



**CITIZENS AS COLLABORATORS: THE CULPABILITY OF THE FOLLOWERS IN LEADERSHIP FAILURE IN ACHEBE'S *A MAN OF THE PEOPLE*.**

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**Abstract**

Many literary critics and scholars have posited that failure of leadership is the major concern of Achebe in *A Man of the People* (1966). This paper proposes, with post-colonial theoretical perspective, a fresh insight of the work by suggesting that the novel should be analysed beyond leadership failure. It argues that the major concern of Achebe in *A Man of the People* is to explore the collaboration of the citizens with their leaders through actions that encourage bad leadership. Relying on deep textual analysis, it discusses instances of the collaboration and how the perception of leadership by the followers (the citizens) influence the follower's conduct. The analysis shows how the collaboration which is conceptualized as the solidarity and cooperation of the followers with the leaders to perpetuate bad governance establishes the culpability of the followers in leadership failure. The work presents a fresh perspective as it reveals that leadership failure is traceable to the actions of the followers thus filling a gap that is largely ignored in most literature. The paper found that it is not only the leaders that should be held responsible for the problems of Achebe's society in *A Man of the People*, the followers are equally culpable.

**Keywords: Citizens, Concern, Collaborators, Culpability, Followers, Failure, Leadership.**

**Introduction**

In his works, Chinua Achebe has always emphasized leadership failure as the problem of Africa, especially Nigeria, without paying adequate attention to how the followers contribute to this failure. For example in *The trouble with Nigeria* (1983) Achebe ascribes the problems of Nigeria, his home country to leadership failure:

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of

its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership (p. 1).

Analysing the works of Achebe, Nnolim argues that "from *Things Fall Apart* to *Anthills of the Savannah* the one consistent concern he exhibited in each novel is the issue of leaders who, in time of crisis, fail their people" (2011, p. 41). Most people agree that leadership failure is the problem of many African nations such as Nigeria and has been a major concern of Achebe in his novels but one issue that is being largely overlooked is how the followers have contributed to leadership failure. The objective of this paper, therefore, is to examine how the followers have contributed to failure of leadership. The paper explores how the collaboration of the followers with the leaders encourage poor leadership. Put succinctly, the paper aims at reading and analysing this novel outside prevailing preoccupations of leadership failure. Suffice to say that in *Re-writing as Aesthetic Experiment: A Study of Achebe's Early Novels*, Ogene, (2016) asserts that critics should read Achebe's work outside prevailing preoccupations.

Prior to the publication of *A Man of the people* in 1966, the concern of Achebe in his previous novels such as *Things Fall Apart* (1958), and *Arrow of God* (1964) is to write back to the "centre", the centre being the colonialists. In these works, he presents the encounter of Africa with the West and the devastating effects of this encounter on the politics, economy and the culture of the African people. This was the period of European conquest and subjugation when African political, economic and cultural systems were forced to give way to the invading authorities of the white colonialists. In *A Man of the People*, Achebe examines the post-colonial landscape of Africa. The colonialists have left and indigenous Africans are in charge of their own affairs. It is the years of





independence and so Achebe's concern shifted from the threats of the erstwhile colonialists to the threats from within. For example, Obi posits that "A Plethora of Critical African novels appeared during the early years of independence in response to the new "threat from within" (1990, p. 402). Such works on post-colonial Africa include Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (1967), Timothy Aluko's *Chief the Honourable Minister* (1970), Kofi Awoonor's *This Earth My Brother* (1971), and Achebe's *A Man of the People* (1966).

Just as Armah, Soyinka, Aluko, and Awoonor highlight the "threat from within" in their works by expressing disillusionment about the conduct of African leaders who succeed the colonialists, Achebe expresses similar disillusionment in *A Man of the People* with bitterness and frustration. For example, Ngugi (1978, p.52) has argued that in *A Man of the People*, Achebe "has turned his back on European presence...in the new novel, the teacher talks to his pupils, directly... he takes his satirical whip and raps his pupils-with anger...with bitterness". Ngugi's comment demonstrates Achebe's shift of focus from erstwhile colonialists to the new African leaders whom he bitterly criticises for their misrule.

In *A Man of the People*, Achebe examines the transition of Africa from colonial to post-colonial era and the effects on the people. Against the backdrop of post-colonial discourse, Achebe chronicles the emergence of a metropolitan African nation with the people trying to cope with the new political elites who are now in control of power that was hitherto in the hands of the white man. He does not hide his indignation for corrupt and irresponsible political leaders at the helm of affairs, not only in Nigeria but in Africa as a whole. Neither does he spare the ignorant citizens that collude with and encourage the leaders in the art of looting the continent.

When *A Man of the People* was published in 1966, it was widely acclaimed as prophetic of events in Nigeria for it was that same year that the Nigerian military took over power from the politicians as a result of poor leadership. Asked about this coincidence, Achebe states in an interview with Serumaga cited in Killam (1982) that "the situation in Nigeria had got to such a point politically that there was no other answer... the political machine has been so abused that whichever way you pressed it, it produced the same results; and therefore another force had to come in" (p. 85). He further explains in the same interview that when he was

writing the novel, it was not clear to him that it was going to be military intervention, that it could easily have been civil war. Achebe had the premonition that the publication would create some problems for him but still went ahead to publish it. He disclosed in *There was a Country* "that I knew the book was going to be problematic for me because of its criticism of Nigerian politics – very severe criticism" (Achebe, 2012, p. 63). *A Man of the People* is a critique of the Nigerian political situation in the post-independence period (Neimneh & Abussamen, 2017). Nevertheless, Achebe still publishes the novel in spite of his apprehension and this attests to his conviction that the failure of the leaders have reached intolerable level. The overthrow of democratic government in the novel is, therefore, the culmination of Achebe's loss of confidence in not only post-colonial Nigeria but also post-colonial Africa which is similar to what Armah presents in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. The failure of the state that one sees in the novel and which Achebe indicts with the resultant military intervention does not just happen, certain factors which this paper has highlighted are responsible for this. What this paper intends to unravel is that if leaders fail as they do in *A Man of the People*, the docility of the followers, their alliance and collaboration with the leaders make them culpable as a part of this failure.

#### **Failure of the leadership and the Citizens as Collaborators**

The pervading tone and mood of *A Man of the People*, hilarious and satiric as they appear, portray a nation and its people whose corrupt leaders, with the complicity of the followers have thoroughly failed in the discharge of their responsibilities to the nation. This assertion is strengthened by Machika who opines that *A Man of the People* "depicts an African society betrayed by its own people... Achebe portrays a post-colonial African society that has come to accept institutionalized corruption and nepotism" (2012, p.15). With independence, African people had thought that the transfer of power from the Colonialists to native Africans would usher in an era of abundance, an era of economic, social and cultural prosperity, as they believed the new leaders would institute programmes and policies that would ultimately better the lots of the common people. Unfortunately, leaders such as Chief Nanga who assumed the leadership of the continent used power to feather their own nests. Ngugi, (1978, p.52) is unsparing in his condemnation of Chief Nanga when he fumes that "Chief the Honourable M. A. Nanga, M. P., is a corrupt, uncultured Minister of



Culture in a corrupt regime... where the majority of the peasants and workers live in sharks..."

Like Achebe, Ngugi, in his book, *Homecoming* also discusses the disillusionment of the African people with their leaders after independence with a critical look at the work of the Malawian poet and novelist, David Rubadiri. In 1952, Rubadiri published his famous poem, *Stanley Meets Mutesa* which painted a picture of a fatal encounter between Africa and Europe and projected the sad mood of a continent in the strangle-hold of imperial conquest. But fourteen years after that and with many African States attaining independence including Malawi, despair enveloped the continent. In response to this situation, Rubadiri published *The Bride Price* where the novelist expressed dissatisfaction with the performance of Post-colonial African leaders. These leaders have turned traitors to the cause of the people and have sacrificed the Continent for their personal comfort. Rubadiri's effusive indictment of the conduct of African leaders in the *Bride Price* after independence is akin to Achebe's own condemnation of the leaders in *A Man of the People*. From the foregoing, one discovers that the crop of the post-independent African leaders behave like the colonial Stanley. This is the picture of post-colonial African leaders that Achebe paints in *A Man of the People*.

This unfortunate transformation of independence into a nightmare for the people is cryptically captured by the African-American writer, Lorraine Hansberry in her *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959):

Independence and then what?  
 What about all the crooks and  
 Thieves and just plain idiots  
 Who will come into power and  
 Steal and Plunder the same as  
 Before-only now they will be black?

In *A Man of the People*, Achebe validates Hansberry's prediction about "crooks, thieves and plain idiots who will come to power" in the form of ascension to power of the likes of the Prime Minister, and other political leaders such as The Honourable Chiefs Nanga and Koko whose conduct portrays them as crooks and thieves.

Achebe does not make this fraudulent image immediately discernible at the beginning of the novel. What he presents at the beginning is the picture of a charming and charismatic Chief Nanga loved, admired and adored by his people. But from the negative comments of Odili, the narrator, that

fraudulent image is ascertained. When Achebe informs us that "No one can deny that Chief the Honourable M. A. Nanga, M. P., was the most approachable politician in the country. Whether you asked in the city or his home village, Anata, they would tell you he was a man of the people" the picture he presents is not that of a crook but that of a leader who is patriotic, accessible to his people and serves them well. The tumultuous reception accorded Chief Nanga by the villagers when he visited his constituency at Anata Grammar School attests to his popularity among the people (AMOP, p. 1). For example, the ignorant villagers of Anata who danced out their hearts to welcome Nanga, the hunters' guide in their full regalia and the college students that lined the road see him as a committed leader for whom they are well pleased. But when Odili admonished that "Tell them that this man has used his position to enrich himself and they would ask you – as my father did – if you thought that a sensible man would spit out the juicy morsel that good fortune placed in his mouth" the readiness of the people to collaborate with corrupt leaders is no more in doubt (AMOP p. 2). As indiscernible and suppressed as leadership failure is presented at the beginning of the novel, one is still made aware as the plot unfolds that what Achebe preoccupies himself with in this novel is the spectacular failure of leadership. Nnolim and Kehinde (2011; 2008) think the same way as they have both argued that from *Things Fall Apart* to *Anthills of the Savannah*, the one consistent concern Achebe exhibits in each novel is the issue of leaders who, in time of crisis, fail their people.

Writing about *A Man of the People*, Ojinmah submits that the novel reflects Achebe's intense disillusionment with the way affairs of the nation are being run and a general sense of despair at the mess the politicians have made of self-rule (Ojinmah, 1991). *A Man of the People* is about the conduct of the leaders in Africa, especially Nigeria. It is about a period when the elites have taken over the reins of government. The novel is not only a political satire on the antics of the politicians in their bid to "colonise" power and the people with it, it is decidedly an elaborate vote of no confidence on the ruling elite with Chief Nanga, as "The Man of the People". The novel captures politics specifically in Nigeria, and generally in Africa after the period of colonial rule and exposes the extent the colonial successors, the native African elite, could go to seek and retain power. The rampaging corruption, the kleptomania, the political ineptitude and the total violation of the economic and cultural ethos of the society by politicians who claim to be serving the people reflect the state of affairs in



many African nations after independence. The quality of leadership provided by the leaders is abysmal, the instituted economic and social policies of the government are designed to cater for the interest of the leaders and minister to their palates. Committed, articulate, and intellectually sound leaders such as Dr Makinde, the erudite Minister of finance who is in every sense of the word “a first-rate economist with a Ph.D. in Public Finance” and is genuinely concerned about saving the nation from apocalypse is hounded and humiliated out of office by the likes of Chief Nanga, who is an original back-bencher in parliament. This is a picture of failed independence which to Ojinmah symbolizes for Achebe a reappraisal of what has been made of an independence that he feels was without substance, in the first place (Ojinmah, 1991). This is the post-colonial perspective that pervades the narratives.

According to Achebe, it was how the Prime Minister handled the slump in the International Coffee market, the main stay of the nation’s economy that first projects the emptiness and incompetence of those at the helm of Affairs and shows how the citizens are collaborators. It also brings out the best in Dr Makinde. But his well-drawn out economic recovery programmes to bail out the country from imminent economic collapse turned out his nemesis as both the Prime Minister and the whole parliament pronounced him an agent of imperialism and an enemy of the people. When he, along with half of the Cabinet, was sacked by the Prime Minister, the whole nation erupts in celebration and condemnation of those they tagged traitors, a reference to the Makindes. As far as the Prime Minister is concerned, “the dismissed ministers were conspirators and traitors who had teamed up with foreign saboteurs to destroy the new nation” and for Chief Nanga, “they deserved to be hanged” (AMOP, p. 3-4). The irony in all of this is that the common people whose interest Dr Makinde is championing are against him. His car was destroyed by angry mobs and his house stoned. There is the case of another dismissed minister who was pulled out of his car by the same mobs, beaten senseless and dragged along the road, later tied hand and foot, gagged and left by the road side to die. The tragedy in the follower’s reactions is that instead of joining forces with the likes of Makinde, they choose to collaborate with the top echelon of the political leadership represented by the Prime Minister and it is this collaboration that emboldens the Prime Minister to declare that “From today we must watch and guard our hard-worn freedom jealously. 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” (AMOP, p. 6). When the Daily Chronicle, in its Editorial admonished that the nation should “extract from our body-politic as a dentist extracts a stinking tooth all those decadent stooges versed in text-book economics and aping the white man’s mannerisms and way of speaking”, it is clear that the press has joined in the name-calling and sloganeering to reinforce the collaboration between the followers and the leaders. This makes the collaboration to be all-encompassing. It shows “that almost everyone in Independent African society is engrossed in corrupt practices” (Macheke, 2012 p. 16).

If the reaction of the ordinary people can be pardoned, assuming that it is born out of ignorance, the press that is supposed to be informed has no moral justification for its position other than pecuniary considerations. It is this consideration that beclouds its sense of judgement and makes the leaders to continue to revel in corruption and abuse of power. Political leaders, being mindful of the role of the press in moulding public opinion, patronise it and seek favour from journalists. When Chief Nanga visits Anata Grammar School, he makes sure he travels with the press crew and since he is more interested in publicity and showmanship than in public service, he reminds James, the newspaper correspondent who accompanied him on the visit, that he should have it published in his paper that he is welcomed into his constituency by a “mammoth crowd”. But within an eye, the “mammoth crowd” immediately metamorphosed into an “unprecedented crowd” in the judgement of Mr Nwege, the covetous Principal of Anata Grammar School who has his eyes on the crumbs from Nanga’s overflowing dining table. “It is an unprecedented crowd in the annals of Anata” he says. Achebe turns the whole drama comical when Odili re-echoed, “tongue in cheek”, that Mr. Nwege pronounced the crowd the most unprecedented (AMOP, p. 10). The import of the elastic crowd is clearly understood by Nanga. As a politician and political leader, he knows that his types are sustained in power by the citizens, referred to as the crowd here and he would want the whole nation to know that he has the support of his people. He is probably going to use his reception by the “mammoth crowd” to bargain for higher political office and patronage. This image of a grassroots politician boosts his political ego, a clear message to his political opponents that he remains impenetrable. In Nigerian political parlance, it means that “he is on ground”.



Chief Nanga has come a long way, from the ass-licking parliamentarian who pronounced death sentence on Dr Makinde and his group of patriots to a Minister of culture who revels in political deceit, corruption, and all other forms of chicanery in Africa post-independence politics. The crowd that is being manipulated here, the citizens whose numbers are banded about for political mileage are the followers, the pitiable victims of Nanga's misrule. In spite of being beaten by scorching sun and torrential rainfall, they still readily offer themselves as rams for sacrifice so that the Nangas of the nation would continue to luxuriate. But chief Nanga is a master of deceit who gives the impression that being a Minister is a lot of burden and a service to the people. He told Odili that "If some person come to you and say "I wan' make you Minister" make you run like blazes comot... Minister de sweet for eye, but too much Kata- Kata de for inside", painting an office enveloped in trouble. Save for a single discordant tone from Josiah, his audience applauded him. It is the same Odili that put a lie into Nanga's testimony. On a visit to Nanga's house in Bori, he unravels the deceit in Nanga's claim and his own lust for the same privileges:

I was simply hypnotized by the luxury of the great suite assigned to me. When I lay down in the double bed that seemed to ride on a cushion of air, and switched on that reading lamp and saw all the beautiful furniture anew from the lying down position and looked beyond the door to the gleaming bathroom and the towels as large as a lappa I had to confess that if I were at that moment made a minister I would be most anxious to remain one forever (AMOP, pp. 36-37).

Odili himself is a character that needs to be unravelled. Achebe initially presents him as both a witness and a narrator of the events in the novel. But as these events unfold and cascade, he gets involved in its foibles. He gradually metamorphoses into an active participant and becomes totally entangled in a moral and political squabble with his once-upon-a-time benefactor, the colourful, crafty and irrepressible Chief Nanga. Chief Nanga is Odili's former High School teacher who recognizes his old pupil on a visit to Anata where Odili now teaches. Outwardly impressed by Odili's educational attainment and Odili himself

elated by being publicly recognized and eulogised by the Minister, the old bond between them is rekindled to Odili's joy and a visible resentment from Mr Nwege. Chief Nanga extends an invitation to Odili to visit him in Bori during the holidays. To be publicly recognized and celebrated by a Minister means a lot and this realization is not lost on Odili and he momentarily enjoys and flaunts it. Odili honours Nanga's invitation as he visits him in the capital but the honeymoon that characterises their relationship within the first few days turns into bitter acrimony on account of a feud over Elsie, Odili's girlfriend. It is this disagreement over the ownership of a girl that made Odili to team up with other elites such as Maxwell to come up with a new political platform that they intend to use to wrest power from Nanga's party. Adjei affirms that it is Chief Nanga's seduction of Odili's girlfriend that sets in motion Odili's hatred of Chief Nanga and all he stands for (Adjei, 2015).

Carroll describes the relationship between Odili and Nanga as "a strange blend of fascination and repulsion" and one is inclined to agree with him considering that the mutual fascination that both of them celebrate at the beginning of the novel later turns into serious repulsion of each other (Carroll, 1979). Odili repulses Nanga for snatching his girlfriend and Nanga himself does not hide his repulsion for Odili for having the temerity to want to snatch his seat in parliament. But more than this, there is a salient and instructive lesson from this relationship. Odili, as highly educated as he is, initially projects himself as a self-serving follower, an ally and collaborator of the political leadership which Nanga symbolises. He only becomes a foe and Nanga's antagonist when their relationship turns sour. Also worthy of note is his being overwhelmed by the luxury of Nanga's home which made him to declare that "If I were at that moment made a Minister I would be most anxious to remain one forever" (AMOP, p. 37). But the fascination is also a pointer to Odili's inconsistency. Here is a man who chastised the villagers for the red carpet reception they accorded Chief Nanga because he regards Nanga as a thief only for him to later engage in a romance with the same man he had earlier pronounced as corrupt. Killam rationalises Odili's conduct as being nearly overwhelmed by Nanga's charisma and that he is seduced to his opportunistic way of thinking and acting (Killam, 1982). Saikia, however, sees no justification for Odili's attitude. To him, "Odili Samalu ... proves himself to be a self-deceiving and self-indulgent anti-hero who analyses the evil practices and corruptions yet he himself indulges in them unscrupulously" (Saikia, 2015, p. 90).



The breakdown of the alliance between Nanga and Odili transforms Odili into a critic of Nanga's politics. As argued above, Odili, hitherto, relates with the Minister as an accomplice and collaborator in the minister's corrupt acts. They frolic and run after women together, Odili does not raise any objection when the minister tried to use his Ministerial influence to obtain overseas scholarship for him. He does not frown at the Minister's order for ten luxury buses to ply the road that is yet to be tarred in his constituency, each bus would cost six thousand pounds of the poor citizens' money. Odili, at this point of cosy romance, does not see Nanga as a barely literate looter, he follows him everywhere. At one time, he is even chauffeur-driven in Nanga's official car on a visit to his girlfriend and he enjoys and flaunts the ride. When he accompanied the Minister to an exhibition, he is effusive in his commendation of the Minister's performance despite the fact that what the Minister showcases in his speech is ineptitude and ignorance. When Odili and Nanga pop whiskey and Champaign together signalling that they are united in collaborative debauchery, Odili does not perceive Nanga as somebody who has taken more than the owner could ignore. These antecedents of Odili compels one to question his altruistic intent in joining politics and they portray him as a collaborator like Josiah or any other poor and ignorant villager in *A Man of the People*. Odili appears to be unmindful of all this, what he is mindful of, in his own words, is that "... a man had treated me as no man has a right to treat another – not even if he was master and the other slave; and my manhood required that I make him pay for his insult in full measure" (AMOP, p. 76). Critical of the romance between Odili and Nanga, Saikia regards Odili as "a self-deceiving and self-indulgent anti-hero...who analyses the evil practices and corruption yet he himself indulges in them unscrupulously and that in his involvement with Nanga, the corrupt Minister, Odili exposes more of his character than the minister" (Saikia, 2015 p. 90).

Odili later becomes a prominent member of the Common People Convention, (C. P. C.) a political party floated by Max, and his friends who are genuinely concerned about the state of affairs of the country and are determined to enthrone change. Though Odili is fascinated by the ideas behind the formation of the party, but C. P. C. is also a political platform that he intends to use to deal with his sexual adversary, Chief Nanga. The idea behind the new party is to champion the cause of the common people and save the whole nation from corrupt leaders. It is, however, doubtful if the party

lives up to that expectation. Aside the revelation that it is being funded by a Junior Minister in Nanga's government, which attests to collaboration with the status quo, Max's confession that he collects money from Chief Koko, his political opponent in the government they want to unseat, is a devastating blow to the good intention of the founders. Odili laments that taking money from those in power cannot be regarded as a clean break from the ills they criticise. This feeling points to the likelihood that Achebe sees Max, Odili and their new political party as not capable of providing a new sense of political direction. This justifies the assertion of "Couple", the village politician that it is misplaced for Max to tell the people that only two vultures, the P. O. P. and P. A .P. are eating and scrambling over the nation's resources. According to "Couple", "There were three vultures ... The third and youngest was called C. P. C." (AMOP, pp. 124-125).

Nnolim has argued that the goals of all Achebe's novels "is that golden era when the intellectual elite will wrest politics from the illiterate politicians and the military and create an egalitarian society free from poor leadership, bribery and corruption" (2011, p. 42). While this argument fits into what unfolds in *A Man of the People* with the formation of C. P. C. by the elites such as Maxwell, but the same Achebe appears to be saying that with the corrupt inclination of Maxwell and Odili, these intellectuals from whom change is expected are Chief Nanga in the making. Palmer shares this view when he argues that "given the same chance as Nanga, Odili would, in all probability become another Chief Nanga" (Palmer, 1972, p.53). Achebe's projection of the elite in this manner is not coincidental. He explores the same theme in *No Longer at Ease* where Obi Okonkwo, a British-trained African and an emerging and promising leader falls a victim of bribery and corruption.

It is apparent that Max understands the enormity of the nation's predicament and he throws himself into the political arena. His accusation that the government is corrupt is not misplaced as Achebe makes this very glaring in the novel. Achebe shows the propensity of the political leaders to conceive and execute projects only for political capital as seen in Chief Nanga insisting that the roads in his constituency have to be tarred before the next election. Max's claim that the leaders want to share out the wealth of the country between them also manifests in their fat bank accounts and the mansions they build all over the country from proceeds of corruption. Their flashy taste and extravagant lifestyle in the midst of poverty that is the lot of the ordinary people, their desperation to



win elections by all means including maiming and killing of their opponents as seen in the gruesome killing of Max and above all the sacking and humiliation of the Minister of Finance and other patriots in the Cabinet because their well-thought out plans for the nation's economic recovery does not go down well with the Prime Minister are all instances of leaders who have failed their people.

### The Culpability of the Followers

In their work on *The Parody of Transformational Leadership in A Man of the People and The Last of the Empire* by Sembene Ousmane, Gonye and Moyo, (2013 p.132) submit that "the two novels capture the extent to which a particular followership helps to mould and frame a leadership that is divorced from and impervious to those they purport to lead." Their submission affirms the culpability of the followers that this paper discusses. *A Man of the People*, no doubt, is the story of a self-serving Chief Nanga and his colleagues at the helm of political affairs of their country who become impervious to the people they lead by running the government not for the people but for their own benefits. "But in telling of the story of Chief Nanga", posits Akwanya, (2013, p. 3) "is the telling also the story of his people. He represents them in parliament, but he also represents as a projector of their habits of thought, their attitudes and values". According to Achebe, Nanga's people are men who are swayed by "their hearts and stomachs and not their heads" and so "the Chief Nanga's of this world will continue to get away with anything" (AMOP, p. 65). The colourful reception held for Chief Nanga in Anata is in every sense ridiculous and undeserving but this is the truth the poor, ignorant and cynical people are not mindful of. They would rather celebrate a man that is the architect of their misfortune. In their own misfortune, they regard Nanga's fortune "as the juicy morsel that good fortune placed in his mouth" and no sensible man would spit it out. The thought pattern of Nanga's kinsman who visits Mrs Nanga during Christmas compliments this. The man is impressed with Chief Nanga's new mansion, a mansion constructed from proceeds of corruption, and he requests for a bottle of beer of all things to celebrate it: "Bring me a beer! Honourable Chief Nanga is my brother and he is what white man call V. I. P.... Me na P. I. V. – Poor Innocent Victim" (AMOP, p. 95-96). Something is certainly wrong with the values and attitudes of a man who knows he is a victim of very important people (V. I. P.) and still worships them. This is the picture of the followers that Achebe presents in *A Man of the People* and it is this worship of the corrupt leaders by the followers

rather than challenge them that make them an accomplice in failure of leadership. This is a clear example of the common people exhibiting a cynical and apathetic attitude as they find no wrong in corruption (Saikia, 2015) and because "followers also tend not to look at the larger picture but at personal benefit, followers are collaborators with mediocre leadership" (Gonye & Moyo, 2013, p. 133).

If we accept, though grudgingly, that Odili's intention in joining Max's party is to project an alternative moral force to the people and set them both morally and ideologically a counter force to the corrupt practices of Nanga's party, what one may find difficult to accept is the reaction and attitudes of the followers to the birth of the new party. The followers see the formation of the new party as a sacrilege and the people behind it as insane jokers who do not stand a chance of changing the entrenched political system. Nothing reinforces this claim more than the admonition of Odo, Chief Nanga's in-law in one of his testy encounters with Odili:

My in-law is like a bull, and your challenge is like the challenge of a tick to a bull. The tick fills its belly with blood from the back of the bull and the bull doesn't even know it's there...I hear that they have given you much money to use in fighting my in-law, if you have sense in your belly you will carry the money into your bed-chamber and stow it away and do something useful with it. It is your own good luck. But if you prefer to throw it away why not ask me to help you? (AMOP, p. 106).

The helpless posture of the followers again manifest in the killing of Max by Chief Koko, his opponent in the election. The acquiescence of the mass of the people is a sad commentary on the followers who fail to avenge the unjust murder of a man who has vouched to fight for their interest. Save for Eunice, Max's girlfriend, the followers fail to realise that Max was murdered because the ruling political class abhors a change of the status quo and the likes of Max are regarded as enemies that should be crushed. Taken side by side with the near-murder of Odili at Nanga's political rally, no one should be left in doubt that the ruling elite is averse to any form of opposition to its rule. Followers who do not offer resistance to the blood-



thirsty antics of the leaders as Achebe presents in this novel are guilty of culpability in leadership failure.

The mammoth crowd that attended Nanga's rally preparatory to the election also shows that the poor followers do not see anything wrong with the way their country is being run. The followers preference for the ruling establishment, their contempt for and total rejection of Odili, their attempt to murder him at the prompting of Chief Nanga confirms Carroll's assertion that "the country as a whole has no kind of political morality by which to judge and condemn a Nanga" (Carroll, p. 130). As events unfold in the novel, the followers become more and more cynical and a willing accomplice in the corrupt practices of the leaders: "Let them eat was the people's opinion, after all when the white man used to do all the eating did we commit suicide? Of course not...if you survive, who knows? It may be your turn to eat tomorrow. Your son may bring home your share" (AMOP, p. 144). Obi captures this passivity more accurately when he describes the broad masses of the people as ignorant and petrified waiting for providence to sweep crumbs into their mouths. "Thus in their constant adjustment to the status quo, they develop no vision of alternative structure" (Obi, 1990 p. 408). Followers who rationalise graft and looting in this manner and live with it are collaborators and are culpable in the failure of the leadership. Such rationalisation according to Das (2015) is a clear manifestation of complete failure of democracy.

### Conclusion

This work has studied the followers in Achebe's *A Man of the People* and established a convenient co-habitation of both the leaders and the followers. The result of the co-habitation militates the progress of the nation. It is evident from the analysis that the "fall for me, I fall for you" co-existence as depicted in the novel projects a nation in a crying need for salvation. Jones, cited in Ojinmah (1991) looks at such a nation and what he sees "is the cynicism of both the politicians and the

people which brings about a situation that invites intervention". According to him, "The politicians cynically use their positions to enrich themselves at the expense of the people, while the people, with the philosophy born of despair tamely lie down under the imposition" (p. 67). Achebe, of course, offers an intervention in the form of Military seizure of power from the politicians. The collaboration of the followers informs Odili's view that the people have nothing to do with the fall of the government (AMOP, p.144).

There is another point of view Achebe proffers at the end of the novel to show that all hopes are not lost in spite of the massive citizen's collaboration with the leaders. This view is reflected in the release of Eunice from jail and the declaration of Max as a hero of the revolution by the new government. Odili believes that Max rightly deserves this honour "for I must point out that my severe criticism of his one fatal error notwithstanding, Max was indeed a hero and martyr" (p. 148). Eunice on her part is an example of a dogged and committed citizen who refused to be cowed by the intimidation of the leaders. The message Achebe is passing across is that the future of the nation lies in the hands of the likes of Eunice and Max and not in the hands of corrupt leaders. It is also a wake-up call on the followers. Writing about Eunice, Mujawar expresses a similar view when he observes that her role is very promising as it prophesies that "whenever there is an opportunity to fight against evil, a woman can finish the evil and guide her people to lead them to the new era" (2012 p.149).

On the whole, this paper has shown that the citizens are collaborators and as the followers, they are culpable in the failure of the leaders. Neimneh & Abussamen (2017, p. 26) do not mince their words in their indictment of the followers: "the people do not care whether a politician or an intellectual takes the lead. What they care about are the benefits that they gain... the masses offer another model of abortive leadership, one of complicity, fickleness, and passivity"

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