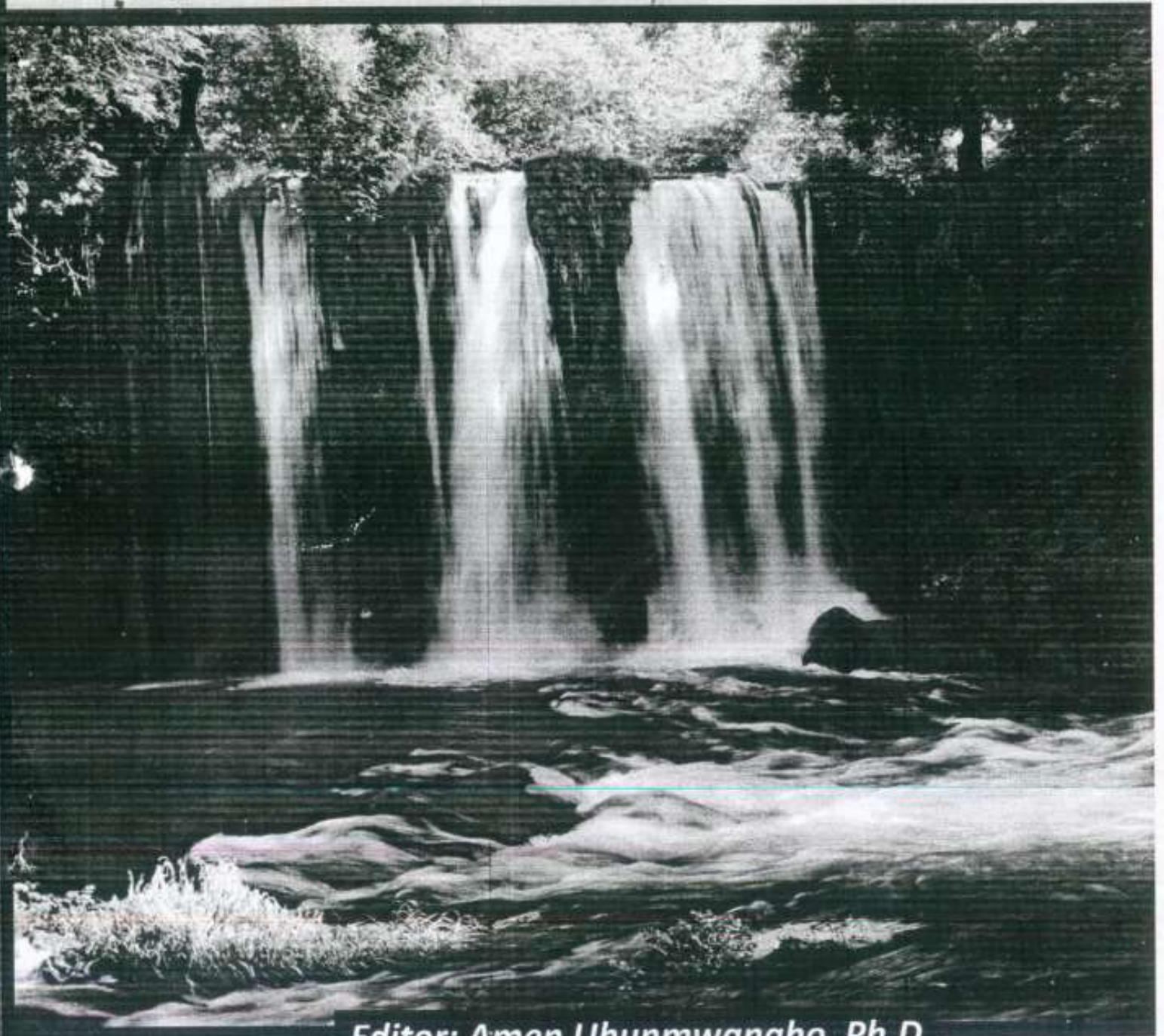


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E-mail: riverjordan619@yahoo.com

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THE AFRICAN NOVEL AND THE HEALING OF A NEO-COLONIAL CRAZE: A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE ON CHINUA ACHEBE'S *ANTHILLS OF THE SAVANNAH* AND AYI KWEI ARMAH'S *OSIRIS RISING*.

CLEMENT CHUKWUKA IDEGWU, PH.D

Department of English,
School of Languages,
College of Education,
Agbor, Delta State, Nigeria.
e-mail: idegwucc@yahoo.com, idegwuc2@gmail.com

Abstract

*Individuals and communities have been battered and left in pains by the very few who form themselves into a cabal. These very few for decade not only oppress the majority but ensure that every act of resistance is met with great force. Such a person is brutally murdered or the psyche maimed forever. Chinua Achebe and Ayi Kwei Armah in *Anthills of the Savannah* and *Osiris Rising* respectively explore this situation in Africa, showing how much harm has been done, the African novels and its attempts to heal the wounds, sensitise and conscientise the masses towards organized revolts and the possibility of an ideal African State. These writers also portray that the likes of Asar in Armah's *Osiris Rising* will live and reorder the society for good if S.S. boss, the perpetrators of the great injustices are killed the moment they are identified. This will enable the emerging beautiful ones sent by God to heal the people and land fulfil their dreams. This paper argues that Achebe and Armah and Armah who represent African novelists are committed novelists who implore their art for the healing of neo-colonial craze.*

Key Words: African novel, *brutally murdered, the psyche maimed forever*, healing, neo-colonial craze.

INTRODUCTION

The attainment of political independence by African countries in the late 1950's and early 1960's ushered in a moment of great expectations. It was like a festering wound that had defied all medications suddenly became placable. Celebrating their dreams that came through, they prayed fervently for its durability.

The African elites who took over the governance of the new nation states soon became gods that they turned their countries into a muted index of wars. This is why Chimalum Nwankwo (1992) stresses that "in Africa, the only thing that is fixed is its desert of pain and despair. And measured by that index, the continent is indeed very small and experimentally uninformed. War and the threat of war is one thing the huge continent shares without quibble" (11). Today, the revolts and spats of revolts and wars across the continent show that nothing has changed, and if any, it is that it becomes worse with each new dawn.

African novelists such as Achebe and Armah thematically x-ray the threat to the novelists vision of an ideal African nationhood by neo-colonialists, and articulate the therapy which the patient needs to undergo or take in order to ensure normalcy. Hence Boris Suchov (1973) postulates that "the study of social relationship is a fundamental ideological and aesthetic task for literature whose aim is to understand and take cognizance of life. Literature, by studying these relationships in their movement and development... has been revealing specific features of society" (30). Suchov further adds that literature's "profound investigation of society, its conflicts and

contradiction, provides the key to cognizance of man himself, in all the complexity of his personal and social manifestations" (323).

This in essence is the thrust of Achebe and Armah's *Anthills of the Savannah* and *Osiri Rising* respectively. A provocative exploration of the very high degree of corruption, and exploitation and despair which "not much light is needed to tell one that the man with the shitpan heavy on his head... carrying other people's excrement" (P.103), as Armah puts it, is around. The presence of the man with the shitpan needs no trumpeting. And its presence is far from being a sign of beauty. This is a very beautiful way of describing the political situation in Africa. African countries and their various years of independence are greatly years of unfulfilled expectations due to the fact that their various corporate lives are unrealistic and highly fraudulent. There is no uhuru anywhere. None seems to be in sight for now. The import or purport of this article therefore, is to explicate that the African novel is a healer which has an overwhelming capacity to cure the neo-colonial craze that has taken hold of the entire continent.

THE STATE OF THE NATION

Frank W. Bradbrook as cited by Kingston O. Onyijen (2010) posits that "experience is a flux and the novelist must communicate it"(260). The insensitive nature of African leaders, to the plight of the people, the degree of corruption, and its endemic nature in the continent, and the mindset of the masses, and the novelist's vision of the ideal, and its possibility are what Achebe and Armah tries to communicate in *Anthills of the Savannah* and *Osiri Rising*, respectively.

Achebe opens his *Anthills of the Savannah* by demonstrating the non-challant attitude of the Head of state thus; "you are wasting everybody's time, Mr. Commissioner for information. I will not go to Abazon. Finish! Kabisa! Any other business?" (1). That is how His Excellency reacts to the plight of the Abazons, a people in dire need of the government's presence having suffered seriously from government neglect and draught.

Armah on his part tells us from his first novel that the beautiful ones are not yet born. Those who took over power from the colonial masters were not the beautiful ones the continent thought would emerge. Each successive regime in the governance of various countries in Africa shows a geometrical progression of the corruption and total neglect of the masses.

Achebe in his portrayal of African leaders, their cult of power and the culture of impunity portrays how they employ threat to humiliate and cow their subjects to ensure that they do not raise an eyebrow against the great injustice taking place in the society. When Chris refused to issue Ike, the Editor of National Gazette, a letter of suspension, simply because he knew that the President's argument was baseless, and a product of the deception of professor Okon, Sam, the drunk of president threatened thus:

I don't mind telling you that your own role in the fiasco was never cleared satisfactorily either and may well come for further investigations!

'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 unwise I can assure you. If I were you I would go and issue the letter as instructed and await further development.'

'And if I refused?'

'I shouldn't if I were you.'

'Well. Your Excellency, for once 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 state called Kanga...' (144).

Achebe, above, shows how corruption has eaten deep into the socio-political, economic and moral fabric of Nigerian society, and by extension, the African continent. He demonstrates that tyrants who wield political power in Africa employ the instrument of governance very coercively. Thus Bernth Lindfors' (1996) description of Achebe's art as "Perennially relevant and universally significant" which are qualities characteristic of classic work of art, qualities bearing the indelible signature of a master craftsman" (486), greatly attest to Achebe's apt exploration of the vagaries of human life and his articulation of a way forward in his novels. Lindfors (1996) further adds that "because Achebe's works have been able to cast a spell on readers all over the world for more than thirty years, he has gained recognition in India, and elsewhere, as Africa's leading literary guru, an enchanter and sage whose words carry extra weight (486).

Indeed, Achebe's words do. Achebe has a way of ensuring that his portrayal of realities in his novels perfects "the task of re-awakening the consciousness of the downtrodden" (85) as Clement Chukwuka Idegwu (2010) posits. As Idegwu further argues, the writings of great literary artists like Achebe and others are "expressions of human struggles that account for the era in which they live. These writings crystallise the spiritual and other spheres of the life of the people. They act as insights into the past and the future helping to shape the people's hopes and aspirations (85).

Achebe has been very critical of the state of things in Nigeria, his country, and Africa in general. In *Anthills of the Savannah* like in most of his novels, he preoccupies himself with the welfare of the average Nigerian. He wages a moral campaign against the social ills of his time. His novels have been in-depth explorations of the problems of leadership in independent African states. M. A. E. Okolie (2005) articulates Achebe's stand with regard to the endemic problem of governance in Africa by stating that:

*Worshipping a dictator is such a pain in the neck, and for Achebe the real problem is having "no way of knowing from one day to another, from one minute to the next, just what is up or what is down". But to think that proven intellectuals lend themselves willingly to this absurd game of servility, just to be in power, makes it all the more exasperating. Achebe openly sneers at intellectuals and elites who prostitute for power and its material dividends, those who sell their consciences and integrity in order, like the commissioner for Justice and Attorney General in *Anthills*, to do the hatchet job for "His Excellency".... It is preposterous that the Africans should survive the humiliation of colonialism only to fall into the predatory exploitation and man's-inhumanity-to-man of his fellow African public "servants" in power.(60)*

Okolie's perspective on Achebe's novels above is an authentication of our stand that he denigrates corruption, Kleptomania of men in power, greed and sycophancy in *Anthills of the Savannah*, and *A Man of the people* and other of his novels. Achebe through Ike, the second witness in *Anthills of The Savannah*, glaringly further explains the near state of anarchy which Nigeria is as a nation by saying:

But it wasn't Authority that worried me really. It never does. It wasn't those officious footings, either. It wasn't even the four who

own humiliation and murder.
As the four men were led out of the Black Maria the shout that went up was not like any sound I had ever heard or hoped to hear again. It was an ovation. But ovation to whom for Christ's sake? (41).

The substantiality or actuality of the errors of our existence could be seen above in the murder of the four who were led to the firing squad. Achebe tells us that the four "were as different as the four days in the sky" (41). One had "his trouser front entirely wet", another tries "to avoid looking ahead to those hefty joists sunk into concrete", "the third, had a dry eyes and a steady walk... shouting something so loud and desperate ...", while the fourth a prince among criminals whose "erect, disdainful walk hurled defiance at the vast mockery and abuse of the crowd and incensed it to greater vehemence" (41) as he proclaims in a loud and steady voice 'I shall be born again' (42). Though the four above could be seen as criminals, and even a prince among them, the question remains what does one expect in a society where there is a great dichotomy between the rich and the poor as Achebe puts it on page 40 of *Anthills of the Savannah* thus:

I began to wonder at one point if I hadn't made a foolish gesture in refusing the ticket for one of these nicely spaced-out numbered seats, that now seemed, so desirably cool. Hardly anybody was sitting on them yet. Isn't the great thing about a V.I.P that his share of good things is always there waiting for him in abundance even while he relaxes in the coolness of home, and the poor man is out there in the sun pushing and shoving and roasting for his miserable crumbs? Look at those empty padded seats! How does the poor man retain his calm in the face of such provocation? From what bottomless wells of patience does he draw? (40).

Truly, from which bottomless wells of patience do we expect the poor to draw and be calm and sane, and remain out of crime in a society where the great divide is as much as the gap between heaven and the earth? The hopelessness of our ugly situation as a nation and a continent becomes glaringly pathetic when the Prince among the criminals proclaimed shamelessly: "I shall be born again!" That this criminal is a prince, of the royal blood who was supposed to be an epitome of purity and the fact that he repeated his vow to be reborn thrice, and the third time "was lost in a new explosion of jeers and lewd jokes and laughter so loud" (42) shows how much the entire members of the society remain a very strong threat to the development of the society. Every concerned citizen of the nation will keep asking "how anyone could laugh at that proclamation of such a terrible curse or fail to be menaced by the prospect of its fulfilment. This is what Ayo Kehinde (2008) sees as the tremors of anguished souls, lamenting the fate of their country, Nigeria, the so-called giant of Africa now reduced to a paltry midget. The texts can be described as tragedies of the traumatized collective souls of a country, due to betrayal of polity," (356). The situation is indeed our collective lamentation, our anguished souls

The portrayal of this curse or prophecy of the criminal of a Prince, and the actuality of the fulfilment of the prophecy could be seen from the actions of President Sam, to the least member of the society. It reminds one of the postulation of W.B. Yeats in his Poem, "*The Second Coming*": A shape with Iron body and the head of a man. A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun... Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born (158). And in Easter 1916 we find that in such a situation "A terrible beauty is born" (156). Daily in our country and continent, this terrible beauty is born. It is even the prophecy of the future brought to the present for as Achebe has it:

If the vision vouchsafed to his last moments was to be faulted in any particular it would be this: that it placed his reincarnation in the future when it was already a clearly accomplished fact. Was he not standing right then, full grown, in other stolen lace and terylene, in every corner of that disoriented crowd? And he and all his innumerable doubles, were they not mere emulators of others who daily stole more from us than mere lace and terylene? Leaders who openly looted our treasury, whose effrontery soiled our national soul, (42).

Achebe's cinematic reflection of the degree of decay in Nigeria and Africa, and the irresponsibility of African leaders endeared him to world readership, saying that Achebe has a writer's purpose. According to Rita Okute (2013) "There was a writer" *The Source – Professor Chinua Achebe 1930 – 2013* "The New York Times obituary described him as one of the continent's towering man of letters", (11). The BBC sees him as one "revered throughout the world for his depiction of life in Africa" (11) and Godimar states that "Achebe has achieved a writer's purpose" (18). That indeed is true for Mapanje, Jack (1997) in an article "The Changing fortunes of the writers in Africa" explicates that "writers and artists must be more vigilant" (29) in their creativity because those in governance are as decayed as excrement. This is why to him "they must continue to play the role they have always played to ensure that our societies do not lose sight of whatever liberation we might have gained" (229). Infact Adebayo Williams graphically describes it as a situation where "the dictator seeks a total domination of men and society, literature often seeks their total liberation. It is thus inevitable that the two must come into potentially fatal collision". (350)

The corporality of the political situation in the political landscape in Africa is that those who question the various authorities over their maladministration, corruption and injustices are terminated or killed at will by the government. It is even worse if those who are calling for justice are within the Cabinet of the ruling power. This is the case of Ikem Osodi in Uncle Sam's government. What the government does is to accuse whoever they want to destroy falsely and at the end destroy such person(s). Achebe portrays this reality in *Anthills of the Savannah* thus:

*Then at six o' clock get another Special Announcement from the Directorate of State Research Council was on the air:
In the discharge of its duty in safeguarding the freedom and security of the State and of every law-abiding citizen of Kangan the State Research Council has uncovered a plot by unpatriotic elements in Kangan working in concert with certain foreign adventurers to destabilize the lawful government of this country. This dastardly plot was master-minded by Mr. Ikem Osodi until recently Editor of the government-owned National Gazette (168).*

Few hours later, Achebe tells us that "another special announcement...issued by the Army Council (a body that no one could recall announcing anything in years)...told the nation simply that in an extra-ordinary meeting of the Army Council, Major Johnson Ossai, Director of state Research Council, was promoted to the rank of full Colonel" (163).

This is the substantiality of the African nation state. Boot-lickers like Colonel Ossai and Prof. Okong are promoted by the boss, His Excellency, while people like Chris and Ikem who will neither boot-lick nor stand hypocrisy which are very regular occurrences within those in the circle of power are quickly liquidated. Ikem one of the major characters in *Anthills of the Savannah* puts

it right when he says that "worshipping a dictator is such as pain in the ass." This is why it did not beat one's imagination when the government announced that:

In the early hours of this morning a team of security officers effected the arrest of Mr. Osodi in his official flat at 202 Kingsway Road in the Government Reservation Area and were taking him in a military vehicle for questioning at the SRC Headquarters when he seized a gun from one of his escorts. In the scuffle that ensued between Mr. Osodi and his guards in the moving vehicle, Mr. Osodi was fatally wounded by gunshot (169).

Achebe explicates the liquidation of viable opponents of various regimes in Africa. These opponents who are bold to disagree with issues of state in their attempts to ensure equity are pencilled down for destruction by the government in power. These members of the oppositions are trailed and destroyed especially if they are members of the ruling party or government. For how can a man under arrest for an offence as serious as treasonable felony, handcuffed and sandwiched between highly armed men whose physical appearance could make one wet his clothes, seize a gun from one of his escorts? What did he use to seize the gun? His handcuffed hands? Larry Diamond (1989) in his well planned Review on Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* gives us a portrait of a dictator and the danger inherent in such regimes:

We see in this a portrait of a dictator becoming obsessed with power and the need for absolute and total loyalty to himself, intolerant of the slightest opposition or criticisms, and suspicions of plots against him. Isolated from the free flow of information, power loses both perspective and accountability, retreating into a narrow circle of lackeys and falterers. The theme is old but timeless: power unchecked feed on itself, becomes intoxicated with itself, and seeks relentlessly to aggrandize itself (125).

Having talked about the President's tyranny and moral laxity, it behoves us to discuss the role of the police in the society Achebe talks about moral laxity in Nigeria. He portrays a situation where those who ought to punish offenders are culprits themselves. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe tells us of a sergeant who attempts to rape an innocent lady in broad daylight;

The girl's desperate shriek rose high over the dense sprawling on noises of the road party. The police sergeant was dragging her in the direction of a small cluster of round huts not far from the road.... he was pulling her by the wrists, his gun slung from the shoulders. He dragged her along on the seat of her once neat blue dress through clumps of scorched tares and dangers of broken glass (214 - 215).

Achebe bemoans a society where those who are supposed to maintain laws and order break it with great impunity. It is even disheartening when only "a few of the passengers mostly other women, were pleading and protesting timorously, while most of the men around "found it very funny indeed"(215). This is the reality of the African state. The men could not say anything because they are not truly free from such evils. For how does one explain a situation where men who were co-passengers, and other who were part of the roadside party occasioned by the coup, celebrating an end to injustice merely laughed at the girl's humiliation and discomfort instead of disarming the sergeant and making sure he is court-marshalled. Even when Chris challenged him for: Chris bounded forward and held the man's hand and ordered him to release the girl at

woman's house, a married woman for that matter, uninvited, and attempts to rape her demonstrates a very high degree of callousness and the abysmal display of the culture of impunity. In *Osiri Rising* Armah tells us that

Ast rose and gave Asar the pistol. He looked at it a second. Then, letting go of SSS, he took out the magazine, and shook out nine bullets. He put the bullets in his trouser pockets, frisked SSS, and shook out the pockets of the jacket. SSS stayed on his knees, not looking at Asar. But he stared steadily at Ast...

"What's he want?" Asar asked

"He tried to frighten me with threats against your life. Then he wanted to rape me".

"Again," Asar said, throwing the empty pistol at SSS, SSS did not catch it. It bumped off his cheek and fell to the floor. He picked it up from there, a smile on his face. Asar went to the apartment door. Holding it open, he waited wordlessly for the Security Chief to depart. For a moment SSS seemed to consider refusing. But something made him change his mind, and he walked slowly out saying: "You'll regret this" (239).

No shame. The Security Chief, who is to ensure that the nation and the citizenry are given maximum protection, terrorizes them, going from one place to another looking for whom to rape and assault sexually. The SSS instead of being ashamed boldly threatened: "you'll regret this", and because in our society, evil walks the streets, like a lion let loose from its cage unhindered and unquestioned. The SSS lived to his threat:

The boat draw so close Ast could see his eyes. In that instant the Deputy Director of Security shouted the order:

"Fire"

The world around Ast turned ashen. She heard a metallic stutter, then a scream of bullets close to her seeking the single target. Between the two boats the paths traced by burning metals looked like a mesmerizing night photograph of a city street.

She saw Asar raise his arms... the first bullet struck, giving him no time to register his surprise. His body pivoted left. Other bullets reversed it. For a moment he stood suspended like a figure treading water.

...then he exploded silently into fourteen starry fragments, and the pieces plunged into the peaceful water (347-348).

Asar, just destroyed by the SSS represents the very beautiful ones who were born and terminated before they could bring about the desired change. Ayi Kwei Armah titled his first novel *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. In his development of the thrust of the novel he presents characters whose beauty was questionable. But in *Osiris Rising* we see and experienced the birth of the beautiful ones who were liquidated before they could beautify their societies. Armah as a literary artist professes that the continent is daily raped by those who ought to nurse the society to life. The killing and death of Asar is the rape of the African nation. It is the rape of the political, socio-economic and cultural bearing of the African nation and the humanness of the people.

He rose and, walking as if he owned the apartment, crossed the room and switched off the light.

"Now what's that in aid of?" Ast asked..

"Understand one thing, he said angrily. "I won't let any woman make a fool of me". Then: "why are you so cruel?"

In spite of the pain, Ast laughed. She needed time. "I don't think giving me a fatal disease..."

"It wasn't fatal," SSS said, "Look at me." I'm alive"

"Granted," Ast said. "But a venereal disease is hardly the way to promote a friendship"

"Relaaax. It was an accident. It's has been taken care of. I'm clear," He dropped Ast's hand.

At once she sprang up and switched the light on again.

"Hey! He shouted angrily, crossing over and switching the light back off (237)."

Here Armah tries to portray how those in government rather than think about, and man the affairs of state spent their time in womanizing and raping girls or women who refused to glaciante (succumb to) their sexual desire. Imagine the Director of State Security Service who should be after the security of the state and the citizenry travelling a great distance to-and-from, with state car and personnel to rape Ast. "SSS sat beside her. A large buttock pressed her hips against the back of the sofa. She felt a hand fumbling its way towards her breast. That was when the department door opened. Only Asar had the key" (238). This is why Jude Agho (1995) in his *Standpoints on the African Novel* states that "Armah's exposition of corruption in the Ghanaian society focuses on different institutions or national projects which further reveal the filth in the society" (66). A society where those saddled with the mantle of leadership deliberately destroy it, through venereal diseases and the gun, progress, and the advancement of the people are never reached.

Earlier on how the Deputive Director of the State Security has tried to rape Ast before the above mentioned encounter. "She was unprepared for his reaction. Extricating his hands from her armpits, he grabbed her hair, pushed back her hand, twisting her neck and, with the edge of his right hand, gave her a hand chop on her windpipe just under her chin. ... She was struggling to regain her breath when he hit her again; this time above his nape (P.79).

It is only in a heartless society that rape is daily carried out by those who are supposed to protect the helpless of the society. The above lines show that the D. D. is morally bankrupt and could kill Ast just to satisfy his urge.

Now the D. D. brought both elbows down with tremendous force against her thighs.

The pain sent a jolt like a current down to her heels and up into her head, which did not stop throbbing as the man now looked down at her. With supreme confidence he landed over and pulled apart her bathrobe and her nightdress, exposing her things...

The D .D. felt secure enough to step down from the bed. He took off his trousers, then pried off his underpants...

With desperate strength she reached out with both hands to meet the D .D.'s advancing thighs. She seized his sexual organ, scrotum, penis, hair and ooze, laced her fingers round them, then squeezed the whole unsightly mess.

As tight as she possibly could. A bellow like a wounded bullock's rocked the room, and the D. D in his pain rolled heavily off the bed. Ast trembling held on (80-81).

What Armah has done here is to ensure that *Osiris Rising* serves as an indispensable tool in the representation of reality. Armah uses the novel as a most veritable medium in the comprehension and interpretation of facts of a high degree of political and moral decadence among political office holders who regard women and wine as their pastime. As Ogungbesan (2008) would say "the writer cannot be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done". (2) And that is what Armah has done in *Osiris Rising* and his other novels. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1996) in his article "Let them Sleep No More!", corroborates Ogungbesa by stressing that the novelists:

Our pen should be used to increase the anxieties of the oppressive regimes at the very least, the pen should be used to increase the anxieties of the oppressive regimes at the very least, the pen should be used to murder their sleep constantly reminding them of their crimes against the people and making them know that they are being seen (32).

What Armah has done in his novels is to make the oppressors uncomfortable for his exposure of their crimes and the conscientisation of the masses about what should be done to change their status quo and make the desired change very imminent. Onukaogu and Onyearionwu (2009) authenticates Armah standpoint when they posit that:

Art has proven to be a most effective medium of achieving change, stability, progress and even order in society. Most artists beyond seeking to create beauty and entertainment for their audience have used the medium of art to express their opinion about their immediate and other societies. These opinions range from those seeking to point out certain practices that the artist thinks cannot predicate growth and development of the society, to those constituting outright protest against real enemies of the society (20).

A critical reading of Armah's *Osiris Rising*, and indeed other Armah's novels will show that Armah is a very committed novelist who uses his novels objectively to criticize the socio-political and other happenings in Ghana, his immediate society and other societies that constitute the entity called Africa. In very succinct terms he explains that a situation where those in power rape the nation and the people arbitrarily and consistently, progress is unachievable.

Armah in his portrayal of the reality of the society veered into the nature of our university as structured by the colonial masters which makes it far from being redemptive. Armah for instance points out that "the old curriculum downplayed connection, between literature and the political and ideological upheavals of society, except for received metropolitan ideologies" (253). He further argues in *Osiris Rising* that

Literature was treated as an academic discipline with few technical or practical aspects. Teachers of literature taught the students to read and appreciate books, poetry, drama, fiction and expository prose as imported commodities not to produce their own. In sum, literature under the colonial curriculum was a dependent consumer activity (253).

This shows that the entire academic programme cannot be free from the corruption and exploitation which were prevalent during the colonial era and had continued in a neo-colonial situation in Africa. Agho in "Ayi Kwei Armah's" *Osiris rising: New wine in an Old wine skin*" argues that:

In Osiris Rising, Armah turns the university inside out, showing it the way it is. It is not redemptive, nor a place free from the corruption and putrescence in the larger society. It is a place that stultifies and kills potential, thereby further retarding Africa (65).

In Ghana, and other African countries attempts at reordering any fault of the society that is bad, and inimical to the well-being of the generality of the masses makes the person involved in the redemptive processes a marked man. Agho accentuating this states that "for all the good thing Asar is dong to prepare the society for the envisaged revolution, and for his fight to reform the lopsided curriculum in the university, ... he becomes a marked man... and killed on the order of Seth"(65).

ACHEBE AND ARMAH AND THE SOLUTION TO THE AFRICAN PREDICAMENT

Chinua Achebe and Ayi Kwei Armah in their novels *Anthills of the Savannah* and *Osiris Rising* respectively, try to sensitise and conscientise the apolitical masses in their respective countries and the continent at large of the follies of those in government. They use their novels to educate the apolitical masses of the deceptive nature of those in government.

Achebe in *Anthill of the Savannah* leads us into a military coup at the end of the novel. In it the president Uncle Sam who came to power through a coup d etat got killed Achebe through the celebration at the end of the novel, a situation where the masses celebrated each coup de tat, seems to warn that the masses ought to see the follies of those in government and stop being deceived. Hence Achebe calls for the ability to discern between truth and falsehood, good and bad, and the courage to take the right path. In *Anthills of the Savannah* Achebe puts it succinctly:

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 Basa. If he comes home and tell us that we should vote yes we will do so because he is there as our eye and ear. I said: If what the strange people are telling us is true, Osodi will come or he will write in his paper and our sons will read it and know that it is true. But he did not come to tell us and he did not write it in his paper. So we knew that cunning had entered that talk. There was another thing that showed me there was deception in the talk. The people who were running in and out and telling us to say yes came one day and told us that the Big Chief himself did not want to rule for ever but that he was being forced (1126).

Here Achebe shows that if a community is able to have the ability to discern truth and falsehood, the community can create an ideal world. Achebe presents a moral analysis of the Nigerian and African society, the deceptive nature of our president, and other political office holders, those at the corridors of power who are ready instrument for the dissemination of falsehood which makes the exploitation of the masses possible, and those who are ready to say No. By presenting the six elders from Abazon in Bassa, Achebe seems to be saying that the time has come for community leaders to rise up to the challenge of understanding an issue or concept before giving their consent for it is an act of foolishness to believe and act what one does not understand, and accept.

On Armah's part, the call for a curriculum change is a way of proffering solution to the African dilemma. It is a gradual revolution aimed at upturning the neo-colonialist structure which is inimical to the society. Armah seems to be saying that while the much desired revolution through curriculum change is being awaited, there is need for the Asars of Africa to judiciously use

the opportunities they have like when Seth was caught in his attempt to rape Ast, to terminate the SETHs of this world in order to restore peace, harmony and progress in Africa. If Asar had not spared Seth's life at the attempted rape ground, the Asars, the beautiful ones born to the African continent would have lived and beautified the society.

In conclusion, we wish to state that Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* and Armah's *Osiris Rising* are explications of the socio-political realities of our time and are in themselves solutions to the societal problems for a society where people are not only conscious of the good and the bad, but willingly choose the good and tread that path constantly, the establishment of the ideal is possible. Though Chris and Ike in *Anthills of the Savannah*, and Asar in *Osiris Rising* are killed, the birth of Amaechina: May- the - path -never- close, a baby girl and a mother to be, by Elewa, and the fact that Ast is pregnant in *Osiris Rising* delineates it very hard to the pessimists that though the beautiful ones have been born and killed their re-incarnates which have been born, and about to be born are super humans that will not bow to the death occasioned by these enemies of progress in Africa. A perfect gaze at the tunnel shows rays of light, emerging stubbornly. The sun will certainly shine through the arms struggle which seems to be on the pipe line. The revolts and spats of revolution in Africa show the inevitable is about to begin.

All told, we wish to state that Africa is embarking on the rough road to freedom for our novelists, Achebe and Armah have done much to re-awaken their consciousness. Soonest the masses shall "liberate the oppressed and the oppressor both... for to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others" (624 -625), as Nelson Mandela succinctly explicates.

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