

**ABUSE OF POLITICAL OFFICE IN AFRICA:
A LITERARY PERSPECTIVE**

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CERTIFICATION

I hereby declare that this submission is my work towards the MPHIL and that ,to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published by another person nor material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree of the University except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

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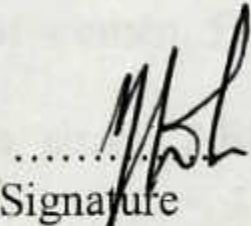
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ABSTRACT

The essay focuses on the arbitrary exercise of power by political office holders on the African continent. Right after independence, the African leaders in whose hands the mantle of political administration was vested disappointed their people. They did not live up to expectation. Indeed, the very accusations levelled against the colonial masters such as abuse of the rights of citizens, exploitation, plunder and pillage became the very excesses of the so-called messianic leaders who had won Africa its freedom. The abuses by African leaders are even worse in comparative terms judging what they did and continue to do. African literature has addressed itself to the issue of abuse in the body politic of Africa. Literary artists in all the three genres of literature have expressed diverse views about this problem. In most cases, these political leaders are satirised with the intent of discouraging their conduct in office, but it is sad to say that either the leaders do not read literature or, even if they do, they seem not to be bothered by what the literary artists say about them.

The problem of abuse of political office is widespread on the African continent. This researcher has discovered, among other things, that acts which constitute arbitrariness include violation of the civil liberties of the people, corruption, incompetent leadership, military incursions into politics with their abuse of the rights of the people, as well as economic and sexual exploitation of women. Finally, the researcher concludes that for arbitrariness in political office to abate, African civil societies should be conscious of their rights and must be prepared to defend them when the need arises.

DEDICATION

This research work is dedicated to
the memory of my late father and mother
who passed to the great beyond
just before the break of dawn
leaving behind unveiled pyramid...Festus Iyayi

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I wish to express my gratitude to my supervisor for the patient and meticulous supervision she exercised over my work. I am particularly grateful to her for going the extra-mile to furnish me with material relevant to my area of research. While acknowledging her immense contribution to the success of my work, I wish to recall her calling the whip and applying it on my back, with motherly care, though.

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Last but not least, to my dear wife, Julie, and our son, Nana Yaw, for your words of encouragement which spurred me on to the end of my work.

To God who is my creator, redeemer and protector, I say thank you.

INTRODUCTION

The politics of Africa dating the post-independence epoch reflects a dictum: "When the slave becomes a master." The pre-independence era saw African leaders waging relentless battles against the colonial masters. A number of reasons were assigned as to why the "White Masters" should not continue to rule over Africa. Africans saw colonialism as exploitative and unjust. In his novel, *A Wreath for Udomo*,¹ Peter Abrahams argues that the imperialists have no right to rule Africans. Leaders of Africa, such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Kamuzu Banda of Malawi, and Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya saw colonialism as a bane, indeed, an albatross around the neck of the African continent. Therefore the liberation fighters left no stone unturned in their efforts to dislodge the common enemy.

When independence was finally won for the continent, the onus then rested on Africans to take their destinies into their own hands and manage the affairs of their states. African leaders were confronted with the realities of ruling their polities. They realised that it was one thing to agitate for freedom and another to lead their people in the reconstruction efforts of the continent.

Had they been satisfied with colonialists' rule, African leaders would not have clamoured and overthrown the colonial masters. They accused the imperialists of reaping where they had not sown. Other accusations were the violations of the sovereign rights of the peoples of Africa, plunder and pillage of the continent². Therefore, one expects that when the reigns of government were finally entrusted into the hands of these patriots of Africa, their rule would be characterised by good governance. They would uphold the tenets of democratic principles and administer justice to their people.

The irony is that the political situation in Africa after independence has never come near perfection. The generality of Africans have never been satisfied with the way the leaders rule. The very excesses the first generation of African leaders accused the colonial masters of having perpetrated are the very things one observes these leaders doing. In comparative terms, one could even say that African leaders are the worst in terms of aberrations they commit in office.

The focus of this study is on the abuse of political office in Africa, juxtapositioning these "real" abuses with abuses in literary texts, and to conclude that indeed literary artists do not write out of a vacuum. Their writings reflect their experience and invariably constitute a response to these experiences.

Arbitrariness in political office manifests itself in varied ways. In the first place, African governments have a disposition of intolerance. Although they claim to be democratic, the political leaders are intolerant especially of the opposition. Mistrust and suspicion characterise the relation between the government and the opposition. Almost every failing on the part of the government is blamed on the opposition. In Ghana, for instance, the June 1982 murder of the three High Court Judges was initially blamed on "the enemies of the nation who have sworn to turn the clock back in this country and to restore a system of the enslavement of the people."³

As a demonstration of their intolerance, African leaders do not tolerate voices of dissent. Such dissenting voices are seen as enemies and everything is done either to eliminate or silence them. Opposition protests and demonstrations, however peaceful they may be, are often fiercely resisted. In Togo, for example, there are reports telling of how demonstrators were dispersed with rubber bullets, water cannon and pepper spray. In Ethiopia, the BBC magazine, *Focus on Africa*,⁴ reports of how opposition elements

including students who went on demonstration to register their displeasure at the outcome of general elections in which the government won, were brutalised and some shot dead.

In his *Anthills of the Savannah*⁵, Chinua Achebe observes how intolerant His Excellency, Major Sam, grows of peaceful demonstrations. He regards demonstrations as acts of "indiscipline."

Most often, African leaders are in the news, but for the wrong reasons. The human rights records of African governments are appalling. They violate the rights of their citizens with impunity. Because they possess the coercive force of the state, they trample on the liberties of the citizens without any regard for how they feel. For instance, people suspected of engaging in acts deemed detrimental to the security of the state can be apprehended and put behind bars without going through the due process of the law, such as being indicted in a court of competent jurisdiction presided over by a competent judge. Mike Oquaye reports in his *Politics in Ghana 1982-1992* that arbitrary arrest and incarceration were regular features of the PNDC military junta which ruled Ghana in the 1980s.⁶ The situation is not different in other parts of Africa where the military intervenes in politics. From Nigeria to Sudan, Algeria to Zimbabwe, the rights of citizens are violated with impunity. In his poem, "Two Songs from Home," Lade Wosornu bemoans the violence unleashed in the wake of military take-over.⁷

Closely allied to the above is the issue of gagging the media. For democracy to thrive there has to be a vibrant and buoyant press. In fact, the media have been christened the "fourth estate in the realm," implying they have to work in concert with the three traditional arms of government, namely, the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. They have been constitutionally mandated to ensure accountability, transparency and probity in government. One major function of the media is to keep government on its toes so that such an exercise will ensure the deepening of democratic tenets in the state.

However, the media have had their functions compromised as a result of the over-bearing influence that governments in Africa exert over them. Very often, the media are under the thumb of these governments for various reasons; either because the government sponsors them, especially in the case of the state-owned media where journalists who work there, ranging from the editor to the reporter, owe allegiance to the government for their employment, or the private or independent media are threatened with retrogressive media laws to cow them into submission. Professor Maduabuchi notes that:

there are many overt and covert ways of carrying out censorship in African nation states and which constitute a threat to the survival of the newly fledged independent press. Perhaps the most obvious of these are direct attacks on both newspapers and journalists including killings, physical attacks, threats, harassment, arbitrary detention and banning of individuals.⁸

The above quotation sums up the difficult situation into which the media are placed in the discharge of their constitutional obligation. Professor Oquaye remarks that in Ghana, "the PNDC employed the Newspaper Licensing Law (PNDC L 211) and other unbridled powers at its disposal to silence the press. A systematic attack was also launched on newspapers which asserted their autonomy."⁹ Another crude method which was alleged to have been used by the NDC government in suppressing the critical press was "shit bombing" where human excreta was splashed on the premises of the targeted media house. Due to such threats from governments, the press in Africa has become a lap-dog instead of being a watch-dog.

By way of comparison, Achebe talks about the subtle attempt by the government to muzzle the media in his *Anthills of the Savannah*. President Sam's policy is that he has instructed the Commissioner for Information to censor any "obscene" material before it gets published. Any voice of dissent is viewed as an enemy to the revolution and His Excellency will not hesitate to crush it out of the state.

The personal liberty of the people of Africa is taken for granted. Both the era of constitutionality and military dictatorships are united in their hostility to dissenting

opinions. President Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana, allegedly grew intolerant of criticism and clamped down on the liberties of the people. His reign saw one of the most gruesome violations of citizens' right with the passage into law of the infamous Preventive Detention Act.¹⁰ This Act ensured that scores of Ghanaians went to prison without trial. During the regime of the erstwhile PNDC in Ghana, the story was not different; the era saw blatant assault on the liberties of Ghanaians. Arrest, torture, detention, flogging, and persecution were the order of the day. Professor Oquaye remarks:

The PNDC recorded beyond comparison the worst human rights record in Ghana..... there was no guarantee against false arrest nor imprisonment without trial..... that abduction, murder, mayhem, destruction of property, blowing up of buildings and untold wickedness..... constituted the official policy in the planning and execution of the 31 December Revolution.¹¹

In an article published in the now defunct *West Africa*, an authoritative journal on Africa, the magazine bemoans the spate of political killings in Africa. The author notes:

Extra-judicial executions in Africa during the 1992 have been a major cause of concern for the worldwide human rights organization, Amnesty International. It said in its annual report of 1992, which was released in July 8: Political killings, sometimes on a massive scale, continued to be the tragic hallmark of human rights violations in Africa.¹²

It is frightening to acknowledge the scale of murder perpetrated in the name of politics. The political office holders supervise killings, especially of those who are considered enemies to the regime. Journalists critical of the government are eliminated, key opposition figures are murdered in cold blood. It is instructive to observe that those in government are sometimes killed by their own colleagues or by opposition forces. President Laurent Kabilla of Democratic Republic of Congo was assassinated by his own body guard.¹³ To lend an element of realism to African literature, Achebe discusses these politically motivated killings in the *Anthills of the Savannah*. Wole Soyinka, in his *Kongi's Harvest*, also talks about the maniac of murder in African politics.

Another arbitrary feature of African governments is the composition of government and quality of personnel assembled to fill various positions. The conventional

practice has been on the basis of competence and loyalty. However, the above prerequisite seems no longer to be the guiding principle. Instead, people who are "near and dear" are selected to fill vacancies. The BBC reports that President Mwai Kibaki of Kenya has filled his cabinet with his cronies.¹⁴ In Ghana during the regime of the NDC of former President Rawlings, one particular tribe to which the president belongs was noted to dominate his government. In such appointments, tribal considerations, cronyism, nepotism, "Old Boyism" and "Old Girlism" appear to wield much influence than academic and other qualifications. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, President Sam fills his cabinet with his old schoolmates. In his *Money Galore*¹⁵, Amu Djoletto also discusses the baleful role of nepotism in African governments. Kofi Kafu, an MP, awards contracts to his colleague who eventually executes shoddy work.

The above brings in the issue of awarding contracts. The normal procedure of awarding contracts is to publicise the contract in the print media to invite competitive bidding. Judging from the competence coupled with the equipment needed for the job, a particular contractor can be awarded the contract. In Africa, this procedure is often sidestepped. Where it is even adhered to, it is a mere formality as those who are deemed qualified have already been earmarked. The arbitrary practice of these "power brokers" is to either award the contract to party "faithfuls," family members, friends, old school mates, wives or girl friends without recourse to their professional training or background. The political office holders take kick-backs of some percentage of the monetary value of the contracts. As a result of this the cost of government projects is grossly inflated. Coupled with the above is the corrupt tendencies of these contractors who want to make abnormal profits; in the process shoddy works are executed. It is very surprising to observe that buildings which are put up in modern times in Ghana are of poor quality compared with those that were built in the colonial days or the decades immediately after

independence. Recently, the BBC reported of a collapsed four storey building in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi. Police blamed the collapsed building on corruption and consequently charged the owner in court. In *Money Galore*, the author ridicules a contractor whose building collapsed a few months after it had been built. In his poem, "His Excellency the Masquerader," J.P. Clark satirises a government appointee who consciously executes shoddy work.

African governments are voted into office with the understanding that they are going to deliver their people from economic doldrums, dysfunctional health delivery system and the general sense of disillusionment. Even military governments come to power riding on the back of non-performing, incompetent and corrupt civilian governments. Therefore the issue of delivering the people from the quagmire of economic depression is paramount to all forms of governments. However, the naked truth is that African governments do not perform to the satisfaction of their citizens. Across the continent, the long-suffering peoples of Africa continue to complain about the nose-diving trend of education, deteriorating facilities at the hospitals, economic insecurities and the general sense of disillusionment. In view of this, countless number of citizens of Africa, on a daily basis, journey to the so-called developed world where they hope to enjoy life to the fullest.

Governments, instead of performing, go on a wild goose chase, pursuing perceived enemies. African governments engage their muscles in unproductive ventures. In Ghana, politicians engage in fiery exchanges of invectives instead of thinking about ameliorating the socio-economic challenges confronting the people. They expend their energies on petty squabbles that do not bring about the cohesion of the polity but rather antagonise everybody. They spend precious time doing trivial things such as commissioning KVIPS – (toilet facilities) when these can be done by local authority. We

note in *Money Galore* where the Member of Parliament, Kofi Kafu, commissions a toilet facility that was poorly built and which consequently collapsed. Former President Rawlings of Ghana cut sods to commission toilet facilities.

One wonders the reasons why these leaders cannot perform. Is it because of incompetence? After almost fifty years of independence, it is sad to remark that basic infrastructure such as roads, railways, school buildings, and hospitals are still in their infant stage of development. In Ghana, major roads, hospitals, and schools are now being constructed. The question is: "why has it taken successive governments all this long to develop the infrastructure of the country?" The governments lack vision and foresight. They have presided over decades of decay and stagnation of virtually everything.

Bribery and corruption have been the bane of Africa's quest to develop. Corruption has been a cancerous disease ravaging African nation-states beyond repair. African leaders, even the most dictatorial, cannot be absolved from the canker of corruption. Throughout the continent, one does not know any leader to trust when issues of corruption arise. For all his murderous deeds, one least expects the late Sani Abacha, former head of state of Nigeria, to be corrupt. Former president Rawlings of Ghana remarked that Abacha "is a man of integrity." Where is his integrity when upon his demise, it was discovered that he had stashed away in foreign banks vast sums of money to the tune of eight billion dollars? African leaders gained notoriety for corruption to the extent that the political scientists on the continent now have a designation, "political corruption." In an article titled: "Political Corruption: a Philosophical Inquiry into a Moral Problem," Professor Kwame Gyekye defines political corruption as:

the illegal, unethical, and unauthorised exploitation of one's political or official position for personal gain or advantage. Political corruption is usually associated with the acceptance of bribe; but it is more than that. For, graft, fraud, nepotism, kickbacks, favouritism and misappropriation of public funds are all acts of political corruption when they are committed by public officials exploiting their official positions for their own advantage.¹⁶

From around the African continent, there are legion stories of prominent political office holders who betray the trust the people repose in them. The late Mobutu Sese Seko, the former president of DR Congo, is on record as having looted his country's kitty and stashed away the money in foreign banks. Day in and day out, there are stories of graft, money laundering, misappropriation of funds, pure embezzlement, and diversion of resources by government officials. What is worrying about the high spate of corruption in Africa is the utter indifference that governments show to it. Because almost the entire government is neck deep in corruption, there is no determination to fight it. President Kuffour's zero tolerance for corruption seems to be waning as the government has turned deaf ears to media reports of corruption. Similarly, Mwai Kibaki of Kenya who came to power riding comfortably on the back of corruption cases against his predecessor, Daniel arap Moi, declared zero tolerance for corruption on assumption of office in 2002 but has done little to minimise the canker in his country.¹⁷

Corruption is a global phenomenon; it is as ageless as it is pervasive. However, the dominance of the canker in Africa is overwhelming. Peter Eigen, the German and founder of Transparency International (an international non-governmental organization fighting corruption in the world) says: "I formed Transparency International because I noticed that corruption, especially in the Third World, has become one of the two or three large international problems like AIDS."¹⁸ As widespread and rampant as the canker is, the top brass of the government is engaged in it. In South Africa, the influential Jacob Zuma, the former vice president of the Republic of South Africa, was removed from office, the reason being "a corrupt relationship with his aide de camp."¹⁹ The vice president of Kenya has appeared before a vetting committee and has been quizzed over his involvement in Anglo Leasing, a scandal that has cost the Kenyan government over 8 million US dollars.²⁰

The effects of these acts of corruption are that the beneficiaries live a life of luxury whilst the broad masses languish in poverty. Africa's underdevelopment is partly attributable to the avaricious grabbing mentality of its political leaders. Achebe, apparently appalled by the high state of corruption in Nigeria and other parts of Africa, gives prominence to the issue in his *A Man of the People*. In *The Beggars' Strike*²¹, Sow Fall castigates politicians who dip their hands into state coffers and enrich themselves. In his poem, "The Motoka,"²² Theo Luzuka names and shames politicians who enjoy a life of opulence at the expense of the general populace. Amu Djoletu ridicules politicians who amass wealth in his *Money Galore*. Similarly, the poet, Richard Ntiru, in his poem "The Pauper,"²³ launches a satiric attack on insensitive politicians who enjoy wealth and power at the expense of the poor in society.

Contributing to a discussion on why African creative writers do not find time to write love stories, Ama Atta Aidoo, a renowned Ghanaian writer, observes: "African writers have been reluctant to write about love, mainly because they have often felt compelled to deal with so-called weightier issues such as poverty, corruption and incompetent leadership."²⁴

By the same token, Stewart Brown comments on the efforts of Nigerian poets in combating corruption in their country:

The notion of the poet as duty-bound to confront the political issues of the day harks back to the idea of the poet in the oral tradition as the literal spokesman for the common people in the courts of the powerful. In claiming that traditional duty to speak out, and in challenging the politicians so openly, contemporary Nigerian poets have often seemed more concerned with that public role, and with the political content and effects of their poems, than they have been with the techniques of their craft...One defence against that charge has been the urgency of the situation. For a poet like the much praised Tanure Ojaide, confronting the desolation of Nigeria's civil society by successive corrupt governments is a sacred duty, and words, given appropriate poetic shape by the very pressure of the circumstances, are the only weapon available to him.²⁵

In addition to the above, superstition thrives in the wielding of political power in Africa. It is not uncommon to hear of highly placed politicians indulging in occultism.

The belief is that these spiritual powers are invoked to give protection to those in the "corridors of power." They are used sometimes to bewitch the opponent and also to guarantee the continued stay in office of the incumbent. In a political treatise entitled: "Cultism, Power and Politics in Africa," J.A. Bamgbose argues thus: "The perception of both Western and African writers is that Africa is the theater of occultic practice, a continent of secrets and hidden forces that tend to run wild and threaten civility and reason."²⁶ Acknowledging the existence and practice of occultism in African politics, J.A. Bamgbose asserts further that:

There are numerous cases in Africa where Heads of state in Africa are fond of cultic powers to prolong their stay in power. It is alleged that Mathew Kereku of the Republic of Benin has a very big tortoise which he uses as a source of his power. Late Dr. Nkrumah of Ghana was alleged to have a secret room and a magical handkerchief...²⁷

It is very interesting to note that these politicians will allegedly stop at nothing to ensure their victory, for example, in elections or their continued stay in power. It is in the light of this pervasive occultic practice in her country, Senegal, that Sow Fall in *The Beggars' Strike* talks about Mour Ndiaye, the protagonist who goes to his numerous Marabouts (fetish priests) to conjure their powers so that he becomes the vice president of the Republic. The question is: If these politicians know they are doing the right things, then why the intervention of juju?

A disturbing phenomenon that has nurtured arbitrariness in African politics is the infiltration of the military into conventional politics. Military rule, as defined by Karo Ogbinaka, is "the seizure of power from elected democratic organs by a few elements of the state army through coup d'etat."²⁸ The military normally intervenes in politics when there is break-down of law and order and when civilian governments tend to be corrupt in office. The military moves in as a corrective measure to embark on what they term as a "clean-up exercise." This was the reason assigned by the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council which seized power on June 4, 1979 in Ghana.²⁹ The military, upon seizing

power, dissolves parliament and suspends the constitution. They therefore rule by decrees. In the event of military take-over, a number of measures are taken to safeguard the so-called security of the state. The irony is that whilst claiming to have intervened in the interest of the people, the security of the state appears to be superordinate. In their bid to ensure state security, they tread on the freedoms and liberties of individuals. Curfews are instituted with dispatch, banning the assembly of all kinds such as political rallies and demonstrations except those in support of the military. Military regimes are vindictive, and go on a wild goose chase to pursue their enemies. In Ghana, the PNDC military junta unleashed terror on Ghanaians. Innocent, defenceless, harmless and armless Ghanaians were arrested, tortured, imprisoned, maimed, whipped, and murdered.³⁰

The problem with the military is that they are incompetent political "governors" and as such are incapable of solving the socio-economic problems of a country. Rawlings of AFRC of Ghana is reported to have said: "I do not know Economics, neither do I know Law, but I know how it feels to go on an empty stomach."³¹ Dr. Joseph Osei, commenting on the incompetence of the military concedes: "The problem of military rule in Africa, I wish to argue, is worse than ineptitude."³² The rule of the military is characterised by chaos and a general sense of insecurity. The issue of the military in politics has been ridiculed in novels such as *Anthills of the Savannah*. In *Money Galore*, Amu Djoletto sees the intervention of the military as ending the irresponsibility of the civilian administration.

One thing about the military in African politics is that when they taste power and realise that power is "sweet," they seek to legitimise their rule by metamorphosing into civilian governments. The practice over the years has been to remove their leopard skins and put on garments of wool. They organise elections in which they are both players and referees. Such elections are always shrouded in controversies. An intriguing phenomenon

is that almost all the military leaders who contest elections emerge victorious. Something similar happened in Ghana where J.J Rawlings, the chairman of PNDC, the military junta which ruled Ghana in the 1980s, vied for elections and won massively. A similar thing occurred in the Gambia, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria. In view of the fact that this phenomenon gained currency on the African continent, literary artists took up the issue in their works. In his *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe talks about the military junta which organises elections for life-presidency for His Excellency, General Sam. An interesting fact is that he is the sole candidate; he wins a landslide victory.

In addition to the incursion of the military into regular politics, gangs of rebels and mercenaries take up arms and engage their government in warfare. In the guerrilla battle that ensues, either the rebels topple the government as it happened in Liberia, Uganda, DR Congo, or they are invited to join the government as in the case of Ivory Coast. This is a thorny issue in African politics; however, in most cases the leaders find it difficult to resolve such armed conflicts satisfactorily.

Politics and lies appear to be bed fellows in Africa. Politicians tell lies to their citizens to the extent that Africans wonder if politics cannot be practised without wrapping up issues in blatant lies. The leaders tell their citizens to practise virtue whilst they practise vice. The much touted slogan is "times are hard." "Tighten your belt." The paradox of it is that whereas the governed are urged to brace up for difficult times, the governors enjoy opulence. Whiles urging the 'tighten your belt' slogan, "they move about with loose belts." In times of elections, they promise the electorate the moon when they know too well that such promises cannot be kept. Observers have conceded that African politicians can promise bridges even where there are no rivers. This has been the bane of politics in Africa. As to why certain projects have not been executed, the politicians' answer is: "plans are far advanced"; "it is in the pipe-line." It is therefore not surprising

that in 2005, the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD) conducted a research which was aired on Joy FM, a local radio station in Accra, in which it was reported that Ghanaians had grown pessimistic; they did not believe that their socio-economic circumstances were going to get better. Indeed, they had given up ever enjoying better standards of living.

The literary artists are not oblivious to the deceitful and lying nature of African leaders. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe exposes the mendacities of President Sam who urges Professor Okong to lie to the demonstrators that he is in the middle of a conversation with the president of America.

In summing up this segment of the research, an interesting theory can be developed. It should be noted that the raw material for this introductory chapter has been taken from history and journalism. The facts presented have their corroborations from literary works. The theory then is that history, philosophy, journalism and literature have their areas of convergence and divergence and reflect and record the state of politics for posterity.

In the next three chapters, this writer would point out actions, commissions and omissions which constitute abuse of power as they are portrayed in selected prose texts, a collection of poems and selected plays.

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30. Oquaye, *Politics in Ghana*, p.400.
31. *Free Press*, July 4, 1979, p.1.
32. Joseph Osei, "A deadly virus against emerging democracies: the power and presence of political manipulation in African politics," published in *Philosophy and Politics*, p.339.

CHAPTER ONE

Postcolonial politics in Africa has seen real sons and daughters of Africa taking up the destiny of their motherland into their own hands with great intentions of steering it to safe anchor. The first generation of Africans who liberated the continent from the shackles of colonialism said all manner of distasteful things about the former white masters. Having worked in close association with the imperialists, African freedom fighters were able to learn at first hand the harm that these men caused Africa. One thought that corruption, exploitation (carting away the valuable resources of the land such as gold, diamond, and timber), oppression and suppression were going to end with the tumbling down of the flags of colonialism. Since Africans saw these negative developments happen to themselves, one expected that they were not going to engineer them and perpetrate them against their fellow countrymen.

However, upon assumption of office of these so-called messianic leaders, abuse of office has persisted, if not accelerated, unremittingly. In recent times, one still hears of corruption in high places, sexual scandals involving political leaders, and flagrant assault on the rights of innocent people. As a result of this arbitrary exercise of power and its negative impact on the lives of African people, many African writers, especially literary artists, have taken this issue up and written extensively on it. In some of their works, these writers, in satiric rendition, have depicted these politicians in grotesque mode with the intent of helping them to mend their ways; nonetheless, their debauched lifestyle continues.

This chapter discusses three novels: Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People*¹ and *Anthills of the Savannah*² and Aminata Sow Fall's *The Beggars' Strike*.³ In these novels, the authors have exposed the pretensions and the dark side of those who dwell in the "power house" of Africa and wield power arbitrarily.

In his novel, *A Man of the People*, Achebe casts a critical eye on African politics. The author's eye-piece are the novel's narrator Odili, Chief the Honourable M.A. Nanga, Member of Parliament, Odili's former teacher and a popular "bush"⁴ politician who has risen to the post of Minister of Culture in his West African homeland. At first, Odili is charmed by the politician, but eventually he recognises the extent of Nanga's abuses and decides to oppose the minister in an election. Odili is beaten, both physically and politically, his appeal to the people heard but ignored. The novel demonstrates, according to critic Shatto Arthur Gakwandi, how "the society has been invaded by a wide range of values which have destroyed the traditional balance between the material and the spiritual spheres of life, which has led inevitably to the hypocrisy of double standards."⁵ Odili is the victim of these double standards.

Despite his political victory, Nanga, along with the rest of the government, is ousted by a coup. The seriousness of the fictional situation portrayed in *A Man of the People* became real very soon after the novel was first published in 1966 when Nigeria itself was rocked by a coup.

One weighty issue that Achebe discusses in this novel is politics. J. G. Nkem Onyekpe defines politics as "the struggle for power which itself is the authority to determine or formulate and execute decisions and policies which must be accepted by the society. In other words, it is the struggle for power of governance, especially executive authority."⁶

In Africa, the struggle for political power is a real serious affair. It is as bitter and acrimonious as it is pugilistic. In African politics, there is no room for gentility. It seems there are no proper standards set to regulate the conduct of politics especially electioneering. Everybody does what they deem fit to secure them victory. In this connection, anything that can be done to undo the opponent is resorted to. So it is not

uncommon to hear of vulgar or abusive words hurled at competitors. At times it is physical assault; one can be ambushed, traps can be set by way of well-orchestrated accidents just to eliminate the opponent. In serious cases too, one can be murdered. In Africa, there are numerous cases of political killings which go unpunished. In *A Man of the People*, one observes interesting developments which characterise the conduct of the general elections. Worthy of note is the injection of money into the body politic. The money is used to influence the people to vote in a certain direction. In some cases too, it is paid to an opponent to withdraw his candidature. Odili is approached with monetary inducement but he rejects it.

Odili's colleague, Max, accepts it but refuses to stand down. When both refuse to back down, they are threatened. Max is killed by government sponsored thugs; Odili is beaten to the point of unconsciousness. To add insult to injury, his nomination papers are seized en route to the offices of the electoral commission. It is interesting to note that he is discharged from hospital on the very day when elections are being run.

In a related issue, Eunice, Max's fiancée, avenges the death of her suitor by gunning down Chief Koko, the incumbent Member of Parliament. What is of utmost concern to Achebe is the violence which characterises politics in Africa. What is the motivating factor behind killing in the name of politics? Is it because these politicians want to serve their country? Certainly not. Behind this blood-thirsty appetite to annex state power is the selfish interest to gratify themselves. It is obviously not in the interest of anybody that the politicians go all out to bend the rules of the game to see themselves in power. It is one thing: "to chop the national cake."

Again, there are instances of intimidation and violence associated with elections in Africa. As soon as Odili makes up his mind to contest in the elections, he recruits body guards and buys offensive weapons for them. Chief Nanga has a gang of hooligans who

are ready to kill and maim, just to ensure victory for their candidate. The intimidation does not rest with thugs alone; the regular police force is also used to harass the opposition. Odili is guarded by the police while in hospital, waiting for him to recuperate so that charges of possession of fire arms without lawful authority can be pressed against him in court.

Modern conduct of elections in Africa runs parallel to incidents described in *A Man of the People*. In his article, "Electoral Process in Nigeria: the Place of Money," Edward O. Erhagbe concedes that

In examining the role money played in the electoral process of the transition programme, it is safe to conclude that at many stages it was negatively used. Money was used overtly and covertly to influence the electoral process. The different forms of those were reported as involving, direct buying of voters' right at polling centres, the giving of inducements such as cooking salt to would-be voters and the influencing of electoral officers. In other instances, voters were rented to go and vote outside of their constituencies.⁷

In Ghana too, the story is not different. The 1992 general elections were widely believed to have been rigged. All kinds of irregularities characterised the electoral process. Intimidation, inducement, filling opaque ballot boxes prior to elections and multiple voting were said to have characterised the electoral process. In view of this, the opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP), boycotted the parliamentary elections and went ahead to publish a book, *The Stolen Verdict*, which tells of how the elections were rigged.

In addition to the above, one observes the politics of vendetta, violence and exclusion. Odili's entry into politics, although noble, is not without mischief. His primary motivation is to play to the rules of the game and inject sanity into the system. However, it is also to get at Chief Nanga for snatching his girl friend. The politics of vindictiveness and exclusion is seen in Urua where the entire community declares support for Odili. The narrator says "seven public works lorries arrived in the village and began to cart away the pipes they had deposited several months earlier for our projected Rural water scheme" (*A Man* 133). Because the people decide to vote for Odili instead of Senator Nanga, the

government terminates the project initiated in their part of the country. In African politics, developmental projects are tied up to loyalty to government. If a particular constituency refuses to vote for the government in power, then it risks not getting its fair share of the national cake. This problem is emphasised in *Anthills of the Savannah* where the people of Abazon are denied their fair share of the nation's resources because they refuse to vote for His Excellency.

Last but not least, an unsavoury characteristic of politics in *A Man of the People* is the issue of tribalism. Tribal allegiance determines the direction of voting in Africa. Politicians stoke tribal embers to their advantage. It is not only Nanga who fans the flames of tribalism, Max, the leader of the newly founded party, CPC, suggests that the people of Urua should vote for Odili because he is a man from their tribe. An old man amongst the crowd interprets it thus: "Our son should go and bring our share" (*A Man* 125). Tribal politics is detrimental to the health of any state. Unfortunately, this problem appears to afflict almost all African states. It can lead to sectarian violence as witnessed in Burundi and Rwanda.

Thus, politics in Africa has been cast in a gloomy picture. Some politicians aspire to political office when they know virtually nothing about their role as administrators. This incompetence, coupled with the ill-intent of some politicians, lends credence to Odili's observation "that the mainspring of political action was personal gain, a view which, I must say, was much more in line with the general feeling in the country than the high-minded thinking fellows like Max and I" (*A Man* 115).

Of philosophical concern to Achebe is the role of the intellectual in postcolonial politics of Africa. A close observation of the politics of Africa, especially in the decades following independence, reveals that quite a huge chunk of the members of government were not properly educated. This half-baked educated class was entrusted with the

onerous assignment of steering the affairs of the state. Their incompetence manifested itself in the unworkable policies they formulated and implemented. Their non-performance is ample testimony that they are not fit to be in high managerial positions. The question then is what have the educated elites been doing?

Some of them are simply uninterested in what they regard as "dirty" politics. What about those who find themselves in politics? Quite often, what one sees is that they are unable to exert and assert their intellectual power over the less educated members of government. The situation even gets worse when there is a tyrant in the presidency. As a result, any brilliant ideas proposed by these intellectuals are either shelved or sabotaged.

In *A Man of the People*, the Finance Minister, Dr. Makinde "is a first rate economist with a PhD in public finance" (*A Man* 3). He proposes a panacea to deal with the slack in the price of coffee on the world market. He argues that the price paid to coffee farmers must be cut down. This advice is made against the backdrop of imminent general elections. The Prime Minister not only dismisses the idea but frames them (the Minister of Finance and other members of the cabinet sympathetic to his proposal) up as conspirators who want to bring down the government. For their punishment they are not only humiliated and dismissed from the government, they are also insulted, man-handled and their cars smashed. Solidly behind these reprisals against the Finance Minister and his colleagues is Nanga, the primary school teacher who has ventured into politics. He is almost illiterate so his only weapon as a politician is crude tactic. He calls from the back bench in parliament for the heads of his own colleagues.

— This episode reveals interesting manoeuvres in politics. Although the minister's proposal is unrealistic and politically suicidal, he ought not to have been treated the way events went. It appears intellectuals have little say in politics in Africa. The art is dominated by ordinary personalities (in the academic sense of the word) such that the

educated elite is always drowned in major policies of state. However, it should be pointed out that some intellectuals too are a disgrace in politics. The action of Max in accepting bribe is the worst that any intellectual can do. Odili's recruitment of thugs as his body guards as well as buying offensive weapons for them is equally hitting below the belt. Why can't the educated class influence society positively and sway it to the right direction? What is normally seen is that the intellectuals are rather dominated by the uneducated.

Achebe, in an address to an audience of Nigerian writers, notes that his concern was not "what politicians say or do but the absence of a countervailing tradition of enlightened criticism and dissent which meant that a writer who must be free has no choice really but to run great risks. And we had better know and prepare for it."⁸ The African intellectuals cannot afford to stay aloof from politics. Any decision government takes affects them so they must be actively involved by being major players; those in active politics must also evolve workable policies and provide constructive criticism for the good of the polity.

In winding up a discussion on politics in *A Man of the People*, Achebe seems to be warning not only politicians but the entire peoples of Africa that if arbitrary exercise of power is not checked, then there is a force that intends to intervene to stem the rising tide of unbridled use of power. That force is the military. Odili tells readers the very immediate cause of the coup: "The rampaging bands of election thugs had caused so much unrest and dislocation that our young Army officers seized the opportunity to take over" (*A Man* 147).

It is strategic that Achebe ends *A Man of the People* with a military intervention. The intervention is occasioned primarily by the corruption and abuse of power associated with the civilian government. An opportunity has been offered by the same author,

Achebe, to put under microscopic examination the politics of the military in his *Anthills of the Savannah* which is a sequel to *A Man of the People*.

Achebe in *Anthills of the Savannah* seems to be telling his readers that politics in Africa is the same old story of arbitrary exercise of power which has blighted the efforts of the continent at developing itself. The novel basically is the misuse of power by the military in a West African State of Kangan, a fictional locale of the novel. The novel reveals the secret lives of politicians. Indeed, it is an eye-opener on those who parade the corridors of political power.

The very first chapter of the novel reveals intriguing things about "power brokers." The reader is afforded the opportunity to witness a mock cabinet meeting of an African government. The naked, authoritative exercise of power comes to the fore. The tension that characterises the meeting is as a result of a mere visit, indeed, an invitation extended to the military leader, His Excellency Sam, to pay a visit to the drought, poverty-stricken province of Abazon. His Excellency's response to the invitation is emphatic "No, Kabisa, finished" (*Anthills* 3). He will not visit them for the simple reason that that particular province refused to grant his bid to become president for life. There are four provinces which make up Kangan, three voted massively for the life-presidency of his Excellency with the exception of Abazon which decided otherwise. As a result, the province has become an avowed enemy, indeed a territory of dissidents to the government; and the latter would stop at nothing to ensure that life becomes uncomfortable for them. In this case, one observes the politics of vindictiveness, vendetta and exclusion. Abazon is a drought-prone area; government turns a blind eye to their plight because they refused to vote for the extension of the presidency.

The cabinet is as inefficient as it is irresponsible. It is packed with highly educated people like professors and lawyers but the unfortunate thing is that they do not live up to

expectation. Instead of prevailing on Sam, the head of state, who is a mere junior Army officer, with virtually no political experience to do the right thing, they allow themselves to be dominated and intimidated by him. Contrary to expectation that they place premium on the needs of the people, they rather get carried away by the security of the state. The military, because of their incompetence, are more concerned about clinging onto power rather than evolving policies that will bring relief to the people. The Commissioners shamefully indulge in petty issues like back-biting and gossiping about their fellow Commissioners. This negative tendency eventually tears the government apart.

Furthermore, on the issue of politics in *Anthills of the Savannah*, it is helpful to note that Professor Okong, the Commissioner in charge of Home Affairs, falsely accuses Ikem, the editor of the *National Gazette*, as the brain behind the disaffection of Abazonians for His Excellency. This accusation is levelled against Ikem at a time when the latter is not present to defend himself. Professor Okong says the same thing about Chris, the Commissioner for Information, that the latter is not entirely supportive of the president.

Similarly, the Attorney General, in response to a question from his Excellency regarding Chris' loyalty to the government, replies in the negative. He stabs Chris in the back by imputing a theory of familiarity as the reason behind Chris' infidelity to the regime. It should be noted that His Excellency Sam, Chris and Ikem were childhood friends. They all attended the same school, Lord Lugard College, and proceeded to Britain to further their studies in different fields. Therefore, the Attorney General's theory is that Chris finds it difficult to take orders from Sam. Chris, according to the Attorney General, even wonders why he is not the president but Sam is. This betrayal supposedly sinks into the mind of Sam and he acts seriously on it in the latter stages of the novel. The

shameful conduct of these so-called intellectuals earns the scorn of His Excellency, rather surprisingly. He remarks about Professor Okong thus:

What exactly did the fellow mean... I handled him pretty well, though. I certainly won't stand for my commissioners sneaking up to me with vague accusations against their colleagues. It's not cricket! No sense of loyalty, no esprit de corps, nothing. And he calls himself a university professor. No wonder they say he heads a handclapping, spiritualist congregation on campus (*Anthills* 21).

His Excellency's dismissal of the professor should not be taken seriously as he is to act firmly on this gossip, and he deals decisively with Chris and Ikem. His Excellency indeed is at his hypocritical best. On the inertia of the educated elite on the cabinet, Chris observes:

I am not thinking so much about him as about my colleagues, eleven intelligent, educated men who let this happen to them, who actually went out of their way to invite it, and who even at this hour have seen and learnt nothing, the cream of our society and the hope of the black race (*Anthills* 2).

Chris, in the above quotation, is worried about the autocratic inclinations in Sam; and worse of it all is the inability of the cabinet to call him to order.

The display of subservience, obsequiousness, bootlicking and political chicanery at the court of the president is very revealing. A professor tells Sam who is a mere junior Army officer that "your Excellency is not only our leader but also our teacher. We are always ready to learn" (*Anthills* 18). Equally revealing is the Attorney General's concession that "a man of my background has no problem worshipping a man like you" (*Anthills* 24). It is these praise songs which eventually make Sam untamable. The moribund cabinet is so much afraid of Sam that even if he errs, they cannot pluck up courage to tell him. Ikem admits that

The Emperor (His Excellency) may be a fool but he isn't a monster. Not yet, anyhow; although he will certainly become one by the time Chris and company have done with him... His problem is that with so many petty interests salaaming around him all day, like that shyster of an Attorney General, he has no chance of knowing what is right (*Anthills* 46).

Here, the concern of Ikem is “the birth and grooming of a baby monster” (*Anthills* 10). Ikem is talking about the nurturing of dictators by the very people who are supposed to “checkmate” their power. The irony is that once the dictator is groomed, the very people on whom he tries his power are first his cabinet. In Ghana, the raw power of the former president, Rawlings, was visited on his vice president when he slapped him at a cabinet meeting in 1995.

His Excellency General Sam is prototypical of tyrants on the African continent. He is cast in the mould of Idi Amin, the vicious dictator who ruled Uganda in the 1970s. He is also J.J. Rawlings of Ghana, Sani Abacha of Nigeria and a host of autocratic African leaders personified. The circumstances leading to his ascension to power have parallel correlations to the circumstances that brought Rawlings onto the political scene in Ghana. Chris provides insight thus:

His Excellency came to power without any preparation for political leadership. Sandhurst (a military academy in Britain) after all did not set about training officers to take over her Majesty's throne but rather in the high tradition of proud aloofness from politics and public affairs. Therefore when our civilian politicians finally got what they had coming to them and landed unloved and unmourned on the rubbish heap and the young Army commander was invited by the even younger coup-makers to become His Excellency the head of State he had pretty few ideas about what to do. And so, like an intelligent man, he called his friends together and said: what shall I do? (*Anthills* 12).

The substance of the above quotation is in line with the June 4 Uprising of Rawlings who had, on 15th May, 1979, led an abortive mutiny and had been arrested and incarcerated. So on June 4, 1979 when junior Army officers successfully staged a coup, they immediately released Rawlings and made him the leader of their military junta. The question then is: With these military adventurers who are ill-prepared to take on the onerous responsibility of government on the political throne, how can Africa move forward in all facets of life?

Another issue of note in the above quotation is the tendency of African governments to fill political positions with their cronies. The BBC reports of the cabinet

reshuffle in Kenya by Mwai Kibaki saying that the president has surrounded himself with his friends.⁹ In such political appointments, the overriding consideration is personal affiliation instead of competence.

His Excellency Sam is not only a junior Army officer; he is also not intellectually capable of coping with the dynamics, intricacies and managerial responsibilities associated with modern governance. Ikem concedes that "if Sam were stronger or brighter he probably wouldn't need our offices; but then he probably wouldn't have become His Excellency in the first place. Only half-wits can stumble into such enormities" (*Anthills* 46). Ikem's point here is that the circumstances under which Sam comes into power can only be fortuitous. Sam is simply a pure fool. Ikem's attack is also directed at the military in general. The indiscipline of the military comes to the fore when Sam, who has no training in the art of government, accepts the invitation to rule a state.

Chinua Achebe in his *The Trouble with Nigeria* asserts that "the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership... the Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility and to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership."¹⁰ Achebe minces no words when it comes to censuring Africa. The continent's underdevelopment is, to a very large extent, blamed on the problem of leadership. The leaders do not only exhibit incompetence, they are also inefficient and corrupt.

Another issue which features prominently in the scheme of the politics of the military is the life-presidency bid of His Excellency. Achebe writes from experience, having observed developments on the political scene for a long time. With the infiltration of the regular army into politics, their next project is to entrench themselves in power because they have tasted power and have felt that power, in the words of Dr. Nkrumah (the first president of Ghana), is sweet. They engineer all kinds of strategies to perpetuate

themselves in power. Although Nkrumah was not a military despot, he declared himself life-president. Gnassingbe Eyadema of Togo held onto power till his death having come to power through the barrel of the gun. Paul Biya and Omar Bongo of Cameroon and Gabon respectively are set on hanging onto power till "death doth them part." Muhammad al Qathafi of the Republic of Libya, also a military colonel, has been in office since 1969. The current amendment of constitutions to extend the term of office of the president in some countries in Africa (Uganda and Chad) is also an avenue through which African leaders entrench themselves in office. They view the presidency as their "sacred stools" which they are not supposed to share with anybody. In this regard, President Sam of Kangan, through his propaganda machinery, campaigns vigorously that the people should vote massively for him to become president for life. The election is held and three out of the four provinces vote for him. The Attorney General obsequiously intones:

The people have spoken, their desire is manifest. You are condemned to serve them for life... The nonsense about one hundred percent was only a machination of a newspaper editor who in my judgement is a self-seeking saboteur... Your Excellency, three provinces out of four is a majority anywhere (*Anthills* 5).

It is interesting to observe the conduct of politics in Africa especially when the military and armed rebels are involved. The outcome of the elections is disappointing to His Excellency. The failure of Abazonians to endorse his bid means he cannot rule for life. However, the bootlickers at the presidential palace are deluding him into believing that the mandate has been granted him.

In the heat of the campaign to canvass votes for the life-presidency of Sam, the lies and intrigues which are employed to hoodwink the people do not totally succeed. The leader of the six-man delegation from Abazon has interesting revelations for the reader.

He notes:

There was another thing that showed me there was deception in the talk. The people who were running in and out and telling us to say yes came one day and told us that the Big Chief himself did not want to rule forever, but that he was being forced. Who is forcing him? I asked. The people,

they replied. That means us? I asked, and their eyes shifted from side to side. And I knew finally that cunning had entered the matter... I called my people and said to them: the Big Chief doesn't want to rule forever because he is sensible. Even when a man marries a woman he does not marry her forever. One day one of them will die and the marriage will end. So my people and I said No (*Anthills* 126).

The failure of Sam's life-presidency project crystallises into a ball of bitterness against not only the people of Abazon, but Chris and Ikem as well. He accuses his friends for abandoning him at a time when he needs them most. He expects the two friends in charge of the information wing of the government to spin the yarn of government's lies. Sam stops at nothing to ensure that Ikem, especially, is punished. He uses the army to harass and eventually shoot Ikem dead.

In an interview granted to the *African Guardian* in 1985, Achebe postulated that

Military regimes are part of the problem of Africa, part of the problem of underdevelopment; of foreign control, of irresponsible leadership, of interference by the major powers. Africa is caught in all these problems and therefore Africa is unstable. Military regimes occur as an indication of the in-built instability of the African nations at this time in history.¹¹

Casting the net wide, it should be noted that the military and the press find it difficult to co-exist harmoniously. Military regimes employ all kinds of tactics to muzzle the press. Very often, the press comes under the thumb of the government. In this novel, the Commissioner of Information, Chris, wishing to abide by the decree that ensures that any piece of information detrimental to the regime should not be published, impresses on Ikem to submit his editorial write-ups for inspection before going to press. Ikem views this directive as a compromise on the independence of the media and for this reason will not have anything to do with it. As pointed out already, Ikem tells Beatrice of certain pieces of news classified as "NTBB" which means "Not TO Be Broadcast." In his own words, Ikem admits: "Anything inconvenient to those in government is "NTBB" (*Anthills* 16).

As a journalist and a literary artist, Ikem is a powerful writer. Of course, one sees Achebe in Ikem. He is vociferous; he launches a diatribe against the military

administration with all the strength he can muster. He spares no effort in calling a spade a spade. He is bold and reckless. He should have known the times and the political milieu in which he lived so that his life could be safe-guarded. But that is not Ikem. He mortgages his life to preserve free speech. Umelo Ojinmah asserts that

Achebe sees the writer (press) as representing, in the final analysis, the conscience of the society; and should uphold and protect whatever fundamental principles on which that society is built...Ikem sustains Achebe's advocacy that one of the writer's main functions has always been to expose and attack injustice.¹²

Following his interaction with the delegation from Abazon and his lecture at the University of Bassa, Ikem is arrested and gruesomely murdered by soldiers. Equally, Chris is pursued and gets killed by soldiers. His Excellency perishes in a coup d'etat. The anarchy which engulfs the state affects almost everybody as Beatrice and Elewa are needlessly harassed. What is of utmost concern to Achebe is the use of security forces to assault the liberties of the people.

In the wake of the unrest which grips Kangan following the murder of Ikem, the leadership of the students of the University of Kangan issues an ultimatum to government calling for a judicial enquiry into the brutal murder of an important citizen of the land. In response to their demand, a contingent of armed police force is dispatched to the university campus to effect the arrest of the students' leadership. The bloody clash which ensues is artistically presented in the excerpt below:

Two jeeploads of mobile police sent to apprehend the President and the Secretary of the Union bungled the arrest; the young men gave them the slip. As if that was not dangerous enough other students began to taunt them as brainless morons. Now teasing the Kangan Mobile Police is worse than challenging a hungry Alsatian. They went berserk. But somehow, for reasons no one had been able to explain, they did not whip out their guns. Perhaps the bloody outcome of a similar invasion two years ago did after all leave its mark...Perhaps in the thousand ages of divine-like patience even this rock of mindlessness will be dented by the regular dripping of roof water! With *koboko* and truncheons they fell upon their fleeing victims chasing them into classrooms, the library, the chapel and into dormitories...As ambulances screamed in later to collect the wounded and move them to hospital an announcement was made on the radio closing the university indefinitely and ordering all the students out of the campus by six o'clock that very evening (*Anthills* 173).

The police force, the army and other security agencies, whether in Military regimes or civilian dictatorships, are often used to intimidate identifiable groups of

persons who are viewed with suspicion. In the event of any protest, they are often called upon to maintain law and order. As part of their training, they are taught to protect lives and property. However when their skills are put to the test, they fail to call up what they learnt at the college. They run wild and unleash terror on harmless people leaving bruised and dead victims in their trail.

Across the African continent, there are scores of police brutalities perpetrated against protesters. In 1995, opposition forces in Ghana took to the streets to register their frustration over the implementation of the Vat Law. They were quelled ruthlessly and in the process three people lost their lives. In 2005, opposition elements in Togo went on a demonstration to protest against the way the presidential elections which brought Faure Gnassingbe to power were run. The BBC reported that the security forces crushed the protesters using tear gas and pepper spray.¹³ In 2005, the BBC broadcast that police in Ethiopia unleashed brutalities on students and opposition groups who had thronged the streets of the capital city, Addis Ababa, to show their displeasure at the outcome of the general elections which saw the re-election of Prime Minister Melez Zenawi. In the said demonstration, the police shot and killed some of the agitators. The interesting thing to note is that no police official is brought to justice for shedding human blood.¹⁴ This is not surprising because they have the blessings of the powers that be.

The Beggars' Strike is another political satire which exposes the lies, hypocrisy, duplicity and incompetence of politicians. The scenario of beggars occupying the centre-stage of government policy is intriguing. The narrator reports of Sagar Diouf, the secretary to Keba Dabo, the efficient deputy director who masterminds the successful operation of throwing the beggars off the streets, that she finds "it's really too funny. She can't imagine how anyone can get so worked up about a stupid business of some beggars. She finds Keba more and more absurd" (*The Beggars' 15*).

A close examination of Sagar's thinking reveals some amount of truth in the politics of Africa. In most cases, African governments invest their energies and resources in trifles. Trivial and unimportant issues engage the attention of African politicians so much that government summons a meeting and the agenda has everything to do with how to rid beggars from the capital city. What is government's responsibility towards the poor and vulnerable in the state? What is government's policy in respect of the physically challenged who form the bulk of the beggars? It is quite interesting that government has no programme to make life worth living for them. Government is only interested in cleaning up the city to boost tourism. Who is more important to the government; is it foreigners or nationals? This is the sad state of affairs in Africa as portrayed in the novel. It should be noted that the politics of oppression and suppression, exclusion and denial observed in *Anthills of the Savannah* is what Sow Fall is talking about in *The Beggars' Strike*.

In 1995, the government of Ghana descended on all lunatics in the capital city, Accra, rounded them up and kept them away. The purpose for such an action was to enable the government host "The NAM Conference." The government felt it would be embarrassing to see mentally deranged people loitering the streets of the capital city where dignitaries would most certainly see them.

The issue of the presence of beggars on the streets is unimportant. Their presence or absence on the streets is not detrimental to the work of government. Government can function effectively with or without beggars. The functions such as poverty alleviation, provision of basic amenities, and maintenance of law and order should rather be the avowed goals of politicians. In *The Beggars' Strike*, one sees clearly that the government has failed in its part of the social pact. Hordes of people have been allowed to wallow in abject poverty to the extent that they have been reduced to begging; this, in itself, is an

indictment against the government. The government should rather have found an ingenious way, such as training the beggars in craftsmanship to make them useful to the development of the nation.

Also, corruption is a corrosive disease which is rusting the African continent beyond redemption. On a daily basis, the media, anti-corruption institutions such as Transparency International and other watch-dog bodies raise eye-brows about the rapacious rate at which resources are looted, misappropriated and misapplied in Africa. In this connection, the novels selected for this research work discuss extensively the irresponsible manner in which African politicians siphon off resources, meant for the development of their countries, for their personal gain.

Following inexorably from the above, one thing that attracts the attention of the reader is the endemic political corruption that pervades *A Man of the People* from cover to cover. Not a single member of the government can be absolved from the infectious canker of corruption which has ridden deep into the fabric of the society. African politicians are interested in lining their pockets rather than serving the populace. What accounts for this greedy desire to enjoy at the expense of the state? The first answer which comes to mind is the greedy nature of the black man. The second point is also the fact that majority of Africans live in abject poverty, so once they inch closer to money, whether it belongs to them or not, they must stockpile it so that their progeny yet unborn will come into it. On this issue Odili, in a philosophical reverie, concedes thus:

The trouble with our new nation - as I saw it then lying on the bed was that none of us had been indoors long enough to be able to say "To hell with it." We had all been in the rain together until yesterday. Then a handful of us, the smart and the lucky and hardly ever the best, had scrambled for the one shelter our former rulers left, and had taken it over and barricaded themselves in (*A Man* 37).

The above quotation is a lucid explanation as to the corrupt calibre of politicians there are on the African continent. The majority have not had a taste of wealthy living;

therefore the opportunity presented by way of serving their compatriots is converted to enriching themselves. So in their selfish acquisitive posture, they eat with their two hands. They live like Medieval Kings; they live in opulence; everything they wish for is provided. In commenting on the official residence of the ministers, Odili says "The first thing critics tell you about our ministers' official residences is that each has seven bedrooms and seven bathrooms, one for every day of the week" (*A Man* 36). Such places of abode are not enough; some of the ministers are also into real estate development. In this regard, they have put up rows of plush houses let out at exorbitant rents to expatriates. In a confab with Odili, Jean, the American, confesses: "that row of ten houses belongs to the minister of construction... They are let to different embassies at three thousand a year each" (*A Man* 54).

To further buttress the avid acquisitiveness of the African politician, Nanga is said to be building a new house. A gossip remarks: "Look at the new house he is building - four storeys" (*A Man* 96). The house is ostensibly a gift offered him by a building firm, "Antonio and Sons, to which Nanga had recently given a half-million pound contract to build the National Academy of Arts and Sciences" (*A Man* 96).

The ostentatious lifestyle of African politicians is seen in the luxurious cars they drive. These cars are bought at the expense of the tax-payer and placed at the convenience of politicians who use them to suit themselves. Chief Nanga drives a Cadillac. Not only that; he has the liberty to lend it to his friend to go running after women. It is important to emphasise that African politicians use the most expensive and luxurious cars ranging from Land Cruisers, Mercedes Benz, Lincoln to Jaguars. It is worrying to see them in such extravagant cars especially when Africa cannot manufacture them. Worst still, there is much harping on poverty. Why is it that the leaders cannot save some money by purchasing less expensive cars so that they can better the lives of their people?

Bribery is another phenomenon that serves as a drawback on Africa's efforts at advancing. A recent study conducted by the Centre for Democratic Development and aired on Joy FM in Ghana (2005) said average Ghanaians spend twenty percent of their incomes on paying bribes.

In *A Man of the People*, Chief Nanga dishes out money to people not because he has the well-being of anybody at heart but because he wants certain things done for him. He offers a bribe to a journalist so that the latter will shelf an incriminating story about him. He confesses to Odili: "If I don't give him something now, tomorrow he will go and write rubbish about me" (*A Man* 66). It does not stop there. He offers a scintillating 250 pounds to Odili for the latter to rescind his decision to contest his parliamentary seat. Odili flatly rejects it but his colleague, Max, falls prey to the test, testifying to the corrosive effect of corruption. It should be noted that almost the entire populace has a seared conscience. Their minds are warped such that there appears to be a blurred distinction between bribes and gifts. Almost everybody who is offered bribe takes it. Both the giver and the receiver are happy about it. Max's acceptance of bribe on the grounds that the money belongs to the state and as such belongs to all is not tenable. There is no means by which bribery can be rationalised to appear acceptable. It portends danger for Africa's democracy and good governance. It lends credence to the assertion that African politicians are the same, whether in opposition or in government.

In his article: "Political Corruption: a Philosophical Inquiry into a Moral Problem," Kwame Gyekye gives a broader insight into acts which constitute corruption.

He argues thus:

The head of a state who stealthily and fraudulently takes huge sums of money from his state and deposits them in foreign banks, the public official who receives a bribe from a prospective employee in return for a promise to give him or her a job, the official who favours a less qualified relative for a position while rejecting the candidate with better credentials, the policeman who receives a bribe and consequently abandons charges against an arrested person, the customs official who illegally reduces the customs duties on some imported goods in return for some gifts, the clerk in a government tax department who reduces the tax burden of a business executive

through deliberate miscalculation in return for some kick-back, the magistrate or judge who perverts the course of justice in favour of an individual who offers him a bribe: all these public officials would be committing political corruption.¹⁵

The above excerpt captures graphically the numerous shady deals that political office holders engage themselves in. In this novel there are numerous acts of bribery. As an illustration, Odili's body guard, Boniface, demands money from his boss so that he can bribe a policeman to drop charges against him. The issue of bribery in this particular case does not rest with greasing the palms of the policeman alone; Boniface adds that the case has already been forwarded to the court so the court official will also have to be bribed to nip the case in the bud.

In his *Novels of Social Change*, K.E. Agove observes that

Achebe's last novel, *A Man of the People*, completes the chronicle of a culture in disintegration...It also records the total ascendancy of the pursuit of money over humanitarian values in a society which previously had recognised the importance of man and the need for him to maintain close and harmonious human relationships without regard to money for its own sake.¹⁶

The theme of bribery and corruption in *A Man of the People* is exacerbated by the attitude of the populace toward the canker. The people are indifferent to the high spate of corruption in the body politic. Although they are aware of corruption in high places, their inertia helps the pandemic of corruption to fester. Odili, in a soliloquy of a sort asserts:

What would happen if I were to push my way to the front and up the palm-leaf-festooned dais, wrench the microphone from the greasy hands of that blabbing buffoon and tell the whole people, this vast contemptible crowd, that the great man they had come to hear with their drums and dancing was an Honourable Thief. *But of course they knew that already.* No single man and woman there that afternoon was stranger to that news... And because they all knew, if I were to march up to the dais now and announce it they would simply laugh at me and say: 'What a fool! Whose son is he? Was he not here when white men were eating, what did he do about it? Where was he when Chief Nanga fought and drove the white men away? Why is he envious now that the warrior is eating the reward of his courage? If he was Chief Nanga, would he not do much worse (*A Man* 138)?

Almost the entire state has lost its conscience. What is wrong appears to be right. The above picture drawn in the quotation emboldens the politicians to corrupt themselves because there appears to be nobody to hold them accountable for their actions.

Umelo Ojinmah, in his *Chinua Achebe: New Perspectives*, writes

that the central concern of *A Man of the People* is the cynicism of both the politicians and the people which brings about a situation that invites intervention. The politicians cynically use their positions to enrich themselves at the expense of the people, while the people with the philosophy born of despair tamely lie down under imposition.¹⁷

The general philosophy of the society is what the people term "chop-make-I-chop." In such a society, who watches over the watch man? In other words, who ensures transparency and accountability in political office?

Closely linked to the above, Achebe discusses further the canker of corruption in *Anthills of the Savannah*. It is very difficult to associate corruption, bribery, graft and embezzlement with military dictators. This is because they always ascend to the political throne riding comfortably on the back of corruption cases against the civilian government. So naturally, one expects that these people would stay clear of the menace of corruption. However, in Africa, military dictators have been found to be the most corrupt public officials. Mobutu Sese Seko of erstwhile Zaire and Sani Abacha of Nigeria stand tall as the most corrupt presidents that ever occupied the highest office in Africa. In consonance with their corrupt practices, Sam also indulges in the act, however, rather subtly.

At the Abichi Retreat, one of the guests, Alhaji Abdul Mahmoud, is said to be a bosom crony of His Excellency. The narrator observes:

Alhaji Mahmoud is himself a hermit...Rumour has it that he has in the last year knocked all other Kangan millionaires into a cocked hat. Eight ocean liners, they say, two or three private jets; a private jetty (no pun intended). No customs officials go near his jetty and so, say rumour mongers, he is a prince of smugglers. What else? Fifty odd companies, including a bank. Monopoly of government fertilizer imports... What I find worrying and I don't think I can quite believe yet is that (voice lowered) he may be fronting you know for... your host (His Excellency) (*Anthills* 117).

The above is the extent of corruption in Kangan and the president is at the helm of affairs.

In an interview granted to the *Sunday Concord* in 1983, Achebe was asked if the Nigerian politician had changed from the way he portrayed him in *A Man of the People*.

He replied:

I think, if anything, the Nigerian politician has deteriorated. The corruption of Chief Nanga of *A Man of the People* was on a minor scale compared with today. Today, we are talking about millions. People are stealing millions. In the day of Chief Nanga, if they stole ten thousand it was very bad news. Today, ministers are in business and there are all kinds of scandals. I think the situation is really much worse and this is one of the reasons why one has to come out and really say something that may sound harsh, but in my estimation necessary.¹⁸

It is important to note an observation that Ikem makes of the Kangan military government. He, in a sober reflection admits:

The prime failure of this government began also to take on a clearer meaning for him. It can't be the massive corruption though its scale and pervasiveness are truly intolerable; it isn't the subservience to foreign manipulation, degrading as it is, it isn't even the second-class, hand-me-down capitalism, ludicrous and doomed; nor is it the damnable shooting of striking railway-workers and demonstrating students and the destruction and banning thereafter of the independent unions and co-operatives. It is the failure of our rulers to re-establish vital inner links with the poor and dispossessed of this country, with the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation's being (*Anthills* 141).

The above excerpt is an eye-opener on the postcolonial politics of Africa. The observation is as profound as it is revealing. It is also a candid observation of the realities on the continent. The corruption, the tyranny, the indiscipline, the debauchery and bad governance are the day to day problems which confront the African continent. Again, one notices that there is a gap between the rich and the poor, between those in government and the citizens. Government is less concerned about the welfare of its citizens. There are people living below the poverty belt like the Braimohs who live in abject poverty. It is unimaginable that a family of seven sleeps in one bedroom. Elewa complains of her sick mother who has to resort to buying "unprescribed" drugs from chemical shops because she cannot afford hospital bills. The extreme degree of poverty in Abazon is not a bother to government.

In *The Beggars' Strike*, Sow Fall also discusses the problem of corruption. In an article entitled "Corruption: the Civil Society and Government," Sunny Akpotor defines

corruption as "the perversion of public office for private advantage."¹⁶ In tune with the above definition, one sees Mour Ndiaye, the principal protagonist in the novel, as a corrupt public official. He starts off in life as a mere clerk in West African Commercial Association, "when he could scarcely make both ends meet" (*The Beggars*' 19). As a result of his staunch loyalty to his party, he is appointed to the position of director in charge of Public Health and Hygiene. The narrator concedes: "Mour had been appointed to this post for political reasons, a form of recognition from the government for his past unconditional activity as a militant in the party" (*The Beggars*' 3). Consequently, he is incapable of discharging his duties efficiently. He has pushed almost all of his responsibilities onto his deputy, Keba Dabo, who does virtually every work in the department. Mour goes about doing nothing, only claiming the praise accruing from the ingenious performance of Keba. The narrator continues to give readers insight into the saga of Mour's performance in office:

... so he shifted all responsibility on Keba, whom he knew to be competent, the main thing for him was that things should be done properly, so that he could get the credit for them. He was only interested in more titles, more honours and for this end he systematically made use of Keba's capacities (*The Beggars*' 3).

His priority is to amass wealth. Politics has become a business avenue in which the unscrupulous politicians make money. The storyteller admits:

Now he has everything he can wish for: a fine house, two cars at his disposal, domestic staff paid for by the state. Sometimes, he is worried by his corpulence, especially at official ceremonies when he has to be careful that the buttons of his dinner jacket don't burst (*The Beggars*' 19).

Why the meteoric rise in the financial circumstances of Mour Ndiaye? As a clerk, he just eked out a living. With the same qualification but this time in politics, why so much difference in his standard of living? From where does he get the money to purchase rams, bulls, bags of rice and cartons of milk for his numerous Marabouts? With politicians, especially those in Africa, everything is possible.

Commenting about Lolli, Mour's wife, the narrator provides useful information which borders on corruption on the part of Mour. He states:

Had she not everything she could hope for? Her wrists were always weighed down with gold and precious stones; her wardrobes were full to bursting; her relatives showered with gifts; she owned three villas bought in her name by Mour Ndiaye because you never know in politics; better take all precautions while one can (*The Beggars* '26).

The above quotation sums up the ostentatious lifestyle of many African politicians. They live like Medieval Kings. As part of their scheme to blur any trace of corruption in office, they acquire property in the names of their dependents: wives, children, brothers, and relatives.

Mour Ndiaye is very rich. He entices the beggars with money so that the latter would go back to the streets to receive his alms. The narrator describes the scene graphically:

Without waiting for a reply and take them by surprise, Mour dips his hand into the pocket of his boubou, bring out wads of bank-notes which he hurls towards the beggars, the majority of the crowd immediately jump up to seize the notes as they flutter in the wind. They jostle each other shouting, "Money's flying about! Money's flying about... It's raining bank-notes (*The Beggars* '92-93).

He throws the money about because he has not toiled hard enough to make it. The scenario involving the distribution of the money to the beggars is symptomatic of electioneering in Africa where politicians rain money on voters. The beggars are symbols of voters in Africa. The ordinary people assume a position of significance only during elections. Just as the government treats the beggars with disdain, negligence and outright rejection, so are ordinary peoples of Africa treated. The only occasion when they become important is during elections. On such occasions, politicians provide such semblance of amenities as electricity, water, roads, and schools for the people.

Mour says of the beggars: "these people that I would never have come into contact with if it hadn't been for this sacrifice" (*The Beggars* '91). However, he "penetrates into

the thick of the scrimmage; the crowd falls on him now, swarming like bees all round him" (*The Beggars* '93).

Besides corruption, the novelists present politicians as a bunch of liars and hypocrites. According to Achebe, politicians preach virtue and practise vice. In *A Man of the People*, Nanga is at his hypocritical best when he pays a visit to Anata Grammar School. While there, he heaps praises on the teachers there and teachers in general. He concedes: "True to God who made me... teaching is a very noble profession" and that he has regretted leaving it for politics. Nanga further admits that "although I am a minister today I can swear to God that I am not as happy as when I was a teacher" (*A Man* 9). He makes these remarks against the background of the grim reality that "at that time, teachers all over the country were in ugly, rebellious mood" (*A Man* 9). Nanga is aware of the false statements he has made about the teaching profession when in a subsequent talk with Odili, the former tells the latter, "by the way, Odili, I think you are wasting your talent here" (*A Man* 12). Odili is wasting away as a teacher because the government does not care about the well-being of teachers. It is only politicians who 'eat.'

Another episode which illustrates double-standards in politicians is the coffee saga involving chief Koko, one of the cabinet ministers. In this particular episode, Simon Gikandi, in his *Reading Chinua Achebe* explains:

A more dramatic example of irony in the novel is the ostensible poisoning of chief Koko. When the minister thinks his cook has put poison in his coffee, his hysteria underlines the fear with which the new men in power live; it also exposes the emptiness of their rhetoric, for in this case the ironic twist is that the poison was just locally processed coffee, itself the subject of a massive government campaign to promote the use of locally made products, which the cook had used because he could not find the imported stuff which the minister prefers.¹⁹

The above quotation reinforces the hypocritical tendencies in politicians. Government's policy is to ensure the consumption of locally made coffee so that the economy can be improved. Chief Koko who is at the centre of government affairs and as such is supposed to lead this campaign rather sees the need to use imported coffee.

Lies and deceptions are the tools that some politicians resort to when they are pinned down. Politicians deliberately paddle falsehoods to pave their way through dicey situations. In *The Beggars' Strike*, Mour Ndiaye is presented as a congenital liar. When he starts seeing Sine, his second wife, he often comes home late. He, however, tells his wife different stories. The narrator observes: "In order to see her without arousing Lolli's suspicions, Mour had invented late meetings with VIPS from Europe who were studying the tourist situation, or 'two-day business trips to a neighbouring country', or lunches with technical advisers" (*The Beggars'* 32).

The above quotation is his alibi to his wife, Lolli, while he spends good times with Sine, his then girl friend. When the idea to get back the beggars to the streets comes to a head, Mour resorts to deceptions and treachery. The storyteller observes: "Haunted by the idea of failure and bedevilled by the obsession of the sacrifice- 'a week later, the vice president' – he deliberately chose to play his last card, that of dishonesty" (*The Beggars'* 83). He goes further to ask the crowd in a rhetorical rendition:

Have you ever seen me intervening directly, in person, in the war waged against you? We bosses, we're in an awkward position; we're made responsible for everything, and God knows that we haven't the slightest idea of half the actions that our inspectors commit; they do as they like and then people say that it's the chief (*The Beggars'* 83).

Mour betrays himself by the volumes of lies he tells the beggars. Contrary to his thinking that the beggars are not clever enough to detect his lies, Salla Niang gets an undercurrent of lies in what Mour says. She remarks to the other beggars thus: "What a liar, what a damned liar?" (*The Beggars'* 85). Later on she speaks of politicians in general when she says: "But why do they wear a reversible boubou! Why don't they remain what they are and show their real face...How petty they are! They'll go anywhere to follow their ambition or if it's in their own interests, even if they go to the devil" (*The Beggars'* 85). The beggars have become accustomed to the lives of politicians. They are able to identify the colour tag of politicians. It is a source of puzzle to the beggars as to

why politicians cannot remain resolute to their principles but rather say one thing today and contradict themselves tomorrow.

Closely allied to the lying nature of politicians is their unprincipled conduct. Mour Ndiaye leads the crusade to rid the city of beggars who are considered a menace to the city. The narrator vividly describes the menace that the beggars supposedly pose to society. He concedes:

This morning there has been another article about it in the newspaper: about how the streets are congested with these beggars, these talibés, these lepers and cripples, all these derelicts. The capital must be cleared of these people - parodies of human beings rather - these dregs of society who beset you everywhere and attack you without provocation at all times (*The Beggars* 1).

The government successfully evicts the beggars from the city. Mour Ndiaye receives commendations from the president. There are rumours to the effect that Mour is likely to be appointed the vice president of the Republic. He allows this rumour to take the better part of him. He consults the most potent occultist of the land, Kifi Boukol, who tells him to make sacrifice to beggars throughout the city. Mour tells Keba to bring back the beggars to the streets. Keba, in a furious tone explains to Sagar, his secretary:

No, that's just it, Monsieur Ndiaye doesn't realise it. He's just asked me, for personal reasons, you hear that! For personal reasons! - to go and dig out the beggars, goodness knows where, so that he can give them goodness knows what. The government's decision about cleaning up the city doesn't count any more; Monsieur Ndiaye's wishes must come first. No, no and no (*The Beggars* 74).

The self-gratification of politicians is under fire in the above quotation. This is the more reason why majority of Africans believe that politicians aspire to state office not so much for the interest of the ordinary people but for their own aggrandisement. For his personal gain alone, Mour is ready and indeed bent on reversing the clock of development the state has chalked.

Pushing the arguments further, political power, money and sexual immorality appear to be bed-fellows. Of critical importance to Achebe in *A Man of the People* is the obsession with sex in the sub-conscious mind of politicians. Politicians rise to fame and

popularity once they attain state power. What follows naturally is the exercise of power, and in Africa, sowing of wild oats appears to be one of the portfolios of politicians. Nanga is a shameless sex maniac. Not only does he chase young girls, he runs after married women as well. His sexual escapades reach their crescendo when after Odili has introduced Elsie to him that she is his (Odili's) girl-friend, Nanga ignominiously goes to bed with her under the very nose of Odili. When Odili marshals bravado and confronts him on this issue, Nanga justifies his action that Elsie is not yet the wife of Odili. Max, apparently appalled by the actions of Nanga in particular and politicians in general makes a general observation thus: "That's all they care for... Women, cars, landed property. But what else can you expect when intelligent people leave politics to illiterates like Chief Nanga?" (*A Man* 76).

Similarly, in *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe deals with sexual harassment usually associated with politicians and political activity. It is often said, however humorously that "seek ye first the political kingdom and all things shall be added onto thee." This cliché finds its fulfilment when his Excellency, exercising his absolute power over all flesh, invites Beatrice to Abichi Lake Retreat, a presidential guest house and plays host not only to her but other invited guests from home and abroad. The significant incident which happens at the guest house is the sexual affair that His Excellency indulges in with Beatrice. Indrasena argues that "her unhappy experience at the retreat signifies her deflowering and her disgrace."²⁰ Beatrice admits the sexual assault perpetrated against her when she says:

So I threw myself between this enemy and him. I literally threw myself at him like a loyal batman covering his endangered commander with his own body and receiving the mortal bullet in his place... I did it shamelessly. I cheapened myself God! I did it to your glory like the dancer in a Hindu temple. Like Esther, oh yes like Esther for my long-suffering people (*Anthills* 81).

The Biblical allusion to Esther sheds light on the sexual escapades His Excellency embarks on. Beatrice, with all her education, astuteness and accomplishment, cannot

resist His Excellency. Is it out of fear? Is His Excellency not aware that Chris was going out with Beatrice? He knows very well. With political power at one's disposal, one could go ahead and win Miss World!

In a similar situation, Mour Ndiaye in *The Beggars' Strike* runs after women once he secures political power and wealth. He takes on a second wife. It must be pointed out that Mour is a Moslem and for that matter, his action of marrying a second wife does not amount to any serious breach of moral and religious etiquette. That notwithstanding, his wife's reaction to the news "I'm being given a wife" is an emotionally charged one. His wife, Lolli, views Mour's marriage as an act of betrayal. After years of poverty, pain and sacrifice, her husband has turned his back on her.

Quite apart from cases of corruption and womanizing, another arbitrary exercise of political power by African politicians is to put up mansions for their comfort. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, the Military regime refurbishes a presidential guest house, Abichi Lake Retreat, at the cost of twenty million manila. This huge imposing edifice is put up for the enjoyment of just a few who parade through the corridors of power. The ordinary citizens of Bassa would never make an appearance there. The gigantic sum of money spent on the resort and the parties which take place there are set against the drought-stricken Abazonians who cannot afford basic necessities of life such as water.

When Chris decides to elope to Abazon, the reader is afforded the opportunity to view the huge contrast between Bassa and Abazon in terms of not only the geographical landscape but the living standards of the people. Foreigners who come to Kangan conclude that "Bassa is not Kangan" (*Anthills* 205). The observation is reinforced by the apparent contrast that exists between the two provinces. The desolation, the poverty, the gloom of life in Abazon scares even the politicians. His Excellency and his cabinet would rather take a duty tour of Abichi Lake than visit Abazon.

In an article titled: "Cultism, Power and Politics in Africa", J.A. Bamgbose argues that "the perception of both Western and African writers is that Africa is the theatre of occultic practice, a continent of secrets and hidden forces that nevertheless tend to run wild and threaten civility and reason."²¹ The writer goes further to opine that "with the rising wave of both civilian and military personnel in African politics each of these categories of people use magical power, curious acts or occultic practices to prolong their stay in government."²²

In connection with the above quotations, Mour Ndiaye in *The Beggars' Strike* consults numerous marabouts to ensure his promotion and stay in power. Mour owes his present state as director to Serigne Birama, a Moslem priest who invoked his spiritual power for Mour to gain his position. The narrator says: "Mour Ndiaye knows many marabouts, but in his eyes none can compare with Serigne Birama, the man whose unfailing disinterest, knowledge and wisdom have earned him Mour Ndiaye's unfailing respect, his immeasurable gratitude" (*The Beggars'* 4). This seer divines Mour's future and tells Lolli that "it is quite clear; what I see is very clear. A star which shines, which shines... prosperity, happiness. Mour could have very great surprise. Tell him to sacrifice a ram. All will be well" (*The Beggars'* 5).

Serigne Birama is like an idol to Mour. He consults him regularly. Then comes his ambition of becoming the vice president of the Republic. Mour travels outside his country in search of the most potent power to secure his post for him. He consults Kifi Boukol, of far off lands because he "is no longer satisfied to consult the most esteemed marabouts of his own country; he travels through foreign territories and sends his confidential agents into quite distant lands in search of the greatest specialists in occultic science" (*The Beggars'* 50). This mysterious man encamps in Lolli's apartment for seven days and finally comes out with the results of his séance: He tells Mour:

You will have what you desire, and you will have it very shortly. You will be vice president. To achieve this, you must sacrifice a bull whose coat must be of one colour, preferably fawn... This offering must go to its correct destination, otherwise everything risks going wrong. It must go to genuine beggars (*The Beggars* ' 58).

Mour has driven all beggars from the streets so he is unable to carry out the sacrifice as prescribed. The significant thing to observe here is the zeal with which Mour consults spiritual powers. To him, it does not matter one's educational qualification, it does not also matter one's scruples in politics. What matters if one wants to make it in life is to consult magicians, priests and other supernatural powers to ensure his existence and welfare.

In spite of the bleak picture painted of politics in *The Beggars' Strike*, there is a faint light at the end of the tunnel. Keba is an exceptional public officer. He refuses to be lured into the canker of corruption that has tainted almost everybody in government. He is a man of principle; he adamantly rejects Mour's instruction that he call back the beggars to the streets. Sagar Diouf suggests to him that giving in to Mour's directive to bring back the beggars can pay off financially because if Mour is appointed vice president, he cannot afford but remember him. Keba gets furious over such a suggestion. He is a symbol of decency, honesty and industriousness. Furthermore, he refuses to give out petrol vouchers to Sagar's friend for her personal use because he sees it as an act of dishonesty; it amounts to defrauding the state. The writer creates Keba as a foil to Mour's dishonesty and incompetence.

Reading through the novels selected for this research work, one interesting thing that is observable is the conspicuous absence of women in mainstream political activity. In *The Beggars' Strike*, Sow Fall presents a political milieu dominated by men. Mour Ndiaye and Keba Dabo are in the thick of political action. Sagar Diouf, the only female character close to political action is a mere secretary at the office of Keba Dabo.

In the same vein, Achebe's *A Man of the People* presents a male chauvinist political establishment with the passive involvement of women in politics. One sees the likes of the Nangas and Kokos at the centre of political power.

By the same token, in *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe presents an all-male cabinet; all the twelve commissioners are men. The above observation tells the marginalisation of women in African politics.

However, it is interesting to note that the all-male dominated political machinery has not produced the desired result. In all the three novels studied, the performance of the men has been disappointing. Whether in civilian or military regimes, the men have exhibited incompetence and greed. They are corrupt, dictatorial and arrogant.

What emerges thus far is that these novelists appear dissatisfied, indeed, fed up with male rulership. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, there is a female character, Beatrice, who is a gem. She is not only clever, but also brilliant. She is an academician par excellence and an efficient bureaucrat at the Ministry of Finance. Although she is not a player in the political game, she is connected in one way or the other to the men at the helm of the political action. At the end of the novel, she survives His Excellency Sam, Chris and Ikem when these political stalwarts are killed in the heat of the political storm or turmoil that engulfs Kangan. Essentially, what Achebe appears to be postulating is that it is about time Africa tried the governorship of women. Implicitly, Achebe is advocating that Beatrice should be given the political mandate to rule Kangan so that people would be afforded the opportunity to compare male and female political leadership in Africa.

Thankfully, Africa has responded positively to Achebe's call for female political leadership with the election into office of the first female African president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia. President Sirleaf, in a paper entitled "Dismantling the imperial

presidency,” delivered at the 2006 Openheimer Lecture at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, notes:

Our recent post-conflict elections have settled a long-running political leadership struggle, and opened up a vista of opportunity for a new Liberia based on the tenets of good governance. I believe also that the election of the first female president in Africa has not only broken the glass ceiling in this hitherto area of male preserve, but has certainly sent an unmistakable message of a growing need for an alternative leadership style on our continent.²³

In concluding this chapter, it is instructive to acknowledge that the three novels examined talk about almost the same issues. It has been shown succinctly that politicians on the African continent are the same. They are corrupt, incompetent, autocratic, and sex maniacs. They are selfish, greedy and hypocritical. They assume office not so much in the interest of the people as of their own self-centred pursuits. The novelists have presented their perception of politicians in Africa; in the next chapter, the picture would be drawn from the perspective of poets.

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CHAPTER TWO

Poetry is one of the effective genres of literature which has been used to protest against the ills of society. Poets use subtle means to expose any act which constitutes abuse of the normal way of doing things in the body politic. Poetry is a vehicle through which a powerful reflection of society is conveyed.

In African Literature, poets protested and continue to raise eye-brows against the actions of politicians in both the colonial and the postcolonial epochs of Africa. They took to task the imperialists' plunder of Africa. They were indeed critical of the colonial administration for a string of abuses it perpetrated against vulnerable peoples of Africa.

David Diop, a Senegalese poet, was a virulent critic of the colonial government. In his "Listen Comrades" and "Africa", he launches attacks against the white masters for their inhuman and degrading treatment meted out to Africans. The poet complains of the murder and imprisonment of African freedom-fighters. "Listen Comrades" reads in part thus:

Listen comrades of the struggling centuries.
To the keen clamour of the Negro from Africa to the Americas.
They have killed Mamba
As they killed the seven of Martinsville.....
The cry of a hundred people smashing their cells¹

Similarly, "Africa" paints a gloomy-optimistic picture of the colonial era:

Africa my Africa.
Africa of whom my grandmother sings.....
Your beautiful black blood that irrigates the fields
The blood of your sweat
The sweat of your work
The work of your slavery
The slavery of your children
Africa tell me Africa
~~Is this~~ your back that is bent
This back that breaks under the weight of humiliation
This back trembling with red scars
And says yes to the whip under the midday sun²

The above vivid descriptions provide a gist of the scenario during the colonial era.

The ignominious history of slavery and colonialism with its painful reminders of torture

and humiliation come up for mention. David Diop in these two poems is protesting, rather subtly, against the callous subjugation of Africans by the imperialists.

Bernard Dadie, in characteristic fashion, also exposes the wicked disposition of the colonialists in his "I Thank You God." Through a heavy dosage of irony and sarcasm, he expresses gratitude to the Creator of the Universe for

... creating me black,
making of me
Porter of all sorrows,
Setting on my head
The world.....

White is a colour of special occasions
Black is the colour of every day.....
Thirty-six swords have pierced my heart
Thirty-six fires have burnt my body
And blood on all cavalries has reddened the snow...³

Dadie, in the above excerpt, cunningly points out the inhuman way the black man was treated under the colonial administration. Racial discrimination, black inferiority and brutal assault on the sovereignty of Africans are the issues he artistically condemns in this poem.

Last but not least, Viriato da Cruz, an Angolan poet, also chronicles the long list of injustices that Africans suffered under imperial reign. He notes in his "Black Mother" in part thus:

Your presence, mother, is the living drama of a race
drama of the flesh and blood
Which life has written with the pen of centuries

Through your voice

Voice from the cane plantations,
the paddy fields, the coffee farms.....

Through your back
Gleaming backs beneath the world's strongest suns
Gleaming backs making fertile with their blood.....
Gleaming backs twisted on the torso
hanging from the gallows, struck down by Lynch ...
Through your eyes, mother,
I see oceans of grief
lit by the setting sun, landscapes.

Da Cruz turns his attention to the immoral trade in human beings, the slave trade, and discusses its effects on Africans. Apart from the fact that Africa was robbed of its potential human resource, the slave trade brought untold grief and human suffering to the entire continent. The pangs which the slaves and their descendants suffered knew no bounds. Even today, there are still vestiges of racial discrimination resonating in the Americas and other parts of the world.

The foregone discussion highlights poets who subjected the colonial administration to a barrage of criticism for their lack of decorum toward Africans.

In similar style, African poets turned their focus on their own house and sought to clean it. This brings up the issue of postcolonial politics; especially the perception of African intellectuals on how their contemporary politicians are doing in politics. It is common contention in Africa that the politicians on the continent have not lived up to expectation. The political leadership has wallowed in one form of mediocrity or the other. Incompetence in office, corruption, brutal exercise of power, the sheer bravado of politicians, infiltration of the army into regular politics and a host of other forms of abuse of political office easily come up for censure. The behaviour of politicians has provided food for thought; their conduct in office has offered subject for deliberation in poetry.

This chapter discusses a collection of poems that express the evils of abuse of political office.

One phenomenon which is as conspicuous as a peacock is the canker of corruption in African politics. The issue of corruption has been a major set-back to Africa's quest to advance in almost every facet of life. Odia Ofeimun, a Nigerian poet, raises the issue of corruption, among other things, in his poem "How can I sing?"

I cannot blind myself

to putrefying carcasses in the market place
pulling giant vultures
from the sky

Nor to these flywhisks:
how can I escape these mind-ripping scorpion-tails
develop in the dark.
with ignominious license
by those who should buttress faith
in living, faith in lamplights?

And how can I sing
when they stuff cobwebs in my mouth
spit the rheum of their black sense
of direction in my eyes
--- who will open the portals of
my hope in this desultory walk?⁵

Ofeimun in the above poem discusses the responsibility of the poet to his society, and in the process takes a very critical look at the socio-political conditions in present day Africa. What the poet is saying, basically, is that poetry should celebrate life and those who create the right conditions for it. However, there is too much filth and corruption around (stanza 1). Rather than correct this ugly situation, the African political leaders, whose duty it is to show the masses the way and make them feel happy to be alive, are trying all sorts of cruel measures to cover up or to suppress it (stanza 2); the political leadership muzzles and blindfolds the poet by their awkward measures, making it difficult for him to find his way and move purposefully (stanza3).

Commenting on this particular poem, Isidore Okpewho, in his *The Heritage of African Poetry*, observes:

These lines are no doubt a reference to suppression of writers by intolerant African leaders. When these writers try to expose the ugly conditions in society, the leaders suppress them by taking them secretly (in the dark) to jail and using all sorts of cruel measures (scorpion tails) to ruin their minds. In this way, the leaders are acting like people using 'flywhisks' to beat off the flies that are drawing attention to a rotting mess⁶

The artistic manner in which the poem is crafted is quite interesting. The scatological imagery of the first stanza paints a disturbing picture of corruption. The overriding mood of this poem is anger, and this can be seen in the frequent use of

language: "putrefying carcasses", "mind-ripping scorpion-tails", "stuff cobwebs" and "spit rheum". The string of rhetorical questions also reveals a certain amount of impatience on the part not only of the persona but the masses as well.

The title of the poem "How can I sing?" is quite appropriate. Ofeimun is saying that he cannot enjoy his art when so much corruption and injustice force his creativity in quite another direction. The situation becomes serious when the writer, who tries to expose the ills of the political leadership, is subjected to all manner of harassments just to discourage the latter in his insistence on justice.

Stewart Brown in his article "The Pleaded Grace of Song: Wole Soyinka and Nigerian Poetry" notes:

that the notion of the poet as duty-bound to confront the political events of the times or more particularly the antics of the country's rulers has become axiomatic. Of course, across the continent, African writers have argued over the extent to which they should become, in Nadine Gordimer's phrase, "more than writers," and the arguments about commitment and responsibility are well rehearsed, not to say well worn; but in Nigeria, as with much else, the issues are felt and expressed in extreme terms. Several poets, most infamously Ken Saro-Wiwa, have incurred the wrath of the politicians or soldiers in power, victimised in one way or the other for their perceived criticism.⁷

The above piece of text is a further corroboration of the fact that writers who expose abuse of political power on the continent are targets of despots. Under such culture of political intimidation, corruption festers because people of clear conscience feel afraid to point out malfeasance in government.

On the subject of political corruption in African politics, Theo Luzuka, a Ugandan poet, makes an incisive contribution to the subject with the composition of his poem "The Motoka" to ram home the greed, the ostentation and the corruption into which the African politician has sunk. Part of the poem is reproduced below:

You see that Benz sitting at the rich's end?
Ha! Motoka is motoka
It belongs to the Minister for Fairness
Who yesterday was loaded with a doctorate
At Makerere with whisky and I don't know what
Plus I hear the literate thighs of an undergraduate.

You see those market women gaping their mouths?
The glory of its inside has robbed them of words,
I tell you the feather seats the gold steering
The TV the radio station the gear
He can converse with all world presidents⁸

"The Motoka" is a posh Mercedes Benz to which Luzuka pays glowing tribute. If Theo Luzuka had lived in the Romantic era of English literature, he would have titled this poem "Ode to a Mercedes Benz." In the first stanza, the poet stresses the invincible nature of the car. In the second stanza, the interior decorations of the car are described as 'glory.'

Interlaced with the description of the "Motoka" are strands of information bordering on serious abuse of power in African politics. In the first place we are told that the Benz belongs to the Minister for Fairness. In other words, the car is owned by a politician of no mean repute - Attorney General and Minister for Justice. In Africa, posh cars such as Cadillac, Jaguar, Land Cruiser and a host of others are driven mostly by politicians. It is important to point out that these brands of cars are very expensive. Africa is noted to be a poor continent, so the question is where do the politicians get the huge sums of money to purchase these cars? Could they not have bought less glamorous cars so that scarce resources could have been saved and invested in other sectors of the economy? The irony of the situation is that the Minister for Fairness does not dispense justice in the society. He drives this expensive Benz when the majority of the peoples of Africa walk bare footed. The Benz symbolises ill-gotten wealth stockpiled to be used by the off-spring of politicians in Africa. The interior decorations of the car are a symbol of the opulent lifestyle of the politicians in Africa. An interesting thing to observe is that in a country where someone has to sell her tomatoes before she can eat, the Minister for Fairness possesses an extremely fantastic Benz which might have cost his country a big slash of its resources.

The important question to pose about the plush Mercedes Benz is where the Minister sourced for funds for the acquisition of the car? Again, is the car his property or does it belong to the state? The purchase of the car is an act of corruption which has implication for the poor people in the polity.

The repetition of the word "motoka," in the line: "Ha! That Motoka is Motoka" is significant. It underscores not only the flamboyant nature of the car but the obvious act of corruption associated with its acquisition. Similarly, the personification in the first stanza: "You see that Benz sitting at the rich's end?" emphasises the corruption and opulent lifestyle of African politicians.

In a related development, Albert Ojuka, a Kenyan journalist, discusses the issue of corruption, ostentation and arrogance in his poem "Pedestrian to passing Benz-man."

You man, lifted gently
out of the poverty and suffering
we so recently shared ; I say-
why splash the muddy puddle on to
my bare legs, as if, still unsatisfied
with your seated opulence
you must sully the unwashed
with your diesel-smoke and mud-water
and force him buy, beyond his means
a bar of soap from your shop?
a few years back we shared a master
today you have none, while I have
exchanged a parasite for something worse
But may be a few years is too long a time.⁹

The poem above depicts the haughtiness of the rulers as well as the misery of the ruled in Africa. The persona is at pains to cope with the arrogance of the politician who until recently was on the same ~~scale of poverty~~ with the persona. The imagery created in the opening stages of the poem is a common sight in Africa where one sees ordinary soldiers ride on the back of politics into riches. Their ostentatious lifestyle is a source of pain onto the poor in the society. The rulers are not satisfied with their present attainments; they go a step forward to show their disdain towards their fellow citizens with whom they shared their misery until recently.

Okpewho remarks about the subject-matter in the above poem thus:

Since the attainment of independence by most African countries, which have shifted political and economic power from the white colonizers to native African leaders, there has been noticeable widening of the gap between the haves and the have-nots among the African citizens. Ojuka's poem is an example of the dissatisfaction of the average African against this ugly social situation. The Mercedes Benz is frequently seen as a symbol of the oppressive wealth of the rich.¹⁰

The above quotation lends confirmation to the corrupt practices of some African politicians. One is inclined to impute motives of corruption in the acquisition and use of such cars because the catch-phrase in Africa is that the continent is poor; therefore the logical question to pose is where do the politicians get the funds to acquire such property?

The language of the poem is simple, mainly because it is spoken by an ordinary man. The angry tone of the poem is discernible in the line, "still unsatisfied/ with your seated opulence". Here the persona shows his disgust at the rich-man politician who does not care about him.

Again, it is instructive to note what Henry Barlow, a Ugandan poet, says about corruption in his poem "I Refuse to take your Brotherly Hand" quoted below:

Your nails are black with dirt, brother
And your palms are clammy with sweat
I refuse to take the hand you extend in help
I shall not join hands with you brother
For unclean hands make me uneasy
For filthy fingernails rob me of my pride.

You argue, gesticulating with your once
Impeccably clean and beautiful hands
That before long it shall not matter
For 'everybody' is delving and digging
And all shall have hands dripping with dirt

That nobody shall know what ~~clean~~ hands look like
And there shall be comfort in the dirty crowd
And enough to eat, for there are good fields
~~When~~ the stinking manure is well dug in
With strong and bold hands in time.

Brother the hands of many are too weak with hunger
And for many the sludge is out of reach
And yet for others the stink is nauseating!
But all have eyes and hunger fills them with anger
As they watch your fingernails fill with dirt!¹¹

Succinctly glaring is the menace of corruption in the above poem. The persona has really touched the core of the concept of corruption. Corruption actually implies rot; something that stinks. The persona refuses to accept any form of assistance from a corrupt person, especially a public official. The corrupt person described in this poem can also be a politician. The extent of corruption pictorially depicted in the poem is so overwhelming that it appears almost everybody is involved in it. It is as pervasive as it is alarming. What makes the issue of corruption in this poem more disturbing is the fact that the politician justifies his corrupt deed on the grounds that "everybody" is doing it, so what is the big deal?

The angry tone of the poem is discernible in the use of invectives such as "your nails are black with dirt," "unclean hands," "hands dripping with dirt," "stinking manure," and "sludge." These words and expressions not only describe the pervasive corruption in the polity; they also portray the anger of the persona who serves as the conscience of the society.

J.P.Clark's "His Excellency the Masquerader" offers a sombre picture of how corrupt some African politicians can be. In this poem, the concern of the poet has to do with a government appointee who is entrusted with the construction of a bridge. He does the work; however, it is shoddily executed. The whole poem is reproduced thus:

He serves
To ford between swamp and sand,
He serves!

The bridge stands,
All that stone and steel put together,
It stands,

But bolts drop,
And steel that should be blue,
At close grip

Shows brown...
And for such service, songs more than
Water sand:

In Ojoto
So they worship the masks,
Altho' in season-

The masks!
O take off the mask! And behind?
What wind! What straw! ¹³

The very title of the poem provides subject for comment. "Excellency" and "Masquerader" are poles apart in terms of conduct, position and demeanour. "His Excellency" is a title accorded presidents, ambassadors and other high ranking officials in government and diplomatic circles. However, a "masquerader" is a pretentious person. The title is therefore oxymoronic as the two words hardly collocate. The purpose of the poet is to point out to readers how dubious some politicians can be.

The first stanza establishes succinctly the function of "His Excellency." He is to carry out a development project. The project in question is the construction of a bridge. "His Excellency" executes the job, however, rather poorly. The persona observes: "But bolts drop/ And steel that should be blue/ At close grip/ shows brown." The bolts holding the bridge are falling off and the steel has become rusty showing brownish colour instead of blue. This shoddily constructed bridge, surprisingly, attracts praises from the citizenry. The poet not only attacks the government, he also criticises society for its lack of vigilance and its hypocrisy. Such an attitude pats politicians on their shoulders and the latter are deluded into believing that they are doing the right thing in politics. The poet vehemently urges both politicians and the people to peel off their garments of hypocrisy and remain true to their calling, the call to duty and service.

If it is the execution of shoddy projects that "His Excellency" can do to advance the cause of Africa, then the continent's efforts at moving forward would be a mirage. The obvious shady deal that the government appointee engages in, in the poem above, is to siphon funds meant for the project for his private business. August Adebayo, in his,

Power in Politics, argues that "political office holders seize every available opportunity to embezzle public funds through the inflation of contracts, fictitious travelling claims and allowances and other devious means."¹⁴ The preceding quotation is a manifestation of the wanton avarice and the willingness of some rapacious African leaders to misappropriate funds meant for development projects.

Another aspect of leadership style of African ruling elites that has come under fire is the latter's disposition to show indifference and insensitivity to the plight of the poor and under-privileged in society. Political leadership is not about barking out orders alone, it is also about evolving policies to free people from numerous problems such as the quagmire of poverty which confront them. Political leaders enjoy power and wealth at the expense of the governed. The ordinary citizens are left to their own ingenuities to hang desperately onto life. In his "Peasants," Syl Cherney Coker, a Sierra Leonean poet, lays bare the indifference of the rich toward the poor; the arrogance of the ruling class towards the people. Below is a reproduction of the poem:

The agony: I say their agony!
the agony of imagining their squalor but never knowing it
the agony of cramping them in roach infected shacks
the agony of treating them like chattel slaves
the agony of feeding them abstract theories they do not understand
the agony of their lugubrious eyes and battered souls
the agony of giving them party cards but never party support
the agony of marshalling them on election day but never on banquet night
the agony of giving them melliferous words but mildewed bread
the agony of their cooking hearths dampened with unuse
the agony of their children with projectile bellies
the agony of long miserable nights
the agony of thatched houses with too many holes
the agony of erecting hotels but being barred from them
the agony of watching the cavalcade of limousines
the agony of grand state balls for God knows who
the agony of those who study meaningless "isms" in incomprehensible language
the agony of intolerable fees for schools but with no jobs in sight
the agony of it all I say the agony of it all
but above all the damn agony of appealing to their patience
Africa beware! Their patience is running out!¹⁵

The above poem is an eloquent expression of the attitude of the rulers towards the ruled on the African continent. Lack of sympathy and empathy is the hallmark of political rule in Africa. Cherney Coker unequivocally catalogues the injustices of the politicians. The politicians seem not to be bothered by the growing slums dotted on the continent. The filth which is engulfing cities is of little concern to them. The living conditions of the people (roach infected shacks) are appalling. It is unimaginable to see the dwelling places of the urban poor and those in the rural areas. The picture becomes worrying when one juxtaposes the standards of living of the politicians with that of the people: "hotel," "cavalcade of limousines." Coker takes a swipe at African governments for their inertia; their inability to put food on the dining tables of the citizens as depicted by the words, "mildewed bread", "hearths dampened with unuse."

Commenting on this particular poem, Isidore Okpewho concedes thus:

This is a very powerful poem denouncing the way in which the poor are treated by the leadership in various countries of Africa. They are left to live in unimaginably miserable and unhealthy conditions with their families, they are exploited by politicians but never rewarded, their support is courted but they are never treated with respect, the wealth of the nation is paraded and wasted before their eyes but they do not get a share of it, and they are treated to all kinds of foreign theories but have no practical meaning for their lives.¹⁶

The success of this poem derives from the down-to-earth diction the poet uses. The meaning of the poem cannot in any way be lost on the reader. Senanu and Vincent declare: "We also sense the poet's anger through the antithetical statements which emphasise the hypocrisy and the cynicism of those in power in Africa."¹⁷ To further buttress the tone of anger is the outright disregard for rules of grammar where the poet adventently refuses to punctuate the poem to underscore the unending nature of the agony. Again, it should be noted that the word "agony" has been repeated nineteen times in the above poem. The significance of this repetition is to emphasise the pervasive nature of the agony or the pain the people have had to endure.

In addition to the above, Henry Barlow's "The Death of an Eland" paints a picture of insensitivity of those in power to the suffering of the under-privileged.

Those eyes!
Those liquid green eyes
Fearless yet crying
Terrified and silent
Imploring for mercy
Those eyes haunt me.

We stood and looked at her
Emaciated with hunger and pain
Lying on her side with the festering leg
Dripping with pus held in the air
Trying in vain to heave itself up with her other leg.

Those eyes!
The terrified liquid eyes
Fervently transmitted pleas for mercy
And the body shook with terror and pain
The emaciated legs kicked feebly
Trying to get her up
Where she had tripped and fallen
There were ticks on her belly
Some were fat and bluish green
And there were numerous small brown ones
The eyes begged!
Those haunting eyes.

The hunter said in a matter of fact way
It is kinder to shoot her and raised his gun
There was a kick and a feeble neigh
The body relaxed; the neck fell back
Those eyes looked at me
Still pleading
As if the hunter had not been merciful
And I stood there
Feeling foolish
I noticed the ticks-
Still sucking
I walked away
With liquid eyes
And followed the hunter.¹⁸

The poem above symbolically describes the pitiable story of an African who has been abandoned to die of hunger and disease. The plight of the character in the poem is compounded by the fact that "predators" feed fat on her.

Her eyes plead for mercy; beg for help from the well-to-do, especially politicians. The irony is that it is the latter who are adding to her already precarious situation by

living at her expense. The Eland is described as "emaciated" mainly as a result of hunger and disease. Her "festering leg dripping with pus" shows the extent to which she has been allowed to waste away.

The reader is told that "there were ticks on her belly/ Some were fat and bluish green/ And there were numerous brown ones." These are predatory parasites feeding fat on the flesh of the Eland. The "ticks" symbolise corrupt people in the country, especially politicians who are supposed to see to the promotion of the well-being of all and sundry. However, they shirk their responsibility to the people and rather gratify their every whim.

This poem is a biting criticism of people in positions of trust who abuse their office and impose severe conditions of living upon their people. There are scores of "Elands" in African political societies.

What is admirable about the style of Henry Barlow in this poem is his artistic use of diction, imagery and symbolism. The "Eland" is an African Antelope and it suggests commoners in society, the poor and dispossessed. Again, words like "emaciated," "pain," "festering," and "pus" underscore the excruciating degree of pain that the poor go through in society. They also depict the disease ravaged nature of the poor in Africa. Equally revealing is the word "ticks," which brings into sharp focus the greed and predatory instincts of the rulers in Africa. These parasites do not give their fellow human beings any respite. They feed fat on the dying poor.

On the subject of inhumanity of man towards his fellow man, of the indifference of the rulers toward the ruled, Richard Ntiru, a Ugandan poet, makes an important exposition on the subject with his poem "The Pauper." In it he bemoans the plight of the poor and dispossessed beggars in Africa. He aesthetically contrasts the poor with the fabulously rich politicians and wonders if the politicians are happy about the squalor into which the poor have sunk. The poem, which is modelled on William Blake's "The Tiger,"

questions the wisdom of politicians in creating the huge gulf between them and their citizens. The full poem is reproduced below:

Pauper, pauper, craning your eyes
In all directions, in no direction!
What brutal force, malignant element,
Dared to forge your piteous fate?
Was it worth the effort, the time?

You simply lean on a leafless tree
Nursing the finger that shrivel your bottom
Like a baby newly born to an old woman.
What crime, what treason did you commit
That you are thus condemned to human indifference?

And when you trudge on the horny pads,
Gullied like the soles of modern shoes,
Pads that even jiggers cannot conquer;
Does He admire your sense of endurance
Or turn his head away from your impudent presence?

You sit alone on hairless goatskin,
Your ribs and bones reflecting the light
That beautiful cars reflect on you,
Squashing lice between your nails
And cleaning your nails with dry saliva.

And when He looks at the grimy coating
Caking off your emaciated skin,
At the rust that uproots all your teeth
Like a pick on a stony piece of land,
Does He pat his paunch at the wonderful sight?

Pauper, pauper, crouching in beautiful verandas
Of beautiful cities and beautiful people,
Tourist and I will take your snapshots,
And your MP with a shining head and a triple chin
Will mourn your fate in a supplementary question at
Question Time.¹⁹

This obvious satire takes a swipe at African governments for doing little or nothing about the plight of the poor and vulnerable in the polity. The poet renders a vivid description of the pauper who symbolises the teeming poor in Africa. The persona talks about the beggar who crouches at vantage points in the city and looks at people's faces; perhaps "manna" will be tossed in his direction. The persona wonders what wicked "malignant element" could apportion such a "piteous fate." The persona tells of the

uncomfortable situation the pauper finds himself. The persona is surprised at the grand human indifference to the plight of the pauper.

The poet draws a contrast between the "hairless goatskins" on which the pauper crouches with "beautiful cars reflect you." He further contrasts the "paunch" of "He" with the pauper's "emaciated skin" and concludes that the fate of the pauper is of less concern to the politicians. Mention should be made of the "He" in the poem. This "He" may symbolise an African president who has grown fat at the expense of his people. The MP comes in for criticism as he does not deem it important to discuss the debilitating effect of poverty on the ordinary citizens.

The strength of this poem is the effective diction coupled with numerous images the poet uses to put the poem together. Notice should also be taken of the mockery, sarcasm and latent irony in the poem.

Providing explication on Ezenwa-Ohaeto's poems, "Song of an Unemployed" and "Song of a Beggar" which are about the plight of the poor in society, Udentia O. Udentia remarks about the above poems:

The "Song of an Unemployed" and "Song of a Beggar" are bitter satires of the contradictory social relations in a recolonised society, where the few members of the ruling class revel in an uninhibited display of filthy wantonness while the mass of the people wallow in destitution and neglect and are stupefied by ignorance and disease.²⁰

Governments in Africa, instead of being humane and sympathetic to the people are rather callous and unsympathetic to the sufferings of the millions of people who bear the brunt of the harsh economic realities on the ground. The much touted phrase, "poverty alleviation," has done little to solve the economic problems of Africans; the truth is that poverty has not thinned in size; it has rather flourished, grown wings, and is tormenting the peoples of Africa. The "Povertometer" by Lade Wosornu, a Ghanaian surgeon and a poet based in Saudi Arabia, discusses rather pictorially the ravages of poverty on the African continent. The poem reads in part as follows:

Hootmania, audible emblem of rags
 Roams our- dusty- muddy streets day and night.
 Drivers of cabs, vans filled with gari bags
 Presidential motorcades in full flight
 Hearses, bridal convoys, private parties
 And, of death-traps on wheels we call lorries:
 None is spared from this collective madness.

Hootmania paints yellow men who wield swords;
 None has the guts to slay this rabid hound.
 Forty years of hollow independence
 And, Hootmania remains unchecked, unbound.
 It barks and spreads the noisome pestilence
 While soldiers hunt girls selling groundnut pods.
 (Price control. O! what utter sadness!)²¹

The concern of Wosornu in the above poem is the fact that poverty, as a "marauding beast," has been allowed to reign too long in Africa. Poverty has gripped almost everybody on the African soil. It is only those in government who seem to have escaped the horrors of poverty. The poet uses contrast to place into proper perspective the huge contrast between the lives of politicians and the ordinary citizens. Whereas politicians are seen in "Presidential motorcades in full flight," "soldiers hunt girls selling groundnut pods." The poor, symbolised by "girls selling groundnut," are rather maligned by security agents when the former try to eke out a living. This brings up the contentious issue of African governments trying to rid their cities of human traffic or human pollution. This policy has been pursued in Ghana and Zimbabwe where governments find the presence of traders on the pavements in the cities a nuisance and consequently clear them.

African governments appear helpless in the face of daunting economic challenges which confront the continent. ~~Governments~~ experiment with one economic policy after another, but all to no avail. This has led to an observation by Claud Ake thus:

Three decades of preoccupation with development in Africa have yielded meager returns. African economies have been stagnating or regressing. For most Africans, real incomes are lower than they were two decades ago, health prospects are poorer, malnourishment is widespread, and infrastructure is breaking down, as are some social institutions...However, the assumption so readily made that there has been a failure of development is misleading. The problem is not so much that development has failed as

that it was never really on the agenda in the first place. By all indications, political conditions in Africa are the greatest impediments to development.²²

The above quotation sets the tone for a discussion on the incompetence of some African political leaders. In his poem, "His Excellency the Masquerader," as noted in previous paragraphs, the poet bemoans the incompetence of a government appointee who executes a shoddy project. No sooner has "His Excellency" completed with the project than the bolts and nuts used for the construction start falling off because they have become rusty: "But bolts drop/ And steel that should be blue/ At close grip/ Shows brown." One realises that it is not only because "His Excellency" is corrupt which results in the poor execution of the project but that he is also incompetent.

In his "Developing Country," Lade Wosornu bemoans the incompetence of African political leaders and impliedly suggests that African leaders should cut the unwieldy size of their governments. The poem reads thus:

In this land
Arrival is not the problem:
It's the survival
In their hotels
Servers outnumber the served
And, hangers-on the lot²³

The 'hangers-on' are the bane of African governments. It is funny to note that there are ministers of state without any clearly defined portfolios. In Ghana, for instance, there are about eighty-eight ministers and deputy ministers in President Kuffour's government, legion Special Assistants, Government Spokespersons for Finance, Good-governance, Social Services, Presidential Press Secretary and a lot more. There is duplication of function; indeed there is confusion amongst them. These are the issues Wosornu seems to be talking about in the above poem. The "hotel" in the poem symbolises any African country where nepotism, cronyism, tribalism and other considerations inform the

composition of government. In the end, the number of government functionaries paradoxically exceeds the number of those to be served.

If the argument is that African leaders are corrupt, insensitive and incompetent, what is it that they are capable of doing? One thing is certain; African leaders can enjoy themselves to the envy of the poor around them. They organise parties and enjoy themselves whilst the majority of the people can hardly afford a meal a day. Mbella Sonne Dipoko, a Cameroonian poet, vividly portrays such a scene in "Rulers:"

This is a rainy night
Rulers unroll scrolls of wretched landscapes
And boast and drink and dance under chandeliers
In castles threatened like pleasure boats in a furious ocean

They are like insects that dance around street lamps.
Looming in the fog of a stormy sky.

This is a seismic night;
Water -divide hills sink into valleys
And rivers flow backwards.
Our faces and farms drip with salt water from the flooded ocean.

But while our hope splits like lips in winter
We must seek the reticent sea-gull before it drowns
Mourned by straw crows
Such is the fate of the wicked kingdom
Governed by gorgeous parrots.²⁴

Mbella sends out warning signals to wicked rulers on the African continent that their days are numbered. He believes that the end of the vindictive dictator, the corrupt politician who enjoys himself at the expense of the citizens will not be pleasant. According to the poet, African leaders throw banquets and enjoy themselves when there is so much poverty and misery around them. Not only are the politicians surrounded by vulnerable people, they are equally circled by dangerous elements who want to take the leadership by storm. Such dangerous elements may include poorly paid security forces, mercenaries, unemployed youths and wicked people who cannot bear the sight of these avaricious leaders in power.

In the second stanza, the poet is seized by a powerful feeling that a violent revolution is about to sweep away the wicked rulers. He sees an imminent chaotic upheaval that will crush both the wicked rulers and the innocent people. He warns rather implicitly that African leaders should be humane enough to accommodate the poor, otherwise doom awaits them.

Closely related to the above is Henry Barlow's "Building the Nation." In this poem, the poet decries the avarice with which African politicians gratify themselves whilst leaving out the masses.

Today I did my share

In building the nation.
I drove a permanent secretary
To an important urgent function
In fact to a luncheon at Vic.
The menu reflected its importance
Cold Bell beer with small talk.
Then fried chicken with niceties
Wine to fill the hollowness of the laughs
Ice – cream to cover the stereo-type jokes
Coffee to keep the PS awake on return journey.

I drove the Permanent secretary back.
He yawned many times in back of the car
Then to keep awake, he suddenly asked,
Did you have any lunch?
I replied looking straight ahead
And secretly smiling at his belated concern
That I had not, but was slimming!

Upon which he said with a seriousness
That arrived more than annoyed me
Mwananchi, I too had none!
I attended to matters of state.
Highly delicate diplomatic duties you know,

And friend, it goes against my grain,
Causes me stomach ulcers and wind.
Ah, he continued, yawning again,
The pains we suffer in building the nation! ²⁵

The poem above is a sterling example of poetic satire. The poet takes greedy, hypocritical and lazy politicians to task and argues that the citizenry should be wary of such politicians.

The persona in this poem is a driver whose duty it is to transport a government appointee to his place of work. This time, the chauffeur drives a Permanent Secretary to an "important urgent [State] function". The persona sarcastically refers to the function as a "luncheon."

The second stanza of the poem catalogues a long list of courses served at the said luncheon. The persona declares: "Cold Bell beer with small talk" and "wine to fill the hollowness of the laughs."

One notable feature of African governments is their disposition to organise outlandish banquets. These banquets are thrown in honour, especially, of foreign dignitaries. The much touted reality that poverty reigns supreme in Africa is of little concern to these leaders when it comes to parties. The political leadership finds money to enjoy themselves. It is important to observe that these parties are exclusively for VIPS.

The third and fourth stanzas of the poem portray the lying and the hypocritical tendencies in the Permanent Secretary. He asks the driver if the latter has eaten. He replies in the negative. The Secretary, wanting to identify himself with the driver, says: "I too had none/ I attended to matters of state/ Highly delicate diplomatic duties you know." The poet exposes the politician in the last stanza when the latter yawns and complains about "the pains we suffer in building the nation." The poet contrasts the Permanent Secretary with the driver and leaves the issue to readers to judge which of the two is serving the nation.

A major outlet through which arbitrariness in political office manifests itself is through oppression and suppression of the rights and liberties of the African peoples. Across the continent, there are scores of stories of egregious human rights violations. Commenting on the oppressive nature of African governments, Muktarr Mustapha, a Sierra Leonean poet, in his poem "Gbassay - blades in regiment" argues that African

governments can be murderous. He lists a litany of violent acts which can be inflicted on a victim of state-sponsored torture. His poem reads:

Push a porcupine quill into
My quaint eyes
Then plunge an assegai into
My fibroid face
Then slash my neck and stain
The tortoise back rich with my blood

Force a rug needle into my narrow
nose: force it right into my
Indigo marrow

Lift my tongue and tie it
With a rope from a tethered goat
Lacerate my lips with deep sanguine
gutters splattering blood like a
Bellow in full blaze - blazing yellow

Disembowel my belly and feed the
Hawks that hover there hourless
Timeless black blue sky
And inside a crater bury
My ears
"Is it death?"²⁶

The above poem records the excruciating pain that a victim of dictatorial regime in Africa can go through. The persona urges his assailants to pierce or pluck out his eyes, make multiple incisions on his face and finally slit his throat. The murderer can, if he so desires, splash his blood on the back of a tortoise, implying he can do whatever he so wishes with his lifeless body.

In the second and third stanzas, the victim of torture further invites his tormentor to inflict whatever damage he wishes on his body. He can either push a pointed needle down his nostril or tie his tongue, implying he can gag him to restrain him from exposing the murderous regime.

In the final stanza, the victim defiantly urges the cut-throat to rend open his bowels and empty his entrails for the relish of birds of prey. He ends the poem on a note of defiance asking his persecutor, "Is it death?"

This poem is a portrayal of dictatorial regimes on the African continent. The poet places in sharp focus the numerous acts of torture that tyrants in Africa perpetrate against, sometimes, innocent people. The assaults on citizens are so strident that they are comparable to the Gestapo of Nazi Germany. Nkrumah of Ghana, Mobutu of Zaire, Eyadema of Togo and a host of other tyrants are on record for their infringement on the rights of their citizens. Senanu and Vincent declare:

But the poem is also a comment upon some of the horrifying experiences of some political victims of oppressive regimes in various parts of Africa, and so the poet's imagination forges links between the past and the present of Africa. And the defiant question with which the poem ends is an expression of personal courage, as well as an inspiration from the traditions of the past.²⁷

Again, on the subject matter of this poem, Isidore Okpewho concedes that

On another level the poem represents a defiance of the terrors posed by present-day political leaders in Africa, who subject their opponents to all kinds of torment. By submitting himself readily to the limits of such a torment, torturing the body to the point of death, the victim is able to say to the oppressor at the end: is that all you can do?²⁸

On the subject of torture, inhuman and degrading treatment meted out to so-called dissidents or critics of a regime, it is instructive to note the experience of a victim of torture in Nigeria during Abacha's administration:

Nigerian newspaper editor Niran Malaolu was arrested on the orders of Sani Abacha in 1997. This is what happened next: They were giving me what they called the "shock treatment." After ten minutes of it my eyes were bleeding, and there were wounds all over my body. I had been beaten with whips, belts, boots, rifle butts, clubs, electrified batons, you name it. My head ached. I tasted the blood which dripped from my mouth. I felt the ultimate fear of death...The shock treatment started again. They hung me by my ankles from the ceiling. They poured ice-cold water on me and applied electrodes to my body. The cold cut through me like a knife. Jos is high on the plateau and it was the season of the harmattan.²⁹

The above extract from *BBC Focus on Africa* magazine, January - March 2000 edition, chronicles the excruciating pain that a victim of a murderous torture squad went through and this is no fiction. This excerpt confirms the persona's experience in the above poem and justifies his implied protest.

In a related development, a flurry of coups, counter-coups and rumours of coups that swept across the African continent provide a subject for comment by African poets. As already pointed out in the introduction, the intervention of the military into politics dislocated the machinery of progress. This negative development reversed the clock of development and almost everybody is a witness to the painfully slow rate at which the continent is advancing.

In his "Radio Revolution", the renowned Ghanaian poet, Kofi Anyidoho, takes readers down memory lane to the era of socio-political upheavals which rocked Africa as a whole, and Ghana in particular.

Again this dawn our Radio
broke off the vital end of sleep

Revolution! Devolution! Resolution

grab a razor-sharp matchet
and step onto the paths of war

Across our yard I disturbed a courtship of
the dogs. They barked and backed away-

through streets to all familiar walks
through maze of slums to armed barracks
of peace. Where? Where?
old peasant with hoe in hand, I
seek revolution. Where is Revolution?
young veteran with blood across blue eyes, I
knew of no Revolution, but I
met Revolt limping down this road
chased by a howling herd of armed jackals
down this road down this road
to the market square where an only
pig searching for a morning meal
took me for a moving lump of flesh
and charged at me charged at me
with fangs sharpened by hunger's despair

I slashed her into two, wiped her
blood upon

her head

down this road down this road
to Dependence square seeking Revolution
I found a lone symbol for Peace
a nameless bronze warrior with empty
gun pointing earthwards doing homage

to earth goddess

The school-boy newspeddler leans against
a smile tells of how he came and found my doors
open my inner rooms unguarded in the dawn

I was out seeking Revolution

Our Revolution, Sir? It's here in these
Dailies. The headlines display it:

THE REVOLUTION – NOT A CONCERT PARTY

The photographs confirm it:

Statesmen at State Banquets
Proposing a toast to the health of State:
LONG LEAVE THE REVOLUTION³⁰

Anyidoho is noted for the turgidity of his poems. He has a circumventing way of releasing the bomb-shell. This poem undoubtedly talks about the late 1960s down through the 1970s when military insurrections were the order of the day in Ghana. The tension, the fear, the anarchy and the general sense of insecurity are the issues for comment in this poem. The persona wakes up to a commotion-filled morning. The radio has announced a violent coup that has rent the nation apart leaving in its trail scenes of chaotic violence. The persona seizes a sharp machete and embarks upon a war-path of blood-spilling. Peasants, security forces and other criminal elements in society take advantage of the confusion and unleash terror on innocent citizens. The blood-gurgling battle that ensues is anybody's guess.

The revolutions are staged in the name of making things anew but it is the same old syndrome of 'dependence' on so called donor partners. Again, the revolutions are staged ostensibly in the interest of the ordinary people. The paradox of the situation is that it is staged in the interest of the coup-makers, their families and bosom-cronies. It is no wonder the persona bids fast exit to the so-called revolution, "Long Leave the Revolution". The preceding quotation is a deviation from the normal cliché: "Long Live the Revolution." It is the poet's poetic style of bidding adieu to the revolution which

brings nothing but unimaginable suffering and misery to the people. What is admirable about this poem is the tinge of irony and sarcasm that the poet gives to the poem.

In the same vein, Anyidoho tells of the heavy toll that coups have on a nation, especially, the desecration of human lives. He notes in "On My Honour" that

...This sister came over at noon
holding a plea to her bosom
The revolution had drafted her
man into the national service corps
He was out in the field campaigning
for the redemption of our souls
They shot him in the waist³¹

His "Elegy for the Revolution" takes the issues further by giving a detailed description of the ravages of military uprisings on the African continent. He declares:

The Revolution violates a devotee. Beware
Beware the wrath of thunderbolts
The agonized thoughts of a detainee translate
our new blunders into nightmares of blood and sweat:
whips slashing through tender skins, broken bones
collapsing to floors of cells, tortured moans
bursting through concrete walls
tearing through clouds and skies
They seek refuge in house of storms
and a sad conscience clears a path
for poison arrows of Gods of wrath³²

The extract above from "Elegy for the Revolution" depicts the grim picture of the period of unconstitutional rule in Africa. The era was so violent and chaotic that citizens sat on tenterhooks. The torture sessions which went on in military barracks and prisons were more than cold print can describe. The National Reconciliation Commission established in 2002 in Ghana afforded an opportunity to victims of human rights violations to tell their stories of murder, disappearances, torture and dispossession. Some victims broke down in the course of telling their stories. One person collapsed and died.

In his treatise entitled "Poetry and Repression in Contemporary Nigeria: Tanure Ojaide's Labyrinths of the Delta," Ode S. Ogede notes of Ojaide's poem, "Message of Lust:"

Ojaide uses other animal imagery to reinforce his picture of African leaders as gluttons, 'Tigers,' 'Vulture,' 'armed robbers,' fowl' are terms that connote the barbarity of those who should direct the affairs of their nation with human feelings but have turned out to be the gravest threat to peace in the land. Referring specially to Nigeria, he characterizes a situation where 'soldiers are firing bullets into the crowd:'

They will boast of those they have killed,
The Pay and Records boys are riding Yamaha,
They are paying and wrecking Nigeria.

These lines serve a useful political purpose to force the attention of all civilized people to the inherent blood baths that follow successive military establishments in Nigeria. The fact that even those in the lowest cadre of the administration of the army are living in great affluence ('The Pay and Records boys...riding Yamaha') highlights the degree of the corruption of the military.³³

Lade Wosornu discusses the same problem of military infiltration into African politics and argues that the military is everything but civil. In his "Two Songs from Home", he speaks of violence, murder, torture and uneasiness that hang over Africa in the events of armed insurgency. The poem reads in part below:

An inner voice accustomed
to obedience, willed in whispers:
"Dawn is breaking. Up! To vespers:

How strangely sleepy church bells had fallen!
Conscripted into false-heaven silence,
Cocks forget to crow-crickets, too stayed low.
Like a man brain-bruised in a swoon
They would not be drawn by even the moon.

Nine priests were shot. (They were the lucky ones)
Ten drowned, thirteen tortured, bleeding, bowels burst.
Altars, once pearls, turned tar with clot and dust
Mingled with ash from yesterday's incense
The holy water was drained to the lees,
Its dozen jugs unwashed, unreplenished
All the choristers had fled in their robes
Music sheets flew in the trespassing breeze:
Temple doors were unbarred, windows unlatched.
I walked alone.

No flags drooped at half mast
No one wore black. No dirge was broadcast.
A people unaccustomed to a flood
Of brutality and a reign of woe
Were seduced with a wine of blood.
And they sung (not in whispers):
"Let the blood flow!"

Unholy song! Go! Down the windless trail!
Prevail nowhere. May you never again
Be heard in our grain-rich and shaded land.³⁴

The poem certainly is an appraisal of the June 4th, 1979 military uprising led by Flt. Lt. Jerry John Rawlings. The blood-letting that ensued in the wake of the rebellion led to a popular slogan among over-zealous University students: "Let the blood flow." The poem tells the chilly stories of ministers of God who were murdered for no offence committed. The rumour that some victims of military revolutions are drowned has been making its rounds although there is no confirmation as to its authenticity. However, there are credible stories of disappearances where some people, known to be targets of dictatorial governments, have gone missing and never came back. The torture sections appear to be a permanent feature of military brutality. The tension which characterises military take-overs is hugely felt in the poem. There appears to be uneasy calm as everybody hushes up in their houses and minds their own business.

The sad aspect of this poem is the fact that nobody sheds tears for the victims of the revolutions. Rather, the people brazenly encourage the perpetrators to "Let the blood flow." The poet shows his disgust at the abomination of the blood-spillage and urges the rioters to let there be peace.

Narrating this particular incident of the murder of priests in Ghana under the Rawlings led military junta, Mike Oquaye notes:

Finally, the prophet was arrested. On Monday, 8 February 1982, the soldiers decided to make a public show of the prophet at the Kejetia round-about. The weak man was led to the slaughter, hardly able to walk. After a tedious public drill, he was asked to run and was then shot in the back. The soldiers poured petrol on the Odiyifo (prophet), set him ablaze and danced round the bonfire as horrified citizens looked on helplessly. The soldiers had triumphed over the church.³⁵

On coups and military violence in African politics, Lenri Peters, a Gambian poet, in 'It is time for reckoning Africa,' provides an eye-opener:

"Maudors" sit on wicker thrones
ghosted by White ants
a hundred Marabus at hand
living on the fat of the land —

all threatening coups
and claiming vast receipts

like winsome children
feeding on mother's milk.

The seats of Government
levelled at the dice
they get the most
who tell the biggest lies.³⁶

The poet is nervous about the frequent military upheavals that have become a feature of the African political system. He bemoans the ineffective leadership African leaders offer. What is worse is their being "remote-controlled" by white governments through their manipulations and prescriptions. The poet comments on the greed and acquisitive posture of leaders in Africa. He goes further to say that honest people are sidelined in power while the crooks are at the helm of affairs.

Commenting on this particular poem, Romanus N. Egudu remarks:

African politicians spend their time and talent on destructive projects, such as organizing coups d'état... Peters considers African politicians the continent's greatest enemies because of their insincerity, ignorance, violence and indolence. The image of Africa as presented in the poetry of Lenri Peters is one of disunity, political instability, social injustice and basic underdevelopment.³⁷

Senanu and Vincent on "It is time for reckoning Africa" argue that

Africa as a continent of new nations has remained for a long time a study in political incompetence and economic mismanagement. The poem is a plea for good government. This poem is different from many other poems written on the fate of Africa because it does not seek to put the blame for Africa's current travails outside Africa. He draws attention to lapses that have destroyed African nations and urges them to take stock and mend their ways, so that the latest hopes will be realized. Africa's problem is that of bad government by Africans themselves.³⁸

In recent history of Africa, there has been a growing phenomenon of armed rebel insurgency which threatens not only the lives of Africans, but also the sovereign security of African states is undermined. This issue of armed rebellion is the subject for comment in Timothy Wangusa's poem, "Psalm 23 Part 11". In this poem, the persona seems to accept the dominion of the state over his life. He appears happier about his condition as a civil servant. However, if the reader probes deep into the psychology of the persona vis-à-vis the general economic malaise of the African continent, the reader would realise that

the persona is full of irony in his poetic effusion. One would not be far from right to conclude that he is boiling inside. The poem reads below:

The state is my shepherd, I shall not want;
It makes me to lie down in a subsidized house.
It leads me into political tranquility; it restores my faith in a lucrative future.
It leads me into paths of loans and pensions, for its International reputation sake.
Yea, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of Kivulu I will
Fear no kondos;
For the State is with me, its tanks and guns comfort me.
It preserves for me a bank account, in the presence of devaluation;
It fills my pocket with allowances, my salary overflows
Surely increments and promotion shall follow me all the days of my life,
And I shall dwell in senior staff quarters for ever.³⁹

The persona is never content with his life as a civil servant. He sees the State and, for that matter, the government, as an instrument of oppression. The so-called accommodation for which he praises the government is nothing short of antiquated structures which have outlived their usefulness. These structures or so-called government bungalows can barely accommodate a family of four.

Where is the political tranquility that the persona is talking about? Timothy Wangusa is a Ugandan and considering the turmoil which rocked his country, one would not be wrong to conclude that he is exploiting a fine irony to talk about the socio-economic situation and political upheavals in his country in particular, and in Africa as a whole.

The irony is greatly felt when the persona intones: "For the state is with me, its tanks and guns comfort me." The poet is talking about decades of armed insurgency in his country. Idi Amin's reign of terror, Museveni's relentless guerrilla warfare and Joseph Kony's Lord Resistance Army's mayhem are the issues under discussion in this poem. These rebel movements have waged relentless warfare against the government of Uganda, in the process, millions of innocent lives have been lost. The LRA, for instance, has for more than two decades, fought the government. It has abducted scores of children, using

some of them as child-soldiers and others as sex-slaves. Currently, The International Court of Justice, based in The Hague, has issued a bench warrant for the arrest of the leadership of the movement.

The postcolonial politics of Africa has been one of turbulence, armed insurgency, incompetence, lies, misery, disease out-breaks and a host of other distasteful experiences. Against the above background, a traditional poem from Nigeria disdains the essence of independence for Nigeria in particular and Africa as a whole. From the perspective of this persona, the much talked about independence that was to bring Africa the moon has brought nothing but untold hardship. The poem, "The woes of independence" reads in part thus:

News came from Benin blacks would govern themselves
That the white men had exploited us for too long.
So the UAC folded up in anger

The first few years were very pleasant
No one ever thought regret would follow
'After independence price of palm produce would soar'
said a slogan
'Rubber would boom' screamed another
Oh, with corn they have lured the fowl into a trap
When the referendum time drew near
Kinsmen in foreign lands were summoned home
'Demo, Power, Zik, Okokoroko!'
The more you drown a calabash the more it
floats! the campaign fever gripped everyone
Barely two years after, tumult of tax raid
brought sleepless night to all
'The police are in town; let no one brave the street
And the naughty children would taunt defaulters
Kikighwo, run fast!'
And a stampede would begin
Those who ran into gullies were countless
And the injured were a multitude
The swift of foot escaped paying that year
But a debt does not grow mouldy with time
Soon angry murmur filled the air:
'Should one defecate in the home for fear of tax?
The so-called liberation is now a curse.
We move stealthily like a fox prowling after a
stray fowl
Independence has brought us woes?

Whilst we fumed over this letters came from Benin

That the government was broke
Tax receipt for four, six years were demanded
For the poor living was a nightmare-
Our race for progress is now at bay
Demo, *Okokoroko*, one Nigeria!⁴⁰

The word "independence" has some special significance for the people of Africa who at some point in their history were colonised by Europeans. For this poet to write the word "independence" starting it with a small letter speaks volumes of his disgust for the whole concept of independence. The word has some emotional over-tones as it calls up fond memories of the euphoria which greeted the declaration of independence for countries in Africa.

The poet is skeptical about the concept of self-government. He discusses the propaganda which heralded the granting of independence. The African educated elites who spearheaded the campaign for self-rule made a number of allegations against the colonialists - mainly that the white men had exploited Africa for far too long. The persona takes readers down memory lane when independence was proclaimed in Nigeria. The poet further talks about the euphoria which greeted the declaration of independence, and concedes that everybody thought it was going to be merry-making all the time. Some people thought independence was going to solve all the problems of Africa. The euphoria gave way to grim realities on the ground. What is of paramount importance to this poet is the exploitation of the people by African leaders. The political leadership imposed prohibitive tax system which scared the citizenry into their abodes; they were disinclined to move outside their houses. The persona should have realised, however, that without an efficient regime of taxation, no country can advance to the expectation of its citizens.

On the subject matter of this particular poem, Isidore Okpewho argues that

The subject of this poem is the value of independence to Nigerians. The poem makes the point that independence has brought about a decline rather than an improvement in the quality of living among Nigerians. With the departure of the colonial government, the society has been thrown into chaos: the economy has suffered a slump rather than a boom as was promised; politics has become a desperate tussle for power among rival parties; and persistent tax raids have driven the ordinary people into a perpetual feeling of insecurity.⁴¹

In concluding this segment of the work, it is important to note the observations of Kofi Anyidoho in his poem "PraiseSong for TheLand". In this poem, he reminds Ghanaians first and foremost, and Africans in general, of the numerous set-backs the continent has suffered in its efforts at advancing in all facets of life, and admires the people for their high sense of fortitude, forbearance and endurance. Excerpts from the poem read below:

I want to sing a PraiseSong
For TheLand
I must sing a PraiseSong
for our People.

It is a passion as strong as Deep
as memories of storms
a vision as sharp as Urgent
as a sudden call to Arms.

There is no genuine praise except
where great battles are won
No deserving praise except
where great despairs are blown apart.

Before the Praise they say
I must remind our people
of our many many Failures.
Before the Praise they say
such ample room for Blame & Shame
So much pain before Dawn of Joy
Blame to count & count until our fingers break.

Yes:
the Song of Sorrow
is
the Ultimate Song of Joy
But have we not wept enough?

Have we ~~not held~~ our wounded souls
to twilight promise
of prophet after discarded prophet
~~of lost~~ decades of empty promises?

Have we not wept & wept enough?

Have we not piled our sorrows
into rows of harvest songs
raised our sagging voices
into awesome glory of giant hopes
in abandoned halls of fame&shame

crowded the skies with sudden storms
covered the moon with shrouds of bloody trails
stripped the sun of all glory
& run naked in the market-place
of rich and proud neighbours?

And have we have we not begged enough?

So many times. How many times
Have we not photographed our pain
in black and white in full colour
in total technicolour
and in giant poster size
for pity and for pleasure
of rich & proud neighbours?⁴²

In the above excerpt, one expects the poet to pour out in torrents the achievements of the African continent since the title of the poem is a "PraiseSong for TheLand." The poet does not do that; he rather does the opposite. He ironically sings the problems and failures of the continent.

He begins the poem by saying he has a strong urge to sing praises for the land and its people. He goes further to say that before he does that, it would be proper to place in perspective the "many failures" the continent has suffered. According to the poet, there cannot be "genuine praise except/ where great battles are won". In other words, he cannot laud the continent when the latter has not made any spectacular achievement. He then launches into a flurry of what he calls "such ample room for Blame&Shame". The poet bemoans the problem of bad leadership on the African continent. According to him, the continent has experienced a situation of frequent changes in government where succeeding governments promise the moon but achieve little or nothing. To the poet, these leaders just waste the people's time. He notes:

Have we not held our wounded souls
to twilight promise
of prophet after discarded prophet
of lost decades of empty words?

The poet is talking about politicians who promise the people but do nothing to fulfil the promise.

He dwells extensively on African governments advertising their problems to the outside world and soliciting for help. According to the poet, the act of going a-begging is a shame and should be discarded.

The poems collected and examined, are mainly from West and East Africa. One interesting thing to observe is that all of them expose strings of abuses located at the doorstep of people in political office. These abuses, whether they happen in West or East, North or South Africa, are almost the same old story of corruption, incompetent leadership style, insensitivity to the plight of the unfortunate in society and the needless incursion of the military into politics with their concomitant effects of oppression and suppression of the liberties of the people; and they can all be laid at the doorstep of arbitrary use of political power. With these leadership problems dogging Africa, these poets say the continent has a long way to go to fulfil its dreams and aspirations in life.

NOTES

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3. Soyinka, *Poems of Black Africa*, p.84.
4. *ibid.*, pp. 82-83.
5. Isidore Okpewho, ed., *The Heritage of African Poetry* (Harlow: Longman Group Ltd., 1985), pp. 94-95.
6. *ibid.*, p.213.
7. Stewart Brown, "The Pleaded Grace of Song – Wole Soyinka and Nigerian Poetry," accessed on 15 December, 2006, available at [www. Poetrysociety-org.uk](http://www.Poetrysociety-org.uk).
8. Soyinka, *Poems of Black Africa*, pp.118-19.
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17. Senanu and Vincent, *A S election of African Poetry*, p.284.
18. Cook and Rubadiri, *Poems from East Africa*, pp.16-17.

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22. Claud Ake, *Democracy and Development in Africa* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd., 2003), p.1.
23. Wosornu, *Journey without End*..., p.31.
24. Soyinka, *Poems of Black Africa*, p.115.
25. Cook and Rubadiri, *Poems from East Africa*, pp.14-15.
26. Okpewho, *The Heritage of African Poetry*, pp.167-68.
27. Senanu and Vincent, *A Selection of African Poetry*, p.279.
28. Okpewho, *The Heritage of African Poetry*, p.263.
29. Niran Malaolu, "Tortured," *Focus on Africa*, January-March, 2000, p.26.
30. Kofi Anyidoho, *A Harvest of Our Dreams* (Accra: Woeli Publishing Services, 1985), pp.64-65.
31. Anyidoho, *A Harvest of Our Dreams*, p.66.
32. *ibid.*, pp.70-71.
33. Ode S. Ogede, "Poetry & Repression in Contemporary Nigeria: Tanure Ojaide's *Labyrinths of the Delta*," in *New Trends and Generations in African Literature*, eds., Eldred Durosimi Jones and Majorie Jones (London: James Curry Ltd., 1996), ~~p.68.~~
34. Wosornu, *A Journey without End*, p.34.
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36. Soyinka, *Poems of Black Africa*, pp.125-26.
37. Romanus N. Egudu, "The Colour of Truth: Lenri Peters and African Politics," in *New West African Literature*, ed., Kolawole Ogungbesan (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1979), p.65.
38. Senanu and Vincent, *A Selection of African Poetry*, p.172.
39. Cook and Rubadiri, *Poems from East Africa*, p.21.
40. Okpewho, *The Heritage of African Poetry*, pp.81-82.
41. *ibid.*, pp.203-04.
42. Kofi Anyidoho, *PraiseSong for TheLand* (Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2002), pp.52-

54.

CHAPTER THREE

The African continent is saddled with the problem of leadership. Since independence, the continent has experimented with several forms of government, ranging from monarchies, civilian republics headed by democratically elected presidents to military juntas. In all these systems of government, a certain feature characterises them all. It is arbitrary manipulation of power and abuse of office. Such arbitrariness manifests itself in dictatorship, corruption, incompetence and gross human rights violations. This chapter discusses arbitrary use of political power as reflected in drama. In this regard, three plays are featured: *Kongi's Harvest*¹ and *From Zia, With Love*,² written by Wole Soyinka, and *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again*,³ by Ola Rotimi.

Conspicuously noticeable in these plays is the issue of dictatorship. Africa, since independence, has had to endure untold suffering under dictators. The first three decades after independence were the times when these dictators reigned supreme on the continent. One or two reasons can be adduced as to why dictatorship was rampant at that time. These leaders were those who had fought gallantly and liberated their countries from the yoke of colonialism; so they felt that they had a God-given right to rule their countries unceasingly, and without any internal or external voice of dissent. Any criticism was viewed as an act of subversion, and the critic was dealt with ruthlessly.

Given the seriousness of the issue of dictatorship in Africa, literary artists have taken up the issue and written plays about the subject. In their literary texts, they expose the dictators for what they are and subject them to public ridicule. These plays are better described as satire.

In the light of the above, Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest* is a masterpiece. Soyinka discusses the problem of dictatorship in post-independence Africa. In it, the author deplores dictatorship which chokes the African continent beyond redemption. Kongi, the

eponymous character, is the president of Isma and his autocratic rule alienates almost everybody in the country. The imaginary country, Isma, is emerging from monarchy into a modern independent country under an elected president. From the very beginning, President Kongi attempts to abolish the political power of the traditional rulers so that all power will be concentrated in his hands. The traditional ruler, Oba Danola, naturally resists. This creates a conflict between the traditional ruler who is the embodiment of tradition, and Kongi, who is the elected modern ruler of Isma.

Kongi is determined at the national festival to eat the yam meant for the gods and the ancestors. This yam is traditionally eaten by the traditional chief on behalf of the gods. Kongi therefore wants to take over both the administrative and spiritual functions in the state. This would naturally make the traditional function of the ruler irrelevant.

Not only does Kongi show disrespect to traditional authority, he insults them as well. This attitude and behaviour poisons relations and alienates him from the people. The first few lines of the play strike the key-note:

The pot that will eat fat
Its bottom must be scorched
The squirrel that will long crack nuts
Its footpad must be sore (*Kongi 1*).

The point has already been made that Kongi has driven away the Old Aweri which served as a council of advisors to Oba Danola. The Oba is not happy about this action by Kongi and remarks to the superintendent thus:

Good friend, you merely stopped
My drums. But they were stopped
On the day when Kongi cast aside
My props of wisdom, the day he
Drove the old Aweri from their seats (*Kongi 3*).

The action by Kongi to dissolve the Old Aweri amounts to destroying the traditional establishment. Oba remarks "what is a King without a Clan/ Of Elders?"

Kongi incarcerates Oba Danola (in political detention). This is to force him to publicly give up the yam to him. This means that the traditional leader should give up all

authority he has been exercising to pave the way for Kongi to be the absolute ruler of Isma. Oba Danola views the act of surrendering the new yam publicly to Kongi as an act of humiliation and complete erosion of traditional authority.

Commenting on *Kongi's Harvest*, James Gibbs and Berth Lindfors aver:

The initial impetus for writing *Kongi* appears, however to have been rather different, namely the drift towards dictatorships and one-party states in Africa during the 60's. When working on the script presumably during 1964 or 1965 Soyinka told David Rubadiri that he was writing a play about [Kamuzu] Banda. Concern with developments in Malawian politics is reflected in the text by the direct quotation of Banda's "Dead or Alive Search Order...." But when the play was first produced, it was the parallels between Kongi and Nkrumah which attracted most notice.⁴

The above quotation lends credence to the theme of dictatorship in the play. It is equally significant to note the attempt to establish a paradigm between Kongi and Africa's former dictators like Banda of Malawi and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana.

In the play, one of the oppressive measures Kongi resorts to, to clamp down on dissenting voices and resistance, is the use of preventive detention act. This infamous act ensures that the Oba and a host of other reactionary elements in Isma are placed in jail. Kevin Shillington talks about Nkrumah's indiscriminate use of the Preventive Detention Act of 1958 to cow his political opponents into submission.⁵

The use of prisons as an institution of state to silence critics is widespread in African Politics. Soyinka is not a stranger to prisons and their appalling conditions. He had been imprisoned for twenty-seven months and had come close to being imprisoned in 1994 when Sani Abacha had sought after his life. This time, he escaped by a hair's breadth and went into exile. Adrian Roscoe notes about Wole Soyinka to the effect that

He is also found on occasions close to the eye of the political storms that have ravaged his country since independence in 1960. As we have already seen, by temperament a satirist, he moves about the West African scene like some marvellously gifted Malcontent, fiercely thrusting at the corruption, intrigue and vaulting ambition which he witnesses on every side. And his blows strike home, for on two occasions he has been sent to prison.⁶

The crux of the above quotation is the fact that Soyinka has been a thorn in the flesh of dictators both military and civilian. He can never go to bed with a political system that toys with the liberties of its citizens. In this connection, Soyinka devotes

much of his time crusading against tyranny on the African continent. He is on record for campaigning for the overthrow of Idi Amin, a vicious dictator who ruled Uganda in the 1970s. He has condemned President Mugabe of Zimbabwe for stifling the opposition in his country. In an interview with the cable network, CNN, in 2001, Soyinka said:

Look at Mugabe stifling the opposition under the pretence of repossessing alienated land. He's one of these dictators who want to die in office and will crush all dissenting views... in the crudest manner... killing his opponents, torturing them, burning their houses.⁷

As already pointed out, a great deal of his literary writing has been concerned with "the oppressive boot and the irrelevance of the colour of the foot that wears it."⁸ In *The Man Died*, Soyinka discusses his bitter experience in jail.⁹ Equally biting is his *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* (his latest memoir) where Soyinka relives his bitter political travails. Reviewing this particular memoir in *Focus on Africa* magazine, Gordon Glyn-Jones writes "his new memoir covers his incarceration (much of it in solitary confinement), his many exiles and the death sentence in absentia meted out by late President Sani Abacha in 1997."¹⁰ In *The Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis*, Soyinka's ire is focused like a laser and on one day, June 23, 1993, and on one man, Nigeria's former brutal dictator, General Sani Abacha. It was on that day that the nation's free and fair elections, held about two weeks earlier, were annulled, and the victor, Moshood Abiola, imprisoned. "Under a dictatorship a nation ceases to exist," Soyinka rails in *The Open Sore*. "All that remains is a fiefdom, a planet of slaves regimented by aliens from outer space."¹¹

Still on the issue of dictatorship in *Kongi's Harvest*, Soyinka gives insight into how dictators are born and nurtured. According to Soyinka, dictatorship is fostered when praises of the leader become so profuse that he ends up believing them. This makes him think that he is infallible and that anybody who criticises him is a public enemy. In the play, Kongi is portrayed as a god, far above his cabinet and everybody in the country. The song in favour of Kongi partly runs as follows:

For Kongi is our father
And Kongi is our man
Kongi is our mother...
And Kongi is our saviour
Redeemer, prince of power
For Isma and for Kongi
We're proud to live or die! (*Kongi* 65).

The above song of personality cult and profuse adulation ingrains on the psyche of Kongi and he thinks of himself as a god. He says "I am the spirit of harvest" (*Kongi* 36). With this thinking, what would he not do to protect his power? Again what would he not do against perceived opponents?

On the above subject of profuse praises and personality cult in African politics, Adu Boahene remarks about President Kwame Nkrumah thus:

Nkrumah became obsessed with his own power and ambition; he also became the subject of a most nauseating personality cult, and most surprisingly of all, he became superstitious, corrupt and immoral. He accepted such ridiculous and nauseating appellations as "Show Boy," "His Messianic Dedication," "Fount of Honour" and "Osagyefo."¹²

The above quotation stresses the extent to which the citizens can go to foster dictators. They may not be aware that by their utterances, praise-songs and profuse adulation to the leaders, they encourage the latter to continue if not accelerate their capricious use of power.

In addition, because the dictator wants to project himself, he names almost everything after himself. For example in the play, one reads

On a huge cyclorama which completely dominates the stage, pictures are projected of various buildings, factories, dams, etc., all clearly titled Kongi Terminus, Kongi University, Kongi dam, Kongi refineries, Kongi airport (*Kongi* 64).

The quotation above is a means of projecting the dictator as a man of action. He is seen as a benevolent father of the nation attending to the material needs of the people. However, the fact still remains that he is flailing the people, especially the reactionary elements in the body-politic. The practice of naming monuments after political leaders is common in Africa. In Nigeria, there is Muturla International Airport named after

President Murtala Mohammed; in Ghana, there are Kwame Nkrumah Circle and Kotoka International Airport.

It must however be made clear that the practice of naming monuments after political leaders is not peculiar to Africa. In the United States of America, they have John F. Kennedy Airport. This practice may be an attempt to honour and celebrate the life of an individual for his contribution to society. Nonetheless, in *Kongi's Harvest*, Kongi deliberately names artefacts after himself just to project and promote himself.

Another manifestation of dictatorship in the play is the conscious effort Kongi's government makes to track down dissidents. An effective system of spying is set in motion to keep the "ears of state" down on the ground and subsequently report anybody whose actions are deemed detrimental to the security of the state. The spies are christened "Left and Right Ears of State." They are seen at Segi's night club which is obviously viewed as an underground movement for the overthrow of Kongi. They again spy on Oba Danola.

Again, on the subject of spying, Adu Boahene reports of Nkrumah that he set up an effective system of spying. He argues that "people were simply picked up at any time often on false information supplied by spies who were planted everywhere."¹³

On the subject of spying, Soyinka amplifies it in *From Zia, With Love* where the military junta makes it a deliberate policy of state to bribe spies so that the latter would furnish them with the information they need. Such information is what they call intelligence reports. Commander Hyacinth tells the Director of Security that "informers must be paid or they do not inform. And where there is no information there cannot be detainees" (*From Zia* 9-10).

Kongi's tool for dealing with the reactionary elements is to put them in detention, some awaiting execution. The offence for which they have been jailed is as frivolous as

criticising the government. Those awaiting execution are said to have made attempts at assassinating the leader. When word goes round that some of the detainees have broken jail, Kongi rages that they must be recaptured and brought back either dead or alive.

Kongi's reign is marked by terror. The rights and liberties of the people are trampled upon. For instance, he starves his Reformed Aweri while expecting them to do proper disputation on policy proposals.

The issue of dictatorship is further heightened in *From Zia, with Love*. In this play the focus is on military dictatorship which has become like an albatross choking the neck of Nigeria in particular and Africa as a whole. Soyinka in this play takes readers through the politics of the military. The strange aura surrounding this play is the fact that the characters are prison inmates who reveal to readers what happens in detention and the State as far as the seat of government is concerned.

Under microscopic scrutiny is the manner in which the military junta arrests and imprisons citizens. All kinds of offences warrant arrest and incarceration. At certain times, the suspects are jailed without trial. Even where there is a trial, it is hurriedly and improperly conducted. The commander tells of the nature of offences which send people to gaol: "Prison na prison. Political detainee dey here. Manslaughter dey (*points upwards*). Innocent dey over yonder (*points to the cell*), mistake dey here. Even coup plotter, e dey here, abi I lie, Mr. Director? Suspicion. Mere suspicion" (*From Zia* 12).

It is important to observe that mere suspicions can send somebody to jail; trumped up charges can land one in trouble. The inmates tell of how one can be imprisoned on a frivolous charge of dating the same lady with a member of the regime. The military aberration comes to a head when people are punished beyond measure. Miguel, Detiba and Emuke deal in illegal narcotic drugs. They are caught, tried and given the death penalty. Can one be made to pay the supreme price for dealing in illegal drugs? Is the

punishment not out of proportion with the gravity of the offence? Come to think of it, these three personalities are tried on a law which was passed retroactively. Retrospective legislation is anathema to the principle of rule of law. Retroactive legislation, according to "The National Bar Association," "is the practice of enacting laws to deal with offences committed when such laws did not exist" (*From Zia 92*). It is only military regimes which can perpetrate such acts of illegality. Not only are the three offenders held in detention for a long time, they are eventually executed.

Writing about military dictatorship in Ghana, Mike Oquaye argues that

It cannot be gainsaid that the human rights record of the PNDC remains the worst in the political history of Ghana. We have seen the torture, arbitrary detention, human indignities, clampdown on media and religious freedom including killing and burning of a priest alive in broad day light... From all indications stemming out of the murder of the High Court judges, the retired Army Major and several others, official liquidation became state policy under Rawlings.¹⁴

The above excerpt is the sum total of the ills of a military regime in Ghana. When the military strikes, almost everybody is affected.

The military in this play is determined to wage a war against moral decadence and all forms of actions or inactions deemed inimical to the health of the state. In this regard, they announce what they call "Battle Against Indiscipline." This battle is against indiscipline in general and narcotic drugs in particular. It is interesting to observe what the military deems offences for which offenders must be dealt with according to their decree. Sebe avers:

It's a moral crusade – slackness, rigidity, forgery, connery, venery, revelry, smuggling, ogling, laziness, eagerness, apathy, telepathy, intolerance, permissiveness, academia, kleptomania, cultism, nepotism, nudity, drunkenness, superstition, godlessness, loitering, muttering, rioting, maligning, rumour mongering (*From Zia 82*).

With so many prohibitions such as those stated above, how can the citizens put body and soul together? In effect, they are telling people to cease to exist. With such arbitrary exercise of power, the liberties of the people are trampled upon.

On the drug menace too, the regime, as a matter of State policy, decrees that anybody who deals in drugs, if caught, will be executed without the option of a fine or imprisonment. It is instructive to note what Commander Hyacinth says:

From the tiniest of doses
to wholesale vendor
Habitual user or
First-time offender
Laundering of earnings
from drug operation
Shall incur something worse
than life incarceration
It's forfeit of life
by firing squad
And forfeit of property
at home or abroad
Be it liquid asset
or landed estate (*From Zia 84*).

The excerpt above spells out in clear terms the fate of drug dealers in the State. The irony is that the Eternal Ruling Council is hand in gloves with some businessmen in the illegal sale and distribution of narcotic drugs. The Wing Commander is the official government representative who deals in the drug trade with some governments in the outside world. Sebe, a notorious "Jack of all trades" and a friend to the Wing Commander states: "I tell you Commander, when you people are in our business, we know we are safe" (*From Zia 55*).

In a related development, the menace of drugs has reared its ugly head in other parts of Africa. The worrying aspect of it all is the involvement of the security agencies in the illicit business; they either receive bribes and shirk their responsibility of arrest, or provide protection and guidelines for the drug dealers.

Recently, there have been numerous cases of drug-trafficking in Ghana. As a measure to curb the problem, the Minister of Interior set up a fact-finding committee to ascertain the extent of the business in the country. The committee found among other things, that "the drug trade in Ghana has taken root; and that sadly, the country is gaining notoriety as a transit point for drug trafficking. This poses a real threat to the stability and

security of the state.”¹⁵ The report further talks about isolated cases of police complicity in the illegal business by taking bribes and letting off the hook people suspected to be dealing in narcotic drugs. The committee recommended for prosecution the Director General of Police Operations, for,

Instead of protecting the national interest and fighting crime, Assistant Commissioner of Police, Kofi Boakye and four others sought to promote their own agenda for financial reward. In pursuance of this common goal, ACP Kofi Boakye connived with the four others to find the owners of the cocaine who are alleged to be Colombians, for an unlawful purpose, other than arresting them and handing them over to the law enforcement agencies.¹⁶

Again, on the subject of dictatorship and abuse of office in *From Zia, With Love*, the military junta, upon seizing power arrests and puts in detention members of the former civilian government. This is usually done as a means of ensuring accountability in political office. This exercise is variously code-named “house cleaning exercise” and “mission of redemption” (*From Zia* 10). It is instructive to note the thinking of the Commander-in-Chief of the military government on the question of freeing political prisoners from jail. He states:

Those thieving politicians from whom we saved this nation – is it the heartless prodigals you now propose we should release from detention... Or the radicals? Those extremists who open their stinking mouths to demand of us a date for restoration of civil rule? Democracy! We have hardly begun our mission of redemption. Where were the bleeding hearts when the nation was being plundered with such unprecedented abandon? Where was their patriotism? Their human rights conscience? Did the very people on whose behalf they claim to speak – did not those very masses pour out into the streets to celebrate our take-over of government? Eunuchs! Impotents! Incompetents! Agitators! (*From Zia* 10).

Notice should be taken of the angry tone in which the above statement is made, not glossing over the invectives poured out in torrents against the armless, harmless and detained politicians. The substance of the above excerpt is the indictment against the citizenry, of the euphoria, enthusiasm and spontaneous uproar that normally greet the announcement of coups. The commander further takes a swipe at the University professors who, according to him, profess but do not teach. One senses an anti-intellectual feeling in the military. They are quick to condemn the educated elites for their

"grammar," that is to say their ability to speak good English, but cannot solve the problems in the society.

It is pertinent to point out that after the military take-over, the first thing the military junta does is to arrest almost all government appointees and place them in jail without going through proper investigation to establish who is culpable or otherwise.

It has been observed that the so-called clean-up exercise military governments engage in immediately after coups are often designed to witch-hunt the deposed government and subject members of the former administration to ridicule. In an article entitled "Bureaucratic Corruption and Policy Reform in Africa," Mbaku argues that

The impetus to cleanup corruption can be provided primarily by political exigency rather than by genuine interest in the efficient function of the nation's political and economic institutions. In several countries, including those in Africa, post coup commissions of enquiry are usually designed to discredit the ousted government and help incoming elites gain recognition and legitimacy. Incumbents also use cleanup programs to help them stay in power and continue to monopolize the supply of legislation and the allocation of resources.¹⁷

The above extract lends credibility to the assertion that the overriding motivation for military clean-ups is not so much to ensure accountability and probity in the country as of pursuing an agenda of political vendetta.

In *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again*, Ola Rotimi also discusses dictatorship in African politics. This time, a parliamentary candidate and a former military General makes a stint in politics. Instead of approaching politics from the perspective of a politician, he rather invests his experience as a military General into politics and thinks rather ridiculously that such a tactic will work to his advantage. Ola Rotimi is satirising the military in African politics. ~~One~~ observes that the political arena is full of misfits. Unfortunately, it is these misfits who constitute the political heavyweights.

Major Rahman Lejoka-Brown is the leader of the National Liberation Party and a parliamentary candidate for his constituency. His approach to canvassing votes for his party is what he calls "Surprise and Attack" (*Our Husband* 7). According to the Major,

the policy of "Surprise and Attack" is to concentrate their campaigns in the rural areas only to launch "heavy artillery of campaign speeches in the cities" (*Our Husband* 57). According to the Major, the policy is war. Lejoka-Brown views his political opponents as "political enemies" (*Our Husband* 50).

Commenting on the political strategy of Major Rahman Lejoka-Brown, Jon Kaplan notes that "Major Lejoka-Brown transfers to the campaign arena tactics that he has taken from his experience in military combat. Lejoka-Brown's strategy is to trick, intimidate and ambush his opponents."¹⁷

The other members of the executive committee of the party disagree with the Major's political strategy. They accuse him of being "old-fashioned and autocratic." Lejoka-Brown is insistent that his policy will work. He casts aspersions at his colleagues and asks rather rhetorically what they know about "hard bone politics." He asks, "you think politics in book is politics in real life?" He adds that, "You lie, Book-heads! Politics means action, and action means war. Therefore Military Surprise and Attack can win us votes" (*Our Husband* 52). What emerges from the meeting is that the leader of the party is bent on imposing his will and opinion on the majority of the members and such autocratic measures have no place in modern democratic politics. Lejoka-Brown's dictatorial posturing costs him the post of the leadership of the party. He is replaced by his former wife, Sikira.

It must be emphasised that Lejoka-Brown's attitude towards his political opponents as enemies is a general view normally held by incumbent governments whether civilian or military. Kongi views Oba Danola as his political adversary.

The issue of corruption is another canker which has bedevilled the African continent. The plays under consideration expose political corruption. In the first place, Soyinka, in *Kongi's Harvest* makes it succinctly clear that dictators can also be corrupt.

For all his high-handedness, President Kongi presides over a corruption-infested government. His cabinet is as corrupt as he is autocratic. The Reformed Aweri do not only take bribes, they also use their closeness to the presidency of Kongi to extort favours from people. The Organising Secretary accuses the Aweri of abusing the trust of President Kongi. The cabinet is as untrustworthy as it is disloyal. The Organising Secretary does not only take bribes, he is also prepared to grease palms to have his own way. He buys the idea of granting reprieve to the condemned dissidents in detention and presents it to Kongi as if it were his own. He organises the grand festival of the harvest with a view to making some profits. The readiness with which he accepts to take bribes from Dende so that the latter can bolt away with him speaks volumes about the degree of corruption and shady deals in the political administration. The Organising Secretary attempts to rig an election in favour of the State Co-operatives but for the vigilance of Daudu. He takes bribes from contract sums meant for infrastructure development of the country. Stewart Brown agrees that "Kongi is a phoney despot who cannot call the whip and apply it to his corrupt cabinet."¹⁹

In a related development, one sees how the love for money has become a motivating factor for people to enter into politics. Although Lejoka-Brown, in *Our Husband*, appears to be doing well in his cocoa business, his prime motivation for dabbling in politics is to take the lion's share of the national cake. He admits unequivocally and without any shred of shame that

Politics is ~~the~~ thing now in Nigeria. You want to be famous? Politics. You want to chop a big slice of the national cake? Na Politics. So I said to my party boys...cakes are too soft, Gentlemen. Just you wait! Once we get elected to the top, we shall stuff ourselves with huge mouthfuls of the national chin-chin, something you'll eat and eat, brothers, and you know you've eaten something
(*Our Husband* 4).

With such thinking, even when he has not been given the nod, what will Lejoka-Brown not do when finally he ascends onto the throne of power? Unfortunately, it is the likes of Lejoka-Brown who have dominated the political scene on the African continent.

Maduabuchi Dukor, in his article "The Military and African Revolution," asserts that "at any rate, democracy has become an excuse for money laundering, parliamentary and presidential irresponsibility and hate of man."²⁰ The description perfectly fits Lejoka-Brown who is bent on going to war to capture State power. He is also ready to loot the kitty of the state if the opportunity presents itself.

In *From Zia*, Soyinka discusses the canker of corruption in almost every facet of the body-politic. At the governmental level, one observes that the military intervenes in politics apparently to halt the depletion of the national economy. One would think that that was going to be the death-knell to corruption. However, corruption is not stamped out of the country. One sees that some members of the Eternal Ruling Council soon find themselves neck-deep in corruption. The Wing Commander is a partner in the illicit cocaine business. The paradox of the situation is that he is no less a member of the governing council of the military regime. Another seamy aspect of the issue is the glaring fact that he is a business partner to Sebe Irawe, a devious businessman who deals in all kinds of illicit business such as buying stolen goods, cocaine and corpses. To think of it that the Wing Commander is a close confidante to Sebe Irawe is quite amazing.

Sebe Irawe fronts for the Wing Commander in the cocaine business. The commander gives him all the security protection he needs. The involvement of the Wing Commander in the cocaine business gives it a governmental aura. He makes readers understand that the drug business is transacted at the governmental level. He travels to Pakistan and impresses on the President of Pakistan, Zia, to give Nigeria fertilizers. The Pakistani leader readily agrees to the Wing Commander's request. The Army Generals in

the Pakistani government, in concert with the Wing Commander, mix the fertilizers with fifty kilograms of cocaine and ship the entire consignment to Nigeria. To cover up the deal, the Wing Commander obtains a covering letter from President Zia to the effect that the consignment of fertilizers is meant to cement the cordial relations existing between the two countries. The consignment of cocaine is, however, intercepted by pirates and stolen away. The stolen cocaine underlies the rationale behind the military campaign against indiscipline in general and the drug menace in particular. The campaign is made to have a national outlook; however, it has a selfish, parochial interest to retrieve the missing cocaine.

The search for the "stuff" must be set against the wider picture of the three illicit drug offenders who are executed for dealing in cocaine. This kind of selective justice lends credence to the assertion that the military is either motivated by jealousy or malice to punish their opponents.²¹

Another dimension of the canker of corruption is the greed of the military government in Africa. In *From Zia*, Detiba, one of the condemned drug offenders, reports of a military leader in Ghana who siphons off entire proceeds from the sale of cocoa on the international market. The details of the issue are the fact that the said military leader stashes the money away in his private account in a foreign bank.

In an article published in *Africa Week* entitled "The Menace of Corruption Rages on," Bernard Otabil argues that

If one is not careful, one might conclude that corruption is an African phenomenon. Hardly would you find a report about Africa that does not talk about the 'high rate' of corruption on the continent. Yes, there is corruption in Africa and the ramifications of it are hardships for the poor people of this rich continent... How can one explain for instance the corruption of the Nigerian dictator, Sani Abacha and his loot from the national coffers? The billions that he alone stole and stashed away in British and Swiss banks are staggering... There are other stories, leaders like Mobutu Sese Seko stealing from his country and also the millions that other dictators stole from Africa.²²

The emphasis is on stealing and stashing away in foreign banks several millions of dollars by African political leaders who are supposed to be trustees of the people's purse. They flagrantly abuse the trust the people repose in them. This negative development has implication for poverty alleviation on the continent. For a continent which is noted to be poor, its leaders are supposed to act responsibly.

In a similar incident, the *Daily Graphic*, in its October 19, 2006 issue, reports that

The former president of the Republic of Botswana, Sir Quett Ketumile Masire, has observed that corruption is draining the economies of Africa. He explained that the drain totalling \$148 billion, far exceeded what African leaders were trotting the globe looking for to improve their economies. He said the situation was negatively affecting the poor by inflating the cost of goods and services in African countries.²³

To further reinforce the incidence of corruption in African body politics, the BBC Online reports that

More than \$380 billion has either been stolen or wasted by Nigerian governments since independence in 1960, the chief corruption fighter has said. Nuhu Ribadu told the BBC that Nigeria had 'nothing much' to show for the missing money. He said the worst period for corruption was the 1980s and the '90s...²⁴

That corruption is widespread as reported in *From Zia* is seen in the way almost everybody is ready to double-cross his fellow citizen. There is so much corruption in the judiciary and the prison services that the characters report of the willingness of the tribunal chairman to collect bribes from defendants. In the prison service too, from the superintendent down to the warders, all are ever willing to do anything for the inmates so long as the latter are willing to pay. Interestingly, one observes the readiness of the superintendent, the head of the prison service, proffering preferential services to Miguel, the wealthy inmate. The superintendent confiscates a game of scrabble from the political detainees and gives it to Miguel and his cell-mates. He also gives newspapers to him to read. Again, he apologises umpteen times for mistakenly lumping Miguel with the brash inmates in cell C where Commander Hyacinth and his hardened criminals are gaoled.

Extending the discussion further is the problem of military incursion into regular politics on the African continent. This development constitutes an aberration of the

sovereign rights of the African peoples. During military coups, the rights and freedoms of the people are curtailed. The military leadership assumes emergency powers and unleashes terror on, sometimes, innocent people. Writing about the unbridled exercise of brutal force by the military, Joseph Osei admits that

Since the military rule by decrees and are therefore not committed to any human or civil rights and the rule of law, military regimes in theory and practice undermine the democratic values of freedom, justice, equality and respect for human dignity.²⁵

The above quotation supports the view that military regimes are an infringement on the rights and dignity of those who live under them.

In *From Zia*, one observes with a chilling feeling the sufferings that the people go through. Apart from living in fear every time the military propaganda machinery sounds the moral campaign against indiscipline, one risks being arrested and jailed for minor offences, not to talk about the fact that one can be thrown into jail for being the subject of jealousy by people in high places. The serious issue under consideration in the drama are the drug offenders who are executed for dealing in drugs. It sounds rather ridiculous because it appears the punishment meted out to them is not in tune with the gravity of the offence committed. Their death appears useless when one considers the fact that hardened criminals like Sebe Irawe and the Wing Commander are free men going about their 'normal' illicit business.

Commenting on the stifling nature of the military in *From Zia*, Gilbertova argues that

Wole Soyinka's recent writing contains much open political commentary. His plays *A Scourge of Hyacinths* and *From Zia, With Love*, share the basic story, inspired by real events. A rich Lagosian is executed along with all those whom the military regime sentences retrospectively to death. *A Scourge of Hyacinths* is a shorter work, a tragedy concentrated on the impact of corrupted power on individual human destiny. *From Zia, With Love* is a cruel farce with a tragic undertone and ending, presenting a sharper and a more general image of society. Both plays share a central symbol water hyacinths, choking the Lagos lagoons as the military chokes the country's life.²⁶

The excerpt above is quite revealing. In the first place, one notices that the story of the executed drug offenders is real. The retrospective legislation which provides the legal basis for the execution of the men is quite serious. The passage tells how cruel and abusive military regimes can be to their own citizens.

It is also significant to note how Soyinka, like a troubadour, traverses the African continent and even beyond, exposing all forms of arbitrary execution of political power. He lands in Ghana and talks about the numerous coups which have afflicted the country. In *From Zia*, Soyinka loses count of the number of times coups have occurred in Ghana. Speaking through Detiba, one of the condemned drug offenders in the play, Soyinka states, "Oh yes. He was one of those they lined up and shot after the second coup. Or third. Or fourth, I forget which" (*From Zia* 61). Here, Soyinka wonders the number of times coups have occurred in Ghana. Nigeria, Uganda and a host of other African countries have had their fair share of military dislocation of the political calendars of the continent. The playwright stretches the issue of frequent occurrence of coups to include the macabre military brutalities in Uganda led by Idi Amin.

Writing about the military in government, Maduabuchi Dukor observes:

It is important to point out that military rule could be either progressive and revolutionary or reactionary. The consensus, however, is that the military involvement in politics has in the main had a reactionary impact on society. A military government exercises supreme, absolute and unfettered powers. Operating without constitution, military leadership rules with decrees and edicts which are not challenged in the courts. The rule of law and fundamental rights of citizens are often curtailed, suspended and violated with impunity. Also Africa has been unfortunate to some classes of military leaders who have no qualification, the intellect and finesse for leadership except for their brawn, machine guns, a naked brute force and tomfoolery. There is a general lack of diplomatic and political skills and clearly articulated and appealing ideology. Frequent occurrences of coups d'état have continued to disrupt the continuity of African governments with their constant disruption of continuities of policies and programmes and *ipso-facto* hinders political development.²⁷

The above excerpt is a perfect summary of the harmful effects of the military in government. The military is not only incompetent; it also uses brutal force to achieve its ends. It must however be made clear that the quest for Africa's development is an exercise in brains and not brawn.

To sum up the discussion, it is intriguing to observe that apart from the fact that the dramatists are nationals of Nigeria and for that matter present political arbitrariness from the perspective of the Nigerian political situation, one sees that these arbitrary manifestations of power are not peculiar to Nigeria; they cut across the length and breadth of Africa. The issues of political corruption, strident attacks on the rights and liberties of the African peoples, incompetent leadership and needless military incursions into politics with their attendant effect of oppression of the people, are the bone of contention in these plays. According to the dramatists, these issues plague almost all African countries.

NOTES

1. Wole Soyinka, *Kongi's Harvest* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).
2. Wole Soyinka, *From Zia, With Love* (Ibadan: Fountain Publications, 1992).
3. Ola Rotimi, *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).
4. James Gibbs and Berth Lindfors, *Research on Wole Soyinka* (Trenton NJ: Africa World Press, 1993), p.68.
5. Kevin Shillington, *Ghana and the Rawlings Factor* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd), p.11.
6. Adrian A. Roscoe, *Mother is Gold: A Study in West African Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p.219.
7. Interview granted by Wole Soyinka to CNN in 2001 and cited at [www. prelectur-stanford. edu/lecturers/Soyinka](http://www.prelectur-stanford.edu/lecturers/Soyinka).
8. Information obtained from www.noble.se/laureates/literature-1986-1-bio.html.
9. Wole Soyinka, *The Man Died* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1972).
10. Gordon Glyn-Jones, "The Giants of Nigeria," review of Wole Soyinka's *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*, in *Focus on Africa*, October-December, 2006, p.53.
11. Wole Soyinka, *Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis*, cited at [http:// people-africadatabase.org/en/profile](http://people-africadatabase.org/en/profile); accessed on September 7, 2006.
12. A. Adu Boahene, *Ghana: Evolution and Change in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Longman Group Ltd, 1975), p.209.
13. *ibid.*, p.212.
14. Mike Oquaye, *Politics in Ghana: 1982-1992* (Accra: Tornado Publications, 2004), p.539.

15. Justice Georgina Wood Committee's Report on the missing 76 parcels of cocaine as reported in *Daily Graphic*, 6 October, 2006.
16. *ibid.*
17. J. M. Mbaku, "Bureaucratic Corruption and Policy Reform in Africa," accessed on October 9, 2006; available at www.cato.org.
18. Jon Kaplan, "Husband Lacks Polish," accessed on October 16, 2006; available at www.amazon.com/exe/obidos/rotimi.
19. Information accessed on 25 June, 2006; available at www.dental.colombia.edu/soyinka.
20. Maduabuchi Dukor, "The military and African revolution," in *Philosophy and Politics: Discourse on values, politics and power in African*, ed. by the same author (Lagos: Malthouse Press Ltd, 2003) p.240.
21. Oquaye, *Politics in Ghana*, p.540.
22. Bernard Otabil, "The Menace of Corruption Rages on," *Africa Week*, January, 2006.
23. *Daily Graphic*, 19 October, 2006, p.5.
24. BBC online news, accessed on 21 October, 2006; available at www.bbcworldservice.com/focus.
25. Joseph Osei, "A deadly virus against emerging democracies," in *Philosophy and Politics*, p.339.
26. Gilbertova, accessed on October 5, 2006 at [www. poetrysociety-org.uk](http://www.poetrysociety-org.uk).
27. Dukor, "The military and African revolution," in *Philosophy and Politics*, p.231.

CONCLUSION

What the researcher set out to do, basically, was to examine African literary texts, mainly prose, poetry and drama, discussing African writers' concern with arbitrary exercise of power by political office holders.

The researcher took a step further to juxtapose the literary findings with real political drama as it unfolds on the African continent. Such an exercise was to point out that African literary artists do not concoct stories from their wild imagination but that they create stories from their own experiences.

At this stage of the discussion, it is important to highlight the issues which are of prime concern to African literary artists. Putting the literary material that forms the body of this research work under microscopic examination, one realises that corruption, tyranny, military intrusion into politics, incompetent leadership and sexual exploitation of women are a bother to the writers.

On the issue of corruption, the artists delve deep into various ramifications through which African political leaders deal in shady deals. Misappropriation, misapplication of resources and pure embezzlement are the hallmarks of their corrupt practices. It has also been revealed that African political leaders siphon off scarce resources of their countries and stash them away in foreign banks. On the domestic scene too, politicians use their political clout to award government's contracts to their bosom cronies. The contract sums are grossly inflated and a huge chunk deducted for their personal gratification. As a result, the money left is incapable of executing the said project properly.

The cumulative effect of such corrupt practices is that they plunge the country into a state of underdevelopment. There is slow pace of development. Essential facilities such as schools, hospitals, pipe-borne water and electricity are in short supply. Those who bear

the brunt of the strangulation of the economy are the ordinary citizens of the land; they suffer needlessly. It is important to argue that it is such economic privations which sometimes engender instability in the body politic.

The reality of the corruption situation in Africa is that almost on a daily basis, reports come up in the media of corrupt deals involving government officials. *Africa Today* reports in its January 2007 issue that

Corruption has stunted not only Nigeria's development, but that of the entire African continent. According to Wolfowitz (president of the World Bank), "20 years ago, there were about 150 million Africans living below the poverty line, but today, the figure has doubled to about 300 million. Yet the continent has seen about \$500 billion oil wealth that has not helped the people. "In 2005, the majority of African countries (30 out of the 44 included) placed in the "rampant corruption" level with a score of less than 3 on the global corruption chart.

Writing about poverty among African peoples and the fact that African governments are responsible for this state of affairs, Festus Iyayi, in his novel, *Violence*, talks about the extreme degree of penury into which the African peoples have been pushed. He notes the exploitation of the masses by the ruling elite and argues that the people have to resort to violence to free themselves from the yoke of neo-colonialism:

In my understanding, acts of violence are committed when a man is denied the opportunity of being educated, of getting a job, of feeding himself and his family properly, of getting medical attention cheaply, quickly and promptly. We often do not realise that it is the society, the type of economic and hence the political system which we are operating in our country today that brutalises the individual, rapes his manhood. We often do not realise that when such men of poor and limited opportunities react, they are only in a certain measure, answering violence with violence. What I would like to see, however, is not just for a handful of men to take up arms to rob one individual. I feel and think it is necessary that all the oppressed sections of our community ought to take up arms to overthrow the present oppressive system. The system has already proved that it operates through violence.²

Such is the fury and rage of Iyayi about the appalling socio-economic conditions of the majority of African peoples. His prescription of the use of arms to set aside the oppressive regime is a far cry from the tenets of democracy and constitutionalism. However, his advice appears to have gone down well with the people in the sense that military uprisings and armed rebellion have been staged in Africa to topple so-called

corrupt regimes. It must however be pointed out that these armed insurrections have not been able to stamp out corruption from the body-politic.

Apart from corruption, tyranny is also an issue which preoccupies the attention of the African literary artists. According to the writers, African governments, both civilian and military, are united in their repression of the civil liberties of the people. Dissenting voices are swiftly and decisively dealt with. There is virtually no room for ventilating grievances. The governments resort to arbitrary arrests, long-term incarceration, torture, beating, maiming and other forms of intimidation to maintain a culture of silence among the citizenry. They impose a regime of fear and anxiety among the people to such a degree that the people feel very much afraid to pass political comments on the turn of events in the political society. It is pertinent to point out that such a reign of terror can trigger off instability in the polity.

Furthermore, the writers demonstrate their concern with the capricious manner in which African political leaders wield state power. The politicians use their power and authority to woo women. All kinds of women ranging from the highly educated to the uneducated fall prey to them. The grievous dimension to this saga is the seduction of female students by the politicians.

It is interesting to observe that while the leaders have time, energy and resources to pursue their parochial interests, they do not attach the same level of zeal to what they have been constitutionally mandated to do such as maintenance of law and order, poverty alleviation, provision of essential services and last but not least inspiring their people to greater heights.

It has been amply demonstrated that abuse of political office is common to both civilian and military regimes in Africa. What then can be done to curb if not root out completely this menace from the body-politic? According to Joseph Osei, in his article,

"A Deadly Virus against Emerging Democracies: the Power and Presence of Political Manipulation in African Politics," African civil society should be empowered to stand against dictatorial regimes. He underscores the need to have a well-informed and vibrant civil society that is alive to its civic responsibilities and would be able to stave off any onslaughts African governments could engineer and perpetrate against the people. He remarks thus:

The value of knowledge in the fight against political manipulation cannot be underestimated. For example, people who know their rights (human rights, civil rights, liberties etc.) and are prepared to defend them or to fight publicly with moral arguments in the public arena and legal actions in court are less vulnerable to intimidation since intimidators, like evil-doers, like to avoid exposure or publicity, and of course the moral or legal penalties for their evils.

An effective political education can ensure a new generation of citizens with critical consciousness who will not tolerate or submit to any form of intimidation or manipulation by any civilian or military government. They will have a high sense of self-esteem, and will not accept any threats to their self-esteem or dignity as persons.³

It can be deduced from the above excerpt that for the battle against arbitrary exercise of power to be won, Africa needs to have a high literate populace to be able to effectively contend against over-bearing governments who are bent on suppressing the will of the people.

It is exactly in conformity with the above didactic lesson that Achebe admonishes African peoples to rise up in protest against any vestige of tyranny. In his *Anthills of the Savannah*, he discusses the struggles of the characters, both power-wielding and the ordinary citizens to oppose the military's attempt to choke the citizens through its arbitrary manipulation. Ikem, the gem of a journalist, writes crusading editorials against the military regime's unpopular decisions.

Writing about the cardinal motif in *Anthills of the Savannah*, Indrasena Reddy in his book, *The Novels of Achebe and Ngugi* notes:

The continual pursuit of power without scruples spells disaster to the people who, shorn of all civil liberties, become its worse victims. The untold suffering and misery inflicted on the people throws up leaders like Ikem, Chris and Beatrice who rise in revolt against the tyrannous establishment. They sow the seeds of courage and fortitude in the masses to stand up against the new oppressors. Ikem and Chris face persecution and eventually liquidated. But they never gave up the struggle. The likes of Ikem would rather die struggling against the foe than meekly submit to him, preferring

death to defeat...The antidote to power, according to Achebe, is the motif of struggle which can effectively counter it (power).⁴

Achebe in the above piece of text urges civil society to resist any attempt by any political leader to take liberties with the freedoms of the people.

Africans have come of age. There are instances where the long-suffering peoples of the continent have battled with their leaders to safeguard their freedoms. It happened in Ivory Coast in 2002 when the military leader General Robert Guei conducted elections. As the results started trickling in, he saw defeat staring starkly at him so he sacked the electoral commissioner and declared himself winner. Angered by the apparent rigging of the elections, the people poured onto the streets and for days battled against security forces.

In a more recent development, Guineans have said "no" to their leaders after decades of dictatorship. The underlying factors which precipitated the protests included the spiralling prices of goods, government's interference in judicial decisions and unprecedented spate of political corruption in the country. Reporting the Guinean protests, the BBC correspondent says:

This year, in an open challenge to government, tens of thousands of Guineans swept onto the streets of the capital, Conakry, and countrywide to say "no" to 23 years of General Conte and "no" to the military ...With massive popular support, the unions became a catalyst and a metaphor for a new Guinea that was to serve all Guineans and not just a rich, powerful and protected clique. Guineans demanded accountable, democratic government, an end to repression, a realistic cost of living, affordable food to eat and a share of the nation's natural wealth.⁵

On the subject of corruption too, what is the way out of the endemic corruption that has devastated the African continent? In this direction, African leaders can strengthen anti-corruption institutions and empower them to deal decisively with acts of corruption without fear or favour.

Writing about Obasanjo's anti-corruption drive, Sola Odunfa, the BBC correspondent based in Nigeria, reports in the April-June 2007 issue of *Focus on Africa* thus:

A hallmark of the Obasanjo presidency has been the emphasis placed on curbing official corruption. From his very first day in office the president promised that it would no longer be "business-as-usual." He set up the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and installed at its head Nuhu Ribadu, then an assistant commissioner of police...For the first time in the history of Nigeria, highly placed persons in both the public and private sectors are being investigated and brought to justice. The EFCC has prosecuted government ministers. It arrested a sitting head of the Nigeria Police Force, prosecuted him for stealing government funds, recovered stolen funds from him and got the court to imprison him.⁶

Reporting on Obasanjo's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, Isaac Umunna of *Africa Today* notes:

Since its establishment, the commission has made more than 2000 arrests and obtained over 100 convictions. It has recovered several houses, land, luxury cars, airplanes, and oil tankers, as well as other assets and cash worth billions of US dollars. It is at present pursuing over 400 criminal cases in various criminal courts in Nigeria.⁷

A country that is noted to be one of the most corrupt in the world, the efforts of President Obasanjo of Nigeria are commendable and recommended to all African leaders to halt the rising tide of corruption on the continent.

In conclusion, it is important that African leaders learn from history to avoid regrettable incidents of the past from recurring. The military and armed banditry which have swept across the continent since the sixties to date have their root cause in bad governance. Such military adventurists and reformists claim they step in to right wrongs, to stop corruption, abuse of office and incompetence. They, however, prove to be more corrupt and incompetent than their predecessors. A word of admonition to present generation of African leaders ~~is that~~ they should pursue good governance, rule of law, transparent and open government and above all corruption-free regime. In this wise, no nation-wrecker would have any pretext to bring down any government for any reason.

NOTES

1. Isaac Umunna, "The Scourge of corrupt officials," in *Africa Today*, January 2007, p.16.
2. Festus Iyayi, *Violence* (Lagos: Longman Group Ltd., 1979), p.155.
3. Joseph Osei, "A Deadly Virus against Emerging Democracies: the Power and Presence of Political Manipulation in African Politics," in *Philosophy and Politics: Discourse on Values, Politics and Power in Africa*, edited by Maduabuchi Dukor (Lagos: Malthouse Press Ltd., 2003), p.340.
4. Indrasena Reddy, *Achebe and Ngugi* (New Delhi: Prestigious Books, 1994), pp. 123-24.
5. Ofeibea Quist-Arcton, "Rising and Resisting," in *Focus on Africa*, April-June 2007, p.31.
6. Sola Odunfa, "Time to Move out," in *Focus on Africa*, April-June 2007, p.23.
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