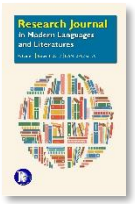

Postcolonial tensions in a fictitious African State: The unconventional first-person point of view in *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987)

George Obara Nyandoro
Department of Languages, Linguistics and Literature, Kisii University, Kisii, Kenya
Email: nyadgeorge@kisiiunuversity.ac.ke
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0468-1942

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Abstract

In the three decades, or so, postdating the attainment of independence in Africa, a whirlwind of coup d'états ravaged many African countries. A subject which Chinua Achebe explores in Anthills of the Savannah. This article explores post-colonial tensions in the novel's fictionalized state of Kangan, as postulated by two of the three first person narrator-characters. By applying the textual methodology of close reading and anchored on American Formalism, particularly on the tenets of Robert Kellogg and Robert Scholes' nature of the narrative and Percy Lubbock's craft of fiction, the article argues that spatial and temporal positionality of the character-narrator informs narrative perspective. Aware that the two of the three first person narrators, under discussion in the article, die before their narrative is articulated, the article explores this unconventional first person point of view by making a critical review of Chris Oriko's complicit positionality to the explosive events of Kangan on the one hand and the ideological idealism of Ikem Osodi on the other to foreground the implausibility of their having to survive the fatalistic logic of the tensions in Kangan, hence their physical vacation of the narrative space, and yet, their retention as witnesses to the tragedy.

Keywords: complicit, insider, outsider, unconventional

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Public Interest Statement

The use of multiple perspectives in prose fiction as technique significantly impacts on the cause and effect relationships in the narrative. The first-person narrator, being character with human characteristics, has the advantage of relating with the audience in his/her triumphs and tribulations, thus, winning over the empathies of the audience. First person narrators conventionally live to tell their tale. The disruption caused in the interpretation of the text by reading a witness account of a dead narrator foregrounds critical questions of narrative order and duration by calling to mind the positionality of the narrator relative to the narrative events in the discourse.

1.0 Introduction.

Anthills of the Savannah, employs the technique of shifting points of view to explore a depth and range of thematic interpretations. The first-person point of view is narrated by Chris Oriko, Ikem Osodi (who against first person narrative convention narrate after death) and Beatrice Nwanyibuife Okoh (who records her story as well as that of Chris and Ikem). The omniscient narrator mediates the interface of limitations of perspective between these narrators. This article pays attention to the narratives of Chris Oriko and Ikem Osodi. Scholes and Kellogg opine that, "In the eyewitness form of narration, considerations of character are intimately related to considerations of point of view. To the extent the narrator is characterised he will dominate the narrative, taking precedence over event and situation" (1968, p. 256). Chris and Ikem both of whom went to school with Sam (the President of Kangan) give credence to their narrative perspective on the basis of the longevity with which they have known Sam but also by their unique and intimate proximity to the events in Kangan.

Lubbock argues thus, "the whole intricate question of method in the craft of fiction, I take to be governed by the question of point of view.... the question of the relation in which the narrator stands to the story" (1921, p. 81). The narrator can describe characters from outside, either as an impartial or partial onlooker. S/he can also assume omniscience and describe them from within, or place self in their position and appear to be in the dark as to motives of other characters. The first-person point of view is potentially the most independent of the author, for such a speaker, as exemplified by the characters discussed, is often given a unique identity, with a name, job, economic and social positions. The distinction Lubbock makes on the intradiegetic narrators: Heterodiagetic and homodiagetic, informs this study. Chris and Ikem being homodiagetic

narrators (narrators who participate as characters in the narrative) bring into sharp focus the feelings, opinions, and perceptions of the protagonists in Kangan.

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe frequently shifts from one point of view to the other. Points of view as constructed by different narrators are basic to the narrative cohesion. As Roberts and Jacobs explain, there is need to establish "the story's focus, the angle of vision from which things are not only seen and reported but also judged" (1981, p. 6). Narrators are central to the establishment of this since it is they who offer us their perspective upon which they interpret the narrative material. Roberts and Jacobson further, assert that, "the principal tool (and heart of fiction) is narration .... The object of narration is, as much as possible, to render the story, to make it clear and to bring it alive to the reader's imagination" (1981, p. 60). The deployment of multiple focalization in the text ignites the readers imagination to foreground an interpretive paradigm which frames the overarching narrative (beyond the textual narrative) of the Kangan citizens in their multiple and fragmented points of view on the mutating postcolonial condition of the state.

2.0 The Perspective of the Complicit Outside Insider Perspective

Chris Oriko, Commissioner for Information in government, is an insider witness to government operations under President Sam's leadership. He begins his narrative by foregrounding his disagreement with Sam which brings to focus the novel's conflict: subjects hitherto bound by kinship chains of friendship and brotherhood disengage, fracture and splinter into different polar dimensions, building tensions and extensions of a fragmented state. On a small scale, three childhood friends; Sam, Chris and Ikem, pull towards diverse and strained speaking positions. On a grander scale, citizens and their leaders dismantle post-colonial focal points of collective national aspirations to pursue scattered ambitions disrupting the state and its citizens into a 'them' versus 'us' dichotomy.

Chris, aware of this conflict, carefully controls his language to signify post-colonial tensions in the text. He presents Kangan as a prison house through carefully selected phrases such as "a gaoler", "the fiery sun", "stronger alarms from deeper recesses of instinct", "panic atonement" which describe a sense of imprisonment suggesting Kangan as one large prison house entrapping citizens' visions, aspirations and wellbeing. The text appropriates point of view and other stylistic strategies, from the outset to forebode a sense of tragedy in Kangan. As Ezenwa-Ohaeto asserts, Achebe represents, "through the use of irony, symbol and imagery in the narrative structure of *Anthills of the Savannah* in

a brink of disaster" (1991, P. 34). David Carroll, on his part, argues that in *Anthills of the Savannah:*

> Frequently episodes document the harsh realities of military rule: the public execution, the police searches, the sycophantic cabinet meeting, the roadblocks, and the inevitable counter-coup. These create the texture of life as it is experienced by and recorded through the points of view of the protagonists in what is basically realistic fictional mode (1990, p. 168).

Chris's perception of Sam's management of public affairs foregrounds the autocracy and lone ranger management of public and national affairs, which pervades in Kangan. Chris's proximity to the ruling elite affects his narrative rendition because, being an insider, he is restricted in directly indicting Sam's behaviour. He, instead, assumes the role of an informed narrator communicating with informed readers, by presenting his reflections for the reader's open judgment and interpretation. By distancing self from the subject of his narration, he successfully portrays the weakness of Sam's government without having to renounce his position in government.

As narrator, Chris's main challenge is to justify himself as reliable and dependable to give an accurate account of political events in Kangan. As a high-ranking officer within government, he has contributed to the status quo. He at first engages in self-justification saying, "but the real question, which I have often asked myself, is why then do I go on with it now that I can see. I don't know. Simple inertia maybe or perhaps sheer curiosity; to see where it will all…. well, end' (2). The ellipses indicate textual silence, which demonstrates his uncertainty about his reason for staying in the same government he condemns. By restraining his judgment on Sam and his government, he lends credibility to his narrative voice and persuades us as an honest narrator. Chris is aware that as narrator, he needs to establish a cordial relationship with the reader, which would inevitably lead to the reader's empathy towards him.

To dissociate himself from his narrative and attain a degree of objectivity, Chris utilises dialogue and description which enhance direct interaction between the reader and the text rather than by directly fostering his preferences and prejudices. He, sometimes, takes background position, subtly foregrounding the events he describes. In such instances, it is unclear which narrative voice is at play. Sometimes, he adopts the dramatic objective narrative strategy, which ordinarily is a third-person point of view. He, thus, succeeds to isolate the events he narrates from the voice itself, hence any of his

shortcomings as a character do not impede his narrative. This deliberate and willful dissociation of narrative focalisation from his active participation as an insider character in key events revolving around the kleptomaniac state, attempts to resolve the psychological tensions of self-resulting from both acts of omission and commission which lead to his tragic ending as well as that of his friends.

Maughan Brown has observed the "tensions and contradictions in *Anthills of the Savannah* resulting from Achebe's attempt to use the tensions in the novel as a vehicle for proposing solutions to the socio-political and economic problems of Nigeria" (1991, p. 13). These tensions build around the superficial relationship between the state and its subjects witnessed in the entire narrative. As a dictator, Sam is estranged from his subjects. The characterisation of his superficiality is implied by his cliché-ridden language: "but me no buts, Mr. Oriko!" (1988, p. 1) and the importation of foreign words in a given speech act, as lexical disruptions (such as the Kiswahili word, Kabisa, completely, in his English conversation with Chris).

Chris allows the reader to analyse Sam's speech acts. Sam utters the vocative, Mr. Oriko, to expresses a changing attitude, which he has acquired towards Chris. This shift in attitude is also manifest when he calls Chris, Mr. Commissioner, rather than simply Chris as was the case in their childhood camaraderie. This creates the impression that his attitude towards Chris is fluid and unstable, which highly impacts on their friendship. To maintain objectivity in the narrative, Chris avoids being accusatory. This succeeds to control the reader's focus on Sam. Sam emerges as inconsistent particularly in matters of loyalty and principle. The reader imagines that if Sam cannot have a stable relationship with his childhood friends, he would less likely have a stable relationship with his subjects. Abazon, where Chris would like Sam to visit, is a dry and neglected region where citizens rely on boreholes to survive. In recent times, however, the government has refused to dig boreholes to punish the citizens for having refused Sam as life-president. This creates the impression that Sam is at war with his subjects. Suspense is then built around the impending showdown between his regime and the resilient spirit of the people. Chris's vantage ground enables him to successfully dramatise Sam's actions at the Cabinet. This is an advantage he does not share with other first-person narrators who sometimes give us second-hand testimony and hearsay on operations of government. Chris dramatises his argument with Sam to great effect. He describes how their disagreement shifts from a war of words into, a childlike, eyewink battle. Although Chris finally capitulates, he informs the reader that he does so as a "ceremonial capitulation" (1988, p. 1), which shows his reluctance to concede defeat. Despite the symbolism of this mock-struggle, an

element of the shallowness of the power games in Kangan is suggested: the basis for their actions and counter-actions seem trifling to the reader. Chris's dramatisation of this episode affords us insights into Sam's troubled ego.

The detailed dramatisation of actions of members of the Cabinet demonstrates their complicitous role in the malfunction of the socio-political superstructure of the state. The ministers are puppets and stooges incapable of just governance or efficient management of statecraft in Kangan: days are good or bad depending on how "His Excellency gets out of bed in the morning (1988, p. 2)". Sam, it becomes apparent, attempts to consolidate power around self without reference to the rule of law. Neither does he subject his words nor actions to intellectual rigour, which would, if he did, surmount the limitations primed by his sycophantic commissioners surrounding him. The commissioners abdicate their duties by perpetually agreeing with him even where he is wrong. Hardly to do they engage in objective inquiry on the socio-economic misery the people of Kangan go through. Instead, having engaged in a massive scale of corruption, the commissioners readily cheer on Sam's autocratic leadership.

Chris blames his Cabinet colleagues, "Eleven intelligent men who let this happen to them… the cream of our society and hope of the black race" (1988, p. 2). This distancing of self-smacks of irony. As an insider, he is aware of his own complicity. Nevertheless, he uses imagery to describe the relationship between Sam and the commissioners: celestial imagery to cast Sam as an omnipotent god-like figure, and zoomorphic imagery to cast the commissioners as animals at the lowest hierarchy of beings. He, for instance, says that the commissioners, "lie close to their hole, ready to scramble in" (1988, p. 2), and, "the frightened Commissioner for Education began to disappear into his hole, as some animals do, backwards" (1988, p. 3). During the disagreement between Chris and Sam, the Commissioner for Education is so scared that he scatters his papers on the table. Chris describes this action as, "the strangest act of all: the scattering again of his council papers in panic atonement and restitution for the sacrilege he has come so close to committing" and "he has drawn his upper arms tight to his sides as though to diminish his bulk; and clasped his hands before him like a supplicant" (1988, p. 9). The degradation of the commissioners to the level of animals and the elevation of Sam to celestial status suggests a fragmented national leadership foreboding a national tragedy.

The commissioners are also portrayed as worshippers of the godlike Sam. Chris chooses words such as "atonement" "sacrilege" and "supplicant" to foreground this relationship. When Sam becomes conciliatory to the commissioners, Chris explains that "the fiery sun retires temporarily behind a cloud" (1988, p. 3). The symbolism of the sun

runs across the novel. The sun is described as the "undying eye of the Almighty" with which he looked at his creation, pondered, and finally decided to tame the nature of authority by "wrapping around power's rude waist a loincloth of peace and modesty" (1988, p. 102). The god-like figure which Chris draws of Sam has drawn the attention of Michael Naumann who has argued, "like the burning sun, Sam, the military head of state, a rigid character, makes most ministers retreat into burrows." Although Sam's rigidity intimidates his commissioners it forebodes ill for his destiny as it completely detaches him from the citizenry.

Sam is afraid of the people and he sees a petition as an act of indiscipline" (1988, p. 113). Blinded by power, he alienates himself from his cabinet as well as from his subjects. Consequently, he becomes dehumanised and loses the susceptibilities to lead his subjects. His alienation from the people is intensified by the fear he has of their latent power, "He soon mastered his fear, although from time to time memories of it would seem to return to torment him. I can see no other explanation for his quite irrational and excessive fear of demonstrations, for example. Even pathetically peaceful, obsequious demonstrations" (1988, p. 3). Fear precipitates hate. Hate for self, and hate for the unknown. This results in self-denial and the projection of a false identity.

He becomes unnecessarily ruthless and cruel, unlike the man his childhood friends (particularly Chris) describe as a socialite. Sam's fear is derived from his political ascendancy, which is not through the popular will of the people but rather through the gun. Despite consolidating power and entrenching his authority on the people, he is aware that with the lack of grassroots support, no political establishment can last. His political ascendancy without grassroots support of citizens inevitably crumbles. Chris presents actions of his Cabinet colleagues with a great sense of irony. Rather than assist Sam with the leadership of the nation, they are too fearful and spend valuable time pursuing personal survival. Their survival instincts are so sharp that the Commissioner for Education, for example, is thrown off-balance during the disagreement between Sam and Chris. As Sam owes his job to the power of the gun rather than the citizens, so do the commissioners owe their jobs to him rather than to the citizens.

After the Cabinet meeting's episode, two narrative voices intervene before we meet Chris's voice again. These voices are the third person narrative voice and the first-person narrative voice focalised by Ikem. The narrative interruption invites other perceptions to the interpretation of how the power brokers relate with ordinary citizens of Kangan. Further, Chris is transformed from narrator to character. We are made to weigh what he has been telling us, his perception and attitude towards the events and

people in Kangan against what others think of the same. This alteration of vantage points for the three narrators (Chris, Ikem and Beatrice), from narrator to character and back to narrator widens the scope of point of view. The next time we interact with Chris's voice, he has shifted his vantage position from a cabinet meeting to a social gathering in high society. This provides a range of atmospheres necessary to broaden his perspective on his perception of Kanganese politics.

Chris's new vantage ground is at Mad Medico's house. The group in Mad Medico's house comprises elite members of the Kangan high society. Like in the previous episode (during the cabinet meeting). Chris's voice remains in the background rendering his narrative through description and dialogue. The beginning of the scene temporally creates the impression that it is narrated from a dramatic or objective point of view (a third-person point of view) which according to Robert and Jacobs, is "as complete and impartial as the speaker's position as an observer allows" (1981, p. 201). By focusing his narrative on the two white men, more or less he, like previously, focuses his narrative on Sam's use of Western clichés, Chris exposes the 'foreignness' prevalent in Sam's government. He, in the process, foregrounds the greatest weakness of Sam's government: the superficiality of its leaders which alienates them from their subjects. He further develops the theme of foreign influence on the national politics as a basis for disharmony in Kangan. Through him, we witness the foreignness in the language used by Sam, in his political thinking and in his invitation of people like Mad Medico who though foreign, manage institutions in Kangan irrespective of the existence of qualified citizens.

3.0 The Perspective of the Rebellious Inside Outsider

Ikem, though himself an elite, focalises his first-person point of view from the perspective of the downtrodden. As a highly educated man, Ikem is fully aware of the existing relationship between the ruling elite and their subjects. But, as a rebel, Ikem is capable of talking for the oppressed without having to be poor or pretending to be one. Since Ikem is not, himself, a poor man, his point of view is shaped by what poor citizens tell him about their oppression (secondhand testimony and hearsay) and what he observes them do (firsthand witness). As one who understands his class position and limitation, his choice to articulate his point of view from the vantage ground of the downtrodden is a conscious one and therefore deliberate. He understands the relationship between the ruling elite and their subjects (or the oppressor and the oppressed) is not a direct one. He, therefore, becomes averse to suggestions that portray easy solutions to the problem that afflicts the downtrodden, but identifies with them in their struggles. His resolution to touch the earth

qualifies him to bear witness on the consequences of the dictatorial regime upon the ordinary people.

In the novel, the sky and the earth symbolise dichotomous relations in the power arrangement. The sky is portrayed as being at war with earth. The sky symbolises the ruling elite while the earth, their subjects. Ikem's conviction to touch the earth as he waves to the sky is informed by mediation within this dichotomy. Ikem presents his perspective in three different ways. As an artist, he writes a creative work 'Hymn to the Sun'. He, then, directly narrates his experiences. Finally, he utilises the epistolary mode by writing to Beatrice a 'love letter,' which is ingrained with his ideas about the place of women in the struggle for liberation. In his narrative, Ikem utilises pidgin. This enables him to bridge the spatial gap between him and the downtrodden giving him credibility to speak for them. By sharing a common code with them, Ikem demonstrates that he understands their aspirations. Ikem's attention to the language of the people is in tandem with the people's sense of being. He identifies with the aspirations of the downtrodden and is thus able to persuade us, as readers, that he is a credible witness.

Ikem utilises anecdotes to enhance his point of view. As a firsthand witness rather than a narrator of firsthand experience (which we have seen Chris to be), it is appropriate that he uses anecdotes to draw comparisons and arrive at conclusions. In this way, he succeeds to convince the reader that he has the necessary sensibilities to speak for the downtrodden. In one of the anecdotes, he tells the story of Mr. 'So Therefore' – a worker at the Posts and Telegraphs who often, at night, beats his wife. The next morning, Ikem finds the two relaxed and in a friendly mood. This greatly shocks Ikem who is lost for words as he tries to comprehend how those who suffer at the hands of the oppressor tolerate their circumstances.

This incident reminds Ikem of another incident in which two taxi drivers had visited his house to apologise, on behalf of one of them, for having competed with Ikem over a one-metre space on the road. The drivers feel that it was rude to compete with a person of Ikem's social standing. They, however, subtly blame Ikem for driving a battered old Datsun without a chauffeur. Their argument is that had Ikem been in a flashy car in accordance with his class, they would have easily identified him. This prompts Ikem to introspect upon the complicity of the downtrodden in their own oppression.

It is ironical that the downtrodden admire the ostentatious display of wealth stolen from them by the oppressor. This admiration, at first shocks Ikem but it also educates him on the complex psychology involved between the oppressor and the oppressed. By trying to understand the psychology of the oppressed, Ikem veers from the Marxist ideology

which presumes the oppressed would unite to overthrow the oppressor (1988, p. 154). It dawns on him that the institutionalisation of oppression is a complex process, which might need a complete overhaul. He tries to interpret the socio-cultural dynamics and concludes that there are no easy solutions to human problems. He, thus, becomes a critic of simplistic maxims in approaching solutions that afflict society. Ikem's point of view seeks completeness and accuracy of observation he does not want to rush the reader into hasty generalisations but instead delves into the bottom of the argument by trying to unearth its essence. Despite being a first-person narrator, he attempts an impartial presentation of his narrative by appearing to be honest, objective, intelligent, and thorough. For this reason, in his entire narrative Ikem consistently indulges in the process of self-questioning and self-examination.

There are moments when Ikem opens up his thoughts to the reader, making the reader visit his innermost struggles in attempting to balance the conflicting nature of the human element. By sharing his thoughts with the reader to the exclusion of other characters, Ikem succeeds in winning the reader's empathy. As he constantly questions his emotions and actions towards the socio-political set-up, he invites the reader to share with him these feelings. In one instance, he finds himself missing the nightly fights between Mr. So Therefore, and his wife. He questions himself: "Do you miss it then? Confess you disgusting brute that indeed you do!" to which he responds, "Well, why not? There is an extra-ordinary surrealistic quality about the thing that is almost is almost satisfying cathartic" (1988, p. 34).

By opening himself up to us, Ikem establishes a rapport with the reader and succeeds in having the reader in great confidence. Ikem wrestles with his own postulations as he tries to find out whether he makes any significant achievement towards liberating himself, as much as he would like to liberate his people from the shackles of an oppressive government. As an intellectual, Ikem thoroughly dissects the liberation process and finds out that life is fraught with irony: the oppressed might not understand the position of the liberator. As a self-styled liberator, Ikem's intellectualism lends credibility to his point of view.

His intellectualism makes up for his inability to report from a firsthand experience which a narrator from a poor background would. Ikem reconstructs his narrative through hypothetical and imaginative information, which is a mark of his interaction with the downtrodden for whom he speaks. Aware that for a new social order to be created, the prevailing systems need to be questioned, if not overhauled, Ikem demonstrates that sacrifice of individual comfort is a necessary ingredient in this process. This precipitates

his decision to narrate his story from an unfamiliar vantage point: that of the downtrodden.

As noted, Ikem's narrative utilises anecdotes, some of which inform his perception of power. In one of these anecdotes, Ikem tells us of a wrestler, in fact, a champion of Kangan, who refuses to be drawn into brawl with a drunken man bent on irking him. People advise the wrestler to deal with the drunken man firmly, but the wrestler appears keen on quietly sneaking out of the market. People are at first surprised that one should tolerate such a nuisance for so long, until one man in the audience recognises him as "last night's new champion wrestler of Kangan" (1988, p. 47). The second anecdote is about a soldier who nearly runs over a hawker in Gelegele market with his jeep. The shocked trader asks the soldier, "Oga, you want to kill me?" (1988, p. 48) and the soldier responds, "if I kill you I kill a dog" (1988, p. 48). The soldier's act of brawn shocks the crowd but the hawker takes it in his stride.

Ikem utilises these anecdotes to enhance his point of view. By dramatising the contrasting usage of power in the two anecdotes, he successfully makes the reader approve of the first episode in which a strong wrestler chooses to use his physical power sparingly while condemning the soldier in the second episode who uses his office to harass the ordinary people. Ikem, through these anecdotes, criticises Sam's government which flaunts its authority on the citizens. As is the case in the anecdote of the unobtrusive wrestler, here also, the citizens are the bedrock of political power, yet government leaders behave as if they could do without them. Through these anecdotes, Ikem tells us that true power rests with the people themselves who are, however, unostentatious with it. The government leaders on the other hand, like the drunken man of Gelegele, arrogantly provoke the people of Kangan by constantly insulting their patience. Besides using anecdotes, Ikem makes use of sarcasm, to dramatise Sam's character:

Sam's play-acting, as perceived by Ikem, foregrounds the unreliability of his leadership and by extension that of his government. Ikem tells us of an incident in which Sam spent a whole morning trying to choose a pipe. The attention that Sam pays to such little incidents insinuates a shaky political status in his leadership strategy. By advancing this argument, Ikem builds on earlier insinuations by Chris, on Sam's superficiality. This superficiality is demonstrated in Chris's narrative by the foreign words and clichés that Sam uses. Ikem brings it a notch higher by assessing his character. That Sam holds the West in awe demonstrates that he is not keen to have a mutual interaction with his

people that would translate to a meaningful co-existence between the leaders and the led.

When Ikem analyses Sam's character he does not articulate a secondhand testimony and hearsay but, instead, he renders a first experience having known Sam for over 25 years. The shift in articulating from a secondhand testimony (in which he must imaginatively interpret the experiences of the oppressed) to articulating from a firsthand experience is necessary to foreground Ikem's class status which he has had to sacrifice for the purpose of controlling his point of view. Ikem attempts to deal with this limitation (of articulating his point of view from the oppressed perspective while belonging to the elite class) by also constructing his point of view through creative art.

Thus, Ikem succeeds in capturing the imagination of the oppressed people for whom he speaks. Ikem's 'Hymn to the sun' is one of the only two artistic pieces of his creative work that we encounter in the novel. Beatrice tells us that Ikem has "written a full-length novel and play on the women's war of 1929 which stopped the British administration cold in its tracks" (1988, p. 91). According to Beatrice, in these works, Ikem assigns women "the traditional role which society gave them of intervening only when everything else has failed. Like the women in the Sembene film who pick up the spears abandoned by their defeated men folk" (1988, pp. 91-92). In the novel, however, we encounter two of his works. One of this works is published in one of his editorial columns and, according to him, is to be sung to the tune of "Lord Thy Word Abideth":

> The worst threat from men of hell
> May not be their actions cruel
> Far worse that we learn their way
> And behave fierce than they (1988, p. 43)

Ikem uses the poem to conclude his editorial in which he attacks capital punishment. The irony of its effect on the ordinary people in Kangan is that the same people who had seemed to enjoy the occasion in which capital punishment is executed, end up liking this poem so much that they sing it "up and down the street of Bassa" (1988, p.43). The people's reaction to this poem underscores Ikem's belief that the people power can be restored back to them. Clearly, Ikem understands the latent power that is hidden in the common person's humble mien.

This poem is similar to the 'Hymn to the sun' in the sense that Ikem invokes the supernatural to artistically discuss political issues in Kangan. 'Hymn to the sun' is

dedicated to the sun. It is a form of prayer. This hymn is a response to Brigadier Misfortune who warns the people of Kangan that they will be steamed into well-done mutton (1988, p. 27) by the sun in April. Ikem describes the disagreement between the earth and the sky in a legendary manner. According to Ikem's hymn, the sun is determined to be vengeful to the earth and shall not relent even for the compassion of mankind. Ikem uses anthropomorphic metaphors to describe the anger and vengeance of the sun. He thus compares the sun to the hunter who, homeward bound with a great hunt, the carcass of an elephant, on his great head still dallies on the way to pick up a grasshopper between his toes (1988, p. 30).

The metaphor here portrays the 'undying eye of God' as greedy and unreasonable. Yet it is with the same 'undying eye of God' that the Almighty looked upon the earth and decided to tame the misuse of authority. It turns out that the 'undying eye of God' acquires these qualities to deal with leaders who exhibit them. Taking the dimension of a legend, Ikem describes the kind of destruction that is done by the vengeful sun. He describes this destruction with a sense of timelessness making it appear as having happened in some unknown time only to bring it suddenly to the present: "so they sent instead a deputation of elders to the government who hold the yam today and hold the knife, to seek help of them" (1988, p. 33).

This sudden shift from cosmic abstractions to the concrete (where we are in an apparent present dealing with characters whom we interact with in the narrative) merges the supernatural and the natural world in an analogous sense. Suddenly, we feel that the 'undying eye of the Almighty' which Ikem has so far kept in the province of the supernatural world, translates to those in government who hold the yam and the knife, meaning Sam. In this respect, Ikem's 'Hymn to the sun' is an important statement on Sam's actions, particularly as it underscores the spiritual realm which he attempts to encroach on in the mythological universe. Sam's spiritual encroachment on the province of the gods makes the semantics of the 'undying eye of God' perpetually ambiguous. On the one hand, we are confronted with the possibilities of the 'undying eye of the Almighty' being the reservoir of peace and tranquility while on the other representing its polar opposite of violent militancy espoused by Sam's military regime. Constantly, we are made to weigh Sam's mortality as a human being, with the gods' immortality, whom he attempts to impersonate and we hence conclude that Sam's fate might be violent.

4.0 Conclusion

The witness accounts of the two dead narrators to the tragic events in Kangan lends credence to their intractability from the failed state of Kangan. As part of a trilogy of the three childhood friends, which includes the dictatorial leader of Kangan, whose personal rivalry and pride distances them from the hopes and aspiration of the ordinary Kanganese citizens, their fate is irrevocably bound. Ikem, as approximate as he may wish to be to the ordinary folk, is inevitably distanced by his elitist class disposition, while Chris's attempt to self-distancing from the government he serves fails to resolve his complicitous standing in the narrative events which lead to the postcolonial tensions in the novel. Thus, for renewal and regeneration of an alternative postcolonial moment, Chris and Ikem have to vacate the narrative space to Beatrice Okoh as a more neutral narrator character even as they remain witness to the tragedy.

Author Biography

George Obara Nyandoro is the Director of Postgraduate at Kisii University where he also teaches literature in the Department of Languages, Linguistics and Literature. He has previously taught at Kenyatta University. He obtained his PhD in Literature from Moi University, having graduated with Bachelors in Education (Arts) and Masters in Literature, from University of Nairobi. His research interest is in the intersection between life writing genres and the reconstruction of national memories. He has also an interest in general fiction, film and theatre as sites of narrating the nation particularly in the construction of national identities.

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