ceremony to the symposium on a vision is brought about by Emmanuel reminiscing over his death. From this event, Emmanuel has learned that it was possible to die with dignity. He has also brought back from that scene three misheard words '*The last grin...*', which Beatrice hails as a 'coded message' and interprets as follows:

What he was trying to say was *The last green*. It was a private joke of ours. The last green bottle. It was a terrible, bitter joke. He was laughing at himself. That was the great thing, by the way, about those two, Chris and Ikem....

Chris was sending us a message to beware. This world belongs to the people of the world not to any little caucus, no matter how talented...' (pp. 231-232).

The symposium which in literary terms is an event of 'supreme importance' (Frye, 63), is 'the dialectic festivity which ...is the controlling force that holds society together' (p. 286). It is so unlike the ritual of power enacted as the closing event of *Things fall apart*: a victory match, with a trophy and hostages:

'Take down the body,' the Commissioner ordered his chief messenger, 'and bring it and all these people to the court.'

'Yes, sah,' the messenger said, saluting (p. 68).

The successful subjugation and colonization of Umuofia hereby becomes an accomplished fact. This situation contrasts with the pledge of fidelity enacted and freely entered into in *Anthills of the savannah*:

Remember [Elewa's uncle's] prayer? He had never been inside a whiteman house like this before, may it not be his last.'

'And we said *Isé!*' said Abdul.

'We did. It was a pledge. It had better be better than some pledges we have heard lately.'

'*Isé!!*' (p. 232.)

The pledge is equally to Chris's message, 'This world belongs to the people of the world not to any little caucus, no matter how talented ...' What is even more important is that this ideal of unity of purpose is not imposed, as in Lord Lugard College or associated to a distinctive ethnic identity, but it is democratic, in both senses of coming from the body of the people and being oriented towards them.

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