



A CRITICAL READING OF CHINUA ACHEBE'S MAN OF THE PEOPLE'S DISCOURSE OF DENUNCIATION

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ABSTRACT

A Man of the People (1966), Achebe's narrative text, is a political satire that exposes the complexities of democratic politics in Nigeria. This story is a clear rebuke of a corrupted political system in a perverse socio-cultural and economic environment, similar to what is depicted in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), Ahmadou Kourouma's *The Suns of Independence* (1970), and Amu Djoletto's *Money Galore* (1975), among many others. Even though *A Man of the People* was published in 1966, its central theme of politics, corruption, and underdevelopment is still relevant to Africa's current socio-cultural, economic, and political context. The novel is unquestionably classified as an African classic in literary studies, as it is one of the narrative texts studied in universities throughout Africa and beyond. This study aims to critically examine the nature of the linguistic tools and stylistic detours that define Achebe's narrative text as a denunciative discourse and their impact on the effective transmission of the message of socio-cultural attitudinal transformation for long-term socio-economic and political development. Given the nature of literature as a social discourse (Fowler 1981), the study will be based on the CDA theoretical framework (van Dijk, 1993b). Critical discourse analysis is a type of discourse analysis research that examines how social power abuse, dominance, and inequalities are enacted, reproduced, and resisted in the social and political context through text and talk (van Dijk, 2001)

1. INTRODUCTION

Achebe's narrative text, *A Man of the People*, is a sociopolitical satire in which sociopolitical and economic actors in a fictional Nigerian setting are mocked for the unprecedented level of corruption and derailment that characterise the country's sociopolitical landscape following her independence from British colonial rule, destroying her life and tearing it apart. Exploitation. Discussion: Discourse can be a long and severe speech or piece of writing about a subject, a long conversation between people, or a long and serious discussion between people or groups. It stands for language, especially in a particular setting or subject. It also says that discourse is a big part of language, primarily spoken language that is longer. The word "discourse" comes from Foucault (1972: 29). He says that discourse comprises "ideas, attitudes, and actions, beliefs, and practises that systematically construct the subject and the worlds of which they speak." This definition is probably the most important because it covers all aspects of this paper's subject matter, making it the best. It, therefore, gives the study the conceptual tools it needs. Achebe's narrative language is primarily negative and critical of the leading political players when discussing this situation. "Denunciation" refers to a "public condemnation" of something or someone. It is outright or subtly expressed rejection of what is deemed an affront to public morality, legality, socio-cultural, economic, and political integrity. Denunciations are spontaneous communications from individual citizens to the state (or to another authority, such as the church), alleging wrongdoing by other citizens or officials and implicitly or explicitly requesting punishment (Fitzpatrick and Gellately 1997). A closer examination of this definition reveals that it only emphasises the concept's negative aspects on only the negative aspects of the idea.

THE MOST EVOCATIVE SATIRICAL LINGUISTIC TOOLS EMPLOYED IN A MAN OF THE PEOPLE

A critical reading of *A Man of the People* reveals Achebe's predominance in this narrative of two distinct linguistic tools. This section discusses satirical denunciation of lexical items and syntactic structures.

Achebe uses appreciative and depreciative modifiers in the text to characterise the satirical denunciation lexical items. The syntactic structure of satirical denunciation, on the other hand, is characterised by the use of compound sentences in the active voice, dialogue, direct speeches interspersed with Pidgin English infusions, rants, and first-person singular narrative. A modifier is a word, phrase, or clause that acts as an adjective or adverb to describe or clarify the meaning of a statement. Appreciative modifiers are adjectives, adverb phrases, or clauses that assign a person, an animal, an object, or a place positive qualitative or quantitative values. On the other hand, Depreciative modifiers are the opposites of appreciative modifiers. They endow people, animals, objects, and places with negative qualitative or quantitative values. Both modifiers are judgmental and reveal the narrator's subjectivity and biases and those of other characters in the text. These are reinforced by the deliberate use of action verbs to enhance theatrical scenes for maximum satirical aesthetic impact.

The following lines demonstrate how Achebe's narrator uses appreciative modifiers to initiate the attempt to expose his protagonist, Nanga, to public ridicule and reproach. He certifies:

No one can deny that Chief the Honourable M.A. Nanga, MP, was the most approachable politician in the country. Whenever you asked in the city or in his home village, Anata, they would tell you he was a man of the people. (2001: 1).

The italicised modifiers in the preceding lines of the narrative are appreciative, as they appear to extol Mr Nanga's virtues. Although compliant, these modifiers expose Nanga as a ridiculous character who embodies unscrupulous politicians and public figures in a perverted multiparty democratic environment. Additionally, the narrator laments the gullibility of the inhabitants of Anata, Chief Nanga's home village, as they gather to greet him as a man of the people. "Five or six dancing groups were performing at various points throughout the compound," he explains. The famous 'Ego Women's Party' debuted a new uniform of opulent Accra fabric. (2001: 1), whereas the cardinal numeral adjectives 'five' and six in the noun reveal the narrator's contempt for the villagers' enterprising political patronage, as evidenced by the crowd that gathered on the occasion of Chief the Honourable M.A. Nanga's visit, the mention of 'new uniforms of expensive Accra cloth' worn by members of the 'Ego Women Party' is a denunciation of the ost The narrator further expresses his opposition to political patronage associated with personality cults and praise singing in the following lines:

In spite of the din you could still hear as clear as a bird the highpowered voice of their soloist, whom they admiringly nicknamed 'Grammar-phone'. Personally I don't care too much for our women's dancing but you just had to listen whenever Grammar phone sang. She was now praising Micah's handsomeness, which she likened to the perfect, sculpted beauty of a carved eagle, and his popularity which would be the envy of the proverbial traveller-todistant-places who must not cultivate enmity on his route. (2001: 1)

The italicised modifiers in the preceding lines complement Micah's physical appearance. "Of course, Micah was Chief the Honourable M.A. Nanga, MP" (2001: 1). However, the narrator's understatement in the sentence "Personally, I don't care too much for our women's dancing, but you just had to listen whenever Grammar-phone sang" reveals his disdain for such disdainful and debasing acts as political praising and dancing in honour of a dishonourable and despicable character like Chief the Honourable M.A. Nanga, MP. It is also a condemnation of moral corruption, which drives people to behave the way they do to survive in the perverted setting of the storey.

Praise-singing in the church Anata's hunter-gatherers' guild, whose "members' arrival in full regalia caused a great stir," is also mentioned as a source of reproof. The italicised prepositional phrase "in full regalia" emphasises the hunters' guild's importance on the Chief's visit. Nanga. The narrator notices a clear contrast between this visit and the unusual. Members of the Hunters' Guild wear their uniforms. "Except for the wedding, these people never came out." I'm sure I could at the funeral of one of their numbers or during some extraordinary and exceptional event. I am not sure when I last saw them. They wield their loaded guns as if they were soldiers. "Child's Plaything" (pp. 1–2). They are also out on this socioculturally minor issue in an ironic twist. Events like the visit of a corrupt and despised political figure like Chief Nanga This is not "a funeral for one of their numbers," nor is it "some extraordinary and unique occasion." "An outstanding occasion." At this point, the narrator emphasises the bastardisation of Political patronage and moral corruption shape people's norms and practices. He also mentions economic and financial difficulties, ironically, preventing the people in check as they act as if they are actively demonstrating their adoration for the Chief of the Honourable M.A. Nanga, MP, is a visiting Minister. He says, amusingly:

Occasionally a hunter would take aim at a distant palm branch and break its mid-rib. The crowd applauded. But there were very few of such shots. Most of the hunters reserved their precious powder to greet the Minister's arrival – the price of gunpowder like everything else having doubled again and again in four years since this government took control. (2001: 2)

The preceding quotation's italicised parenthetical comment clause evokes the precarious economic situation of being complicit in this wasteful squandering of scarce resources. Additionally, it is a criticism of the government's inability to rein in inflationary trends. Chief Nanga, a ruling party member of parliament, is jointly denounced and rejected by the political elite that comprises this government. The narrator's and various characters' harmonious use of these linguistic tools highlights the subject: the destructive nature of socio-cultural, economic, and political perversion in governance and nation-building. How does the balanced combination of these linguistic tools correspond to the stylistic detours taken in producing the narrative's satirical denunciation discourse? How does the study try to answer this question? It looks at how the satirical denunciation takes stylistic turns.

NATURE OF THE STYLISTIC DETOURS OF SATIRICAL DENUNCIATION IN A MAN OF THE PEOPLE

Numerous stylistic detours of satirical denunciation occur throughout the narrative. The first person narration, characterization, conflict, dialogue, flashback, and abuse are critical components. This section examines how these stylistic detours are used to concretize satirical denunciation in the narrative as social discourse.

FIRST-PERSON SINGULAR NARRATION

A Man of the People is a first-person narrative in the singular. Odili Kamalu, the narrator, is also a dynamic character in the storey he recounts. The text is entirely about his perspective and interactions with and connections to other characters in Achebe's textual universe in A Man of the People. As a result, he moderates the storey from a subjective standpoint, in which readers see, hear, and learn what he desires and enjoys revealing to them. He weaves his own storey into the narratives of others. The very first indications of his overbearing presence and control over the history are found in the following words: "I have to admit from the outset or else the story I'm going to tell will make no sense." The first person identifies the narrator's singular subject personal pronoun 'I,' as used in 'I have... and I am going to...'. He establishes his ownership of the storey he is about to tell. This overbearing presence of the first-person narrator is a subtle infiltration of the narrative by the author's voice.

CHARACTERISATION

The characterisation is how writers present and reveal a character, a fictional individual assigned a role in a literary text. It is accomplished through the first person singular narrator, who serves as the sole presenter of the characters and events that comprise the story. In "A Man of the People," Achebe communicates with his characters through their speech, dress, manner, and actions.

The narrator appears to crush Mr Nanga, the story's main character. The young idealistic university graduate, the narrator, serves as a foil to the main character, a pragmatic and opportunistic politician. The narrative title is, in fact, a designation for the main character. The reader is made aware of this in the report's first paragraph. He claims:

No one can deny that Chief Honourable M.A. Nanga, MP, was the most approachable politician in the country. Whether you asked in the city or in his home village, Anata, they would tell you he was a man of the people. (2001: 1)

Mr Nanga's accumulation of nominal titles 'Chief Honourable M.A... MP' highlights the narrator's dislike for the character as a self-conceited megalomaniac.

The reader gradually learns about Chief the Honourable M.A. Nanga, MP's infamous popularity. The name 'Nanga' is magnified ironically by the nominal phrases used as descriptive modifiers. It condemns Mr Nanga as a self-centred, greedy, and evil public figure and politician. The narrator's hidden ironical intentions are revealed in the following paragraphs, as he criticises the most elaborate preparations, pomp, and pageantry put in place by the people of Anata to feast Chief Nanga "due to address the staff and students of Anata Grammar School [...] (2001: 1).

Chief Nanga exemplifies greedy and corrupt politicians and public figures who adorn themselves with accumulated empty titles to satisfy their egoistic instincts. These open titles are used to play games with their supporters and followers, who are also corrupt and disgusting.

Whereas politicians and public figures feel elated and highly esteemed as these titles are bestowed upon them in public, their followers use them to seduce and win the favours of these unsuspecting politicians and public figures whose folly is being exposed in this manner by the narrator. Titles are bestowed on such people not out of genuine reverence because most do not live up to the virtues embodied in those titles. In the eyes and minds of the people, they are a distrusted and scorned group of people. In the eyes of those who manipulate them to meet their socio-economic needs while pretending to love and revere them in public, they are nothing more than stooges.

Chief the Honourable M.A. Nanga, MP's insatiable desire for popularity and fame is further rebuffed in the narrative when the narrator makes him proudly announce his trip to the United States to be awarded a doctorate in the following words: "They are going to give me doctorate... Doctor of Laws, LL D" (2001: 16).

Ironically, Chief the Honourable M.A. Nanga, MP, has shown a relentless dislike for intellectuals and university-educated and professional men whose degrees and titles he despises. Yet, here is Chief the Honourable M. A. Nanga, MP, overjoyed to be awarded a university degree, which will undoubtedly boost his egocentric personality even further.

The narrator in Achebe's A Man of the People possesses a strong descriptive ability, which he uses to caricature characters and situations vividly. He interweaves the description with denunciatory hyperbole, the form of deliberate exaggeration that confirms his heightened aversion for the sociopolitical ills and actors. Given the narrator's disappointment and anger, hyperbolic denunciation is a driving force in the narrative. He appears as a sociopolitical outcast in a bastardised society's political independence due to his incorruptible positions. His idealistic convictions clash with those of Chief the Honourable M. A. Nanga, MP, and most other characters in the narrative. This competition significantly adds to the plot's dynamism and propels the narrative.

Through this artistic ingenuity, metaphorical and ironic denunciations emerge, reinforcing the narrative's aesthetic stance and the impact of the narrator's denunciatory posture. Whereas metaphoric condemnation results from the narrator's juxtaposition of contradictory viewpoints and paradoxes in the speeches and actions of the central characters to expose the hypocrisy and double-strand of the hallma, ironic condemnation results from the narrator's juxtaposition of contradictory viewpoints and contradictions in the speeches and actions of the central characters. What is the significance of Achebe's A Man of the People's combined use of these linguistic tools and stylistic detours toward attitudinal and behavioural transformation for improved democratic governance and sustainable human development?

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF COMBINING LINGUISTIC TOOLS AND STYLISTIC DETOURS TO EFFECT ATTITUDINAL AND BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE TO IMPROVE DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

In A Man of the People, Achebe's discourse is founded on a satirical denunciation of socio-economic and political corruption in various forms and degrees in a newly independent fictional Nigeria. The significance of the initial examination of the combined use of the best satirical linguistic tools and stylistic found in the manifestation of satirical denunciation of the ills mentioned above in four primary categories. It includes the rejection of socio-economic and political perversion, the condemnation of selfishness and greed, the denunciation of unhealthy social, political, economic stratification, the denunciation of growing 'intellectualism,' and the rejection of media corruption and terrorism.

The narrative characterises the media and practitioners as incredibly corrupt in the text. The narrator is unequivocal in his condemnation of journalistic standards being perverted and journalists being degraded in the performance of their duties.

The media actively assists politicians in distorting the truth and discrediting their perceived adversaries. For example, when the Finance Minister presents a "complete plan" to address the country's "dangerous financial crisis" caused by the "slum in the international coffee market" (2001: 3), "the

Prime Minister said 'No' to the plan." He was not about to risk losing the election by lowering the price paid to coffee planters at such a critical time" (2001: 3). Alternatively, he directs that the "National Bank be instructed to print fifteen million pounds" in the spirit of corrupt politics (2001: 3).

Aware of the dire long-term consequences of such a directive for the national economy, "two-thirds of the Cabinet backed the Minister" (2001: 3). The following morning, however, the Prime Minister issues a nationwide broadcast announcing their dismissal. As is customary for unscrupulous politicians in such situations, the Prime Minister discredits his former colleagues and sows public discontent with them.

As the narrator puts it, "he declared that the dismissed Ministers were conspirators and traitors who had collaborated with foreign saboteurs to destroy the new nation" (2001: 3). The media lap up the contents of this broadcast and press the public destruction button on unfortunate patriotic citizens who genuinely want what is best for their country and compatriots. Thus, newspapers and radio broadcasts relayed the Prime Minister's version of events." (2002) p. 3. Following that, as a matter of course, the anticipated public reactions elicited by this politically and socially damaging broadcasting are discussed. Without knowing the truth, [we] were highly dissatisfied. Our Students' Union convened an emergency session. It passed a vote of confidence in the leader and a resolution calling for the establishment of detention law to deal with miscreants. Additionally, the entire country rallied behind the leader. Protest marches and demonstrations held throughout the country" (2001: 3).

2. CONCLUSION

A Man of the People's characters and events bear a striking resemblance to contemporary sociopolitical and economic characters and events in most African countries. In light of this observation, we pause to ask the rhetorical question, "What lessons have we learned from the plethora of literary works that have shaped nation-building in Africa over the years?" Is literature viewed as social discourse or as the fruit of the fertile imaginations of irresponsible authors?