

**INTERTEXTUALITY AND THE “TRUTH” OF ACHEBE’S FICTION:
MILITARISED NIGERIAN POSTCOLONY IN ANTHILLS OF THE SAVANNAH**

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Abstract

*This paper critically explores the centrality of intertextuality in the production and appreciation of Chinua Achebe’s fiction, mainly, his political novel that deals with militarism, *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). Intertextuality deals with relations among texts: no text is an island. The departure from author-centred theory of literary criticism to unrestricted and diversified one, following the urgency of poststructuralist theory precipitated intertextuality. Militarism is the prevalence of the armed forces in the administration or policy of the state. The significance of intertextuality to the creation of postcolonial Nigerian literature establishes the fact that the social facts (part of which militarism) that are being refracted are real. These artistic productions are “truthful chronicle”; they are relational in textual make-up. This paper therefore demonstrates that Achebe’s fiction is a derivative of the corpus of “verifiable”, realistic literature on militarism in Nigeria’s postcolonial experience. That is the “truth” about Achebe’s fiction. Thus, the remit of our textual analysis here is *Anthills of the Savannah*, which largely borders on militarism and political dictatorship.*

Keywords: Achebe, militarism, intertextuality, fiction, post colony, Nigeria.

Introduction: The Origin of Intertextuality - An Overview

“Fiction reveals truth
that reality obscures”.
--- Ralph Waldo Emerson.

The concept of intertextuality was born following poststructuralist theorising about envisioning the death of author-centered criticism, which limited the gamut of apprehending wide-ranging, disparate meanings and multidimensionality of textual interpretations. Intertextuality de-emphasises the space of discursive evanescence thereby providing a bulwark for inclusivity and heterogeneity of textual relations and meanings for diachronic textual interpretation. This process is opposed to Ferdinand de Saussure’s synchronic method of assessing texts, which is not historical in reach. Thus, the author was killed in Roland Barthes ambitious essay, “The Death of the Author” (1967). As Barthes lucidly puts it,

a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the message of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture (1967: 146).

Intertextuality ensconces that no text is an island. In maintaining that there is no isolated text, rather every text is derived from a pool of textual relations, intertextuality reverses the structuralist contention that a text can only be influenced by its antecedents and has no destination. Therefore, in the poststructuralist schema, older text can be filtered

through later texts – thereby foregrounding the endless stream of interconnectivity of textual tissues, cultures and ideologies, among others. Also, Barthes' contention in his avant-garde essay was to annihilate interpretive tyranny, which consigned omniscience to the author; this is in line with Erich Auerbach's idea of narrative tyranny in relation to author-centered textual interpretation, a departure from the Barthesian concept.

The present canonised field of study, intertextuality, has Julia Kristeva as its intellectual high priest. Kristeva borrowed a lot from the famous Derridean philosophy, a neo-Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis, and appropriated these theories for her conceptualisation of intertextuality. Also, Kristeva's radical critical tool has prehistoric indebtedness to Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralist semiotics and Bakhtin's idea of dialogism. In Bakhtin's concept of dialogism or dialogicity, a word (in text or language) is no longer a construal of fixed meaning, rather a concourse of textual networks and surfaces (Kristeva, 1969: 144). Thus, "any text is a new tissue of past citations" (Barthes, 1981: 39). Intertextuality as Julia Kristeva's brain-child was conceptualized in 1966, during the march from structuralism to poststructuralism – in order to curb the power of the author, who assumed the authority of a closed sign-system, dictating how text could be read or understood. This approach was a prelude to Deconstruction, which takes textual interpretation from multi-faceted perspectives.

In theorising intertextuality, Kristeva maintains that every text is constituted "by a mosaic of citations, every text is absorption and transformation of another text" (Kristeva, 1986: 37). Like Kristeva, Terry Eagleton opines that every literary work is essentially "re-written" (1983: 192). In re-writing literary works as Eagleton indicates, each text directly or indirectly makes reference to other texts, this is what Peter Barry sees as "a major degree of reference between one text and another" (1995: 91). In his important work, "Theory of the Text", Barthes lends credence to this perspective:

any text is an intertext; other texts are present in it, at varying levels, in more or less recognizable forms: the text of the previous and surrounding culture. Any text is a new tissue of past citations. Bits of codes, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social languages, etc. pass into the text and are redistributed within it. [...] Epistemologically, the concept of intertext is what brings to the theory of the text the volume of sociality (in Young, 1981: 39).

The relationship amongst texts and the dialogue such texts address brings to the fore the ideological coloration of a particular epoch or time.

In instantiating this, the corpus of colonial fiction passes through a filter: the texts produced during this time, highlight imperial rule and its concomitants. The same goes for anti-colonial fiction, which gibbets imperialist incursion. Therefore, every text or literary work is derived from the ideological or politico-social realities of a particular time in the history of a people. Jean Howard echoes the same position:

In fact, I would argue that [...] attempting to talk about the ideological function of literature in a specific period can most usefully do so only by seeing a specific work relationally – that is, by seeing how its representations stand in regard to those

of other specific works and discourses (1986: 30).

This is the case with Achebe's political fiction. Every of Achebe's fiction has a trace of earlier ones at least indirectly. This is fundamentally true about his postcolonial fiction, which refracts Nigeria's "postcolonial disillusionment"; and it is a product of "... a plural productivity in which multiple voices – textual, socio-historical and ideological – coexist and communicate" (Lara-Rallo, 2009: 92). Thus, in connection to Achebe's fiction – particularly his political fiction on militarism *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), which is the focus of this paper, attempts will be made to locate the place of intertextuality in this work. The novel as shall be argued here has a lot with Achebe's earlier fiction in texture and perspective.

Achebe is widely known for his appropriation of precursory artistic elements in his art. Thus "Achebe is able to retrieve fascinating antecedent works to espouse his philosophical outlook, i.e., his belief in the cyclical theory of history" (Kehinde 2003: 377). This narrative pattern is characteristic of the Coleridgean "suspension of disbelief" paradigm, a concept coined by Samuel Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria* in (1817). The meat of Coleridge's phrase "suspension of disbelief" underwrites a writer to inject what Coleridge calls "human interest and a semblance of truth" into a piece of fiction thereby making a reader to suspend judgment concerning implausibility. Intertextually, this means a writer's ability to identify similar conjunctures in another work, which technically showcases verisimilitude, makes the reader to believe in the actuality of such aestheticisation. This artistic faithfulness is responsible for the Yeatsian invocation in Achebe's *tour de force*, *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Yeats' Ireland has some semblance with Achebe's Igbo universe in the novel. The locale Achebe portrays in the work is turn apart by colonial incursion as with Yeats'.

In his *Fiction of Chinua Achebe* (2007), Jago Morrison sees this commitment in Achebe as a consistent continuation of his vision, craft and ideal. Thus,

[...] Achebe is also known to recast the notion of "commitment" so often associated with his writing... a writer's willingness to hold firm to the personal and the aesthetic – a writer's willingness to hold firm to the truth of his vision, the authenticity of his language and to his own artistic integrity (2007: 137).

In this same train of thought, Onyemaechi Udumukwu's statement here corroborates the intertextual nature of Achebe's fiction:

Achebe's reflection in *Home and Exile* paves the way for us to understand his novel *Anthills of the Savannah* as opening up the authentic grounds for social and political re-storying and reinvention in the postcolonial context (2006: 195).

The act of "re-storying" above resonates with Umelo Ojinmah's contention regarding Achebe's fiction as "mosaic of quotation", to borrow Julia Kristeva's phrase. Thus,

Achebe's latest novel, *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), extends his structural time sequence to the present. It encapsulates both Achebe's original views and concepts on the role of the artist in African societies, as contained in his earlier fictions and essays,

his disillusionment and despair at what we have made of independence (Ojinmah, 1991 :84).

In Search of Truth: Text and Militarism in Nigeria

The coalescence of literature and truth cannot be glossed over; the quotidian deployment of art by writers to refract truth in our society is a case in point. Nigerian writers have appropriated literature to give expression to the socio-historical malaise that buffets the nation as well as harnessed it to give man a platform to know what is happening around his world in order to move in such world (Delbanco, 1999: 34). This is quite pronounced in the postcolonial Nigerian novel, which chronicles social facts in the polity. In his analysis of the debt of literature to the service of humanity and its truthful reconstruction of militarism in human society, C.O. Ogunyemi asserts that writers engage in writing because of

The sheer urge to record, as truthful as possible, an excruciating and delible, visceral experience which the author has been physically and/or emotionally involved (Nwahunanya, 2007: 109).

For postcolonial Nigerian writers, writing does not exist in a vacuum; every piece of fiction refracts truthfully the situation and realities in Nigeria. This “veracious” artistic faithfulness is what Wellek and Warren in their well-titled book, *The Concept of Criticism* call the “the reflection of reality” (1963: 239), a pattern Lindfors sees as the true account of writers’ state of their society (1972: 8).

The truth of the tragic, cataclysmic military experience in Nigeria is a cardinal leitmotif of postcolonial Nigerian literature. In the foreword to *The Insider: Stories of War and Peace from Nigeria*, Emmanuel Obiechina adds credence to the reality of the tragic atmosphere that Nigerian writers dramatise in their works: “out of every serious crisis in the life of a people there comes a deepening insights into the true nature of man and of human society” (1971: vi). This is the tradition in which novels that reconstruct military experience in Nigeria were born; Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah* follows in the footsteps of this mould. In the novel, Achebe takes us on a roller-coaster of military dictatorship in Nigeria fictionalised as Kangan, the setting of the novel. The novel also adumbrates subsets of power struggle and feminist agitation. In the main, Achebe’s major thematic preoccupation in *Anthills of the Savannah* is military governance, which he sees as a mere aberration. It is a regimen that rather aggravates the same inanities that characterise civilian administrations.

The concept of intertextuality irrespective of its Euro-Western beginning is not entirely foreign to Nigerian (African) literature and oral tradition. There is no gainsaying the fact that African oral art and literature is typified by absence of authorial omniscience; there are rather communal participation/ownership and group authorship, among others. In her seminal work, *Oral Literature in Africa* (1970), Ruth Finnegan comments on the communality of African orature and art by saying that : “such literature was, for instance, supposed to be the work of communal consciousness and group authorship rather than ... of an individual inspired artist” (36). Nigerian fiction is a product of seamless unity that exists amongst various works as it directly or indirectly refers to one another. Therefore, “every text is an intertext” (Leitch, 1983: 59) and in the same manner, “all intertexts are texts” (Plett, 1991: 5). Accordingly, in Charles Bodunde’s view on the intertextuality of Nigerian literature, he maintains that “each literature or text has the capacity to influence and extend the meaning of the other” (1994: 72). This is the case with Achebe’s work under review; it

extends his artistic vision and craft about Nigerian experience.

Therefore, African (Nigerian) literature is *prima facie* intertextual in scope. In the case of war novels or fiction of military experience in Nigeria, there is a palpable leitmotif that these novels adumbrate: they all point a flambeau to command-and-obey system, violence, power drunkenness, brutality and above all militarism. Put simply, novels on military experience in Nigeria are in a seamless textual relation: they all echo theatre of horror and failure of men in uniform to drive positive change after preaching messianic mission as reason for dabbling into politics. It is on this score that Achebe says that the political failure of Kangan is encapsulated in the inability of men in khaki to establish vital nexus with the people, whom he considers as “the poor and disposed” (141) of Kangan, a simulacrum of Nigeria. In his “Military Dictatorship”, Manivuzzan, reaffirms Achebe’s view about military dictatorship’s disempowerment of the people and its atrophied messianic mission: “the military leaders only aggravate the problems of nation-building after taking over from the civilian political leaders” (1992: 248).

It is noteworthy to make an array of fictional distillates that foreshadow military experience in Nigeria. From Achebe’s prescient text about Nigeria-Biafra 1966 coup d’état, *A Man of the People* (1966) to his short story collection, *Girls at War* (1972) to *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) there is aesthetic consciousness in his craft to reconstruct militarism in postcolonial Nigeria. In this regard, all works on military dictatorship in Nigeria have a thread that runs through them: they synthesise the horrors of brute force and tyranny, which have been previously articulated in earlier texts. Thus, Chinua Achebe’s political novels on military dictatorship, Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) and Helon Habila’s *Waiting for an Angel* (2006) become intertexts, turning a mosaic of meanings and dialogue addressed by other political novels steeped in military absolutism (Ogunpitan, 2007: 12; Oyegoke, 1992: 158). Hence, since Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah* is suffused with traces of earlier works on postcolonial Nigerian militarised status quo, the novel (text) is truly intertextual and foregrounds Achebe’s artistic meditation on postcolonial Nigeria.

Art has been described by the formalists as mere contestation of language, rather than a representation of reality - a mere simulacrum that gives a deceptive substitute of reality. It distorts and imitates rather than reflects “truth” or reality; it does not even oppugn reality, as some posit. Also, proponents of this idea of art, maintain that art offers a grotesque caricature of reality. If this position was true, how could art have persuaded men, time immemorial, to change their environment, had it not have relationship with truth? Also, if art has no “social truth” or does not romance with reality, why does it disturb the conscience of a people? Achebe writing on “The Truth of Fiction” brings very insightfully the truth of art: “But if art may dispense with the constraining exactitude of literal truth, it does acquire in turn incalculable powers of persuasion in the imagination” (1990: 95). By extending the frontiers of this Achebean indication,

the work (of art) is a tissue of fictions: properly speaking it contains nothing that is true. However, in so far as it is not a total deception but a verified falsehood, it asks to be considered as speaking the truth: it is not just any old illusion, it is a determinate illusion (Macherey 1978:69).

Consequently, Salman Rushdie’s single stroke on the canvas, *The Satanic Verses* (1988), turned Khomeini’s Iran into a splendid spectacle of disquiet. This delineation is seen in Pablo Picasso’s mural, *Guernica* (1937), a painting that pricked the conscience of Spanish

fascism thereby signaling the tragedies of war and their concomitants to mankind.

Similarly, the intertextual ability of Achebe's fiction (particularly political ones) to refract Nigeria's political history is what Simon Gikandi sees as "The way narrative recreates history and memory ..., a crucial theme in *Anthills of the Savannah*" (1991: 126). There is a thread that runs through Achebe's political novels on military rule: it excavates a particular type of historical experience – that of "succession of military coups, the civil war itself and a series of corrupt dictatorships" (Morrison 2007: 139) in postcolonial Nigeria. In this vein, Achebe's *A Man of the People* (1966), published in January 1966, two days before the Nigeria-Biafra civil war, makes the point about the "truth" of his fictive writing as well as its intertextuality. Commenting on the "truth" of Achebe's political fiction, *A Man of the People*, Jago Morrison says that

there are certainly close correspondence between the political developments of the mid-1960s in Nigeria and those that are depicted in the novel. Achebe's account of the military takeover at the end of his text, in particular, comes remarkably close to describing the actual events that followed (2007: 116).

This is also similar to the conjunctures that *Anthills of the Savannah* refracts. It is a dramatisation of political excesses as well as state usurpation of power in the successive military juntas that greeted Nigeria after her political independence in 1960.

Bringing Militarism to Heels: Violence, Narrative and History

Published in 1987, Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) deftly reconstructs postcolonial Nigerian space in vice-grip of militarism. In dramatising this notion, the opening statement in the novel exemplifies militarised Nigerian postcolony:

You are wasting everybody's time, Mr. Commissioner for Information.
I will not go to Abazon. Finish! Kabisa! Any Other business?

As Your Excellency wishes. But...

But me no buts, Mr. Oriko! The matter is closed, I said (1).

The tone that pervades the above exchange, which is speckled with language of altercation suggests that Kangan is enmeshed in a political muddle that the Nangas and Sams have made of democracy on the African continent. In addition, the above exchange pushes sturdily to the fore that "the military and democracy are in dialectical opposition ... The military demands submission, democracy enjoins participation; one is a tool of violence, the other a means of consensus building for peaceful co-existence" (Ake, 1995: 34).

The plot rotates around the fate of two prominent male intellectuals (Chris and Ikem) oppressed in a militarised crackdown orchestrated by the nation's "president-for-life" (Sam), who is a childhood friend of theirs. The novel's sequence of narration moves between these two characters and their female friend, Beatrice, who works in the Ministry of Finance. As Kangan's Minister of Information, Christopher Oriko is in a position to wield influence since he is part of the government but cannot because of the president's absolutist power base. The president's militarised power network does not allow opposition or alternative view. This is exemplified in the manner the presidency runs the Ministry of Information by dictating to it

what should be done. This is responsible for Chris and Ikem's feisty debate about the latter's editorials, which the president had asked Chris to moderate. As Ikem argues, "... as long as I remain editor of the *Gazette* I shall not seek anybody's permission for what I write" (44). But as the novel unveils, Ikem's idealism to change his world, Kangan, was met with brutality and his sudden death.

After the death of Ikem, Chris went into hiding and wanted to escape the country because Sam's toadies wanted him for their master, Sam. In his bid to do this, Chris was killed by Sam's security operatives. Chris' killing is a horrific form of brutality. This incident took place as Chris wanted to rescue a schoolgirl who was being abducted by a police officer. The police officer in question was stealing some beer before he saw the schoolgirl and wanted to rape her. The girl was being mishandled brutally by this officer. This made Chris to get involved – by coming to her rescue:

The police sergeant was dragging her in the direction of a small cluster of round huts not far from the road and surrounded as was common to these parts by a fence of hideously-spiked cactus. He was pulling her by the waist, his gin slung from the shoulder (215).

Chris' intervention by trying to save the schoolgirl's life caused him his life:

He unslung his gun, cocked it, narrowed his eyes while Confused voices went up all around some asking Chris To run, others the policeman to put the gun away. Chris Stood his ground looking straight into the man's face, Daring him to shoot. And he did, point-blank into the Chest presented to him (215).

As Ojinmah avers, "In Achebe's view, the circumstances of Chris's death typifies the depravity of military dictatorships to whom human life has become worthless" (1991: 91).

In order to clobber opposition and dissenting views, the military in Nigeria employs violence and militarisation of operation to sustain itself in power. The military in this sense sees might as right and coercion as a substitute for democratic principles. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe considers the soldiers as being worse than the civilian government they ousted; they have in this regard perfected killing, torture, intimidation, terror, violence and have in the final analysis militarised the social space. In instantiating this,

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe sees the soldiers as not being any better than the civilians that they ousted; if anything, they have become worse, having perfected torture, intimidation and cold-blooded killings as weapons to cow the opponents of their policies. And believing that they are accountable to no one but themselves, And having the ultimate weapon – the brute force of the army at Their beck and call – they have to see governance as a matter of How long they are able to stay in or cling to power (Ojinmah, 1991: 86).

Intertextually, the above insightful, gripping remark by Umelo Ojinmah, which is characteristic of *Anthills of the Savannah*, percolates the cosmos of Achebe's postcolonial Nigerian fiction.

In this direction, "scenes of political brigandage and thuggery as we find in Achebe's *A Man of the People*" (Amuta 1986: 149) are self-evident in *Anthills of the Savannah*, where

Achebe indicates that “There were unconfirmed rumours of unrest, secret trials and executions in the barracks” (14). Achebe considers the use of violence and brutality as a form of police state. This indication presages the Gestapo regime in Hitler’s Germany. In *No Longer at Ease* (1960), the nature of violence here is essentially that of psychological violence and threat. The protagonist of the novel Obi Okonkwo is in crisis. The wellspring of his crisis is that he is in a society whose values and mores are completely out of sync with his personal values and aspiration. This situation in Obi’s world pushes him to marginality and cultural transition thereby constituting psychological violence as well as emotional trauma. This situation in the final analysis threatens Obi Okonkwo’s wellbeing and survival. Thus, “Whilst Obi is an alienated, confused protagonist, the world he inhabits is shown as threateningly empty” (Morrison, 2007: 90).

The three main characters in *Anthills of the Savannah*: Chris, Ikem, and Beatrice whom Achebe portrayed as representing the voice of change are faced with diverse forms of inhumanity ranging from political assassination, violence, threats and intimidation. As Achebe illustrates, these three people symbolise “the cream of our society and hope of the black race” (2). The trio’s dilemma is similar to the fate of real people in postcolonial Nigeria, who are constantly threatened. Starting with Beatrice Okoh (Nwanyibuife) – “A female is also something” (87), Achebe presents a woman who is in a struggle with the apparatuses of Sam’s power game to fight for the political rights of women in her society, Kangan. Although the militarised social milieu in Kangan makes Beatrice’s quest difficult, she eventually makes the voice of women to be heard: “This world belongs to the people of the world not to any little caucus, no matter how talented” (232). Understandably, the repressive system in Kangan is a direct fall-out of African traditional institution that marginalises women. This form of oppression is occasioned by militarism.

In the case of Ikem Osodi, he was killed by his Excellency’s hatchet men for standing up for truth. Though Ikem tried the hardest to use the pen to smother militarism and dictatorship through his editorials in the *National Gazette*, which he edited, but he was eventually felled by the guns. This goes to questioning the capacity of the pen and dialogue to triumph over militarism in Kangan. As the sergeant declared: “Oh no. The pen is mightier than the sword. With one sentence of your sharp pen you can demolish anybody” (131). This did not materialise; rather, Ikem was brought down by the bullet. The death of Ikem is a celebration of raw force and brutality to silence opposition. After Ikem’s speech at the University of Bassa on the insensitivity of Sam’s mode of governance, he was accused of regicide because the powers that be reckon that his speech radicalised the students as well as the people. Ikem’s speech was titled “The Tortoise and the Leopard – a Political Meditation on the Imperative of Struggle” (153). Symbolically, Ikem’s choice of words for the speech paints in a bold relief the militarisation of the status quo. The tortoise represents the people as well as the intellectuals, while the leopard signifies might and raw power. It was essentially because of this event that the Excellency (Sam) asked for Ikem’s head after his speech was misquoted to incriminate him. The next day, the national paper, *National Gazette* had a headline as thus: “EX-EDITOR ADVOCATES REGICIDE” (162). At the behest of Sam, Major Sam Ossai (Samsonite), Sam’s hatchet man was ordered to arrest Ikem. Ikem was killed eventually:

In the early hours of this morning a team of security officers effected the arrest of Mr. Osodi in his official flat at 202 Kingsway Road in the Government Reservation Area and were Taking him in a military vehicle for questioning at the SRC Headquarters when he seized a gun from one of his escorts. In the

scuffle that ensued between Mr. Osodi and his guard in the Moving vehicle, Mr. Osodi was fatally wounded by gunshot (169).

The atmosphere above paints a shocking picture of a society caught in a mesh of blood-curdling violence and apprehension occasioned by men in khaki to curb opposition.

Sam, the military commander and dictator of Kangan, who assumed the “presidency-for-life” in a *coup d'état*, brooks no resistance to his authoritarian regime. In clobbering his political opponents as well as resisting their efforts, Sam uses violence and brutality. Major Johnson Ossai (later Colonel) is Sam’s (Excellency’s) Chief Security Officer. He is the main character used to perform most of the brutal and violent operations. Ossai’s portraiture in the novel parallels Nazi’s chief of Gestapo (the Secret Police), Heinrich Himmler, who was executing the people during the monstrous reign of Fuehrer (Third Reich). As the sabre-rattling and belligerent Director of State Research Council (14), Sam uses Ossai to force submission and loyalty from the masses through the instrumentality of coercion, killings and violence. A case in point was when Sam used Ossai to dowse agitation from the Abazon delegation regarding draught in their province, which the Excellency (Sam) had neglected because the people’s welfare does not matter to him. Thus, with the help of Ossai, Sam’s anxiety regarding the drought in Abazon was “swiftly assuaged by his young, brilliant and aggressive Director of State Research Council” (14).

Between Art and Truth: Intertextuality, Postcoloniality and Power Personalisation

The truth of Achebe’s fiction fundamentally lies in its capacity to mirror diverse perspectives and narratological patterns as indicated by other writers in relation to the same subject matter that he articulates in his earlier fiction. Essentially, in his political fiction, there is a distillation of Achebe’s preoccupation to address one major concern: the political impasse and power usurpation in postcolonial Nigeria. This method of artistic representation is akin to the West Indian postcolonial literary experimentation on “mosaic” of sources, which Henry-Louis Gates calls “tropological revision”. This is in relation to postcolonial Nigerian literature that is given to alluding diverse narrative patterns that coalesce to paint a similar and familiar picture about Nigeria. In the Gatesian locution, this thesis is considered as “the manner in which a specific trope is repeated with differences, between two or more texts” (1988: xxv).

The architecture of Achebe’s technique transcends the referentiality of his earlier political fiction, and lends itself to larger complexity and synchronicity with other fiction that treats same Nigerian history. Consequently, in his piece, “Language, Foregrounding and Intertextuality in *Anthills of the Savannah*”, Omar Sougou’s statement makes credible the textual interdependence of *Anthills of the Savannah* with other pieces of fiction on the militarism in Nigeria:

The intertextual construct of *Anthills of the Savannah* rests on a number of allusions, parodies and direct references to Achebe’s own works and to that of other writers which are ingrained in the main text (45).

The emphasis here is the intertextual nature of Achebe’s works – they constantly refer to his earlier works as well as works of other postcolonial Nigerian writers. This pattern is reminiscent of Bakhtin’s dialogism. In fleshing this out, Bakhtin notes, “a language is revealed in all its distinctiveness only when it is brought into relationship with other

languages” (141). The “allusions” Sougou refers to are the undeniable place of power drunkenness, political violence and the truth about militarised form of governance in this nation. As Kofi Owusu affirms: “with varying degree of emphasis, all of Chinua Achebe’s novels to date explore the use and abuse of power by those who wield it” (1991: 459).

So the question of power as well as the militarisation of society through perpetual military intervention in Nigeria is constant staple in Achebe’s postcolonial fiction. This is one of the major thematic axes of *Anthills of the Savannah*. This is very symptomatic of Sam’s leadership style, as demonstrated by Chidi Maduka in his essay, “Chinua Achebe and Military Dictatorship in Nigeria: A Study of *Anthills of the Savannah*”:

Thus, Achebe deftly opens the novel with an apt dramatisation of the power game which is a major concern of the work. Sam is a power seeker who ruthlessly silences opposition in order to show that he constitutes a formidable power base capable of resisting the assault of political opponents (2007: 68).

This power personalisation and crude use of force to enforce subordination by the “alliance of purse and gun” (Soyinka 1973: 134) is the same point that Onyemaechi Udumukwu makes here in his *Social Responsibility in the Nigerian Novel* (1998):

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, the leaders’ lack of contact with the aspiration of the ordinary people manifests in an attempt of the leaders to reduce national interests to their personal interests. This is evident in the indiscriminate scramble among the leaders for political and state power as a means of attaining financial profit (1998: 23).

It is within this remit that J.O.J Nwachukwu-Agbada has argued that “the novel (that is *Anthills of the Savannah*) is a study of power in an African state, and shows how original ideals are swept aside by the concept of power personalisation” (My parenthesis, 2007: 102).

The privatisation of the public space by the military leaders and their foot soldiers in Kangan, a penumbra of postcolonial Nigeria is largely responsible for the leadership malaise buffeting this space indicated by Elewa’s uncle in the novel:

We have seen too much trouble in Kangan since the white man left because those who make plans make for themselves only and their families (228).

Gabriel Okara, one of the patriarchs of Nigeria’s poetry bemoans the breach of peace occasioned by militarism in his “The Silent Night”, a poem from his famous collection, *The Fisherman’s Invocation* (1979). The militarised, wrecked social space that Okara’s poet-persona refers to is being ruled by “Sounds of exploding shells/rattling guns and raucous laughter of death” (1979: 44). The same mantra pervades the genre of Nigerian drama that is largely steeped in militarism and power drunkenness. In drama, works such as *Opera Wonyosi (Six Plays)* (1981) by Wole Soyinka, *Once Upon Four Robbers* (1991) by Femi Osofisa, and Niyi Osudare’s *The State Visit* (2002), among other pieces of drama that dramatise this tradition, show the colour of militarism and despotism.

Thus, the aesthetic of power and militarism has spawned its own literary tradition in Nigerian postcolonial fiction writing: “in the beginning power rampaged through the world, naked” (Achebe 1987: 102). This “naked” power finds effulgence in the regimes of Buhari/Idiagbon, Abulsalam Abubakah, Sani Abacha, Olusegun Obasanjo, Badamashi Babangida and even most of the civilian governments since Nigeria’s political independence in 1960. Intertextually, other Nigerian fiction that responds to this state of affairs includes Chukwuemeka Ike’s *Sunset at Dawn* (1976); Chinua Achebe’s *Girls at War* (1972); Isidore Okpewho’s *The Last Duty* (1976); Festus Iyayi’s *Violence* (1979) and *The Heroes* (1986); Frank Uche-Mowah’s *Eating by the Flesh* (1995); Adebayo Williams’ *The Remains of the Last Emperor* (1994); Kole Omotoso’s *Just before Dawn* (1988); Sowaribi Tolofari’s *The Black Minister* (1994); Ngozi Chimamanda Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) and *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007); and Tanure Ojaide’s *The Activist* (2008) as well as *Matters of the Moment* (2009) among other pieces of fiction on postcolonial Nigerian military dictatorship. It is in this light that Adeoti indicated that

on a general note, the reality of militarism has engendered its own aesthetics. Hence, the predominance of drama of rage, fiction of protest and poetry of indignation... These writings are remarkable for deliberate violation of hallowed conventions of literary compositions without necessarily impeding significance. After all, military rule thrives on violation and subversion of rules (2003: 33).

A priori, Achebe considers art as a refraction of the goings-on in Nigeria. For him, there is no such thing as the Kantian/Gaultherian art for art’s sake thesis, which is largely autotelic; rather, in Nigeria as well as other countries in Africa, what art should portray is “the precision and vividness ... of some observed detail” (Williams, 1972: 581).

In this connection, Achebe reasons with another great novelist in Africa, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, who affirms that

literature results from conscious acts of men in society. At the level of the individual artist, the very act of writing implies a social relationship: one is writing about somebody. At the collective level, literature, as a product of men’s intellectual and imaginative activity embodies, in words and images, the tensions conflicts, contradictions, at the heart of a community’s being and process of becoming. It is a reflection on the aesthetic and imaginative plane, of a community’s wrestling with its total environment... (Ngugi, 1981: 5-6).

The issue of power personalisation and its manifestation in social relations in Achebe’s work are what Udumukwu (2006) considers as thus:

The worldliness of Achebe’s text manifest itself in its preoccupation with power relations. The theme of power relations is an important one because the sharing of power and its abuse remained (sic) a major social reality in postcolonial Nigeria... (196).

The issue of power abuse is very crucial in understanding the political history of postcolonial Africa, particularly Nigeria. This is inextricably linked to Ngugi's statement above concerning "conflicts" and "contradictions" that stem from power in postcolonial Africa. This is the atmosphere that *Anthills of the Savannah* refracts in Kangan.

Part of a Whole: Epiphenomenon of Realist Tradition

In his *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (1992), Martin Gray asserts that the realist tradition is a literary and aesthetic approach appropriated by writers "who show explicit concern to convey an authentic impression of actuality, either in their narrative style, or by their serious approach to the subject matter" (241). This method of refracting social facts in a given social space amounts to "literary aesthetic of truth-telling" (Lodge 1986: 4), which according to Dwivedi (2008) is the hallmark of Achebe's literary enterprise:

Chinua Achebe has been particularly successful in creating a realistic representation of an African environment. He is one of the major writers from the African subcontinent who have given a new direction to English-language African literature by representing, realistically, an African environment and giving expression to a sense of increasing disgust and unrest within its population (2).

One of the facets of "disgust" and "unrest" on the African continent according to Dwivedi above is military dictatorship, a recurring decimal in Nigeria's political equation. It is to this end that it has been noted that

the military is not only a dominant political force in the country's postcolonial governance but also a recurrent subject in its narrative fiction, poetry and drama. In the works of ... Chinua Achebe... one is confronted with the tropes of power abuse, economic mismanagement and poverty among other legacies of military regimes. (Adeoti, 2003: 6).

Military intervention in Africa particularly Nigeria has become a major source which writers use as a canvas for reconstructing real, identifiable events in the body polity. And for Achebe, shying away from representing realities in postcolonial Nigeria, not the Lacanian *The Real*, will amount to sheer formalist literature: "Art for art's sake is just another piece of deodorised dog shit" (Achebe 1976: 25).

One major reason for military intervention in Nigerian politics is failure of leadership, which Achebe himself sees in his chapbook, *The Trouble with Nigeria* (1983) as "the trouble with Nigeria" (1). And as Achebe observes in *Anthills of the Savannah*,

The prime failure of this government began also to take on a clear meaning... It can't be the massive corruption though its scale and pervasiveness are truly intolerable; it isn't the subservience to foreign manipulation, degrading as it is; it isn't even this second-class, hand-me-down capitalism, ludicrous and doomed... It is the failure of our rulers to re-establish vital inner links with the poor and dispossessed of this country, with the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation's being (141).

Traditionally, the military have no idea of governance. This is the case with Sam, His

Excellency. Sam's characterization smacks of militarism, which is a reality in political history of Africa. Sam is a quintessence of "soldiers-turned-politicians" (141) in Africa. Sam's leadership in Kangan dovetails with undemocratic, military mode of governance in Africa. This is also true of other fictive writings on military dictatorship as said earlier.

Another way of measuring the realist nature of the novel is lodged in the manner in which women are marginalised and repressed in political participation and governance in Kangan, a simulacrum of Nigeria. In the novel, there are clear demonstration of power play and political tyranny meted against women. This gendered social space, which marginalises as well as discriminates against women, is typical of postcolonial Nigerian state. This contention has been taken further in this analysis:

It should be remarked that the dominance of the military as subject in Nigeria's postcolonial literature does not imply the absence of other engagements. Some writers have explored the crucial issue of gender in social formation. The contention is that colonialism merely exacerbated gender imbalance in indigenous cultures as men were obviously privileged in the operation of the colonial machinery. Political independence had not washed off the splodge of patriarchy (Adeoti, 2003: 9-10).

In an exchange between Beatrice and Ikem, it is self-evident how the gender-blind Kangan society operates:

The women are, of course, the biggest single group of oppressed people in the world and, if we are to believe the Book of Genesis, the very oldest. But they are not the only ones. There are others – rural peasants in every land, the urban poor... (98).

The characterisation above is in tandem with the actualities evident in postcolonial Nigeria, where women are oppressed politically through the instrumentality of political coercion, militarism and exclusion. The societal texture captured here is one which is inseparably linked with the realities in postcolonial Nigeria. Part of these realities is women political disempowerment, which needs to be reversed for participatory, democratic governance. It is to this end that Umelo Ojimah argues that in *Anthills of the Savannah*, "Achebe believes that the time is now, for the new nations of Africa, to invoke the female principle, not necessarily in its original form of keeping women" (103) in the back burner through gendered political space. The craft of *Anthills of the Savannah* is a synecdoche of the realities in postcolonial Nigeria and Africa by extension. Put simply, the conjunctures in Nigeria are what the novel refracts.

Conclusion

The main thrust of this paper is to demonstrate that the concept of intertextuality is pertinent to apprehending the oeuvre and hallmark of Achebe's fiction. In addition, art does not exist in a vacuum; Achebe's fiction is a response to lived experience in postcolonial Nigeria. Thus, the "truth" that Achebe's fiction refracts is social experience located within an identifiable, real social space. Moreover, it has been demonstrated that the issues that Achebe's fiction addresses are equally a continuation of similar matters by other fiction on Nigerian experience. There is therefore a relational nexus between Achebe's postcolonial fiction and novels in the same mould; they spawn a discursive confluence. This diachronic

similarity makes Achebe's fiction intertextual: it is part of a seamless "mosaic" of reference, quotation, and allusions. Therefore Achebe's fiction is essentially a response to an "effective presence of one text in another" (Genette 1982: 8). *Anthills of the Savannah* therefore effervesces with themes articulated by other writers on the same issues, which are militarism and power as well as bristles with Achebe's major concerns in his earlier works. This makes a case for "truthful" refraction of events in Nigeria that is fictionalised as Kangan. It is within these parameters that the novel can be read as a typical postcolonial novel about Nigeria's militarised postcolony.

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