

Intellectuals, Politicians, and the Public in Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People*: A Postcolonial Critique

Shadi Saleh Ahmad Neimneh

English Department
Hashemite University, Zarqa, Jordan

Amneh Khaleel Hussein Abussamen

Zarqa, Jordan

Abstract

This paper sheds light on the possible hope for the Nigerian situation in Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* (1966), away from bankrupt intellectuals, corrupt politicians, and an ignorant public. This novel portrays two schools of ineffectual native educators who seem to be antagonists: the traditional old school and the new modern intellectuals. Postcolonial/race theories of Fanon, Appiah, Du Bois, and Woodson as well as Gramsci's notion of the "organic intellectual" are employed to get a clearer image of the role of intellectuals and politicians in shaping the future of a country in the post-independence era. The article concludes that intellectuals with European education may contribute to the corruption of their country due to reasons like divided loyalties, miseducation, and lack of communication with the public. Additionally, Achebe is critical of the current politicians and the excluded public. So, our analysis employs Woodson's concept of "the miseducation of the Negro" because such "miseducation" produces incompetent politicians like Chief Nanga, weak intellectuals like Odili Samalu, and ignorant people like the public in the novel. Real hope against governmental corruption in Achebe's satirical novel can be found in integrating the class of intellectual/political leaders and the public and in a different kind of indoctrination, neither colonial nor neo-colonial. The truly educated class and the "organic intellectuals" produced from the public are key solutions for a better "Nigeria." Hence, this article highlights the role of politicized education in post-independence nation building and tackles the mishaps of nascent nationalism.

Keywords: Chinua Achebe, Intellectuals, Politics, Postcolonialism, the Public

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Introduction: A Man of the People in Context

Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* (1966) is a political critique of the Nigerian political situation in the post-independence era. Independence is supposed to be a glorious period in the history of a nation; however, it is presented in this novel as very gloomy. Achebe's first three novels—*Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960), and *Arrow of God* (1964)—can be read as a critique of tribalism and bad traditions as well as a counter writing to the English colonial canon. On the other hand, in this fourth novel the reader encounters a very harsh self-criticism that exposes the wrongs of the intellectual elite, the politicians, and the public. Hence, Achebe's sociopolitical satire is a directed one. In "The Novelist as Teacher," Achebe (2007) confirms his position as an author who uses literature to correct the nation's deeds. He believes that the "beneficent fiction calls into full life ... total range of imaginative faculties and gives ... a heightened sense of ... personal, social and human reality" (p.104). Therefore, we look into the social, political, and moral implications of Achebe's fiction, namely his novel *A Man of the People*, by way of showing the corrective function of his definitive satire.

Abiodun (2014) exposes the link between the power of politics and the corruption of wealth, on the one hand, and the negative role of people, on the other, arguing that these people endorse such corrupt politicians to gain personal favors. For Abiodun, the novel condemns "the African politicians' negative tendencies" and "the ordinary people in different African societies, for their seeming endorsement of corrupt politicians" (p. 202). The present article focuses more on the interrelationship between education and politics and, unlike Abiodun's, presents a way out of the failures of nationalism depicted in Achebe's novel through highlighting the ameliorative potential of satire as a genre.

In *A Man of the People*, Samalu Odili represents the intellectual elite and Chief Nanga represents the politicians. Odili is a member of the "comprador intelligentsia" who were well-trained in the West and "are known" there "through the Africa they offer" (Appiah, 1991, p. 348). This group of intellectuals, who received Western education and got assimilated into every English-like way of thinking, came to Africa to apply what they have learnt on a newly independent Nigeria (Fanon, 1967, p.178). They suffer from divided loyalties as they "can't choose; they must have both. Two worlds: that makes two bewitching ... each day the split widens" (p.17). For Fanon, this split state of the native intellectual's mind between two cultures is called "cultural imposition" (p.139). *A Man of the People* symbolizes the rift between the native intellectuals and the politicians in a politically turbulent Nigeria and in the absence of an engaged public. This national leadership, in Fanonian logic, is neither fully prepared for nor seriously engaged in issues of nationhood.

Achebe's prediction of a military coup in his novel turned "to be so accurate" (Morrison, 2007, p.115). On January 14, 1966, Achebe celebrated his novel with "the society of Nigerian Authors" (p.115). The next day, the coup's leader "demanded that the radical action taken by army officers ... had been a patriotically necessary act" (p. 115). After that, the commander of the Nigerian army survived and arrested the coup's leader, announcing himself the "Nigerian Head of State" (p.114). However, the Nigerian public were absent from the scene. This was the political context that surrounded and followed the publication of *A Man of the People*.

In fact, many critics thought that Achebe's novel was "prophetic" in its prediction of a military coup. However, Bernth Lindfors (1968) believes that it only reads reality so well to the extent that it demands a military coup to settle the whole country down (p.131). The novel is "a devastating satire" which reflects, Lindfors contends, "the developing political crisis" (p.131). Morrison (2007) agrees with Lindfors that the novel is a political satire in the general sense, being "a commentary on the situation of many of the newly independent states in Africa in 1960s" (p.119).

On the other hand, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in his 1966 essay argues that *A Man of the People* is a continuation of the framework of earlier narratives seeking "to look back and try to find out what went wrong" (as cited in Morrison, 2007, p. 119). Morrison agrees with Thiong'o that it is the "first time that Achebe turns his back on the colonizers" and that "his anger is directed with full force at his countrymen for their corruption, indifference and cynicism" (p.119). On the other hand, Morrison criticizes Achebe for what he believes to be a superficial treatment of the political situation in the novel. He declares that "in searching for the causes of Nigeria's national crisis", the novel "is ultimately unable to show us anything more than its symptoms" (p.123). After the publication of the novel, three thousand people were killed in the Eastern region of Nigeria where Achebe belongs. What began as fiction has turned to be so personally real for Achebe when his novel was seen to implicate him in the country's military coup. However, we argue that the novel is not an empty satire concerned with its own symptoms of political corruption as has been claimed. There is a worthy sociopolitical vision that needs explication. As a corrective satire, the novel works symbolically though suggesting or hinting at counter/better sociopolitical realities. It is our task as readers to foreground such hints.

In this article, we analyze the relationship between intellectuals and politicians in the Nigeria of *A Man of the People*. Additionally, we analyze the role of the public in the rift between the politicians and the intellectuals to understand Achebe's implicit sociopolitical messages in an otherwise bleak satire. The absurdity of intellectualism in the context of the unstable Nigeria is a strong theme in *A Man of the People*. Consequently, politics is absurd as well in the absence of effective intellectualism. For Onyemaechi Udumukwu, the novel shows "a specific consciousness toward an attempt to inspire a genuine form of leadership and political activism" for Nigeria (as cited in Morrison, 2007, p. 124). Udumukwu believes that "the negation of independence in Nigeria" was due to "the failure of the leaders to rise up to the challenge of leadership" (p. 124). Achebe represents "an authentic sense of desperation at the failure of the nation to live up to its own hopes" (p. 124). He explores the role of intellectuals and the political elite in ending corruption and supporting the public. The next section analyzes such roles as well as the ending of the novel.

Abortive Models of Sociopolitical Change

A. The Intellectual (Odili Samalu)

Samalu Odili is an idealistic, inexperienced young teacher whose idealism leads to his destruction. At first, we meet Odili who is fond of his former teacher Chief Nanga, a famous politician now. Odili is innocent in politics, so he accepted the invitation of Nanga to stay at his house so he could try to help him get a scholarship to study abroad (Achebe, 1966, p.12). Additionally, Odili seeks a scholarship but refuses to use the authority of politicians to get it for he seeks cleanness (p.12). Elsie is his girlfriend; she comes to visit him at Nanga's house (p.49).

Odili, the intellectual who tries to rescue his country from the corrupted politician, lives a moment of disillusionment and epiphany. He overcomes his innocence and uncovers the corruption that Nanga sinks in. Although the reason is a girl, Odili witnesses a real change in his personality as he declares: "I could not help thinking...of the quick transformations that were ... a feature of our country and ...of the changes of attitude in my own" (p.74). The epiphany in his personality begins when he turns his back to the Minister over the girl. Nanga has a relationship with Elsie, so Odili gets angry and leaves Nanga's house to form a party which plays a role in removing the Minister (p.49). He feels injured and wants to reclaim his offended masculinity and take "revenge" (p. 51). The personal anger he carries towards Nanga has turned to a political campaign against him. Consequently, Odili talks with his friend Max who has good relationships with English men. They all put a blueprint to form a party that takes part in the next elections against Nanga. Odili states that he "not only heard of a new political party" but also became "a foundation member" (p.56). The problem of money is resolved, for Max addresses Odili:

Do you know, Odili, that British Amalgamated has paid out four hundred thousand pounds to P.O.P to fight this election? Yes, and we also know that the Americans have been even more generous, although we don't have the figures as yet. Now you tell me how you propose to fight such a dirty war without soiling your hands a little? (p. 86)

Max is more practical than Odili in accepting a little corruption in the way to clean elections by accepting money from abroad. Odili is afraid that their morality and symbolic place as "hope of salvation" for the people is swept with Max's little corruption (p. 87).

It is hard to tell whether Odili's activism against Nanga is out of personal revenge for his offended masculinity or mere patriotism. He himself felt confused, for he declares that "It was difficult to say; things seemed so mixed up; my revenge, my new political ambition and the girl" (p.73). He stays naïve after his epiphany. Before, he thought of Nanga as the ideal teacher and leader. Now, he thinks of himself as the ideal man of the people: "what I had to accomplish... rose to the heights of symbolic action, a shining monumental gesture untainted by hopes of success or reward" (p. 89). So, he is looking to be elected with his new party that is supported from outside the country (pp.77-86). This point of divided loyalty is a one of self-destruction that leads not only to the tragic end of his political life but also to that of the whole country. Morrison (2007) declares that "Achebe's protagonists are, almost...more problematic and self-destructive than inspirational" (p.127). Maybe they inspire the readers alternatively, i.e. by evoking in them a will to oppose such characters.

Odili and his friends at the new party start to enlighten people by exposing the reality of Nanga's deeds, telling them of the public money that he has taken for personal projects (Achebe, 1966, p.68). This campaign is confronted by a counter campaign from Nanga who depended on his previous triumph in elections to deceive people by his words. Additionally, Odili tries to convince Edna, the Minister's bride-to-be, of cancelling her marriage to Nanga by exposing his scandalous political career to her (pp. 60-66). The fight heightens to the point that Nanga tries to kill Odili to stop the electoral competition (p. 94). Max is killed as well (p. 96). The government has fallen, so a military coup has taken over the country. After Nanga's arrest, Odili is free to marry Edna. Ironically, he decides to take the money of the party to pay her price only to become corrupt like Nanga (p.100). Odili welcomes the coup although his party is stopped.

Another self-destructive trait in Odili is his weakness with women. We do not know exactly whether he welcomed the coup because it takes Nanga away as a possible suitor for Edna or a political rival. Joe Obi (1990) states that Odili “fails as a hero: He does not inspire us precisely because he represents the ineffective plight of idealism in a rotten country” (p.407). Additionally, Thiong’o believes that “people like Odili are shown as being perilously close to Nanga- with their greed, lack of creativity and pitiable dependence on their former colonial rulers” (as cited in Morrison, 2007, p.120). This first model of intellectuals — underdeveloped, dependent, idealistic, self-seeking and innocent — does not work for the post-independence nation. As the next section shows, the model of greedy, self-seeking educators who suddenly became politicians does not work either.

B. *The Politician (M. A. Nanga)*

Chief Nanga is “the most approachable politician in the country” and a former school teacher (Achebe, 1966, pp.1-2). He is lucky enough to become a Minister of the people. It seems that he tries to compensate for the years of poverty that he has lived before. His philosophy is to eat and let the people eat. He brings his people water and other small services to make them superior to their neighbors (p. 91). However, what really happens is that he eats whole cake and gives the people only a bite.

The politician plays the role of the patriotic man, misleading people’s consciousness. Once, he told Odili that the meaning of “Minister” is “servant” (p. 6). However, he lacks simple political leadership skills such as the ability to give a speech. Max and Odili criticize his underserved position due to his humble educational background. Max tells Odili: “just think of such a cultureless man going abroad and calling himself Minister of Culture. Ridiculous. This is why the outside world laughs at us” (p. 16). To support his position as an “educated” politician and a guardian of culture, Nanga is looking to get an honorary law degree from a small college in U.S without working for it (p.18). For Zapata (1993), “politicians” like Nanga, despite their “apparent social commitment,” are basically interested in “the perpetuation of their power, even if this means the persecution of dissenters” (p.215). In this negative model of leadership, education becomes a means of gaining more political power at the expense of the uneducated masses.

Everything is going smoothly for Nanga until the appearance of Odili. Since Nanga is ethically corrupt, he cheats on his wife several times with Odili’s knowledge (Achebe, 1966, p.49). However, Odili turns his back on this fake politician only after he took his own girlfriend. Although Nanga was a man of the people who voted for him, he turns his ugly face to others who chose not to vote for him, as when he tries to kill Odili (p. 94). He antagonizes Odili who calls people to stop voting for the “Honourable Thief” (p. 93).

A Man of the People begins by portraying Minister Nanga as a loved public personality. However, Odili leaves Nanga because of a girl. Surprisingly, it turns out to be bigger than it begins. Odili now starts to see the reality of Nanga. Nanga has connections with the black side of Nigeria. He offers to bring Odili six girls to compensate for the girl he has taken from him. He tells Odili who is very angry over the matter:

Don't be childish ... After all she is not your wife...She told me there is nothing between you and she... But anyway I am sorry if you are offended; the mistake is mine.... If you like I can bring you six girls this evening. (p. 49)

Achebe continues, through Odili, to expose the scandalous parts of Nanga's political life. The Minister — a symbol of the corrupted politician in an underdeveloped country — had everything in his hands. He built a very huge house (p.68). Also, he paid the price of a new bride (p.75). Ironically, the corrupted politician himself suffered from bribes and journalists. He tells Odili about the Press that blackmailed him: “if I don't give him [the journalist] something now, tomorrow he will go and write rubbish about me. They say it is the freedom of the Press” (p. 45).

This enthusiastic “intellectual” came to apply Western democracy to his Nigeria. He was unaware of the reality of Nigeria after independence, seeing it as the cake that every politician and his followers are looking to taste (p. 97). Real democracy and corruption are necessarily enemies. So, Odili is fought by the ideal teacher who is indeed “Honourable Thief” (p. 93). At first, Nanga tries to seduce Odili with money, but Odili refuses. He bribes him to step down, saying: “take your money and take your scholarship to go and learn more books; the country needs experts like you. And leave the dirty game of politics to us who know how to play it” (p. 81). This was a threat; however, naïve Odili goes to a speech of Nanga thinking that he is in a free country. Unfortunately, he is almost killed and put in hospital under arrest to be prevented from signing the paper that proves him a possible candidate for elections (pp. 94-100).

Odili sympathizes with Edna, who was to be Nanga's wife because he has paid her greedy father the bride-price (p. 75). Odili sends her a message informing her of the risk of marrying such a bad person as a second wife (pp. 60-66). A shared self-destructive point in Odili and Nanga is their weakness with women, like Elsie and Edna. Odili falls in love with Edna. Nanga did not miss the opportunity and he politicized it, for he declares to his audience when he caught Odili there: “He even tried to take a girl on whose head I had put full bride-price and many other expenses---and who according to our custom is my wife” (p. 94). Such two models of leadership are essentially weak or incompetent, more personally-centered than national. Bribes, womanizing, and personal grudge, among others, distort the claims of such two representative “leaders” to nationhood. The European educational ideals of such men as well as their personal interests distort their claims to leadership.

C. The Novel's Ending (Neither Politicians nor Intellectuals)

The novel ends with a military coup, which is presented in “a positive light” (Morrison, 2007, p.124). Odili welcomes the coup, for now he is free to marry Edna because Nanga is out of sight (Achebe, 1966, p. 99). Similarly, in an interview for the Kenyan *Sunday Nation* in January 1967 Achebe admits his understanding that *A Man of the People* “would be controversial and that its publication might lead to some negative personal consequences” (as cited in Morrison, 2007, p.125). In this interview, Achebe presents his ambivalent attitude towards the coup. He says:

Military takeovers are not always bad in themselves. The Nigerian situation left no political solution. The political machine has been so abused that whatever measures were taken, it could only produce the same results ... I don't think one can say a military takeover is never worth it. (p. 125)

Thiong'o analyzes the military coup, arguing that it is controversial; but Achebe wants the readers to wonder whether any of the antagonists could find a solution for a corrupted Nigeria without the intervention of the army (as cited in Morrison, 2007, p.120). It is a really harsh criticism of both politicians and intellectuals who turned to be useless when it comes to real future national solutions. Both were good at fighting each other instead of looking for a shared opinion that gives each class its position.

For Joe Obi (1990), the justification of the uselessness of both politicians and intellectuals is that there was

an inraelite split ... between the political elite and the literati. The handful of nationalistic politicians who articulated the demands for self-government ... joined their not-so-educated colleagues (i.e., the commercial elite as well as traditional rulers) to wield power. This arrangement excluded the writers and the bulk of the intellectual class from the power to direct their societies other than as subservient civil servants. (pp. 404-405)

Consequently, intellectuals such as Odili try to find themselves a place from which they can state their opinions about solutions for their Nigeria. Odili and Max established a new party to counter Nanga's. Unfortunately, Max got killed while Odili survived (Achebe, 1966, p.96). Nanga was removed with the military coup and got arrested (p. 99). Commenting on the characters of Nanga and Odili, Morrison (2007) quotes his book *Scandalous Fictions: The Twentieth Century Novel in the Public Sphere* (2006), declaring that

the effect of Achebe's text is to present Nanga's corruption as an organic extension of traditional mores into modern national culture. If Nanga is shown as a retrograde figure whose weddedness to the past stifles both political and economic development however, Odili is shown as an equally poor progenitor of change. Vain, pompous, misogynistic and elitist. (p.128)

Nanga was arrested after the fall of the government when he was "trying to escape by canoe dressed like a fisherman" (Achebe, 1966, p. 99). On the other hand, Odili's "dubious seductions of women" were more obvious "than any kind of political or social reflection" in the novel. He was politically "impotent" and "self-regarding" (as cited in Morrison, 2007, p.128). Additionally, Morrison believes that "if Odili and Nanga are, each in their own way, profoundly unsatisfactory agents of national development, then this in itself can be read as one of the challenges Achebe's novel lays down to its readers" (p.127). The third option, i.e. the people, discussed in the next section does not seem quite successful either in Achebe's rounded satire.

D. The Public

The public are so passive in the novel. They were "not only ignorant but cynical" (Achebe, 1966, p. 2). So, change will never come through them (Morrison, 2007, p .123). Their ignorance and detachment pave the way for a military coup. Similarly, Udumukwu declares that there was no connection between the ruling class and the ignorant people who "lack a true knowledge of the essence of their condition" (as cited in Morrison, 2007, p.125). Additionally, Morrison thinks that "people are paralyzed by false consciousness" (p.124). As Fanon illustrates, the masses can lack agency: "the incoherent mass of the people is seen as a blind force that must be continually

held in check either by mystification or by the fear inspired by the police force” (1967, p.146). People were used as a means of winning the elections for both Odili and Nanga. Nanga’s people are weak and vulnerable to his words. Analyzing their relationship with Nanga, Achebe states:

Chief Nanga was a born politician; he could get away with almost anything he said or did. And as long as men are swayed by their hearts and stomachs and not their heads the Chief Nangas of this world will continue to get away with anything. (1966, p.44)

Thus, the problem with some Nigerian people might lie in the fact that they are not reasonable. An old man tells Odili, “we are ignorant people and we are like children” (p. 86). Odili cynically thought of people’s decision to vote for Nanga according to their own point of view: “Why should they lose their chance of getting good clean water, their share of the national cake? In fact they had adequate justification for their volte-face just two days later when the pipes returned” (p. 91). Although they already know that Chief Nanga was “Thief” Nanga, they still think that Odili is bad (p. 93). Their way of thinking reflects the bad traditional beliefs they used to cling to. When Odili thinks of telling them the reality of Nanga, he imagines their reflections on him as follows:

What a fool! Whose son is he? Was he not here when white men were eating; what did he do about it? Where was he when Chief Nanga fought and drove the white men away? Why is he envious now that the warrior is eating the reward of his courage? If he was Chief Nanga, would he not do much worse! (p. 93)

Unfortunately, “The people themselves ... had become even more cynical than their leaders and were apathetic into the bargain” (p.97). They believe in the philosophy of “let them eat” (p.97), i.e. that of the politicians. They justify their point of view, saying that they have survived the days of the “white men” and they did nothing for them when they were taking their country’s resources. Simply, “he came, he ate and he went” (p.97). For them, “the important thing then is to stay alive” because their “old people” told them that it “is reminiscence” that matters (p.97). They live with hope that one of their sons might bring them their share (p. 97). Thus, Odili denies the fact that people have brought on the fall of the current political situation, declaring: “No, the people had nothing to do with the fall of our Government ... Let’s make no mistake about that” (p. 97). According to Fanon (1967), this

Immobility to which the native is condemned can only be called in question if the native decides to put an end to the history of colonization- the history of pillage- and to bring into existence the history of the nation- the history of decolonization. (p.40)
People are immobilized due to many reasons; they learnt how to “stay” in their place and not cross “certain limits.” Also, they are “envious” of the colonial and are “always presumed guilty.” Furthermore, people think that what happens with them is what God wants, and they believe in “terrifying myths” (pp.40-43).

When the novel ends with a military takeover, such fickle people have suddenly changed their mind:

Overnight everyone began to shake their heads at the excesses of the late regime, at its graft, oppression and corrupt government: newspapers, the radio, the hitherto silent intellectuals and civil servants ... And these were the same people that only the other day had owned a thousand names of adulation, whom praise singers followed with song and talking-drum wherever they went. (Achebe, 1966, p.100)

People's ignorance and mutability appear not only in their illiteracy but also in their inability to differentiate between the political and the intellectual. Edna's mother declares that Odili and Nanga "are both white man's people" (p.72). Additionally, Odili underestimated the role of the public national politics, assuring that "the great revolutions of history were started by intellectuals, not the common people" (p. 53). In the novel, Odili is wondering about the owner of people that is repeated in many Ibo proverbs. Then, he "discovered" that it "is the will of the whole people" (p.58). Near the end of the novel, we witness Odili's changed perception of this will, as he declares:

The owner was the village, and the village has a mind; it could say no to sacrilege. But in the affairs of the nation there was no owner, the laws of the village became powerless. Max was avenged not by the people's collective will but by one solitary woman who loved him. Had his spirit waited for the people to demand redress it would have been waiting still, in the rain and out in the sun. (p. 100)

Furthermore, people do not care whether a politician or an intellectual takes the lead. What they care about are the benefits that they gain. Achebe's criticism does not spare anyone. Like politicians and intellectuals, the masses offer another model of abortive leadership, one of complicity, fickleness, and passivity. Lack of revolutionary potential and of the will to be more engaged make the public another object of Achebe's satire.

Avenues of Hope

As one concludes from the previous discussion on Achebe's satirical vision, the Nigerian situation needs to be changed. The truly educated class and the organic intellectual, we argue next, are the possible hope for Nigeria and the cure for its political and social crises. Although Achebe's novel does not directly state this, it is what we should infer as readers of this satire.

A. The Truly Educated Class

W.E.B Du Bois, in his fundamental essay "The Talented Tenth" (1903), maps out his scheme for the elevation of "Negroes." He believes that "The Negro race... is going to be saved by its exceptional men" (p. 33). Those "exceptional men" are "The Talented Tenth" who must be developed as "the Best of this race that they may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the worst, in their own and other races" (p. 33). The salvation of the whole black race, according to Du Bois, lies in educating its gifted youth; "the best and most capable of their youth must be schooled in the colleges and universities of the land" (p. 45). He declares that to have "Men" they shall "make manhood the object of the work of the schools-intelligence, broad sympathy, knowledge of the world that was and is, and of the relation of men to it-this is the curriculum of that Higher Education which must underline true life" (pp. 33-34). Additionally, when it comes to the masses, Du Bois denies their role at the beginning of the reformation process. He wonders and then answers:

Can the masses of the Negro people be in any possible way more quickly raised than by the effort and example of this aristocracy of talent and character? Was there ever a nation on God's fair earth civilized from the bottom upward? Never; it is, ever was and ever will be from the top downward that culture filters. (p. 45)

In *A Man of the People*, we are shown the opposite example of what Du Bois called "The Talented Tenth." Odili, the intellectual, has got a Western education, not a national one in his land (Achebe, 1966, p.6). We are shown the pitfalls of the native intellectual who is vulnerable towards women. Odili has a relation with Elsie at first (p.17). Then, he has another relation with a British woman he met at a dinner party (p.38). At last, he falls in love with the bride of Nanga, Edna (p.73). Furthermore, he receives money from England to fight against Nanga in the elections (p.86). On the other hand, Chief Nanga, the politician, was a simple school teacher who got a colonial education before independence (p.2). His corruption appears at first when he took the public money to build houses (p.68). Then, he cheats on his wife several times, once with Elsie who was Odili's girl (p.49). Also, he had a relation with a lawyer, an educated prostitute "for twenty-five pounds a time" as he told Odili (p.87). Nanga tries to get a certificate from America to support his political position (p.12). In addition, he bribes the press to stop criticizing him publically (p.45). By the same token, this politician who is supposed to be of "The Talented Tenth" feels superior to his fellow men, and the intellectual Odili likes Nanga's "lack of modesty" (p.8). Similarly, he "distrusted ...young university people and...would rather work with a European" (p.44). Thus, there is no question of the catastrophic future of Nigeria in the hands of Odili and Nanga who detached themselves from their people.

It seems that Achebe and Du Bois, apparently writing about different political and historical contexts one African and another Afro-American, still agree when it comes to the role of education in raising a nation. "The Talented Tenth" and the national intellectuals have to take the lead in their countries: "The Talented Tenth of the Negro race must be made leaders of thought and missionaries of culture among their people" (Du Bois, 1903, p.75). Du Bois assures at the end of his article that "Education and work are the levers to uplift a people. Work alone will not do it unless inspired by the right ideals and guided by intelligence" (p.75). Achebe (1966) states a relevant opinion through one of his characters who says: "the great revolutions of history were started by intellectuals, not the common people. Karl Marx was not a common man" (p.53). Additionally, another character in the novel declares that "what is important nowadays is no longer age or title but knowledge" (p. 85). Achebe's satire thus functions through reverse logic: the absence of a qualified group of educated leaders, the "talented tenth" so to speak, leaves room for blatantly corrupt versions like the ones we encounter in the novel. By showing the limitations of such bad "educated" leaders like Odili and Nanga, Achebe hints at the need for a better group, one neither educated at the hands of the colonizer nor implementing colonial ideologies. In addition to proper education, the relationship between the intellectual and the masses should be strengthened. Avoiding such a rift, the next section shows, can ensure more effective politics.

B. The Organic Intellectual

The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci comes up with a new category of intellectuals that is missed but suggested in Achebe's *A Man of the People*. Gramsci (1971) believes that "every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of economic production, creates

together with itself, organically, one or two strata of intellectuals” (p.134). The role of this group of intellectuals is “to give it [their social group] homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields” (pp.134-135). Additionally, the member of this group of intellectuals “must be an organizer of masses of men; he must be an organizer of the ‘confidence’ of investors in his business, of the customers for his product” (p.135). So, organic intellectuals have a social, economic and political role in organizing the group that they come from. Consequently, it is crucial for any group to accelerate its efforts to create and develop its organic intellectuals due to their fundamental role in its stability. Gramsci announces that,

One of the most important characteristics of any group that is developing towards dominance is its struggle to assimilate and to conquer “ideologically” the traditional intellectuals, but this assimilation and conquest is made quicker and more efficacious the more the group in question succeeds in simultaneously elaborating its organic intellectuals. (p.142)

The group of intellectuals we see in *A Man of the People* falls short from the organic intellectuals of Gramsci, as Achebe’s satire works through analogy with absent models. Nanga warns people against trusting the intellectuals. He declares: “Never again must we entrust our destiny and the destiny of Africa to the hybrid class of Western educated and snobbish intellectuals who will not hesitate to sell their mothers for a mess of pottage” (Achebe, 1966, p.4). By the same token, Odili criticizes the teachers in his country stating that they “were all dead from the neck up” (p.5). He believes that the ones who are in top are “the smart and the lucky and hardly ever the best” (p.26). Instead of serving the people and organizing them, Odili fought against Nanga in “a life and death fight” (p.68), to the extent that the public thought that they “should never have asked the white man to go” (p.55). Additionally, people do not trust education, for Mrs. Nanga declares that “Education has been falling every year. Last year’s standard six is higher than this year’s” (p.59). On the other hand, politicians and intellectuals underestimate their people, so they detach themselves from them. Nanga thinks that “people are too selfish and too jealous” (p.29). Also, he addresses Odili saying: “you are wasting your talent here [in teaching in a school]. I want you to come to the capital and take up a strategic post in the civil service” (p.8). So, Nanga believes that education is not important in shaping the character of an intellectual who is supposed to be an “organic intellectual.” This man was “a minister bloated by the flatulence of ill-gotten wealth, living in a big mansion built with public money, riding a Cadillac and watched over by a one-eyed, hired thug” (p. 51). The former reasons of Nanga’s lifestyle do detach him from both the intellectuals and the public. Similarly, Odili thinks that people “were not only ignorant but cynical” (p.2). This unfriendly relationship between the masses from one side, and the intellectuals and politicians from the other side has made the people opportunistic; wanting their part of the “national cake” regardless of the party they supported (p.9).

Accordingly, one understands the tragic end of the intellectual group in *A Man of the People* whose role is far from organizing the masses. Along with the corrupted politicians in charge, they play a big role in distracting the masses at the political level. This mistrust between intellectuals/politicians, on the one hand, and the masses, on the other hand, is partially caused by the miseducation of the masses, i.e. their ignorance, and the imposed forms of colonial and Western education.

Coda: Miseducation

Achebe does not write a novel of solutions for Nigeria; however, he unfolds the future that he predicts for his people depending on the reality of Nigeria of that time to “challenge” them to find a solution (Morrison, 2007, pp.129-130). The passive roles of intellectuals, politicians and the public probably save no room for hope in the Nigerian setting of *A Man of the People*. However, we have argued that Achebe’s hope for the future lies in the truly educated class and the organic intellectuals who are properly connected with their people. Although this is not directly articulated in Achebe’s satire, it is our contention that satires function through analogy with and suggestion of better realities as we read them against their corrective function. Achebe’s way of enlightening his people is an overdose of satirical realism about social and political corruption. This satirical approach functions through foregrounding the gap between the proper roles of politicians, intellectuals, and the public as opposed to their actual limitations.

Achebe “was identified as a possible conspirator” of the coup in Nigeria after the publication of *A Man of the People* (Morrison, 2007, p. 129). However, he stays committed to his “ego ideals” that appeared “in his fictional and non-fictional works.” He incorporates such corrective ideals in his satirical works as reminders for himself as well as other African writers (Abussamen & Neimneh, 2016, p. 221). Thus, he continues what he believes to be the kind of responsible and beneficent literature that contributes to raising national awareness. The ideals Achebe fosters, however, function in this satire through analogy with the shortcomings of existing models, like those related to education, politics, and the mob.

According to Joe Obi (1990), *A Man of the People* is a novel that exposes the author’s “disillusionment with the fruits of independence” (p. 402). Although Nanga was corrupt, he was a symbol of a stable country which has a parliament. And after Odili, Nigeria is ruled with force because “the country was on the verge of chaos” (p.68). Many thought of coups as good solutions, but it is ironic to use military weapons and soldiers to keep peace. On the other hand, Nanga, the greedy politician who wants to stay long in power, tries to kill Odili to move him from his way (Achebe, 1966, pp. 94-97). By contrast, wouldn’t Odili — being a lover of women, money and fame — become a thief like Nanga if he won? Consequently, Achebe is directing his readers to the importance of real national education through the inadequate examples of political leadership he offers. As Woodson (1933) memorably states in his study on miseducation,

If you can control a man’s thinking you do not have to worry about his action. When you determine what a man shall think you do not have to concern yourself about what he will do. If you make a man feel that he is inferior, you do not have to compel him to accept an inferior status. If you make a man think that he is justly an outcast, you do not have to order him to the back door, his very nature will demand one. (p. 84)

Woodson has clearly articulated the interrelationship between power, politics, and education. For Woodson, the educated “Negro” was taught to despise his people and think like and imitate whites. The educated “Negroes” have failed to make their race progress because of “their estrangement from the masses” (Woodson, p. 88). Hence, Woodson claims that the black race “needs workers, not leaders” (p.118) as good leadership entails service rather than the empty talk of miseducated leaders chosen by whites. Achebe criticizes the former colonials who still intervene in Nigeria through their well-formed intellectual elite. Fanon (1967) declares that

“inside the nationalist parties, the will to break colonialism is linked with another quite different will: that of coming to a friendly agreement with it. Within these parties, the two processes will sometimes continue side by side” (p. 98). Those people inside the nationalist parties are the means of intervening in the newly independent country. Also, Achebe criticizes his fellow Nigerians who are still unable to serve their country and build their nation.

The problem of Nigeria in *A Man of the people* is that intellectualism does not stand firmly against the corruption of politicians. Rather, it seeks to establish a politics of itself instead of working hand in hand with the current authority. We have argued for a national consensus that puts a blueprint for the future to uplift the country at the hands of a truly educated class of organic intellectuals and an engaged public. Force generates force, and violence is exactly what has happened in real Nigeria after the coup; a counter coup (Morrison, 2007, p.115). Unfortunately, the enlarged egoism of the intellectuals and politicians, together with the complacency of the public, has endangered the country. Educating the masses is crucial to change the political situation of a place like Nigeria. As Fanon (1967) declares,

to be responsible in an underdeveloped country is to know that everything finally rests on educating the masses, elevating their minds, and on what is too quickly assumed to be political education ... Political education means opening up the mind, awakening the mind, and introducing it to the world (p. 138)

Achebe adds that “the most urgent thing today for the intellectual is to build up his nation” (p.199). Nigerians have to control their destiny by having political education. They should produce their organic intellectuals according to their own national standards. The public must be the rulers who choose a man from the people to serve the people, not to exploit them.

About the Authors:

Dr. Shadi S. Neimneh has a Ph.D. in literary and cultural studies and is currently associate professor of English literature and vice-dean of Arts College at Hashemite University, Jordan. He specializes in South African apartheid literature with research interests in literary and cultural theories. He has published widely in many international journals.

Amneh K. Abussamen is a certified instructor of English with a Master’s degree in English Literature from Hashemite University, Jordan (2015), and a BA in English Language and Literature from Al-Balqa’a Applied University, Jordan (2011). Her research interests cover African literature, psychoanalysis, postcolonialism.

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