



THE IMAGE OF AFRICAN INTELLECTUALS AND THE POSITION OF EDUCATION IN ACHEBE'S *NO LONGER AT EASE*

Achebe'nin *Artık Huzur Yok* Romanında Afrika Aydınlarının İmaju ve Eğitimin
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ABSTRACT

Education serves as a constructing process of the society and the intellectuals stand as the constructors of this process. The intellectuals have both positive and negative impacts on social construction and deconstruction. However, it is mostly the political motivation that determines the role of education and intellectuals in society. *No Longer at Ease*, with its protagonist Obi Okonkwo who goes to England for his university study and returns to his motherland Nigeria after four years of education, presents the expectations and contributions of education and exemplifies the ineffective status of African intellectuals resulting from the policies of the imperialist powers. The deliberate representation of the Easterners and the Westerners, their attributed racial properties, and the apathy and misconduct of the African intellectuals are of great interest in the novel and accordingly in this paper. The conflicting image of the Easterner and the Westerner intellectuals are particularized and the unsimilar outputs of education for the conflicting sides are analyzed regarding the educated people of the East and the West. This study delves into background information, examines the influence of education on society implying the vanity of the African's education, offers the significance and role of the intellectuals, and deals with the contradiction of the African ones by presenting a picture of society, particularly that of intellectuals.

Keywords: education, intellectual, No Longer at Ease, African society, corruption.

Öz

Eğitim toplumun inşa sürecine hizmet eder, entelektüeller ise bu sürecin mimarı konumundadırlar. Entelektüellerin toplumsal inşa ve yıkım üzerinde hem olumlu hem de olumsuz etkileri vardır. Ancak, toplumda eğitimin ve entelektüellerin rolünü belirleyen şey çoğunlukla politik motivasyondur. Üniversite eğitimi için İngiltere'ye giden ve dört yıl eğitim gördükten sonra anavatanı Nijerya'ya dönen başkahraman Obi Okonkwo ile *Artık Huzur Yok*, eğitimin beklenti ve katkılarını sergiler ve emperya-

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list güçlerin politikaları sonucu Afrika aydınlarının etkisizleşmesini örneklendirir. Doğular ve Batıların kasıtlı temsili, onlara atfedilen ırksal özellikler, Afrikalı aydınların ilgisizliği ve kusurlu davranışları romanda ve dolayısıyla bu makalede ilgi odağıdır. Doğulu ve Batılı aydınların çatışan imajı ayrıntılandırılır ve çatışan taraflar için eğitimin farklı sonuçları Doğu ve Batı'nın eğitilmiş insanları dikkate alınarak analiz edilir. Bu çalışma, konu hakkındaki temel bilgileri ele almakta, Afrikalıların eğitiminin anlamsızlığını ima ederek eğitimin toplum üzerindeki etkisini incelemekte, entelektüellerin önemini ve rolünü ortaya koymakta ve Afrikalıların çelişkilerini, toplumun özellikle de entelektüellerin, resmini tasvir ederek ele almaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: eğitim, entelektüel, *Artık Huzur Yok*, Afrika toplumu, yolsuzluk.

Introduction

Chinua Achebe, regarded as the father of modern African literature, mostly writes in order to raise awareness of his countrymen criticizing the approaches of the West towards the East. During the process of decolonization of Nigeria, he uses English, the oppressor's language, to reach wider ranges, especially to the colonizer, and he uses the oppressor's discourses to provide a clear picture of the Westerners' attitudes towards the Easterners' along with demonstrating the permanence of the Western policies on the East. He provides a sense of satiric attitude to life in Lagos with his satiric humor writing and simply tries to identify his countrymen under a similar impression owned by the colonizer Westerners. To reveal and maintain the necessity of the West, the discourses of the West try to ensure both the Westerners and the Easterners on the inferiority of the East and the superiority of the West. Edward Said popularizes the concept of Orientalism which addresses the way that Western ideologies deliberately and historically study and portray the East. He emphasizes in his masterpiece *Orientalism*, it is an academic study serving several institutions (2003: 2). The natives of the East are usually depicted deliberately as savage, uncivilized, primitive, and in need of being represented and improved by the civilized, well-versed, sophisticated Westerners who always struggle to verify Karl Marx's famous statement, which says "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented" (qtd in Said, 2003: XXVI).

Influenced by both Western and traditional Igbo culture, Achebe can genuinely mirror both contexts. While doing so, he reflects both the positive and negative sides of these cultures. As a prominent figure of African literature, he writes to reveal the African conditions and realities. He aspires to renovate "the true image of Africa" and induce his people to re-explore

their cultural heritage that has faded under the impacts of colonization (Madubuike, 1975: 142). With respect to this, he explores the influences of colonial power on traditional Igbo society in his African trilogy – *Things Fall Apart* (1958) reflecting the pre-colonial period, *No Longer at Ease* (1960) depicting the post-colonial period, and *Arrow of God* (1964) representing colonial period. The trilogy, which begins with *Things Fall Apart*, narrates the inconvenient continuation of conditions resulting from colonialism and persisting across generations. *No Longer at Ease*, the focus of this paper connects the traditional African community portrayed in *Things Fall Apart*, and the colonial strain illustrated in *Arrow of God*.

In *No Longer at Ease*, Achebe portrays his characters from the colonizer's perspective to satire the whole attitudes and approaches. The novel is of great concern for offering a great number of modern Africa's challenges with its broad themes of cultural conflict, moral dilemmas, corruption, alienation, and identity problems. Anand Menon asserts Achebe's engagement in the representation of Igbo society as an output of a political liability that "ranges up to shattering the Eurocentric stereotypes regarding Africa by regenerating the culture" (2015: 21). The novel, written in 1960, tells the story of Obi Okonkwo, an Igbo man, who leaves his country winning a local scholarship given by the Umiofia Progressive Union to do his academic studies overseas. On his return to Nigeria, he finds violent, evil, and corrupted politicians who harm the natives rather than helping them to develop. His relationship with Clara, an Osu that means outcast, draws another pathetic picture of the Africans swarmed with over-emotionality, being far from objectivity and reason. Since other characters, like the main characters, are educated ones. This study aims to analyze the position of education, the portrayal of educated men and intellectuals of Africa in *No Longer at Ease*. With the intent of making the analysis clear, the paper is divided into six subtitles which provide background information on the writer and novel briefly, examine the prominence of education on society in general and imply the vanity of the African's education, offer the significance and role of the intellectuals, and deal with the contradiction of the African intellectuals depicted in the novel, question the issues of corruption and morality.

No Longer at Ease is a simple narration of the erosion of Nigeria, its natives, and their conventional values influenced by the capitalist and colonialist invaders of Europe. One of the main focuses is a dramatic process of defective growth desiring for enlightenment which ends in misery and an-

tipathy. The book gives a sense of certainty along with hope on behalf of the African natives to be able to develop themselves, be educated, and become a member of civil service. For instance, the tribesmen of Obi admire him for having the opportunity to study abroad and for advancement. Achebe's target is to show the ridiculous and pathetic case of an assimilated black man who is educated through a European training system and loses his primary national values ending up with failure and corruption. Being actively exposed to Western ideologies and therewithal as an observer of his culture, he tries to find answers to such questions: "How can an African nation and community be created in the marginal space between autonomy and the colonizing structure? What are the doctrines that inform the postcolonial structure?" (Aji, 1993: 124). Achebe also implies that "African style of village life seems preferable to a new European mode; or at least, it could withstand any other twentieth-century fashion by all sensible methods of analysis and judgement" (qtd in Babalola, 1986: 146). In addition to the positive perspective mentioned above for the case, it is generally agreed that the African style is fundamentally bad and static, unchangeable; nothing can influence it even education which is accepted as the only key opening relatively all the doors of the different areas. Achebe makes use of Fanon's presentation which aims to present how the East is despised by the West prejudicedly and how the Easterners are regarded as undeveloped and inferior in his remarkable book *Wretched of the Earth* which reveals dehumanizing the colonized and moving them down to the status of an animal (2004: 48). Using a simple narrative style that provides an effective understanding of the African people, their feelings and thoughts, and ways of life, their bad habits, attitudes, and misconducts in particular, Achebe portrays his characters from a null native black for the sake of making his craft credible.

The Concept of Education in General and Particularly in African Context

Undeniably, education is the center of almost every problem and solution for production, alteration, development, labor force, democratic movement, the process of struggle, cultural creativity, and so on. Education may be defined as the process of relating and transmitting the culture from one generation to the other, the process which is followed by the adult members of the society while bringing up the younger ones, the process of adapting and modifying the inheritance of the culture from the older, and finally conveying it to the following generations. The general functions of

education are to allow individuals to integrate themselves into the society in which they have been born and live, to explore and comprehend the world in order to find their places, to cultivate their good habits, and to improve the right attitudes towards the life and their potentialities to the full, mainly for the sake of leading a good living (Adeyinka & Ndwapi, 2002: 20). In developing countries like Nigeria, one additional purpose of education is to promote awareness of national unity and international understanding to offer solutions for poverty, hunger, illiteracy, ignorance, disease and to develop industrial and commercial standards. Today, it is one of the most important driving forces for resistance employing the developing of the cultural struggle.

Since the aims of the training system are mostly determined by the power of the colonizer, African profits are ignored, and education does not serve exactly for the natives' goals. Formal education in colonial Africa was mostly "a creation and product of a foreign dominant culture", formulated by the British who dehumanized Africans and aimed to assimilate the indigenous people (Shizha & Kariwo, 2011: 14). Because of the colonizer's policies, the education of Africa loses its nationality and experiences difficulty in raising a preferred functional education system. The effect of education is surely undeniable, yet Achebe emphasizes the necessity of nativeness. However, racism, imperialism, and their natural growth, colonialism remove the real objectives. Benzair tells a classic story about racism and knowledge:

Many non-Europeans who study at that medical school, just because it is for non-Europeans, however when they have a European carcass to dissect and on which they can practice their medical knowledge, non-European students are excluded from attending. They are permitted to attend only if the carcass is a non-European carcass (qtd in Connel, 2007: 16).

Deliberately, a small black elite, behaving like the whites is produced by a hierarchical formal education system that lets the blacks embrace the capitalist aspects of invading society, otherize their nation, abuse, and live however they want disregarding the others (Abraham, 1980: 529). The central dilemma in the novel is that the hope of the Umiofia Progressive Union by wasting their meagre earnings for the education of Obi results in his becoming a complete part of them on his return and ends in the paradox that this sacrifice becomes a means of estrangement than integration (Wali, 1965: 32). Obi disobeys the identity frames shaped by society just for social

cohesion, rather, he breaks his relationship with the union due to the matter of his choice of wife and their objection to the relationship with an Osu. He is judged by the values of collectivism which inclines him to focus on individualism.

The Portrayal of the Intellectuals

Throughout history, intellectuals have been leading actors directing the wide-scale transformations in their societies. Most of them generally relate their local social context to global values to enhance their countries and nations in the fields of economy, sociology, science, and so on. It is of great interest to stress that they are responsible for dealing with creative ideas which may bring about ways of solution and development. Cyril Obi, a contemporary African researcher, defines intellectuals as manufacturers and dealers of knowledge, thoughts or systems, as social leaders concerning identity, meaning, and culture, as politicians serving critical roles in the construction of nationalism (2004: 1). In the pre-colonial era of Africa, socio-political life of Africa was dominated by some intellectuals like priests, Islamic scholars, philosophers, griots, artists, and art historians who attach meaning to identity, development, unity, knowledge and common aspirations of communities and kingdoms while in the colonial era of Africa, intellectuals were mostly imaged by missionary and western style of education. As seen, colonial intellectual history can be qualified as “a particular kind of combined and uneven development” (Du Toit, 1991: 8). In the postcolonial era, the policies of the colonizer are sustained to exploit disguisedly and dominate the oppressed country in similar ways of the previous deliberate ones. Existing local conventions try to define their values, ideas and goals under the hegemony of imperial powers and their discourses.

In the post-colonial era, it is seen that despite the relatively small number of African intellectuals, the colonizers become scared and anxious of their role of initiating and stimulating national freedom. So, they try to maintain control of oppressed countries through their own plans and profits with the expectation of taking control of power. Within this context, the educated natives who are from non-elite backgrounds in Africa are mostly confused and influenced by international connections by the colonizer’s approaches and systematic methods that disregard the local values and acquisition.

A variety of intellectual identities are produced by histories and ideological positioning (Connell, 2007: 21). The history and deliberate strategies

of colonialism, and the peripheral economic conditions are implied to bring them to a deadlock. Since most Africans are bogged down in pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras, the African intellectuals are supposed to produce an activist identity longing and looking for truth, justice, democracy, human rights, independence, and freedom. The intellectuals take a major role as architects of national resistance and the political formation of refuge hinged on national identity, looking for national liberation under favor of anger and blood, expecting freedom “firing the engines of national resistance against the oppressor” (Obi, 2004: 1). As seen, the role of the intellectuals in the process of decolonization of most colonized countries is inevitably undeniable. Intellectuals are the leading force both positively and negatively.

African Intellectuals in the Light of *No Longer at Ease*

The status of intellectuals in the line of decolonization is obviously incontestable, particularly, in the period of civil war and decolonization of Nigeria. Achebe, as an activist, sets sights on enlightening his country to raise awareness of his fellow countrymen and culture itself. In order to achieve his goals, he uses articulation of cultural materials of Africa in *No Longer at Ease* and portrays Obi as an educated man and an intellectual to reflect the orientalist thoughts and conditions. Obi exhibits a parallel portrayal of Achebe’s scholarly identity (May, 2008: 904). He additionally portrays two major characters Clara, Obi’s partner, and Christopher, his educated African friend with whom he alludes and satirizes that anything in Africa and for Africa is unfortunately pointless including education and intellectuals. Neither Obi nor other educated people of *No Longer at Ease* can keep up with the identities of intellectuals as mentioned above in a positive sense. Their characteristics, unlike expected, are imaged as considerably careless for connecting people to knowledge concentrating on their inner world, and ignoring others. In other words, they are mostly devoid of passion for saving their country and community.

Unlike African intellectuals Mr. Green, an educated Westerner officer, is reflected in a noteworthy position and is stated to have admirable qualities, taking his commitment to duty; rain or shine, being punctual, and going to his office half an hour before the official time, working longer after two, returning in the evening, trying hard for a country even though he does not give credence to and reminds Obi of the case of Mohammed Ali, who is in his old age, works extremely to advance his country when he has the opportunity to do. (Achebe, 1963: 105). While talking to Obi, Mr. Green humili-

ates him neglecting his position as an educated man and implies that Obi is reluctant to work or not prepared to think over which could provide him to enjoy his occupation (Achebe, 1963: 65). His humiliation and otherizing Obi go on with his criticism of even the trained men is not reaching the level of considering future (Achebe, 1963: 95). His usage “educated” tastes like vomit proving the western attitudes towards not only the ordinary African but also the educated ones. He also emphasizes the African being lack of self-sacrifice and carelessness about their country: No Nigerian, from your ministers to the lowest-ranking clerk, is willing to give up a small benefit for the good of his country (Achebe, 1963: 153). Similarly, Mr. Green criticizes Obi through the generalization of all Africans for having holidays and offering holidays and comments that:

It often amazes me how you people can have the effrontery to ask for local leave. The idea of local leave was to give Europeans a break to go to a cool place like Jos or Buea. But today it is completely obsolete. But for an African like you, who has too many privileges as it is to as for two weeks to go on a swan, it makes me want to cry (Achebe, 1963: 153).

As for another great interest in intellectual virtue, open-mindedness is closely related to the term of Siegel, “critical spirit” and thanks to this link, an intellectual, an open-minded intellectual is expected to criticize, revise, or reconsider the facts of passively accepting deposits of reality from the world outside (Ndofirepi, 2012: S31). The African intellectuals of the book are clearly depicted far from this spirit. Obi is unable to attempt to change the realm of a colonial society despite his education which provides him to comprehend modern life. He, a typical product of the progressive union of the Igbo people of Nigeria, represents a kind of loneliness and frustration representing an alienated Nigerian graduate. On his return to Lagos, he is mirrored being fulfilled with personal desires rather than tangible hopes for his country. His desire for money principally defeats education, marriage, and profits of his own country and culture. Under the influence of Western culture, he is separated from his parents and is estranged from his own values and culture. In general, Obi is sympathetically mentioned as he reveals to have little or nothing in common with his neighborhood. He is dominated by cultural, physical, intellectual, and economic self-ambition regardless of national hopes and profits. Ide simply criticizes the corruption of African society, but it seems to neither intensely be against capitalism nor concern of democracy and liberation. Later, he obeys the rules of the game of cor-

rupted institutions and society. The major character, Obi is inclined to anxiety, sleep and day-dreaming. "He lives more in the mind and realm of fancy than in actual world of everyday things, characters and events" and produces an amusing sense by standing with a bachelor's degree in English in London University than laws as originally proposed (Babalola, 1986: 141).

To possess a European experience raises a man from the mosses to the elite owing to the fact that it means second only to actually being a European (Achebe, 1963: 92). However, in the end, Obi is neither a white nor a black losing his socioeconomic and cultural integration, more in particular, his political pride and honor. Obi is caught between values imposed on him by the help of Western education and traditions. Modern African individuals experience spiritual dislocation showing that Western education has created a rift between them and the masses stemming from complicated issues of cultural identity that is defined through the idea of "us" as opposed to "them" and struggle with changing social mores (Gandhi, 2012: 60).

The culmination of Obi's disastrous individualism is proof of the lasting punishment of the down generations due to the evil actions of his grandfather Okankwo, the main character of the first novel of the trilogy, *Things Fall Apart*. The members of the Umofia Progress Union emphasize the similarity of Obi and his father's carelessness. When his mother dies, he behaves quite carelessly however this reminds a similar reflection of his father's carelessness for his father's death. In order to stress the influence of heredity, one of them persists to state that you reap what you sow, attaching importance to the blood and emphasizing that nothing resembles it. (Achebe, 1963: 159-160).

Besides Obi, the other educated characters Clara, and Christopher are made up with identities that do not correspond to intellectual identity. Clara the Osu bride, symbolizes the modern woman carrying her profession of nursing and spending time buying expensive clothes, watching exotic films, or dancing with her boyfriend at night. She is a disguised prostitute with her nature that favors abortion or being addicted to materialistic tastes and myth-making adventures. She obviously depicts the marginalized position of African women because of her out-of-wedlock pregnancy and abortion. She contradicts her culture by following her own desires and perceptions. Owing to Clara's being an Osu, she is double-otherized all along the novel disregarding her education, personality, and profession. Obi's father rejects the marriage ignoring her father's being a good human and prominent Christian. He neglects all of the other conditions and con-

concentrates merely on the case of being an Osu, he exemplifies the despisedness of a captain despite his honorable stance resulting in marginalization (Achebe, 1963: 133). He tries to influence Obi and discourage him from marriage with the analogy. He stresses that Osu is like leprosy in their minds (Achebe, 1963: 133). Furthermore, Joseph, Obi's friend, is another one otherizing Clara, regardless of her education. He shows provinciality by the favor of discrimination reminding Obi of being the one and only Umofia son to be trained overseas and stresses that "We don't want to be like the unfortunate child who grows his first tooth and grows a decayed one. What sort of encouragement will your action give to the poor men and women who collected the money?" (Achebe, 1963: 75).

Christopher, another educated one, portrays an immoral intellectual character defending immoral actions and stating "But the point is, there was no influence at all. The girl was interviewed, anyway. She came voluntarily to have a good time. I cannot see that bribery is involved at all" (Achebe, 1963: 121). He also justifies bribery implying: "If the applicant is getting the job, anyway, then there is no harm accepting money from him" (Achebe, 1963: 121). With his cynical but realistic style, he portrays the pragmatic and worldly traits of Africans.

The Question of Corruption and Morality

The problem of corruption is an indispensable part of everything related to Africa and the Africans. Anything in Africa from healthcare to education is subject to corruption. Whether it is a product of outside strain or internal African factors is still a matter of debate (van den Bersselaar & Decker, 2011: 742). The book exemplifies the specific representative recent case of the African, especially educated ones providing a broader outlook on this problem. When corruption means a variety of practices such as favoritism, abusiveness of public funds, bribery, and misuse of power, the main type owned by the major character Obi is bribery. It might be a trace of weak government; however, it can equally be comprehended as a function of how colonial powers present local governing. As a central place attracting people, especially the educated elite ones, Lagos is of great interest in the whole story with its government offices that enable the corrupted business community. In spite of its position, unlike expected, its tribeless anonymity, plastic entertainment, its cheap nightclubs, its rootlessness, its unemployment, its incapability to deal with the thousands of rural immigrants and immense squalor became the symbol of evil Nigerian society" (Abraham,

1980: 529). The instability and confusion of Lagos imply the psyche of the Nigerians, probably the intellectuals as well.

The dark picture of Lagos is depicted as a world of corruption and crucial political intrigue among educated men. Mackay brings the Lagos scene vividly to life and reveals the circumstances that almost automatically lead to corruption like *No Longer at Ease* (1963: 550). Also, the vast area of Lagos symbolically goes between Obi's puberty and manhood, much the same between his past African existence and his new mode of European (Babalola, 1986: 142). Corruption is not only seen in business but also encountered in personal care in almost every part of Nigeria. Similar to natives of the East, their relationships are in the same way odd and incomprehensible. The incident of abortion is surely at the center of satire and quite suggestive of moral decay and social instability. Moreover, Obi's devastated personal morality depending on the sense of responsibility services the end of his relationship.

Since the concept of morality is one of the most significant achievements of education, the educated people, the intellectuals are supposed to possess a good character, and positive attitudes to social norms and rules. When the intellectual characters of the novel are analyzed from an ethical perspective, most fail. The failure is related to both social and official life. They are mostly devoid of odd moral values such as dependability, wisdom, individual responsibility, justice, honesty, truthfulness, humility, tolerance, selflessness, respect, and so on. The intellectuals are principally expected to deal with the problems that help them explore and identify the meaning and purpose of life to serve as models; to develop a sense of community and build relationships in society; to understand and respect anybody's identity avoiding racism and discrimination. They are to be purified from prejudice. Even reactions of most of them to the case of Clara's being an Osu destroy most of the characteristics mentioned above. They are mainly to come up with daily life and struggle, however, the protagonist Obi fails to carry his daily life, and is devoid of developing a sense of sympathy and empathy for their culture, moral standards, and rules of social behaviors. They are vaguely unaware of irrelevant moral and social issues, particularly the importance of family.

Conclusion

Education raises awareness, initiates critical thinking, and serves for social and cultural development in addition to its numerous functions. For

colonized or postcolonial countries, it has stronger roles. The novel makes it clear that Europe allows education even that of the poor countryman, but it is limited by how, to what extent, and to what end the West wants to educate and improve the Easterners. Achebe stresses the undesirable and unfair conditions resembling “a concert where Europe is the conductor and Africa the drummer” (Losambe, 1960: 215). The students from poor Africa, who are sponsored by governments or local scholarships, naturally hope to become one of the most substantial solutions that may open different doors of a new world, and eventually bring ease as desired. The book simply provides us with the improbability of such productions by means of the available conditions. Racism, colonialism, and imperialism strengthen the Orientalist view. In the novel, the biased and orientalist outlook is tried to be justified by the president of Umiofia Progressive Union stating that a man’s blood type does not change after becoming a lawyer or doctor in England, it resembles a bird taking off from the ground and landing on an anthill, is still lying there. (Achebe, 1963: 160).

Eventually, Achebe images his intellectual Easterner characters in the same way as Western writers; for instance, his intellectuals correspond to E. M. Forster’s educated character Godbole in his famous novel *A Passage to India* which is one of the most representative novels that humiliates the East and glorifies the West. They are similarly indifferent to social matters and the situation of their countries contrary to the Westerner intellectuals. Characters’ discourses obviously reflect the thoughts of the Western world. Achebe vilifies the attitudes using the same narration of the Westerners. He criticizes the thought: there is nothing that may change the inevitable, cursed fate of the East including education. There is no way out but unhappiness, backwardness, and uneasiness. Thus, the intellectuals do not stand for lights they are characterized as little stones influencing and helping nothing or trivial matters.

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