



The African Novel: The Ongoing Battle against Literary and National Neo-Colonialism

Emira Derbel^{1,2}
emira@buc.edu.om

¹ Manouba University, Tunisia.

² Al Buraimi University College, Oman.

Abstract. The African novel does not stand aloof from the historical and socio-political concerns of the African nation. It communicates an African reality, and it condemns the falsity of decolonization as it has turned to be a replica of colonialism. Chinua Achebe's *A Man of The People*, *Anthills of the Savannah* and Aye Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* are examples of African novels that play a political corrective role to denounce the double-sidedness of decolonization in Nigeria and Ghana, respectively. This article seeks to shed light on the uniqueness of the African novel as a genre that defies the simplistic imitation of the Western novel to dismantle such literary colonization. Additionally, this study focuses on the role of the African writer to make use of the novel as a carrier of social corruption and political criticism through the analysis of Achebe and Armah's novels.

Keywords: *African Novel, decolonization, nation, neo-colonialism, Western novel.*

1. Introduction

It is widely accepted that each literary work cannot stand by itself since it's always already a response, an illustration, or a representation of a particular historical or socio-political context. Following this line of thought, Georg Lukács (1970) stresses that "the genuine categories of literary forms are not simply literary in essence" (p. 21). In other words, a work of art bears the echoes of its time. In the context of African literature, one cannot negate the presence of a strong interconnectedness between the novel and the African political scene. The African novel illustrates a long tale of subjugation and struggle whether against slavery, colonialism, or its legacies like neo-colonialism.

The modern African novel is characterized by internal dynamics allowing it to develop a critical insight vis a vis an African reality bereft of a real sense of independence for the process of decolonization seems to have yielded nothing but a furthering of colonialism. The Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe attributes to the African novel a salient role for its ability to "provide a new way of re-organizing African culture, especially in the crucial juncture of transition from colonialism to national independence" (Gikandi, 1991, p. 30-31). The African novel, therefore, internalizes an artistic talent and a literary artistry to interrogate, in a fictional fashion, its historical reality in the aftermath of decolonization.

While decolonization forms one "important part of the lexicon concerned with the dismantling of empire", the modern African novel resists such denomination by adopting a critical historical and realistic approach to denounce the havoc which European colonial culture has unleashed on neo-colonial Africa (Ahluwalia, 2001, p. 35). In the same way, both post-colonial theorists Edward Said and Franz Fanon categorized decolonization as "a process that persists and [they] have offered insightful and compelling strategies and perspectives for liberation and resistance" (Ahluwalia, 2001, p. 35). For instance, Edward Said asserts that decolonization constitutes "a retrospective reflection on colonialism, the better to understand the difficulties of the present in newly independent states" (1986, p. 45). Said (1986) posits colonialism as the vital contributor in the propagation of a neo-colonial crisis within the sphere of the African nations. Said's ideological thinking finds its best echoes in Aye Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Chinua Achebe's *A Man of The People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*. Both writers explain that their respective countries post-colonial conditions are mainly due to the African nation inheritance of

imperialist social and economic institutions. Many African writers widely condemned the process of decolonization as Achebe, Armah and Ngugi Wa'Thiongo for its furthering of Western domination and hegemonic culture which has deepened the feeling of African strangeness and alienation.

Decolonization signaled, as Basil Davidson (1992) puts it, a "transfer of crisis", to which the African novel is considered to be the appropriate carrier (p. 38). The crisis is not only of the African governments or lands but also of the African literature and of "the African Mind" (Wa Thiongo, 1986, p. 88). The African novel witnesses the emergence of two distinct literary perspectives. While some critics of African fiction related the origin of the African novel to the European one, some others, such as the Nigerian critics Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubinke, strongly opposed such affirmations.

Chinweizu et al., define African literature as an "autonomous entity" and carry on their analysis "correcting these misusages" by analytically separating the European novel from the African one on the ground of the latter's preservation of "its own traditions, models and norms" (1985, p. 4). For instance, Wa' Thiongo's *Devil on the Cross* written in Gikuyu can be considered a way to resist the invasion of Western culture embodied in the English language. Yet, the translation of his novel to English language contradicts his position towards the African writer's use of a second language. In an interview with Jane Wilkinson, the Kenyan writer claims:

I think I used to have complexes about it when I was writing in the language. (...) so in fact confronting the issue of my own language has solved my relationship to the English or any other languages all over the world. For me this language is now a language like any other. I don't feel it dominates me now as a writer in the way it used to when I was writing in it (1992, p. 127).

Decolonization, therefore, occupies an important space in the African novel. Whether written in English or in a native language as the Igbo one, the African novel condemns as much as it satirizes the change brought by independence. Neil Lazarus, explains that the intrusion of "the category of Neo-colonialism" in African literature is mainly due to the assumption that independence was nothing but "a fraud" a "refinement of the colonial system" (1990, p. 5). This is a historical reality that stimulates the emergence of an African literature which, in Achebe's words, "evolves out of the necessities of its histories" (Gorlier, 2004, p. 50). The African novel fuses historical facts with the fictitious event within a well-recognized African reality. Hugg Webb sheds light on the traditional amalgamation of historical events within a fictional pattern as a central practice of the African novelist who, according to Webb, "proceeds from this principle to create literary works that, in their shaping and ordering, give significant insights into the potentialities of a fictional treatment of historical material" (1980, p. 24). The African novelist fuses history into fiction to create his/her literary work. A practice that witnesses the rise of the African historical novel and erases the already existing barriers between the novelist and the historian.

Yet, the central question that is still haunting the African literary field is whether such category called the African historical novel is merely an imitation of a western genre which further points to its cultural and literary dependency or whether it departs from the western norms to create its own specificity freeing the African novel from a second level of colonization and paving the way towards a "decolonization of African literature" (Chinweizu et al., 1985, p. 5). Using the American comparative school insights, the first part of this study will examine similarities between as well as departures from the Western historical novel using three main African novels as a case in point. The focus will be on the texts, their "literariness" combined with the frame of the cultures they represent. The article also seeks to shed light on the innovative tendency in comparative literature that contextualizes a literary text within its historical and cultural panorama. Here one can speak about the openness of African literature on its cultural and historical reality.

In representing African culture, the African novel plays a political corrective role by revising its history and by resisting any imitation of a western model. Even if several levels of similarities can be delineated which ironically proves to be parasitic to an African essence, they are not considered as mere imitation since they constitute for many African writers areas of subversion and resistance. The comparison may be implicated at many levels: the function of history, the nation, narrative strategies, language, the shift in the category of realism, time, as well as the role of the writer, constitute areas of diversion as well as similarities between the Western and the African historical novel.

2. Towards a Comparative Study between the African and the Western Historical Novel

African literature has its roots deeply grounded in a history of struggle against slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. One can, therefore, speak about a chronological development of African writing that goes hand in hand with significant historical events. A close relation between history and writing has given

birth to an African literature reminiscent of a certain historical and socio-political context against which it also reacts for the purpose of correcting and altering a set of the stereotypical configuration of Africa. In the absence of military assets to defend the continent against slavery and colonization, the West African novel becomes the weapon brandished by its writers on the face of the West denouncing its ravages and atrocities. Despite the continuous endeavor of the “colonialist critic” to dismiss the existence of the African novel as an independent genre on the premise “that the novel is peculiarly Western genre”, the literary field witnessed the rise of an African historical novel that remains faithful to its Africaness (Achebe, 1995, p. 76). Yet, its faithfulness remains threatened by a set of characteristics common with its Western antecedent.

Many similarities can be delineated between the Western historical novel and the African one. The African historical novel is characterized by its embodiment of quasi-real characters and events, it also exhibits a necessity to reflect real events and people in the narrative and to link the past to present to accommodate a narrative space for the illustration of history. Similarly, the Western historical novel locks history into an extended dialogue with the recent past and the presence ensuring a kind of process and continuation between both periods for history.

The African historical novel relates the use of the past in the historical novel to the context of its existence which is full of anxiety that despite its haunting intellectual disability, affords the African historical novel with clues to ponder on the instabilities of the present. As the Western historical novel, the African model oscillates between the past and the present. While the Western historical model, focuses on the French Revolution and its ideological aftermath on Man’s life in Europe, Achebe and Armah’s novels depict the legacies of decolonization and the ongoing impact of colonialism or neo-colonialism on the African Nation.

A distinct kind of anxiety does not seize from burdening the contemporary African Writer whose primary concern is to denounce the individual psychological alienation and to highlight the African nation’s weakness in the aftermath of the colonial domination. The African writer also seeks to deploy a distinct view of history. In “Narrative, history and the African Imagination”, Abiola Irele further outlines the necessity to reconstruct history through narrative as the sole way for Africans to share in the reconstruction of history (1993, p. 157). Irele further asserts that:

It is not only a secure sense of being-in-history that is no longer available to the African, but also a proper sense of belonging in the world: both have, therefore, to be constructed, striven for, in other words, imagined. Narrative, in the form of the novel, has afforded a privileged mode for this process of reconstruction (1993, p. 164)

In their fictional treatment of the historical material, both Western and African historical novels share what Paul Ricoeur in *Temps et Recit* calls “L’entrecroisement de l’histoire et de la fiction” as one fundamental phase of what he terms as “la refiguration effective du temps” (1985, pp. 264-265).

Chinua Achebe’s *A Man of the People*, *Anthills of the Savannah* and Ay Kwei Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* bridge the gap between historical events and fiction, a practice whereby both historical novelists establish a dialectical relationship between history and fiction. In “Discourse in the novel”, Mikhail Bakhtin highlights the existence of a “potential tension between the “heteroglot nature” of the novel “particularly of the historical novel and the refracting imagination of the author” (1998, p.39). In the case of the three African novels under study, one can denote the existence of such tension between the fictional panorama of the novel and the historical reality. For instance, the successive military coups and political turmoil in *Anthills of the Savannah*’s fictitious Nigeria reflect the country’s first attempted coups by which the writer himself as his character Ikem Osodi was accused. In the same way, “Kangan”, the fictitious West African republic bears resemblance to Chinua Achebe’s native Nigeria at the level of political corruption and social instability running through its days.

Achebe identifies history in *Anthills of the Savannah* as “the story of a people and the narrative of destiny” (1989, p. 74). History in *Anthills of the Savannah* becomes an act of recording led by its characters. Beatrice, for example, “strives to record the story of her friends and her country” by “bringing together as many broken pieces of this tragic history as she could lay her hands on” (1987, p. vii). The history of one country is constituted through the collection of its characters stories. This act of bringing together a heap of broken stories into a whole to form that of the country brings to mind a traditional practice in post-colonial literature followed by many expatriate writers. The African historical novel legitimizes the power of fiction to document and to correct the traumas of history.

Achebe’s two novels document political corruption in an African country resembling Nigeria in the sixties deploying satire as its primary strategy. At the same time, Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah* does

not entirely rely on the recording of some aspects of the past, but, it is essentially viewed as a projection of the future. Achebe's last novel is a projection towards a new era fuelled by the hopes of a new African generation "[...] with the possibility of some of the survivor to pick up something from the wreck of their recent past that may help them as they make their way into the future" (Wilkinson, 1992, p. 51).

Following the same pattern, Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* presents a pessimistic depiction of history encapsulated in the latter presentation of the failure of decolonization in Ghana during Kwame Nkrumah's last years of government. The narrative translates to its reader the flow of time along with the stagnation of values and old promises. In neo-colonial Ghana "the listening mind is disturbed by memories from the past, so much time has gone by, and still there is no sweetness here" (Armah, 1968, p. 67). The past still haunts Man's existence and colonial history is re-inscribed within the pattern of decolonization.

The three novels integrate both "l'imaginaire" and "la visée réaliste" within the same narrative space (Ricoeur, 1985, p. 266). At this level one can add that the novel plays the role of a historical record. This is a practice that further enhances Ricoeur's consideration of the treatment of any historical document as "une trace" (Ricoeur, 1985, p. 268). The African novel, therefore, turns to be itself a historical document, "une trace", "un opérateur effectif du temps historique" through which readers are not only confronted with merely an African novel but with an African history, an African story which is meant to supply the African thirst for restoring their dignity (Ricoeur, 1985, p. 268).

History and literature shift roles intermittently. The power of the story and the storyteller to evoke the past to comment on the instabilities of the present finds its most urgent resonance in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*. Narrative, in the novel, follows a retrospective flow for the story is told from the perspective of "Ikem" and "Chris", its prominent narrators who are already dead by the time we read the novel (Gikandi, 1991, p. 127). The narrator's constant interrogation and revision of the past is mainly meant to solve present crises to save the African nation's future.

The necessity to revive the African memory by re-writing its people's history to defy an already altered historical vision voiced by the colonizer explains Achebe's view of the African writer as someone who is: [...] committed [to] reclaim the rich heritage of Africa, every inch of it, and redrawing the contours of African history which in the hands of others has been drawn, and is drawn, with great malice and lurid falsehood... The perspectives will be many reflecting the complexity of the problem but out of the welter will emerge a sound, clear vision of the way forward (1964, p. 158).

For the process of engaging oneself with the burden of the past, the African writer becomes a historian and a novelist whose sense of interpretation of history in Said's term "holds and crosses over" between "colonialism and its genealogical offspring" (1979, p. 128). The story bridges the gap between the past and the present and goes beyond its limits. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Christopher Oriko, the commissioner for information, is portrayed as an "agent of historical memory" who bears witness to the past through the act writing (1987, p. 133). Indeed, the role of the African writer may differ from its western counterpart for its duty is not more concerned with recording but with correcting a falsified version of a colonial historical discourse. African writers have a more acute sense of the critical functions of their novels. The African writer's duty vis a vis its society is best illustrated in Achebe's essay "The Role of the Writer in a New Nation" when the latter claims that the "[...] novelist's duty [...] is to explore in depth the human condition. In Africa, he cannot perform this task unless he has a proper sense of history" (1964, p. 159).

The African writer is aware that the African historical novel differs from its Western antecedent since it has "[...] evolve[ed] out of the necessities of its history, past and current [...] and the aspirations and destiny of its people" (Achebe, 1976, p. 274). African writers have felt the sharp nagging voice of history, its constant demand on the writers to revise and to rewrite history to re-right their African nations. Achebe fuses the western form of the novel with an African flavor, local color, wit and African proverbs countering western fiction by the creation of a new kind of literature both imitates and departs from Western hegemonic discourse.

Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* oscillates between an African mythical dimension and a Western narrative style. Armah's novel is haunted by the traces of the Western novel. Armah's fiction has been severely accused of being foreign-derived for its imposition of a modernist alienated anguish illustrated in its character "the man" whose quasi-existentialist malaise calls to mind Samuel Beckett's absurdist contemplation of the world and echoes Lukacs theorizing of the novel's hero as being trapped between his fruitless search for authentic values and the degrading reality of his society. In his *Theory of the Novel*, Georg Lukacs's links "the emergence of the novel as a major modern genre" to a "change in the

structure of human consciousness" governed by "the man's way of defining himself in relation to all categories of existence" (1971, p. 53). Armah's novel echoes Lukács's theory for the writer's main character, suffers from an alienated existentialist situation because of the latter's refusal to contaminate his soul with the material filth of his society.

Contrary to the rest of the novel's characters, the "man" is not named, his anonymity is mainly due to his community's refusal to accept him since his honesty does not conform to his society's decadent values for whom "money was life" (Armah, 1968, p. 77). The journey, therefore, seems to be a fruitless process during which the battle becomes even against the "loved ones", like his wife "Oyo" (Armah, 1968, p. 77). The search is accompanied with the central character's meditation on the state of Ghana through a continuous cycle of seclusion best illustrated in the novel's sixth chapter through the conversation between the "man" and the "teacher"; a dialogue full of rhetorical questions reflecting the existentialist ennui of its protagonist (Armah, 1968, p. 78). Here the "man" is a "narratee character" who while listening to the "teacher's" monologue, plunges into a state of reflection and meditation on Ghana's decline and mainly on his decision to shut himself from the outside world (Lorentzon, 1996, p. 58). His reflection is reframed within the structure of rhetorical questions: "why should there be such a need for shrinking the hoping self, and why must so much despair be so calmly embraced?" (Armah, 1968, p. 79). Both characters' questions are reflections on neo-colonial Ghana.

Unlike the realistic mainstream of African literature, Armah's novel deploys symbolic fictional modes as well as imagery. Symbolism is the literary engine by which the writer translates to his audience the decadent reality of neo-colonial Ghana. The first chapter, for example, ends with the description of a wooden banister.

The banister had originally been a wooden one, and to this time it was still possible to see, in the deepest of the cracks between the swellings of other matter, a dubious piece of deeply aged brown wood. And there were many cracks, though most of them did not reach all the way down to the wood underneath. They were no longer sharp, the cracks, but all rounded out and smoothed, consumed by some soft, gentle process of decay (1968, p. 12).

At this level, one can denote the excessive use of a "symbolic code" which is mainly meant to refer to moral decay and filthiness (Lorentzon, 1996, p. 62). In addition, one cannot ignore the ironical tone of the narrator since "decay" in Ghana loses its true meaning and becomes, instead, a "soft process" (Armah, 1968, p. 12). A large idiom related to human body functions governs the novel. Scatology is the running imagery throughout the novel, an imagery that is highly illustrated in the image of the "man" who "was trying to speak like a white man" but ironically enough, "the sound that came out of his mouth reminded the listener of a constipated man, straining in his first minute on top of the lavatory seat" (Armah, 1968, p. 125). An image that ironizes black's man attempt to mimic a white man's speech.

The large body of scatological imagery reflects Armah's implied view of post-colonial Ghana whose political and social scene becomes a drain for its politician's corruption and bribery; an increasing amount of dirt enough to provide the "office sweeper" and the "latrine man" with three daily cleaning jobs (1968, p. 125). For example, the narrator mocks the African civil service's effort to speak like a white man for "the sound that came out of his mouth reminded the listener of a constipated man, straining on his first minute on top of the lavatory seat" (Armah, 1968, p. 125). Armah's style highly differs from Achebe's. The novel descriptive tableau echoes those of the French nouveau roman. Also, one can denote that the novel is composed of a mosaic of foreign inter-texts.

Armah's foreign style can also be grasped at the novel of the latter's incorporation of foreign inter-texts. Throughout the novel, one can detect the presence of a sort of "cross-cultural borrowing" (Hokenson, 2000, p. 4). From the first chapter, there is an illusion to the "passion week" accompanied by pages from the holy book and Christian hymns as well as the evocation of Christ's crucifixion (Armah, 1968, p. 1). Such religious reference is, however, structured within an utterly materialistic semantic field which annihilates the religious connotation of such a celebration relating it, instead, to the monthly week before payday. Ironically enough, neo-colonial Ghana witnessed a collapse of religious and moral values. In Armah's novel, the individual becomes nothing else but an "article of no commercial value" (1968, p. 6). The post-colonial era is metamorphosed into an age of commodity, and ironically, decolonization gives free rein to the inheritance of a Western capitalist structure. Adopting a pessimistic philosophical tone, "the teacher" in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, presents the new colonizer of Ghana, Western capitalism:

No difference at all between the white's man and their apes, the lawyers and the merchants, and now the apes of the apes, our party men. And after their reign is over, there will be no difference ever. All new

men will be like the old. Is that then the whole truth? Bungalows [...] cars long and heavy. Women, so horribly young, fucked and changed like pants, asking only for blouses and perfume from diplomatic bags and wigs of human hair scraped from which decayed white woman's corpse? (1968, p. 89).

The process of commodification invades the African consciousness and strengthens the dependence of Ghanaian society on the capitalist West. The teacher's statement highly illustrates how western capitalism keeps its grip on the African nation by objectifying its individuals, trapping them into a vicious circle of exchange and consumption. At this level, one can notice the common ground that post-colonialism may share with post-modernism since the novel's characters seem to be present in both spheres. On the one hand, the "man" and the "teacher" are highly aware of their state of alienation due to the decadence of social values as well as the reiteration of the colonial replicas in neo-colonial Ghana (Armah, 1968, p. 12). On the other hand, the text running metaphor of eating as bribery enhances Armah's presentation of the African culture and the African nation as a commodity product.

Significantly, even the notion of time is contaminated by the materialist glamour that shapes the novel. Time is depicted as a stagnant, passive process, burdening the worker's daily life. It is a monotonous experience, but it is also a necessity that governs the individual's financial needs. For the railway clerk the slow flow of time, and "its frightening sameness" have rendered his night work a meaningless task (Armah, 1968, p. 16). Similarly, Achebe's *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah* translate the massive, stagnant process of time. Albeit its old promise of social and political stability, independence falls short of meeting the Nigerian's hopes. The "winds of change" proved to be false slogan which paved the way toward the propagation of the old Western colonial discourse which pervades everything and "[...] everywhere [...] in structures and in minds" (Ahluwalia, 2001, pp. 37-38). Things do not change for the best. Armah does not only cast his characters into a modern dystopian pessimistic condition, but he also locates his narrative at the intersections of both, post-colonial and post-modern paradigms.

In Armah's novel the past re-inscribes itself in the form of mythological inter-text. In chapter five, the "man" alludes to the Indian Buddhist philosophy of "reincarnation" as a possible evasion from "the horrible threat of decay" (1968, p. 48). There are also references to Kalil Gibran's *The Prophet*, the cave myth in Plato's *The Republic* and an implicit reference to T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. These foreign inter-texts further illustrate the reigning atmosphere of corruption in post-independent Ghana. For instance, Gibran's poetry put in the mouth of "the grieving soul of the [man's] friend" reflects the truth about the laws of life, the law of the fittest:

Would that you could live on the fragrance of the earth,
And like an air plant be sustained by the light.
But since you must kill to eat,
And rob the newly born of its mother's milk to quench
Your thirst
Let it then be an act of worship ... (Armah, 1968, p. 48).

The necessity to guarantee one's existence on earth obliges the human being to succumb into a daily struggle with the other to preserve his existence. Yet, the repetition of such a process renders it similar to an "act of worship" devoid of any sense of mercy. In addition, Armah infers to a similarity between the state of the "naked man" and T. S. Eliot's characters in *The Waste Land* (1968, p. 60). For example, the teacher asserts that he is "also one of the dead people, the walking dead. A ghost. [that he] died a long ago. So, long that not even the old libations of living blood will make [him] alive again" (Armah, 1968, p. 61). The modernist alienation of the teacher, his death in life state owes a great resemblance to Eliot's characters.

Despite the absence of any appropriate association between these intertexts and the story, one can notice that all these intertexts are meant to obscure the sense of decay and disillusionment in neo-colonial Ghana whose people become similar to Eliot's hollow modernist characters. Plato's metaphor sustains one of the novel's central theme that of the individual imprisonment within the sphere of his materialistic desire. In *The Republic*, the cave prisoners are those driven by their utter "desire for competition rather than reason" (Lutz, 2003, p. 105). Armah creates a parallel between the latter's and the "man's" social countrymen who run after appearances, like 'Oyo' and "Estella", worshipping luxury. The writer's integration of a highly elevated level of religious and literary intertexts determines the kind of audience to which these references are aimed. So, he or she may be a well-educated Ghanaian reader. Armah's narrative seems to be a qualitative one for the novel excludes the average Ghanaian reader.

On the one hand, it is almost possible to categorize Armah's novel as "a Westernized stylistic experiment" (Lorentzon, 1996, p.63). On the other hand, the novel is also a container of African inter-

texts. Armah incorporates African mythology to comment on the decadent situation of Ghana and to resist, at the same time, a bunch of western audiences for whom the text will constitute a cultural barrier. For instance, there is the revival of the “African many Water Legend” in the picture of the “mad woman Manaan” who loses her powers of rebirth and renewal because of the society’s degraded and corrupted reality. The story reveals the “carrier myth” transmitted by the “man”, who like the cyclical movement of a legend, at the end of each year he returns to the sea to dump the accumulated filth of his society (Lorentzon, 1996, p. 62).

Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah*, as well, is not devoid from an Igbo cosmology. The Nigerian writer incorporates African myth and legend by referring to the prose poems of Ikem’s “Hymn to sun” and by evoking the creation myth of “Idemili”, the Almighty’s daughter (1987, p. xiii). By clearing a narrative space in the novel for mythical intertext, such as the evocation of the “Emperor Shaka’s smile” and “beautiful” death, through his reference to “Mazisi Kunene’s” epic poem Emperor “Shaka the Great” at the end of the novel, Achebe harmoniously links literature to history and myth (1987, p. 54).

The Igbo oral tradition is better illustrated through the novel’s title itself. “Anthills of the Savannah”, wrote Achebe, refers to an Igbo saying which is “[...] an observation of what happens after the dry season in the grassland” (Achebe, 1997, p. 148). The burning of the old grass will pave the way to the growing of a new one which, however, will have no memory of what happened before it. Yet, there will be these “old termite structure” which will remind us of the past. Applied to the novel, the title’s significance may give us an insight in the author’s intention (Achebe, 1987, p.56). The new generation symbolized in the birth of Ikem’s daughter “Amaechina” whose name’s connotation “may the path never close” embodies a sense of progress and of hope (Achebe, 1987, p. 55). The new African generation will continue to fight for the protection of an African national unity and an African identity. While Achebe seems to be optimistic regarding the future of Nigeria, Armah’s the ‘Beautifuls’ are still waiting to be born. Both novels share a common reconfiguration of realism within the sphere of post-colonialism.

The three novels under study deploy the same referential pattern to illustrate their postcolonial condition from a realistic angle. They use a kind of binarism at the level of characters to reflect two different orders of reality. The westernized intellectual Odili Samalu is opposed to Chief Nanga in *A Man of the People*, the “man” in the *Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is presented in opposition to “Koomson” and, finally, “Ikem Osodi” and “Christopher Oriko” in *Anthills of the Savannah*, are set in a triangular relationship with “Sam”, the president of “kangan”. It is the confrontation between art and politics, the writer and the political reader. Achebe’s aim is to represent “these two roles, these two views of the world” which are, in fact, “at the centre of [his] thinking: action and reflection” (Wilkinson, 1992, p. 48). We are, on the one hand, inclined to conceive the truth about Africa’s political reality reigned by bribery and political greed. On the other hand, one can notice the presence of a new wave of African intellectuals who, despite their internalization of Western ideologies, developed a critical insight vis a vis an African reality. African writing like the African writer has a sense of commitment to an African reality.

The three novels are an exposure of social and political corruption in Africa. Decolonization fails its promises of political stability and offers instead “disillusionment and national disunity” (Derbel, 2017, p. 173). Ironically enough Neo-colonialism spreads into the sphere of African literature itself. Armah’s narrative is to some degree a replica of a Western style. Despite “the change in the subjects and themes treated” in the novel, Armah does not succeed in extracting from his novel “colonial attitude, norms, world views, values and techniques” (Chinweizu et al., 1985, p. 145). Armah’ novel oscillates between a wholly Western style and an utterly African context which may categorize the novel as a hybrid text. Even though Armah tries to clear a narrative space to condemn the process of Decolonization in Ghana, he adopts Western modernist techniques.

Unlike Armah, Achebe’s novels derive their narrative strength from the political breath that prompted them. The latter’s novel celebrates the African cultural heritage for they constitute the space where remote African tribes like the Igbo one come into existence. Yet, both writers underscore important issues as the African nationalist consciousness. The three novels illustrate the capacity of the African novel to reflect the fragmented aspect of the African nation. The African writer’s primary goal is to document national consciousness.

3. Representation of the new African Nation in Chinua Achebe's *A Man of The People*, Anthills of the Savannah and Aye Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*.

3.1. The Subversive Role of the African Literary Tradition

Writing in African literature emanates from the latter's negation of its marginalization and evokes the African writer's continuous search for a space for self and national assertion. The African writer seizes writing as a source of self-empowerment for its ability to re-invent an African world, an African 'counter-hegemonic discourse' which in Kwame Anthony Appiah's words summarizes the African writer's need to create an "African literary tradition" (1988, p. 155). African writing challenges a western literary tradition whose critics have historically defined African narrative as an alien form of literary expression. It has evolved out of a political and social commitment to an African reality.

African narrative exposes and subverts, in Edward Said's words, the exoticist "representation" of Africa as being "the sedate prose of the district-officer-government-anthropologist of sixty or seventy years ago" (as cited in Gikandi, 1991, p. 31). African literature opposes such exotic representation. It is the writer's commitment to the idea of the nation. Facing the further upheaval brought by the independence of the African nation, the African novel begins to interrogate the present and to worry about the future of the African nation. In an interview with Jane Wilkinson, Achebe discloses his view of the African writer as one whose duty is primarily to recover "the truth" about reality, "the truth of fiction" which is, according to him, the highest form of art (1992, p. 48). African writing, therefore, seeks to denounce the truth about its African social, economic and political structure.

The act of writing is contextualized within the scope of African literature stimulates the latter to carve its space and to re-assert its existence as a cultural body. African writing bears in its genesis a utopian dimension embodied in its narrative ability to recover an African identity trapped between the interstices or the "cross-roads" of cultural homogeneity (Gikandi, 1991 p. 15). One cannot undermine the power of the story to transcend political and social fragmentation in post-independent Africa by reflecting the fissures at the heart of the African nation trying to unify its broken parts into a meaningful whole.

The novel proves to be the most convenient genre that the African writer adopts to reflect on the past, present and the future state of the African nation. Hence, the story according to Achebe is "our escort; without it we are blind" (1987, p. xiv). Achebe's claim further illustrates the powerful impulse of the story "to continue beyond the war and the warrior ... to outline the sound of war drums . . . it is the story, not the others, that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence" (1987, p. xiv). Achebe, here, points to the immortal aspect of art embodied in the story's power to create history and to protect memory from blindness allowing future generation to learn from the mistakes of its predecessors.

3.2. The Construction of the African Nation Through Narrative

Achebe, like many other African writers, considered the novel to be the most appropriate imaginary vehicle through which the structure of the African nation could be transmitted to the "new man" of the post-independent era (Gikandi, 1991, p. 8). Unlike any other literary genre, the novel, according to Timothy Brennan, "mimics the structure of the nation" by reflecting on a peculiar stage of a nation's life as the post-colonial phase regarding third world literature (1989, p. 89). In the same vein, Lucien Goldman's term "homologies" denotes a form of correspondence or equivalence between the novel and reality (1975, p. 159). Indeed, the same line of thought is tackled by George Lukacs in *Theory of the Novel* embraces the notion of the novel as a critique (1971, p. 56). The latter affirms that the novel displays a "heterogeneous and contingent discontinuity" defined by Lukacs as "irony" (1971, p. 56). The three novels deploy irony to satirize the decadent moral and political status of the African nation.

Imitation and critique go hand in hand. In *A Man of the People*, the notion of imitation and critique are locked together within the same narrative space. Hence, Achebe's concept of "interest" in writing as "a form of commitment to a project [and] a form of compensation or supplement" in the Derridean sense (Gikandi, 1991, p. 11). Narrative, in this sense, fills in the gap and adds to a mutilated historical version. On the one hand, the novel, according to Achebe, delineates the author's responsibility in politicizing his art by reflecting on issues like nationalism. On the other hand, literature becomes that "supplement" that traverses official discourses (De Man, 1993, p. 117). This political discourse is reflected through Chief Nanga's speech during the election campaign, his urge to give his people "their fair share of the national

cake”, disguises the latter’s true intention, to reap the fruits of the nation (Achebe, 1987, p. 56). In the post-colonial moment, the novel interrogates the status of the new African nation.

The African writer relies on the power of the novel to give the wretched of post-independent Africa, whose voices are blurred by their leader’s discourse of power a narrative space through which they can comment on their post-colonial condition. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, for instance, the Abozon delegation composed mainly of peasants whose voice of protest engenders bitter dissatisfaction from the part of the president for the voices of discontent are censored or “Not To be Broadcast” in neo-colonial in neo-colonial “Kangan” (1987, p. 53). The novel illustrates Achebe’s central premise about narrative which is articulated through the voice of an old Abazon character: “the story is our escort; without it we are blind” (Achebe, 1987, p. 119).

The story is a source of insight meant to appease the character’s post-colonial condition. The novel gives us an alternative, a new vision of reality. It gives a voice to the silenced Abazonian character. The African nation is still haunted by the traces of its colonial era. Their leaders are nothing but “dusky imitators of petit bourgeois Europe” (1987, p. 54). The notion of critique haunts the novels since it gives them the power to unveil hidden clashes in the nation. Literature, at this level, traverses official discourses. Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, for instance, interrogates the policy of the “new men [who] would take into their hands the power to steal the nation’s riches and to use it for their own satisfaction” (1968, p. 162).

The three novels illustrate what has been termed by Franz Fanon as “the cracks in the edifice” of the nation (1963, p. 158). The concept of nationhood is presented through the relation of narrative to the fissures in the nation sphere because of the propagation of political corruption. In *A Man of the People* there is a shift at the level of the character’s role. The writer ironically points to the contradiction between the “crier’s” role in the past and his role in the present days of Nigeria’s independence:

“In the past his business was to serve notice of something that was to happen. But this night he did something new: he announced a decision already taken. The elders and the councilors of Urua and the whole people; he said, had decided that in the present political fight [...] they knew one man [...] Chief Nanga” (Achebe, 1998, p. 134).

The novelty proved to be nothing else but a “process of retrogression that is so harmful and prejudicial to national effort and national unity” (Fanon, 1967, p. 180). Odili’s village people are monopolized by the “national crier’s” discourse and their political leaders’ promises of “good, clear water” (Achebe, 1998, p. 134). People are silenced by the propagated urge for the nation’s unification as an important step toward the construction of a strongly unified African nation. Yet, the call for the homogeneity of nationalism is a policy meant to mobilize the masses. In the same context, Homi Bhabha criticizes the ideas of a new nation state presented in a hegemonic manner by pointing to “a particular ambivalence that haunts the idea of the nation” (2013, p. 1). Armah and Achebe’s novels are haunted by the idea of the African literature commitment to the notion of national community by denouncing the inner level of corruption that governs the African nation. The role of the writer, therefore, is to teach his people and to correct the ills of his own nation.

The image of the nation in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is governed by a capitalist structure. Armah’s narrative illustrates the story of the “man” whose state of alienation is essentially caused by his unwillingness to sink into the corrupt attraction of money which becomes a common feature of the nation’s daily life. The “man’s” world, his conceptualization within an African nation guided by false appearances and by a sense of repulsion vis a vis the “made in spirit Ghana” becomes an allegory that in Patrick Mc Gee’s words, “arises from a culture in which the real world has become meaningless, devoid of intrinsic value fragmented yet mysterious” (Armah, 1968, p. 116; 1992, p. 241).

The national reality is governed by colonialist capitalist values. In post-independent Ghana “the national bourgeoisie identifies itself with the Western bourgeoisie, from whom it has learned its lessons” (Fanon, 1963, p. 168). Fanon’s association of the new African nation with the capitalist structure finds one of its illustrations in Armah’s novel through which “koomson”, his wife Estella and “Oyo” are knee of “European drinks”, “Oyo” tries to mimic the new social order and to climb the social ladder even at the expense of her husband’s moral ethics (1968, p. 178). Pretending that she also belongs to “the Upper Residential Area” gives her a momentary feeling of superiority (Armah, 1968, p. 178). In Ghana, the national bourgeoisie’s 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 masque of neo-colonialism” (Fanon, 1963, p. 178).

The nation in Achebe and Armah's narratives constitutes what Bhabha calls that "curiously hybrid realm where private interests assume public significance" (2013, p. 4). The African nations turn to be an amalgamation of local and foreign colors, a construct mapped by dictators in the African mind under the guise of collective interest. The fruit of the nation, however, are swallowed by its dictators. The African novel uses imagination to give its African audience "a different order of reality, a second handle of existence than the one imposed on them" (Gikandi, 1991, p. 3).

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe relies on different narrative strategies to narrate the state of Nigeria. The writer no longer adopts a first person narrator to condemn political corruption and moral filthiness. He projects the state of the new kangan nation through the perspective of several witnesses: like Chris, Ikem, Beatrice and an anonymous narrator. The novel opens with a cabinet meeting conveyed through the ironic stance of its first witness Christopher Oriko followed by Ikem Osodi's version of the nation's history in the novel's fourth chapter. Both witnesses transfer to the reader the monopolizing power of its "ruthless dictator" (Achebe, 1987, p. 3). It seems that Achebe invites the reader to the nation's court to play the role of the judge while both witnesses narrate the dramatic process of the nation formation after independence. Ikem seems to be aware of the importance of his role as a storyteller when he asserts that "Storytellers are a threat, they threaten all champions of control" (Achebe, 1987, p. 146). In the novel, Achebe fuses an oral tradition, storytelling, within the narrative flow to awaken an aspect of African orature. Achebe debunks the Eurocentric prejudice that promotes the idea that the African novel will be contaminated with "the deficiencies of the oral tradition" (Chinweizu et al., 1985, p. 32).

Chris relies on memory to tell the story of the national "game that began innocently enough and then went suddenly strange and poisonous" (Achebe, 1987, p. 1). Both witnesses, Ikem and Chris are interested in that moment where public opposition to colonial rules paves the way for a national crisis, and the struggle turns to be against the nation's bourgeois politicians, the fruit of a form of neocolonialism. Chris is aware of his role as a writer and an observer of the story of his country. Adopting an ironic tone, Chris transmits to the reader His Excellency's fear regarding peaceful delegations, petitions, and television (Achebe, 1987, p. 17). The witness's omniscient presence can penetrate the official discourse. Ikem stands for the writer, the artist and the intellectual who represents, according to Achebe, "the other side of the truth; the side of gentleness where there is too much violence" (Wilkinson, 1992, p. 48). In the novel, the writer underscores the conflict between "the artist and the regime" (Wilkinson, 1992, p. 48). It is the artist power to lay bare the inner corruption that lies at the heart of the African nation that mostly threatens the perpetrators of violence for the force of the idea and the discourse traverses the mask of power. The conflict between art and politics comes into the light following Ikem's refusal to "seek anybody's permission of what [he] writes" (Achebe, 1987, p. 40).

Each witness tells the story of the nation from his position and perspective. While Chris seems to resent Ikem's radical tone in writing, he is projected as a mere observer who only tries to detach himself from the internal crisis while narrating it. Chris, however, is highly aware that "[they] are all connected. You cannot tell the story of any of us without implicating the others" (Achebe, 1987, p. 61). The story of the nation is composed of a multiplicity of sub-stories. It is in this sense that Beatrice tells her friends "the story of the country, as far as you are concerned, is the story of the three of you" (Achebe, 1987, p. 62). Ikem's tragically plotted death unveils the real face of the nation.

Simone Gikandi aligns Ikem's vision of the nation as "naïve romanticism" (1991, p. 145). This is rather exaggerated as Ikem's role is more of a witness of the nation's history. This allows him to transcend the visible structure of the nation's politics. It means that Ikem was able to detect the reasons behind the national crisis by digging into the heart of Africa's politics. Ikem comes to a conclusion that "the failure of our rulers to re-establish vital inner links with the poor and dispossessed of this country, with the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation's being" (Achebe, 1987, p. 135). The poet was, therefore, conceived as a threat because he acknowledged that power might be disturbed by the voice of truth and that silence is what "your proprietor" yearns for (Achebe, 1987, p. 141).

Achebe does not only rely on two male voices to tell us the story of their nation, but he also gives space to the female voice to play a crucial role in projecting the future development of the nation. The novelty with *Anthills of the Savannah* is that the nation is also narrated from a female perspective. Indeed Beatrice's role as a writer and a narrator of her nation's history underlines Achebe's intention to assign the modern African woman a new role within both the social and the political sphere. In an interview with Jane Wilkinson, Achebe points to the necessity of giving voice to a woman in his novel to speak about an African tradition and African experience:

I think we must re-examine this situation and find a way in which the modern woman in Africa will have a new role which is not just something we refer to once in a while but brings her talents and her unique gifts to the running of the affairs. This is one of the things that I was tentatively exploring in *Anthills* [...]. I think women should organize themselves to speak, from a real understanding of our situation and not just from a copying of European fashions, women's lib and things like that, but out of our traditions to work out a new role for themselves. This is the challenge I throw both to the men and to the women, but particularly to the women (1992, pp. 53-54).

Beatrice challenges all the stereotypes that traditionally shaped the female character. She criticizes her father's "chauvinism", the social codes that relegate the woman to a peripheral position (Achebe, 1978, p. 78). Her retrospective looks into the past is a necessary phase to define her role in the present nation's crisis and to develop a critical insight into women's status. For instance, she affords Chris with a new way of perceiving women's role in the nation's politics. Despite the difficulty she encounters in writing about "this tragic history", she "still could not find a way to begin", however, she successfully undertakes the role of the storyteller (Achebe, 1978, p. 78). The unnamed narrator urges Beatrice to take over the responsibility of telling the story of the nation after Ikem's death and Chris's escape: "It's now up to you women to tell us what has to be done" (Achebe, 1978, p. 176).

This projection toward the future may also be illustrated through the birth of Elewa's daughter whose name "Amaechina" explained as "may the path never close" metaphorically conveys a kind of continuum (Achebe, 1978, p. 208). It is the rebirth of a new generation that may afford an answer to Beatrice's rhetorical question "what must people do to appease an embittered history?" (Achebe, 1978, p. 211). Amaechina, the female born baby, is the emblem of the beautiful that are waiting to be born in Armah's novel.

Women's role in *Anthills of the Savannah* highly differs from the one depicted in Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Estella, Oyo's mother and Oyo herself are not the healers of a diseased society, they are, instead, presented as contributors in the destruction of moral ethics and blind worshippers of Western capitalism. Armah's presentation of women's status in the neo-colonial Ghanaian nation is an ambivalent one for it oscillates in E. N. Obiechina's view between being both "victim and evil-doer" (Ikonne et al., 1991, p.118). While Estella, for instance, indirectly supports Koomson's illegal monopolization of the nation's wealth, Oyo encourages her husband, the Man, to adopt the illegal methods of his counterparts to achieve wealth. Both women are replicas of consumerist society; symbols of yearning for British products and drinks, which reflects a Ghanaian nation still dominated by foreign values.

4. Conclusion

The broad category of African literature is reduced to what Bill Aschcroft calls "regional" or "newer" literature whose primary focus is to discuss the national impulse that nourishes the postcolonial African novel's narrative (Aschcroft et al., 2003, p. 17). This further enhances the functional nature of African literature, its political and social commitment to an African reality. The three novels point to the African nation's cultural fragmentation and disorientation from their cultural traits best illustrated through the adoption of Western behavior and European values. African literature highly differs from its Western counterpart for it is not merely a reflection on individual experience, but also a reaction against historical denigration of African culture.

The African novel politicizes history by criticizing colonial oppression and neo-colonial dependency. The development of critical insight vis a vis an African reality is carried by the African writer's decolonizing project. Decolonization takes two different dimensions. On the one hand, it is a matter of extracting from the African social and political life western influences and ideologies. On the other hand, it is a question of creating a wholly African literature debased from western literary contamination. It is a position that can explain Achebe's refusal to attribute a universal aspect to the African novel for African literature has its specificity that distinguishes it from the mainstream of Western, Asian or Indian literature.

Achebe and Armah give free rein to the incorporation of African myths and legends. They politicize their narratives by condemning the failure of decolonization as it obscures their nation's cultural and political dependency on the west. Both writers' narrative brings to light dialogic relationship between the novel or the story and the nation. The nation's formation owes a lot to the story and the storyteller. Despite Armah's condemnation of political and social corruption in Ghana, his style remains highly contaminated by a Western flavor. Yet, Achebe fuses African storytelling, with an irony within his

narrative to defy the Eurocentric view of orature as a “shortcoming” if added to the narrative (Chinweizu et al., 1985, p. 33). Both writers, however, resort to the English language to reflect an African crisis, an African reality. The three novels under study cannot escape their textual hybridization, but they are still able to face it by subverting its ideology and by introducing local colors to their novels. The African novel deconstructs that old taxonomy that regulates it to an inferior position by subverting the hierarchy.

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