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AFRICAN WRITERS' USE OF SYMBOLISM, MYTH AND ALLUSION IN PRESENTING THE IDEOLOGY OF LEADERSHIP IN POST-INDEPENDENCE AFRICA: A STUDY OF SELECTED NOVELS BY NGUGI WA THIONG'O, CHINUA ACHEBE AND AYI KWEI ARMAH.

BY

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation was aimed at examining African writers' use of symbolism, myth and allusion in presenting the ideology of leadership in the post-independence Africa. Specifically, it focussed on Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *Petals of Blood* and Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah.*

One of the basic problems of the African continent has been the quality of its political leadership. In most cases, leaders that take over power in Africa after independence are not different from their colonial masters. Having attained power, these leaders exhibit worse oppressive tendencies than their erstwhile colonial masters. The African writers of this period have responded to this harsh reality with works that are critical of the excesses of these leaders. Strange as it seems, although it was fashionable for black writers to pit themselves against the system of apartheid at its peak in South Africa, the same writers have in the main, not yet responded to some of the excesses of the country's leadership in the new dispensation.

This research was therefore necessary because of the literary vacuum left by the demise of apartheid in the literary output of South Africa's post-independence period. There is so much the writers have to say in this period especially when one considers the fact that problems experienced in the post-independence Africa in general are beginning to manifest themselves in South Africa as well. While writers in other parts of the continent have produced works that mirror the hopes and aspirations of the masses in the post-independence period, such has not been the case in South Africa. This dissertation was in a small way, intended to serve as a wake-up call to South

African writers. It was meant to signal a resuscitation of literary creative writing in the post-apartheid South Africa; a type of literature whose concerns will resemble those of the general post-independence prototype in Africa. The dissertation examined critical novels of other African writers in the post-independence period and presented these as examples for South African writers to follow.

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INTRODUCTION

In order to establish a strong foundation to this dissertation, it is necessary to trace, right from the onset, the origin and development of this writer from the period of imperialism/colonialism to the post-independence era. Accordingly, this chapter will begin by focussing on the nature of the European metropolitan literature that attended the process of imperialism/colonialism as well as on the almost concurrent protest and resistant literature it triggered from the colonised writer throughout the empire in the colonial period. While the European metropolitan writer served, through his writing, to promote the presumed European imperial supremacy to the whole world, the colonised writer tended, through his work, to resist and contest this perspective. Secondly, as an immediate prelude to the ultimate thrust of this essay, the chapter will give a general overview of the nature of the African literature written in the post-independence period. Finally, since the four form the essence of the dissertation, this chapter will also make an attempt to give a brief definition of the concepts, ideology, symbolism, myth and allusion. Hence, what follows is a brief history of the emergence and development of African literature, a type of literature that was fundamentally a response to the European metropolitan type produced in Europe at the onset of imperial exploration.

The African writer who emerged after the second world war has gone through three periods which also mark the three stages in his growth. These are the ages of the anti-imperial/colonial struggle, independence and post-independence (Ngugi 1993: 60). In

order to put the writer's development in its right perspective, a brief definition of the concepts imperialism/colonialism is necessary. The word imperialism can be defined as the authority gained by a state subsequently known as the mother country, over another territory beyond its borders. This authority can be expressed in pageantry, symbolism as well as in military power (Boehmer 1995: 2). Immediately after this, imperialism proceeds to its second and final stage of development known as colonialism. This is the stage at which the mother country consolidates its imperial power over the occupied territory subsequently called its colony. This consolidation is manifested in the settlement of the occupied territory, exploitation of its resources and the attempt by the mother country to govern the indigenous inhabitants of this territory (Boehmer 1995: 2).

With the onset of European migration and colonisation, people in the imperial European countries, that is, metropolitans, began to experience a need to fashion stories about the foreign lands their countries were colonising. The advent of European imperialism therefore, almost simultaneously stimulated the rise of a literature that underpinned it, and that understandably came to be known as colonialist. This was a type of literature that expressed the colonising European's distorted perception of the colonised non-European peoples subjugated by them. Very often, this literature embodied the stereotyped and prejudiced imperialist perspective of the colonised. It is against this background of its distorted representation of the colonised, that Boehmer (1995: 50) broadly defines colonialist discourse in general as:

> that collection of symbolic practices, including textual codes and conventions and implied meanings, which Europe deployed in the process of its colonial expansion and in particular, in understanding the bizarre and apparently unintelligible strangeness with which it came into contact.

In specific terms, colonialist literature formed the essence of the symbolic practices referred to by Boehmer in the passage above and was founded on theories that espoused the superiority of European culture and that legitimized European efforts at imperial expansion. In addition to this, this literature clearly expressed the imperialists' assumed incomprehensibility of the peoples they colonised. Boehmer (1995: 14) concludes thus, that from the early days of colonisation, colonialist literature underpinned efforts to interpret other lands in order to offer domestic audiences a way of thinking about exploration. It served as a means through which colonial images and ideals could be exchanged. It was through this literature, that the view of the world as conceived by colonial metropolitans came to be consolidated and confirmed.

Since the ultimate focus of this dissertation will revolve around the African writers whose countries of origin were formerly colonised by Britain, it seems pertinent at this stage, to narrow its focus briefly onto British imperialism in general and its attendant colonialist literature and subsequently, onto the literature of protest and resentment precipitated by the British colonialist type from colonised writers in her colonies.

Although the British colonial mission was in the main, distinguished by the industrial and military power that underpinned it, it also entailed ideologies of moral, cultural and racial superiority that formed the basis of her attempt to interpret the colonised world. From the point of view of the British imperial nation:

> its history made up a tale of firsts, bests and absolute beginnings. Where (the British) established a cross, a city, or colony, they proclaimed the start of a new history. Other histories by definition, were declared of lesser significance or in certain situations non-existent. (Boehmer 1995: 24)

Accordingly, as they conquered colony after colony, the British introduced their language, upholstery, cuisine and ways of dress which they of course, believed were superior to indigenous forms of culture in these colonies. Naturally, this kind of world-view needed substantial cultural and discursive reinforcement. It was in this respect, that British colonialist literature in particular came to play its part. British writers of this period formed the essence of their imperial society and consequently found it incumbent upon themselves to produce a type of literature that promoted the imperialist cause. Thus, their work came to be instilled with the general belief common in Britain at the time that a large portion of the world was destined to fall under the country's imperial jurisdiction. It was on the basis of this belief that the British colonialist literature came to participate in and to reflect the British colonial ethos of this time more than any other colonialist discourse. It presented a world-view in which British rule was accepted as part of the order of things.

Boehmer's acute awareness of the commanding perspective assumed by the colonizer or what she calls the colonial gaze, in the British literature of the time, provides a clear picture of the pivotal role played by the literature in the country's imperial expansion. Her perception of this deserves to be quoted at length:

> In this paradoxically confined world of the empire, any conflict which emerged would always in the first place have to do with the colonizer, with his attempt to shape the world in his image. His drama, the colonial drama, was the narrative. Narratives endorsed the struggles and triumphs of his self-making .... Many of the dominant, constitutive motives of the colonialist narrative or drama embody this sense of imperial centrality and superiority ... and of the colonial gaze. (Boehmer 1995: 66)

A noticeable feature of this Eurocentric self-projection in colonialist literature in general is its stereotyped and prejudiced representation of the lands they colonized as opposed to the 'civilized' colonial Europe. In instances where reference is made to the superiority of Europe, colonized people are represented as less human, less civilized, as children or savages and wild. This literature is over-determined by stereotype and tends in its characterization of the colonized, to screen out their humanity. It is in the same spirit therefore, that many of the colonialist literary works produced in this period are empty of indigenous characters. In such texts, empire is chiefly represented as commodities such as food, clothes, and adornments and not as comprising human beings. Furthermore, these texts are alternatively replete with:

> stereotypes of the Other[1] as indolent malingerers, shirkers, good-for-nothings, layabouts (and) degenerate versions of the pastoral idler. (Boehmer 1990: 39)

In contrast, colonialist literature generally represents the European as a diligent worker and provident profit-maker. He is portrayed as a builder of railway lines, administrative centres and cities. Needless to say, this characterization of the colonized people as secondary, abject, weak and Other to Britain was used in the colonial period, to justify their dispossession. It is not surprising then, that colonialist literature was at this time, advocated throughout the British empire as a means to inculcate a sense of imperial loyalty in the colonized.

By the beginning of the 20th century however, Britain's imperial supremacy began to show signs of collapse. Her humiliation by the South African Boers in the 1899-1902 Anglo-Boer War in particular, exposed her vulnerability as a colonial power. Accordingly, contrary to the British literature produced in the colonial period, a new uncertainty and a large scale disintegration of old absolutes began to engulf the literary writing of the early 20th century British novelists such as Virginia Woolf, E.M. Forster, George Orwell and Graham Greene, writers who had hitherto, been instrumental in providing substantial cultural reinforcement to the British imperial expansion (Boehmer 1995: 98). As if in confirmation of this European collapse in confidence, at the same

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[1]The concept of the Other is herein used to signify that which is unfamiliar and extraneous to a dominant subjectivity, the opposite or negative against which an authority is defined.

time, anti-colonial movements of resistance and self-affirmation were beginning to emerge in British colonial territories. In support for this, throughout the empire, colonized elites who were articulate enough also began to organize cultural revivals and to raise their voices in protest against imperialism. These were writers who had vehemently started to express the validity of their colonial experience with new confidence. From this, it is clear that this period of nationalist upsurge produced a type of literature that invites the name anti-colonial. Boehmer (1995:3) defines anti-colonialism as the condition in which colonized peoples seek to take their place forcibly or otherwise as historical subjects. It is clear from this definition that anti-colonial literature is one which critically examines the colonial relationship and sets out to resist colonialist perspectives. It is deeply marked by experiences of cultural exclusion and division under the empire. Moreover, since the literature is nationalist in nature, it identifies itself with the broad movement of resistance for the transformation of colonial societies.

The anti-colonial writers were members of small, highly educated and committed class of elites who were determined to put their message across a wide textual spectrum and who in the process, produced anthropological studies, social history, journalism and in particular, poetry and fiction to promote the anti-colonial cause. The message they put across was distinguishable by their strong determination to defend the beauty of national culture. Accordingly, their works characterize the culture of the colonized as rich, pure and authentic. The general belief they maintained was that their identity,

although suppressed for many years, lay embedded in their cultural origins and that it could be recovered intact and free from colonial adulteration. It was this culture in the form of reinterpreted history, religious revivals, elegiac and nostalgic poetry that was developed into an important front for the mobilization of the colonized nations. In this period, the anti-colonial writers appropriated, translated, decentred and hybridized the literary conventions and discourse they inherited from the colonizer and developed them into an effective means of self-expression (Boehmer 1995: 100). In the process of so doing, these writers effectively side-stepped their position of silent objects in colonialist literary representation. They reflected back to the colonizer a stereotyped and distorted image of his world and undercut his categories of perception.

Many writers in English from the British colonies responded positively to this general tendency to deploy literature as an instrument for mobilization in the nationalist struggle. For them anti-colonialism became a rallying cause, an enabling context and a focal subject. There was widespread agreement amongst these writers that the role of literature was to help transform social life and that in turn, social transformation had the potential to regenerate a marginalised culture. In general, the British colonized nationalist writers therefore, focused on reconstituting from the position of their historical, racial or metaphysical difference, a cultural identity which had been damaged by colonial experience. The common need amongst them, they tacitly agreed, was for roots, origins, founding myths and ancestors. In order for them to conceive an independent national identity, these writers concentrated on developing a symbolic

vocabulary that was indigenous and Other to European representation.

It was in line with this, that a group of Nigerian Writers of the 1960s told stories of Igbo families and compound life which not only championed traditional ways but also figured communal and by implication, national togetherness from within, using symbols of recognizably local derivation (Boehmer 1995: 187). As they looked about for cultural and political examples to follow other than those they inherited from Europe, these writers looked for anti-colonial uprisings in other parts of the world. They investigated histories of the anti-imperialist struggle and their own legends of ancestral valour against invading powers. Thus, in the anti-colonial period, nationalist literature became increasingly more combative, cause-led and polemical. It was generally believed that literature had to represent the struggles, passions and landscapes of the colonized. Most pertinently, the general belief was that literature should begin by dramatizing moments of indigenous resistance. In the process of so doing, the anti-colonial writers attempted to find and describe networks of racial and ancestral affiliation and to unearth communal memories.

In a typical anti-colonial nationalist literary text, part could signify whole in the same way as singular could represent plural because from the perspective of the colonized, these were by definition, the same (Boehmer 1995: 191). For instance, a writer might in this case, choose to reflect the history of a whole section of the national community through the experience of one character. Two of the distinctive genres of the anti-colonial

period in particular, assumed connections of this kind. These were the communal biography and the symbolic autobiography. The former genre captured the cultural life of a particular group and made this to represent a broader national history. The latter genre recorded personal histories, reminiscences, prison memoirs as well as collections of speeches that charted a political career and bore a wider national reference. Furthermore, as narratives of parts of the nation, individuals, bits of national history, personal moments and local struggle, such texts also undercut by way of contrast, the all-encompassing rhetorical figures of colonialist discourse (Boehmer 1995: 192). It was taken as self-evident that in such works, the experience of the writer was in some way typical. His development, it was believed, captured the emergence of a self-conscious nation. Furthermore, as a way of maintaining unity and continuity with the past, the anti-colonial nationalist writers did not lose connection with the teachings of the generation which had gone before. The teachings of nationalist writers and leaders of the previous generation such as Aime Cesaire, C.L.R. James and Jomo Kenyatta gave valuable guidance to those writers in quest of a self-defined identity and of strategies of anti-colonial overthrow.

In Africa, this was the 1950s, the decade that represented the height of the African people's anti-colonial struggle for independence. This was a period of tremendous anti-imperialist and anti-colonial revolutionary upheavals distinguished by the forceful intervention of the masses in history (Ngugi 1993: 60-61). It was a decade of hope in which people looked forward to a bright future in a new Africa finally freed from

colonialism. The African writer on which this essay will ultimately focus, was born at the peak of this anti-colonial upheaval and world-wide revolutionary ferment. The very birth of this writer and of his work in particular, were in themselves evidence of this new assertive Africa:

> The writing itself, whether in poetry, drama or fiction, even where it was explanatory in intention, it was assertive in tone. It was Africa explaining itself, speaking for itself, and interpreting its past. It was an Africa rejecting the images of its past as drawn by the artist of imperialism. (Ngugi 1993: 61)

Thus, this writer and his work were part of the African revolution even as he and the literature he produced, tried to understand, reflect and interpret this revolution. The prompting of this writer's imagination sprung from the fountain of the African anti-imperialist and anti-colonial movement of the 1940s and 1950s.

In seeking alternative political traditions and striving for the transformation of their societies, many anti-colonial writers later turned to the revolutionary politics of Marxism and radical socialist nationalism. It is in accordance with this, that Ngara offers a Marxist reading of the African anti-colonial revolution and its attendant literature. He argues that although the dominant ideology of an epoch is that of the ruling class, there are times when different powerful ideologies coexist in the same polity. However, the nature of ideology is such that the coterminous existence of two powerful and opposing ideologies can only lead to the ascendancy of the one and the decline of the other

(Ngara 1985: 25). In the anti-colonial period, colonialism and anti-colonialism represented just such coterminous existence of two powerful ideologies. Significantly, Ngara (1985: 25) sees no peaceful co-existence between such ideologies in oppressive societies. In times of crisis, he argues, the dominant ideology can find itself facing a challenge from a new ideology. This is true of nationalist uprisings whose main thrust is a rejection of the forces of colonialism and imperialism as well as their attendant ideologies. The very nature of colonialism and imperialism ineluctably leads to revolt by the colonized whose exploitation, dehumanization and enslavement result in a national consciousness that openly challenges foreign domination (Ngara 1985: 26). Thus, Ngara (1985: 26) concludes, nationalism has the effect of raising the consciousness of colonized peoples. It gradually opens their spiritual eyes so that they can begin to see that it is not right for a foreign power to subjugate them. As they awaken to this reality, they also begin to reject the ideology of the ruling colonialists and to appreciate their own culture.

Literature can either confirm or oppose the dominant ideology of an epoch. The degree to which literature confirms or opposes this ideology depends to a large extent, on the degree to which the ruling class is challenged by revolutionary groups (Ngara 1985: 26). In times of nationalist uprisings, the dominant imperialist ideology faces a confrontation from the ideology of the rising national bourgeoisie which is often led by the intelligentsia. In this nationalist phase, when the struggle is seen as a fight against foreign domination, revolutionary art may arise and its dominant theme will be that of

nationalism which may find expression in decolonized forms of English as well as in literary ideologies like Negritude, the African Personality and other philosophies that express the prevailing mood of nationalism (Ngara 1985: 26). Accordingly, Ngara establishes an intricately intertwined link between the nationalist revolutionary struggle against colonialism and the thrust of its attendant literature:

> The conflict between nationalism and colonialism gives rise to tension in the ideological sphere, a tension between the pull of nationalism and the pull of imperialism, between the surging forward of the national democratic revolution and the holding back of acquisitive capitalism. Now this tension in turn results in a new form of art. All art is produced by this tension between changing social relations and outmoded consciousness. At such points, art is likely to present a significant challenge to the ideology of the ruling group. (Ngara 1985: 26)

In the first few years after independence, it became clear to the anti-colonial writer that his history needed to be repaired. Historical retrieval, including the reclamation of oral memory, were believed to be the process through which damaged selves could be remade. Whether in fiction, narrative poetry, literary epic or transcribed oral tales, the formerly colonized could represent themselves as subjects of their own past. in order for them to cancel colonial stereotypes, the writers of this period searched for evidence of a rich and varied pre-colonial existence, tales of military victory against colonial forces and portraits of defiant and self determining leaders (Boehmer 1995: 194). These leaders' small-scale writings such as stories of a colonial childhood, prison notebooks and revolutionary reminiscences were invoked to work against the more

monumental histories of the imperial powers.

The urge for the formerly colonized to rewrite their past grew particularly acute where European colonialist writers had represented the pre-conquest period as blank and unmarked by any significant action or achievement. It is in view of this stereotyped and prejudiced representation of Africans in particular in colonialist discourse that Achebe has more recently recounted how reading colonialist writers such as Cary, Conrad and Haggard made him realize 'that stories are not innocent; that they can put you in the wrong crowd, in the party of the man who has come to dispossess you' (Achebe cited in Stratton 1994: 23). In the face of this colonial derogation, the prime duty of the African writer in the first few years after independence was according to Achebe, to restore dignity to the past, to show:

> that African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African people all but lost during the colonial period.and it is this that they must now regain. The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self-respect. The writer's duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost. There is a saying in Igbo that a man who can't tell where the rain began to beat him cannot know where he dried his body. The writer can tell the people where the rain began to beat them. (Achebe cited in Stratton 1994: 23)

Thus, whereas colonized peoples had previously been relegated to earlier historical periods frozen in time, or the realm of the timeless, they in histories and historical narratives of this period, proved determined to gain access to temporality. They represented themselves as governing the course of their own lives. It is significant to note too that as part of their attempt to explore agency, the writers of this period investigated their own complicity in colonial occupation. Accordingly, historical atonement, that is, the account of a community's coming into being, was fundamental in the process of nationalist self-imagining (Boehmer 1995: 197). Examples of the past, elaborated as allegory or simplified as lessons could be used to crystallize the ideals of liberation. In historical fiction than in conventional history, a disappearing, threatened or neglected way of life could more freely be recreated and preserved. Narratives therefore had the capacity to project communal wholeness and to enact nationalist wish-fulfilment in texts as well as to provide role models.

Then came the post–independence period in Africa. The advent of independence in the whole continent was a historic event for politicians, intellectuals and the masses. The ceremony of independence was a legitimate occasion for joy (Lazarus 1990: 2). It heralded the end of colonialism and confirmed the great victory of the national movements for liberation. The ceremony transformed the harsh memories of struggle into images of heroism. It allowed the newly independent nations to re-imagine their past in a meaningful way and to re-conceive the defeats they had sustained as positive events. Great hopes and dreams had thus, attended the prospect of being free from

the colonial masters. Independence had seemed to be an opportunity to provide for all a joyous and liberated society. Interestingly, in his novel called *A Grain of Wheat,* Ngugi captures a then, not yet identified mood of expectation that attended the official celebration of independence in Kenya and one dare say, in many formerly colonized African states:

> Everybody waited for something to happen. This 'waiting' and the uncertainty that went with it ... was a taut cord beneath the screams and the shouts and the laughter. (Ngugi 1967: 177)

Lazarus (1990: 3) argues however, that one is shocked and dismayed when one looks back at the great expectations that accompanied the process of decolonization in African countries such as Ghana, Uganda, and many formerly colonized states. For the indisputable, brutal fact is that, in the majority of these countries, the expectations have not even come close to being fulfilled. Whereas in 1957, the year of Ghana's attainment of nationhood for instance, Kwame Nkrumah envisaged independence as an era of unity, strength and humanity, today's observer would find it impossible to find evidence of this vision. What they will find in abundance is the exact opposite of the vision: fragmentation, weakness and social violence.

Independence seems to have brought neither peace nor prosperity to Africa. Instead, it has paradoxically borne witness to stagnation, elitism, class domination and the intensifying structural dependence of Africa upon the imperial Western powers (Lazarus

1990: 3). It was independence with a question mark. It had produced a new class of leadership that was not different from the old one. This was a new company of profiteers that firmly derived its character, power and inspiration from their guardianship of imperialist interests. This was an underdeveloped middle class that was not interested in putting the national economy on a new footing, but in becoming intermediary between Western interests and the masses of the African people (Ngugi 1993: 65).

It is on these grounds that Ngara (1985: 26) concludes that nationalism does not necessarily lead to a genuine transformation of society because the national bourgeoisie often steps into the boots of the departed colonialists, maintaining the same old system and introducing only cosmetic changes, while working in alliance with the international bourgeoisie who controls the economy of the country from a distance. As a result of this, the workers and peasants, who had hoped to benefit from national independence, continue to be exploited under a new form of colonialism called neo-colonialism. The realization of this often results in disillusionment among the masses who feel that they have been cheated by their new masters, the national bourgeoisie.

Along the lines of Ngugi and Ngara's argument, Fanon, writing years ahead of many African states' achievement of nationhood, pointed out that nationalism was above all, the ideology of the African middle class (Fanon cited in Lazarus 1990: 90). This middle class, Fanon further noted, were in the colonial period being groomed by the colonial

powers to take over the reigns of power at independence and were in his view, essentially 'underdeveloped'. This means that the class wielded no autonomous political and economic power and that its ideological rationale was derivative rather than self-determined. In Fanon's view, an African national bourgeoisie of this kind could only play the role of functionary (Fanon cited in Lazarus 1990: 9). It could only be an intermediary class that principally served to mediate between metropolitan capitalism and the masses of the African population:

> Seen through its (the African national bourgeoisie) eyes, its mission has nothing to do with transforming the nation; it consists, prosaically, of being the transmission line between the nation and a capitalism, rampant though camouflaged, which today puts on the mask of neo-colonialism. The national bourgeoisie will be quite content with the role of the Western bourgeoisie's business agent, and it will play its part without any complexes in a most dignified manner. (Fanon 1963: 152-3)

This class could in fact never really be a bourgeoisie at all, since by virtue of its dependency, it would always necessarily lack the dynamism and energy that had characterized the European bourgeoisie in its ascendant phase. It would be doomed to go on taking its political lessons from the Western bourgeoisie of the late colonial era:

> It follows the Western bourgeoisie along its path of negation and decadence without having emulated it in its first stages of exploration and invention, stages which are an acquisition of that Western bourgeoisie whatever the circumstances. In its beginning, the national bourgeoisie of

> the colonial countries identifies itself with the decadence of the bourgeoisie of the West. We need not think that it is jumping ahead; it is in fact beginning at the end. It is already senile before it has come to know the petulance, the fearlessness or the will to succeed of the youth. (Fanon 1963: 153)

In seeking to account for nationalism as an ideological configuration, Fanon turned to the colonially induced schism between the small African middle class and the overwhelming remainder of the African population (Fanon cited in Lazarus 1990: 9). The relative power of the former, he argued, was indicative of its subservience to colonial authority and not of its ability to lead the nation to independence. On the basis of this, Fanon warned that if leadership in the post-independence Africa were to come to rest in the hands of the African middle class, the whole momentum of the national liberation struggle would be derailed (Fanon cited in Lazarus 1990: 9). The structure of the colonial economy would be consolidated instead of being overturned. The national bourgeoisie would transform itself into capitalism's broker. It would deliver the resources of the nation to capital for exploitation and would receive its broker's fee in return. Under these circumstances, the national bourgeoisie would quickly cease to offer even the appearance of being a progressive force. Gradually at first, and then more and more rapidly, it would stand unmasked in its true historic guise as being profoundly dominative. Consequently, Fanon argued that genuine national liberation could only be ensured through the defeat of the national bourgeoisie and its ideology of nationalism:

> In under-developed countries, the bourgeoisie should not be allowed to find the conditions necessary for its existence and its growth. In other words, the combined effort of the masses led by a party of intellectuals who are highly conscious and armed with revolutionary principles ought to bar the way to this useless and harmful middle-class. (Fanon 1963: 175)

In colony after colony, often with the connivance of the very colonial regimes they had claimed to be fighting against, African nationalist parties assumed government at independence and as Fanon had predicted, proceeded to consolidate their positions and enrich themselves at the expense of their communities at large. From the point of view of the leaders of these parties, consolidation entailed their own security (Lazarus 1990: 10). Accordingly, the new leaders from Malawi and Zaire to Kenya and the ivory Coast, had no sooner been sworn into office than they began to move against the popular forces massed below them.

In the groundswell years of anti-colonialism however, the same leaders deemed it necessary to pose as progressive and militant anti-colonialists by way of asserting their suitability to lead. The ideology that served their platform was nationalism. This made it possible for them to make the claim that they were indeed speaking in the best interests of their nations as a whole even as this rendered them indifferent to the actual circumstances of the general population (Lazarus 1990: 9). True to their mission in society, radical writers of the anti-colonial time threw themselves into the campaign to promote the politicization and anti-colonial militancy of their greater populations. On the

subject of colonialism, the writers produced works that were incisive and powerful. Although they tended to emphasize the brutality of colonialism, the tone of their writing was seldom defeatist and merely reflective of frustration. In contrast, it was fueled by massive political anger and resolve. Lazarus (1990: 4) notes however, that the clear sightedness and urgency of this writing was characterized by a disturbing blindness on the part of its writers. In trying to mobilize unity against the colonial forces, the writing displayed a naive and dangerous generosity. It welcomed to its cause any anti-colonial sentiment on the principle that the enemy of its enemy was its friend. It is along the same lines that Ngugi (1993: 13) concludes that very often, the writer who sang tell freedom in tune with the deepest aspirations of his society in the anti-colonial period did not always understand the true dimensions of those aspirations.

The general rhetoric of anti-colonialism was reductive. It implied that there was only one struggle to be waged and that this was the struggle against colonialism and not for anything specific. By urging all anti-colonial activists to unite in a single campaign, the rhetoric tended to deflect attention from critical questions concerning the precise substance of independence. Moreover, the register of anti-colonialism actively sought abstractions in a bid to remain free from ideological factionalism. To it, there were only today and tomorrow as well as bondage and freedom. It never paused long enough to give its ideal of freedom a content. Specificity, it implicitly rationalized, exposed the movement to the risk of division. It was for this reason that the radical anti-colonial writers of this period tended to romanticize the resistance movement and to

underestimate dissensions within it. Their heavy emphasis on fraternalism blinded them to the fact that within the same movement, there were groups and individuals who worked with quite different, and often incompatible aspirations for the future (Lazarus 1990: 5).

This harmonizing rhetoric of anti-colonialism could not survive in the period of independence. The event became the stage for the violent uncoupling of the diverse views that had co-existed within the anti-colonial movement. Thus, Independence marked the attainment of nationhood and at the same time, threw into sharp relief, the differences that existed between nationalists and more radical writers. While the nationalists tended to identify the goal of the anti-colonial struggle as precisely the attainment of nationhood, the radical anti-colonialist writers viewed the attainment of nationhood in the light of a seizure of colonial state power, a seizure to be followed in their vision, by the wholesale reconstruction of society in the post-independence era (Lazarus 1990: 5).

When one looks at the rhetoric to the nature of the political programs espoused in the anti-colonial period by the nationalist politician as represented in the African literature of the post-independence period however, one encounters a chilling discrepancy between promises and intentions. The nationalist politician in the discourse, and this is not coincidental, says nothing about post-colonial social restructuring for instance. Beyond his nationalist call for the shelving of tribal hostilities there is only silence. He

says nothing for example, about the realignment of social classes, redistribution of wealth, more equitable utilization of resources, and the implementation of more participatory forms of political organization. Significantly, Lazarus (1990: 6) notes that this silence is crucial because it is not silent at all but, in fact, eloquent. It reveals what Fanon, writing about African nationalism in general has called the desire to transfer into native hands, those unfair advantages which are a legacy of the colonial period.

Quiet pertinent to their representation in the literature mentioned above, in their public pronouncements, the nationalist leaders of the anti-colonial period deliberately left many basic political questions unanswered. Notably, Smith has argued that the mere acknowledgment of this fact does not necessarily suggest that the leaders did not know themselves what they intended to do:

> African nationalism from its inception had clear 'positive' programmes and ideals, which went beyond a simple opposition to colonial European authority, or to imperialism or capitalist (or any other) exploitation. Their aim, then and always, has been the same as that of nationalists everywhere: to set up 'nations', autonomous, unified and with a clear cultural identity, *but on the pre-existing basis of the territorial 'grid' of states imposed on Africa by the colonial powers.* (Smith cited in Lazarus 1990: 7) (My emphasis)

He notes that the African nationalist leaders' vision had been framed not only by the felt necessity of operating within the territorial boundaries constructed by colonialism, but also by the desire to retain and inherit the colonial state apparatus. Smith observes

thus, that African nationalism had aimed at taking over the territorial bureaucratic state which it inherited from the colonial powers and that its character had consequently been largely shaped by etatiste presuppositions and state institutions. In the same way, Worsley speaks of the nationalist leaders' ambition to overthrow not capitalism but foreign capitalism (Worsley cited in Lazarus 1990: 7). Clearly, from the point of view of the nationalist leaders, all that they needed was the control of their own political institutions and, the support of the masses for this project was won by telling them that independence was the precondition for economic expansion which would benefit everyone (Lazarus 1990: 8).

Nationalist anti-colonialism had been animated by frustration (Lazarus 1990: 11). It had aimed towards securing for the anti-colonial political leaders everything that under the colonial system had been off-limits. Under colonial rule, this anti-colonial leadership had inevitably felt its freedom of movement restricted. Its boundless ambition had been capped. Independence was therefore experienced by this class as changing everything for the better. In other words, independence let loose the national bourgeoisie to behave as it liked. Significantly, the African writers of the independence era belonged themselves to this class (Lazarus 1990: 11). Almost all of them were comparatively educated and by virtue of their qualifications and experience, they along with the rest of their class, stood poised at independence to inherit privileged and responsible positions in the post-independence society. Accordingly, they also came to experience independence as a time of loosening up and of opening up options.

When one examines the literature produced by these writers in the post-independence period however, one realizes that it did not take long after independence for them to realize that something had gone wrong with the independence they had so valiantly and desperately fought for. They had experienced decolonization as a time of massive transformation (Lazarus 1990: 18). Yet, looking around themselves in the aftermath, they quickly began to perceive that their revolution had been derailed. Working for the most part as urban professionals, they came to see that the liberation they had celebrated at independence was cruelly limited in its effects. It was a liberation to suit the nationalist interests they deplored. It was in their eyes, a liberation for the nationalist middle class and not for the population at large. What they saw made them painfully conscious of the savage irony of their situation because as Lazarus (1990: 18) observes, these were writers in communities in which the overwhelming majority of their fellows were illiterate and who were rich in the midst of squalor and abject poverty.

There could be no silence amongst the writers in the face of this situation. Accordingly, Some of them responded to these hard facts of independent society with disillusionment and cynicism. The literature of disillusionment grew out of a feeling experienced by many radical writers that they were becoming more socially marginalized as the drama of the post-independence period unfolded (Lazarus 1990: 18). They felt isolated and ineffectual, stranded between the masses of the population on their left and the political class on their right. Eventually, a position was reached from which politics came to be mistrusted and despised.

As disseminated by the African political elite, the ideology of independence had trumpeted that with the passing of colonialism, everything would be restored to its proper place (Lazarus 1990: 19). Contrary to this, many post-independence writers were increasingly drawn to a different conclusion. To them, it began to seem as though from the perspective of the society at large, independence had altered very little and that it merely represented a change of embezzlers. Significantly, in almost all the literature they produced, the post-independence African writers as different in other respects such as Ayi Kwei Armah, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Okot p'Bitek and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o tended in seeking to account for the stagnation of the post-independence society, to focus on the parasitism of the African political elite.

In work after work, one finds the elite exposed in its ruthlessness and vulgarity. The literature of this period exposes the post-independence African leadership's ethic of conspicuous consumption, corruption, greed, crass materialism and more than anything else, its atrocious lack of vision. To these writers therefore, it began to seem that the African revolution had not failed because it had to, but rather for the specific reason that it had been sabotaged by its leaders. In *A Man of the People*, a novel he wrote in this period, Achebe captures, in an image of a house, this deliberate murder of democracy by the new African leadership:

> 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, and from within they sought to persuade the rest through numerous loudspeakers, that the first phase of the struggle had been won and that the next phase—the extension of our house—was even more important and called for new and original tactics; it required that all argument should cease and the whole people speak with one voice and that any more dissent and argument outside the door of the shelter would subvert and break down the whole house. (Achebe 1966: 37)

Thus, the history of the anti-colonial period began to loom for them as a history of betrayal. The revolution had in other words, been betrayed because its leaders had realized once independence had been won that wealth, power and privilege meant more to them than social justice. In fact, their realization had been that a precondition of wealth, power and privilege was social injustice (Lazarus 1990: 21). Hence they had moved to consolidate what independence had bestowed upon them.

Thus, there is one respect in which the African writers of the first decade of independence are all immediately recognizable. They are all concerned in their work, to the point of obsession, with independence as a failure, with what independence did not bring and with the unraveling of the social unity that they firmly believed had been in evidence at the various ceremonies of independence. Throughout the 1960s, as the marginalization of these writers advanced, so too did the intensity and the introspection of their work. Within this literature, the old sureties were breaking down and writers began to ask themselves new questions. Specifically, the articulations of cynicism and despair in the face of post-independence developments began to seem increasingly

inappropriate to them. It was at this stage that the writers of this generation belatedly began to appreciate that independence had all along been mythologised, above all by intellectuals, and credited with an emancipatory potential that it could not possibly have achieved (Lazarus 1990: 25). It was against this background of the post-independence writer's indignation with independence that in 1967, Ngugi felt that the African writer had failed. As Ngara observes:

> The failure referred to here was in fact not that of the African writer alone. It resulted from the failure of the African bourgeoisie to give meaningful freedom and independence to the broad masses of the people .... In less than a decade of their rule, many African leaders proved that they were incapable of shaking off the shackles of neo-colonialism .... The essence of Ngugi's complaint, therefore, was that by failing to challenge this new state of affairs, the African writer was guilty of neglecting his duty to society in general and to the African masses in particular .... It was now incumbent upon the writer to throw in his lot with the masses once more by confronting the ideology of the new ruling elite. (Ngara 1985: 25)

It was in response to this call that the African writer responded by producing works that dealt a heavy blow to the ideology, aspirations and life-style of this class. Even in the countries that became independent in the 50s and 60s, the writer started to take a more and more critical stand against the anti-national, anti-democratic and neo-colonial character of the post-independence ruling regimes (Ngugi 1993: 70). He began to connect these ills not just to the moral failings of this or that ruler, but to the perpetuation of imperialist domination through the comprador ruling classes in Africa.

Not only does the African literature of this period express the writer's anger at the new political class, it also tries to go beyond just explanation and condemnation. Thus, one can sense in some of the writing of this period an edging towards the people and a search for new directions. The African writer of this period was therefore coming face to face with neo-colonialism as he began to take sides with the people in the class struggle in Africa.

What follows is a brief definition of the concepts ideology, symbolism, myth an allusion around which the argument of this dissertation will revolve.

Murfin & Ray (1997: 164) define ideology as a set of beliefs that underlies the customs, habits and practices common to a given social group. To members of that group, the beliefs seem obviously true, natural and even universally applicable. They may however, seem just as obviously arbitrary, idiosyncratic, or even false to those who adhere to another ideology. The concept symbolism, derives from the word symbol which is equivalent to a sign, that is, anything which signifies something else. In literature, the term symbol is applied only to a word or phrase that signifies an object or event which in turn signifies something, or has a range of reference beyond itself (Abrams 1988: 184). Symbolism therefore means 'to throw together', the serious and relatively sustained use of symbols to represent or suggest other things or ideas.

Murfin & Ray (1997: 229) define myth as a traditionally anonymous story which is

originally religious in nature and told by a particular cultural group in order to explain a natural or cosmic phenomenon. Myths generally offer supernatural explanations for the creation of the world and humanity, as well as for death, judgement and the afterlife. In literature, the word allusion refers to an explicit and indirect reference, to a well known person, place or event, or another literary work or passage. Most allusions serve to illustrate or enhance a subject, but some are used in order to undercut it ironically by the discrepancy between the subject and the allusion (Abrams 1988:109).

In the next three chapters, the focus of this dissertation will shift to a close study of how Ayi Kwei Armah, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe use symbolism, myth and allusion to present the post-independence African political leadership ideology in their three novels namely, *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Petals of Blood* and *Anthills of the Savannah* respectively.

CHAPTER ONE

The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born

Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Why Are We So Blest?* and *Fragments* are all set in the post-independence Africa. Any attempt to gain a good understanding of the conceptual horizon of the three novels, must take Frantz Fanon's essay, 'The Pitfalls of National Consciousness' in his book called *The Wretched of the Earth*, as its point of departure. Armah's intellectual debt to Fanon is profound and has, in fact, been freely acknowledged by Armah himself. In his essay published in 1969 called 'Fanon the Awakener', Armah points out that, unless Fanon is understood, 'we'll never get where we need to go. We may move without him, but only blindly, wasting energy' (Armah cited in Lazarus 1990: 27).

In 'The Pitfalls of National Consciousness', Fanon is quite explicit about African independence. In his view, independence merely involves a placing of colonial social relations onto a new and more mediated basis, that of neo-colonialism (Fanon cited in Lazarus 1990: 27). Fanon believes that nothing essentially changes at independence. Above all:

> the national economy of the period of independence is not set on a new footing. It is still concerned with the groundnut harvest, with the cocoa crop and the olive yield. In the same way there is no change in the marketing of basic products, and not a single industry is set up in the

> country. We go on sending out raw materials, we go on being Europe's small farmers, who specialise in unfinished products. (Fanon 1963: 151-2)

The nationalist bourgeoisie, which all over Africa, assumes power in the ex-colonies that subsequently exist as sovereign independent states, represents a wholly parasitic social fraction (Lazarus 1990: 28). From the point of view of liberation, Fanon is quite frank in his description of the class as:

> Literally ... good for nothing .... When (the national bourgeoisie) has vanished, devoured by its own contradictions, it will be seen that ... everything must be started again from scratch ... since that caste has done nothing more than take over the unchanged legacy of the economy, the thought, and the institutions left by the colonialist. (Fanon 1963: 176)

Fanon's argument suggests that African independence fundamentally serves to perpetuate imperialist domination and in the process, throws the national liberation forces off balance. Thus, when in his 1969 essay Armah presents his own thoughts on the same subject, he reaches what seems to be a similar conclusion:

> Africa under white European powers was divided into a number of colonies for easier control. The entire economy of the continent was planned to serve not the African people but European and American masters. Independence did not mean that this enslaving arrangement was destroyed. On the contrary, in place of white governors working to keep the African people down we have African heads of state and their

> parasitic elite maintaining the same old exploitative system in which the economy serves European and American needs. The African ruling classes do not rule in the interests of African people. If they function at all, they function as agents of white power. (Armah cited in Lazarus 1990: 28)

In the *Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born,* Armah is less preoccupied with cultural and sociological matters. Instead, he is more concerned about exposing the corruption and incompetence which are rampant in African political and governmental circles. The novel is therefore a devastating critique of post-independence corruption and neo-colonialism in Nkrumah's Ghana (Ngara 1985: 113). Palmer (1972: 129) defines the novel as a symbolic moral fable. In the novel, one is ineluctably stricken by Armah's moral earnestness. On almost every page, in an unenviably vigorous and realistic language, the author expresses his nausea at the all-encompassing corruption that pervades the post-independence Ghana.

The symbolic nature of the characters and the vagueness of the setting of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, reinforce Palmer's impression of the novel as a moral fable. The characters are important not for what they are in themselves, but for what they symbolise (Palmer 1972: 129). Most of them are vaguely particularised and indicated by generalised names. For instance, Armah's central character in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is known only as 'the man' and is in various instances referred to as 'the watcher', 'the giver' and the 'silent one'. His wife and children are called 'the loved ones' and his friend and mentor is called 'Teacher'. Although Manaan,

Oyo and Koomson have names, it is clear that their function in the novel is mainly symbolic (Palmer 1972: 129).

In the same breath, Lazarus (1990: 48) observes that the narrative circumstantial dimension of the *Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* has a double resonance. In his view, every detail in the novel is important both for what it is, that is, a detail or sociological fact, and for what in terms of the novel's immanent rationality, it comes to symbolise. Furthermore, 'The deliberate sensuosity of Armah's style', Ogungbesan has argued, 'has no aesthetic value in itself; its value lies in the subtle means by which sensuous details become symbols, and in the way the symbols provide a network which is the story, and which simultaneously provide the writer and the reader with a refined moral insight by means of which to evaluate it' (Ogungbesan cited in Lazarus 1990: 48). The cumulative effect of this 'network' of details and symbols in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is to present the reader with a harrowing and relentless vision of the post-independence Ghana as a neo-colony.

The novel's Ghana is a society that seems bent on self-destruction. Although it is materially and psychologically crippled by its colonial history, the society is perversely engaged in the process of entrenching the divisions and systematic brutalities resulting from this history (Lazarus 1990: 48). As though driven by some monstrous and self-maintaining logic, the society continues to maim itself in a worthless effort to satisfy an insatiable alien master. It is sick to the very core, rotten with the congealed decay of

centuries of domination, capitulation and betrayal. This society limps into tomorrow, riven, bereft, dependent, and its citizens are engaged in a ceaseless, debased, and dehumanizing struggle simply to eke out their lives from day to day, from passion week to passion week (Lazarus 1990: 48) .

Most of the inhabitants of the novel walk like dead men in a land which is morally and spiritually dead. Thus, the passengers in the bus at the beginning of the novel are described as 'walking corpses', home is called the 'land of the loved ones', and there is a suggestion later that 'the loved ones are dead', and that 'their embrace will be a welcome unto death'. It is clear from this that Armah sees the post-independence Ghana as a land of the spiritually dead. His use of symbolism is further strengthened by the numerous religious allusions he deploys in the novel. For example, during the week before pay day, that is, passion week, 'the man' himself, like Christ, is exposed to various humiliations. Moreover, Manaan is often called "Sister Manaan', and two other characters whose names carry biblical allusions namely, Zacharias Lagos and Abednego Yamoah appear briefly in the novel. There are also allusions to 'Jesus wept' and 'Onward Christian soldier'.

At the close of *A Man of the People*, Chinua Achebe's novel depicting the rise and fall of a corrupt Nigerian politician, the narrator, Odili, declares:

> For I do honestly believe that in the fat-dripping, gummy, eat-and-let-eat regime just ended - a regime which inspired the common saying that a

> man could only be sure of what he had put away safely in his gut or, in a language evermore suited to the times: 'you chop, me self I chop, palaver finish', a regime in which you saw a fellow cursed in the morning for stealing a blind man's stick and later in the evening saw him again mounting the alter of the new shrine in the presence of all the people to whisper into the ear of the chief celebrant in such a regime, I say, you died a good death if your life had inspired someone to come forward and shoot your murderer in the chest without asking to be paid. (Achebe 1966: 149)

This passage encapsulates themes and symbols that are common to a number of novels emanating from West Africa in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Innes 1995: 1). In many of these novels, a preoccupation with political corruption and consumer capitalism is mediated through symbolic images of the consumption of food, eating, bodily decay and defecation. To these images are linked metaphors of pollution, which may be symbolically imaged as natural, cultural or, as in Achebe's *A Man of the People*, linguistic: 'a language evermore suited to the times' (Innes 1995: 1). As in Odili's flight of rhetoric, in the novels of this period, the association between political and cultural corruption or pollution is assumed and so powerfully interwoven as to pass easily unquestioned by the reader. Frequently, disgust at political corruption is also linked to a disgust for the body and its processes.

The African novel of the 1960s with the most intense concentration and intermingling of such symbolic images is *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, a novel published in 1968, two years after *A Man of the People*. In the novel, Armah expresses his disgust

for the Ghanaian post-independence leadership's corruption by exploiting the potential of a central symbol namely, filth, putrefaction and excreta. In the first chapter of the novel, the reader and the nameless protagonist alike are unceasingly assaulted with smells, sights, and feel of physical decay and corruption (Innes 1995: 2). In the same breath, as Palmer (1972: 130) puts it, throughout the novel, 'the reader's nose is ... rubbed in spittle or in the phlegm from somebody's chest or a little child's nostrils. The odours of excreta, effluvia, and vomit assault his sense of smell.' The ugliness of the language is a reflection of the repulsiveness of the corruption which the author sets out to expose (Ngara 1985: 114).

All these symbols of political corruption are presented in the first powerful scene in the bus in the novel. It is passion week and the conductor knows that it will be impossible for him to make large profits through his usual corrupt practices. 'The man' gives him a cedi for his bus fare and as usual, he gives short change. Immediately, the foul smells which Armah employs to symbolise political corruption are associated with the conductor:

> The cedi lay there on the seat. Among the coins it looked strange, and for a moment the conductor thought it was ridiculous that the paper should be so much more important than the shiny metal. In the weak light inside the bus he peered closely at the markings of the note. Then a vague but persistent odour forced itself on him and he rolled the cedi up and deliberately, deeply smelled it. He had to smell it again, this time standing up and away from the public leather of the bus seat. But the

> smell was not his mistake. Fascinated, he breathed it slowly into his lungs. It was a most unexpected smell for something so new to have: It was a very old smell, very strong, and so rotten that the stench itself of it came with a curious, satisfying pleasure. Strange that a man could have so many cedis pass through his hands and yet not really know their smell. (p. 3)

It is only when the conductor's satisfaction is tinged with shame that he turns around and notices 'the man' staring at him. He is immediately overwhelmed by fear of being exposed and in a desperate bid to save himself, attempts to bribe 'the man'. Again, the nauseating images are immediately associated with the conductor: 'An important bargain was hanging in the air. The conductor cleared his throat and ate the phlegm' (p. 5). When the conductor realizes that 'the man' is actually sleeping rather than watching, and that his spittle is soiling the bus, a wave of indignation fills him:

> Then a savage indignation filled the conductor. For in the soft vibrating light inside the bus, he saw, running down from the left corner of the watcher's mouth, a stream of the man's spittle. Oozing freely, the oil-like liquid first entangled itself in the fingers of the watcher's left hand, underneath which it spread and touched the rusty metal lining of the seat with a dark sheen, then descended with quite inevitability down the dirty, aged leather of the seat itself, losing itself at last in the depression made by the joint. (p. 5)

What happens in the bus is a parable of what happens in the country as a whole (Palmer 1979: 131). The bus like the state, is in a state of decay and its pieces are only

held together by rust. The passengers symbolise the ordinary citizens while the driver and the conductor represent the post-independence Ghanaian political leadership that connives to defraud its citizens and if caught, to bribe them into silence. Furthermore, the violent insult the bus conductor heaps on 'the man' after his realization that he has been sleeping: 'You bloody fucking sonofabitch! Article of no commercial value! You think the bus belongs to your grandfather?' 'Are you a child? You vomit your smelly spit all over the place. Why? You don't have a bedroom?', 'Or where you waiting to shit in the bus?' (p. 6), is symbolic of the social violence the leadership perpetrates against the ordinary citizens of the country. The 'prized embassy cigarette' that is offered by the conductor to the sleeping man alludes to another facet of the ideology of the leadership, the conspicuous consumption that accrues from its corrupt practices. Like the bus conductor, Armah also associates the driver with the symbolic nauseating image of the phlegm: 'The driver ... cleared his throat and spat out a generous gob of mucus against the tyre' (p. 1). In addition to this, as:

> he (the man) walked by the driver, the driver coughed, a short violent cough which ended with a hoarse growl as he cleared his stuffed throat. Then he collected his full force and aimed the blob far out in front of him. The man who had come out of the bus felt the accompanying spray settle on his cheek and on one side of his upper lip. (pp. 6-7)

The nauseating image of phlegm associated with the driver also serves to symbolise the leadership's corrupt practices, while the latter incident is a symbol of the adverse effect of this corruption on the ordinary citizens that are represented by 'the man' in the

novel. It is noteworthy that in the course of the story, Armah names this man 'Countrey', a name that axiomatically represents the deprived masses in the whole country.

The power of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* partly derives from the consistency with which Armah exploits the central symbol of filth to articulate his revulsion against corruption (Palmer 1972: 134). For example, on his way to work, 'the man' passes a waste box with the caption in bold shiny, red capitals: KEEP YOUR COUNTRY CLEAN BY KEEPING YOUR CITY CLEAN. Immediately after this, the association between filth and moral squalor as well as cleanliness and moral purity is registered. The box symbolizes the post-independence Ghanaian leadership's initial determination to rid the country of the corruption of the previous regime and to preserve certain standards of moral decency. Ironically however, the box attracts the worst kind of filth and within a very short time, the shiny red capitals that reflected the optimism of the new leadership can no longer be seen. Thus, like the all powerful night, corruption and filth draw everything to themselves and smother even the best of intentions (Palmer 1972: 134). Significantly, the bus driver and conductor, the two characters who, it was pointed out earlier that they symbolise the leadership, worsen the decaying state of the box by urinating on it:

> the bus conductor walks away down the road. In a few moments the waiters can hear the sound of his urine hitting the clean-your-city can .... The driver in his turn jumps down and follows the conductor to the heap.

> His sound is much more feeble. (p. 39)

Shortly after this:

> When the conductor returns he is eating a shiny loaf of bread by hollowing it out, and the food handled in this way in the darkness looks intermittently like something resentful and alive. (p. 39)

The latter incident also alludes to the Ghanaian post-independence leadership's ethic of gratuitous conspicuous consumption which will be discussed in details in the course of this chapter.

Shortly after his encounter with the bus conductor, 'the man' finds himself in yet another violent verbal victimization by a taxi driver for unwittingly crossing slowly to the other side of the road when his speeding vehicle is advancing:

> Abruptly the headlights of a fast-advancing car caught him in their powerful brightness. In that hasty second the man was far too startled even to move. Instead, he raised his eyes in a puzzled, helpless gesture and got in them the full blinding force of the light. The scrape of breaking tyres on the hard road and the stench of burning rubber hit him, bringing him out of his half-sleep. Just in front of him the car stood with its tyres sharply arced toward the safe centre of the road. It was a shiny new taxi, and it was still bobbing gently up and down from the sudden halt. The man recovered from his numbness, and took the few remaining steps to the side of the road. There, away from the overpowering glare of the headlights, he saw the dim outline of the taxi driver's head as it thrust

> itself out through the window. For long moments of silent incredulousness the taxi driver stared at the man, doubtless looking him up and down several times. (pp. 8-9)

Significantly, the narrative voice describes the taxi as 'fast-advancing, shiny and new', and its light as a 'full blinding force' and an 'overpowering glare'. These are some of the attributes which Armah, throughout *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, closely associates with the Mercedes car owned by Koomson, a character whose role in the novel is symbolic of that of the post-independence Ghanaian leadership as well. This being the case, it is reasonable therefore to contend that the taxi driver also symbolises this leadership and that his insult of 'the man': 'uncircumcised baboon', 'moron of a frog. If your time has come, search for someone else to take your worthless life' 'Your mother's rotten cunt', (p. 9) also serves to symbolise the social violence suffered by the general citizens from this leadership.

From the early pages of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, a composite picture of Ghana as a neo-colony is presented. In the world of the novel, the aspect of post-independence is disturbingly reminiscent of that of colonialism proper. The new seems to have taken after the old so thoroughly, and in such indecent haste, that it is as though the old had never gone away at all (Lazarus 1990: 48). This motif is introduced at a very early point in the novel, as Armah describes 'the man's' walk from the bus terminal to his place of work:

> He passed by the U.T.C., the G.N.T.C., the U.A.C., and the French C.F.A.O. The shops had been there all the time, as far back as he could remember. The G.N.T.C., of course, was regarded as a new thing, but only the name had really changed with independence. The shop had always been there, and in the old days it had belonged to a rich Greek and was known by his name, A.G. Leventis. So in a way the thing was new. Yet the stories that were sometimes heard about it were not stories of something new and vigorous, but the same old stories of money changing hands and throats getting moistened and palms getting greased. Only this time if the old stories aroused any anger, there was nowhere for it to go. The sons of the nation were now in charge, after all. How completely the new thing took after the old. (pp. 9-10)

The fact that 'The shops had been there all the time, as far back as he (the man) could remember', and that the G.N.T.C. in particular had also 'always been there, but (that) only (its) name had really changed with independence', alludes to the neo-colonial ideological orientation of 'the sons of the nation' referred to in the passage above: 'How completely the new thing took after the old' (p. 10).

Armah portrays these 'sons of the nation' as men with the stench of centuries of betrayal and compromise upon them (Lazarus 1990: 49). The elite that such individuals comprise is described as being directly responsible for the squalor and deprivation of the community at large. It is not only that the bankruptcy and exocentrism of the society's economy have resulted in a situation in which, as a taxi driver in the novel puts it, 'it seems everybody is making things now except us. We Africans only buy expensive things' (p. 140). It is rather that the 'men of substance' are living on the

backs of their fellow countrymen (Lazarus 1990: 49). Their wealth is built upon their countrymen's poverty, their power is the corollary of the powerlessness of their countrymen and their ease is the product and the enduring cause of the degradation that surrounds but does not touch them (Lazarus 1990: 49).

In *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Armah argues that for every bottle of White Horse, Black and White, Seagrams or Gilbeys that is imported to cater to the elite's ethic of conspicuous consumption, millions of individuals like 'the man' are deprived of the wherewithal to purchase even the most basic of foodstuffs (Lazarus 1990: 49). This point is nicely presented by the British journalist, Michael Wolfers who, writing in the early 1970's observes that:

> If one looks at the main shopping centres of almost any African capital, one sees that it attempts on a reduced scale to replicate the shopping centres of European towns. The central shops are primarily supplying European goods to European customers, or to an African Bourgeoisie which has been strongly Europeanised. Prices are inflated, to cover the cost of an absurd exercise in transplanting provincial Britain and France, and the goods are imported with the use of the country's scarce foreign exchange. Money that could go towards building internal self-sufficiency is expended on trivial items of wasteful consumption, to the partial or total exclusion of more relevant kinds of expenditure. (Wolfers cited in Lazarus 1990: 49)

Thus, in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the 'men of substance' are presented

as merely the new wielders of old colonial corrupt power. In Armah's view, independence has given Africa not its freedom but only 'a change of embezzlers' (p. 162). The new leaders are the direct successors of the colonial masters of the past and are always concerned with privilege and the consolidation of their power rather than with progressive leadership and public accountability.

The moral intensity of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is fuelled not simply by Armah's insistence that Ghana's post-independence leaders are just as corrupt and self-serving as previous rulers had been (Lazarus 1990: 50). Rather, the novel gains its distinctive moral flavour from Armah's additional insistence that in the decolonizing years, there had existed the real potential for the radical transformation of the Ghanaian society. Speaking in this instance on behalf of Armah, 'the man's' friend and mentor, Teacher observes of these years both that 'we were ready here for big and beautiful things', and that 'the promise was so beautiful. Even those who were too young to understand it all knew that at last something good was being born. It was there. We were not deceived about that' (pp. 81,85).

Kwame Nkrumah, the man who had risen to power on the basis of massive popular support in the decolonizing years, and who had led Ghana to independence, had been the embodiment of this promise (Lazarus 1990: 50). In Teacher's view, Nkrumah had been quite unique. Far from being a 'typical' leader born into wealth and power, he had been a popular hero, a 'man of the people'. In *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*,

the authenticity of Nkrumah's public stance in the decolonizing years is repeatedly emphasized. His campaign speeches are described as having reflected his private passions, and their felicity is seen to have rested in the fact that they tapped exactly the mood of the masses. It is for this reason that when Teacher comes to contemplate the dissolution of Nkrumah's promise in the era of independence, he presents it as something sickening and more truly obscene than any ordinary political betrayal. For in Teacher's eyes, Nkrumah and his party have taken Ghana through a full circle: from hardship and disaffiliation, through the promise and even the beginnings of real change, and to hardship and disaffiliation once more (Lazarus 1990: 50).

Nkrumah is thus presented in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* as a leader who captured the people's hearts and minds by speaking directly to them, without patronization, about their responsibility to free themselves, their strength, solidarity and action. As Teacher reflects: 'It is so simple. He was good when he had to speak to us' (p. 88). It is Teacher's charge that this spirit which Nkrumah seemed to embody during the decolonizing years, was subsequently betrayed by Nkrumah himself, once independence was won. Teacher accuses Nkrumah of having failed his people in their hour of greatest need. For in his vision, it was Nkrumah who had roused the mass of the population, organised them, taught them to feel the power in their numbers, moulded them into an unstoppable force and then betrayed them abruptly by turning the central thrust and logic of the revolutionary movement in upon itself (Lazarus 1990: 52). The trajectory presented above, affirms that outlined by Fanon in 'The Pitfalls of

National Consciousness':

> Before independence, the leader generally embodies the aspirations of the people for independence, political liberty and national dignity. But as soon as independence is declared, far from embodying in concrete form the needs of the people in what touches bread, land and the restoration of the country to the sacred hands of the people, the leader will reveal his inner purpose: to become the general president of that company of profiteers impatient for their returns which constitutes the national bourgeoisie. (Fanon 1963: 166)

It might have been appropriate for Teacher to say in this context that Nkrumah was a political schizophrenic, that is, a leader who 'talked left' but 'lived right' and who embodied the incompatible personae of 'Verandah Boy' and 'Show Boy' (Lazarus 1990: 53). The revolutionary Nkrumah posed as the 'Verandah Boy', while the decadent post-independence exhibitionist was the 'Show Boy'. The 'Verandah Boy' was the homeless, propertyless and jobless Ghanaian commoner desperate for change while the 'Show Boy' was the Ghanaian who had arrived. In these terms, Teacher might have argued that Nkrumah's career involved nothing more than the progressive degeneration of the dedicated 'Verandah Boy' to the ostentatious 'Show Boy' and finally, to the haughty old man dispensing patronage to an increasingly narrow circle of personal friends and sycophants (Lazarus 1990: 53). Thus, within the space of a few short years, the party men are seen to have first started to forge a revolution and subsequently, to have sabotaged it absolutely. As Teacher observes:

> True, I used to see a lot of hope. I saw men tear down the veils behind which truth had been hidden. But then the same men, when they have power in their hands at last, began to find the veils useful. They made many more. Life has not changed. Only some people have been growing, becoming different, that is all. After a youth spent fighting the white man, why should not the president discover as he grows older that his real desire had been like the white governor himself, to live above all blackness in the big old slave castle? And the men around him, why not? What stops them sending their loved children to kindergartens in Europe? And if the little men around the big man can send their children to new international schools, why not? (p. 92)

Teacher's feeling is that the Nkrumahist party men such as Koomson, who once seemed fired with revolutionary fervour, have subsequently become indistinguishable from the pre-independence white men. In *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Koomson has assumed a life style worse than that of generations of the powerful colonial masters:

> He lives in a way that is more painful to see than the way the white men have always lived here .... There is no difference between the white men and their apes ... and now the apes of the apes, our party men. (p. 89)

The transition from colonialism to neo-colonialism thus perceived, has served to punctuate Africa's degradation only to underscore it (Lazarus 1990: 54). The unfree 'masses' are first afforded a vision of freedom, and are exhorted to move towards it and when they have wrestled themselves to within touching distance of it, it is snatched from their grasp, and unfreedom is cynically re-imposed in its stead. Finally, this humiliation

is compounded by the official rhetoric, which celebratingly proclaims Africa's independence. Thus, in independence, *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* trumpets, the masses are still unfree. Yet, they are expected to bear their destitution and suffering with exaltation instead of bitterness.

The novel suggests that the only real gainers from independence are those who have contrived to service the interests of the departing colonial power (Lazarus 1990: 54). This is so much the case, in fact, that the road to power is represented as the path to a white, dependent and Western-oriented cast of mind. The new leaders in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* have finally settled for living 'above all blackness' (p. 92). Koomson for example, names his daughter 'Princess'. It is not surprising then to discover that the girl 'spoke English like a white child', has about her 'the fearless, direct look of a white child', and that she calls her father 'Daddy' (p. 144).

In the officially preserved serenity of what used to be known as the 'white men's hills', far from the squalor of his neighbourhood, 'the man' encounters further evidence of black men falling over themselves in their desire to escape the burden of being black. In these hills are the opulent 'Estates', that look exactly as they did in colonial times and yet:

> Not everything was entirely the same .... Here and there the names had changed. True, there were very few black names of black men, but the plates by the roadside had enough names of black men with white souls

> and names trying mightily to be white. In the forest of white men's names, there were signs that said almost aloud: here lives a black imitator. Mills-Hayford ... Plange-Bannerman ... Attoh-White ... Kuntu Blankson. Others that must have been keeping their white neighbours laughing even harder in their homes. Acromond ... what Ghanaian name could that have been in the beginning, before its civil servant owner rushed to civilize it, giving it something like the sound of a master name? (p. 126)

Thus, *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, reveals the contemporary conditions of Ghana, and parallels that of many independent African countries, where independence has propelled a new set of masters, black this time, into the seats the colonial bosses used to occupy (Palmer 1972: 136). These new masters have acquired the same status symbols, and behave with the same arrogance and condescension. Armah's satirical symbolism is particularly vitriolic when directed against the grotesque attempts of this new class to behave like Englishmen (Palmer 1972: 136). There is for instance, the intolerable snobbery of Koomson's wife, Estella, who is in the novel, endlessly pushing an imaginary curl back into the mass of her false hair with the languidness of a Hollywood film star. Moreover, as it was indicated in the quoted passage above, top civil servants scramble to convert genuine Ghanaian names into grotesque English sounding concoctions like Binful, Fentengson and Kuntu - Blankson. Likewise, the black golfers show their gratitude for being admitted into the golf club that used to be frequented by the colonial white men by imitating English mannerisms, accents and the nuances of English speech.

One of the chief devices Armah employs in his presentation of the post-independence Ghanaian political leadership ideology is his metaphorical construct of 'the gleam', a phrase that alludes to the leadership's ethic of gratuitous conspicuous consumption, crass materialism and ostentation. The reader is introduced to the gleam right from the beginning of the novel. As 'the man' walks to work in the early morning, the dark shape of Yensua Hill begins to be visible against the background of the dawn sky:

> On top of the hill, commanding it, just as it commanded the scene below, its sheer, flat, multi-storied side an insulting white in the concentrated gleam of the hotel's spotlights, towered the useless structure of the Atlantic Caprice. Sometimes it seemed as if the huge building had been put there for a purpose, like that of attracting to itself all the massive anger of a people in pain. But then, if there were any angry ones at all these days, they were most certainly feeling the loneliness of mourners at a festival of crazy joy. Perhaps then the purpose of this white thing was to draw onto itself the love of a people hungry for just something such as this. The gleam, in moments of honesty, had a power to produce a disturbing ambiguity within. It would be good, but it would be far from the truth. And something terrible was happening as time went on. It was getting harder to tell whether the gleam repelled more than it attracted, attracted more than it repelled, or just did both at once in one disgustedly confused feeling all time these heavy days. (p. 10)

The Atlantic Caprice is a tourist hotel which is closely associated with the gleam and the venue of elaborate social functions attended by all the local 'big men' (Lazarus 1990: 57). Significantly, the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* defines the word 'caprice' as 'a sudden and often foolish change of mind or behaviour usually without any

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real cause'. It is clear from this, that the name of the hotel itself alludes to the schizophrenic character of the Ghanaian post-independence leadership with which it is so closely associated throughout the novel. To those who aspire towards the status of the 'big men', all roads lead to the Atlantic Caprice. The hotel's gleaming spotlights speak of success, and thoughts of success consume the waking minds and haunt the sleeping thoughts of almost everybody in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. People are attracted to the gleam because of its brilliance. Its sparkle seems to promise splendour, power, prestige and luxury. Within the massively deprived universe of the novel, such a promise cannot be easily ignored. The fact that certain individuals have managed to 'arrive' at the gleam serves to strengthen the belief of the thousands aspiring towards it, that their desires are capable of being fulfilled. The power of the gleam in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is such that every human action is judged less in terms of its social utility and legality than in terms of its efficiency. The sole criterion of judgement is whether the action in question has propelled its instigator close to the gleam. Just like the leadership, the novel's society has become fetishistically obsessed with conspicuous consumption and ostentation, in its eschewal of all principles except those related to materialism and accumulation (Lazarus 1990: 57).

McEwan (1983: 97) observes thus, that in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Armah is not that much concerned with poverty in Africa. Instead, he is more pre-occupied with the state of mind which is produced by the poverty among its victims in cities of

Africa. In the society of the novel, the disadvantaged are tantalised by the prospects of immediate enrichment which press so close and hard upon them. For instance, the workmen who discuss the material success of an acquaintance at one point in the novel are hurt by their own failure to arrive at the gleam:

> 'He is only a small boy ...' 'Yes, it's the CCP that has been so profitable for him ....' 'Two cars now ...' 'No, you're way behind. Three. The latest is a white Mercedes. 220 Super.' 'You will think I am lying, but he was my classmate, and now look at me' ... 'Ei, and girls! Running to fill his cars. Trips to the Star for weekends in Accra. Booze. Swinging niggers, man.' 'Girls, girls. Fresh little ones still going to Achimota and Holy Child ...' 'These Holy Child girls!' 'Achimota too!' 'He is cracking them like tiger nuts.' 'Contrey, you would do the same ...' 'True money swine.' 'Money swine.' (p. 110)

The novel's central character suffers, although less crudely and directly, the same sense of deprivation. 'The man', works as a railway clerk on a very small income which he might supplement by taking bribes from contractors, except that he is an honest man. His family has scarcely enough to eat. For him home is poor, dirty and made more depressing by his wife and mother in law who nag him about his failure to do better, and about Koomson's success. 'His excellency Joseph Koomson, Minister plenipotentiary, Member of the Presidential Commission, Hero of Socialist Labour' was 'the man's' classmate. Through the party, he has risen from the dockyards to a villa in the Upper Residential Area and is equipped by the State Furniture Corporation with the latest of everything. 'The man' himself is troubled, as he admits when he visits the villa,

by envy and self-doubt. He confides this in his friend, Teacher:

> I am asking myself what is wrong with me. Do I have some part missing? Teacher, this Koomson was my classmate. My classmate, Teacher, my classmate. So tell me, what is wrong with me? (p. 57)

They started, the man feels, as equals. He had hopes of going to university, but marriage made that impossible. Unlike 'the man', Koomson has pushed ahead and as Teacher diagnoses 'the man's' problem: 'You cannot lie very well, and you are afraid to steal'. Thus, Koomson is corrupt, and so is the rich 'small boy' the workmen speak of in the passage quoted above. Evidently, the novel implies that those who have materially succeeded in Nkrumah's Ghana are all corrupt.

Armah's account of this is sharpened by the stress he places upon the scarcity of commodities in the society of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. In the universe of the novel, the passion with which commodities such as television sets and Mercedes cars are sought is inversely proportional to their availability. The entire society has internalised the imperatives of the gleam, and yet a life of luxury is well out of reach of all but an infinitesimal fraction of the whole population (Lazarus 1990: 58). It follows from this social obsession with the gleam and the near impossibility of it ever being reached, that alternative methods of approaching it are attempted everywhere in the novel's world. Thus, one discovers very early in the novel that corruption is so rampant as to be positively conventional. Not only is it accepted as a fact of life but also actively

endorsed as a way to get ahead.

The all-consuming but invariably fruitless and self-torturing quest after luxuries that only the gleam can bring is such as to transform the end of reaching it into a matter of far greater significance within the public consciousness than the mere means of doing so. The gleam is regarded as a stage or condition to be sought and gained at any cost. Qualitative distinctions between means and ends are first blurred, then eroded, and finally come to be envisaged only as a hindrance to success, rationalisation of failure and the trademark of cowards and fools (Lazarus 1990: 58). This is precisely how 'the man's' wife, Oyo reasons for example, when she heaps scorn upon him for having been abstractly righteous as to refuse a bribe. She accuses him of having acted like an 'Onward Christian soldier', and when he demurs she asks:

> 'What were you afraid of then?'
> 'But why should I take it ?'
> 'And why not? When you shook Estella Koomson's hand, was not the perfume that stayed on yours a pleasing thing? Maybe you like this crawling that we do, but I am tired of it. I would like to have someone drive me where I want to go?
> 'Like Estella Koomson?'
> 'Yes, like Estella. And why not? Is she more than I?'
> 'We don't know how she got what she has', the man said.
> 'And we don't care!' The woman's voice had lost its excitement and reverted to flatness .... 'We don't care. Why pretend? Everybody is swimming towards what he wants. Who wants to remain on the beach

asking the wind, 'How ... How ... How ...' (p. 44)

Clearly, the pursuit of the gleam has become the sole preoccupation of the general society in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born.* Outside this self-depleting and cut-throat pursuit there is as 'the man' eventually surmises, nothing left 'worth pursuing, nothing at all worth spending life's minutes on' (p. 47). In the novel, respect, admiration and trust seem to have been voided out of the society and replaced by sycophancy, covetousness and callous manipulation (Lazarus 1990: 59). It is 'only the heroes of the gleam who do not feel that they are strangers' even in their homes (p. 35). This change in 'the man's' initial perception of reality is reflective of the ordering rationality of the gleam, which seeks to impose an ethos of instrumentality upon the ground where a system of humane values ought to stand (Lazarus 1990: 59). Clearly, the principles of Christianity and socialism, which might have replaced the older African codes of fair dealing in consumer societies, have little force here (McEwan 1983: 98). Indeed, Oyo jeers 'Onward Christian soldier' at the man and Koomson confides elsewhere in the novel that 'the old man' himself, a reference to Nkrumah, does not believe in socialism. Given the profusion of material benefits to be seen, for instance, at Koomson's house, envy undermines Christian and socialist principles. Thus, the novel shows how it is that dishonest policy has come to be the most effective in the post-independence Africa.

Ogungbesan has contended that if light is one obvious attribute of the gleam in the society of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, speed is another (Ogungbesan cited in Lazarus 1990: 59). In the novel, those who have arrived at the gleam, the leadership

in particular, are invariably presented in the process of fast movement. They are metaphorically and literally presented as 'jet setters' (Lazarus 1990: 59). Usually, the reader sees them in their cars. Their speed is so great that the words 'leap' and 'soar' are used to describe it. Just as ostentation has become both the means to the end of reaching the gleam and an end in itself, so too has 'fast driving' (Lazarus 1990: 59). For those like 'the man's' wife, Oyo, who have become slaves to the ideology of the gleam, living appears to revolve around the twin principles of 'learning to drive' and 'driving fast'. As the man explains to his friend, Teacher:

> Teacher, my wife explained to me, step by step, that life was like a lot of roads: long roads, short roads, all sorts of roads. Next, she let me know that human beings were like so many people driving their cars on all these roads. This was the point at which she told me that those who wanted to get far had to learn to drive fast .... Accident would happen, she told me, but the fear of accidents would never keep men from driving ... (pp. 58-9)

In Oyo's eyes, it is speed alone that has the capacity to render life enjoyable. She has a vision of salvation firmly within her sight. Her vision is of 'the blinding gleam of beautiful new houses and the shine of powerful Mercedes cars ... the scent of expensive perfumes and the mass of a new wig' (p. 56).

As Oyo understands the matter, the gleam is arrived at only after a journey. Those who arrive there first will be those who have driven the fastest. Lazarus (1990: 60) contends

however, that this schema lacks the fundamentally qualitative consideration of direction. Oyo reckons only with the quantitative aspects of speed and distance. For her, there is only one place to get to and that is 'far'. It is noteworthy, that not only does this fetishistic obsession with 'learning to drive' and 'driving fast' symbolize the dizzying speed in which the post-independence Ghanaian leadership ravages the country's scarce material resources, it also alludes to the same leadership's atrocious lack of vision herein symbolized by its lack of concern with direction.

The Railway Administration Block where 'the man' works is a mass of decay, putrefaction, filth and reeks of putrid turpentine. The banister is like a long piece of diseased skin and the character of the wood itself has been changed by the accretion of excreta over the years:

> Apart from the wood itself there were, of course, people themselves, just so many hands and fingers bringing help to the wood in its course towards putrefaction. Left-hand fingers in their careless journey from a hasty anus sliding all the way up the banister as their owners made the return trip from the lavatory downstairs to the offices above. Right hand fingers still dripping with the after piss and the stale sweat from fat crotches. The calloused palms of messengers after they had blown their clogged noses reaching for a convenient place to leave the well rubbed moisture. Afternoon hands not entirely licked clean of palm soup and the remnants of kenkey. The wood would always win. (pp. 12-13)

The Railway Administration Block symbolises the post-independence Ghanaian body

politic while its rottenness is a symbol of the state of moral squalor which the leadership is in.

Shortly after this, Armah shifts his focus to the timber merchant who comes to 'the man's' office and unsuccessfully tries to bribe him. The merchant also serves to symbolise the corrupt Ghanaian leadership. Furthermore, his 'wolf mouth' (p. 27) and the nauseating image of its 'lips (that) had this habit of leaving in their wake bubbles and lines of filmy saliva whose yellow colour ...' (p. 28) symbolise the repulsiveness and ugly face of corruption. Finally, the merchant's '(flabby) belly' and grotesque 'teeth which come in rows' (p. 27) allude to the same leadership's repulsive ethic of gratuitous conspicuous consumption.

Armah's insistence on the realistic details of urine, faeces and snot is aimed at shocking the reader into a realization of the repulsiveness of corruption (Palmer 1972: 134). In his view, the whole of Ghana, buildings as well as people and in particular, the leadership, stinks of corruption. The following nauseating passage is hard to beat:

> Walking with the slowness of those whose desire has nowhere to go, the man moved up the road, past the lines of evening people under the waning lamps selling green and yellow oranges and bloated bread polished with leftover oil, and little tins and packets of things no one was in hurry to buy. Under a dying lamp a child is disturbed by a long cough coming from somewhere deep in the centre of the infant body. At the end of it his mother calmly puts her mouth to the wet congested nostrils and

> sucks them free. The mess she lets fall gently by the roadside and with her bare foot rubs it softly into the earth. (p. 35)

This juxtaposition of filth and food is Armah's allusive comment on the negligence and lack of concern shown by the leadership towards the lower classes. He forces the reader to feel disgust as the woman sucks her child's nostrils and not to arouse indignation against her but against the leadership that allows her to languish in poverty, squalor and ignorance while the same leadership fattens itself on the country's riches (Palmer 1972: 135). The fact that the woman's foot is bare further alludes to the state of abject and grinding poverty in which she lives and which is a corollary of the leadership's ideology of crass materialism.

For purposes of symbolism, the image of the latrine is a recurrent one in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*:

> The man leaps up on the cleanest he can find, near the far end of the long latrine, passing his eyes over the row of cans encrusted with old shit. When he chooses the one he will use he is careful, in letting down his trousers, not to let the cuffs fall into the urine grooves in front. The thing that makes this place better than home is that here there is air, even if this air also rises from the holes below and is misty with the presence of familiar particles suspended in it. Squatting up there, he lets the air from below blow a cooling draft against his buttocks, and he looks at the crowded wall opposite, with the bright light of the big bulbs bouncing off it. Up near the ceiling the wall is still a dazzling white where there are no webs to hide the paint. The colour does not really change until about the

> level of the adult anus. There the wall is thickly streaked with organic brown, each smear seeking to avoid older smears, until the dabs have gone all round the wall. There are places where, it seems, men have not bent down to find an unused spot to use, and in a few incredible places men seemed to have jumped quite high and then to have accomplished a downward stroke. There must have been people who did not just forget to bring their paper, but who also did not bother to drop their loads, for the wall has marks that are not mere afterpieces, but large chunks of various shit. (pp. 105-6)

Armah is completely frank in describing bodily functions. Undoubtedly, a large number of readers will wish that he had not resorted to such coarse language. However, the language does make its point very effectively (Palmer 1990: 135). The latrine becomes another symbol of the post-independence Ghanaian body politic, decayed, uncared for and stinking with corruption. Just as the latrine reeks of excrement and just as each user leaves his own dark smear on the walls, each minister befouls his already ill-used country with his own corrupt acts.

Significantly, Armah also insists on the juxtaposition and association of excrement and sex. For instance, there are sexual drawings on the walls of the lavatory at 'the man's' place of work. In *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, political leaders, the most corrupt men in society, are notable for their sexual activities. Manaan is a typical victim of such activities in the novel. As Palmer points out, Manaan:

> ... represents millions of Ghanaian women betrayed by husbands who

have failed them and politicians who have exploited and then destroyed them. (Palmer 1972: 130)

As a woman in a patriarchal and fetishistic society, Manaan is a symbol of an object very similar to one of the commodities in Koomson's house, an object to be pursued, bought and consumed (Lazarus 1990: 68). Indeed, the narrative voice in the novel refers to 'women, so horribly young, fucked and changed like pants, asking only for blouses and perfume from diplomatic bags' (p. 89). In the same way, with specific reference to Koomson, the narrative voices continues to say: 'Young juicy vaginas waiting for him in some hired place paid for by the government' (pp. 89-90).

Manaan struggles to resist this aspect of the gleam, which would deny her, her creativity and ability to contribute to the social being of her community (Lazarus 1990: 68). Her struggle is a hopeless one however. She progressively abandons the arena of social action for more derealised and derealising pursuits (Lazarus 1990: 68). She ends up smoking 'wee', finds 'refuge in lengthening bottles', and accepts 'money and sometimes even love' from foreign sailors (p. 66). Finally, Manaan succumbs to the accumulated agony of her personal and political suffering and the humiliation she has been forced to endure. She is last seen wandering purposelessly along the shoreline, mad perhaps beyond retrieval, and muttering frenziedly to herself: 'They have mixed it all together! Everything! They have mixed everything. And how can I find it when they have mixed it all with so many other things' (p. 180).

Although Koomson chiefly represents the evils of the post independence-Ghanaian leadership, to some extent, his character reflects a tinge of good naturedness. His good side is shown during his visit to 'the man's' house. It is here that one sees the marked difference between his behaviour and that of his repulsive wife, Estella. Where she is condescending, ill-mannered and snobbish, Koomson is jovial and does his best to put his host and hostess at their ease. In spite of his good naturedness, however, Koomson is essentially corrupt and consequently, Armah does not spare him in his condemnation. Since he symbolises the sort of corrupt leadership in the society of the novel, Armah portrays his spiritual rottenness through the foul smells that emanate from his body as he cowers in 'the man's' bedroom in his attempt to escape the police towards the end of the novel (Ngara 1985: 114). This is exemplified in the following passage:

> He (the man) waited for Koomson to say something now, but only the subdued breathing of the frightened man, punctuated with increasing rapidity from below, destroying the peace in the room .... His mouth had the rich stench of rotten menstrual blood. The man held his breath until the new smell had gone down in the mixture with the liquid atmosphere of the party man's farts filling the room. At the same time Koomson's insides gave a growl longer than usual, an inner fart of personal, corrupt thunder which in its fullness sounded as if it had rolled down all the way from the eating throat thundering through the belly and the guts, to end in further silent pollution of the air already thick with flatulent fear. (pp. 161,163)

Although one is aware of the extent of Koomson's corruption and spiritual rottenness, one does feel some sympathy for him as he cringes like a frightened animal and finally squeezes his enormous bulk through the lavatory hole used by the night-soil man. His gruelling struggle through the putrid lavatory has two symbolic functions. In the first place, it enables Koomson to experience the conditions of life of the ordinary men and women, that is, the men and women whose trust he had betrayed. Secondly, the lavatory is really the place where Koomson belongs in the end, its putrefaction mirrors his spiritual rottenness. His escape through the lavatory deserves to be quoted:

> Push! The man shouted before he had thought of the nearness of the searchers or the fact that his companion could not hear him any how. Quietly now he climbed onto the seat, held Koomson's legs and rammed them down .... But the man pushed some more, and in a moment a rush of foul air coming up told him the party man's head was out. The body dragged itself painfully down, and the man got ready to follow into the hole. (p. 168)

In *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, corruption is accepted as inevitable or even necessary, and even those adversely affected by it, are prepared to bear patiently in the hope that their own turn to 'eat' will come (Palmer 1972: 137). Ministers and other authorities carry on their fraudulent practices without interference largely because corruption is virtually accepted as the legitimate means of enhancing one's prosperity. The recurring analogy between eating, temptation, desire and corruption in the novel, implies the inevitability of corruption, since man must eat, food must be digested and

finally evacuated (Innes 1995: 7). Nowhere in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is there pleasure in eating. Food can never be an end in itself, but always a mere necessity for the poor and a sign of status for the wealthy. It is a world, as Teacher declares, where there are 'No saviours. Only the hungry and the fed. Deceivers all' (p. 90). Bribery and eating are frequently equated, as is wealth and food.

Not merely are the corrupt and the wealthy well-fed, they are also presented as grotesquely fat and flabby. Thus, Armah's description of Koomson's double chin, his chubbiness, his inability to fit comfortably in the chair provided by the man, and his flabby hands, all connect him to the nation's rulers before and after colonialism. As Armah comments:

> And yet these were the socialists of Africa, fat, perfumed, soft with the ancestral softness of chiefs who had sold their people and are celestially happy with the fruits of the trade. (p. 131)

This sentence might well be read as a direct rebuttal of Nkrumah's celebration of an original and essentially socialist Africa, innocent of class division (Innes 1995: 8). The 'fruits' mentioned here recall an earlier point in the novel that associates celestial happiness with the collaboration between black and white men in depriving Africans of 'fruits' which rightfully belong to them, when 'the man' remembers the incident of the stolen mangoes from the white man's garden. Here the mangoes become a forbidden fruit in a paradisal enclosure. The boys steal the fruits, but before they can eat them

are forced to run. In an image which foreshadows Koomson's escape at the end of the novel, the boys squeeze through a tiny hole at the bottom of the wall, and run away from the paradisal white garden, which however, encloses not European apple trees, but African mangoes and almonds.

The analogy here with the biblical story of the Garden of Eden and the expulsion of man for eating the forbidden fruit, reminds one how widespread and fundamental is this association of eating with desire for greater power and knowledge in the novel, the desire to be god-like (Innes 1995: 8). It also reminds one of the widespread association between such temptations and the role of women as temptress (Innes 1995: 8) For example, throughout the novel, Oyo is portrayed as a kind of Eve who urges 'the man' to eat the forbidden fruit, in order for him to become godlike. Certainly 'the man' believes that she provides the main source or pressure of temptation to sin and to lose his purity. Teacher endorses this reiterated view of the dangerous seduction of 'the loved ones':

> But you know that the loved ones are dead even when they walk around the earth like the living, and you know that all they want is that you throw away the thing in your mind that makes you think you are still alive, and their embrace will be a welcome unto death. (pp. 55-56)

Oyo envies and would like to emulate Estella Koomson, who is also scathingly satirised as being more desperate to dissociate herself from everything African, able to consume only Western drinks, and as shrinking from the contamination of poverty in 'the man's'

house.

The preoccupation with decay and corruption, reiterated persistently throughout *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, is imaged as a natural and inevitable process intrinsic to the wood of the banister in the Railway Administration Block (Innes 1995: 3). In the novel, Armah employs an image of the powerful darkness of the night to demonstrate this all-encompassing and insidious power of corruption. This state of affairs is symbolically enacted as 'the man' walks pensively through the desolate streets to Teacher's house:

> Outside, the night was a dark tunnel so long that out in front and above there never could be any end to it, and to the man walking down it, it was plain that the lights here and there illuminated nothing so strongly as they did the endless power of the night, easily, softly calling every sleeping thing into itself .... Around a street lamp high over the coal tar, insects of the night whirled in a crazy dance, drawn not directly by the night from which they had come, but by the fire of the lamps in it. Their own way of meeting the night, and it was all the same in the end. (p. 47)

Similarly, Teacher's rendition of the myth of Plato in the novel, testifies to this impregnable power of corruption. In the myth, the wanderer who finds truth outside the cave and who comes back inside 'with the eagerness of the first bringer' in order to share his discovery with his fellows, finds himself being mocked by them. They see in his revelations not the deluded nature of their own understanding hitherto, but the incoherencies of a lunatic:

> ... to those inside the eternal cave he came as someone driven ill with the breaking of eternal boundaries, and the truth he sought to tell was nothing but the proof of his long delusion, and the words he had to give were pitiful cries of a madman lost in the mazes of a mind pushed too far out and away from the everlasting way of darkness and reassuring chains. (p. 80)

This insidious power of corruption in the society of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and the difficulty of avoiding being engulfed by it, are suggested by a number of powerful allusive images. The first of these is the rot in the banister of the Railway Administration Block. The banister was continually polished to get rid of the rot, but in the end it was the rot that won:

> It would always take the newness of the different kinds of polish and the vaunted cleansing power of the chemicals in them, and it would convert all to victorious filth. (p. 12)

In the same way, the allusion by Oyo to the Chichidodo serves the same purpose. This bird 'hates excrement with its soul' but feeds nevertheless on maggots which grow best in the lavatory (p. 53).

The story of Rama Krishna, like that of the Chichidodo, demonstrates the general belief in the novel that the more earnestly one tries to avoid corruption, the more does one become involved in it. Walking through the streets one night, 'the man' recalls Rama Krishna, a Ghanaian friend of his who 'had taken that far-off name in the reincarnation

of his soul after a long and tortured flight from everything close and everything known, since all around him showed him the horrible threat of decay' (p. 48). Obsessed by the gleam's tentacular purchase upon the material world, Rama Krishna had progressively sought refuge in immateriality, eschewing first what he took to be the tangible, then the intangible, social agencies of corruption. Eventually, this procedure led him to abstain from all sexual conduct. He would not corrupt himself by touching any woman, but saved his semen to rejuvenate his brain by standing on his head a certain number of minutes every night and every dawn. Ironically however, it is of corruption that Rama Krishna eventually dies:

> It was of consumption that he died, so very young, but already his body inside had undergone far more decay than any living body, however old or near death, can expect to see. It was whispered - how indeed are such things ever known? - that the disease had completely eaten up the frail matter of his lungs, and that where his heart ought to have been there was only a living lot of worms gathered together tightly in the shape of a heart. And so what did the dead rot inside the friend not have to do with his fear of what was decaying outside of himself? And what would such an unnatural flight be worth at all, in the end? (pp. 48-9)

There is also the allusion to the proverb of the healthy green fruit to demonstrate the totality with which the gleam has imposed itself upon the world of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* as a reality. Its social symptoms of corruption and the resultant illicit, garish success appear so incontrovertibly natural in the public eye that to seek to resist them is conceived as a deviant aim:

> Was there not some proverb that said the green fruit was healthy, but healthy only for its brief self? That the only new life there ever comes from seeds feeding on their rotten fruit? What then, was the fruit that refused to lose its acid and its greenness? What monstrous fruit was it that could find the end of its life in the struggle against sweetness and corruption? (p. 145)

This proverb shows that almost everybody in the society of the novel not only sees the descent into corruption as natural, inevitable and in a sense beneficial, but also regards all those who resist it as selfish and unnatural like the monstrous fruit.

Finally, the novel demonstrates by means of significant symbolic images, that almost everyone, those who wish to resist as well as those who welcome it, are involved in messy corruption (Palmer 1990: 138). For instance, in the Railway Administration Block, the stewy atmosphere is compounded by the salt from the sea and the sweat of every office worker. Subsequently, one sees in a lavatory scene that 'all around decaying things push inward and mix the body's juices with the taste of the rot' (p. 40). Moreover, near the same lavatory, an old man, conscious that he and everyone else is enveloped in corruption, in spite of all possible efforts to avoid it, sleeps with his mouth wide open, and thereby allowing particles of excreta to rush in: 'why should he play the fool and hold his breath?' (p. 41.).

When a coup puts a stop to Nkrumah's government towards the end of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Koomson flees to the shelter of 'the man's' home. He has

been swaggeringly ostentatious while rich and powerful, now he is broken and stinks with terror. The man helps him to escape, through the latrine whose normal use Koomson disdained on a previous visit. Scattering bribes on his way, 'the man's' old classmate escapes on his boat. Although the novel ends gloomily as the man watches a policeman taking a bribe, and then reads the comment provided in the novel's title words, Koomson in defeat is an effective picture of Armah's central theme (McEwan 1983: 101). He is quickly bereft of the riches which never really belonged to him. Although, he has for a time manoeuvred himself into a position of wealth and power, he too is a poor man.

CHAPTER TWO

Petals of Blood

Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* is his most representative novel in that it incorporates all the major preoccupations of his career as a writer. The novel's major concerns are closely related to those of his earlier writing but are in this case, more abundantly conveyed. In *Petals of Blood*, Ngugi widens and deepens his treatment of the themes which he has narrated and dramatised before. These include themes related to both formal and informal education, Christian and customary religion, the alienation of peasants from the land as well as the struggle for independence in Kenya (Killam 1980: 96). Indeed, McEwan observes:

> novelists of the 70's are increasingly urgent and polemical in presenting topics which have been most acceptable in the realm of African fiction: politics, education, money and the white man. (McEwan 1983: 102)

Ngugi's first novel, *The River Between*, is concerned with the first phase of the historical process that resulted from the imperialist occupation and exploitation of Africa. It concentrates on the disruption caused within the African traditional society by the alien educational and religious systems. The second and third, *Weep Not, Child* and *A Grain of Wheat*, deal with the second phase, the Mau Mau struggle for liberation. *Petals of Blood* is unique in that, not only does it deal with these two phases, it also gives an extended treatment of the third phase, the age of independence in Kenya. To the

themes he is concerned with in his earlier writing, Ngugi has in this novel added artistic representation of the betrayal of the independence movement, the nature and cost of modernity as these coincide with the emergence of a Kenyan middle class and the need for the creation of a cultural liberation struggle fostered by the peasants and workers (Killam 1980: 96). *Petals of Blood* is therefore, a political novel in the widest sense.

If Ngugi's politics have become more comprehensive in *Petals of Blood*, so too has his humanism. Thus, of his purposes in writing, Ngugi says:

> My position here is very simple. As I said in your earlier question, I believe that a people have a right to know how wealth is produced in their country, who controls it and who benefits. I believe that every Kenyan has a right to decent housing, decent food and decent clothing. I believe that no Kenyan should be able to sleep with any peace of mind for as long as he knows that what he is feeding upon has been taken from the mouths of the thirsty and hungry in Kenya. I also believe that no Kenyan should be able to sleep peacefully for as long as he knows that the wealth of the country is still controlled by foreign merchants. In other words, I believe in a national economy free from any foreign domination or free from imperialist control. These are my fairly simple beliefs and what labels are put on them is really the business of whoever is fixing the labels on these simple beliefs. In a nutshell, I would say that I believe that our national economy reflected in our national culture should be able to develop freely but that Kenyan wealth should feed, clothe, and shelter Kenyans. (Ngugi cited in Killam 1980: 96)

In Ngugi's view, the independence movement has been betrayed and the peasants and

workers for whom the war was fought have been further alienated from the land, deceived and made pitiable by a growing Kenyan middle class of entrepreneurs which is in league with internationally financed capitalism.

It is clear from what Ngugi further says that he is on the side of the people, African populism and against capitalism:

> Capitalism and imperialism are the root causes of evil. Our economy is dependent on international capitalism. And capitalism can never bring about the equality of peoples. The exploitation of one group by another is the very essence of capitalism. The peasants and workers are very much exploited in this country. They get very low pay, very poor housing, and unemployment affects them more than anyone else. Now, women form the majority in this category of peasants. Women are doubly exploited and oppressed. It's a general Third World problem. Workers and peasants and women form the most important element in this country. They are the true producers of wealth. They produce all the wealth that feeds, clothes, houses everyone in the society. They also produce all the wealth that goes out of the country. Yet they do not get even the barest minimum of that which they produce. The middle class that feeds on the workers and peasants is a superfluous, parasitic class. (Ngugi cited in Killam 1980: 107)

Of the role of the African writer in the face of this capitalist exploitation, Ngugi says: 'all writers can do is really try to point where things are wrong; ... fiction should firmly embody the aspirations and hopes of the majority of peasants and workers' (Ngugi cited in Killam 1980: 97). Significantly, this recalls Achebe's view on the same subject that:

'The writer's duty is to help the people regain their dignity and self respect by showing them in human terms, what happened to them, what they lost' (Achebe cited in Stratton 1994: 23). Ngugi further points out however, that: 'fiction cannot be the agent of change. The people are the agent of change' (Ngugi cited in Killam 1980: 97).

Of all African novels, *Petals of Blood* probably presents the most comprehensive analysis to date, of the evils perpetrated in independent African society by black imperialists and capitalists (Palmer 1979: 288). Furthermore, the novel subsumes several aspects of Ngugi's earlier fiction such as the widespread and effective use of symbols and images, the resourceful and morally courageous women as well as the indecisive young men who are called upon to play a major role in society but who are unable to do so because they are plagued by a sense of insecurity and guilt (Palmer 1979: 288). The narrative technique of the novel also seems to be a conglomerate of those of *The River Between, Weep Not, Child* and *A Grain of Wheat*. In addition to this, *Petals of Blood* is clearly, an epic, not just of the East African struggle but of the entire African struggle. It is on these grounds that the novel has been described by Calder as the most ambitious novel yet to be realized by the pen of an African (Calder cited in Palmer 1979: 288).

Although Ngugi is in the novel explicitly on their side, the point of view of *Petals of Blood* is not that of the peasants and workers. Instead, he conveys their plight by presenting their lives in both dramatic actions and through the revelations of the private lives of the

four principal characters namely, Wanja, Abdulla, Munira and Karega, who come together by chance in Ilmorog. Hence, in *Petals of Blood*, Ngugi mainly presents the ideology of the post-independence Kenyan leadership from the point of view of these characters. *Petals of Blood* is divided into four parts. Part One is called 'Walking', Part Two:'Towards Bethlehem', Part Three:'To Be Born' and Part Four:'Again ... La Luta Continua'. The narrative technique of the novel is not as subtle as that of *A Grain of Wheat*. Most of its story is told in the form of reminiscences rather than flashbacks. The story is told from the perspectives of different characters at various times. It is variously told by one or other members of Ilmorog, through the recollections of one or another character and in some instances, by an omniscient narrator in the first person plural 'we'.

Petals of Blood adopts a variety of time frames. The present tense action of the novel takes about ten days. This is the story of the four principal characters who are in jail on suspicion of implication in the murder of the three directors of the Theng'eta Breweries namely, Mzigo, Chui and Kimeria. Actually, the story takes the form of Munira's recollections as he sits in his cell and writes notes in order to clear his own mind about the significance of the events and to satisfy the demands of the chief inspector of the police, Godfrey. Thus, from the present, the story goes back twelve years to Munira's recollections of his first arrival in Ilmorog. It periodically returns to the present and to Munira in his cell, and on one or two occasions goes even further back to his experiences while he was at school in Siriana in the 1940's and to the Mau Mau

uprising in the 1950's. Furthermore, Ngugi goes backwards in time to 1896 when the exploitation of Kenya by Europeans began and in some passages to the pre-historical period of Africa. Otherwise, the story moves progressively forward from Munira's arrival in Ilmorog twelve years previously to the present and to the resolution of the murder riddle.

Just like Armah in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, in *Petals of Blood*, Ngugi also employs para-linguistic affective devices such as symbolism, myth and allusion to present the ideology of the post-independence leadership in Kenya (Ngara 1985: 76). On the page immediately preceding the Acknowledgements one, in a poem by Derek Walcott with which *Petals of Blood* is prefixed, there is a reference to 'petals of blood'. Here, 'petals of blood' are associated with a concealed but dangerous and poisonous serpent. Moreover, on page one, there is a passage from the sixth chapter of the New Testament Book of Revelations. In the passage, descriptions of horses and their fighting riders present images of violence and suppression to the reader's mind. Immediately below the Revelations passage is an extract from a poem by Walt Whitman. These lines present images of the violence of monarchical rulers against a people who wish to free themselves from oppression. One is also given a list of who in Ngugi's opinion, are instruments of oppression namely, hangman, priest, tax-gatherer, soldier, jailer and others. In the first chapter of the novel, one is immediately confronted with clear evidence of this violence and suppression as people are being arrested by the police for the murder that has taken place in Ilmorog.

Thus, the novel's title, 'Petals of Blood', points to the significance of symbolism in any attempt to elucidate its meaning. One dominant symbol cluster in the novel relates to flowers and other forms of vegetation (Palmer 1979: 289). At times, this suggests regeneration, fecundity and luxuriance. However, more often, as in the poem by Derek Walcott, the symbol cluster suggests destruction, evil, the unnatural, corruption and death:

> Fearful, original sinuosities! Each mangrove sapling
> Serpent-like, its roots obscene
> As a six-fingered hand,
>
> Conceals within its clutch mossbacked toad,
> Toadstools, the potent ginger-lily,
> Petals of Blood,
>
> The speckled vulva of the tiger-orchid
> Outlandish phalloi
> Haunting the travellers of its one road.
>
> (Derek Walcott, from *The Swamp*)

It is clear from the poem that, in *Petals of Blood*, Ngugi implies that in the 'very huge tree (that) prevents little flowers from reaching out into the light' is suggested a metaphor of the way 'in which the social systems of capitalism and imperialism act to stifle life' (Killam 1980: 116). There is more to it than this however. The verses suggest the existence of forces symbolised by the physical objects of toad, toadstools and tiger-

orchids which are associated with death and danger and which make man's journey in life perilous. In other words, the poem implies that there is a deadly force in nature which threatens mankind. It is noteworthy however, that in the network of associations Ngugi derives from the phrase, 'petals of blood', this deadly force is juxtaposed with those forces in nature which are in harmony with man. Thus, in Ngugi's view, 'although mankind can look to the sweeping vision of sun-drenched plains and valleys for a vision of his connections with the heavens, he must as well be constantly on guard for the lurking danger' (Killam 1980: 117).

It is further clear from the poem that the 'petals of blood' of the title of the novel are also connected with the 'potent ginger lily', one of the destructive, repulsive plants which give a scene which should normally appear natural and beautiful an eerie, unnatural and evil aura (Palmer 1979: 289). This imagery clearly alludes to the distortion of the state affairs in the society of the novel from the normal and natural to the abnormal and evil. In other words, it alludes to the introduction of chaos and destruction where a semblance of beauty and order should prevail. In terms of the immanent rationality of the novel, the 'potent ginger lily' in Walcott's poem is used by Ngugi to symbolise the contemptuous capitalist post-independence Kenyan political leadership that is in *Petals of Blood*, represented by Chui, Mzigo and Kimeria.

In fact, the plant with 'petals of blood' in the novel refers to Theng'eta, the plant with a pattern of four red tiny petals which grows wild in the plains that are associated with

luxuriance, vitality and vigour (Palmer 1980: 290). The plant is in the novel, associated with Ilmorog's pristine traditional splendour. As Wanja puts it:

> Theng'eta is the plant that only the old will talk about. Why? It is simple. It is only they who will have heard of it or know it .... It was when they were drinking Theng'eta that the poets and singers composed their words for a season of Gichandi, and the seer voiced his prophecy. (p. 204).

The name Theng'eta also refers to the drink that Nyakinyua, the staunch upholder of traditional values in *Petals of Blood*, and her formidable husband used to brew before the advent of colonialism in Kenya. The drink symbolised truth and purity in that the flower with four red petals, that is, Theng'eta, was used to purify the drink. Significantly, the purified drink itself had the remarkable quality of soothing the body, exposing the soul and forcing people to confront the truth about themselves. Thus, the drink Theng'eta derives its name from the fact that the Theng'eta plant was used to purify it. In Nyakinyua's words, the drink is nothing without its purification by the Theng'eta plant itself:

> 'This is only ... this is nothing yet', Nyakinyua explained. 'This can only poison your heads and intestines. Squeeze Theng'eta into it and you get your spirit. Theng'eta. It is a dream. It is a wish. It gives you sight, and for those favoured by God it can makes them cross the river of time and talk with ancestors. It has given seers their tongues; poets and Gichandi players their words; and it has made barren women mothers of many children. Only you must take it with faith and purity in your hearts.' (p.

210)

The Theng'eta drink is after independence in Kenya, adulterated by the new capitalist leadership, mass-produced and distributed in various consistencies overseas for capital gain by Mzigo. It is also supplied to the workers to deaden their pain from exploitation and dull their recognition of this. It is an opiate which is as deadly and useless to their needs as the Christian church and the charismatic movement as portrayed by Ngugi later in the novel. After its adulteration by the capitalists, the drink Theng'eta, variously called 'Drink of peace', 'Drink of strife' and 'Deadly lotus' becomes the agent of hallucinary revelations which prompt division between the four principal characters. It creates strife where at least, a semblance of peace prevailed. It is noteworthy however, that the original traditionally produced Theng'eta drink was more stronger and efficacious than the impure adulterated variety subsequently mass-produced by the greedy modern capitalists in their sophisticated distilleries.

Thus, unlike the 'potent ginger lily' in Walcott's poem, Theng'eta, the flower also associated with 'petals of blood' in the novel, is itself a victim of evil. Its original innocence has been destroyed by agents of corruption. The blood of the novel's title suggests suffering. It stands to reason therefore, that the flower with 'petals of blood' becomes the symbol of the entire society Ngugi is concerned with in the novel, a society that is potentially beautiful, healthy and productive but whose potential is unrealized and is itself destroyed by the agents of corruption and death (Palmer 1979: 290). Thus, the people of Ilmorog's decision under the inspired leadership of Nyakinyua to re-engage

in the production of the Theng'eta drink symbolises a decision by them to return to the purity of their traditional values. Contrary to this, the subsequent transformation of the drink into a debased modern spirit by the capitalists suggests the erosion of these values and the destruction of the community's traditional innocence by the corrupt and depraved agents of modernism. Like the 'potent ginger lily' in Walcott's poem, the embodiment of the agents of corruption and death as well as the depraved agents of modernism mentioned above is the post-independence Kenyan leadership.

One other pervasive symbol in *Petals of Blood* is drought. In this regard, Ngugi has used an actual historical and ecological fact, namely, the then recent disastrous drought in most of Africa for symbolic purposes with a telling effect (Palmer 1979: 291). For purposes of counterpoint however, the drought is often juxtaposed with rain symbolism. This suggests the fecundity and luxuriance which the region ought to enjoy under normal circumstances. The telling description of the people's suffering, the poverty of their harvest, the scarcity of food and the death of animals ought to convince one that the drought is an actual physical fact. However, there is no way in which one can deny its symbolic significance in the novel. The drought is also emotional, economic and political. It generally relates to the arid conditions of the lives of the people, that is, their general deprivation of all the needs which should make life meaningful to them such as good health, opportunities for the education of their children, employment and freedom from exploitation (Palmer 1979: 291). Again and again the people talk about the drought in their lives. Significantly, Wanja's yearning after release from barrenness

makes her grow more restless and moody, the more arid the environment becomes. Likewise, Munira is at one stage in the novel, powerfully in love with Wanja and after she has left Ilmorog for sometime, he soon discovers that without her, Ilmorog has become a land of drought. The physical drought and the arid emotional, spiritual, economic and political conditions of the people it symbolises, allude to the leadership's neglect of the general population while it fattens itself on the country's scarce resources.

There is also the symbol of maiming which also relates to the people's spiritual condition. The one-legged but very resourceful Abdulla, who was paralysed in the Mau Mau emergency is the most concrete symbol of the people's maimed spirits. Ironically, it is those who almost sacrificed their lives during the Mau Mau struggle for liberation that are the most degraded and exploited in the independent Kenya (Palmer 1979: 300). It is one of Abdulla's roles to emphasize this in *Petals of Blood*. He emerges as the most convincing spokesperson, an idealist who joined the struggle in the hope of helping to bring about a better future. Originally a divided self because of his ambiguous racial origins, Abdulla is subsequently transformed into a man by the great struggle. His reminiscences give one a powerful glimpse of the suffering involved in the struggle during the emergency. The very fact that Abdulla was maimed in the struggle is a concrete symbol of the sacrifice that had to be made. In this sense, he is rather like his donkey with which he is throughout the novel, closely associated. Significantly, Abdulla always refers to his donkey as his other leg. When the people, in a desperate

bid to propitiate the gods and end the drought, plan to use the donkey as a sacrificial victim and maim it, Abdulla correctly sees this as a maiming of his other leg. The physical maiming which the Ilmorogians almost extend to his donkey also relates to their maimed spiritual condition. Abdulla's lame leg is therefore merely a physical manifestation of a general spiritual fact.

After independence Abdulla's disillusionment with independence is complete:

> I waited for land reforms and redistribution.
> I waited for a job.
> I waited for a statue to Kimathi as a memorial to the fallen.
> I waited. (p. 254)

During the march to the city Abdulla becomes the rallying force that, in spite of his lame leg, sustains others through sheer resourcefulness and leadership potential. Despite the ensuing prosperity which could be attributed to his efforts, Abdulla is degraded and ends up as the most abject peasant who is forced to sell oranges and skins in order to make a living. His plight recalls that of Sergeant and Janabari in Zakes Mda's *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland*. It is understandable then, that Ngugi uses Abdulla as his spokesperson to express in mythical terms, the despicable trajectory taken by the Kenyan leadership at independence. This is what he says to Nderi wa Riera, the M P for Ilmorog, in the Ilmorogian delegation's meeting with him in the city:

> Hare and Antelope once fell into a hole. Let me climb on your back first,

> then I shall pull you out, said Hare. So Hare climbed on Antelope's back and out he jumped onto dry sunny ground. He dusted himself and started walking away. 'Heh, you are forgetting me,' shouted antelope. Hare lectured Antelope. Let me advise you my friend. I fell into the same hole with you by mistake. The trouble with you, Mr Antelope, is that you go jump-jumping leap-leaping in the air instead of firmly walking on the ground and looking to see where you are going. I am sorry but you have only yourself to blame. (p. 179)

In terms of the novel's immanent rationality, the Hare in the passage above symbolises the new leadership while the Antelope represents degraded people in the society of the novel like Abdulla.

Thus, at independence, *Petals of Blood* trumpets, it is the traitors of the people such as Chui, Mzigo and Kimeria who prosper. It is they who ride sleek Mercedes Benzes, own thousands of acres of land, housing estates and breweries, resort to golf clubs once frequented by the white imperialists where they clinch business deals, visit expensive night clubs, exploit women and hold frivolous parties (Palmer 1979: 301). Ngugi spares no pain in exposing the cynicism and hypocrisy of it all, just as he forcefully registers his concern at the exploitation of the toiling masses. He also stresses the fact that the corruption of the system results in the under-utilization and destruction of potential. For instance, in *Petals of Blood*, Wanja and Karega, both of them highly intelligent and resourceful young people who could have made a significant contribution to their nation, are forced to drop out of school. Due to his integrity and idealism, Karega is further persecuted by this society and forced to drift from one menial job to the next. There

could be no powerful symbol of this destruction of potential than Karega himself in a drunken stupor in Munira's room after he has been rescued from a night brawl:

> How now, how could the young the bright and the hopeful deteriorate so? Was there no way of using their energies and dreams to a higher purpose than the bottle, the juke-box and the sickness on a cement floor? (p. 103)

The scene of most of the events of *Petals of Blood* is the community of Ilmorog which subsequently grows from a small traditional village into a modern capitalist complex. Ilmorog represents any other Kenyan village. It is a microcosm of Kenyan society as a whole and its experiences are the paradigm of what has happened to a number of similar villages (Palmer 1979: 292). Ngugi's compelling historical presentation of the village gives the reader a glimpse of its historical past. The village was originally a purely traditional society that was unadulterated by Western values and in which the dignified, courageous peasants reckoned with their wealth in land, cows and goats. The exemplary Nyakinyua, appropriately called 'mother of men', is the living embodiment of the values of this society and the repository of its legends and history. When she sings the bawdy traditional songs during the initiation ritual, she invests them with a kind of dignity which exposes by comparison, the obscenity of the modern rendition of them at the contemporary capitalist parties. Thus, in *Petals of Blood,* Ngugi also shows tremendous concern about the clash between the old traditional values and the decadent values of the modern Kenyan capitalist society. In particular, he exposes the tendency of the modern capitalists to debase those values as when they convert the

time-honoured songs of the initiation ritual into obscene entertainment at their parties, or pervert the custom of oath-taking for their most sordid ends (Palmer 1979: 300).

At the beginning of 'Part Two', in the most impressive chapter called 'The Journey', through the use of legend and oral tale, Ngugi celebrates the valour of the first heroes of this community and shows its gradual change from an originally nomadic to an agrarian civilization. In the process, he presents its former prosperity, contentment and sense of community. As the omniscient narrator puts it:

> It (Ilmorog) had its days of glory: thriving villages with a huge population of sturdy peasants who had tamed nature's forests, breaking the soil between their fingers, had brought forth every type of crop to nourish the sons and daughters of men. (p. 120)

The imperialist intrusion which follows and the inhumanity perpetrated against the people are the first blow to Ilmorog's pride. The consequent disruption heralds the beginning of the village's decline. Right from the beginning of the novel, one realizes that the once thriving community of Ilmorog has fallen on evil times and that it appears a desolate and unprogressive place from which the young are only happy to get away. Significantly, the only young people who come to the village and stay there have all been spiritually maimed in one way or another. For instance, Munira comes to the village because he is looking for a place to hide away from the competitive adult world. Abdulla does so because he has been paralysed in the Mau Mau uprising and is disillusioned by the results of independence. Wanja comes to Ilmorog because she is

disgusted by her life as a prostitute in the city and is yearning for the fulfilment of motherhood. Finally, Karega also comes to the village because he has been expelled from school and is unable to make headway in the modern capitalist Kenya.

In the first part of the novel, Ilmorog is blighted by drought and its community's suffering is enhanced by its neglect by the political leadership, in particular, its Member of Parliament, Nderi wa Riera. After he has obtained votes from his constituency, Nderi stays away in the city and concentrates on his capitalist enterprises. Eventually, Karega, the bright young teacher in the community, puts forward the daring plan that they should march to the city, confront their Member of Parliament and force him to acknowledge his responsibilities. With the imminence of the march, the people of Ilmorog discover a new spirit. This is a community spirit that induces both men and women to pool their resources in preparation for the journey. This symbolises the return of the pristine Ilmorog spirit when their warriors used to go out in pursuit of hostile nations who had stolen their goats and cattle and would not return until they had recovered their stolen wealth (Palmer 1979: 293). The journey to the city is an ordeal which tests the people's capacity for endurance and brings out the best in the leaders such as Wanja, Karega and Abdulla. The success of the march in alerting the whole of Kenya to the plight of the people of Ilmorog is the turning point in the village's fortune.

One other very important para-linguistic affective device Ngugi employs in *Petals of Blood* is the symbolic journey referred to above. In the novel, the journey operates at

two levels. On one level, there is the physical journey that takes place in Part Two. On the other level, the whole novel is conceived as a journey. The phrase, 'Walking Towards Bethlehem To Be Born Again', covers most of the novel and the book itself is consequently conceived as a journey towards Bethlehem for rebirth (Ngara 1985: 77). In his use of the journey motif, Ngugi alludes to Yeats' poem, 'The Second Coming', which ends thus: 'And what beast, its hour come round at last, slouches towards Bethlehem to be born.?' (Ngara 1985: 77). In the poem, Yeats expresses his then, perceived end of the Christian era and the coming of another era. According to him, the rough beast which slouches towards Bethlehem to be born symbolises the advent of a new epoch which is to replace the Christian era. One possible interpretation is that Yeats prophesied the coming of socialism, and that henceforth, socialist values were to replace Christian values just as Christian civilization had replaced Roman civilization in Europe (Ngara 1985: 77). It is significant that the poem was published a couple of years after the October Revolution of 1917 which established the first socialist government in the world.

However, Yeats does refer to the Second Coming of Christ as described in St Matthew's Gospel (Chapter 24), and in *Petals of Blood,* references to the Second Coming occur several times. If for Yeats the Second Coming of Christ meant the advent of a new epoch, for Ngugi in *Petals of Blood*, this rebirth has a multiplicity of meanings. Among other things, it symbolises the rebirth of Karega and Munira in their new visions of life. More importantly however, walking towards Bethlehem to be born

again are the people of Kenya. This is symbolised by the journey of the masses of Ilmorog to Nairobi. Thus, in Ngugi's view, Kenya is about to enter another struggle after which another republic will be born, that is, a socialist republic. This interpretation is borne out by a number of events described in the novel. In the first place, the workers in Ilmorog are towards the end of the novel, on strike in support of Karega, 'the trade union agitator', and are now talking in terms of a movement of all the workers in Ilmorog. Workers in other parts of the country, Nairobi for instance, are also reported to be in action. Lastly, there is now talk of another war of liberation. As the girl Akinyi reports these to him, Karega conceives a vision of a new Kenya:

> Tomorrow it would be the workers and the peasants leading the struggle and seizing power to overturn the system and all its prying, blood-thirsty gods and gnomic angels, bringing to end the reign of the few over the many and the era of drinking blood and feasting on human flesh. (p. 344)

After the journey, Ilmorog is earmarked for rapid development and this is accompanied by visible signs of revival in the community. The revival is in the novel, suggested by means of rain symbolism. The rain which falls immediately after the march is in the opinion of the elders in the village, God's response to their sacrifices. In addition to this, Ngugi also suggests images of fecundity and fertilization to demonstrate the earth's response to the rain:

> This waiting earth: its readiness powered Wanja's wings of expectation and numerous desires. Feverishly she looked out for tomorrow, waiting

> like the other women, for earth to crack, earth to be thrust open by the naked shoots of life. (p. 196).

Some of the images are taken directly from oral tradition:

> The older folk told stories of how Rain, Sun and Wind went a-wooing Earth, Sister of Moon, and it was Rain that carried the day, and that was why Earth grew a swollen belly after being touched by Rain. Others said no, the raindrops were really the sperms of God and that even human beings sprang from the womb on Mother Earth soon after the original passionate downpour, torrential waters of the beginning. (p. 196).

This spirit of rebirth finds a counterpart in the erstwhile arid souls of individual characters: 'Wanja was possessed of the rain spirit. She walked through it, clothes drenched, skirt-hem tight against her thighs, revelling in the waters from heaven' (p. 196). Although walking in the rain is always a sign of good times to come in Ngugi's novels, the luxuriance which pervades Ilmorog at this time is however, different from that of earlier similar times because it is punctuated by doubts. With memories of their experience in the city still fresh in their minds, the people are uncomfortably aware of a more troubled world 'which could, any time, descend upon them breaking asunder their rain-filled sun-warmed calm' (p. 197). The people's doubts are subsequently justified. As the capitalists move in with their roads, banks, factories, distilleries and estate agencies, the old traditional Ilmorog is irreplaceably destroyed. The destruction of the hut of the mysterious spirit, Mwathi wa Mugo, by a giant bulldozer is a concrete symbol of the annihilation of this once-proud society by the forces of modernism. One

watches with profound sympathy as the bewildered and deceived peasants who are unable to match the business acumen and financial standing of the big men from the city, inevitably lose their lands and all their possessions and helplessly degenerate into labourers.

Just like in his earlier writing, Ngugi is in *Petals of Blood,* mainly concerned with land. He is concerned about the way Africans have been alienated from the land, first by the imperial colonialists and subsequently, by a class of African landlords who because of their connections with the forces of world capitalism are able to afford the purchase price of the land (Killam 1980: 102). It is through the question of how the land can be re-achieved that Ngugi links the Kenyan people's struggle to that of other movements in the Third World. More than once in the novel, this unity of experience and purpose is conveyed through references to 'Chaka ... Toussant ... Samori ... Nat Turner ... Arap Manyei ... Mondlane ... Cabral ... Kimathi ... Nkrumah and others.' The fictional embodiment of these figures in *Petals of Blood* is Ole Masai and Abdulla.

What happens to Ilmorog, that is, how it is converted from a worn-out village to a glistening, neon-lighted new town points to what the modernizing process, in the sway of foreign capitalism can do to a people (Killam 1980: 102). As Karega perceives it:

> Within only ten years-how time galloped, he thought-Ilmorog peasants had been displaced from the land: some had joined the army of workers, others were semi-workers with one foot in a plot of land and one foot in

> a factory, while others became petty traders in hovels and shanties they did not even own, along the Trans-Africa Road, or criminals and prostitutes who with their stolen guns and over-used cunts eked a precarious living from each and everybody-workers, peasants, factory owners, blacks, whites-indiscriminately. There were a few who tried their hands at making sufurias, karais, water tins, chicken feeding troughs, shoemakers, carpenters; but how long would they last, seeing that they were being driven out of their trade by more organised big-scale production of the same stuff? The herdsmen had suffered a similar fate: some had died; others had been driven even further out into drier parts away from the newly enclosed game-parks for tourists, and yet others had become hired labourers on wheat fields or on farms belonging to wealthier peasants. And behind it all, as a monument to the changes, was the Trans-Africa Road and the two-storied building of the African Economic Bank Ltd. (p. 302)

The gravity of the general circumstances described in the passage above are made vivid in Nyakinyua's attempt to resist the bank's confiscation of her land. The courageous Nyakinyua is in *Petals of Blood* given real tragic stature when she decides single-handed, to put up a determined fight against all the forces that have deprived her of her heritage. Her resolution constitutes the last flagging attempt of the once dignified and secure society to resist the encroachments of the new men. This is however, doomed to failure, and the reluctance of others to support her suggests the demoralization that pervades Ilmorog at this time:

> Nyakinyua, the old woman, tried to fight. She tramped from hut to hut calling upon the peasants of Ilmorog to get together and fight it out. They

> looked at her and they shook their heads: whom would they fight now? The Government? The Banks? KCO? The party? Nderi? Yes who would they really fight? But she tried to convince them that all these were one and that she would fight them. Her land would never be settled by strangers. There was something grand, and defiant in the woman's action-she with her failing health and flesh trying to organise the dispossessed of Ilmorog into protest. But there was pathos in the exercise. Those whose land had not yet been taken looked nervously aloof and distant. One or two even made disparaging remarks about an old woman not quite right in the head. Others genuinely not seeing the point of a march to Ruwa-ini or to the Big City restrained her. But she said: 'I'll go alone ... my man fought the white man. He paid for it with his blood .... I'll struggle against these black oppressors ... alone ...' (p. 276)

Soon after this, Ilmorog is transformed into a capitalist complex with all the attendant problems of prostitution, social inequalities and inadequate housing for the poor. The village has twice been exploited and destroyed, initially by the foreign imperialists and this time, by their successors, the black imperialists. It is against this background of the community's dispossession that on his return to New Ilmorog, in seeing what has happened to the village, Karega reflects that:

> Kenya, the soil, was the people's common shamba, and there was no way it could be right for a few, or a section, or a single nationality, to inherit for their sole use what was communal, any more than it would be right for a few sons and daughters to own and monopolise their father and mother. It was better for him to get reconciled to his situation: since the only thing that he had now was his two hands, he would somehow sell its

> creative power to whoever would buy it and then join with all the other hands in ensuring that at least they had a fair share of what their thousand sets of fingers produced. (p. 302)

Wanja is one character in *Petals of Blood* who is central to Ngugi's development of his theme of social disintegration (Palmer 1979: 298). Her portrayal represents a thorough demonstration of the causes of prostitution in modern African societies. Seduced at an early age by an irresponsible married man old enough to be her father, she finds herself pregnant just as she is about to embark on higher education, and has to leave home rather than endure the taunts and cruelty of her parents. In desperation, Wanja murders her baby and is herself thrown in the big city, on the mercies of even unscrupulous men who are determined to exploit and degrade her further.

Thus, through his depiction of Wanja, Ngugi gives a sympathetic presentation of prostitutes, that is, the fact that they are products of their social circumstances (Ngara 1985: 80). Wanja takes the only route open to her in life. She is forced to play the tough city game in order to survive in the jungle in which she finds herself. After her regeneration in Ilmorog, when she discovers a new sense of purpose in helping to engineer the society's revival, she is thrown back into high class prostitution through the intrigues of the new imperialists. Wanja chooses to exploit rather than to be exploited by the moneyed class when New Ilmorog comes into being. Although she is creative and imaginative, Wanja is also a practical realist who recognises that in order to survive in this society, she must use its weapons. In her view, mere idealism will never work:

> Kimeria, who made his fortune as a Home Guard transporting bodies of Mau Mau killed by the British, was still prospering .... Kimeria who had ruined my life and later humiliated me by making me sleep with him during our journey to the city .... This same Kimeria was one of those who would benefit from the new economic progress of Ilmorog. Why? Why? I asked myself? Why? Why? Had he not sinned as much as me? That's how one night I fully realized this law. Eat or you are eaten .... I have had to be hard .... It is the only way ... the only way .... Look at Abdulla ... reduced to a fruit seller ... oranges ... sheepskins .... No I will never return to the herd of victims .... Never ... never. (pp. 293-4)

Ngugi imputes to Wanja a stature larger than life. She is stronger than all those around her, survives ordeals they do not and ultimately controls her destiny in a way they cannot. She has worked as a barmaid and as Ngugi puts it 'is a member of the most ruthlessly exploited category of women in Kenya' (Ngugi cited in Killam 1980: 100). Thus, Wanja stands for Kenyan womanhood because of her experiences of what happens at every social level in the country. For Abdulla, she symbolises the source of the new creative energy in Ilmorog:

> Under her firm guidance, Ilmorog suddenly seemed to expand: new roads, influx of workers, banks, experts, dancers and numerous small traders and crafts. He saw the changes as something being brought about by Wanja's magic. What a woman! One in a thousand! For she seemed to him anyway, the true centre of all the numerous activities that were working in obedience to an invisible law .... He applauded her selfless act of honour in redeeming her family land. (pp. 310-11)

Wanja enters her career as a whore-mistress frankly and honestly and accommodates herself to her perceived new law of the land, 'Eat or you are eaten', of which her new profession is a reflection. This is evident in what she says to Abdulla:

> My heart is tearless about what I have committed myself to. You know I have tried. Where was I to throw these girls that were part of the old Theng'eta premises? To others too who would profit from their bodies? No, I am not doing this for their sakes. From now onwards it will be: Wanja First. I have valued your friendship. And I hope we can remain friends. But this is my cup. I must drink it. (pp. 311-12)

Although one may not agree with Wanja's profession, one certainly feels compelled to appreciate her reasons.

Throughout *Petals of Blood*, Wanja is associated with fire symbolism. She is involved in at least four fires. The first is the gruesome one in which her aunt is killed and which breeds a neurotic dread for fires in her. The second one occurs during her life of prostitution in the city in which she is almost destroyed. The third is accidentally started by Munira in Wanja's hut soon after her arrival in Ilmorog. The last one is the murderous conflagration deliberately engineered by Munira and which claims the lives of Chui, Mzigo and Kimeria. The fire is significant on several levels. On the first level, it is literally an agent of destruction and a threat to Wanja's existence. Thus, in a sense, all the various occurrences of fire in the novel are a prefiguration of Munira's destructive act at the end. On another level, the fire also represents a ritual of baptism. Wanja

undergoes an ordeal by fire in the process of which she is exposed to the horrors of existence, her character is tested and she emerges slightly tarnished but toughened (Palmer 1980: 299). On the third level, the fire is a purifying agent that represents a kind of cleansing for Wanja. It reminds her 'of the water and the fire of the beginning and the water and the fire of the Second Coming to cleanse and bring purity to our earth of human cruelty' (p. 65). Ironically, this is what Munira's arson towards the end of the novel does for her:

> She wanted a new life ... clean .... She felt this was the meaning of her recent escape. Already she felt the stirring of a new person ... she had after all been baptised by fire. And to think that it was Munira and Abdulla who were instrumental in her double narrow escapes, in her getting yet another chance to try out new paths, new possibilities? (p. 337)

Wanja is the most important woman character in *Petals of Blood*. Unlike Munira, a character who is associated with closed spaces throughout the novel, her dynamism and vitality are suggested by her association with the fields and plains. She belongs to the remarkable breed of Ngugi's women in his earlier writing, all of whom are brave, resilient, resourceful and determined (Palmer 1979: 297). Significantly, there is an element of masculinity in all these women, just as there is an element of feminity in all of Ngugi's men. Perhaps the women have to be masculine in order to make up for their menfolk's indecision and lack of resolution. Thus, it cannot be denied that it is the more masculine aspects of Wanja's character that Ngugi stresses in *Petals of Blood*.

One other principal character in the novel is Munira, the teacher who decides to settle in Ilmorog. Ngugi's devotees cannot fail to recognise in Munira, reminiscences of the writer's three heroes in his three earlier novels (Palmer 1979: 295). In *The River Between*, Waiyaki like Munira, fails to attain the stature of a manly hero through his indecision. Likewise, in *Weep Not, Child*, Njoroge also like Munira, pins his faith on education and refuses to face the world of adult responsibility. Finally, like Munira, Mugo in *A Grain of Wheat*, is tortured by a sense of guilt and insecurity. Unlike Mugo however, Munira's sense of insecurity degenerates into inferiority complex, a conviction of his irretrievable mediocrity (Palmer 1979: 295). During his student days at Siriana, he had been involved in a strike that resulted in his expulsion. Other leaders of the strike like Chui were able to reorganise their lives through sheer determination and resilience. In contrast, due to his lack of capacity to engage in a world of adult endeavour and experience, Munira can only drift from one failure to another. He is in *Petals of Blood*, a passive spectator that hovers on the fringes of important actions, and thereby withdraws from involvement like Mugo in *A Grain of Wheat*. However, while Mugo wishes to be left alone as an act of deliberate policy in order to guarantee success, Munira's solitude is a concomitant of his character and personality.

Since Munira's passionate desire is a safe place in which to hide and do some work, he withdraws to the remote village of Ilmorog and settles down to the career of a teacher. There, safe from the competitive adult world, and away from the glare of publicity, the intellectually timid Munira can create his own empire and at last becomes

a leader and a success. He is therefore at his best in the classroom, although even there, his ego takes a tremendous deflation whenever his students ask him difficult questions or when any of his brighter teachers proves more persuasive in argument. Ngugi uses significant images to define Munira's character. Firstly, he uses the image of the closed space. While the people of Ilmorog as a whole are associated with open spaces such as the fields and the plains, Munira is associated with the four walls of a room: 'and they were all busy putting seeds in the soil, and he watched them from the safety of his classroom or of Abdulla's shop' (p. 24). This recalls Mugo's symbolic bolting of himself within the four walls of his hut in order to guarantee security against the encroachments of the outside world. Secondly, Munira is associated with images of darkness, shadows and twilight:

> Munira relished twilight as a prelude to that awesome shadow. He looked forward to the unwilled immersion into darkness. He would then be part of everything: the plants, animals, people, huts, without consciously choosing the link. To choose involved effort, decision, preference of one possibility, and this could be painful. He had chosen not to choose, a freedom he daily celebrated walking between his house, Abdulla's place and of course Wanja's hut. (p. 71)

Palmer (1979: 296) points out however, that Ngugi's portrayal of Munira in the earlier sections of the novel shows keen psychological understanding. At this point, not only does one gain an insight into his thoughts and actions but also into the forces which have conditioned him. Munira's shrinking, introspective personality is an unconscious

reaction partly due to his overbearing, contemptuous and successful proprietor-father, and partly to his materialistic and no less successful brothers and sisters who have been able to carve niches for themselves in the highly competitive capitalist Kenyan society. Although Munira possesses a certain measure of idealism, it is Palmer's (1979: 296) view however, that it would be a mistake to suppose that his withdrawal from involvement is due to an idealistic revulsion against his competitive, materialistic and corrupt society.

However, Munira succeeds in his career as a teacher and after some initial setbacks, becomes accepted and idolized by the people like Waiyaki in *The River Between* and Mugo in *A Grain of Wheat*. He thus achieves a sense of fulfilment at last and his love for Wanja pulls him into involvement. The sexual prowess he demonstrates in his lovemaking, both with Wanja and later with Lillian, helps give him the sense of mastery and masculinity which he has hitherto completely failed to manifest in the world of adult affairs. However, it is his very association with Wanja which reveals the cracks in his personality and eventually leads to his disintegration. When Karega arrives on the scene he deals a heavy blow to Munira's self-respect by winning Wanja's love.

The journey marks a turning point in the lives of Munira, Karega, Abdulla and Wanja. For them, it is more than a physical journey. It is a spiritual journey as well:

> For the journey had presented each with a set of questions for which there were no ready answers; had, because of what they had seen and

experienced, thrown up challenges that could neither be forgotten nor put on one side, for they touched on things deep in the psyche, in their separate conceptions of what is meant to be human, a man, alive and free. (p. 197)

After the journey both Munira and Karega undergo a profound transformation. In the first place, Munira begins to be jealous of Karega and to hate him. The hatred surfaces after Karega's confession which takes place during the Theng'eta drinking ceremony. Munira accuses Karega of having driven his sister, Mukami, to her death and of mentioning her in a dream in the same breath as 'a prostitute', a reference to Wanja. In reality, however, Munira's motives are mixed here. His hatred is largely the outcome of Wanja's preference for Karega, for as she confesses to Munira later on, Karega has given back to her, her sense of integrity as a woman. Thus, from an ideological point of view, the difference between the two men becomes much clearer after the journey (Ngara 1985: 78).

Munira is subsequently converted by a charismatic Christian movement which is critical of what it sees as the hypocrisy and worldliness of the organised church, and preaches equality between the poor and the wealthy. The movement teaches its followers to scorn this world and to fight for the kingdom of God. Munira is therefore born again in a fanatical evangelical way. Ironically, obsessed with his idea of saving people from this vile world, Munira goes to the extent of committing murder . He sets Wanja's whorehouse on fire, his intention being to save Karega from Wanja's evil ways. Again, Munira's motives are mixed here. It happens that it is not Karega who is in Wanja's

whorehouse at the time of its burning however. Instead, there are the three compradors: the three African directors of Theng'eta Breweries namely, Chui, Mzigo and Kimeria. Significantly, the fire Munira lights and which swallows Wanja's house forms a shape that looks like 'petals of blood': 'He stood on the hill and watched the whorehouse burn, the tongues of the flame from the four corners forming petals of blood, making a twilight of the dark sky' (p. 333). Thus, the title of *Petals of Blood* is also associated with Munira. One sees the same association of 'petals of blood' with this character in other parts of the novel. The expression 'petals of blood' is first used by one of his own school children to refer to a beanflower which like the Theng'eta plant, also grows wild in the plains:

> One cried out:
> 'Look. A flower with petals of blood'.
> It was a solitary red beanflower in a field dominated by white, blue and violet flowers. No matter how you looked at it, it gave you the impression of a flow of blood. Munira bent over it and with a trembling hand plucked it. It had probably been the light playing upon it, for now it was just a red flower. 'There is no colour called blood. What you mean is that it is red. You see? You must learn the names of the seven colours of the rainbow. Flowers are of different colours. Now I want each one of you to pick a flower ... count the number of petals and pistils and show me its pollen ...' He stood looking at the flower he had plucked and threw the lifeless petals away. Yet another boy cried: 'I have found another. Petals of blood-I mean red .... It has no stigma or pistil ... nothing inside'. He went to him and the others surrounded him: 'No, you are wrong', he said taking the flower. 'This colour is not even red ... it does not have the fullness of

> colour of the other one. This one is yellowish red. Now you say it has nothing inside. Look at the stem from which you got it. You see anything?' 'Yes', cried the boys. 'There is a worm-a green worm with several hands or legs.' 'Right. This is a worm-eaten flower ... it cannot bear fruit. That's why we must always kill worms .... A flower can also become this colour if it's prevented from reaching light.' (pp. 21-2)

Munira describes this flower with 'petals of blood' as a fruitless one: 'This is a worm-eaten flower', he says, 'It cannot bear fruit' (p. 22). Later on, Munira himself uses the expression 'petals of blood' in the context of the murders he commits. This takes one back to Derek Walcott's poem at the very beginning of the novel where one is told about a serpent-like and dangerous flower. Munira is in fact a worm-eaten petal of blood, poisonous and incapable of bearing fruit (Ngara 1985: 80). From this materialist standpoint, Ngugi depicts Munira's conversion as a kind of confused mysticism and religious idealism.

The section of the novel in which Ngugi analyses the rivalry between Munira and Karega for Wanja's love is compelling. His presentation of Munira, the basically immature man tortured by sexual jealousy, is very realistic. Munira takes every opportunity to find fault with Karega's work and finally engineers his dismissal on a most flimsy pretext. Through the squalid manoeuvring , he alienates whatever sympathy the reader may originally have been tempted to accord him. Contrary to him, Mugo retains the reader's sympathy right up to the end of *A Grain of Wheat* because of his basic honesty, integrity, humanity and willingness to acknowledge his faults. Thus, Munira

becomes a hypocrite, a liar and a destroyer whose conduct is hardly alleviated by any extenuating circumstances. He becomes no different from the other forces that have plagued and degraded Karega in *Petals of Blood,* in particular, the post-independence Kenyan leadership.

Ngugi knows what has gone into his creation of Munira. He, in the way his life has developed, reveals a pattern of action and reaction that is seen mostly from a religious point of view and which has shaped the sensibility of modern Kenya (Killam 1980: 105). Evidently, as much as he deplores the effect of more formal Christian religion, Ngugi attacks the hysterical brand of charismatic evangelicalism practised by Munira in the latter third of the novel. In his view, both forms of Christianity divert people's attention away from contemplating the real nature of their circumstances and what they must do to correct this. Thus, Ngugi uses Munira effectively to castigate a character whom he holds the most loathsome in *Petals of Blood,* his father, Ezekiel Waweru. In his view, Munira's father represents those Kenyans who over the years, have persistently sided with the oppressor.

Munira's father is a devout Presbyterian and a rich conservative who is tough with his workers. Ngugi's anger at the thought of such a man coarsens the narrator's irony into sarcasm: 'They (the workers) nearly all had one thing in common: submission to the lord ... there were of course some who had devilish spirits which drove them to demand higher wages and create trouble on the farm' (p. 14). A few lines later, the narrative

voice recounts an incident from Munira's youth in which religious submissiveness is very tactfully observed. After his first sin with 'a bad woman at Kamiritho' Munira fails to confess at church because he fears that the faithful will not believe him. Instead, he makes a match-box model of the prostitute's house, burns it with cow dung, and is afterwards 'at ease with himself and peaceful in his knowledge of being accepted by the lord' (p. 14). During the night a barn takes fire from the smouldering sacrifice and he feels as if his father knows this. This further adds 'to his consciousness of guilt'.

Ezekiel's apostasy is complete He denies his own father and becomes a Christian because political strength and monetary reward are with the missionaries. He refuses to take the oath in support of the independence movement and thus denies the legitimate claims of his countrymen. Finally, he sides with the new imperialists to divide the Kenyan people. Munira's denunciation of his father is intimidating in the political attitudes it expresses:

> And yet in 196-, after independence, you took an oath to divide the Kenyan people and to protect the wealth in the hands of only a few. What was the difference? Was an oath not an oath? Kneel down, old man, and ask the forgiveness of Christ. In heaven, in the eyes of God, there are no poor, or rich, this or that tribe, all who have repented are equal in His eyes. (p. 341)

Clearly, Karega and the lawyer are the embodiment of Ngugi's moral positives in *Petals of Blood*. They are the spokesmen for the socialist solution he proposes through the

novel. However, while the lawyer, like Armah's Teacher in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, is an idealized symbol of perfection and purity, a mere voice who gives his views in lengthy speeches rather than a character that plays a part in the drama, Karega is an active character who is convincingly portrayed. Like Wanja, he is a dynamic, vital individual who is also associated with the plains, and who brings to his vocation as a teacher a drive and an intellectual power which puts Munira in a shade. Together, he and Wanja act as forces of regeneration in Ilmorog and significantly, their love-making is described in ritualistic terms. They frequently appear in scenes of vegetation and they are evidently associated with the luxuriance and freshness of such scenes. There is also a suggestion that their mating heralds the dawn of a new day: 'Wake up, Wanja', Karega called out to her ... ' Wake up and see signs of dawn over Ilmorog' (p. 230).

Thus, if there is any hope for the future, it is really Karega who holds it. It is him who confirms one's impression that Ngugi has gradually been leaning over to socialism as the solution to Africa's problems. Through his spokesman, Karega, Ngugi also seems to imply that socialism was a natural way of life in traditional African society. Appalled by the capitalism and materialism he sees around him, in a world:

> built on a structure of inequality and injustice, in a world where some can eat while others can only toil, some can send their children to school and others cannot, in a world where a prince, a monarch, a business man can sit on billions while people starve or hit their heads against church walls

> for divine deliverance from hunger, yes in a world where a man who has never set foot on this land can sit in a New York office and determine what I shall eat, read, think, do, only because he sits on a heap of billions taken from the world's poor (p. 240),

Karega comes to the conclusion that for a proper and equitable reorganization of society, the people must go back to their African origins to learn lessons from the way in which African peoples produced and organized their wealth before colonialism.

The implication of this is that it was colonialism that brought inequality, injustice and capitalism to Africa. Karega feels that a thorough study of the African past would reveal systems which were fair and equitable and in which wealth was owned by those who produced it and where there was virtually no unemployment. In a bid to bring about this kind of socialist society in modern Kenya, Karega becomes a trade union agitator, tirelessly mobilizing the workers and the masses until a world can be created in which:

> goodness and beauty and strength and courage would be seen, not in how cunning one can be, not in how much power to oppress one possessed, but only in one's contribution in creating a more humane world in which the inherited inventive genius of man in culture and science from all ages and climes would be not the monopoly of a few, but for the use of all... (p. 303)

There is no doubt that Ngugi endorses Karega's socialist analysis and sees his solution, that is, the solidarity of the workers and the masses as the hope for the future.

In addition to the evident intimacy of his views to Ngugi's, Karega's socialist stance is intricately bound up with questions of education. In *Petals of Blood*, education is discussed a great deal and significantly, four of the principal characters namely, Munira, Karega, Chui and Mzigo, are teachers. The complexities and coincidences of the relationships between these characters play a vital thematic role in the narrative structure of the novel. Chui and Munira have been school boys together at Siriana. Chui is something of a legend as a scholar and sportsman. It is he who leads a strike against the pedagogy of the headmaster, Fraudsham. Chui causes so much bother that he is sent overseas to complete his studies there. The pattern of Chui's life repeats itself in Karega. In the succeeding generation, Karega leads a strike to have Fraudsham fired. This time the strike succeeds, Fraudsham is deposed and ironically replaced by Chui. As a result of this, Karega and his classmates anticipate a new beginning and a reform of the curriculum. However, Chui proves to be a black replica of Fraudsham as he re-affirms what for Karega and his fellows are the out-worn traditions of cultivating an alien culture at school. It is on these grounds that Palmer observes that in *Petals of Blood*:

> The purpose and content of imperialist education is thoroughly scrutinised and its relevance to the African situation questioned. It is presented as an oppressive, irrelevant, and racialist system obviously geared towards perpetuating white domination and instilling into the pupils a respect for British institutions and attitudes. Cambridge Fraudsham, the eccentric headmaster who terrorises his pupils and eventually provokes student riots, is the embodiment of this educational process. But his successor

> Chui, an African who in his student days has been victimised by the oppressive imperialist system and might therefore have been expected to effect changes, turns out to be more British in his attitudes and policies than Fraudsham himself. (Palmer cited in McEwan 1983: 114-5)

For Chui, this is the first step on the road towards becoming an investor in the foreign exploitation of his country. Contrary to this, for Karega, it is the beginning of his quest for a purpose in his life, a quest that is connected to the amelioration of the lives of the exploited masses. It must be done, he conceives, through education. However, Karega wrestles with what kind of education it should be. His sense of purpose is confirmed when in a hallucinary, Theng'eta-induced dream, he encounters his long dead brother, Nding'uri. Karega shouts after Nding'uri: 'I want to follow you!' Nding'uri stops and he is both weary and angry:

> What kind of teacher are you? Leave your children adrift? The struggle, brother, starts where you are. (p. 237)

The question of how to advance the struggle challenges Karega. He seeks through formal learning to find truths which he can convey to his pupils. He turns to history, political science and literature for answers but he finds none. It is the lawyer, the shadowy and ambiguous figure the marchers have met in Nairobi who points out certain fallacies and fallibilities in formal learning to Karega:

> You had asked me for books written by Black professors. I wanted you to judge for yourself. Educators, men of letters, intellectuals: these are

> only voices-not neutral, disembodied voices - but belonging to bodies of persons, of groups, of interests. You, who will seek the truth about words emitted by a voice, look first for the body behind the voice. The voice merely rationalises the needs, whims, caprices, of its owner, the master. Better therefore to know the master in whose service the intellect is and you'll be able to properly evaluate the import and imagery of his utterances. You serve the people who struggle; or you serve those who rob the people. In a situation in which the old man of the sea is sitting on Sinbad, there can be no neutral history and politics. If you would learn look about you: choose your side. (p. 200)

Karega's bewilderment over the failure of formal learning to provide the answers he needs seems to be an anagram of Ngugi's own disillusionment. The names he associates with the formal inquiries of history, political science and literature are scholars from his own country. Whatever his disillusionment however, Karega's procedures as a teacher are shown to contrast in a favourable light with Munira's throughout the period of their association. While Munira believes that pupils should be given 'simple facts. Information, just so they can pass their CPE' (p. 246), Karega disputes this claim:

> I cannot accept that there is a stage in our growths as human beings when all we need are so-called facts and information. Man is a thinking being from the time he is born to the time he dies. He looks, he hears, he touches, he smells, he tastes and he sifts all these impressions in his mind to arrive at a certain outlook in his direct experience of life. Are there pure facts? When I am looking at you, how much I see of you is conditioned by where I stand or sit; by the amount of light in this room; by

> the power of my eyes; by whether my mind is occupied with other thoughts and what thoughts. Surely the story we teach about the seven blind men who had never seen an elephant is instructive. Looking and touching, then, do involve interpretation. Even assuming that there were pure facts, what about their selection? Does this not involve interpretation? (p. 246)

In Karega's view, learning and teaching are inseparable: 'In teaching the children, he had sensed a possible vocation, a daily dialogue with his deepest self, as he tried to understand the children and the world which shaped their future and their chances in life' (p. 252). Even though he abandons formal learning and teaching and says 'besides, what else was there to learn besides what he had experienced with his eyes and hands?' (p. 302), his mission as a union leader will be to teach since he will have to convey the truth to the peasants and workers that there has to be a choice between capitalism and socialism.

Ngugi's rendering of history is consistent with his political purposes in the novel and follows the Marxist process of evolution (Killam 1980: 109). Marx describes this process from feudal to bourgeoisie capitalism and eventually, to proletarianism. In *Petals of Blood*, Ngugi's analysis is at the stage where class antagonism between the capitalists and proletariat is polarized. Unlike Marx however, Ngugi celebrates Africa's glorious past in numerous passages in the novel. He is also pragmatic in recognizing that history, the contemplation of the past, offers no short cuts to the solution to problems in the present (Killam 1980: 109). In his view, solutions which make for the

brighter future will come at the end of a long and arduous class struggle. He believes that the struggle will have its origins in the peasantry.

In the third part of the novel, Ngugi draws more on traditional verbal material than elsewhere in his writing. He uses this to enforce a sense of community derived from custom and a system of village ethics which suppresses individualism in the interests of the common good. For example, one sees Nyakinyua and Njuguna providing what Killam (1980: 110) calls an 'opera of eros' at the ceremony of the first Theng'eta making. Perhaps, this is the last manifestation of a group of villagers acting in a communal way. In this scene, the young and old, celebrating the harvest, form a circle and move to the rhythm of the chanting of Nyakinyua and act as a chorus to the ceremony they perform in mime and song. In the chanting, the history of the village moves forward from the dim mists of early times through to the present. The change which subsequently rends the society apart is manifest from the last segment of her song:

> They listened to Nyakinyua as she sang Gitiro. At first it was good-humoured, light-hearted, as she commented on those present to a chorus of laughter. But suddenly they were caught by the slight tremor in her voice. She was singing their recent history. She sang of two years of failing rains; of the arrival of daughters and teachers, of the exodus to the city. She talked of how she had earlier imagined the city as containing only wealth. But she found poverty; she found crippled beggars; she saw men, many men, sons of women, vomited out of a smoking tunnel-a big,

> big house - and she was afraid. What had swallowed all the wealth of the land? Who? And now it was no longer the drought of a year ago that she was singing bout. It was all the droughts of the centuries and the journey was the many journeys travelled by people even in the mythical lands of two-mouthed Marimus and struggling humans. She sang of other struggles, of other wars-the arrival of colonialism and the fierce struggles waged against it by new circumcised youth. Yes it was always the duty of the youth to drive out foreigners and enemies lodged amongst the people: it was always the duty of youth to fight all the Marimus, all the two-mouthed Ogres, and that was the meaning of blood shed at circumcision. (pp. 209-10)

In this recapitulation of the history of his people, Karega recognizes the force of traditional ethics and the beauty of the history of the people Nyakinyua sings about. In the end however, Karega feels that the account has no relevance in the present:

> It was really beautiful. But at the end of the evening Karega felt very sad. It was like beholding a relic of beauty that had suddenly surfaced, or like listening to a solitary beautiful tune straying, for a time, from a dying world. (p. 210)

In his view, the struggle is in the future and he is moved to recognise that the past is of no use to the present struggle:

> Even in himself he could not recognise the dreamer who once could talk endlessly about Africa's past glories, Africa's great feudal cultures, as if it was enough to have this knowledge to cure ones day's pang of hunger,

to quench an hour's thirst or to clothe a naked child. After all, the British merchant magnates and their missionary soothsayers once colonised and humiliated China by making the Chinese buy and drink opium and clubbed them when they refused to import the poison, even while the British scholars sang of China's great feudal cultures and stole the evidence in gold and art and parchments and took them to London. Egypt too. India too. Syria, Iraq ... God was born in Palestine even ... and all this knowledge never once deterred the European merchant warlords. And China was saved, not by singers and poets telling of great past cultures, but by the creative struggle of the workers for a better day today. No, it was not a people's past glories only, but also the glory of their present strife and struggles to right the wrongs that bring tears to the many and laughter only to a few. The Ilmorog whose past achievements had moved him so after listening to Nyakinyua was not there any more. (pp. 301-2)

Although *Petals of Blood* is open to the charge of political attitudinizing, generally, the political attitudes Ngugi strikes and the political questions he examines through the events and actions of the characters in the novel are balanced by his humanism. This quality is best summed up in Karega's statement to Wanja:

> Whenever any one of us is degraded and humiliated, even the smallest child, we are all humiliated and degraded because it has got to do with human beings. (p. 161)

At the end of the novel there is hope for Wanja and her child by Abdulla. Abdulla, who has at last found a kind of peace for himself recognizes that:

> History was a dance in a huge arena of God. You played your part, whatever your chosen part, and then you left the arena, swept aside by the waves of a new step, a new movement in the dance. Other dancers, younger, brighter, more inventive came and played with even greater skill, with more complicated footwork, before they too were swept aside by yet a greater tide in the movement they had helped to create, and other dancers were thrown up to carry the dance to even newer heights and possibilities undreamt of by an earlier generation. (p. 340)

This metaphor is worked out in the life of Joseph who, ironically, repeats the cycle in which Munira, Chui and Karega were involved. Joseph is at Siriana. His catalogue of complaints about Chui's regime is reminiscent of those of Karega. His aspirations are identical to those of Karega: This is what he says to Abdulla:

> When I grow up and finish school and university I want to be like you: I would like to feel proud that I had done something for our people. You fought for the political independence of this country: I would like to contribute to the liberation of the people of this country. I have been reading a lot about Mau Mau. I hope that one day we shall make Karuna-ini, where Kimathi was born, and Othaya, where J.M was born, national shrines. And build a theatre in memory of Kimathi, because as a teacher he organised the Gichamu Theatre movement in Tetu .... I have been reading a lot about what the workers and peasants of other lands have done in history. I have read about the people 's revolution in China, Cuba, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Angola, Guinea, Mozambique .... Oh yes, and the workers of Lenin and Mao ... (pp. 339-40)

Finally, there is hope in the solidarity among workers and peasants which emerges in

the New Ilmorog. In this unity, Karega sees the possibility of reversing the patterns of history which has brought the 'Blackman' to his knees. Karega sees in the beginnings of this nationalist movement a pattern epitomized in his drugged dream:

> Today, children, I am going to tell you about the history of Mr Blackman in three sentences. In the beginning he had the land and the mind and the soul together. On the second day, they took the body away to barter it for silver coins. On the third day, seeing that he was still fighting back, they brought priests and educators to bind his mind and soul so that these foreigners could more easily take his land and its produce. And now I shall ask you a question: what has Mr Blackman done to attain the true kingdom of his earth? To bring back his mind and soul and body together on his piece of earth? They are actually - how strange - on a raft of banana streams drifting across oceans of time and space. And he is no longer Mwalimu but Chaka leading Induna after Induna against the foreign invader. He is L'ouverture, discarding the comfort and the wealth and the false security of a house slave to throw his intellect and muscles at the feet of the field slaves ready for a united people's struggle against the drinkers of human sweat, eaters of human flesh. Children, he calls out: See this new Africa without chains on his legs, without chains on his mind, without chains in his soul, a proud warrior - producer in three continents. And they see him over and over in new guises Koitalel, Waiyaki, Nat Turner, Cinque, Kimathi, Cabral, Nkrumah, Nasser, Mondlane. (pp. 236-7)

However, the hope Karega has is circumscribed by the existence of Nderi wa Riera, the M P for Ilmorog as well as the organizer and controller of an association known as the KCO, 'the most feared instrument of selective but coercive terror in the land' (p. 186).

The organisation is supported by and owes its existence to the police. Indeed, of the poor, underdeveloped countries such as the Kenya led by the likes of Nderi wa Riera, 'where the rule is that the greatest wealth is surrounded by the greatest poverty', Fanon writes:

> the army and the police constitute the pillars of the regime; an army and a police force ... which are advised by foreign experts. The strength of the police force and the power of the army are proportionate to the stagnation in which the rest of the nation is sunk ... scandals are numerous, ministers grow rich, their wives doll themselves up, the members of parliament feather their nests and there is no soul down to the simple policeman or custom officer who does not join in the great procession of corruption. (Fanon 1963: 172)

Nderi is a member of the repressive and corrupt post-independence political regime in Kenya. Although he began well in public life, Nderi quickly succumbed to the blandishments of directors of various organisations of international capitalism. His path, as Ngugi describes it, is one which many of his type have followed:

> He would champion such populist causes as putting a ceiling on land ownership; nationalisation of the major industries and commercial enterprises; abolition of illiteracy and unemployment and the East African Federation as a step to Pan-African unity. Then was flooded with offers of directorship in foreign-owned companies. 'Mr Riera, you need not do anything: we do not want to take too much of your busy and valuable time. It is only that we believe in white and black partnership for real

> progress'. The money he had collected from his constituents for a water project was not enough for piped water. But it was adequate as security for further loans until he bought shares in companies and invested in land, in housing and in small business. He suddenly dropped out of circulation in small places. Now he could only be found in special clubs for members only, or in newspapers-photographed while attending this or that cocktail party. As if to reinforce his new social standing, he took a huge farm in the Rift Valley. But his most lucrative connection was with the tourist industry. He owned a number of plots and premises in Mombasa, Malindi and Watamu and had been given shares in several tourist resorts all along the coast. Soon he began talking of 'the need for people to grow up and face reality. Africa needed capital investment for real growth - not socialist slogans'. (p. 174)

Towards the end of *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi gives a glimpse of the disillusionment that set in soon after Kenya's achievement of independence. *Petals of Blood* gives a most comprehensive picture of what the writer sees as the evils pervasive in Kenya under black rule. The Member of Parliament whose corrupt activities are barely suggested in *A Grain of Wheat*, appears in *Petals of Blood*, as a real life-size character, who demonstrates his incompetence, corruption and indifference to the people's suffering in a number of telling scenes. Nderi wa Riera has become one of the country's wealthiest capitalists, a fitting illustration of a common phenomenon in the post-independence Africa, the use of politics as a stepping-stone to personal material aggrandizement (Palmer 1979: 300). The party in power also comes in for the most scathing denunciation because of its corruption, thuggery, sectionalism and indifference to the people's plight. In a grotesque parody of the Mau Mau oath, the party forces

people to take an oath intended to perpetuate the complete dominance of a particular tribe. Quite pertinent to this, Fanon observes that:

> everywhere that the (African) national bourgeoisie has failed to break through to the people as a whole, to enlighten them, and to consider all problems in the first place with regard to them-a failure due to the bourgeoisie's attitude of mistrust and to the haziness of its political tenets-everywhere that the national bourgeoisie has shown itself incapable of extending its vision of the world sufficiently, we observe a falling back toward old tribal attitudes, and, furious and sick at heart, we perceive that race feeling in its most exacerbated form is triumphing. (Fanon 1963: 158)

All the time however, the party blinds itself to the real problems of the country which are poverty, starvation, inadequate housing and educational provision.

Inspector Godfrey knows Nderi as corrupt and is moved to list in his mind the extent and ugliness of that corruption. Ultimately, however, Godfrey is 'a crime detective not the leader of a moral vice squad .... How silly of him to have let himself be drawn into moral questions of how and why?' More than this, he:

> had been brought up to believe in the sanctity of private property. The system of private ownership, of means of production, exchange and distribution, was for him synonymous with the natural order of things like the sun, the moon and the stars which seemed fixed and permanent. Anybody who interfered with that ordained fixity and permanence of

> things was himself unnatural and deserved no mercy: was he not inviting chaos such as would occur if some foolish astronaut/cosmonaut should go and push the sun or the moon from its place? (p. 333)

Thus, for Godfrey: 'People like Karega with their radical trade unionism and communism threatened the very structure of capitalism: as such they were worse than murderers' (p. 333).

In Karega's view, the struggle will need to continue in the face of opposition as formidable as that represented by Nderi and Godfrey. This is confirmed in his assertion to Wanja:

> They are bound to fail. Can't you see: we, the workers, the poor peasants, ordinary people, the masses are now too awake to be deceived about tribal loyalties, regional assemblies, glorious pasts, utamaduni wa Zamani, all that when we are starving and we are jobless, or else living on miserable pay. Do you think we shall let foreign companies, banks, insurance - all that - and the local rich with their Theng'eta companies, the new black land lords with their massive land holdings and numerous houses - do you think people will let a combination of these two classes and their spokesmen in parliament, at universities, in schools, in churches and with all their armies and police to guard their interests - do you think that we shall let these owners of stolen property continue lording it over us for ever? No ... it is too late, Wanja ... we shall no longer let others reap where they never planted, harvest where they never cultivated, take to their banks from where they never sweated .... Tell them this: There are a million Karegas for every ten Kimerias. They can kill the lawyer or

> ten such lawyers. But the poor, the dispossessed, the working millions and the poor peasants are their own lawyers. With guns and swords and organisation, they can and will change the conditions of their oppression. They will seize the wealth which rightly belongs to them. Why - it's happening all around us - Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe. Just now you thought I was not touched by your grand father's story. I would choose your grandfather ten times ... not your father .... Never! The workers and the peasant farmers of Kenya are awake. (pp. 326 - 7)

At the end of the novel, unlike Munira , Karega's achievement is that he has helped to lead the workers of Ilmorog against the exploitation of a capitalist company, Theng'eta Breweries. He has been instrumental in raising the level of consciousness of the workers, in helping them to be fully aware of their exploitation and of the necessity to resist it (Ngara 1985: 79).

Karega's language is that of a Marxist revolutionary who accepts the odds and who recognises that the struggle will be long and hard (Killam 1980: 114). This statement is reinforced throughout the novel in stark references such as 'all the black toiling masses carrying a jembe in one hand and three bullets in the other, struggling against centuries of drifting, sole witness of their home coming'. Thus, Ngugi's debt to Marx is transmuted into fiction in his description of the circumstances by which the alienation of the peasants from their land takes place and of the social and economic conditions which arise out of this, conditions which prompt the revolution. He expresses concern for a mass of people consigned to poverty and exploitation. He is a humanist who seeks political solutions to awful political problems. Clearly, Ngugi is willing to face

squarely, mankind's imperfections, his susceptibility to corruption and proneness to violence (Killam 1980: 115).

Set against Ngugi's depiction of the desecration of the landscape are passages of lyrical exuberance in their evocation of the land. In his view, land is life. While there is no consistent use of motifs in the novel that relates natural elements to the fundamental human problems one might expect to find as one does elsewhere in modern African writing, Ngugi does in *Petals of Blood*, use natural elements to define human relations (Killam 1980: 115). Thus, of the unsatisfactory liaison of Wanja and Munira on the night Wanja hopes to become pregnant at the time of the full moon, Ngugi writes:

> If Wanja had been patient and had waited for the new moon to appear on new Ilmorog ridge - as indeed she had been instructed by Mwathi wa Mugo - she and Munira would have witnessed one of the most glorious and joyous sights in all the land, with the ridges and the plains draped by a level sheet of shimmering moonlit mist into a harmony of peace and silence - a human soul would have to be restless and raging beyond reach of hope and salvation for it not to be momentarily overwhelmed and stunned by the sight and the atmosphere. (p. 67)

In the same way, the success of Karega and Wanja's love relationship is expressed in naturalistic terms. Their happiness is revealed to Munira to whom a similar happiness was denied:

> of an evening I saw them together across the fields, stumbling over Mikengeria creepers, over yellow merry - golden flowers, over the tall thangari stem grass, bringing back thistles on the back and front and the sides of their clothes. Often, they would walk across Ilmorog ridge, two distant shadows against the golden glow of the setting sun, and disappear behind the hill to come back in the darkness or in the moonlight. Their love seemed to grow with the new crops of the year. They were still wandering across Ilmorog country, always together in the fields, on the mountain - top, in the plains, their love blossoming in the wind, as if both were re-enacting broken possibilities in their pasts. (pp. 244-5)

Above all, Ngugi's realism is seen in his attempt to capture the totality of life at this particular time and phase of history (Ngara 1985: 83). When he describes the harvest season in a year of plenty in Chapter Seven, he does not restrict himself to the activities of the people. Instead, he depicts man, the land, animals and plants. In other words, he describes the interaction and celebration of man and nature in one festive mood at this time of universal productivity. This, for instance, is a passage typifying this festive mood:

> There was something about harvesting, whether it was maize or beans or peas, which always released a youthful spirit in everyone. Children ran about the fields to the voices of women raised to various pitches of despairing admonition about the trails of waste. Sometimes the children surprised a hare or antelope in a lair among the ripened crops: they would quickly abandon whatever they were carrying and run after the animal the whole length of Ilmorog, shouting: Kaau ... Kaau ... catch ... catch it ... catch meat. Even old men looked like children, in their eyes turned to the

> fields: only they tried to hide their trembling excitement as they carried token sheaves of beans to the threshing ground .... Women winnowing beans in the wind was itself a sight to see: sometimes the breeze would stop and women would curse and wait holding their wicker trays ready to catch the breeze when it returned .... Later it was the turn of the cows: they were left loose to roam through the harvested fields of maize: they would run about, tails held up to the sky, kicking up dust with their hind legs, their tongues reaching out for the standing feed of maize. Sometimes the male would run after a young female giving it no rest or time to eat, expecting another kind of harvest. (pp. 203-4)

A realistic work is rich in a complex and comprehensive set of relations between man, nature and history (Ngara 1985: 83). Nothing demonstrates this statement better than the passage quoted above. Here Ngugi attempts to relate each individual and each type of creature to the social whole. Nothing is seen in isolation from others. The festive mood of the creatures depicted here is in turn linked to the circumcision ceremony which is a key element of the fertility rituals celebrated in the novel. The circumcision dance and song have heavy sexual connotations. Sex is an important motif in Ngugi's writings, since it symbolises fertility, productivity and life. Thus, Karega's sexual contact with Wanja is a fruitful exercise because it brings back life to Wanja who has for many years been overwhelmed by the fear of being barren. The fact that Karega succeeds in rousing sexual feelings in Wanja when, despite his long relationship with her, Munira fails, is symbolic of Karega's productivity and Munira's failure in life.

Ngugi has pointed out that some of the characters in *Petals of Blood* are meant more obviously to be symbols than others (Killam 1980: 105). While Munira, Abdulla, Karega and Wanja are fully realized figures, resonant with ambiguities, uncertainties, contradictions, and until their tales are told, a sense of mystery, Chui, Kimeria and Mzigo, Nderi wa Riera, Munira's father and Rev. Jerrod stand 'as class types, a typical class that has come to be completely indifferent to the cry of the people' (killam 1980: 105). It is important to note as well the added depth of meaning Ngugi achieves by the allegorical associations of the names which he gives to his characters. The two English names of the school masters convey the allegory readily enough to the reader. As his name implies, the Rev. Iron Monger is a man whose religion is as heated as a forge and his activity is to shape the tools which serve God and the nation[2]. Likewise, Cambridge Fraudsham's name readily implies that he symbolises fraud and Sham in the society of the novel. He is a product of Cambridge, one of the senior universities in England, an elitist institution and a model of the elitism he practises in Siriana.

It is in the African names however, that the full importance of the allegorical association is revealed. For instance Munira means 'stump'. This describes his devitalized state and his inability to connect with those around him in the novel. Wanja, whose affairs are described with a sensuality more frank than those of any other female character in Ngugi's work, assumes such a position of influence in Ilmorog that it is assumed by the towns people that her name comes from 'Wanjiku', the mother of the nine clans of the

[2]For the explanation of the symbolic and allegorical meaning of the names, I am indebted to Killam G. D., *An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi.*, p. 106

Gikuyu people in Kenya. Wanja also means 'stranger or outsider'. Karega means 'he - who - refuses'. He is also an outsider who is cast as an 'archetypal non-conformist', who travels from an idealistic youthful search for a cause, to the status of an anti-establishment revolutionary leader. 'Chui' is the Kiswahili word for 'leopard'. In African folktales the leopard is cast as a 'shrewd, grasping, brutal tyrant king'. The M P for Ilmorog, the Hon. Nderi wa Riera means 'Vulture son of air'. Plainly, he lives a vulture-life existence, high above the people, fattening off their misery and feeding on the dead and near dead people and cattle of his constituency. Other names given to lesser characters in the novel point to Ngugi's attempt to establish universal character types while he fixes his action in the immediate locale. Muturi means 'black' and Ruoro means 'the scar or furrow'. Njuguna represents the 'common man'. The allegorical names in the novel is one of several unifying devices Ngugi employs in the novel.

Thus, in *Petals of Blood*, Ngugi's characters seek ways to give meaning to their lives in a world where customary values and props have been abandoned, repudiated and even made mock of. The younger generation, Karega and Joseph pin their faith on socialist political solutions as a means of combatting the hatred, intolerance, tribalism and corruption which flourish. Moreover, Ngugi suggests in the hope one has for Wanja and the child she will bear that love, friendship and decent human relations may flourish. Certainly, he also suggests that the response made by Munira, that is, his recourse to Christianity is hopeless. It is also appropriate that Nyakinyua dies when she does for what she stands for and what she lived by are no longer valued. When the

homestead of the traditional sage, Mugo wa Mwathi, is driven at by bulldozers, all the villagers expect death and destruction to follow. The building gives way to the blades however. The sage had fled. Nyakinyua's time had passed.

CHAPTER THREE

Anthills of the Savannah

The name of Chinua Achebe is synonymous with the rise and development of African literature. At the time when Africa was awakening from the deep sleep of colonial domination, Achebe was one of the first African writers to record and promote the rising consciousness of the African people, who were at this time, in the process of fighting for nationhood. His first novel, *Things Fall Apart* heralded the rise of the modern African novel and overshadowed any work that was published before it. The novel, together with Negritude poetry, marked the awakening of nationalist consciousness in Africa and pointed the way for the rest of African writers, particularly novelists (Ngara 1990: 113). The publication of *Things Fall Apart* was therefore a landmark in the cultural and political development of Africa.

A perceptive analysis of the development of African history and literature will show that the publication of *A Man of the People* was a turning point in Achebe's career as a writer. During the struggle for independence, the African politician and the African writer joined hands in the campaign against colonialism and cultural imperialism. In less than a decade of their rule however, many African leaders proved that they were incapable of providing effective leadership. Instead, African rule was characterised by neo-colonialism, economic mismanagement, tribalism, corruption and other social ills (Ngara 1990: 113).

Consequently, while Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* had been a response to Africa's encounter with Europe and her resultant rejection of European cultural and political domination, it was at this stage, incumbent upon the African writer to ask questions about the way things were going in independent Africa (Ngara 1990: 114). Again Achebe, led the way. Achebe's *A Man of the People* was the first major novel of disillusionment in Anglophone Africa. Published in 1966, two years before Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *A Man of the People* was the first African novel in English to seriously tackle the theme of corruption in political leadership circles.

Achebe was destined to be the doyen of African writers of fiction for one major reason in particular. This is the fact that he is a talented writer and a genuine artist. A genuine artist strives to go beyond the mere telling of a good and captivating story and endeavours to communicate something of significance and lasting value (Ngara 1990: 114). He strives to tell a story which captures the history of a whole generation, of a nation and at the same time, to tell the story of particular individuals. Thus, in Ngara's view, a real artist causes the reader to reflect on their nations' history as well as that of humankind as they read about individual characters.

In Achebe's work, character is intricately intertwined with history and social circumstances (Ngara 1990: 114). For instance, Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, Obi in

No Longer at Ease and Ezeulu in *Arrow of God* are genuine characters with individual qualities and traits and yet their behaviour serves to symbolise history and social circumstances. Likewise, in Odili and Chief Nanga in *A Man of the People*, Achebe has created characters with distinct personal qualities but their story is also the story of Nigeria soon after independence, and one dare say, of many independent African states.

Although the death of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* is the death of an individual character, it also serves to symbolize the destruction of the social fabric of the Igbo society as a result of the onslaught of Western cultural, political and economic influences. The same is true of the demise of Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu in *Arrow of God*. Furthermore, the experiences and predicament of Obi in *No Longer at Ease* are a mirror of the experiences of any African intellectual who found himself in a responsible position during the transitional period from colonialism to independence in the 1950s and 1960s.

Achebe's fiction would not be as great as it is if Achebe himself did not have a social vision and a clearly articulated philosophy of art as a writer (Ngara 1990: 115). One of the hallmarks of Achebe as a creative artist is that he is a committed writer who firmly believes that a writer has a mission in society. Way back in 1964, Achebe had this to say:

> The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self respect. The writer's duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost. (Achebe cited in Stratton 1994: 23)

In his statement above, Achebe was referring to what he called 'the fundamental theme' that had to be disposed of first, namely, 'that African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans' (Achebe cited in Ngara 1990: 116). In order to perform this task and to explore human conditions in depth, Achebe went on to say, the writer had to have a proper sense of history (Achebe cited in Ngara 1990: 116). What Achebe called 'a proper sense of history' explains one fundamental feature of his art. This is the fact that reading Achebe's fiction is like reading about the history of Africa from pre-colonial times through colonialism and the early days of independence to the present (Ngara 1990: 116). This links closely with what was said earlier about Achebe's characters who have distinctive qualities but who at the same time, serve to epitomise the experiences of African nations and people.

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe deals with the cynical calculations and calcifications of Africa's post-independence power elite and the bankruptcy of the nepotistic politics of the 1960s and 1970s. The novel is thus, in a sense, a sequel to *A Man of the People*, a novel which, it was pointed out earlier, explored the theme of political corruption and in addition to this, the military take over on the eve of Biafra. However, Achebe's view of that elite and its politics in the wider African context as presented in *Anthills of the Savannah* has become more uncompromising and attuned

to gender and populist ideas (Boehmer 1990: 102).

The Trouble with Nigeria , a pamphlet which Achebe wrote as an injunction to Nigeria just before her 1983 election scandal, sheds valuable light on the political conception behind the novel. 'The trouble with Nigeria', as Achebe cites the popular expression in the pamphlet, is quite bluntly, the 'indiscipline' of its leaders, a national condition of 'lawlessness' and rampant selfishness (Achebe cited in Boehmer 1990: 103). In an interview after the publication of *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe made it clear that one of his intentions in the novel had been to take up issues he raised in *The Trouble with Nigeria* and to use the novel to propose solutions (Maughan-Brown 1990: 140). What will save Nigeria's future 'progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence'; to adopt the Old Man of Abazon's felicitous proverbial phrase in the novel (p. 124), is according to Achebe, better leadership.

In the interview, Achebe's interviewer, Anna Rutherford says:

> I had the feeling that what you were suggesting (in *The Trouble with Nigeria*) was that society reflected the quality of leadership, if the leadership was corrupt, the society would also then turn to corruption - in other words, the negative aspects in the society could be directly related back to the negative aspects of the leadership. (Rutherford cited in Maughan-Brown 1990: 140)

Achebe wholeheartedly agrees with this interpretation and further adds:

> ... but what I'm really interested in is how you could begin to solve the problem. If you are going to do that, you have to pinpoint the responsibility specifically before you can even begin to break out of the vicious circle. And it is at the level of the leadership that this break must occur. (Achebe cited in Maughan-Brown 1990: 140)

What Achebe means here is that, in the post-independence Africa, the malaise is evident in society but that its root cause and primary cure are not to be found in the society at large, but in a nation's leadership. As Achebe reflects, leaders combine and compound lawlessness with influence and power:

> They are in the language of psychologists, role models. People look up to them and copy their actions .... Therefore if a leader lacks discipline the effect is apt to spread automatically down to his followers. (Achebe cited in Boehmer 1990: 103)

Accordingly, the solution Achebe proposes in *Anthills of the Savannah*, is expressed in leadership terms, a preoccupation he carries over into the novel from his non-fictional statements in *The Trouble with Nigeria*. In the first sentence of the pamphlet, Achebe states quite baldly: 'The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership' (Achebe cited in Maughan-Brown 1990: 143). He then goes on to comment:

> The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal examples which are the hallmark of true leadership. (Achebe cited in Maughan- Brown 1990: 143).

Achebe concludes a few pages later that:

> ... every single day of continued neglect brings Nigeria ever closer to the brink of the abyss. To pull her back and turn her around is clearly beyond the contrivance of mediocre leadership. It calls for greatness .... Nigerians are what they are only because their leaders are not what they should be. (Achebe cited in Maughan-Brown 1990: 143)

It is unsurprising therefore, that in 1988, Achebe can be found interpreting the causes of the Biafran war in precisely the same terms: 'The war resulted from the failure of the leadership of Nigeria to protect significant portions of the population ... from destruction' (Achebe cited in Maughan-Brown 1990: 143).

In pursuit of his leadership thesis, Achebe goes as far as asserting that 'after two decades of bloodshed and military rule' in 'one of the most corrupt, insensitive and inefficient places under the sun', what his society 'craves today is not a style of leadership which projects and celebrates the violence of power but the sobriety of peace' (Achebe cited in Maughan-Brown 1990: 143). According to him, what the wretched of the earth 'crave' as the solution to the 'gargantuan disparity' of privilege between the 'tiny class' of the elite and 'the vast multitude of ordinary Nigerians' is, he suggests, a change in leadership style (Achebe cited in Maughan-Brown 1990: 143). Achebe concludes that:

> If Nigeria is to avoid catastrophies of possibly greater dimensions than we have been through since independence, we must take a hard and

> sentimental look at the question of leadership. (Achebe cited in Maughan-Brown 1990: 143)

Clearly, Achebe's theory of the need for strong leadership preponderates *The Trouble with Nigeria*. In his view, although Africa's national leadership has become its curse, Achebe also believes that it might be its solution. In his diagnoses of his perceived leadership problem of Nigeria, in *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe focuses on the leadership characters and role models who are in favour of class and neo-colonialism. In the process of addressing this elite, Achebe is ambivalent in his view of this leadership as the chief pivot of political and economic transformation. Although he believes that the advent of a new leader should be followed by a 'radical programme of social and economic reorganization or at least, a well-conceived and consistent agenda of reform', Achebe sees the first step in any process of change as being new rulership, in effect, the intervention of personality (Achebe cited in Boehmer 1990: 104).

It is in line with this leadership thesis that the public execution scene described through Ikem's eyes in the early pages of *Anthills of the Savannah* is given prominence and is subsequently authorially endorsed in interview. As Achebe puts it:

> The fact that the people are prone to this kind of behaviour, that they could come to a stage where they could relish this kind of scene, must make the leadership say to itself, 'Why is this possible? How can this happen? It is wrong. We must do something about it.' So you find a

> leader like the editor of the *National Gazette* setting himself up to correct the situation. It is people like him who must initiate the action. (Achebe cited in Maughan-Brown 1990: 146)

Maughan-Brown (1990: 146) concludes thus, that, the centrality given to the 'delirious and obscenely happy crowd' at the execution scene, is clearly directed towards proving the necessity for effective leadership of 'the brutish masses by an elite.'

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, through the omniscient narrator, one gets an insight into Sam, the President of the Republic of Kangaan's capacity to keep his ministers on their toes by playing them off against one another. Through Beatrice's narrative however, one begins to see a sharp contrast between his ability to control his own ministers and the ease with which Westerners, even mere journalists, can dominate his thinking and behaviour, as in the case of Lou Cranford, the American journalist one meets in the course of the novel. Although His Excellency emerges as a character who has distinctive features and qualities, like Achebe's characters in his earlier fiction, he also serves to play a symbolic function (Ngara 1990: 121). His behaviour is symbolic of the neo-colonial ideological orientation of some African heads of state as well as their relationships with their ministers and other senior government officials. This neo-colonial character of the post-independence African leadership is convincingly expressed by Fanon when he says:

> Because it is bereft of ideas, because it lives to itself and cuts itself off from the people, undermined by its hereditary incapacity to think in terms

> of all the problems of the nation as seen from the point of view of the whole of that nation, the national middle class will have nothing better to do than to take on the role of manager for Western enterprise, and it will in practice set up its country as the brothel of Europe. (Fanon 1963: 154)

In conjunction with his use of symbolism, Achebe also employs myth and allusion in his presentation of the ideology of the post-independence African leadership. For instance, Ikem's 'Hymn to the Sun' a mythical poem that one meets in the early pages of the novel (p. 30-33), foreshadows the disaster that follows in the novel. It probably alludes to the self-destructive tactics of His Excellency, who in an attempt to preserve his own power, resorts to destroying his former friends namely, Chris and Ikem, and is himself destroyed in the process.

In *The Trouble with Nigeria,* Achebe castigates a corrupt African elite while in *Anthills of the Savannah* he sets about deposing one (Boehmer 1990: 104). In the process of deposing this leadership, Achebe develops some of the concepts he introduces in the pamphlet, and begins to suggest what sort of leadership it is that might come in its place. Thus, in a bid to describe the character of the leadership Achebe aims at deposing in *Anthills of the Savannah*, Chris Oriko, a symbolic member of this leadership in the novel dies with the phrase 'the last green bottle' on his lips (p. 216). This is a cryptic allusion to his own perception of the increasingly inward-looking and alienated rulers of the nation Kangaan (Boehmer 1990: 104).

Likewise, in her revelatory conversation with Chris, Beatrice comments that, from the point of view of the three men, that is, His Excellency, Ikem and Chris, who were trained for power at Lord Lugard College, 'the story of this country, as far as you are concerned, is the story of the three of you' (p. 66). Furthermore, during what will be the last days of his life, Chris comes to the realization that: 'We? Who are we? The trinity who thought they owned Kangaan as BB once unkindly said? The three green bottles. One has accidentally fallen, one is tilting. Going, going, bang! Then We becomes I, becomes Imperial We' (p. 191). Although Chris' statement is partly a joke about His Excellency being left alone in power, the 'Imperial We' also alludes to the obsession with power that, in different ways, motivated and also undermined each member of the trinity (Boehmer 1990: 104).

Of this 'little clique' that found itself in leadership positions at independence, Achebe has noted that it 'was not big enough ... it had no perception of incorporating others' (Achebe cited in Boehmer 1990: 103). Thus, as a solution to his perceived leadership problem, Achebe has in *Anthills of the Savannah* tried for incorporation. He has attempted to stage a type of 'top-down' or 'passive revolution', one that operates through the appropriation of popular elements of the elite (Boehmer 1990: 103). He has shifted authority away from the group that inherited state power in the 60s, that is, the first interpreters of African nationalism. In the process, Achebe has called in question certain of what he views as the more inappropriate and destructive political conceptions that subtended ruling ethos and in particular, the assumption of the unambiguously

exclusive maleness of the leadership.

It follows then, that one of the major indications of Achebe's development in social consciousness in *Anthills of the Savannah* is his portrayal of women (Ngara 1990: 124). In his earlier novels, women are given minor roles and all the major parts are taken by male characters. In contrast, in *Anthills of the Savannah*, Beatrice, a woman character who symbolises Achebe's female member of the alternative political leadership he proposes, is neither intellectually inferior to his old boyfriend Chris nor patronised by him. Their relationship is one of equals who have a natural attraction for each other. While Beatrice rejects the Western concept of Women's Lib, she is certainly of the view that woman is equal to man and that a woman can live a complete life without a man.

Thus, Beatrice is a feminist whose views have been shaped, not by the Western women's movement, even though she has spent many years abroad as a student, but by her experience while she was growing up (Stratton 1994: 165). 'There was', she says, 'enough male chauvinism in my father's house to last me seven reincarnations' (p. 88). Moreover, it is significant that Beatrice is the only government official who is brave enough to tell His excellency off. For example, disgusted by the excessive deference His Excellency shows to Lou Cranford, a mere journalist just because she is American, Beatrice is bold enough to accost the Head of State who normally reduces his ministers to the status of mere boys. With regard to His Excellency's bootlicking of Lou Cranford, Beatrice says: 'If I went to America today, to Washington DC, would I,

could I, walk into a white house private dinner and take the American President hostage. And his Defence Chief and his Director of C.I.A' (p. 81).

It is also significant that Beatrice is closely connected with Ikem's daughter, who in *Anthills of the Savannah*, clearly symbolises hope for a better leadership in future. It is noteworthy also that Ikem's child is a girl. It is Beatrice who names the child and the symbolic significance of the child is captured in the masculine name Beatrice chooses for her: 'We have our own version of hope that springs eternal. We shall call this child AMAECHINA: *May-the-path never- close*. Ama for short' (p. 222). As part of the symbolic logic, Amaechina's name, *may-the-path-never-close* is translated as 'The Shining Path of Ikem' (p. 222). The implicit idea behind this, that is, of inheritance along a male line, symbolises the passing of the rod of leadership from male to female.

The naming ceremony of Elewa's daughter symbolises a new major development in Achebe's writing. It symbolises the fact that the world of *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* has gone and that it has been replaced by new social values. Contrary to custom, the naming is done collectively by young people and the old man from the village who is supposed to perform the task realises that social values have changed and thus accepts and blesses what the young people have done. Indeed, as Innes observes, in *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe's own early works and pronouncements also come under scrutiny (Innes cited in Stratton 1994: 164). For Achebe himself, in an endorsement of Ikem's view in the novel, seeks 'to widen the scope of (his) self

examination'. Of his earlier works, the one which Achebe most obviously interrogates is *Things Fall Apart*. While he acknowledges the canonical status of his own first novel through inter-textual citation, Achebe nevertheless, goes on to revise it through his critique of patriarchal ideology and practices in *Anthills of the Savannah*. Thus, *Anthills of the Savannah* both repeats and negates *Things Fall Apart* (Stratton 1994: 164). Although the two novels are set in different periods and were written almost thirty years apart, the same kind of historical perspective shapes both narratives. If the main issue dealt with in *Things Fall Apart* is the reason for the rapid capitulation of Igbo society to the invading colonial forces, in *Anthills of the Savannah*, it is the reason for Nigeria's equally rapid slide into a corrupt and brutally authoritarian form of government shortly after independence (Stratton 1994: 164). Beatrice's question near the end of *Anthills of the Savannah* applies to the circumstances in both novels: 'What must a people do to appease an embittered history?' (p. 220). The blame in both the two novels, is attributed not to the potency of external forces, but to an internal weakness, that is, an imbalance in the local governing ethos between masculine and feminine values.

Thus, in his expression of mature disillusionment and heavily qualified fresh hope, Achebe's tentative new vision is manifested in the strategic gender configuration of his central characters (Boehmer 1990: 102). It is noteworthy that although the novel opens with paranoid manoeuvres within a male elite determined to keep hold of power, it ends with a celebratory naming ritual involving key female figures: Beatrice, Elewa, and Elewa's daughter by Ikem, called Amaechina, *'May-the-path-never close'* (p. 222).

Headed by Beatrice and composed of her affiliates from various classes, urban and rural, this life affirming sisterhood signifies a new conception of rulership, the beginning perhaps of a new era for Kangaan. From the point of view of gender representation, the formation of this group certainly signals a new moment in Achebe's work.

In Achebe's view, the group that coheres around Beatrice is to be the catalyst of the future (Boehmer 1990: 104). As Achebe himself remarked:

> The ultimate responsibility for getting us out of this bad patch is with the small group of people who, in one way or another, find themselves in positions of leadership. (Achebe cited in Boehmer 1990: 104)

Achebe further points out that in this small group, the tendency to nepotism and corruption which have compromised elite rulers in the past, will presumably be mitigated by the advent of women's salubrious force.

Unlike in the earlier novels, in *Anthills of the Savannah*, the elite can no longer be expected merely to engage in gratuitous actions in defence of political honour (Boehmer 199: 102). Rather, it must in Achebe's view, revise its power base and its understanding of leadership, thereby opening its doors to traditionally excluded groups. Achebe signals this change in attitude by admitting to his narrative, representative members of 'the people' such as peasants, taxi drivers, a shop assistant, the urban poor and towards the end, a market woman. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, the peasantry

is represented by Elewa's uncle and the Abazon delegation that comes to Bassa in an effort to reach an agreement with 'the big chief' with the view to persuade the government to continue with the work of boreholes which was stopped because of the people of Abazon's refusal to support His Excellency's claim to life presidency. The taxi drivers are represented by Braimoh. Elewa is a shop-assistant while the urban poor are represented by Emmanuel Obete, the president of the students' union. Finally, Elewa's mother is a market woman.

If there is any character whose ideas are closely related to those of Achebe about art and politics in *Anthills of the Savannah*, it is Ikem Osodi (Ngara 1990: 124). Through the opinion of Ikem in relation to those of other characters, Achebe persuades the reader to reflect on a number of topical issues such as the place of women in society, issues relating to class struggle and theories of revolution, the African post-independence political predicament as well as issues relating to literary theory and the role of the writer in society. Thus, the key to the ideological thrust of *Anthills of the Savannah* lies in the symbolic use Achebe makes of Ikem as the primary vehicle for his message, and thereby in the ideology of leadership and reform, rather than revolution, in whose service Ikem lives and dies as a fictional character (Maughan-Brown 1990: 141). As a novelist and a journalist, and also as a character who is not directly part of His Excellency's government machinery, Ikem appears to be the most appropriate character to raise some of these questions and to reflect on them (Ngara 1990: 124).

Clearly, with regard to the question of women, Ikem's views are deeply influenced by his interaction with Beatrice who has definite ideas about the place of women in society. Thus, through the 'strange love letters' he reads to Beatrice, Ikem redeems himself in the face of her criticism of his male chauvinism. Indeed Beatrice who can be taken as a reliable witness throughout the novel, describes Ikem's treatment of women as 'about the only chink in his revolutionary armour' (p. 65). Furthermore, it is Beatrice who, through her criticism of his political thinking, leads Ikem to extend the terms and range of his analysis of Kangaan's political structures and to reconsider the position he has taken up in his writing. Beatrice holds the view that 'giving women today the same role which traditional society gave them of intervening only when everything else has failed is not enough' (p. 91). She sees this as a weakness in Ikem's original political position and as a fact which blurs his vision as a writer. In his acknowledgement of his indebtedness to Beatrice for the insight, Ikem goes beyond the distinction Uchendu makes in *Things Fall Apart* between the idealization of motherhood and the subordinate role of women in society and exposes the hypocrisy of his forebears' gender ideology:

> Nneka, they said. Mother is supreme. Let us keep her in reserve until the ultimate crisis arrives and the waist is broken and hung over the fire .... Then, as the world crashes around man's ears, woman in her supremacy will descend and sweep the shards together. (p. 98).

It is her discussion with Ikem on questions such as these that leads him to formulate his theory on women and other social groups. His reflections on the problem of women result in his formulation of a radical theory of social class:

> The women ... are the biggest single group of oppressed people in the world, ... but they are not the only group. There are others, rural peasants in every land, the urban poor in industrialised countries, black people everywhere, including their own continent, ethnic and religious minorities and castes in all countries. (p. 98)

The point of resolution to which Ikem's meditation leads is captured in Achebe's idea of incorporation, or broadening from the top as opposed to democratisation or widening from the base: 'You have to broaden out so that when you are talking for the people, you are not only talking for a section or a group interest' (Achebe cited in Boehmer 1990: 105). Given the need for an elite and therefore for hierarchy, in Achebe's eyes, the main possibility of reconciliation lies in building and extending person to person connections across class, gender and political hierarchy (Boehmer 1990: 105). The intention, according to Achebe, is to maintain an elite leadership within a national framework, that is, to develop responsibility, a newly gendered image of power and a broader support base.

This means that the leaders approach the 'owners' of the country in order to embrace and take into their bosom certain of their number (Boehmer 1990: 106). In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Beatrice, leader, inspirer and new seer, becomes the informal central symbol of a new select group drawn from various social sectors. As Boehmer (1990: 106) puts it:

> According to the leitmotif of the novel, in the anthill that survives after the

> fires of the harmattan, Beatrice is queen, keeping the colony together ... though things threaten to fall apart, though old vortices implode and collapse, centres, stable 'cores of reality' (leaders, elites, women as dispensers of succour) - are needed if there is to be movement and change.

Achebe has prepared for his caveat by eulogising the power and importance of myth and storytelling in the novel through the rhetoric of the Old Man from Abazon, in the hymns and the poetic role of Ikem and in the apotheosis of Beatrice (Boehmer 1990: 106). In Achebe's view, the nation is to be redeemed metaphysically or metaphorically by Beatrice turned in the novel into an Igbo priestess, by syncretic ritual and emblematic cross-class and cross-ethnic alliances. Achebe's general idea seems to be that, in the African context, where much theory has already been uselessly imposed, political postulates such as those set out in *The Trouble with Nigeria*, do not themselves offer hope of regeneration (Boehmer 1990: 107). In his view, the nation cannot interpret its present confusion and conceptualise a new future by cliche's from other histories. Instead, it should turn to the figures of gods and rituals drawn from its own local cultures, or as Beatrice puts it, 'subvert the very sounds and legends of daybreak to make straight the way' (p. 109). This relates closely to Ikem's idea that humanity be reformed around what lies within it, and that, times have 'come round again out of story-land' (p. 33). In other words, one should draw on history and story as it is and has been lived.

Accordingly, significant symbolic elements appear in Ikem's dense prose poem, 'The

Hymn to the Sun' (p. 30-33) and his meditation on the myth of Idemili's power. In both the poem and the myth, masculine images of power and agency are juxtaposed with feminine evocations of peace and reconciliation. It is clear from a perceptive analysis of the poem and the myth that old dichotomous gender distinctions run deep. However, the final scene at Beatrice's flat dramatizes and unifies Achebe's central symbolic meanings and therefore demands attention (Boehmer 1990: 107). It is here that Beatrice, a prefigurement of a gynocentric spiritual way, stands forward as the harbinger of a new order. From the initial act of having pointed Ikem in the direction of his vision of women, and through being flippantly called a prophetess by Chris, one finds Beatrice metamorphosed through sorrow into a priestess of Idemili, 'the unknown god' (p. 224). Thus, Achebe draws appropriately on the redemptive Igbo tradition of female devotion and worship. With her moral authority, goddess-like carriage and capacity for mediation and inspiration, Beatrice has in *Anthills of the Savannah*, recognizably become a daughter of the Idemili described in the myth told by Ikem in the novel:

> In the beginning power rampaged through our world, naked. So the Almighty, looking at his creation through the round undying eye of the sun, saw and pondered and finally decided to send his daughter, Idemili, to bear witness to the moral nature of authority by wrapping around power's rude waist a loincloth of peace and modesty. (p. 102)

The incarnation of the Idemili is a redemption of the contemporary political situation and as it is, of the neglect of the goddess in the past (Boehmer 1990: 108). Attended by Elewa, the bearer of the seed of a poet, and a new child, a girl with a male name,

Beatrice's spiritual power as a blessed woman thus symbolises the fulfilment of Ikem's final vision of women as adopting a new and yet to be imagined role and as signifying new hope (p. 98). As Achebe himself puts it, Beatrice and her entourage represent women in their place, 'in the forefront of history' (Achebe cited in Boehmer 1990: 108).

Certain traditional gender specific spheres of influence appear to remain in force in *Anthills of the Savannah*. For instance in their time-honoured way, women in the novel especially Elewa, wield power through sex and their bodies, whereas men continue to control the word (Ikem's poetry) and also, one presumes, the rule of word which is politics (Boehmer 1990: 108). As in Achebe's earlier nationalist writing, the artist, the one who transmits the myth to the people is male. Boehmer (1990: 108) notes however, that towards the end of the novel, women decisively obtain control of vatic power. For example, Beatrice too is a writer and the narrator of part of the story. She takes on the task of 'bringing together as many broken pieces of this tragic history as she can' (p. 82). Of even greater significance however, is the fact that she initiates a dialogue on gender with Ikem who is Kangaan's most renowned writer and, one is told, 'one of the finest (poets) in the entire English language' (p. 62). Moreover, Beatrice is also instrumental in the process whereby her boyfriend, Chris, broadens his conception of state leadership and power. The commissioner for information in the cabinet of his and Ikem's former classmate, His Excellency the President, Chris is even slower than Ikem to realize the importance of establishing 'vital inner links with the poor and dispossessed' (p. 141). His dying words are 'a coded message' to Beatrice

acknowledging the justness of her accusation of conceit on the part of the old school friends in their attitude to leadership, as well as the accuracy of her prediction that their obsession with power would destroy all three of them (Stratton 1994: 166).

After the death of Ikem, Chris and the President, power continues to rampage the Kangaan world of public affairs as another male elite seizes control of the state. Stratton (1994: 166) notes however, that in the final chapter of the novel, Achebe changes the focus of his narrative from the domain of power politics to the social sphere where Beatrice, in her new role as the priestess of Idemili, assumes power. The group that gathers in Beatrice's flat for a naming ceremony is carefully constituted. The assembly embraces class, religious, ethnic and sexual differences, a reminder of Ikem's observation on the multi-faceted nature of oppression. In Achebe's words, this signals 'the possibility of a new beginning' (Achebe cited in Stratton 1994: 166). However, gender is the category Achebe most favours in his representation of an alternative politics. Thus, three female figures namely, Beatrice, Ikem's girlfriend, Elewa and Elewa's baby, move into the narrative space formerly occupied by the male trinity. Seizing the traditional male role of naming the child, Beatrice gives the baby girl a boy's name, Amaechina, '*May-the-path-never-close*' (p. 222). As Stratton (1994: 166) concludes, it is to women, then, that Achebe assigns the task of 'appeasing an embittered history'.

Another issue that Achebe takes up in the novel is the state of power in Nigeria after

independence. He explores in fictional form, many of the ideas he deals with more directly in his pamphlet, *The Trouble with Nigeria*. As Innes indicates, Ngugi is one of Achebe's implied literary antagonists in the novel (Innes cited in Stratton 1994: 164). Ikem Osodi, a character who it was indicated earlier that he symbolises Achebe's views in the novel, a newspaper editor as well as a creative writer, provides a critique of Marxist readings of recent African history of which Ngugi is a strong literary proponent. Instead of these readings, Ikem, who had himself once been a proponent of Marxism, offers what he calls a 'new radicalism', from the perspective of which he views the practice of 'heap(ing) all our problems on the doorstep of capitalism and imperialism' (p. 158) as absurd and irresponsible. He also ridicules '(t)hose who would see no blot villainy in the beloved oppressed, nor grant the faintest glimmer of humanity to the hated oppressor' (p. 100), and condemns the Marxist revolutionary theory as presumptuous and narrowly dogmatic in its self-assured prescriptions.

In other words, through Ikem Osodi, Achebe comments on the theory of class and class struggle and calls to question some of the fundamental tenets of historical Marxism. These include the Marxist idea of a millennium in which there will be no oppression of one social group by another after the establishment of communism. Ikem believes that the orthodox Marxist position proposes a simplistic remedy to the problem of oppression. For his part, he does not believe that once a socialist and communist revolution has taken place, all the social problems of society are bound to disappear:

> The sweeping, majestic visions of people rising victorious like a tidal wave against their oppressors and transforming their world with theories and slogans into a new heaven and a new earth of brotherhood, justice and freedom are at best grand illusions. The rising, conquering tide yes; but the millennium afterwards, no! New oppressors will have been readying themselves secretly in the undertow long before the tidal wave got really going. (p. 99)

In *A Man of the People*, Achebe exposes the corrupting power of privilege and high political positions. In the novel, one sees how people who have been given positions of authority in society are tempted to abuse them and indulge in self-aggrandisement and personal pleasure at the expense of the majority. In *Anthills of the Savannah* one is made to reflect on this African predicament (Ngara 1990: 125). In the novel, there are indeed, massive corruption, subservience to foreign manipulation and the problem of capitalist exploitation. When this concern with Achebe's perceived problem of leadership finds direct expression in *Anthills of the Savannah*, one finds allusions such as 'leaders who openly looted our treasury, whose effrontery soiled our national soul' (p. 42). Furthermore, Ikem comes to the prime conclusion that the 'prime failure' of the leadership of Kangaan, the fictionalized version of Nigeria, can be seen as the:

> failure of our own rulers to re-establish vital inner links with the poor and the dispossessed of this country, with the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation's being. (p. 141)

Ikem Osodi looks at all the issues referred to above as well as others relating to his

function as a writer. In the course of articulating his political philosophy, he is in the same breath, propounding a theory of artistic creativity (Ngara 1990: 126). Ikem's rejection of aspects of the orthodoxy of historical Marxism is closely linked with his views on the relationship between art and any belief. Referring to Graham Greene, a Staunch Roman Catholic who does not idealise catholic priests in his novels, Ikem asks: 'Why then does he write so compulsively about bad, doubtful and doubting priests?'. In his response to this question, Ikem continues:

> Because a genuine artist no matter what he says he believes, must feel in his blood the ultimate enmity between art and orthodoxy. (p. 100)

In fact, Ikem refers to this in his discussion with Beatrice at one point in the novel. In his view, a writer must not seek to constrain his characters. Instead, he must let them go ahead and say things which make the creator uncomfortable:

> It simply downed on me two mornings ago that a novelist must listen to his characters who after all are created to wear the shoe and point the writer where it pinches. (pp. 96-7)

In his lecture to university students, Ikem addresses this important question of the function of the writer in society. The writer does not provide solutions to problems, he argues, a writer does not give answers, but asks questions. In his view, writers do not give prescriptions, but headaches. 'Writers are therefore gadflies that prick the reader's conscience' (Ngara 1990: 126). The most important function of the writer is according

to Ikem, to induce people to reflect upon the conditions of their lives and to raise their consciousness so that they can begin to ask why things are as they are, why things are going wrong:

> No I cannot give you the answer you are clamouring for. Go home and think! I cannot decree your pet, text book revolution. I want instead to excite general enlightenment by forcing all the people to examine the conditions of their lives because, as the saying goes, the unexamined life is not worth living .... As a writer I aspire only to widen the scope of that self-examination. (p. 158)

Significantly, Ikem's view of the role of the writer in society concurs with Achebe's:

> The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self-respect. The writer's duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost. There is a saying in Igbo that a man who can't tell where the rain began to beat him cannot know where he dried his body. The writer can tell the people where the rain began to beat them. (Achebe cited in Stratton 1994: 24)

Apart from Ikem's campaign for resistance to 'catchy, half-baked orthodoxy' (p. 158), 'modish radical' (p. 159) and 'half-digested radical rhetoric' (p. 161), the main burden of his political message in *Anthills of the Savannah* lies with his elevation of reform over revolution:

> The sweeping, majestic vision of people rising victorious like a tidal wave

against their oppressors and transforming their world with theories and slogans into a new heaven and a new earth of brotherhood, justice and freedom are at best grand illusions .... Reform may be a dirty word then but it begins to look more and more like the most promising route to success in the real world. (p. 99)

It is important to note that, in order to provide a continuous favourable assessment of Ikem's performance in the crucial speech to the students, Achebe develops a device whereby his description of the audience's response serves as an index to the incisiveness and accuracy of what Ikem says (Maughan-Brown 1990: 142). Thus, for instance, the statement that 'the laughter had died all of a sudden' (p. 160) indicates that Ikem has scored a telling point at the students' expense. This is a device which readers first gain the opportunity to familiarise themselves with in the wholly uncontentious context of the long speech given by the Old Man from Abazon at the Harmony hotel (Maughan-Brown 1990: 142). In this case also, statements like 'The footfalls of waiters padding about the cemented courtyard rose to a new prominence in the profound silence' and 'The silence was so complete that one could hear him gnashing his teeth' (p. 126), serve to emphasize Achebe's view of the incisiveness of story-telling.

A survey of assertions made by Achebe in essays and interviews in the late 60s, reveals a tendency on his part towards radical populism and an unswerving conviction about the necessity for 'commitment' on the part of writers of fiction (Maughan-Brown 1990: 139). Thus, for example, one finds Achebe asserting that 'the masses own the

nation because they have numbers' and further declaring that:

> These are the real victims of our callous system, the wretched of the earth. They are largely silent and invisible. They don't appear on front pages; They do not initiate industrial actions. They drink bad water and suffer all kinds of preventable diseases .... The politician may pay them a siren-visit once in four years and promise to give them this that and the other. He never says that what he gives is theirs in the first place. (Achebe cited in Maughan-Brown 1990: 139)

In his use of Fanon's phrase, 'The Wretched of the Earth' and his endorsement of the African revolution, Achebe here sounds more like the Ngugi of the 1970s than the Achebe of the 1960s (Maughan-Brown 1990: 139). Indeed, as early as 1970, one finds Achebe asserting:

> ... the regenerative powers of the people ... are manifest today in the African revolution, a revolution that aims towards true independence, that moves towards the creation of modern states in place of the new colonial enclaves we have today, a revolution that is informed with African ideologies. (Achebe cited in Maughan-Brown 1990: 139)

Political commentary of this tenor was accompanied in the same period by comments on the role of the artist which went far beyond his often quoted 1966 comments on 'The novelist as a teacher'. For instance, one finds Achebe asserting in 1968 that, '... this is what literature in Africa should be about today, right and just causes,' and four years later he is saying: 'I have come to the view that you cannot separate the creativity from

the revolution that is inevitable in Africa' (Achebe cited in Maughan-Brown 1990: 140). Thus, Achebe claims for the writer a role more active, and presumably more influential, than that of a mere reporter: 'the writer's role is more in determining than merely reporting. In other words, his role is to act rather than react' (Achebe cited in Maughan-Brown 1990: 140).

It is unsurprising then, that in *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe stakes a large claim for the writer of fiction, herein wearing the mantle of the story teller. The Old Man from Abazon in the novel is clearly, a character for whom the reader's wholly unqualified approval is solicited. This is done partly through the ascription to him of supreme facility in both the use of proverbs and in the art of storytelling. In his assessment of the respective claims of the storyteller, the warrior and the beater of the battle-drum to being awarded the prize of the eagle-feather, the old man from Abazon awards it to the storyteller:

> the sounding of the battle-drum is important, the fierce waging of the war itself is important, and the telling of the story afterwards each is important in its own way. But if you ask me which of them takes the eagle feather. I will say boldly: the story .... Because it is only the story that can continue beyond the war and the warrior. It is the story that outlives the sound of war drums and the exploits of brave fighters. It is the story, not the others, that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is the escort, without it, we are blind. (pp. 123-4)

Ngara (1990: 127) concludes that in *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe has produced a novel which raises questions about, and probes profoundly into a wide variety of fundamental issues. For instance, Ikem's point about all certitude being suspect (p. 99) and his scepticism about a millennium of communism have according to Ngara (1990: 127) been vindicated in recent years. As Ngara (1990: 127) further corroborates, In Eastern Europe and Asia, socialist countries have come to the realization that the mere adoption of socialism as a political ideology is not in itself a panacea that represents ready solutions to all problems of social and economic development. For instance, after going through a fervent cultural revolution, China abandoned the approach in 1978 and adopted an open door policy and a form of socialism that suited the Chinese conditions. Furthermore, in the Soviet Union, Gorbachev has followed suit with his perestroika, while one of the former leaders of the German Democratic Republic Mr Krenz, has recently called for a redefinition of socialism. Ngara (1990: 127) observes however, that this is not to say that there is necessarily something inherently wrong with socialism, but simply to emphasize the point Achebe makes that simplistic remedies like the dictatorship of the proletariat are likely to fail.

Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* ends with a wonderful vision of workers and peasants leading the struggle to bring about an end to exploitation and class struggle:

> from Koitatel through Kang'ethe to Kimathi it has been the peasants, aided by the workers, small traders and small landowners, who had mapped out the path. Tomorrow it would be the workers and the

> peasants leading the struggle and seizing power to overturn the system and all its prying bloodthirsty gods and gnomic angels, bringing to an end the reign of the few over the many and the era of drinking blood and feasting on human flesh. Then, only then, would the kingdom of man and woman really begin, they joining and loving, in creative labour. (Ngugi 1977: 344)

As Ngara (1990: 127) notes, this is the kind of enthusiasm about which Achebe in *Anthills of the Savannah* is saying: 'Wait a minute. Is it really going to be as simple as all that? Is there no likelihood of new oppressors emerging from among the victors?

CONCLUSION

One of the major problems of the African continent has been the quality of its political leadership. Since independence, African leaders have proved to be incapable of providing effective leadership. African rule has been characterized by neo-colonialism, economic mismanagement, tribalism, corruption and other social ills. The new leaders are the direct successors of their erstwhile colonial masters and are always concerned with privilege and the consolidation of their power rather than with progressive leadership and public accountability. Thus, African independence seems to have failed to bring about fundamental change. It has produced a new class of leaders that exhibits worse oppressive, corrupt and insensitive tendencies than its colonial predecessors.

The African writers of this period have responded to these harsh realities with disillusionment and criticism. In seeking to account for the stagnation of the post-independence African society, the writers have tended to focus on the parasitism of the African political elite, its ethic of conspicuous consumption, crass materialism, ostentation and atrocious lack of vision. Indeed, in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, a novel that forcefully registers the typical literary mood of this period, Armah asks a crucial rhetorical question: 'How long will Africa be cursed with its leaders?' (p. 80). Although this literature has made significant contribution towards raising the African people's overall consciousness of the political ills of independent Africa in general, this

has to a large extent, been handicapped by the fact that the literature is mainly written in English, a foreign language which is inaccessible to the illiterate masses of the African peoples.

In their expression of disillusionment and criticism of the new political class, the writers employ symbolism, myth and allusion in their writing. In this regard, the writers draw appropriately on African traditional orature to convey their fictional matter. Thus, in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Armah presents his preoccupation with political corruption and consumer capitalism through symbolic images of the consumption of food, eating, bodily decay and defecation. He expresses his disgust for the leadership's corruption by exploiting the potential of a central symbol namely, filth, putrefaction and excreta. The recurring analogy between eating, temptation, desire and corruption in the novel implies the inevitability of corruption, since man must eat, food must be digested and finally excreted as waste. The ugliness of the language Armah uses is a reflection of the repulsiveness of the political corruption which he sets out to expose. Armah also employs symbolic images to present the dizzying speed in which this leadership ravages the country's scarce resources.

Furthermore, Armah employs allusion to depict the neo-colonial ideology of the leadership as well as its ethic of gratuitous conspicuous consumption, crass materialism and ostentation. He uses the same technique to present the schizophrenic character of this leadership and its atrocious lack of vision. Armah also uses allusion to present

the negligence and lack of concern shown by the leadership towards the lower classes and the resultant state of abject poverty in which the masses of the population live in the society of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. Finally, Armah's perceived all-encompassing and insidious power of corruption in the society of the novel is further suggested through his use of myth.

Like Armah in the *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, in *Petals of Blood*, Ngugi also employs symbolism, myth and allusion to present the ideology of the post-independence leadership in Kenya. Clearly, the novel's title itself points to the centrality of symbolism to its overall meaning. One dominant symbol cluster in the novel relates to flowers and other forms of vegetation. As in Derek Walcott's poem with which *Petals of Blood* is prefixed, the symbol cluster suggests destruction, evil, the unnatural, corruption and death. Indeed, the poem associates 'petals of blood' with a concealed but dangerous serpent. It is further evident from the poem that the 'petals of blood' of the novel are also connected with the 'potent ginger lily', one of the destructive, repulsive plants which give a scene which should normally appear natural and beautiful an eerie, unnatural and evil aura. Ngugi uses this imagery to allude to the distortion of the state of affairs in the society of the novel from the normal and natural to the abnormal and evil. In other words, it alludes to the introduction of chaos and destruction where a semblance of beauty and order should prevail. In terms of the immanent rationality of the novel, the 'potent ginger lily' in Walcott's poem is used by Ngugi to symbolise the contemptuous capitalist post-independence Kenyan leadership.

The plant with 'petals of blood' in the novel also refers to Theng'eta, the plant with a pattern of four red tiny petals which grows wild in the plains that are associated with luxuriance, vitality and vigour. The plant is associated with Ilmorog's pristine traditional splendour. Unlike the 'potent ginger lily' in Walcott's poem however, Theng'eta, the flower also associated with 'petals of blood' in the novel, is itself a victim of evil. Its original innocence has been destroyed by agents of corruption. The blood of the novel's title suggests suffering. Thus, Theng'eta becomes the symbol of the entire society Ngugi is concerned with in the novel, a society that is potentially beautiful, healthy and productive but whose potential is unrealized and is itself destroyed by the agents of corruption and death. Like the 'potent ginger lily' in Walcott's poem, the embodiment of these agents of corruption and death is the post-independence Kenyan leadership. Ngugi further uses the physical drought and the arid emotional, spiritual, economic and political conditions of the Ilmorogians it symbolises to allude to the leadership's neglect of the general population while it fattens itself on the country's scarce resources. Finally, he also employs myth to express the despicable trajectory taken by the Kenyan leadership at independence.

Like Armah and Ngugi in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Petals of Blood* respectively, in *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe also uses symbolism to depict the neo-colonial ideology of the Nigerian post-independence political leadership. In conjunction with his use of symbolism, he also employs myth to allude to the leadership's obsession with power, alienation, its inward-looking character and

consequent self-destruction. Furthermore, Achebe uses symbolism to present the alternative political leadership he proposes through the novel. It is in the same spirit that he employs the myth of Idemili to express his belief of the need for women to intervene in the post-independence African politics. Thus, in *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe draws appropriately on the redemptive Igbo tradition of female devotion and worship to express his own proposed ideology of leadership in the post-independence Africa.

In view of the thorough investigation of the thrust of the fiction written in the post-independence Africa conducted in this dissertation, it is reasonable for one to argue that the emergence of a similar literature in the post-apartheid South Africa is long overdue. For despite the fact that the country hardly sees itself as part of Africa, it is hardly any different from any other African country (Hlophe 2000: 9). This seems particularly true when one considers the fact that the post-apartheid black government is still battling to meet the expectations of the historically disadvantaged communities throughout South Africa.

The post-independence governments in Africa assume governance with the mandate to socially and economically, empower the historically marginalised. As it was pointed out earlier in this dissertation however, Fanon has observed that former liberation fighters assume governance with two economic handicaps. Firstly, they lack economic power both in terms of ownership and secondly, in terms of the knowledge necessary

to steer the economy towards a more mass beneficiary direction. The post-apartheid South African government is no exception to this. As one provincial judge-president recently said: 'We are governed by activists, and not governors' (Hlophe 2000: 9). This means that those who are currently governing the country are not as yet well equipped for the task. Furthermore, the minority that dominates the economic pillars of the country is questionable in terms of its South African patriotism.

The unfortunate outcome of this economic weakness is that the country has a private-sector economy that has failed to meet the basic socio-economic expectations of the majority of South Africans. As Hlophe (2000: 9) observes, 'The combination is indeed rather scary: a majority that does not own the economy; a government that does not own the economy, or run it; and a minority people who own and run the economy and yet, do not feel any sense of patriotism to the nation whose resources it is milking.' Consequently, South Africa has an economy that is more geared towards the creation of profits for a minority than sustaining the well being of South Africans. This kind of economy places the majority of black people as spectators than participants (Hlophe 2000: 9).

In the light of all this, it is strange that with the exception of a rare figure like Zakes Mda, South African writers have in the main, not yet followed the general trajectory taken by other writers in the post-independence Africa. By failing to challenge this new state of affairs in the country, the South African writers are guilty of neglecting their duty to the

South African society in particular. It is incumbent upon the writers at this stage, to throw in their lot with the masses by confronting the ideology of the new ruling elite.

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