A Record of the Struggle: Chinua Achebe's Anthills of the Savannah

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A RECORD OF THE STRUGGLE:
CHINUA ACHEBE’S ANTHILLS OF THE SAVANNAH

by

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A Master’s Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Arts

May 2007

College/School College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Department English

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Abstract

In Anthills of the Savannah Chinua Achebe presents the struggle of a formerly colonized African nation, Kangan, a substitute for Nigeria, to become a post-colonial nation. Achebe’s three main characters, members of the elite, who are personally and politically involved with the nation’s ruler, narrate their version of events. Their separate but intertwined journeys from the center of power to the margins where the majority of the country’s population resides illuminate the elements necessary for an inclusive postcolonial nation to rise from the neocolonial ruins of a traditional society.

Achebe uses narrative strategies that illuminate the collapse of the neocolonial state and the rise of a post-colonial society that is rooted in the traditional values of the country. His characters use the colonizer’s language changed in its daily use by the people to a new creole English. Achebe sets the groundwork for a new nation with characters who have benefited from the boons of a neocolonial society but are still motivated to develop a “new narrative of the nation” (Hall 613).

The nation’s new narrative is grounded in the myths, fables and rituals that are central to its identity as an imagined community as described in Stuart Hall’s The Question of Cultural Identity. Quoting Benedict Anderson, Hall states that “national identity is an ‘imagined community’” (613) constructed of five elements: (1) “the narrative of the nation”; (2) “emphasis on origins, continuity, tradition and timelessness”; (4) “invention of tradition”; (5) “a foundational
myth...[a]story which locates the origin of the nation” and a “pure, original people or ‘folk.’” (613-615)

Achebe employs myths and fables to underscore the philosophical differences between the colonial/neocolonial concepts of power and its use with that of the Kangan/Nigerian traditional culture and traditional people. Women who figure so prominently in the foundational myth of the country, Idemili, (Anthills 93) which is detailed in a central chapter in the novel, will, in the end, be the ones responsible for leading the transformation of Kangan. Beatrice, the Honors English graduate, will be the creator of the new narrative as she is the writer who survives in the end. She, as well as all major representatives of the society; the peasants, students, soldiers, marketwomen, and domestic servants will be instrumental in the creation of new traditions within an egalitarian society. This new nation will incorporate and respect the precolonial past without discarding any benefits from the colonial era in forging a post-colonial nation cleared of white supremacy values.

The struggle to accomplish this rebirth is not over by the end of the novel. However, Achebe uses another major fable of the country, “The Leopard and the Tortoise”(117) to illustrate both the role of the writer and the importance of controlling and shaping the narrative for future struggles.
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A THESIS

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Montclair, NJ
2007
“Igbo...view of the world...: ‘No condition is permanent.’” Chinua Achebe

Acknowledgments

My long sojourn as a graduate student at Montclair State University has come to an end. Finally, my family and friends would say. I am most grateful for the constant encouragement and unwavering financial and emotional support of my husband, Joe. It has also been my good fortune to have my dear friends, Nancy Shakir, Gloria Pinkard, and Elaine Walters as cheerleaders for my efforts to fulfill a long held goal. My mother and children never doubted my ability to complete the degree even if they may have been puzzled as to why I wanted to go back to school. I appreciate their faith in me and know that in time they will understand my reasons.

Every course I took in the program from the first, “Milton,” with Lee Khan to the last one, “Rhetoric,” with Paul Butler prepared me for the capstone course of my program, Thesis with Sally McWilliams. It was in Sally’s course, “Writers of Africa and the African Diaspora,” that I first read Chinua Achebe’s Anthills of the Savannah and was deeply impressed with a fable in the novel, “The Tortoise and the Leopard” and the critical writings of Stuart Hall, both important elements in my thesis. I am deeply grateful to Sally not only for her incredible patience; close reading of my many, many drafts; skilled guidance in helping me to refine my thoughts and arguments; and great good humor but also for the rigor of her teaching. My sincere appreciation to the other members of my thesis committee, Professors Daniel Mengara and Emily Isaacs, for their generous gifts of time and effort on my behalf.

Last but not least, I must thank the treasures of my heart and inspiration for all my right actions, my grandchildren: Asia, James, Khalis, Erin Skye, and Brisa.
Section One: Introduction

How does a nation become post-colonial in something other than nomenclature? Does a nation’s existence after independence signify it as post-colonial or is there a meaning that can be implied in “post” that goes beyond the world view of the colonial powers? The power alignment adumbrated in the post-colonial society in Chinua Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah* and the movement from neocolonial to post-colonial show a shift of power. This movement is away from the interests of the neocolonial ruler in the capital center of Bassa towards the issues and concerns of the majority of the Kangan people who are at the margins of society. The completion of this movement will usher in Achebe’s vision of a post-colonial society, one that moves beyond the centralization of wealth and influence for the benefits of the few. The new Kangan leadership will be connected “with the poor and dispossessed...at the core of the nation’s being” in the words of Ikem, one of the novel’s main characters (131).

*Anthills of the Savannah* is the fifth of Chinua Achebe’s novels that reclaims and recounts the historical narrative of Nigeria from its incarnation as a colonial possession to its transition to an independent nation, albeit a neocolonial one. Each of these novels, *Things Fall Apart, No Longer at Ease, Arrow of God,* and *A Man of the People* as well as *Anthills of the Savannah,* although set in different time periods, is about power conflicts that are the result of the nation’s colonial experience from the perspective of the colonized. In *Anthills of the Savannah* Achebe charts the course of three members of the country’s educated elite in their journey from the center of neocolonial power towards the construction of an inclusive post-colonial society. Achebe demonstrates in his characters’ transformation how they must integrate the skills and education they have
acquired from the colonial era with respect and value for the country’s pre-colonial historical and cultural past to serve the interests of the majority of the people. The novel’s narrative structures focuses on elements and transitions the author deems critical for change and the pre-colonial traditions he notes as crucial for the survival and growth of a democratic Kangan, the imaginary country he creates in Anthills as a substitute for Nigeria. In addition to close attention to these characters’ political and personal changes, the novel reveals the breakdown of the neocolonial government.

The collapse of the oppressive neocolonial government is the defining issue of the text and it spurs the incipient growth of an egalitarian community with people from disparate economic and educational backgrounds. The causes of the government’s collapse are shown in reoccurring issues in the text that propel the plot. The major ones are: the disconnect between the people and the government; the use of police power to oppress the people by force; and the alienation of different segments of the society from one another. These issues are the hallmarks of a colonial or neocolonial society whose government is only for the enrichment of the few in control.

Achebe’s Kangan society is a former colonial possession still enmeshed in the colonial power’s world-view that marginalizes the people of the country. In Anthills of the Savannah Achebe employs five narrative strategies to illuminate the breakdown of Kangan’s neocolonial society and the elements necessary for its transformation into an egalitarian post-colonial nation. The narrative strategies are: (1) the use of myths and fables as the carriers of cultural wisdom; (2) the transformation of the inferior status of women to leadership roles; (3) the role of writers and narratives as guides for the transformation of a neocolonial country into an egalitarian post-colonial society; (4) the
use of a Creole English modified by the people with African customs of speech, proverbs and fables that reflect their cultural heritage; (5) and the motif of the journey. The culminating strategy of the journey highlights a move towards a national identity that Kangan/Nigeria can develop as a post-colonial society with its roots firmly entrenched in the precolonial culture of the people. The struggle Achebe presents through the five selected narrative strategies is the reclamation of those cultural values from their devaluation under colonialism while reforming the government's relationship to the people and the people's responsibility to the society.

The novel takes place in Kangan, a fictional country created as a substitute for Nigeria. The three major characters, Chris, Commissioner for Information; Ikem, editor of the National Gazette newspaper; and Beatrice, “Senior Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Finance”(68), are long-time friends and contemporaries of the country’s recently elected President-for-Life, Sam.1 Sam is a former military officer who initially seized power through a coup. The novel revolves around a crisis that starts with a visiting delegation of elders from a small, drought-ridden Kangan province, Abazon. The delegates have come to the capital to see Sam about a halted water project. The project was halted because Abazon was the one province that did not support Sam's election as President-for-Life. Sam views the group's unannounced arrival at the Presidential Palace with some concern because he has a “quite irrational and excessive fear of demonstrations” and an unwillingness to hear citizens' complaints (12).

Sam will not meet with the Abazonian delegation because he does not want to respond to petitions from the people. His attitude about petitions, which he says “everybody knows,” is that they are “sheer signs of indiscipline” (15). He is also greatly
Concerned with appearances and is afraid that if he meets with them other groups will present petitions and make demands on him. Sam’s lack of responsiveness to the concerns and needs of the people highlights his neocolonial perspective on governing. In the colonial and neocolonial world-view the people exist to serve the government not the other way around.

In a power play, Professor Okong, the Commissioner for Home Affairs, plants a seed of suspicion in Sam’s mind about Chris’s and Ikem’s loyalties and their involvement with the delegation. Okong tells Sam that “I believe that if care is not taken those two friends of yours can be capable of fomenting disaffection which will make the Rebellion look like child’s play…. they may be causing a lot of havoc already” (18). Okong insinuates that Chris and Ikem had something to do with Abazon’s lack of support for Sam in the election. Although Sam won the election, the fact that it was not unanimous still rankles. Sam then seeks confirmation from the Attorney General about Chris’s loyalty. The Attorney General tells Sam that he does not think “Chris is one hundred percent behind you” (21). These seeds of suspicion sown by members of Sam’s cabinet feed into Sam’s paranoia about his presidency’s tenure and the support of his friends. The latter concern was fostered by his meeting with another despotic African leader at an international conference who warned him as a matter of course to beware of his childhood friends.

Although Sam will not meet with the people from Abazon, Ikem does. His meeting with them is both professional and personal. He has been asked by Chris to send a reporter to interview them, which he does but Ikem is drawn to them as they are from his home province. Arriving late at the Palace grounds he makes arrangements to meet
them at their hotel. The delegation itself consists of six elderly men but when they went to the Palace they were accompanied by hundreds of people from Abazon who now live in Bassa, an alarmingly large group to Sam’s mind. In Ikem’s meeting with the Abazonian delegation’s the leader’s remarks about struggles with power and the role of the story teller/writer in society profoundly impress Ikem. Later, the members of the delegation are placed in custody, and Ikem is charged by Sam “with conspiring with thugs to invade the Presidential Palace” and is suspended from his position at the newspaper (133). Upset about the arrest of the Abazonian delegation, Ikem goes to the University and informs the students, a volatile political constituency, about the elders’ arrest in a lecture titled, “The Tortoise and the Leopard—a political mediation on the imperative of struggle”(141). His comments during a question and answer period about the reported wish of the President to have his picture on the country’s currency is mis-interpreted by Sam and his sycophants to mean that Ikem is calling for Sam’s death.

Meanwhile, Beatrice, an educated member of the bureaucracy and a personal friend of Ikem and Chris’s lover, has an ugly scene with Sam at a dinner party at his summer palace. Although Beatrice, Chris, and Ikem had frequently visited Sam at the palace early in his reign, Beatrice had not seen Sam for over a year when he called to invite her. She was surprised to learn that Chris had not been asked to attend with her. Beatrice’s expectation that she was invited to repair a rift between two old friends, Chris and Sam, is quickly disabused when she meets the visiting American newswoman. Beatrice understands that she was invited “to wait on” the “cheeky” American reporter (73). Sam’s attentiveness to the young woman’s political pronouncements that run counter to the country’s interest further infuriates Beatrice. In a bit of sexual foreplay to
press her position Beatrice confronts Sam about his response to the foreigner which angers him. Sam accuses Beatrice of racism and has her escorted from the party. This confrontation and Sam’s suspension of Ikem from his editorial post causes a complete rift between Chris and Sam: Chris resigns his post. Sam’s paranoia fed by the Attorney General and stoked by the Director of the State Research Council, Major Johnson Ossai, fuels Ikem’s arrest and causes his death while in police custody.

Chris realizes he is in danger and flees the capital to seek refuge in Abazon. Braimoh, a taxi-driver, and Emmanuel, a university student, accompany him on his journey. Both of these men came to Chris’s aid because of their respect for Ikem and the ideas he expressed in his editorials and speeches. While Chris is on the run for his life, a sympathetic military officer, Abdul, alerts Beatrice when Chris’s hiding places are in danger of discovery. The government falls; Sam disappears and is presumed dead while Chris is on the run. Chris and his companions hear the news when they arrive at a scene of a celebratory melee of drink and confusion at the site of an abandoned beer truck on the road to Abazon. Chris is shot dead there when he confronts a drunken policeman who is dragging off a young woman to rape her.

After his death, Chris’s companions—Braimoh, Emmanuel, and Adamma, a young woman student they met on the bus—return to Bassa, the capital, changed because of their experience. They are part of a small supportive group that forms around Beatrice. This new community—Beatrice’s maid Agatha; Elewa, Ikem’s girlfriend and mother of his daughter; Abdul, the military officer who attempted to help Chris through Beatrice, and Braimoh’s wife, Aina—come together for a naming ceremony for Ikem and Elewa’s daughter. Elewa’s mother, a market woman, and her uncle, a cultural
traditionalist, arrive to participate in the ritual that has already been conducted in a non-
traditional way. The entire group joins together to affirm their connection to one another
and the country in a kolanut ceremony, a hallmark of Igbo life and ritual. After Elewa’s
mother and uncle leave, the remaining group mourns and reflects on the meaning of
Chris’s death.

Section Two: Myths and Fables—Addressing Power and National Identity

Achebe uses myths and fables to contrast colonial attitudes and perspectives with
the traditional or pre-colonial philosophy of the Kangan people in addressing power and
its limits and abuses. The novel works on several levels updating and embedding ancient
myths in a modern society, and they can be viewed as guides to the transformation of a
neocolonial society to a post-colonial one. Anthills is structured so that the foundational
myth of Idemili is at the core of the narrative and the center of the culture. In literature
today myths such as Idemili are considered “narrative embodiments of a people’s
perception of the deepest truths” (Harmon 326). Cultural Studies theorist Giroux explains
that, “According to [Stuart] Hall culture is central to understanding struggles over
meaning, identity and power” (342). Achebe uses myth in the novel as an effective part
of the struggle to overcome the neocolonial hold on Kangan power and identity. Achebe
speaks about this use of myth in the struggle against colonialism and neocolonialism in
an audio taped interview with Kay Bonetti, “To counter colonialism, you need your own
ideology.” The myth and fables Achebe uses in Anthills are rooted in Kangan culture
before the colonial period. Ideologically, they ground the characters in a non-western
concept of power and its limits.
Achebe’s employment of myth and fables to guide the building of a post-colonial nation can also be understood using Stuart Hall’s concept of national identity. Quoting Benedict Anderson, Hall states that “national identity is an ‘imagined community’” (613). Why imagined? It is imagined because it is constructed, according to Hall, of “meanings about ‘the nation’ with which we can identify,... contained in the stories,... memories... and images...” (614). Images of priestesses, gods, animals and natural phenomena are passed on in the fables and myths retold in the novel; they embody and transmit the cultural values of the Kangans, fictional representatives of Nigerians. National identity is constructed, Hall writes, of five elements: (1) “the narrative of the nation” made up of stories, told in histories and the media that emphasize “tradition and heritage” and “continuity so that” the “present political culture is seen as the flowering of a long organic evolution”; (2) an “emphasis on origins, continuity, tradition and timelessness”; (3) an “invention of tradition”; (4) “a foundational myth... [a] story which locates the origin of the nation”; and (5) a “pure, original people or ‘folk’” (613-615). These elements provide the underpinnings for a national identity for disparate groups of people who do not know one another or may not even live in the same contiguous territory. The relationship it provides is one of membership in a nation “conceived” as Anderson describes nations “as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (7). Achebe envisions this egalitarian relationship in post-colonial Kangan as based upon myths re-introduced in narratives that place African history, philosophy, and culture as the origin and perspective from which plots will unfold rather than from a European consciousness. These narratives, such as Achebe’s Anthills, position the Kangan/Nigerian
people in equitable relationships to each other regardless of their status in the neocolonial era.

The Idemili myth about power is central to the precolonial culture of the Kangan people. The myth sets conditions and restrictions on those who would hold power. Power is restricted to the righteous. In the myth, Idemili is the Almighty’s daughter sent to clothe “Power” with a “loincloth of peace and modesty” (93). She determines who is worthy enough to hold power with a test of sexual restraint. A man who wishes to rise to the level of “ozo,” a position of power and respect, must be “accompanied by his daughter or if he has only sons, by the daughter of a kinsman; but a daughter it must be” (94). The girl child arranges seven pieces of chalk on the floor and the man must sit on them without breaking them. If he is found unworthy, he will die; if approved, he will live and “still be about after three years” (95). There is a period of 28 days when the applicant must be celibate. The abuse of power is depicted in the myth as a man who is unable to control his sexual appetite.

According to the Idemili myth those who seek power must not only be righteous and in control of their sexual instincts and appetites, but most importantly their rule or weight must not oppress or break the people (represented by the chalk in the myth).

The inclusion and description of the Idemili myth as the basis for power in Kangan society establishes what Catherine Hall describes as “narratives from the past [that] enable us to construct identities” (66). The myth describes an identity that is precolonial but is useful in the construction of a post-colonial identity. The myth’s emphasis on righteousness as a condition for holding and using power contrasts with the neo-
While myths are described as the embodiments of truth, fables, on the other hand, usually provide a moral. The main fable presented in *Anthills* is “The Tortoise and the Leopard,” and its lesson reverberates throughout the novel. Both the central Idemili myth and The Tortoise fable are concerned with power—the former in its assumption, delegation, and control, and the latter with the response of the victim to its overwhelming force.

“The Tortoise and the Leopard” fable is told to Ikem by an old man, the leader of the delegation from Abazon. The elder explains that although he was unsuccessful in meeting with the president, he and his group can return to their village with the sense that they have done the right thing. He can tell the villagers that the delegation has “struggled for them” (117). The old man uses this fable to illustrate his point:

> Once upon a time the leopard who had been trying for a long time to catch the tortoise finally chanced upon him on a solitary road. ‘Aha,’ he said; ‘at long last! Prepare to die.’ And the tortoise said; ‘Can I ask one favour before you kill me?’ The leopard saw no harm in that and agreed, ‘Give me a few moments to prepare my mind,’ the tortoise said. Again the leopard saw no harm in that and granted it. But instead of standing still as the leopard had expected the tortoise went into strange action on the road, scratching with hands and feet and throwing sand furiously in all directions. ‘Why are you doing that? Asked the puzzled leopard. The
tortoise replied: ‘Because even after I am dead I would want anyone passing by this spot to say, yes, a fellow and his match struggled here.’

(117; emphasis in the original)

The lesson of the fable is that even though you are overwhelmed by an opposing force you must struggle against a powerful opponent even if the struggle is only in the narrative that you construct about the contest. To say that you are the equal of your opponent opens the door for a reversal of the defeat in a future contest.

With the use of proverbs, myths, legends and fables, Achebe grounds his novel in the cultural world that existed in Kangan/Nigeria prior to colonization and projects the traditions they uphold into the country’s future. African societies make use of proverbs and fables in the course of everyday discourse and consider the skilled use of them in speech to be a sign of wisdom. Achebe’s employment of the myths and fables as the leitmotiv of the novel is what distinguishes it as an African novel written in English rather than an English novel about Africa. “The Tortoise and the Leopard” fable is an illustration of the writer’s role in preserving and controlling a record of a country’s struggle. The fable is told in the narrative style of the nation from the perspective of the powerless without conceding that the majority of the Kangan people do not yet possess the upper hand. The power seized in Anthills is the control of the narrative of the Kangan people that shapes national identity using myths and fables rooted in their precolonial past.

Section Three: Transformation of Women—Myth and Status

Beatrice’s evolution to both a goddess and a more empathetic woman represents the transformation of a Kangan woman who is an educated product of the colonial era
and distanced from her country’s traditional culture. At the beginning of the novel Beatrice’s values are those of the colonial system that has nurtured and educated her. She is the daughter of the colonial past and a member of the neocolonial elite. When first introduced, the reader sees that Beatrice is alienated from her family and her country.

In the chapters that she narrates, she recounts the past in her notes after the action of the novel has occurred. She tells about her childhood and how she was raised in a “World inside a world inside a world, without end” (77). She recognized her alienation from her family when she was very young: “I couldn’t have been more than seven or eight at the time but I know I had this strong feeling then—extraordinary, powerful and adult—that my father and mother had their own world, my three sisters had theirs and I was alone in mine” (79). She was in her father’s house, inside an Anglican church compound, inside the colonial country of Kangan that was in the British Empire. Beatrice felt the impact of her position in this enclosed space most intimately in her relationship with her father. Her father, a “stern” and emotionally “distant” man used the power of the whip to control his students and his family (78). He was an overseer of the colonial education system and its values. In a sense he was a stand-in for the colonial power keeping control of the students and as well as his family. His sayings were not the proverbs of the Kangan people but those of colonial England. Beatrice recalls that one of his favorites was “Procrastination is the lazy man’s apology” (100). Beatrice describes this as a “maxim of mixed mintage” (100). The original British saying is ‘procrastination is the thief of time’. It is as if the father cannot totally escape his own cultural heritage. The father’s version of it will surface again in the novel at the scene of Chris’s death just
as the colonial influence on the government and society is most profound and resurfaces in many of the social interactions in the novel.

Not completely unexpected, Beatrice is unaware and disrespectful of traditional customs but she is a strict observer of formal western manners. She mocks the ads in the obituaries memorializing long dead family members, a modern carryover of ancestor worship, an aspect of African societies (101). She is a career woman and a stickler for neocolonial protocol that she demonstrates in two different social situations. She chastises a white British character, a hospital administrator, John Kent, known as MM or Mad Medico. His informality in addressing the President-for-Life by his first name rather than the title Excellency provokes her retort: “Tell me, would you walk up to your Queen and say, ‘Hi Elizabeth’ ” (54). In an earlier scene, she enrages Sam, the President-for-Life, when she questions his flirtations with an American white woman reporter at his dinner party: “If I went to America today, to Washington DC, would I, could I, walk into a White House private dinner and take the American President hostage. And his Defense Chief and his Director of CIA” (74). The common thread in both scenes is Beatrice’s demand for respect for the ruler of the people even from the ruler himself. Her attitude will later change to one of respect for the people. The scene with Sam marks the beginning of Beatrice’s transformation to her mythic goddess incarnation as Idemili.

Beatrice’s transformation has to bridge the emotional distance inbred in her by her relationship with her family. She is aware of her mother’s resentment that she is a girl and not the long hoped for son. The name her parents select for her, the fifth daughter, reflects the defensive posture the parents have assumed in their patriarchal society,
“Nwanyibuife—a female is also something” (79). Part of the something that Beatrice becomes is a representation of the goddess, Idemili.

Like Idemili, Beatrice tests the worthiness of the men in her life to hold power. Beatrice performs a version of the mythic test with Sam. She, like Idemili, is a daughter of power, an honored daughter of her nation. However, her strength comes from her own identity and achievement. She is an independent woman who decides on her own to see to Sam’s worthiness. She arouses his sexual interest in her in a competition with a white American woman reporter who is being catered to and listened to by Sam. Beatrice is upset that Sam is uncritically accepting, almost welcoming as Beatrice sees it, of the young American woman’s political and economic pronouncements which do not benefit the Kangan people. Beatrice is outraged at the American’s behavior and that she, Beatrice, “had been dragged here to wait upon this cheeky girl from Arizona or somewhere” who is by now more than a little intoxicated (73). Sam’s deference to his female guest takes Beatrice mentally back to similar experiences she had as a student in England with young black men leaving her for “Desdemona” (74). She felt that she was “locked in combat again with Desdemona” (74). A “Desdemona complex” is the name a young Cockney girl gave Beatrice for the attraction black men had for white girls. Beatrice told Sam this story of her rejection by her countrymen for white girls after he was fully aroused by their dancing. He accuses her of being a racist when her intention was, as she put it, to save “the sacred symbol of my nation’s pride” (74). Beatrice’s reactions described in her account of the event show the beginning of her goddess incarnation: “Something tougher than good breeding had edged aside in a scuffle deep inside me and was importing to my casual words the sharp urgency of incantation” (69).
This new representation of Idemili presents Beatrice as the "daughter" of the nation who will not only accompany the power seeker but also attempt to prevent him from betraying the national interests. Sam, in his rejection of Beatrice and the Kangan people's interests, fails the test.

Beatrice, still testing for worthiness, even questions Chris's values after this disastrous party at Sam's house: "You asked the girl you want to marry to go along and keep all options open.... You didn't want to call earlier.... Because you didn't want to find out if I slept in Abichi with your boss" (103). Beatrice accuses Chris of giving her up to Sam which he denies. At the end of the novel his worthiness is demonstrated when he dies protecting a young woman from a rapist, an authority figure/police officer, a representative of the government, who is drunk on beer as the government is drunk on power. This scene also reinforces the Idemili myth as Chris protects the young woman as he would now, the reader believes, protect the country from further corruption.

Achebe also ties the Idemili myth into Ikem's relationship with Beatrice. Ikem approaches Beatrice through a "pillar of rain," the symbol of Idemili (85). Rain as a symbol of fertility and forthcoming natural abundance occurs frequently in their friendship. Their memories of their reactions during rainstorms in their childhood bond them: he sang to the rain—the rain sang to her. Ikem is at one point her protector, her friend, her equal, and in their last meeting alone together, her priest. He visits her for what turns out to be the last time to tell her that he understands a point she made about him. She had told him a while ago that his "thoughts were unclear and reactionary on the role of the modern woman in our society" (88). He has thought long about the topic and the status of women and now knows that she's right. He thanks her for that insight which
has brought him to a new understanding about women and their role in the modern world. This insight he tells Beatrice is that women must determine what their “new” role should be (90). Beatrice and Ikem part with a passionate kiss. The storm that raged outside during his visit has “died down” (92). The rain, the symbol of Idemili’s fruitfulness or blessing, has fallen and has now ended. It seems to signify the future fruitfulness of Ikem’s new insight about women.

Beatrice’s scene with Ikem at her home and her ugly scene with Sam at the palace bracket her goddess transformation. She felt the beginning of the change inside her in her interaction with Sam. After the ignominy of being escorted out of the party she awakens early the next morning, “tranquil,” “eyes and head virtually clear” and hears sounds and sees creatures of the natural world that she has not experienced since her childhood (98). It is as if after her disillusionment with Sam, the President-for-Life, and his coterie of government officials at his party, she has opened her eyes and senses to the world around her. This physical awakening to her environment will also encompass the social and political world she lives in:

So, two whole generations before the likes of me could take a first-class degree in English, there were already barely literate carpenters and artisans of British rule hacking away in the archetypal jungle and subverting the very sounds and legends of daybreak to make straight my way. (100)

Later that morning, Chris comes to see her to find out about the party. In pillow talk with him, Beatrice claims the role of priestess and prophetess, “I do sometimes feel like Chielo in the novel, the priestess and prophetess of the Hills and the Caves” (105) but it has an
edge of fearsome reality for her. She sees and tells Chris of the trouble ahead for the three of them, which she gleamed from her exposure to Sam and the people surrounding him at the dinner party.

Beatrice's character raises some provocative issues. In some ways she is the key to the novel's quest for change from the recent past of colonialism and the direction that the narrator foreshadows for the nation. Her character is the archetypal Woman, daughter, lover, temptress, and mother of the country. All of the primary male characters have a strong sexual and/or emotional attraction to her. She is Chris's lover, Ikem's friend in a relationship with sexual overtones, and Sam's would-be seducer and reformer. She is like a goddess desired by all—like Idemili—in that men seek her out. The president sends for her; Chris intends to marry her; Ikem visits her as a man would visit an oracle and leaves her with a passionate kiss and the message that she/Woman must decide the future. Yet her alienation from the country and the people is exemplified in her present relationship with her maid, her security concerns, and her past relationship with her family. This alienation shows the gulf that exists between classes in a world dominated by a colonial world-view.

Beatrice's concern about security clashes with her maid Agatha's behavior. Beatrice has iron bars on her doors and windows. She frequently chastises Agatha for opening the door without checking the identity of the visitor. Beatrice says of Agatha:

No matter how I tried to explain it with details of multiple rape and murder, Agatha remained blissfully impervious to the peril of armed robbers surrounding us. She simply says yesmah and nosemah to
everything you tell her and goes right ahead doing whatever she was doing before. (85)

However, the working class and poor Kangans harbor no illusions about being safe. Only those who are part of the neocolonial ruling class think that security is possible. The others know that they are subject to the indignities visited upon them by the state’s security forces and they go on living their lives with that knowledge. Agatha’s safety is in not being secure just as paradoxically Beatrice becomes secure after her home is searched. When Beatrice realizes her own vulnerability she becomes free and perversely more secure. It is evident in her comment to Abdul when he tells her that he was going to protect her, to “watch her,” Beatrice’s reply is “Good luck” (204).

Beatrice is the only woman presented in the novel with a high status and education. We see the possibility of transformation of Kangan’s educated, privileged women through Beatrice. The change she undergoes is what must occur in the elite class’s relationship to the working class and poor for the society to move from neocolonial to post-colonial. The other secondary female characters, Elewa, Ikem’s girlfriend, and Agatha, Beatrice’s maid, are working class and not well educated. The reader is never inside their minds and we only know them as the other characters discuss and describe them with the exception of Elewa. The reader is able to see the depth of Elewa’s perceptions about Ikem’s actions and his position in the privileged class through her dialogue.

Yet interestingly enough, the reader sees that Beatrice’s goddess transformation makes her more human and humane towards others, in particular women. The change in Beatrice’s viewpoint towards lower class women has been strongly influenced by Ikem.
Elewa’s status in the novel is elevated in Beatrice’s life because of Ikem’s death and the birth of his and Elewa’s daughter. Beatrice begins to see Agatha as a person and something other than a servant because of Ikem’s message to Beatrice about women. Ikem tells her in their last private meeting: “The women are, of course, the biggest single group of oppressed people in the world and, if we are to believe the Book of Genesis, the very oldest” (90). Elewa’s charm and beauty and pregnancy make her a very sympathetic character for Beatrice to relate to but Agatha who lacks those attributes is difficult for Beatrice to see in a different light. Agatha is, “so clearly, so unpleasantly, so pig-headedly unhappy in her lot…and her adamant refusal to be placated may be rendering a service to the cause more valuable than Elewa’s acceptance; valuable for keeping the memory of oppression intact, constantly burnished and ready” (167). When Beatrice accepts Agatha as a person worthy of respect which is presented as her apology to Agatha for hurting her feelings and making her cry, the reader sees that Beatrice now knows that they are really in a horizontal relationship. She can no longer function in a hierarchical power structure with Agatha. Beatrice hears in her mind Ikem’s voice telling her, “It is now up to you women to tell what has to be done. And Agatha is surely one of you” (169). Beatrice gains new understanding of her relationship to even those women like Agatha who are oppressed by men and women from Beatrice’s social class. Beatrice’s awareness of Agatha’s unhappiness and her role in perpetuating it helps to create a path for new relationships to emerge in a post-colonial society under Beatrice’s leadership.

Beatrice is the first female narrator in any of Achebe’s major novels. Her voice is that of an educated, intelligent woman. Perhaps Ikem is expressing a realization that Achebe has also had: “It simply dawned on me two mornings ago that a novelist must
listen to his characters who after all are created to wear the shoe and point the writer where it pinches" (88). The pinch Beatrice feels and expresses is the sexism prevalent in Kangan society. She is aware of the male chauvinism she experienced at home and in her social life and concluded that it was not just a western concept but also a part of her Kangan upbringing: “There was enough male chauvinism in my father’s house to last me seven reincarnations” (81). She knows that her father not only beat his students, her and her sisters but also her mother although she never “actually saw it happen” (79). This particular type of oppression spanned precolonial, colonial and neocolonial Kangan society. Beatrice recognizes this fact as she is transformed into a person who is no longer alienated from her society. She is committed to the new community developing around her. Beatrice’s actions lead the reader to believe that this type of chauvinistic oppression will be addressed in the post-colonial world she and the other women will be involved in building.

Unlike other female characters in Achebe’s novels; Clara in No Longer at Ease, Edna and Elsie in A Man of the People and the various wives and daughters in Arrow of God and Things Fall Apart—Beatrice’s perspective is presented. This transformation of a female character’s status is important in the narration of the novel because it signals a change in her status based both on an ancient Kangan myth, Idemili (the cultural roots), and her characterization as an intelligent, independent, western educated woman. Her transformation acknowledges the importance of having a woman in control of the direction of the nation and a woman’s value in the traditional culture. In the end Beatrice is left to write the story and control the narrative of the events. As she writes after the deaths of Ikem, Sam, and Chris, “I had definitely taken on the challenge of bringing
together as many broken pieces of this tragic history as I could lay my hands….” (75). In
the new narrative of the post-colonial nation that Achebe is foretelling a woman’s voice
will be heard and she will deal with power in a leadership role. One can easily believe
that the narrative created by a woman with Beatrice’s knowledge and recently acquired
sensibility will be similar to that of “The Tortoise and the Leopard” fable in that it will be
shaped for the future in recounting the struggle.

How exactly women will handle power is not described in the novel for as Ikem
said it would be up to the women to decide. Although at the end of the novel when Chris
and Ikem are both dead, it is Beatrice who has a role very similar to the one Ikem
described in their last conversation, that of “a fire-brigade after the house has caught fire
and been virtually consumed” (89). It is a role that Beatrice accused Ikem of assigning to
women and in the novel it is a foreshadowing of what is to come. The difference for
women in this new community is that their leadership will be collaborative with men; it
will cross class and status lines.

Section Four: Controlling the Narrative- Seizing Power

“The Tortoise and the Leopard” fable illustrates the political importance of the
narrator, a fact that became evident to Achebe as a student encountering unrecognizable
depiction of Africans and Africa in the English novels he read in school. The experience
of reading Joyce Cary’s and Joseph Conrad’s descriptions of Africa and Africans led him
to understand that “There is such a thing as absolute power over narrative” (Achebe,
Home). Controlling the narrative is another method used to advance beyond the
neocolonial era, and to borrow Ella Shohat’s phrase, to the clearing space of the post-
colonial.
According to Shohat the difference in meaning of the terms neocolonial and post-colonial in an academic context is the political weight of the former while the latter is considered pastoral at least in academic communities (321). For the purposes of this paper, the tension she describes between the two terms exists in the dynamics of Anthill’s plot:

The ‘colonial’ in the ‘post-colonial’ tends to be relegated to the past and marked with a closure an implied temporal border that undermines a potential oppositional thrust. For whatever the philosophical connotations of the ‘post’ as an ambiguous locus of continuities and discontinuities, its denotation of ‘after’--the teleological lure of the ‘post’--evokes a celebratory clearing of a conceptual space that on one level conflicts with the notion of ‘neo.’ (327)

In Anthills, Achebe’s characters in the very last scene have a celebratory clearing of the emblematic space of neocolonial: “the three green bottles” which represent Ikem, Sam, and Chris have fallen and their fall advances the society towards the post-colonial reality that Achebe envisions.

Achebe is deliberate in creating national identity through narrative. He is quoted by Bernth Lindfors in an interview about the role of writers as saying as much: “I think our most meaningful job today should be to determine what kind of society we want, how we are going to get there, what values we can take from the past if we can as we move along” (7). As Lee Patterson wrote in his essay, “Literary History,” “texts do not merely reflect social reality but create it” (260). Achebe in Anthills creates a direction for the elite, the professional class, the workers, the students, the peasants and the market people.
to move in to benefit the entire society. The novel’s narration of the society’s movement in that direction is like the interaction between the leopard and the tortoise in the fable that the tortoise describes as, “a fellow and his match struggled here” (117).

In the fable in marking the road as it faces certain death the tortoise is controlling the narrative of that event as the writer controls the history of the world s/he creates in novels. The importance of the story is that it lives beyond the lives of the characters in it. Achebe also makes this point with another key character in the novel, an elder from Abazon, an out-of-favor village away from the capital. In answering his own question about who is most important, the story-teller or the warrior, the old man explains that the story is the most important: “Because it is only the story can continue beyond the war and the warrior....The story is our escort; without it we are blind. Does the blind man own his escort? No, neither do we own the story; rather it is the story that owns and directs us” (Anthills, 114).

The prevailing western story in the colonial and neocolonial world that “owned” the Kangan people depicted them with little of value culturally. The acceptance of this story of the white man’s superiority is shown in several places in the novel and is an underlying factor in Kangan’s neocolonial society. Although this concept is mentioned only obliquely, it surfaces in conversations on a few occasions. Early in the novel, the Attorney General implies that his education was inferior to Sam’s because he “was never taught by a real white man until I went to read law at Exeter in my old age as it were. I was thirty-one”(22). At another point, Beatrice remembers her father’s inordinate pride at having been “praised by some white inspectors” because his school was “the most quiet in West Africa” (78). At the end of the novel, Elewa’s uncle comments that there has
been "too much trouble in Kangan since the white man left" a suggestion that law and order could only be maintained by the white man (212). Each speaker represents a different level of Kangan society that is "owned" by the western story of white superiority.

In direct contrast to the white superiority story is the philosophy undergirding the character of the elder from Abazon. With this character Achebe presents a view of traditional precolonial African culture not expressed in the western literature he read as a young man. The elder illustrates a point that Achebe made in his essay, "The Role of the Writer in a New Nation": "That African peoples did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity" (qtd in Lindfors 47). One of the main aspects of Achebe's novel is his emphasis on the philosophy and wisdom that existed in the country prior to the colonial period with his use of traditional myths and fables. Knowledge in an oral culture is expressed in the myths, fables and proverbs that distill the wisdom of ages past.

In Anthills, the elder from Abazon, dignified, poetic and wise in his pronouncements captivates Ikem, the worldly, western-educated writer as well as the other guests in the hall with his traditional philosophy expressed in fables and myths addressed to the situation that confronts his people in a modern world. The story he tells to illustrate his people's position about power is "The Tortoise and the Leopard". As mentioned earlier the tortoise in marking the road as a site of struggle in a situation, in which he has no control, is claiming mastery of the narrative about that event. The narrative posits what is possible—determines identity—and directs action: we are those
who struggle against our oppressor, we are the match of the oppressor and as the match we can defeat the oppressor. Achebe in writing Anthills is also claiming mastery over corrupt political rule in Kangan/Nigeria in which he has no control. Yet, if it is true as the elder from Abazon says that the story owns us and creates national identity as Hall and Anderson assert, the Kangan/Nigerian people can gain control and seize power.

Section Five: Language—Realigning Power and Status

The language used in the narrative is another element in Achebe’s account of the struggle against the narrative of (neo) colonialism. In Anthills Achebe recasts the colonizer’s language and illuminates the elements necessary for an inclusive post-colonial nation to rise from the neocolonial ruins of a traditional society. He uses English transformed by the Kangan people to lay the groundwork for a post-colonial nation. His decolonization of the language respects its precolonial African legacy and traditions. The principal characters, fluent in the language of the former colonial power which helps them benefit from the boons of their neocolonial society, bring this transition about when they are pushed by circumstances to the margins of the society with the majority of the population.

The main characters were not only educated in the English language but they were also taught in a colonial system. According to Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, a major African writer, education under colonialism was designed to produce a neo-colonial attitude: “This kind of education ... was part of a calculated policy to nurture a dependent native middle class sharing the values of exploitation, to take positions of influence after constitutional independence...” (Writers 23). This educational system was devised to promote “indirect rule” by educating Africans to “facilitate British rule in Africa”
The most successful students especially in the English language became the leaders. Sam, Beatrice, Ikem and Chris, the major characters in *Anthills*, have been successful in the British educational system in a “metropolitan language” as theorist Okara would term it, and the men at least are the leaders of Kangan with Sam as the supreme leader (16). As Beatrice points out, the men see themselves as the privileged owners of the country not the servants of the other millions of inhabitants. They are continuing the mindset and process that the British started.

All of the principle characters have led privileged lives separate from the great mass of the people. Their education, work, and command of the English language set them apart. Ikem notes in his narration that the Black elite had assumed the attitudes of whites towards the Blacks and transferred them to the poor:

> You see, they are not in the least like ourselves. They don’t need and can’t use the luxuries that you and I must have. They have the animal capacity to endure the pain of, shall we say, domestication. The very words the white master had said in his time about the black race as a whole. Now we say them about the poor. (37; emphasis in original)

Achebe’s use of fables and proverbs is one of the methods he employs to short-circuit this system of discrimination and control by using the colonizer’s language to create “‘a new English, still in communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings’” (Achebe qtd in Rao 1). Achebe shows the language’s alteration by the people as spoken English takes on elements of the traditional languages of the Kangan marketplace and villages. The fables, myths and proverbs reach back past
the colonial period to connect the people to one another beyond class privilege. This new English is not exclusionary.

Okara describes Achebe as a member of the Evolutionist/Experimenter school of writers who use English to “express the totality of the message of African culture in their works” (16). Okara says of them that they “emulsify it (English) with the patterns, modes and idioms of African speech until it becomes so attenuated that it bears little resemblance to the original” (17). The dialogue between Elewa and the taxi-drivers illustrates this point:

‘Why I go tell you? And if I tell you wetin you go do with am? Illiteracy de read paper for our country?’ [asks Elewa]

‘Wonderful? You no see say because you no tell me, I come make another big mistake. If I for know na such big oga de for my front for that go-slow how I go come make such wahala for am? I de craze?....’(Anthills 126)

Achebe shows that the hybrid English developed by the people during the colonial period is used by both educated and uneducated Kangans. In intimate moments, Chris and Beatrice, and also Ikem and Beatrice, weave this creole language into their conversations. It is used in play or for emphasis or even tender moments. When Ikem tells Beatrice that Chris is not married, Beatrice replies: “Me! Wetin concern me there”(82). The educated also use it when speaking to their servants, taxi-drivers, or others outside of their social class. It is the public language while English is the official one. The use of a metropolitan language as the official language in a culture with a large illiterate population places another barrier for the poor to access power in a neocolonial society. It is not the language of the people. Yet Achebe does not, as Okara writes about
the Rejectionists, reject all "Metropolitan (European) languages" (14) and his educated characters use standard English in conversation with each other (sprinkled with words and phrases in pidgin) and in their narrations. Its use is an example of Ikem’s explanation of how change occurs, not by revolution but by gradual reform. “You re-form it [society] around what it is, its core of reality; not around an intellectual abstraction” (91). In Anthills the colonial language is not rejected, it is re-formed around the life and colloquial language of the people.

Ngugi questions the validity and significance of post-colonial literature written in a European language indirectly criticizing Achebe whose novels are written in English. Achebe redefines English as not only a colonial import, it is also African: “A language spoken by Africans on African soil, a language in which Africans write, justifies itself” (Hope 93). Achebe is unlike Ngugi, classified by Okara as a “Rejectionist” (16), who decries the use of European languages in African Literature (Moving 108). Achebe’s position is to take this aspect of colonial domination, the education of the people in a metropolitan language, and incorporates it into a hybrid English. The lingua franca of the people becomes the avenue that different ethnic language groups and social classes cross to communicate with each other. It is a “pidgin,” Ipshita Chandra, a post-colonial studies scholar, writes of the novel’s and Nigeria’s creole, “where there is no hierarchy based on correct and incorrect usage of the colonizer’s language” (137). In Anthills, all strata of Kangan society use this emulsified English.

The major characters in the novel are all members of the educated elite and possess a mastery of the English language. MM, Mad Medico, one of the white characters in the novel, comments on this language facility of the major African
characters. He says about Ikem that he is “a fine poet”; that “Beatrice took a walloping honors degree in English from London University” (57); and that Sam “knew a lot more than his fellow English officers and damn well spoke better English” (54). It is almost as if the author is certifying with the English character that the African characters are skilled English speakers and writers and that their use of hybrid English is by choice and not necessity. The reader may wonder to whom this certification is addressed. Is it for the Nigerian reader under the sway of the colonial past or readers from elsewhere who need to know that the characters in question English language skills were recognized by the British themselves? It is addressed I think to those who are “owned” by the story of white superiority. These readers are assured that they can take the characters seriously. Yet Chris, Ikem and Beatrice, the novel’s narrators, who have superior skills in the colonial language, demonstrate their alignment with the Kangans in their fluency in the creole language the majority of the people speak.

Raymond Williams, the British Cultural Studies critic, describes this alignment as a natural development. He writes that the story and the storyteller are aligned with the culture and people in which they developed:

[s/he is born into a language; that his/her very medium is something which [s/he will have learned as if it were natural, although of course [s/he eventually knows that there are other very different languages. But still it is the medium in which [s/he will work, the medium which [s/he shares with his/her own people, and which has entered into his/her own constitution long before [s/he begins to write. To be aligned to and by that language, with some of its deep qualities, is inevitable if [s/he is to
write at all. So, born into a social situation with all its specific
perspectives, and into a language, the writer begins by being aligned.

(Williams 86)

In that sense the struggle to become post-colonial is based in resolving the
writer’s world-view when s/he is born into one language and educated in another. The
language that Achebe was born into was Igbo and his education from the age of age eight
was in English. Achebe’s alignment to his Nigerian Igbo culture is expressed in the
English language of his British education, and the challenge he meets in his novels is to
express the one with the other’s language. He meets this challenge by using the English
language as it has been altered by the Nigerian people to express their perspective,
culture and philosophy.

Achebe’s use of language was greatly influenced by his experience as a student in
a colonial school where he did not find complex or believable African characters in the
literature he read. If he restricted his writing to African languages, he would not portray
the truth of the characters’ experiences that have been shaped by the language they were
educated in. Achebe’s characters’ struggle to move out of the neocolonial era into a post-
colonial period is also in language. “Language” as bell hooks writes in an essay about
the topic, is “a place of struggle”(295). She sees that oppressed people are colonized by
the “oppressor’s language” and they, the oppressed need to claim their use of that
language as a “space of resistance”(297). A “counter hegemonic world view” can “be
created” by the oppressed people with the power of this transformed English (298). This
struggle to do so can also delineate the post-colonial according to another writer: “the
politics of language and its playing out in the interstices of daily life may well be said to characterize the descriptive term post-colonial "(Chandra 128).

An example of the politics of language playing out in daily life is illustrated in the naming ceremony that closes the novel. The old man, Elewa's uncle, does not speak English and his toast is translated into English for the others who do not speak his native language. When the old man says that he has never been in a "whiteman house," the expression also represents the English language that the old man's speech is translated into for all of the non-native speakers. Like Beatrice's home to which the old man is referring, language and the power it conveys will also be open to him and others like him if the movement to a truly post-colonial era continues. The use of standard English as the official language served as a barrier to access power for the majority of the Kangan people. The language, this new English modified by the people in their daily lives and open to all, reflects the language's location in an African country and the linguistic heritage of that country.

Section Six: Neocolonial to Post-colonial - A Journey from the Center to the Margins

The final narrative strategy used by Achebe in his deconstruction of the (neo)colonial is the motif of the journey. Each journey considered or undertaken by the major characters involves a movement of a member of the elite towards or in Sam's case away from the people on Kangan society's margins. Each journey impacts on the political life of the country. Chris, Beatrice, and Ikem establish relationships with working class Kangans on their journeys as their personal crises deepen. The ensuing breakdown of the
country’s social stratification symbolized by these cross-class relations is a step away from the colonial past and the neocolonial present towards a post-colonial future.

In their essay “Anthills of the Savannah and Petals of Blood: The Creation of a Usable Past” the critics Podis and Saaka write that the characters Chris, Ikem, and Beatrice are “in a state of spiritual exile. Despite their membership in the governing elite, they are alienated and disenchanted”(113). This alienation from the people is an aspect of the neo-colonial society that is, in effect, a continuation of the colonization process. The “neo-colonial regime” as described by Ngugi, “is, by its very character, a repressive machine.... one man rule, despotism” (Moving, 71) which Chris and Beatrice benefit from and initially support. Ikem rationalizes about Sam’s rule because he has in the past had some success in influencing him for the benefit of the people, and he believes that “right now he [Sam] is still OK, thank God. That’s why I believe that basically he does want to do the right thing”(42). Their illusions about the nature of the regime end as their situations change and they move to the margins of the society and towards a post-colonial world-view.

The conceptual space that Achebe clears for his reader, Shohat’s clearing space of the post-colonial (Shohat 30), is based on a critique of neocolonial leadership. Chris is on a journey to the people as the novel moves from an account of a neocolonial government to the groundwork for a post-colonial one. This is a journey that Sam as president was to have made but decided against because it would be, in effect, against the one-man rule he has established. In Sam’s neocolonial government, all power resides with the ruler. No demands can be made on him or limits placed on his power. However, the people of Abazon and the Idemili myth have rules that circumscribe and
limit power. Neocolonial rule brooks no limits. As one critic wrote about Achebe and the post-colonial that after Nigeria’s many political and economic crises he could still see past the neocolonial era for the country. “Nigeria has had a civil war, secession, oil wars, public executions, exiled writers, assassinated writers and military dictatorships, yet somehow, the writer finds a path to clear” (Chandra 136). Yet Chandra also questions “How ‘post’ is colonialism if the structures of meaning and the conceptual apparatus that animate it are still wedded to the colonizers’ world-view” (138). The world-view that Achebe provides is cleared of the colonizer’s framework that shaped the neocolonial elites’ perspective. Achebe’s world-view draws upon the traditional values and strengths of the Kangan people.

Sam’s refusal in the first chapter in the novel to go to Abazon, a poor drought stricken section of the country in the north, or to meet with their delegation is a searing indictment of the government’s neocolonial values. The Abazonian delegation represents people who live on the margins of society and are being punished for not voting for Sam. They journey to the capital to speak to those who have the power to help them. In Kangan’s neocolonial government, the people do not have the power to even speak to their ruler. They are unsuccessful in gaining an audience with Sam and wind up being imprisoned. The imprisonment of people seeking to petition their government for assistance goes to the heart of the disaffection between the people and the government in a neocolonial society.

Ikem, a son of Abazon goes to meet with the Abazonian delegation while they are in Bassa. In this meeting with people of a different economic and social class, Ikem is no longer the outsider looking in. Although the physical location for the meeting is a hotel
in Bassa, emotionally the terrain for Ikem becomes Abazon. He is in their world and understands their motivation and philosophy. He does not journey physically to Abazon but emotionally and intellectually he moves from the political center of the powerful to the margins where the poorest citizens of the country reside. His journey on that path begins with just the knowledge that the Abazonian delegation is in town. Before he meets with them he composes his own myth, “Hymn to the Sun” (28) which describes their desperate situation. The myth ends with the delegation’s purpose for visiting Bassa: “So they send a deputation of elders to the government who hold the yam today, and hold the knife, to seek help of them” (30). Ikem’s myth is his attempt to provide a “frame of meaning” (Harmon, 326) for an intolerable situation, the government’s refusal to provide relief and assistance to relieve the people’s suffering caused by its own actions.

Ikem’s myth is in direct contrast to the Idemili myth. In his myth the people are without power and can only ask for help from those who control life and death. They are suffering from extreme drought. In the Idemili myth the people have an opportunity to be in power if they are moral. Ikem’s myth acknowledges the powerlessness of the people in a neocolonial society. The symbol for Idemili, a traditional myth, is a “Pillar of Rain” which brings forth fertility. In Ikem’s myth the fruit of the neocolonial government is drought and famine. Achebe’s use of these contrasting stories, Idemili from the traditional culture and Ikem’s Hymn, a tale of loss and privation which arises out of the neocolonial society and its treatment of people, illuminate the importance of “the story” in shaping the culture. These two tales depict the moral difference between traditional Kangan and neocolonial society.
Ikem embodies the transformation of a sympathetic character of the ruling, privileged class. Initially, he works from within the power center to effect change for the working class, the majority of people, by speaking for them through his editorials. When he is perceived as a threat and suspended from his position at the newspaper, he directs his challenges to the people he wants to help and change. As Beatrice is the key character in the development of a new post-colonial community, Ikem is the character who provides the ideas that propel its growth and motivates others to make their own journey. As the newspaper editor he had a platform for his views about the issues and concerns of the people which he addressed to the ruler, Sam. When he is removed from his post, he addresses the people directly in his speech to the university students.

Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined Communities* describes newspapers as the perfect vehicle for understanding national identity as an imagined community. They are read by people across the country on a daily basis. The citizens of the country can imagine others reading the same items they are reading and that thought unites them. Those that do not read hear the news from their peers as Ikem's scene with the cab drivers illustrates: “I no sabi book but I sabi say na for we this oga de fight, not for himself” (125). Ikem, the newspaper editor, constructs through his “crusading editorials” the ideas and issues that the Kangan community will reflect on (35), but that only Sam can act on. The actions of Ikem show the importance of a free press in a post-colonial nation—that it should report not only to and for the government, but also to and for the people.

Yet at the beginning of the novel, the audience Ikem is addressing is primarily Sam because Ikem believes that he can influence him and because all power rests with
Sam in their neocolonial world. Ikem has had success with a change in the law outlawing executions and mandating the cleaning of an area that the taxi-drivers use. This latter success brings him eventually into contact with the cab drivers. Prior to that as Chris says of Ikem, he “had no solid contact with the ordinary people of Kangan”(36). This is not exactly true since Ikem’s girlfriend is a store clerk and her mother is a market woman. However Chris’s point is well taken: Ikem is an observer of the Kangan working class and poor but his connections with them have primarily been through his love life. After Ikem’s meeting with the taxi-drivers, he is elated because of “this rare human contact across station and class with these two who had every cause to feel hatred but came instead with friendship” (125). Ikem who spent so much time watching people in the big Gelgele market and foregoing privileges out of solidarity with the poor was in fact actually alienated from them. The expectation that the cab drivers would feel hatred toward him because of his class and status belies his own observation on how the poor survived abuse from the powerful. In an earlier chapter, Ikem recounts how a young boy who was almost run over by a soldier parking his car responds to the officer’s verbal abuse of him, “If I kill you I kill dog.”(44). The young trader explains to his friends that what the soldier meant was: “ ‘If I kill you I kill dog means that after he kill me he will go home and kill his dog’ ”(44). He and his friends laugh and an explosive situation is defused. The young man even tells the soldier, “ ‘Go well, oga’ ” (44). There was no hatred expressed even with extreme provocation. Ikem’s guilt about his privileged position is the reason he thinks the cab drivers would hate him. The drivers are like the young trader, and Beatrice’s maid, Agatha, just living their lives without undue concern
about the privileged lives that elites have or for their own security because they know
they are not safe.

Ikem’s use of his power as a newspaper editor to help members of the working
class is laudable. He had not reached the same opinion of his work in that regard that he
ascribes to a social group, The Bassa Rotary Club, about charity. “While we do our good
works let us not forget that the real solution lies in a world in which charity will have
become unnecessary” (143). The real solution for the cab drivers would be an equitable
world where crusading editorials were not necessary to provide a clean and safe place to
work. However, the cab drivers go to see him to express their appreciation for his work.
They fully understand that he does not suffer as they do. They see themselves as
politically powerless but they do appreciate having powerful friends even though they
were critical of Ikem camouflaging his importance by driving an old car. The drivers’
attitude puzzles Ikem. He finds it hard to understand their “preference for a leader driving
not like themselves in a battered and spluttering vehicle but differently, stylishly in a
Mercedes and better still with another downtrodden person like themselves for a
chauffeur” (127). Not so his girlfriend, Elewa, she understands the drivers’ position. She
comments on Ikem’s refusal to get a better car or use one from the office: “No be the
same government work?” (128). Elewa recognizes his status even though Ikem does not
want to see himself as part of the neocolonial ruling apparatus of their nation.

Ikem, however, is a son of Abazon, a very successful one. He is excused by the
elder from Abazon because of Ikem’s importance when he is criticized by others in the
crowd for not taking part in the community’s rituals such as the naming and wedding
ceremonies that cement communal ties. This is an element of Ikem’s alienation from the
people as a member of the elite. It is interesting in the end that just such a ritual with all segments of the society participating is presented as a representation of the post-colonial nation. Ikem, the ideological firebrand of the novel, has not been connected to the people who consider him their “eye and ear” (116). The fact that Ikem did not tell them to vote for Sam for President-for-Life influenced the village’s negative vote. The consequence for their lack of support for Sam is the halted water projects in their village. The delegation does not blame Ikem for their situation nor does he see his own involvement in it.

It is Sam’s imprisonment of the storyteller and the Abazonian delegation more than Ikem’s suspension from the newspaper that propels Ikem forward to the final stage of his journey. Ikem’s visit with the delegation and the wisdom of the elder leader of the group strongly impresses him. The elder is a storyteller. Ikem knows the power of the storyteller, “storytellers are a threat. They threaten all champions of control, they frighten usurpers of the right to freedom of the human spirit-in-state, in church or mosque, in party congress, in the university or wherever” (141). He takes the message and the news of its aftermath from his meeting with the Abazonian delegation to the country’s future rulers, the students.

Ikem’s belief is that the “prime failure” of the government 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” (131). Ikem goes to speak to the students at the university which is his last appearance in public and in the novel. He concludes his speech, “The Tortoise and the Leopard, a political meditation” with the news of the arrest of the Abazonian delegation. The students are outraged at the
news. However Ikem does not let the students just fault the government for what has happened. In the question and answer period with the students after his speech, Ikem confronts them on their failure to assume responsibility, their selfishness, and their courting of favoritism and mediocrity in their associations and studies. Ikem’s criticism of the students holds the core of his argument about citizens’ responsibilities in a post-colonial nation. It is their responsibility he tells them, “to hold your own student leaders to responsible performance” (148). This is a mandate that also applies to the people in a post-colonial society about their leaders. According to Ikem they must be responsible and ethical to root out corruption in their own ranks. They must also be diligent and motivated holding themselves to high standards. It is not a task that Ikem and his friends have been able to do. The reversal of that failure serves as the prime task for a post-colonial nation. Ikem’s ideas about the responsibility of government and its citizenry will fuel the actions of the new community that coalesces around Beatrice at the end of the novel. This can be seen in this new non-hierarchical community when Emmanuel, the student, corrects Beatrice when she says, “Ideas cannot live outside people”(207). He responds to her:“—‘It wasn’t Ikem the man who changed me. I hardly knew him. It was his ideas set down on paper. One idea in particular: that we may accept a limitation on our actions but never, under no circumstances, must we accept restriction on our thinking’”(207). It is Ikem’s ideas that provide the direction and describe the responsibilities that people must assume in a post-colonial society.

Through Chris’s narration the reader sees how absolute power has corrupted his former friend, Sam, and how far removed Chris, because of his proximity to that power, is from the Kangan people. Chris’s awareness and knowledge about others outside of the
ruling elite and change in his attitude towards them comes late to him on his journey north to Abazon. He must leave Bassa, the capital for his own safety after Ikem’s death. On his flight from the capital to Abazon, his experiences lead him to a measure of respect for those in the working class and the knowledge that “To succeed as small man no be small thing.”(179). Chris said of Emmanuel, the young student he had come to admire for his quick wit: “Why did we not cultivate such young men before now? Why, we did not even know they existed if the truth must be told! We? Who are we? The trinity who thought they owned Kangan as BB [Beatrice] once unkindly said”(176). When Chris’s final words are told to Beatrice, she understands the extent of the philosophical and political journey he made:

‘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….The bottles are up there on the wall hanging by a hair’s breadth, yet looking down pompously on the world. 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…” (214-5; emphasis in original)

Chris’s revelations about power and the values of working class people come too late for him to take a changed role in the post-colonial society. Chris is, as Beatrice says of him, followed by “an alienated history,” both figuratively and literally, in the form of a man who witnesses his death (204). This character, a “highly articulate drunk,” is like Chris a product of a colonial education (198). Both Chris and this unnamed character are products of “mixed mintage” of the colonial and the traditional a term Beatrice uses to describe her father’s favorite quotation, “Procrastination is a lazy man’s apology”(100). It
is the term, “my headmaster used to say” the drunk tells Chris in their interaction before Chris’s death that points him out to the reader as a student of Beatrice’s father.

The anonymous character is the one who identifies Chris, who has been traveling under an assumed identity as a workman, to his killer: “My friend, do you realize you have just shot the Commissioner for Information”(200). This nameless character represents the “alienated history” of the colonial past there to witness the death of a neocolonial government official at the hands of one of the enforcers of neocolonial power. Chris’s death also reinforces elements of the Idemili myth. The myth has an element of vengeance in it as it tells the story of one young seeker of power who contravenes the rules and winds up in the embrace of the great boa—death. Ikem, Chris and Sam, the members of the ruling triumvirate that Chris jokes about as he lay dying also meet the same fate. They are part of the same government and their fate under the Idemili myth does not differ.

Beatrice’s journey to the margins takes place physically in her accompaniment of Chris for part of his trip north and psychologically in her relationships with women of the working classes. With Chris she experiences the generosity of the poor as they provide shelter for the two of them at a cost to their own well being and safety. She develops close bonds with the uneducated women in her life, her maid, Agatha, an emotional person possessed of great religious fervor, and Elewa, Ikem’s salesclerk girlfriend. Agatha’s character, like that of Beatrice’s father, can be seen as reflecting the colonial missionaries’ influence in the people’s lives and culture. Beatrice’s relationship with both characters is emotionally distant. She treats Agatha formally and coolly until she actually begins to empathize with her in trying to understand Agatha’s coldness to Elewa. For the
first time, Beatrice apologizes to Agatha for making her cry a not uncommon occurrence in their mistress/maid relationship. This step towards one of the oppressed who is, “so unpleasantly, so pig-headedly unhappy” and “sanctimonious” is a mark of Beatrice’s growth (169). It is prompted by a memory she has of something Ikem said to her in his last visit with her: “It is now up to you women to tell us what has to be done. And Agatha is surely one of you” (169; emphasis in original). Beatrice also befriends Elewa, a young woman, “a half-literate salesgirl” (168) who is pregnant with Ikem’s child, and brings her into her home. She begins to relate to and care about women not in her social class.

Beatrice’s reaching out is not just limited to women. Experiences she has with other members of the working class after Chris goes into hiding also break through her reserves. This part of Beatrice’s journey connects her to the poor and working class people of the country. She sees that those, like her, who have benefited from the neocolonial spoils must be involved with those who are oppressed, like Agatha, to move the country into a post-colonial sphere of equality.

At the end of the novel women will lead Kangan’s journey of transformation from a neocolonial to a post-colonial society. Women as a group are as Ikem said “the single most oppressed group in the world” (99). They are at the very margins of power in Kangan society. Yet Beatrice, the Honors English graduate, will be the creator of the new narrative as she is the writer who survives in the end. She, as well as all major representatives of the society— the peasants, students, soldiers, market-women, and domestic servants— will be instrumental in the creation of new traditions within the society.
The critic Elleke Boehmer questions whether this ending, “remains in the main emblematic, a public enshrining of a canonised and perhaps stereotyped ‘womanly’ authority set up as a last resort in the face of a depraved political situation” (103). Boehmer asks, “if the faith in an alternative female rule depends on the stereotypical image of woman as inspirer and spiritual guide, does that idea, whether as stereotype or as ideal, have much hope of practical application”(103). Boehmer does not include in her argument the origin of this new rule squarely in the pre-colonial era of the Kangan “mythic past” as Hall would term it. The Idemili myth pertains to the use of and limits on power expressed in a way that resonates in the culture of Kangan/Nigeria. The myth speaks to the Kangans where they are as Ikem describes it in their “core of reality” (91).

Achebe’s novel may be read by people all over the world but its primary audience is, I think, the Nigerian people. The author’s leadership in directing the future of his society is a role that he has written about in the past: “The writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done. In fact, he should march right in front” (Achebe, Hope 45). The ending is not faith based on “an alternative female rule” rather it is based on a collaborative inclusive sharing, symbolized in so many ways in the naming ceremony of the shopgirl and the intellectual’s child in a new manner of being that does not accept either inheritance uncritically. The newborn is given the male name “Amarchina, May-the-path never close,” but she will be called Ama, which is a female name (206). Her name reflects both a new way and a remembering of the old. It symbolizes the path this new community will take in building their nation.
Section Seven: Conclusion: The Struggle Continues

The colonial era cannot be undone. Neither can the recent neocolonial past. The future, however, can be different. As the old man says of the young people gathered at Beatrice’s party for Ikem and Elewa’s child, “You have put the world where it should sit…” (210). It is a world, in this instance a naming ceremony, that celebrates patriarchal rule in the process of being reformed. This ceremony exemplifies Ikem’s theory of how society is changed by reform rather than revolution:

Society is an extension of the individual. The most we can hope to do with a problematic individual psyche is to re-form it. No responsible psychoanalyst would aim to do more, for to do more, to overthrow the psyche itself, would be to unleash insanity. No. We can only hope to rearrange some details in the periphery of the human personality. Any disturbance of its core is an irresponsible invitation to disaster. Even a one-day-old baby does not make itself available for your root-and-branch psychological engineering, for it comes trailing clouds of immortality. What immortality? Its baggage of irreducible inheritance of genes. That is immortality. (91)

The story of the struggle of Kangan/Nigeria is also immortal. The survival of the anthills “to tell the new grass of the savannah about last year’s brush fires” (28) as well as the account of the tortoise’s struggle live forever within the framework of Achebe’s story of the struggle of a formerly colonized people to move past that era and assume a post-colonial national identity. The reverberation of each of these stories within the framework of the novel enriches the reader’s understanding of Kangan culture and identity.
The national identity Achebe builds in the novel has elements of Hall’s "imagined community" (613). The key character, Beatrice, is suffused with her new identification with an ancient goddess myth, Idemili, who controls and limits power. She leads her small community in the creation of new traditions that are a melding of the old and new and cross generational, class, ethnic and religious lines in forming their new identity. They are a community of “timeless folk,” as Hall might say on the one hand and on the other changing in their relationships with one another in forming a post-colonial society. Women who are most likely to suffer from abuse of power are assuming leadership in this new society and resuming a mythic role in determining who is honorable enough to hold power which in itself is powerful. In the end a woman is left to write the narrative of the nation. The new status of women in the country will also transform the old, precolonial, traditional, patriarchal rituals and customs in a collaborative manner as represented by the women leading the naming ceremony.

At the core of Kangan/Nigeria society is the cultural wisdom of the people. These are the “timeless” values Hall describes. The people may be students, soldiers, shopgirls, marketwomen, taxicab drivers or professionals, but what makes them Kangans/Nigerians is their awareness of their connectiveness—we are these people rather than those—a sense of nationhood—the imagined community. The Kangan nation is based on a capitalist society rooted in a white supremacist ideology that the ruling Kangans have carried over from the British without regard or respect as Achebe shows for their own people, culture and traditions. They are in the process of forging a national identity as an “imagined community” that represents the Kangans. The Kangans’ progress to this future is illustrated in Achebe’s creation of the characters, Beatrice, Ikem and Chris: Beatrice as
re-embodying and recasting ancient myths and traditions to bring the new nation beyond neocolonial to post-colonial fruition; Ikem who aligns himself “with the people: their economic, political and cultural struggle for survival” (Ngugi, Moving 74) and Chris who “aligns himself” with the people after his expulsion from the center of power to that of a man on the run protected by the people on the margin encapsulate the position Achebe sees for Kangan’s “talented tenth” (DuBois).

Achebe’s use of myths and legends with the traditional wisdom of the people, and his foregrounding of a leadership role for a woman in a traditionally male-dominated society demonstrates the blending of the cultural legacy of the precolonial period and the changing status and education of women from the colonial era. This tactic brings the nation to the threshold of a new identity as an egalitarian society. As Umelo Ojinmah wrote in his study of Achebe’s work, that his “message is clear...to salvage what is useful from their past, graft those to what is useful from European culture, and re-form the colonial political and social heritage around their existing cultural world-view” (109). Achebe’s use of the colonizer’s language enriched with the nation’s native linguistic inheritance allows for the full transmission of the people’s values. They fulfill the sense of the people that what is to come in the truly post-colonial nation “is seen as the flowering of a long organic evolution” (Hall 614).

The story that is told in the novel shows that “a fellow and his match struggled here” (117). However there is a lingering sense of pessimism in the novel’s concluding pages as two of the key questions posed by Beatrice go unanswered. In speaking of Chris and Ikem she asks: “Were they not in fact trailed travelers whose journeys from start to finish had been programmed in advance by an alienated history” (204). Then referring to
that history she asks, “What must a people do to appease an embittered history” (204).

The novel’s shift in focus from that of alienated people to that of an alienated history is both troubling and promising for the future. It is promising because it is being asked by a person who was once and is no longer alienated from the people. It is troubling because the transformation of a history can only be controlled by the writer of that history and there we are back again at the tale told in “The Tortoise and the Leopard.” It matters who is telling the story and what is being written. As the elder from Abazon said, “It is the story that owns and directs us. It is the thing that makes us different from cattle; it is the mark on the face that sets one people apart from their neighbours” (114). In short, it defines who we are.

The narrative, “the story,” whether told in fable or myth or novel, defines the people and informs their beliefs and makes sense of their society, it is what lasts. In Achebe’s earlier novels of Igbo life (Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God) their customs and encounters with the British are from the Igbo’s perspective. His later novels describe a Nigerian perspective and identity. Anthills not only depicts a Nigerian identity but it also projects a direction for restructuring the society. It is a reformist view rather than a revolutionary view. The struggle Achebe recounts in Anthills is not over by the end of the novel but a way has been shown and emphasized in the naming ceremony that concludes the novel. This part of the narrative includes all classes and religious groups in the society participating in a ritual that is about the future not only of the child but also of their society. As the old man who represents the traditional religion and culture says, “May this child be the daughter of all of us…. May these young people here when they make the plans for their world not forget her. And all other children” (Anthills 211). They
conclude the ceremony with the toast, “The life of Kangan” (212). This diverse group of people claims a common identity. They are Kangans. They now claim for themselves a national identity that was initially imposed on them by a colonial power. The national identity of Nigeria qua Kangan is comprised of many different ethnicities and a wide variety of religious adherents. These differences are unified in a national identity as Kangans. As Hall writes, “instead of thinking of national cultures as unified, we should think of them as constituting a discursive device which represents difference as unity or identity…. National cultures help to ‘stitch up’ differences in one identity” (Hall 617-8). Achebe illustrates this aspect of colonialism as a heritage that all Kangans can accept.

In order to have a nation that is not a continuation of colonial abuse in a new guise as an independent country they must clear the oppressive core of the neocolonial government that only exists to retain power and not to serve the people. It is in this “clearing” as Shohat describes it, the truly post-colonial nation can emerge. The post-colonial world being constructed by Beatrice’s community will have its roots in the culture and philosophy that existed in Kangan before colonialism. The story that owns them will be a newly written Kangan narrative and not British.

_Anthills of the Savannah_ does not deliver its characters to the promised land, a post-colonial society, but it does record that a “fellow and his [her] match struggled here,” and the struggle continues for those of formerly colonized nations to reclaim and direct their story. Chinua Achebe has accomplished the beginning of this reclamation in _Anthills_ using: a colonial language transformed by the people to reflect their cultural heritage; and the ideas and actions that propel the main characters to move their
allegiance from a neocolonial form of government to an inclusive post-colonial nation under the collaborative leadership of women.
Notes

1 Chinua Achebe, *Anthills of the Savannah* (New York: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1987). All quotations are from this edition and are cited in the text as *Anthills* with page numbers following.


3 Sani Abacha, the military ruler of Nigeria died of a heart attack in the arms of a prostitute, an ending worthy of the Idemili myth. (Abbas 49)

4 *Things Fall Apart, No Longer at Ease, A Man of the People, and Arrow of God*

5 Shohat sees the term post-colonial arising as a substitute for the no longer in vogue term, “Third World”(322).


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