

Review

Need that throbs at the heart: Solidarity in Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*

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Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* has often been called a 'political novel' and directly linked to the experience of military rule in Nigeria, even though that country is not mentioned in the story. It leaves open the question what might be Achebe's purpose in such an undertaking. Would he be trying to tell the people what they already know about their experience under military rule, or to provide guidelines, the dos and the don'ts to keep in view for successful military rule, or is he saying that military rule is all right as long as it is responsive to the needs of the people? This way of reading the novel may have discouraged literary criticism of it, as it tends to end in inane plot summaries. This paper takes the view that *Anthills of the Savannah* is a literary novel, which demands literary criticism. The approach followed here is to analyze the metaphors of the work in such a way that its form as a text, a woven pattern is apparent.

Key words: Demonic imagery, interpretation, metaphor, myth, solidarity, primary symbol, text, textuality.

INTRODUCTION

In Ricoeur's theory of deep semantics, the focus of interest is the metaphor, specifically the poetic metaphor; and hermeneutics is a tool that serves both for analysis and for the identification of poetic metaphors in the text. Such are the metaphors of which the paraphrase 'is without end' (2004: 223). By reason of its character as 'any shift from the literal to the figurative' (222), metaphor is already an interpretive act; at the same time it challenges hermeneutics with the task of producing new paraphrases, as paraphrase is the first movement of *interpretation* in the sense of 'translatability' (Iser 2000:5). With respect to the poetic metaphor, Ricoeur explains that the paraphrase is:

endless precisely because it can always spring back to life. If metaphor engenders thought throughout a long discourse, is this not because it is itself a brief discourse? (2004: 223).

We may take this further. Metaphor is not only a brief discourse, its capacity to engender thought throughout a long discourse is because of the resonances it awakens in its correlates throughout the discourse which provide the ingredients for the construction of paraphrases. For whereas in Schleiermacher's nineteenth century methodology, the business of interpretation consisted of finding 'out how the author thinks' (Iser x). Roland Barthes showed in the twentieth that meaningfulness with regard to the literary text is possession of correlates, which may be on the level of 'function of a sequence' or that of 'indice with reference to an actant' (1977: 124). Hence the text itself, the long discourse which may contain brief discourses in which 'all has already been said in enigma' (Ricoeur 1974: 288), is determined as a poetic text by reference to the fact that it behaves like a poetic metaphor, having the capacity 'always to spring back into life'. Bringing about this springing back into life may

depend on which correlate has been highlighted. In other words, metaphor in a literary text is a key to the unlocking of the *textuality* of the literary text. Such is the functioning of metaphor in Achebe's (1988). *Anthills of the Savannah*.

A method of reading *Anthills of the Savannah* frequently encountered is what Schökel calls 'existentialist exegesis', which consists of 'explanation of the text according to the meaning it has for readers' (1998: 15). For instance, Nwagbara says that, 'In the novel, Achebe takes us on a roller-coaster of military dictatorship in Nigeria fictionalized as Kangan, the setting of the novel' (2011). Along similar lines, Eldred Durosimi Jones has argued that:

The hero of Anthills of the Savannah also becomes increasingly alienated from the dictatorial regime in which he served, becoming a quarry of his erstwhile employers to find a casual death as he fled into a physical exile. Chris Oriko thus typifies the dozens (hundreds) of exiles of conscience who have fled various forms of tyranny and misrule in their own countries (2000: vii).

In effect, this text is treated as a paraphrase for the history of military involvement in politics in Africa, especially Nigeria. Such analyses are usually arrived at by treating the incidents of the narrative as 'phenomenologically given' (Mackinlay 2010: 37); whereas 'phenomena are not only interpreted after they have appeared, but are always already interpreted in their very appearing' (36). As we shall see, military rule is not phenomenologically given in *Anthills of the Savannah*; it is interpreted by its appearing as a modality of power.

Pattern of misrule

A key presupposition in *Anthills of the Savannah* is the irreplaceable role of solidarity in governance, nation-building, and social practice. This underlying principle both modulates the tone in the presentation of the incidents and provides a resource base for metaphors. An example of a metaphor of solidarity which will be very important for this paper is that of the 'three green bottles' (191). In this paper, we shall analyze this and other metaphors as *textual* processes, in line with what Janicaud, following Husserl, calls 'the suspension of the natural attitude... [and] a deepening of the transcendental regard' towards the text as a text (see Sol Neely 160). This attitude is distinctive to post-structuralist literary criticism. By tracking such metaphors which recur throughout the novel, forming an internal network where forms interconnect and re-echo one another, we become aware of the narrative as a fabric. This is the *text*, the 'weave-work', in which meaning is continually redistributed, but at the same time building up and moving towards total significance.

Solidarity is a high value to all the major participants some of whom are contributory narrators in the story. But it figures so strongly for all the characters that it becomes a conflict generator. For instance, to the extent that General Sam, the Head of State of Kangan recognizes his need to escape solipsism and perhaps hear other voices than his alone, he has a cabinet of senior officials with whom he meets from time to time. At these meetings, he receives remarks which are offered up to him as if a tribute, and it gives him a sense of 'togetherness of a people bound by shared goals and goods', which is what Caputo calls 'sociological solidarity' (1987: 240).

However, a longing for another kind of solidarity, *ethical* solidarity, manifests within the cabinet and gives rise to contrasting viewpoints than the president's alone. Such variant views, often heard from his boyhood friend Chris Oriko, are regarded by the president as impertinence, an attitude strongly reinforced by cabinet colleagues like the Attorney General, who exploit the man's sense of insecurity to damaging effect:

he can't cheer up. Why? The reason is not far to seek. Two of you were after all class-mates at Lord Lugard College. He looks back to those days and sees you as the boy next door. He cannot understand how this same boy with whom he played all the boyish pranks, how he can today become this nation's Man of Destiny.

You know, Your Excellency it was the same trouble Jesus had to face with his people....

He was going on and on, but His Excellency's mind was now divided between what he was saying and the echoes of old President Ngongo's advice: 'Your greatest risk is your boyhood friends, those who grew up with you in your village. Keep them at arm's length and you will live long.' The wise old tortoise!

A new respect for his Attorney-General was now reflected on the mirror of his face where the shrewd lawyer saw and caught its beams in both hands. This giant iroko, he thought to himself, is not scaled every day, so I must get all the firewood it can yield me now while I am atop.

'As for those like me, Your Excellency, poor dullards who went to bush grammar schools, we know our place, we know those better than ourselves when we see them. We have no problem worshipping a man like you' (*Anthills of the Savannah* 24).

With the remarks of the Attorney General, the words of old President Ngongo, a brother-president met at the Organization of African Unity meeting, have become in the president's mind corroborated by 'facts'. He is now predisposed to misread Mr. Oriko's words and actions. Mistrust of his old friends will gnaw at the heart and will continue to be fed by incidents that lend themselves to interpretations unintended by the subject, as long as it is

the person meant by the Attorney-General.

The narrative opens on a clash between Chris Oriko, the man principally meant by the Attorney-General and the president:

'You're 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. How many times, for God's sake, am I expected to repeat it? Why do *you* find it so difficult to swallow my ruling. On anything?'

'I am sorry, Your Excellency. But I have no difficulty swallowing *and* digesting your rulings.'

For a full minute or so the fury of his eyes lay on me (1).

Ethical solidarity which creates a bond with those who are suffering demands a presidential visit to Abazon, but it is here confronted by the president's Machiavellian vision of power as a facility to obtain unquestioning compliance from subordinates. It is out of his own feelings of togetherness with the draught-stricken Abazon people that Mr. Oriko speaks. In this he not only expresses solidarity with the suffering but also appeals to the president's moral or political judgment as well as compassion, with the aim of bringing him into solidarity with them.

Mr. Oriko is the 'First Witness'. We are going to hear from two more in the course of the narrative. These are Ikem Osodi and Beatrice. Chris Oriko witnesses from near the seat of power – or within the seat of power itself, except that the cabinet is one in name only. And there probably would have been no need for his witnessing if solidarity existed in the cabinet. The other two are farther away, but well positioned to bring additional or balancing insights into the crisis that is gathering pace. This witness places the blame for the crisis at General Sam's door, connecting it to his solitary exercise of power. The only problem is how to explain this pattern of behavior, whether as part of Sam's character traits or whether a reaction to external events:

if I am right, then looking back on the last two years it should be possible to point to a specific and decisive event and say: it was at such and such a point that everything went wrong and the rules were suspended. But I have not found such a moment or such a cause although I have sought hard and long for it.

And so it begins to seem to me that this thing probably never was a game, that the present was there from the very beginning only I was too blind or too busy to notice (1-2).

The rules said to be suspended are those of corporate practice in decision-making, where the airing of views is to ensure that the decision reached is well-informed and in the common interest.

A presidential visit to draught-stricken Abazon is the issue on the table; and the Head of State has made up his mind not to go, whereas the Commissioner for Information thinks he should go and is being sharply called to order for voicing that view. Some of the other cabinet members are of the same view as Mr. Oriko, but leave it to him to express this contrary view and take the rap for it; hence this bit of theatre:

As he left his seat an orderly gathered up his papers quickly and followed him out. Another orderly, more stern-faced, opened the heavy doors of carved panels, stood aside and gave a long, hand-quivering salute.

'He is not in a good mood today,' says the Chief Secretary, breaking the freeze. 'We'll bring it up again next Thursday, Chris. Don't worry.'

His Excellency is probably meant to overhear this and I believe he does. I could see a smile or the radiance of a smile from the back of his head like the faint memory of light at the edges of an eclipse.

In the final stages of His Excellency's retiring, the silence in the Council Chamber seemed to be undergoing a subtle change (8).

Key issues of governance are decided based on the Head of State's changing moods. Some in the cabinet have become adept at making out those moods and tailoring their comments accordingly, so that the Head of State's arbitrary decisions appear to have the support of the majority in the decision-making chamber. In Mr. Oriko's judgment, it is a cabinet of boot-lickers (6). The appearance rather than the reality of solidarity in the cabinet has been developed with active connivance by the cabinet members, as Caputo would say, to let the Head of State's 'will to dominate and manipulate' hold sway (233), seeing this as in their own best interests.

Interpretations

Even though he himself is uninvolved in boot-licking, Mr. Oriko does not exonerate himself from responsibility regarding the way the cabinet and the president himself have evolved over the years:

Perhaps [Professor Reginald Okong] has more responsibility than any other single individual except myself for the remarkable metamorphosis of His Excellency. But, perhaps like me he meant well, neither of us having been present before at the birth and grooming of a baby monster (10).

Mr. Oriko's assessment of the troubled state of Kangan has to be seen in proper perspective. He is making up his notes in the manner of a diary, observing the slow deterioration of things. He does not have the advantage of looking back after the crisis and reinterpreting events

with the benefit of hindsight. He is carried off in the crisis. His friend, Ikem Osodi, the Second Witness is taken out right at the onset of the crisis. Their views on the situation give the impression of thinking men who are socially and politically aware in a disinterested, dispassionate way. Of course, he has no idea of the way in which the Attorney General has been influencing things from behind the scenes. It is Ikem rather who has an uncanny sense of it.

But his view of the breakdown of solidarity is in some ways similar to Chris Oriko's insofar as responsibility for it is blamed on Chris.

The Emperor may be a fool but he isn't a monster. Not yet, anyhow; although he will certainly become one by the time Chris and company have done with him. But right now he is still OK, thank God. That's why I believe that basically he does want to do the right thing. Some of my friends don't agree with me on this, I know. Even Chris doesn't. But I am sure I am right; I am sure that Sam can still be saved if we put our minds to it. His problem is that with so many petty interests salaaming around him all day, like that shyster of an Attorney-General, he has no chance of knowing what is right. And that's what Chris and I ought to be doing – letting him glimpse a little light now and again through chinks in his solid wall of court jesters; we who have known him longer than the rest should not be competing with them. I have shown what light I can with a number of controversial editorials. If Sam were stronger or brighter he probably wouldn't need our offices; but then he probably wouldn't have become His Excellency in the first place. Only half-wits can stumble into such enormities (46).

The impending catastrophe is in his view Sam's, but the situation is not yet irretrievable. He can still be saved, if only it were possible to break through the ranks of 'court jesters' surrounding him. The solidarity that is needed is not that of the cabinet; it is rather that among the three old friends and former schoolmates, Sam, Chris, and Ikem. It is this solidarity that is capable of saving Sam and in that process Kangan itself. What is needed is to bring influence to bear on Sam, particularly, his own beneficent influence. But if he is going to be able to exert the influence he thinks he is capable of, he needs an ally: 'With Chris I could do much more', he asserts.

The word 'monster' has also cropped up in his thinking about the situation of their country, and what will amount for him to total disaster is if the president has become a monster. Following the man's career from considerable distance, he considers that he has not yet metamorphosed. As to the evidence of disorder he has made out, he pins the blame on the people in the intermediate space between him and the president. These he has freer access to. But the man he chiefly blames, Chris, is certain that he has witnessed the birth and grooming of the monster and is waiting with bated breath, as it were,

for the chaos that would inevitably follow such an event as prophesied in Yeats's 'The Second Coming'. The conflicting analyses result in serious conflict between the two friends. They cannot see eye to eye anymore and no longer seek opportunities for face to face meetings. Ikem believes he cannot get the cooperation he needs from Chris because this friend is now driven by petty personal motives and is competing with other people for favor from the president. He has no inkling of Chris's real motivations, at least as the man formulates these to himself and to Beatrice in whom they have both confided at one time or another. He is conscious,

how tricky things can become of a sudden. That's why I have said a hundred million times to Ikem: Lie low for a while and this gathering tornado may rage and pass overhead carrying away roof-tops and perhaps ... only perhaps ... leave us battered but alive. But oh no! Ikem is outraged that I should recommend such cowardly and totally unworthy behavior to him. You yourself have been witness to it again and again. And you are now asking me to go yet again and go on my knees and ask an artist who has the example of Don Quixote and other fictional characters to guide him ...' (119).

For Chris here an explosion is inevitable, and his sense of what is needed is to be pro-active in damage control or damage limitation. Even though other factors intervene in bringing the crisis to a head, specifically, Ikem's speech at the university and the clash between Chris and the president over the president's order to suspend Ikem as the Editor of the *Gazette*, it would appear that these are catalytic rather than causative. Chris's assessment is basically correct.

There is no doubt that both characters mean well in their efforts to help in managing conflicting social forces and interests to ensure a positive outcome for the people of Kangan, but there is equally no doubt that between them there is struggle for leadership. There is a laughing admission of this fact by Chris, although Ikem does not think it is a laughing matter. Still there are things he does not mind sharing with Chris:

'Same here,' says Ikem.

'Shit!' replies Mad Medico. 'You don't have to follow your fucking leader in this house, you know. Come on, have Scotch or Campari or anything – even water – just to show him.'

'Too late,' says Ikem. 'We were enslaved originally by Gordon's Dry Gin. All gestures of resistance are now too late and too empty. Gin it shall be forever and ever, Amen.' Jovial words, but there is not the slightest sign of gaiety in the voice or face.

'I wonder where you got the idea that Ikem follows my

lead. Once again, you are the last to know. He'd sooner be found dead. I thought everyone, even you, knew that.'

'Following a leader who follows his leader would be quite a circus,' said Ikem with unabated grimness (54).

Ikem apparently believes that Chris no longer has views of his own in Sam's government but obediently goes along whatever the president might wish. Also like the president, his mind is poisoned against Chris, but in this case, it results from his own analysis of the facts available to him.

On the issue presently at stake, there is no chance that they could reach a common position on the basis of free discussion and exchange of views. Since Chris's position implies a claim of superior knowledge and that of Ikem one of superior ability and utter lack of self-interest, there is lacking in their exchanges 'inter-subjectivity of a discursive agreement between citizens who reciprocally recognize one another as free and equal' (Habermas, 1998). Far from discursive agreement, there is rather mutual 'invisibility' (Laing, 1967: 17), and therefore antagonism, between two individuals around whom the crisis will revolve and whose lives will be sacrificed in it. These are two of the 'three green bottles' of which we read in Chris's ruminations as he tries to escape from the hue and cry that had been put out for him with the unfolding of the crisis that:

Chris was almost certain that Emmanuel's Gazette story must be more than marginally responsible for thus putting the law off their guard. He was something else, that boy Emmanuel. Why did we not cultivate such young men before now? Why, we did not even know they existed if the truth must be told! We? Who are we? The trinity who thought they owned Kangan as BB once unkindly said? Three green bottles. One has accidentally fallen; one is tilting. Going, going, bang! Then we becomes I, becomes imperial We (191).

In terms of his functional role in society, Chris thinks of himself as part of a group, which may be the government itself, suggested in 'Why did we not cultivate such young men before now?' or the 'trinity who thought they owned Kangan'. The habit of thinking in terms of the functional role may have led Chris into unconsciously collapsing the one group into the other. What we see above is also a moment of illumination for him, enabling him to process Beatrice's charge that he and his two boyhood friends think of themselves as owners of Kangan, a charge that had hurt at the time it had been made. Now he sees that she is right and that his very habits of thought had been infiltrated by that sense.

Mythic formations

The thought of being the owner of Kangan may be

seductive, but it is fundamentally mistaken. Owing Kangan is in the manner of three green bottles 'up there on the wall hanging by a hair's breadth, yet looking down pompously on the world' (*Anthills of the Savannah* 232). The inspiration for this metaphor, which is originally Beatrice's, is the curious arrangement of things in the bar in Mad Medico's home. This segment is narrated by Chris:

Elewa's fascination grows as she explores with wide amazed eyes Mad Medico's strange home. I find her freshness quite appealing. Now she nudges Beatrice and points at the legend inscribed in the central wall of the bar above the array of bottles in a semi-literate hand and Beatrice obligingly chuckles with her although she has seen it at least a dozen times. Mad Medico notices the young lady's fascination and explains that he owes the inspiration for that poem to his steward, Sunday (55).

The bottles may look down pompously on the world, but to claim ownership of Kangan by virtue of their station on the shelf is vacuous. They are rather at risk of destruction by falling off the shelf. This is what becomes apparent to Chris in his ruminations along the Great North Road trying to escape from the regime's minions. Ikem is already gone and he is logically the next to follow. Indeed he is sure they will get him sooner than later: 'One has accidentally fallen; one is tilting. Going, going, bang!' The president, however, is taken out shortly before his own death; and he tries to make a joke of this as he is expiring from a gunshot wound from a drunken police sergeant:

'Please, sir, don't go!' cried Emmanuel, tears pouring down his face. Chris shook his head and then seemed to gather all his strength to expel the agony on his twisted face and set a twilight smile on it. Through the smile he murmured words that sounded like – The Last Grin –... A violent cough throttled the rest. He shivered with his whole body and lay still (216).

He has learned the truth of the metaphor of the bottles too late to do anything about it, except to laugh at himself as he does now. In Beatrice's account of the meaning of this passage when it is narrated to her by Emmanuel, the young student leader accompanying Chris as he tries his escape:

'You don't know why I went in to cry ... That joke was a coded message to me, to us,' said Beatrice, to everyone's surprise. 'By the way, Adamma heard it better. What he was trying to say was The last green. It was a private joke of ours. The last green bottle. It was a terrible, bitter joke. He was laughing at himself. That was the great thing, by the way, about those two, Chris and Ikem. They could laugh at themselves and often did. Not so the pompous asses that have taken over' (231).

The attitude of pomposity similarly marks the new rulers that have taken over after doing away with General Sam, but with 'undented grimness'.

There is no doubt that Ikem's *Gazette* is influential. He draws attention, for instance to his 'crusading editorials' with which he has scored so 'many bull's-eyes'. But it seems that the influence he exerts is with the ordinary people mostly. With respect to the government and government policy, there are few bull's eyes to count. According to Chris, there has been 'one and only joint effort' between him and the president, which is the saving of Mad Medico from deportation (55). The story is quite different with respect to the common people. The old man of Abazon, for example, explains that he has counted much on the *Gazette*. At the time the Head of State is campaigning by subterfuge to be voted a life presidency in a referendum, his attitude is,

We have Osodi in Bassa. If he comes home and tells us that we should say yes we will do so because he is there as our eye and ear. I said: if what these strange people are telling us is true, Osodi will come or he will write in his paper and our sons will read it and know that it is true. But he did not come to tell us and he did not write it in his paper. So we knew that cunning had entered that talk (38).

There is other evidence to show that his thinking is in line with that of the people generally. But he seems to overrate the power of his crusading editorials with the government. He is clearly mistaken in his belief that what the Head of State needs is good quality information. The Third Witness, Beatrice will find to her humiliation at the party the Head of State holds in honor of the American journalist Lou that Sam is hankering after far other things than good advice. Making an impression on this girl is more important to the Head of State than either decorum or national security. So she puts into operation her plan of intervention:

Fully aroused he clung desperately to me. And I took him then boldly by the hand and led him to the balcony railings to the breathtaking view of the dark lake from the pinnacle of the hill. And there told him my story of Desdemona. Something possessed me as I told it.

'If I went to America today, to Washington DC, would I, could I, walk into a White House private dinner and take the American President hostage. And his Defence Chief and his Director of CIA?'

'Oh don't be such a racist, Beatrice. I am surprised at you. A girl of your education!'

And he stormed away and left me standing alone on the balcony. I stood there staring at the dark lake and my tears flowed in torrents (81).

Being a president is a status which allows General Sam unlimited self-enjoyment with no responsibilities, except

perhaps maintaining himself in power. In the pursuit of these two aims, the enjoyment and the keeping his hold on power, he exempts himself from the norms of public morality and the demands of due process.

He does give a broad hint to his cabinet about his disposition in this regard, but he is speaking to Chris, really, the only free-thinking and un-submissive member of the cabinet. It comes out in Chris's conversation with Beatrice as they contemplate the situation with increasing apprehension with weighing of options:

do you know something else; it may not be easy to leave even if I wanted. Do you remember what he said during that terrifying debate over his life presidency? I told you, didn't I? For one brief moment he shed his pretended calmness and threatened me: If anyone thinks he can leave the Cabinet on this issue he will be making a sad mistake.'

'Anyone walking out of that door will not go home but head straight into detention. Yes I remember that. So?'

'I am not saying that such a ridiculous threat is what is keeping me at my post. I mention it only to show how tricky things can become of a sudden' (118-119).

But it is Ikem who doesn't know the extent of Chris's solidarity with him who first experiences the brutal exercise of violence which the president has granted himself, causing an open split with Chris.

There is a sense in which the squabbles between the three friends which dominate the story are quite irrelevant. The issues of concern are in the public domain, but interpersonal struggles for leadership or to maintain and enhance power already in possession quickly produce personal conflict out of the public issues and loss of focus by the characters. Sam has stumbled into the position of head of state – an enormity, as Ikem calls it – without any preparation and therefore without a plan. He completely fails to understand those who offer information to the effect that the position carries responsibilities, since he lacks awareness of what this text calls 'the moral nature of authority' (102), and quickly loses patience with Chris who tries to remind him. He is rather seen as interfering:

up until now this same boss has allowed you and others to call the shots. Not any more, Chris. I will be doing the calling from now on and I intend to call quite a few before I am done (145).

He is now manifestly authoritarian, relying more and more on his State Research Council, the secret police, and keeping the cabinet for appearances. This turn of events appears to be the reference point in Chris's thinking about the emergence of the monster. But it is something to do with personality, for the capacity to bond with those who suffer is crucial for personality. Ethical solidarity is authentic solidarity and according to Gadamer, the

prerequisite of 'all human solidarity and the viability of society'. To attain it, General Sam would have to have overcome 'subjective self-centeredness so as to understand oneself-as-another', and 'suspending the will to dominate,' to have gained the capacity 'to go beyond oneself toward others' (Kearney 1999: xvi). If for as long as two years Chris has noticed no evidence of this in the president, it is more than likely that it never existed in that subject. So the monster must have been there from the beginning and it may not be being 'His Excellency' that is the enormity, but that one with so fundamental a character flaw should be found in that situation.

If Chris had a vision of a government that would genuinely move Kangan forward, it does not appear in the narrative. Ikem is the one who seems to have a sense of what is at stake. But the insight is coming to him at a moment of thoughtfulness after all hell, so to speak, has already begun to break loose. In this troubled environment,

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

The ideal government here is one of responsiveness to the needs of the people; these needs are metaphorized in the above as 'the bruised heart', and are specified in concrete terms elsewhere as the people's 'basic needs of water which is free from Guinea worm, of simple shelter and food' (73). Attentiveness to these would have satisfied for Ikem the basic requirements of government for the people – even if it isn't a government of the people. The demand by Chris that the president visit drought-stricken Abazon boils down to a request to show solidarity with the people in their suffering. The idea of solidarity with a people who have turned down his request to be voted a life president is wholly offensive to him. But he can make a joke of it on occasion:

'You are telling me to insult the intelligence of these people,' he says, his tone mollified and rather superior. I shake my head then, slowly. 'Yes, that's precisely what you are telling me to do,' he says spiritedly, spurred to battle by my faint resurgent opposition. 'These people believe in rain-makers and so let's go ahead and exploit their ignorance for cheap popularity. That's exactly what you are telling me to do, Chris. Well I can't do it. You all seem to forget that I am still a soldier, not a politician' (4).

This refusal to show basic sympathy brings about what Paul de Man would call a 'referential aberration' in the narrative (1979: 10). The General becomes identified with the sun ravaging Abazon with its blazing heat, most tellingly in the harangue of the president's men when they go to tell the people of Abazon the consequences of what they have done in turning down the president:

Because you said no to the Big Chief he is very angry and has ordered all the water bore-holes they are digging in your area to be closed so that you will know what it means to offend the sun (127).

It sounds quite as if this referential aberration has the approval of the president himself. Several occurrences of the sun in different strands of narrative, especially in its blistering aspect, have to be associated with a double signified in the reading: the solar luminary itself and the figure of the Head of State of Kangan.

An example is in Ikem's 'heat-haze reverie' in the go-slow frustrating his anxious haste to cover the Abazon delegation to the Head of State; for he and Chris are more closely aligned in their motivations than they are aware.

The sun in April is an enemy though the weatherman on television reciting mechanically the words of his foreign mentors tells you it will be fine all over the country. Fine! We have been slowly steamed into well-done mutton since February and all the oafs on our public payroll tell us we are doing just fine! No, my dear countrymen. This is Brigadier Misfortune of the Wilting 202 Brigade telling you, you are *not* fine. No my dear countrymen, you will not be fine until you can overthrow the wild Sun of April. Later tonight, fellow countrymen, you will hear the full text from General Mouth himself – I am only a mouthpiece – you will hear the words direct from him after the national anthem shall have been played backwards. Until then, beloved countrymen, roast in peace (27-28).

The lines he is running in his head are familiar from the language of announcement of coups and government takeovers by the military, but it is interfused with another language, that in which his mind is processing the discomfort of heat experienced in a stationary car in a traffic hold up under an intense midday sun all of which captures for him the impact of military intervention in politics. This disorder has figured forth in his mind as 'Brigadier Misfortune of the Wilting 202 Brigade', with Sam himself in the background. He himself has coined the epithet 'General Big Mouth', fearing that he might end up with just such a name in the Western press if some incident in Kangan that would put him in a bad light should come to the notice of the outside world:

'it's me the world will laugh at, isn't it?' ... Yes, it is me. General Big Mouth, they will say, and print my picture on

the cover of Time magazine with a big mouth and a small head. You understand? They won't talk about you, would they' (15).

Perceptions in the West are the only moderating factors in the general's decision-making and statecraft. To give the slightest cause for disapprobation from that quarter is what he calls his *funeral* (16). His casting protocol and national security to the winds just to impress a young American lady journalist is partially explained by this. The West comprises the only divinity he knows and fears; over the people of Kangan he sits with the immobility of a statue, like his hero, the old emperor he had met at his first Organization of African Unity meeting 'who never smiled nor changed his expression no matter what was going on around him' (52). He is thus without sensibility for this people, without a 'common sense', elaborated by Gadamer as 'sense of community, genuine moral and civic solidarity that means judgment of right and wrong, and a concern for the common good' (Bilen, 2009: 60).

The sweeping away of the three green bottles who treat Kangan as their property does not lead to what Lukács would call a 'qualitative change' (1976). It is another military government that succeeds General Sam's bungling one. But the prospects of more repression and a deepening of the disconnect with the people are all that may be anticipated. This is the view of Beatrice, the Third Witness, who picks up the scattered strands and loose ends the First and Second Witnesses had been unable to tie up in their accounts before they are done away with. But her work is primarily interpretive. In piecing it all together, she places everything on the canvas of the myth of Idemili out of which comes the great metaphor of power running amuck:

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

What we see here is not just a *rationalizing mythology* but the vision of power as a 'primary symbol' containing 'a double intentionality': on the one hand, 'a certain experience blazes its own trail', but also it 'points to a certain situation of man in the Sacred; this situation, aimed at through the first meaning, is precisely stained, sinful, guilty being' (Ricoeur, 1974: 289-290). General Sam has taken things back to the original chaos which had to be overcome for order and civilization, as it were, to emerge. In this format we can understand the careers of Chris Oriko and Ikem Osodi in terms of ministrations with the aim of 'wrapping around Power's rude waist a loincloth of peace and modesty'. They are unsuccessful

in this, but they never give up and die trying. Beatrice, daughter of mythic Idemili – 'Priestess or goddess herself? No matter' (114) – also tries and fails. *Anthills of the Savannah* is the account of these spectacular failures, but also the resilience of the ordinary people who, undeterred, resume building networks of solidarity among themselves, their backs firmly turned to those in charge at the political level.

In terms of the incidents making up this narrative, the experience that blazes its own trail is obviously the career of Sam as Head of State of Kangan. That is what engages the concern of the other participants irresistibly and arouses their passion to intervene. In the brief narrative of the coming of Idemili, it is the mythic intervention of the Almighty on behalf of the victims of power rampaging through the world naked that blazes a trail. It sets an example of the solidarity the Witnesses have sought in vain to foster in the governance of Kangan; in other words, General Sam's career in Kangan, in the language of Ikem's reverie plays this mythic intervention backwards. This kind of narrative is what Northrop Frye calls demonic imagery insofar as it plays back primordial chaos and lends itself 'very readily to being projected existentially as ... hell' (1970: 158).

Conclusion

The solidarity of the 'three green bottles' is basically sociological. Under stress mainly from the president's quest for absolute power, it breaks down. The two members of 'the trinity' who are aligned by ethical solidarity with the suffering and disadvantaged are kept apart by a struggle for leadership exacerbated by conflicting readings of the intentions of the one whose decisions shape destinies in Kangan. They are taken out one by one, but this does not result in restoring Kangan to its people. Rather a new master emerges, who appears to have no interest in solidarity or even the pretense of it. In archetypal terms, the inferno does not burn itself out, it has only given off a flare – disastrous in that it carries off good and bad, negative as well as positive forces of healing solidarity alike; and cleansing in that it has rid Kangan of the presumptuous trio that thought Kangan their private demesne. The Kangan inferno has shown its destructive energy and then it has resumed smoldering.

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