



## The postcolonial problems presented in Chinua Achebe's 'Antilles of Savanna'

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the postcolonial problems presented in Chinua Achebe's 'Antilles of Savanna'. A selected book of the 'Antilles of Savanna', which is written by prominent African author Chinua Achebe, was used as an oeuvre for the study. The main objective of this paper is to analyze the major themes of the literary work 'Antilles of Savanna'. The specific objectives are to identify the major themes raised and to examine the postcolonial problems presented in Chinua Achebe's 'Antilles of Savanna'. This study was collected from print documents. Thematic and contextual analysis employed a theoretical framework for analysis. The results of the study delineate the problems inflicting newly independent African states. The prevailing theme and the major problem in this novel are the corrupt dictatorial setup of Kangan. The theme in the work is 'overcoming the history of suffering' through the inculcation of a strong sense of community among the people. Finally, the study also clearly shows the postcolonial problems presented in the Anthills of the Savannah: nationalism, discriminating attitudes towards women, amalgamation of indigenous cultures, opposition to African indigenous cultures, and leaders influenced by colonizers.

**Keywords:** Antilles of Savanna, postcolonial, and Kangan.

### 1. Introduction

Chinua Achebe, emeritus professor of the University of Nigeria, one of the great pioneers of modern African literature in English, who published several outstanding novels, among which *Things Fall Apart* (1958), has already become something like an African classic, and who is not only known for his stories, essays, and children's books but also for his award-winning poetry, has given us another very fine novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*. This is an extremely well-written and balanced novel about the ugly contrast between idealistic aspirations and violent corruption in an imaginary but realistic postcolonial setting, a novel that enlightens the reader on many different levels.

The anthills represent the Abazon elders, who serve as archives for ancestors' knowledge and collective experience. The Savannah was devastated by post-colonization, the division of Cold War ideologies, the collapse of incompetent leadership, and the economic downturn. A symbol of the hopes and dreams dashed, the jugged anthills rise out of the desolate savannah. Despite the challenging sociopolitical environment, these individuals have persevered to pass on their stories of struggle, coups and countercoups, and "last year's bushfire" to the next generation, so inspiring them to fight for and pursue social transformation.

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The setting of *Anthills of the Savannah* is Kangan, an imaginary country in West Africa, where Sam, a Sandhurst-trained military officer, also known as His Excellency, has taken the reins of power by coup d'état. Achebe, or Chest, rates his societal vision for postcolonial Nigeria, which is suffering from prebendal looting and inept leadership, while also separating the authorial voice through the use of many narrative channels and points of view. Ikem, Chris, and Beatrice are the three companions in the center of the national tragedy, which is regarded as the main plot point of this fictional work.

### **1.1. Symbols in *Anthills of the Savannah* by Chinua Achebe**

**The Drought in Abazon:** The denial of people's basic, core social amenities is symbolised by the drought in Abazon. It's a way of punishing those who have done wrong. In the *Anthills of the Savannah*, this natural occurrence is utilised to represent the natural drought that a people have been exposed to as a result of cruel leadership and bad governance. Paradoxically, Major Sam refuses the Abazon people access to water during this drought in retaliation for their refusal to back his life-long presidency vote.

**The Death of Chris:** Even though *Anthills of the Savannah* is not a religious book, Chris's death is comparable to Christ's death. Chris donates his life to Adamma to protect her from the evil sexual nature of the police officer, much as Christ gave his life to save humanity (Adam) from their sin and earn them eternal life.

***Anthills of the Savannah*:** In fact, *Anthills of the Savannah*, which is the title of the novel, is another powerful symbol that I have found in the novel. I feel that Mr. Achebe is symbolising the independent, self-serving colonies that African despots have built with the labour of the people by using termite mounds or anthills, which are ubiquitous on the continent. It is also instructive to know that sometimes Savannah is used to represent Africa. For instance, studies have shown that the medium-sized Savannah Monitor lizard and the wild cat breed known as the Savannah Cat are native to Africa.

**The Newborn Baby:** At the end of the novel, Elewa's newborn child serves as a sign of hope and renewal for the Kangan people as well as for Elewa and Beatrice.

## **2. Methodology**

In this study focusing on the examination of postcolonial issues in Chinua Achebe's "*Antilles of Savanna*," a qualitative approach was employed. The methodology centered on thematic and contextual analysis of a specific text selected from the novel to explore the major themes

related to postcolonial problems. Utilizing a single oeuvre from the book, the research relied on print documents as primary sources, emphasizing a meticulous reading to extract nuanced insights on the postcolonial African experience portrayed in the work.

The research methodology integrated a theoretical framework for analysis, aligning with the thematic and contextual exploration of the major themes within "Antilles of Savanna." By delving into the corrupt dictatorial system of Kangan—a prevalent theme in the novel—the study aimed to uncover the broader postcolonial issues afflicting newly independent African states. Moreover, the analysis focused on themes including nationalism, discriminatory attitudes towards women, the fusion of indigenous cultures, resistance to African indigenous traditions, and the impact of colonial legacies on African leadership. Through this comprehensive thematic and contextual analysis, the research sought to provide a nuanced understanding of how Achebe addressed and critiqued postcolonial problems within his literary work, shedding light on the complexities of the postcolonial African experience as depicted in "Antilles of Savanna."

### 3. Major Themes of Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*

- 3.1. The **difficulty of overcoming a system of political unrest** is one of the central themes of the novel. The people are unable to construct a government based on justice under a power-driven rather than a respect-driven system. Although the people in the society shown have limited political rights, they are notable for being able to hold onto their feeling of community and hope that things would get better eventually, even though it doesn't seem possible.
- 3.2. The **corruptive aspect of power** is another theme explored in the book, especially in the character of Sam. When he comes to power, Sam, who was ill-prepared and inexperienced, develops into "a full-fledged evil dictator," highlighting "the dangers of blindly pursuing power at the expense of the community."
- 3.3. The **importance of storytelling** is an important theme because through stories, a civilization retains its "sense of history and tradition", providing it an anchor and a guide by which it can direct its future. The tribal elder in the book recognizes that story is more powerful than battle, grounding a society in its identity and in truth.

3.4. The **important role of women in modern society** is a theme clearly addressed by the author. Women are portrayed as "the keepers of tradition", and as such maintain a connection with the past, keeping the culture alive and embodying the qualities of "moral strength and sensitivity".

#### **4. Post-colonialism and Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah***

Chinua Achebe's "*Anthills of the Savannah*" is undoubtedly included in the broadest definition of postcolonial fiction. The historical reality of European colonialism and the various tangible consequences that resulted from this phenomenon serve as the foundation for post-colonial studies. From the start of colonial interaction until its conclusion, it covers every facet of the colonial process. The experiences of Nigerian people following the end of British colonialism are the subject of Chinua Achebe's novels. His books portray a prototypical African nation in the post-colonial age. Post-colonial refers to a society that is still getting over a major event.

The issue of colonization does not just touch upon the struggle of native people to adjust to a new culture. The suppression that results from the presence of someone who thinks his culture is superior to the destruction of the original people's past lives and cultures are a more significant challenge that must be overcome. Obviously, problems of cross-identity, imposed inferiority, and even a raging hatred for the colonizer surface in the consciousness of the colonized people.

What occurs when two cultures collide and one believes it is better than the other is what is meant to be understood when one uses the word post colonization. Unquestionably, colonialism entails some type of suppression; typically, this oppression manifests itself as a largely unconscious cultural assimilation or as the ignorant indoctrination of the colonialists' ideals into their colonized people. **Post-colonialism** focuses primarily on the long-lasting, unconscious impacts of the colonizer's presence those facets of his culture that are assimilated and incorporated into the colonized population. Using post-colonialist literature, one can analyze how a culture has unintentionally transformed.

A "discourse of compositionality that colonialism brings into being" is produced by post-colonialism. In essence, post-colonialism establishes two separate parties and presents two sides to the expansion debate. Post-colonial refers to more than just a people adjusting to

changes; it includes the relationship between the changed and the changer. Within this very relationship, the unconscious assimilation that lies at the heart of post-colonialism comes into being.

Chinua Achebe authored *Anthills of the Savannah* in 1987, bearing witness to the failure of social justice and democracy to take root in post-colonial Nigeria. The story, which is set in the fictitious country of Kangan, a barely disguised replica of Nigeria, centres on the fate of two well-known male intellectuals who were the targets of a military takedown carried out by the president of the country, a boyhood friend, for life. The two main characters and their female buddy, who works for the Ministry of Finance, alternate in the narrative. Achebe picked them because they were distinguished individuals to represent his personal resentment of Nigeria and conflicting emotions regarding the future of Africa.

As elite figures they were chosen by Achebe to reflect his own frustrations with Nigeria and mixed feelings about Africa's future. As Minister of Information, Christopher Oriko is in an unenviable position. Charged with the responsibility of defending the policies of a military dictator, who happens to be one of his oldest friends, he treads a fine line between loyalty and subversion. He is intelligent and knows how rotten the government is but he is too detached an intellectual to commit himself to struggle. When confronted by his old friend Ikem Osodi, a firebrand oppositionist who succeeded him as editor of the state-owned newspaper, Oriko justifies his action through a kind of aloofness. Ikem Osodi obviously serves as a vehicle for his own dissatisfaction with post-colonial society.

In contrast to Chris Oriko's cynicism, Ikem Osodi is driven by compassion for Kangan's underclass. After attending a public execution as a representative of the state-owned newspaper, he makes the decision to launch a campaign against them right away. He is horrified by the vicious jeers from the crowd and motivated by the dying man's dignity to pen an editorial the next day. Chris Oriko calls his old friend into his Ministry of Information office to warn him against writing editorials that might risk his career or his life. If Ikem is always acting impetuously, we understand that he has no choice given the urgency of his continent's problems.

Despite Ikem's sympathy for the poor, he is out of touch with them. He regards them sympathetically from afar but is not organically linked to their struggles. This speaks directly to the central theme of Achebe's book, which is the elite class's incapacity to relate to the

general public. Ikem initially feels a little uneasy when a few cab drivers' union members unexpectedly knock on his house one day to express their gratitude for his support. He is moved to tears when a driver tells him how much the rank-and-file values his columns.

Later, Ikem considers how much the cab drivers respect him for choosing to drive a beat-up Datsun instead of the Mercedes that government officials like. This individual decision spoke louder than any well-chosen words.

To blame all of Kangan's problems on capitalism and imperialism as "our modish radicals do" is "sheer cant and humbug." It is like arresting the village blacksmith every time a man hacks his fellow to death.

The government sentenced Ikem Osodi to death during a crackdown against all dissidents, despite the fact that he had no affiliation with any organised mass movement except from his role as an unelected tribune. A soldier randomly kills Christopher Oriko for no other reason than that he seemed rude during the ensuing chaos. In a following coup, the president for life is likewise removed from office. Put another way, for the past thirty years or more, Kangan has essentially followed the same path as Nigeria and other West African countries. The other major character in 'Anthills of the Savannah' is Beatrice Okoh who is a minor official in the Ministry of Finance and an old friend of the two major male characters and a former lover of Chris's.

Despite she denies the notion that her desire to succeed in her career comes from any exposure to "Women's Lib" ideologies, even if she is adamant about pursuing a career in England. Her father's home was filled with enough masculine chauvinism to last a lifetime.

The main characters' individual acts of selflessness are the only things that break the deeply utilitarian mood of "Anthills of the Savannah." The birth of Ikem's daughter, for whom Beatrice has a customary naming ceremony, is the main topic of the last chapter. This action highlights the great desire for a return to some form of African custom that was destroyed during colonialism. In memory of her late father, Ikem, the child is named Amaechina, which means "May-the-path-never-close."

## 5. Postcolonial problems presented Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*

**Nationalism** is a concept or a political ideology that involves an individual's loyalty, attachment and sense of belonging to the nation. It suggests that a person accepts and is loyal to the main goals of the country. Almost all nation-states are roughly divided along ethnic lines; however these divisions are not founded on shared ethnic identities because nationalism encourages all ethnic groups to unite around a single issue: The setting of *Anthills of the Savannah* is a fictitious nation named Kangan, which is modeled after Nigeria in the 1980s. A string of coups and countercoups have wreaked havoc on the nation's political life. The nation's order and stability are never fully restored by successive military regimes. Achebe demonstrates how Nigeria's pressing issues have never been effectively addressed and resolved, whether it is the Republican administration or the armed forces.

Therefore, Achebe hopes that a strong leadership and the emergence of the people as a nation can only solve the problems that have been plaguing the country from years. Achebe presents three males Sam, Chris and Ikem and one female Beatrice as the leading characters of the novel.

His main concern is to find out the ideal leader among them, a leader who can bear the responsibility to lead the country and its people towards progress and development. The three males are childhood friends but now follow different routes. Sam is the President of a military regime in Kangan, He is the self-declared leader who desires to rule the nation violently and with force. Chris serves as Kangan's Commissioner of Information, while Ikem edits the *National Gazette*, a publication controlled by the government. Beatrice works for the Kangan government as the Senior Assistant Secretary to the Minister of Finance. These four characters' lives are centered on the nation's political ups and downs.

In addition to having distinct tasks to perform, they disagree on many aspects of Kangan's political life. Sam is an avaricious autocrat who isolates himself from the populace and the serious issues the nation faces. Chris initially watches Sam's actions in silence before taking on a late role and becoming accountable to the nation; Ikem is fierce critic of the government's **corrupt practices and unscrupulousness**. Achebe completely dismisses Sam as a leader as he has placed himself above the common people and has turned a deaf ear towards their problems. Chris also falls short as a leader as, at first, he remains indifferent towards the activities of Sam. His realization comes rather late, just before his death, when he

actually feels motivated to do something good for the country. Achebe also deprives Ikem of leadership, as the latter, in spite of his connection to the common people, fails to break the boundary of gender.

Ikem shows a **discriminating attitude towards women**. So, while the three men fail to come up to the mark, it is only Beatrice who displays the qualities of a responsible leader. Beatrice is portrayed by Achebe as a contemporary, intelligent, forward-thinking lady who strikes a healthy balance between tradition and modernity.

**Corruption** *Anthills of the Savannah* also x-rays all forms of corruption political, moral and social among the ruling elites. Major Sam has no accountability to anyone, as is the case in most military administrations and as depicted in the novel. He wastes the country's money on luxuries and self-aggrandizement. The "Presidential Palace," which has turned into a haven for corruption, wastes money that could have been used to advance the nation. Once more, the extent to which moral decay has ravaged the continent is demonstrated by Major Sam's participation in public execution, which is now out of date, and his attempt to rape Beatrice at the celebration.

An anthill in the Savannah represents the multitude of issues that Nigerians deal with as a result of the elite's dominance. Ikem demonstrates how the powerful disregard the demands of the general populace. The norms that the ruling class follows are not the same as those that they advocate. They subjugate the populace to their culture by using money and religion as tools to hold onto their dominance.

As a result of the change from colonialism to independence and the changes caused by a **meeting of two cultures**, Nigerians assimilate to a form of the English culture. This convergence of culture and repetition of English behavior is best illustrated by the interaction between religion and economic class ("Religion and Class among the Colonised"). As a storyteller, Chinua Achebe uses tactics like characters, style, ethos, irony, and place to express his disapproval of the ways in which power is distributed in Nigeria.

An anthill recounts the story of a London-educated Nigerian woman, Beatrice Okah, who boldly **opposes the age-old African tradition** – the naming of the child only by the father: '... it is really safest to ask the mother what her child should be called'. Beatrice serves as a passion and inspiration to men around her with her urge for new culture. Achebe's female character rises above the oppressive patriarchy in order to dismiss male superiority. Beatrice

represents a small percentage of women in "a lop-sided system in which the African men received a higher education" as a Senior Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Finance and the only employee with a first-class Honours Degree in English. Legislation in Nigeria restricted women, and most women's status was marginalised by the colonial economy (Rojas, online). After overcoming these obstacles, Beatrice gains the admiration of her male peers and enlists in the revolutionary elite to fight against the military dictatorship's persecution.

Anthills of the Savannah expose the problematic of masculinity in postcolonial Africa whose leaders through military governance are associated with the model of the warrior.

**The political crises** are one of postcolonial problem in the work escalate to counter coup d'états, power game, political assassination, feminist agitation and other integers of an unwholesome state of affairs. However, in context, the political turmoil in the novel basically stems from the class struggle and power play, which are fuelled by cultural materialist imperatives. The exchange between Sam, His Excellency, and Chris Oriko is a presage of power play and class war, which were fully developed as the novel progressed.

Sadly, power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely, making it impossible for Africa to rely on leaders obsessed with power. The defect is profoundly felt in Nigeria, where ethnic loyalties are exploited by leaders, making political debates acrimonious. Within a year after the first coup, there were three countercoups that culminated in the North and Eastern Igbo Nationals' 'Biafra War' that lasted for two and a half years. The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely failure of leadership. Achebe quotes

'The Nigerian [African] problem is the unwillingness  
or the inability of its leaders to raise to the responsibility,  
to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks  
of true leadership.' (*The Trouble with Nigeria* 1)

Despite the changes in the government, the essence of British attitude persists in the country, because the nation's new leaders are **the products of the British-European culture**. Ikem, Chris, Sam and Beatrice all London University products, equally indicted, symbolize a section of the society as intellectuals, who have modeled their lives and beliefs after the British lifestyle and through their flawless English; Achebe subtly underscores their British backgrounds further widening the gap between government and the common masses.

The new black leaders yearn to mimic **the British life style as well**. But Sam adopts the colonial masters' role, continuing to idolize the British and their oppressive, autocratic authority. As a result, the new governing class associates more with the colonial overlords than with the indigenous population. Rather of valuing their own rich traditional value system, these so-called elite classes want to adopt the role of colonisers and adhere to western culture.

According to **Fanon's** the coming education is harm full because the learner who came back in their home land, they tried to implement the westerns culture, the same is true leaders of Kangan implement what they seen and learn it. Another problem which poses serious threats to the development of Nigeria is tribalism. The novel looks into this. In many African nations, tribalism is a powerful political force that impedes the development of the continent along with exploitation, poverty, and genocide. Long before colonists arrived, tribal warfare was being fought throughout Africa, and it is still going strong today. Tribal rivalries were used by the colonists to control the development of the continent and to redraw the boundaries between the various regions.

## **6. Conclusion**

*Anthills of the Savannah* which written by the greatest African novelist Chinua Achebe. This is an extremely well-written and balanced novel about the ugly contrast between idealistic aspirations and violent corruption in an imaginary but realistic postcolonial setting, a novel that enlightens the reader on many different levels.

*Anthills of the Savannah* delineate the problems inflicting newly independent African states. The main issue and overarching theme of this book is Kangan's despotic, corrupt regime. The work's central idea is "overcoming the history of suffering" by instilling in the populace a strong sense of community. The populace is in favor of peace and reform, but they are unclear about how to establish an appropriate form of governance. Therefore, driving out the colonists is the first step towards saving the country.

Dramatizing the impasse in the *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe bears witness to the failure of social justice and democracy to establish them in postwar Nigeria. It is clear that the author selected the two main characters and their girlfriends to represent his personal grievances with Nigeria and his conflicting views about the future of Africa. *Anthills of the Savannah* addresses a number of postcolonial issues, including nationalism, attitudes against women,

the blending of indigenous cultures, resistance to African indigenous customs, and leaders who have been shaped by colonizers.

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