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# Goddess of the Savannah: Beatrice as Achebe's Sensible Solution

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Goddess of the Savannah: Beatrice as Achebe's Sensible Solution

By

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In his memoir, *There Was A Country: A Personal History of Biafra*, Chinua Achebe states, “Every generation must recognize and embrace the task it is peculiarly designed by history and by providence to perform” (14). His final novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*, embodies this message as its protagonists embrace the task assigned by providence to “appease an embittered history” (204). Widely recognized by scholars as a political allegory for the state of affairs in Nigeria<sup>1</sup>, the novel is set in fictional postcolonial Kangan, where the political system is presented as elitist and patriarchal, and it functions to weaken the voices of the masses. Its protagonists include Ikem, the editor of the Kangan newspaper and the novel’s idealistic activist; Chris, the Commissioner of Information in the novel’s regime who questions the motives of the country’s dictator, Sam, who is the novel’s antagonist and a former friend of Chris and Ikem; and Beatrice, a mutual friend of both Chris and Ikem as well as Chris’s lover, who offers a resolution to the novel’s political and social crises.

Within this political allegory, Achebe reconstructs the place of women in the novel’s postcolonial society through the character Beatrice. Scholars agree that Beatrice is a shift from Achebe’s earlier women, who many argue are portrayed as flat, domestic, and passive. Beatrice is a dynamic and round character: independent, educated, unmarried, compassionate, and politically active. As Margaret Fafa Nutsukpo notes in her essay, “Feminist Stance and Language: A Focus on Beatrice in Chinua Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah*,” “Achebe has

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<sup>1</sup> See Acholonu, Rose. “Outsiders or Insiders: Women in *Anthills of the Savannah*.” *Eagle on Iroko: Selected Papers from the Chinua Achebe International Symposium*. Ed. Edith Ihekweazu. Nsukka, Nig.: Heinemann Educational, 1996. 311-21; Maughan-Brown, David. “*Anthills of the Savannah* and the Ideology of Leadership.” *Chinua Achebe: A Celebration*. Ed. Kirsten Holst Peterson and Anna Rutherford. Sydney, Aus.: Dangeroo P, 1991. 139-48; Gandhi, Neena. “At the Crossroads: Culture and Cultural Identity in the Novels of Achebe.” *African Identities* 10.1 (2012): 55-62.

created a radical feminist . . . Beatrice is portrayed as an intellectual who is incredibly intelligent . . . Beatrice's feminist perception of independence and selfhood embodies her lifestyle as an individual and a single woman" (160, 161). The work of academic Rose Acholonu compares *Anthills* to his previous novels, arguing that Beatrice is the culmination of an evolution in his female characters. She contends that Achebe's goal with Beatrice is to develop a woman who does not meet society's norms for women: "Achebe's woman . . . could wield the power of sustaining peace, commonsense, and humanism in a world threatened by the tyrannical rule of a despot and the untempered fanaticism of egocentric, revolutionary ideas" (320). According to Acholonu, Achebe then is placing his faith in women as the nation's future.

Along these same lines, Julie Agbasiere claims that though Achebe's previous novels have presented masculine dominate societies, these societies still provide a place for women. She points out that in *Anthills* such elements of patriarchy have been tempered and Beatrice is created as an empowered woman: "*In Anthills of the Savannah*, the woman is dignified and free to live her life the way she wants . . . the more educated she is, the more her prestige rises, and the more she is a good candidate for the governance of the community" (364). Irene Salami-Agunloye argues that female power in the novel disturbs male-dominated power and politics. She adds that power then becomes redistributed to women in the novel. Caroline Mbonu contends that through a liberating rereading of the text, it is clear Achebe constructs a positive female model in *Anthills*. In this way, they all argue that *Anthills* is a political allegory calling for government responsibility, critiquing corruption within the current system, and offering women as the idealistic resolution to the problem of an exclusive, oppressive political and social structure.

These scholars argue then that in *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe is presenting women as the solution to Nigeria's leadership problem. While I agree with their analysis of Achebe's progress regarding Beatrice's character, I contend that Achebe is not presenting Beatrice as the solution, but that he is instead offering a solution by developing her character to create a space for the voices and perspectives of all citizens, regardless of gender and class. If given a voice in the political sphere, women would then create a place that allows others to be part of the solution he offers: a stable Nigerian-specific democracy and social system that values the betterment of all its people, and it is Beatrice's adaptation of traditional culture which serves as an example of how to achieve this solution.

Before delving further into Achebe's purpose, I must establish a clear sense of the terms colonialism and postcolonialism in order to apply them to the text. Ania Loomba, author of *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, defines colonialism as the "conquest and control of other people's lands and goods" (20); yet, she notes that Western colonialism is marked by the restructuring of economies and social systems, "creating a flow of human and natural resources between colonized and colonial countries" (21). While European colonialism can be broken into many different categories, all of the categories have two commonalities: violence and capitalism. Anne McClintock remarks on this significance in her book, *Imperial Leather*, affirming, "European imperialism was, from the outset, a violent encounter with preexisting hierarchies of power that took shape not as the unfolding of its own inner destiny, but as untidy, opportunistic interference with other regimes of power" (6). By briefly analyzing colonialism's role in destroying the socioeconomic and political systems already in place in African nations, specifically Nigeria, and the byproduct of this destruction, postcolonialism, I note how Achebe uses his narrative, and

specifically the character Beatrice, to examine the relationship between postcolonialism and these systems' major issue: exclusion.

In her book *Beyond Borders*, Paula Rothenberg argues that during the time African countries were being colonized, for approximately seventy years, their economies were being stunted by capitalistic ventures that sought to oppress the African worker while rewarding the colonial capitalist. Since such an impedance was happening during a time that other countries were being economically and socially revolutionized, colonization functioned to hinder African countries' social and economic growth. This interference then situated African nations behind the development of now more advanced nations, causing them to lose power. Rothenberg defines power as "the ultimate deterrent in human society," adding that "When one society finds itself forced to relinquish power entirely to another society, that in itself is a form of underdevelopment" (116). She goes on to explain how the removal of power then results in a loss of history, causing African nations to be globally perceived as primeval.

Along with this loss of economic power and cultural history came the loss of political power. While some colonizers permitted Africans to rule their countries, it was only the case when these leaders were handpicked by the colonizer, making a sham of the ruler's power. Most importantly, Rothenberg cites the adverse effects of the loss of political power in African nations on women. Also noting the gender discrepancies that exist in capitalistic societies, she states, "The colonists in Africa occasionally paid lip service to women's education and emancipation, but objectively there was deterioration in the status of women owing to colonial rule" (117). While Rothenberg acknowledges that the traditional practice of polygamy in many African countries held its own form of oppression and that the treatment of women depended on the

culture (e.g. Muslim African nation's treatment of women like "beasts of burden" [117]), she contends, "there was a countertendency to ensure the dignity of women to a greater or lesser degree in all African societies . . . women held a variety of privileges based on the fact that they were the keys to inheritance" (117). When colonialism disrupted the structure of the typical family in African nations by placing men in the position of capitalistic workers, forcing them to leave the household affairs to women and putting a great number of men into the newly designed workforce over women, the labor of women then came to be viewed as inferior. While colonization negatively impacted all members of a nation's native people, it brought more dire consequences for native women, ensuring their oppression for centuries to follow.

Not only did colonialism subdue women's positions within some African cultures, it also disrupted the way African states were comprised. Rothenberg points out that prior to colonialism, African nations were often comprised of members of the same ethnic groups. When colonists began to separate Africa into newly formed nation-states, they became multi-ethnic groups with diverse cultural histories that held no allegiances to one another, inhibiting national solidarity and even leading to Nigeria's civil war as no such massacre had ever occurred prior to colonization. Such a rearrangement evidently then directly impacts what are considered to be postcolonial African nations, which serve as the setting of Achebe's *Antills*.

Noting the difficulty in defining postcolonialism by citing its various definitions around the world as well as its inadequacy at singularly defining the divergent struggles of all post-colonial countries, Loomba distinguishes it as "far from being a term that can be indiscriminately applied . . . riddled with contradictions and qualifications" (32). She makes clear that "the dismantling of colonial rule did not automatically bring about changes for the better in the status



of women, the working class or the peasantry in most colonized countries” (33). McClintock further elaborates on these concepts, arguing that the word ‘postcolonial’ does not take into account the effects currently taking place as a result of colonialism, noting “the term postcolonialism is, in many cases, prematurely celebrated” (12), and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak discusses in her piece, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” the limitations and irony of many postcolonial approaches: that, often, they utilize modes of colonialism by analyzing events through a decidedly Western perspective, establishing the West as the focal point of the analysis. Citing the work of Jorge de Alva, Loomba does resolve to express postcolonialism as, “not just coming literally after colonialism and signifying its demise, but more flexibly as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism” (33). Using Loomba’s abridged definition of postcolonialism, which takes into consideration the complexities surrounding the term, and keeping in mind the critiques of McClintock and Spivak, I can begin to discuss the complex link that Achebe’s narrative makes between colonialism and Nigeria’s contemporary political as well as social issues.

In the novel, tradition is represented as a series of social expectations and a knowledge of Kangan’s ancestral rituals and customs, as well as its storytelling history. Tradition then shapes how people see the world as well as the future, and it links a country to its past. It creates common ground within a country and it often defines a community. Although tradition can function positively within a community, it can also work to exclude, as Achebe portrays in the novel by highlighting the significance of Beatrice’s character as an educated, unmarried, and innovative woman and the judgments she and other women endure as such. In addition to illustrating these restrictions, Achebe subtly uses characters like Elewa, who represents the

uneducated Kangan woman who values her culture (yet, markedly she and the novel's other female character, Agatha, are not given narrative voices), to juxtapose Beatrice, albeit an educated woman, but one who spends the majority of her life as a part of Western culture and who must adopt her country's native origins before she can begin to play an active role in transforming its future. By blending change and tradition, Beatrice is able to form a solution that is inclusive and one that can continue to evolve. This solution creates a place for the voices of women, the uneducated, and the deprived to be heard in order to ensure a better future.

Since the effects of colonialism have worked to undermine the emphasis placed on the improvement of the community over the desires of the individual, the replacement of tradition's role in governing has been tyrannical regimes. According to scholar Solomon Laleye, whose piece "Democracy in Conflict" takes a critical look at the role of conflict in the emergence of Nigerian democracy, conflict is a product of the discordance between the desires of community groups against those of the individual. He argues that democracy in Nigeria can prevail if it is based in customary Nigerian principles. Laleye defines democracy as "synonymous with decency and civilization in the social and political spheres" (128). Working within this definition, he describes traditional Nigerian ideologies as placing emphasis on community and including qualities of "cooperation, togetherness, freedom, mutual trust, accountability, and other related virtues" (139), all virtues found in an ideal civilization. He further explains that because of the diverse ethnicities inhabiting Nigeria, their history of harmony is based on compromise and a system of check and balances. While this traditionally-based system has customarily worked to include all members of a community, *Anthills* argues that it still devalues the role of women when, according to Beatrice, the woman option is treated as a last resort:

But the way I see it is that giving women the same role which traditional society gave them of intervening only when everything else has failed is not enough, you know, like the women in the Sembene film who pick up the spears abandoned by their defeated menfolk. It is not enough that women should be the course of last resort because the last resort is a damn sight too far and too late! (84)

Beatrice is making clear that women are only looked to once all options have been exhausted and when the state-of-affairs has gone so far wrong that it is too late for them to contribute. With this section in mind, it seems Achebe's novel is arguing that while the previous system had its flaws, it would have adjusted itself without the interference of colonialism. Because it has been subjected to colonialism, tradition no longer functions to meet the needs of the novel's society, a society which once worked to encourage unity and the distribution of power, so it must be remade. It is within this framework that Beatrice's uniquely Kangan democracy can be examined as a movement that eradicates the colonial climate of oppression and modifies aspects of what the novel presents as traditional Nigerian values in a society influenced by colonialism.

The novel's current, established Kangan leadership is presented as draconian, juxtaposing the inclusive and stable system Beatrice works to create. Sam, or His Excellency, creates a false sense of democracy by establishing a cabinet of advisors whom he disregards, demeans, threatens, and even detains. When he does regard them, he shapes their opinions through intimidation and fear:

Days are good or bad for us [the cabinet] now according to how His Excellency gets out of bed in the morning. On a bad day, such as this one had suddenly become after many propitious auguries, there is nothing for it but to like close to

your hole, ready to scramble in. And particularly to keep your mouth shut, for nothing is safe, not even the flattery we have become such experts in disguising as debate. (3)

His Excellency prides himself in being the conventional Kangan military dictator, one with no formal political or public affairs training: “‘Soldiers are plain and blunt,’ he says defiantly. ‘When we turn affairs of state back to you and return to barracks that will be the time to resume your civilian tricks’” (4). Sam clearly abuses his power and the resources of Kangan through his lavish lifestyle and his refusal to drill wells to provide life sustaining water to the Abazon region in retaliation for their voting against his petition to be Kangan’s president-for-life: “Well you know – everybody knows – my attitude to petitions and demonstrations and those kinds of things . . . Sheer signs of indiscipline. Allow any of it, from whatever quarter, and you are as good as sunk” (15). In this conversation with one of his cabinet members, he rebukes the peaceful protest from Abazon, noting that any marks of insubordination will be suppressed, showing the reader his fear of losing power.

Due to this fear, Sam clings to colonial values introduced by the West and he exploits the adverse effects of colonialism. This can be most obviously seen through his fashioning of an imperialistic name for himself, His Excellency, which contrasts Achebe’s choice to provide Beatrice with an additional name derived from the Kangan language. Further serving to distinguish him from Beatrice, Sam also proves to be out of touch with his own culture, shown when he does not understand the use of proverbs, both wise and native to his heritage: “I don’t quite get you, Professor. Please cut out the proverbs, if you don’t mind” (18). Additional marks of Sam’s reverence for Western colonialist values that contribute to his poor leadership are

displayed by his desire to appease English schoolmasters, his emulation of and reverence for previous imperialistic Kangan leaders, and when he rebukes Beatrice's efforts to advise him as she expresses her aversion for the disrespectful, casual demeanor the American journalist has used with Kangan's leaders: "If I went to America today, to Washington D.C., would I, could I, walk into a White House private dinner and take the American president hostage? And his Defence Chief and his Director of CIA?" "Oh don't be such a racist, Beatrice. I am surprised at you. A girl of your education!" (74). Her interaction with Sam enables Beatrice to observe his disconnect from Kangan's culture as he admires Western views. Beatrice then becomes a force that opposes not only the novel's government, but also its dictator and Westernized values.

During His Excellency's dinner party, Beatrice additionally acknowledges her own embarrassment that she is invited to the dinner because of her education and position within the government. She recognizes that she is there as an emblematic African woman, meant to serve the American with a female's perspective on Kangan's state-of-affairs. After this realization, she reflects on this situation and the state of her country through what she terms a Desdemona experience – a term taken from Shakespeare's *Othello*, in which Beatrice is referring to an African man who is seduced by a Western woman – an experience that is shared to illustrate the danger and false lure of the West:

The first time it happened I was a student in England . . . After two dances with the white girl, Guy went completely beserk . . . So I was locked in combat again with Desdemona, this time itinerant and, worse still, not over some useless black trash in England but the sacred symbol of my nation's pride . . ." (73, 74)

These images work metaphorically to suggest that Beatrice, who represents Kangan's ideal future, must compete for Sam, who serves as a symbol of Kangan's current social and political system, against the American journalist, who is representative of seductive Western political and social values. Achebe is careful to contrast Beatrice's modern political methods not only from Sam's colonialist tactics, but also her democratic approach from that of a strictly Western dominated democracy. Beatrice's solution is a Kangan solution, not a Western one. While many of Beatrice's ideals are similar to those found in an idealistic democracy, these ideals are also evident in the novel's portrayal of tribal policies, making the point that democracy is not merely a Western concept.

It is this situation that acts as a catalyst, spurring Beatrice to realize her purpose in shaping the country's future. In a struggle to remove His Excellency from the presence of the American, Beatrice is willing to sacrifice her integrity for the greater good of the country by attempting to seduce Sam: "So I threw myself between this enemy and him. I literally threw myself at him like a loyal batman covering his endangered commander with his own body and receiving the mortal bullet in his place" (74). She recognizes that in order to shape the future, she must actively work to rebuff the imperialist doctrines impressed upon Kangan. Prior to this, while she had unconsciously represented a contemporary change in the roles of Kangan women, Beatrice had not intentionally sought to support the democratic and feminist transformation that is occurring. This awakening can be seen in her embracing elements of the novel's traditional culture, which includes an emphasis on folklore, rituals, and community.

It is through connecting her country's origins to a form of democracy that Beatrice finds the necessary connection to its people. It is from her connection to her origins that she derives

her strength. While Beatrice obtains a first-class degree in English from the University of London and she is raised in a Westernized Christian compound, she prefers the traditions of her ancestors. An example of this is found in her preference of what she refers to as her “hymn of thanksgiving” over her father’s “family prayers,” which are Christian, and thus Western influenced. Her bond to this hymn, or music of the rain – which she describes as the word “uwa-t’uwa! uwa-t’uwa! uwa-t’uwa! uwa-t’uwa! uwa-t’uwa! uwa-t’uwa!” – and its definition, “a world inside a world, without end” (77, 78), display the many influences that exist around her. While her entire life is immersed in Western culture, she is able to find a connection to her native heritage and she favors it over the more prevalent Western influences. Her father’s prayers are not hers because they are not reflective of her traditional roots, which become the source of her inspiration to act against the novel’s current political system. These influences are important because they enable Beatrice to interact with others in the community she creates, and they establish her as a keeper of tradition, showing that even when faced with change, tradition can endure.

Beatrice’s name also establishes a link to tradition as it influences Beatrice’s life and her value system. While the name, Nwanybuife, meaning “a female is also something,” is initially an insult given to her by her father, she transforms this offense into a source of strength which she uses to defy the exclusive nature of tradition in her culture:

Perhaps it was the *nwanyi*, the female half of it that I particularly resented. My father was so insistent on it. “Sit like a female!” or “Female soldier,” which he called me as he lifted me off the ground with his left hand and gave me three stinging smacks on the bottom with his right. (80)

The original insult behind her traditional name is shown to be transformed to a place of power when Achebe titles the section that contains her first act of defiance – her refusal to behave as His Excellency requires – in the novel, “Nwanybuife.” Rather than providing her with solely a Western name, Achebe provides her with a traditional name that he uses as the title of the chapter that marks her character development and her ability to modify tradition in her favor to make it inclusive: “Beatrice Nwanybuife did not know these traditions and legends of her people because they played little part in her upbringing . . . But knowing or not knowing does not save us from being known and even recruited and put to work” (96). Whether she realizes it yet or not, Beatrice will find that by embracing and utilizing aspects of her culture rather than accepting strictly Western influences, she will become a necessary source of change in the novel’s political and social system. Through her name, Beatrice’s politics are offered as harmonizing with, rather than removing, ancestral customs.

Beatrice’s working within such ancestral customs can also be seen in her role as a griotte, or in this case, taking on the tasks of the griot. The griot image merges heritage with change by developing Beatrice in a masculine, time-honored role associated with leadership and historical storytelling. According to scholar Thomas Hale in his book *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music*, while a griot is often perceived as a historian and storyteller, the tasks of a griot, or griotte, are much more complex, including holding a variety of positions such as spokesperson, diplomat, mediator, teacher, witness, and ceremony participant: “Seen from a functional perspective, the descriptions of these activities contribute to a portrait of an extremely dynamic profession that enables societies to cohere” (19). He explains that the most common functions of a griot are performance and gathering people together for storytelling, ceremonies,



and speeches. Using this definition of a griot, it is apparent that Beatrice operates as such in *Anthills*. In this role, she disassembles tradition in order to create an image that enriches and develops the unification that is a new tradition.

Beatrice's character plays many roles, providing her with agency, rather than simply labels. She is a metaphorical griot, goddess, prophetess, and priestess, parts that all work together to shape her political philosophy, which reshapes tradition. Such dismantling of tradition through change is most evident in the naming ceremony, where Beatrice's home is the scene of a respectful transformation of customary practices in the novel. In this ceremony, which occurs at the end of the novel, Beatrice functions as a griot in the role of ceremony participant, "Beatrice had decided on a sudden inspiration to hold a naming ceremony in her flat for Elewa's baby-girl . . . Beatrice had asked the same handful of friends who had kept together around her like stragglers of a massacred army" (201, 202). As Elewa, Ikem's lover, symbolically whispers into Beatrice's ear – in such a ceremony the mother will whisper the baby's name into the griot's ear and the griot will call the group together to begin the ritual – Beatrice, "...called the little assembly to order and proceeded to improvise a ritual" (206). The ritual continues with Beatrice announcing the name of the child and evoking the memory of Ikem, Beatrice's close friend and fellow activist who is murdered by government officials: "But the man who should have done it today is absent . . . The man is not here although I know he is floating around us now, watching with that small-boy smile of his" (207). Here, Beatrice alters custom to create a new and embracive environment which distributes power among men and women because it places Beatrice in a powerful and customary position typically led by a revered male member of the

community. Beatrice's symbolic role of griot works to support the variation on precolonial traditions that makes up her politics.

By breaking away from custom and naming the baby herself rather than waiting for Elewa's uncle to do so, Beatrice enacts a necessary change, one acknowledged even by Elewa's uncle who represents a more traditional generation in the novel. In addition to this, the child is a girl, yet Beatrice gives her a boy's name, "Amaechina". While Elewa's uncle agrees with this act, her mother, a woman falling into what the novel portrays as a customary postcolonial feminine role and someone who would likely benefit from this adjustment, remains appalled by their wandering from custom: "Elewa's poor mother was left high and dry carrying the anger of outraged custom" (207). While Elewa's mother is representative of a woman's place in a damaged tradition, the young people who are brought together because of Beatrice signify an altering of the old ways. They continue on with the ritual, ultimately overcoming Elewa's mother's disdain. It is evident here that change is a slow and continual process which needs people like Beatrice to enact it.

By conducting the ceremony without the ritual's required male presence, Beatrice ensures that traditional customs will endure, but with progressive adjustments. The ceremony demonstrates the necessity of reworking tradition, as found when the old uncle states, "I am laughing because in you young people our world has met its match. Yes! You have put the world where it should sit . . . you people gather in this whiteman house and give the girl a boy's name . . . That is how to handle the world" (210). The uncle's notable use of the phrase "whiteman house" is indicative of Kangan's postcolonial status and his mention of the girl receiving a boy's name points to a revolution in existing gender inequalities. By placing the Kangan traditional

ceremony in what is viewed as a “whiteman’s” house, Beatrice regains ownership of what was perceived as colonial territory; therefore, the house can come to represent a taking back of the once colonially devastated Kangan by means of tradition in order to better it. Through altering the custom and positioning it within previously colonized territory, this group of young people, led by Beatrice and representative of change, begin to shape a future that values all of Kangan’s members.

Since Beatrice takes only what she can use progressively from tradition, it allows her to create real change. This is seen when she gives Elewa’s baby girl what is traditionally a boy’s name and when she works with others to reshape the limitations of the naming ceremony. Looking to McClintock’s work in *Imperial Leather*, we find that “Colonized women, before the intrusions of imperial rule, were invariably disadvantaged within their societies, in ways that gave the colonial reordering of their sexual and economic labor very different outcomes from those of colonized men . . . colonized women had to negotiate not only the imbalances of their relations with their own men but also the baroque and violent array of hierarchical rules and restrictions that structured their new relations with imperial men and women” (6). In naming the child herself, as a woman, in reclaimed colonial territory, and providing the child with what is traditionally a boy’s name, Beatrice skillfully begins to negotiate these imbalances. When Elewa’s uncle asks who has named the child, Beatrice responds, “All of us here” (209). It is a result of this open nature that also allows for others to rework tradition, as seen when “Abdul, a relative stranger to the kolanut ritual, was carried away beyond the accustomed limits of choral support right into exuberant hand-clapping” (212). Here, although Abdul is of a different ethnicity and he needs Emmanuel to translate for him, he comfortably steps into the ceremony.

His inclusion not only goes unopposed, but it is embraced as others join in. Both the novel's traditional and modernized values must be operative, working together with one another as the influence of each is what will create this new generation. It is the new generation that will transform Kangan while still cherishing its early customs.

Anthropologist Gwendolyn Mikell writes about similar shifts in gender and ethnic norms currently happening in many African nation-states and these shifts relationship to a democratic process in her work "African Feminism: Toward a New Politics of Representation." Mikell argues that it is the current calamitous political, social, and economic atmosphere which has prompted women, as well as other marginalized groups, to seek a place at the patriarchal table, a seat that is being obtained through political democracy: "After many years of observing, it is gratifying to see that an internally driven and aggressively democratic politics appears to be characteristic of the African feminism which is emerging across the continent" (419). Mikell attributes this emergence to "dialogue opportunities," or occasions when spaces in the political domain are created in response to crisis. Mikell observes that while participating in these opportunities may be difficult due to historical barriers established by ethnicity and culture, many are willing to overcome these biases. They are willing to join the cause against gender discrimination which manifests itself in basic human rights laws. She shares the experience of a multicultural workshop she attended and its interest in undertaking the problems faced by all group members regardless of their ethnicity, asserting the importance of culture in deciding how inclusive politics will progress in the future: "However, the sheer multicultural nature of the group forced greater clarity in how women defined and thought about the problems faced by different groups of Nigerian women, and it reinforced the important role of culture in advancing

or retarding women's progress" (416). Similar to the women in Mikell's observations, Beatrice must adapt traditional cultural restrictions in order to achieve political and social change by uniting people of various ethnicities, as well as educational and socioeconomic statuses.

While in the naming ceremony she enacts the role of a priestess, it is also Beatrice's role as a prophetess that clearly exemplifies her as a conduit for power. Such allusions to Beatrice's role as a prophetess are established in contrast to the novel's other, male characters: while Chris and Ikem actively influence the novel's outcome, Beatrice is able to sense the future through intuition – like a prophetess, she predicts the novel's events on numerous occasions. This is most notably found when she senses that Chris and Ikem are in danger, advising them to be wary of Sam and their relationship with him. This advice functions to display Beatrice's embodiment of the traditional Igbo prophetess as her guidance foretells the deaths of Ikem and Chris: "And I see trouble building up for us. It will get to Ikem first. No joking, Chris. He will be the precursor to make straight the way. But after him it will be you" (105). She also attempts to instruct Sam on the ramifications of his actions, foreseeing his demise, and, as the novel's only surviving narrator, she bears witness to the outcome of its events, allowing her to recall the past in order to influence the future: "May it always shine! The Shining Path of Ikem . . . All of we,' continued Beatrice, 'done see *baad* time; but na you one, Elewa, come produce something wonderful like this to show your sufferhead. Something alive and kicking'" (206). Like a traditional priestess, she evokes the name of the novel's zealous activist to call forth the power of remembrance, and as a prophetess, she foresees a hopeful future. Such an evocation serves the purpose of never forgetting Kangan's painful past in order to mold for it a better future.

Her roles as a griot, prophetess, and priestess also work to assure that Beatrice will have listeners, which is important to her position in reshaping Kangan's traditions to include all people. This is substantial because she will need to tell its past in order to shape its future. Her role as prophetess is again evident when she displays her contempt for Chris's part in the humiliating dinner party situation, shouting at him for insisting she attend the party to counsel Sam and to "keep all options open" (67) and his response to her, "I don't know what has come over you. Screaming at me like some Cherubim and Seraphim prophetess or something" (103). Once Chris observes and acknowledges Beatrice as a prophetess, he is finally spurred to play an active role in the unfolding of the novel's climactic events: "Slowly, very slowly under Beatrice's expert resuscitation his spirits began to rally . . . she made another passionate plea to get him to agree to patch things up with Ikem" (106, 107). Instead of remaining in inert despair as he is at the novel's beginning, Chris struggles to assist Ikem by warning him about the gravity of the situation they are in, asking him to remain silent for a time in his public reproaches of the government for his own safety. Later, he acts bravely against a government official by saving Adamma, a young nursing student, from being raped:

Chris bounded forward and held the man's hand and ordered him to release the girl at once . . . The other said nothing more. He unslung his gun, cocked it, narrowed his eyes while confused voices went up all around some asking Chris to run, others the policeman to put the gun away. Chris stood his ground looking straight into the man's face, daring him to shoot. And he did, point-blank into the chest presented to him. (199)

Chris's death is ordained to support Beatrice's cause. Through a discussion of Chris's final message, Beatrice shares with her diverse group of listeners that their final pledge is to promote a shared tradition, kinship, and cooperation. It is this group who will help to form Kangan's future:

“It was the same message Elewa's uncle was drumming out this afternoon . . . On his own crazy drum of course . . . Remember his prayer? He had never been inside a whiteman house like this before, may it not be his last.”

“And we said *Isé!*” said Abdul.

“We did. It was a pledge.” (215)

By hoping it may not be the last time the uncle, a representative of tradition, enters what was once considered colonial territory, the group expresses its hope that Kangan's future generations will reclaim their heritage from the damaging influences of colonialism. It is in the nature of Chris's selfless and senseless death, which is prophesized by Beatrice and indirectly spurred by her as priestess and prophetess, that her small community recognizes its ties to one another, its past, and its changing future.

Achebe additionally places Beatrice in other ancestral positions of command throughout the novel. Another influence on Beatrice's politics can be seen through her embodiment of the goddess Idemili. The Idemili myth is significant not only due to its Igbo roots, but also because Achebe makes it evident that Beatrice is a key piece to shaping contemporary Kangan society. This is seen in Achebe's reworking of the Idemili myth: in one of Achebe's earlier novels, *Arrow of God*, Idemili is represented as a male deity, while in *Anthills* the deity is a goddess. In this creation myth, the goddess, Idemili, comes to earth at the request of her father, the Almighty, as

a pillar of water. Once on earth, she works to humble Power by covering its naked body with a loin cloth. According to the myth, she also serves as a mediator between men and power: “It is to this emblem [Idemili’s shrine] that a man who has achieved wealth of crop and livestock and now wishes to pin an eagle’s feather on his success by buying admission into the powerful hierarchy of *ozo* must go to present himself and offer sacrifices before he can begin the ceremonies, and again after he has concluded them. His first visit is no more than to inform the Daughter of the Almighty of his ambition” (94). By altering the Igbo myth and charging a female Idemili with the responsibility of moderating Power, it is unmistakable that Achebe’s solution to Kangan’s leadership problem involves the activity of women and the presence of tradition as a solution, but a solution that must be reformed to include all people, regardless of gender.

In order to establish future harmony, the society must acknowledge a similar belief system, one that can be found in their heritage. Prior to this chapter, Beatrice’s life has been absorbed in the contemporary, postcolonial society of the novel. Being educated in England, given a Western name, and raised in a Christian compound, Beatrice has been more a part of the Western culture than a part of her traditional heritage; it is here that she begins to discover the Kangan legacy lying dormant inside of her. Beatrice, as Idemili, serves as a ceremonial channel for power, working to mitigate authority: “In beginning Power rampaged through our world, naked. So, the Almighty, looking down at his creation . . . decided to send his daughter, Idemili, to bear witness to the moral nature of authority by wrapping around Power’s rude waist a loincloth of peace and modesty” (93). The myth continues that if a man seeks power, his desire must first be approved by Idemili, and if it is bestowed, it is done so reluctantly, indicating her “contempt for man’s unquenchable thirst to sit in author on his fellows” (95). This myth not only



serves to place women in the role of managing power, but it also expresses the goddess's contempt for man's desire to rule over other men, a trademark of imperialistic rule. This is evident in the novel through Sam's failed attempt to become president-for-life.

Achebe makes it clear that the Idemili myth speaks to Sam's, Kangan's ruler, abuse of power as the man who does not adhere to Idemili's rules. The novel tells of a handsome man who does not abide by the laws of Idemili. When she disregards his request for power, he insincerely follows the ritual of seclusion by leaving his wives and living alone during the day, but sneaking out to visit his lover at night. Upon his attempted return to seclusion, he is bitten and killed by the goddess's royal messenger, Eke-Idemili, the python. The lesson of the myth is played out when Sam disregards Beatrice's advice that he not behave foolishly. Although she fails to sway Sam, Beatrice discerns the future she was attempting to prevent, a scene which functions to foreshadow Sam's demise at the novel's conclusion. Later, when she recalls the myth of the songbird asking if the king's property is correct, she replies that it is not. The "king's property" is symbolic for Kangan's state-of-affairs and thus alludes to the fact that Sam is corrupted and that this corruption will be his downfall. Shortly after this follows the novel's climax and Sam is murdered during a military coup.

While her character and her actions provide a place for women to intervene, they do not initially present women as agents of power. Thus, these influences still suggest the continued struggle that women in the novel must overcome. In her essay, "The Power to Name," scholar Salami-Agunloye's views of gender norms in Nigerian society and *Anthills* assist in addressing this observation of Beatrice's politics while including an element of women's issues. Salami-Agunloye raises the issue that motherhood is a male-controlled institution in many African

societies, noting that the worth placed on women is dependent upon their ability to bear children, and being a single and educated woman in many African societies is discouraged: “Women are not valued for themselves, but for their ability to ‘breed’ . . . single women have a poor reputation . . . In traditional African society, women are discouraged from acquiring higher education” (178, 180). Such struggles are conveyed when Beatrice recounts the tale of her friend Comfort, who responds with dignity to an insult aimed at her by her fiancé’s aunt for being twenty-six and not yet married:

She was taken by her fiancé to meet his people in some backwater village of his when an aunt or something of his made a proverb fully and deliberately to her hearing that if *ogili* was such a valuable condiment no one would leave it lying around for rats to stumble upon and dig into. . . Then she told him he was always something of a rat. I can hear Comfort saying that and throwing him out of the flat! (81)

Her character assists in changing these attitudes by resisting them. Beatrice represents an alternative to the customary social expectations placed on women: she is unmarried, educated, and childless. By acknowledging that such issues in tradition exist and that these issues were embellished and perpetuated as a result of colonialism, Achebe reinforces the need for Beatrice to alter tradition for her purposes.

In this manner then, tradition as it is changed by colonialism also works as a source of opposition for Beatrice. The memory that her father, who is presented as imitating Western colonial leaders in his strict and oppressive behavior, beat her mother works as a marking point in the novel, a moment which then characterizes her pro-woman and anti-colonial mode of

politics. It is worth noting that in this moment, Beatrice calls upon the folktale to assist her: “She would come out afterwards (having unlocked the door, or perhaps he did), wiping her eyes with one corner of her wrapper, too proud or too adult to cry aloud like us . . . it always made me want to become a sorceress that could say ‘*Die!*’ to my father and he would die as in the folk tale” (79). The folktale is widely recognized as an imperative way to pass on knowledge from one generation to another, as well as a means of sharing a culture’s history and customs. While it is at this point she innately begins to oppose the place a colonial influenced tradition has set aside for women, she uses the traditional folktale to teach her father a lesson, showing that her connection to Kangan’s values was inherently known and cherished from an early age. Not only does her summoning of the folktale indicate a regard for Kangan folklore, but it also establishes that Beatrice is empowered by her culture.

Beatrice’s thoughts and actions present her as not simply a liberated woman, but a liberated Kangan woman. As Spivak argues through her repetition of the allegorical (and literal) phrase, “white men seeking to save brown women from brown men” in “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, a Western notion of feminism treats the “third-world” woman as a victim of her own ignorance and culture, a victim who needs saving by Western ideals, noting that “Imperialism’s image as the establisher of the good society is marked by the espousal of the woman as *object* of protection from her own kind” (94). Significantly then, Achebe presents Beatrice’s advancements and beliefs, including her own perspective on women’s liberation, as rooted in Kangan:

That every woman wants a man to complete her is a piece of male chauvinist  
bullshit I had completely rejected before I knew there was anything like Women’s

Lib. You often hear our people say: But that's something you picked up in England. Absolute rubbish! There was enough male chauvinism in my father's house to last me seven reincarnations! (81)

Her point indicates that women's liberation is not a concept derived from the West, but that it is a global concept, emphasizing that while women's struggles became more solidified as a result of colonialism, they existed prior to it<sup>2</sup>. Kangan's struggles cannot be solved through a Western answer, since not only is the West culturally different from Kangan, but it has not experienced the same turmoil brought on by colonialism; therefore, its "solutions" cannot resolve the issues colonialism perpetuated in Kangan. The solution must come from within Kangan. It is this belief which helps to guide Beatrice in acting on behalf of her country's people.

Again citing Mikell, this inclusive and traditionally-based democratic women's movement is taking place, involving women in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. In the past, marital and custody concerns, economical issues, and domestic violence have often been alleviated by traditional principles, but with the loss of traditional values and positions since colonialism, women's issues are now matters that must be addressed by women themselves: "The manner in which they [women in the prior cited various parts of Africa] discussed women's problems indicated their awareness of the decreased capacity of traditional systems to respond to their complaints and the absolute necessity for women's assertive actions" (413). As is evident by Mikell's work, many African women from a variety of nations are attempting to change their current positions despite government and social opposition which often result in community

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<sup>2</sup> See McClintock, Anne. "Introduction: Postcolonialism and the Angel of Progress." *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Imperial Contest*. New York: Routledge, 1995. 1-17.

exclusion, rape, and/or incarceration. She affirms that the women's movement in these areas has been pushing for gender equality, and as previously mentioned has in many ways transcended concerns over status and ethnicity, in a context that includes their cultural values and democracy as a platform for achieving equality.

Beatrice's liberation and alternative politics work to overcome social barriers that exist as a result of her status by embracing others despite their class and educational differences. This is seen when she cares for Elewa – as shown when she stays with her and grieves with her over Ikem's death – and when she learns to accept Agatha as a necessary piece of her democracy. Although they are not of a privileged or educated social group, Beatrice accepts these women as part of her ideals. By doing so, she creates the possibility for Agatha, who had formerly been cruel to Elewa, to receive Elewa and Beatrice in sisterhood:

Elewa and Agatha had been having a quiet discussion of their own on the matter.

“Madam, make you no worry at all,” said Agatha. “Whether they look from here to Jericho, they no go find am. By God's power.”

“Amin,” replied Elewa. “Na so we talk.” (171, 172)

While these women initially do not seem to have anything in common, it is their commitment to one another that illustrates the essence of female community.

It is in Beatrice that Achebe's message of an inclusive and evolving politics is fully realized: she hopes for a better future for Kangan as shown when she names Elewa's child “May-the-path-never-close.” Since the child is the product of Ikem, who is considered an elitist, and Elewa, a woman of a lesser social status, it represents the enlightened unification of classes. Beatrice's views are not so limited as to believe that this future relies on the elite alone. She

realizes that in order to create meaningful change, it is unacceptable for any person, regardless of gender, race, social status, or education to remain oppressed and silenced in the process.

Beatrice's inclusiveness is seen when she realizes how poorly she has treated Agatha: "After the first surge of anger Beatrice found herself feeling for the first time for this poor, twisted, desiccated, and sanctimonious girl something she had never before thought of extending to her – pity . . . and in the background the narrator's voice coming through and declaiming: *It is now up to you women to tell us what has to be done. And Agatha is surely one of you*" (169). While prior to this moment Beatrice has acted on behalf of Kangan's women, it is here that she recognizes her own elite status and acknowledges that all of Kangan's people, regardless of socioeconomic status, must have agency.

Beatrice's creation of a democratic community measures the success of her methods. This is seen in the diversity of the group brought together by the naming ceremony. This group is comprised of Emanuel, the student activist who learns to accept group member Abdul, the soldier of a different ethnic group assigned to watch over Beatrice; Adamma, the Muslim girl Chris saved from being raped; Agatha, Beatrice's devout Evangelical servant; Elewa, the illiterate mother of Ikem's child; Captain Abdul Medani, a member of His Excellency's military who assisted in Chris's escape; Braimoh and Aina, the impoverished taxi driver and his wife who hide Chris in their home during his escape; and Elewa's uncle and mother, both representative of traditional culture and the impoverished masses. Many of these characters are frequent visitors and guests in her home since Chris's death. They discuss current events and state-of-affairs, airing their concerns and disagreements openly, "the words and snatches of sentences coalesced into spirited conversations and even debates mostly between Emmanuel and Abdul" (203). It is

also in this portion of the novel that Beatrice serves as the translator of Chris's final message. The statement he makes with his dying breath, "The Last Grin [Green]" (200), reflects an accomplishment of Beatrice's ability to fuse tradition and progress in that it acknowledges he has understood her point that the nation cannot be run by one elitist group while disregarding the voice of the country's masses.

Beatrice also does not believe that her emerging politics should be shaped by her alone. She believes that they can be altered and improved upon by others' experiences, attitudes, and values. This belief is displayed when Beatrice acknowledges the hardships of the novel's climactic ending and the small group gathered in her home toast to a better future. Beatrice remarks that Elewa's child is the only living product of their suffering. Emmanuel disagrees with this observation, arguing that people's ideas survive after their passing and citing Ikem's powerful ideas as the reason for his own activism. Beatrice concedes to this argument, noting, "You win! People and Ideas, then" (207). Likewise, she partakes in Agatha's religiously inspired dance after Aina joins in, despite having shown contempt for this behavior in the past. To herself, Beatrice considers, "Well, if a daughter of Allah could join his rival's daughter in a holy dance, what is to stop a priestess of the unknown god from shaking a leg?" (208). Her willingness to accept concepts that are different from her own illustrates her ability to adjust and accept others. Just as Beatrice works toward achieving unity among a variety of people, she also regards and values their input. The inclusiveness that Beatrice supports creates stability within Kangan society.

As a progressive Kangan woman, Beatrice is able to act outside of this society's sanctioned expectations of women to promote change. She does this by guiding the beliefs of

others and endorsing an acceptance of differences. Although her education and position within the government enable her to act on achieving change, she mainly achieves change through her ability to relate to others via the bond of common values, rooted in the nation's past traditions, and common purpose. Beatrice's role as an activist is put to work when she facilitates the ideas of the novel's other narrators. By influencing the views of her fellow activists, who in turn influence others, she ensures that the future of the movement will not make the same mistakes as the country's current government. Beatrice unveils the contradiction between Chris's history of Kangan, its true history, and its future, forcing Chris to recognize the flaws in his view when she tells him, "Well, you fellows, all three of you, are incredibly conceited. The story of this country, as far as you are concerned, is the story of the three of you" (62). Her remarks that he has been too limited in his views are not completely realized or acted on by Chris until he has recognized her as a prophetess. This is shown when he later reflects on it, considering the significant roles played by Emmanuel – the student activist – and the impoverished Braimoh and his wife in assisting his escape from His Excellency and the government. At the novel's end, Chris fully grasps Beatrice's point that the country's future must involve the voices of all the country's people, regardless of class or gender: "What he was trying to say was *The last green* . . . . This world belongs to the people of the world not to any little caucus, no matter how talented . . ." (214). Chris's final message, a result of Beatrice's influence, summarizes the resolution that Beatrice is proposing.

Beatrice's influence over the exclusive views held by the novel's other narrators is also found in Ikem's outlook. Regardless of his idealistic nature, Ikem struggles to include all people in his vision for a new Kangan. It is through Beatrice's enlightenment that Ikem begins to shift



his beliefs, significant because it credits Beatrice as the only protagonist who acknowledges the necessity of an inclusive politics: “Over the last couple of years we have argued a lot about what I have called the chink in his armory of brilliant and intelligent ideas. I tell him he has no clear role for women in his political thinking . . .” (83). Once Beatrice ridicules him for having no clear place for women, Ikem’s views change, as presented in a “love letter” to Beatrice and women in general. In this letter, Ikem notes the historical oppression of women and reasons that other marginalized groups do not have a defined part in the country’s future. It is this historical oppression that Beatrice must overcome and she is beginning to do so by causing others to recognize and reflect on it:

The women are, of course, the biggest single group of oppressed people in the world . . . But they are not the only ones. There are others – rural peasants in every land, the urban poor in industrialized countries, Black people everywhere including their own continent, ethnic and religious minorities and castes in all countries. (90)

Though Ikem is eventually able to recognize the gaps in his ideals, it is Beatrice who transcends social barriers in order to create unity during conflict in the novel.

By linking Beatrice, a contemporary woman, so strongly to Kangan’s ancient customs, its modernization, and the social and political activism taking place, Achebe displaces the roles of the novel’s other, and male, narrators. Beatrice’s narration becomes a hybrid of the novel’s other protagonists, Chris and Ikem. Rather than holding a position of prominence over *Anthills’* female narrator, or each other, their viewpoints and roles are presented as equal to Beatrice’s perspective and the part she plays in the novel. Beatrice’s unique position within the novel as a cultural

insider outsider – an educated, female member of Kangan’s Western influenced elite – allows her to take part in, as well as share, the story of an inclusive revolution as she experiences and observes it through her relationships with the diverse groups of Kangan’s people. While it is only from each of the storyteller’s experiences that the reader gains a full picture of the novel’s events, it is imperative to the novel’s theme that the reader receive Beatrice’s perspective, as Spivak illustrates in the close of her article, “Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with flourish” (102). Achebe acknowledges the task Beatrice has as an educated Kangan woman to share her story by giving her voice the same authority as the novel’s male narrators. Granted Beatrice’s narration is less prevalent at the novel’s start, but this choice is balanced when it becomes the only perspective offered at the novel’s conclusion.

Beatrice alone survives while the novel’s other narrators are killed in the military coup incited by an unstable government and in the chaos that ensues. She endures so she can work to create a place among the disorder for the diverse groups of people. Although Beatrice suffers from the loss of Chris and Ikem, she uses this experience to establish community and change within the novel:

In earlier times she would have responded to Chris’s death by retreating entirely into herself . . . But the weeks of ill omen presaging the bloody events of November had already thrown her into a defensive pact with a small band of near-strangers that was to prove stronger than kindred or mere friendship. Like old kinships this one was pledged also on blood. (202)

In this final chapter, Beatrice chooses to celebrate life in honor of her friends' deaths and she notes that their sacrifices is what has allowed for these human bonds to be strengthened. The statement, "pledged also on *blood*" alludes to the connection between Kangan's violent past and its people. Such a connection is established in the characters' support of one another as those gathered at Beatrice's house are together to mourn Chris and Ikem's deaths as well as uphold the idealism for which they died. Through her ability to look beyond barriers, Beatrice commits to recreate such connections, as seen, for instance, in her commitment to Elewa, providing others with the ability to look past boundaries and commit to one another, and thus their country's future, as well.

Beatrice as the sole narrative survivor of the novel's tragic events indicates that her ideals are essential in building a better society. These ideals are based in a balance that honors Kangan's past by protecting its historical practices while also endorsing the contemporary belief that such practices must involve women in more dominate roles. While the substantial inclusion of women is part of the solution, it is not the only key to Kangan's change. Along with the addition of women's views and voices, new political and social practices must also incorporate the voices of the uneducated and the deprived. It must involve a commitment from the people to one another, to their past, and to their future. Regardless of its painful past, an unethical and oppressive government, and Kangan's class disparity, Beatrice is able to customize a democracy that includes heritage along with contemporary cultural ideals to create a space for those typically ignored in Kangan's political realm. Inspired by a dynamic tradition, she is beginning to create an alternative to the novel's current society and atmosphere, to carve out room for the voices of all its members. She represents a spokesperson, a teacher, a mediator, and a diplomat.

Through her ability to establish unity, Beatrice begins building a nation where all members are empowered and, therefore, feel they have a stake in its future.

Beatrice's actions are not entirely fictional. As Mikell notes, Nigerian women are attempting to transform the status imposed on them by society and government through actively creating domains for political and social engagement. By creating a place for themselves, they also create room for others. It is in this restoration and adaption of culture that Beatrice's politics differ from the politics of Kangan's past. By embracing and empowering the wills of others, Beatrice demonstrates that Kangan's people can overcome and prevail. Beatrice emerges as a symbol of Kangan's future. It is through her activism that she becomes the warden of an altered tradition that respects Kangan's history while evolving it so as to enable a prosperous future. By retaining the knowledge found in tradition, but improving on it, Beatrice continues the struggle, offering hope for Kangan. And it is through this hope that Achebe expresses his answer for how a people can appease their embittered history.

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