

The use of mixed narrative in anthills of the savannah

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



Explore the uses and effects of mixed narrative in *Anthills of the Savannah* By Emmanuel Sunil. *Anthills of the Savannah* is set in the fictitious West African country of Kangan, a country which has been overrun with political instability ever since becoming an independent state from British rule. The novel centers on the lives of three civil servants, Christopher Oriko, Ikem Osodi and Beatrice Nanyibuife, and all three serve three separate narrative voices in the novel, each sharing his or her own point of view.

This provides the reader with a 360 degree picture of the situation by offering multiple points of view as well as enabling the reader to make judgments for him/ herself rather than relying on a narrator or a single character to supply descriptions of people and events. In this essay I shall consider detail the narrative roles of all three characters of the novel.

Christopher Oriko is the Commissioner of Information in the cabinet of His Excellency, Sam. His duties bring him to close proximity to Sam and thus we obtain an insiders account of the political situation in Kangan.

Chris informs us in the very first chapter of Sam's frequent mood swings. In fact he goes as far as to say that " days are good or bad for us now according to how His Excellency gets out of bed in the morning". Here, Chris indicates the dictatorial nature of Sam thus setting a stage for the instability in the government. Chris also has a very realistic opinion of the situation and he is careful in pushing for reform than his close friend Ikem, who he thinks is far too sensitive to the danger of angering Sam.

A topic which is often considered in Chris' narrative is the futility of Ikem's editorials which makes Sam consider him as treacherous. Chris often

defends Ikem; however he is getting “ tired “ of doing so. This difference in opinion and the fact that Ikem has more freedom leaves Chris with growing resentment towards Ikem, and the two seem to be drifting further apart as the novel progresses: “ I can’t talk to Ikem any more. I am tired. And drained of all stamina”, says Chris in chapter eight. Ikem Osodi , who has replaced Chris as the editor of the state controlled National Gazette, feels that “ the situation in Kangan can only be improved through reform”. The editor often writes sharp editorials full of criticism towards the government, giving insights to the problems in Kangan (for example public executions). Ikem states that the best weapon against ineffective government is passion: “ Passion is our hope and strength”, something that he feels immensely strong about and also reflects in his work, for example “ Hymn to the Sun”, where Sam is compared to the sun as a metaphor to something that is immensely powerful yet equally destructive.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, His editorials often put him in conflict with Chris, who is now Ikem’s boss, however Ikem refuses any interference towards his work: “ as long as I remain the editor, I shall not seek anybody’s permission to what I write”, however he still acknowledges that “ there is a big danger doing this”. Despite the fact that he is an extremist, Ikem also adds humor through sarcasm (“ following a leader who follows his leader would be quite a circus”), and thus making the novel quite amusing at times.

Beatrice Nanyibuife is Chris’ girlfriend and also works in the government (in the ministry of finance). She has been intimate with Ikem, Sam and Chris at

some point in her life and even though she is engaged in a relationship with Chris, she still gives us an unbiased outsider's opinion about the situation between the three of them. For example in chapter five, she claims that " 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. Although much of her narrative concerns her own past, she also tries to bridge the ever developing gap between Chris and Ikem; in chapter eight she tries to persuade Chris to talk to Ikem and work together to solve the mounting crisis of Sam's power hunger (trying controlling power similar to Idemili). Apart from these three; an unknown narrator also exists in the novel. While he does not give us any personal opinions like the other narrators, he gives details into African traditions such the story of the goddess Idemili.

The different narrators of the novel give us different opinions about the same events that occur, and this as stated in the introduction gives a full and accurate picture of the current situation in the country. It is surprising that despite the novel being about the political instability and the unfortunate condition of the people; it is only the upper class that has a voice in the novel; a kind of metaphor indicating the division in the society and proving that it is only the upper class that has the power to bring about reform.

Also, the mixed narratives do not follow a chronological pattern, which could symbolize the general state of confusion in the country. Achebe's use of multiple narrative voices indicates that history is more than a set of events in the past to be told; it is also the feelings and ideas that different people

have about the events and at the same time focuses on the community rather than on the individual