

Book Reviews

Chinua Achebe. *A Man of the People*. Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1967. Pp. 150. Paper \$11.95.

A gifted and recognized writer, Chinua Achebe's career began in Nigeria as the director of external broadcasting. Currently a Literature Professor at Bard College, Achebe's acclaimed novel *A Man of the People* takes place in an unnamed African state that just gained its independence and is based on a corrupt political system. The main protagonist is Odili Samalu, a schoolteacher who finds himself caught up in a fraudulent election when he decides to run for political office.

It is through Samalu's transformation from a schoolteacher to a politician, that Achebe explains how the state oppresses its citizens, favors the elite, and creates a hierarchical chain of corruption. The state's oppression is managed through the control of public opinion and freedom of speech, obtained through the manipulation of the media and political power. Threats to the state, such as Samalu's participation in a liberal party, are considered direct challenges to this system that ignores its citizen's yearning for equality. As a result of challenging the system, Samalu's community loses its water system, receives bribes to encourage his early exit from the race that eventually leads to the loss of his job. The state's victory over the people's wills is a representation of corruption, exploitation and pessimism, all contributing to the exploitation of its citizens' rights for the elite's personal gain.

Although a fictional story, Achebe's description of events before they became a tragic reality in many parts of Africa, allows historians to comprehend how much politics in African states have changed in the past forty years. Instructors and students interested in learning about the challenges in newly independent African states will find this novel indispensable because it will broaden their understanding of the effects European decolonization had on the lives of the people, their politics and the roles played by each individual.

Juan Meza