

Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* and *Things Fall Apart* : A Study in the Battle of Colonialism

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Abstract. This paper is an attempt to reveal how colonize used, ideological instrument to grab the thought of the African people in the light of Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*. The unseen and unrealised instrument of European schooling system used by the colonialist has brought down many of Africans to their knee willingly. The ideological arsenal like European education has served the purpose of enslaving the mind the African without bloodbath and physical harm. This paper tries to show that the process of enslavement is more subtle and gentle as it was fought not on the battlefield but was fought inside the mind. The research is also an attempt to delineate the fact how the coloniser through the act of educational manipulation got over the seething resentment of the Africans without their being realized for the lost of their cherished cultures. Contrary to their antagonism they became the advocates of the colonizer.

Keywords : Slavery; education; colonisation; value.

Albert Chinualumogu Achebe (1930-2013), generally known as Chinua Achebe, was born in Ibo village of Ogidi in Southeastern Nigeria. Although Achebe's parents converted to Christianity, they also admired their traditions. Therefore, his childhood was regarded by rich ambivalence of heritage. He was accepted at the University College in Nigeria on a scholarship. At first, he studied medicine, but he changed it to English like the protagonist, Obi of *No Longer at Ease*.

This paper is a review of Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* and evaluates the psychological effect of colonial education on the mind of the colonised. The protagonist is Obi Okonkwo, a grandson of Achebe's first protagonist in *Things Fall Apart*. Obi is struggling against many obstacles. He is trying to live a decent life while he is trying to satisfy his family, his home village, and larger society. Unable to make a balance between his values and the expectations of the society, Obi experiences a total breakdown.

History of Colonialism

When westerners spread across the world they did not come in huge numbers; neither they came in with the intention of exterminating the lives of the African, which could have been easily destroyed with sophisticated modern arsenal, as had been done in the case of destroying the life of American ancient settlers Mohicans, the ancient settlers of America in 17th and 18th centuries. The ancient men of America have been brutally pulverized and almost obliterated from their

own land by the barbaric and brutal forces of the European. It was a win but was a pyrrhic victory, resulting in self-inflicting and collateral loss of life and resources of American colonizer. Moreover, the loss of the ancient dwellers of America left European stripped off from luxurious and more aristocratic life which they could have derived through enslavement of the Mohicans had they not pulverized the life of the ancient settlers.

European endowed with the insightful wisdom gained from renaissance and its subsequent tracks of discovery fraught with dotted failure, success and inspiration. The continued exploration over a period of time deepened their insight on disseminating the effect of colonialism with gentle and subtle effect. Their mind sharpened and got tactical through the experience and furthered their exploration and settlement in the new found land across the world. Long period of rugged exploration and occupation have taught them the trade of enslaving and colonizing new lands.

Furthermore, the experience of French revolution and industrialization rendered Europeans not only with sophisticated tools but also intensified their tactical insight of colonizing the world. When they landed in Africa they used gentle and subtle behavioural tools to colonise them. It helped them to sail through the intended plan of colonising Africa and subsequent exploitation of resources without much resistance. Their prime task was not to colonise the land but colonize the mind. This time they are ready to fight the battle against the African but not in the battlefield but in the mind.

Unrealized War of Colonial Education

The tools for colonising the mind they used were schooling. The ultimate purpose of any education is to bring about change and change happens through learning and learning comes through education. And change requires step by step logical process. And schooling brings about change through step by step process. The evolutionary process of schooling is so slow and subtle that the African became off the guard. Their logical faculty failed to capture the moment of subtle change. Moreover, education was not projected as the colonialist tools but as an instrument to make their life more civilized. This means that the tools were used under disguise.

People are in the habit of resisting the visible and sudden antagonizing forces which creates shockwave across the belief system of the people. The sudden insecurity spurred by the visible attack made the African defensive in *Things Fall Apart*. Contrary to this, an education system of a particular country is the accumulating of many experiences, ideas and ideology. And in every civilization, education system gets coloured by the historical and social influence of the country. It consists of the language, manner, literature and philosophy of the individual country. In sum, it is recorded accumulation of historical information and data

which represents the culture of the country to which it belongs. And when it is enforced in the name of knowledge and wisdom in another country it's tantamount to cultural imperialism though at unspoken level.

When the other country culturally embedded education enters into the mind through the gradual process of schooling, it replaces the existing data of the subconscious mind. But as the space of the brain begins to get encroached upon by the new information, the existing or the old data recedes back and slowly and gradually scales down to the unconscious level to the extent of obliviousness. While the current data with its consistent supply ravage into the mind and spread like a wildfire, the existing data first got dimmed and then dominated over it. It began to rule the roost in the memory socket. The older information of the memory weighed down and squashed by the new information. Emptied mind get encrypted by the new one. The older values and beliefs get replaced. People forget about the values and purpose of life and their life enforcing force – their own culture. New germ occupies and controls the thought of the individual. People seize to be themselves. They become the creation of the coloniser and start to identify with western culture. The subtle process of education makes the African people think that the westerns are better to govern their life.

Change of Values

In *Things Fall Apart*, the church disproves many of the Igbo superstitions, which encourages the Igbo to break the traditions that they had followed for many years. Thus, slowly destroying their society. They request a piece of land to build their church on. The clan decides to give them a piece of land of the Evil forest and let them stay. To the clan's surprise this happens :

At last the day came by which all the missionaries should have died. But they were still alive, building a new red-earth and thatch house for their teacher, Mr. Kiaga. That week they won a handful more converts.

(Things Fall Apart, 151)

The Evil Forest was known as a forest where people go to die, and the clan members thought that by allowing the missionaries to build their church in the evil Forest they could easily get rid of them. Since the white men didn't die but lived, this made the Ibo people question their own beliefs. When some of the villagers noticed that they were misled by their gods they decided to convert to Christianity.

Mr. Brown is a decent man who does not force his religion upon the clan. He interacts with the people, enabling him to figure out the best way to draw them toward Christianity. He appeals to their sense of independence while mentioning the need to read and write. However, Brown has an ulterior motif, "From the very beginning, religion and education went hand in hand." (178) The people of Umuofia now appreciate the trading store, send their children to the missionary school, and

utilise the hospital. They have accepted the presence of the new religion. Even the great men of the clan talk with Brown. It seems just a matter of time until larger numbers of people convert.

The western schooling as system for education disseminator, its scope of education is as limited and fixed. The knowledge is syllabus oriented which comprises only selective topic; qualified under the influence of the nation state police. These schoolings are made to produce the people mind as they make them willingly accept the code of the nation and culture. The fixed and selectively distorted education deprived the African from critical and relative thing. They became the passive agent of the schooling system. Moreover, in most cases the model of the teaching was based on pedagogy, where teachers determine the understanding level of the students and not based on heutlogy where students learn through their own reflection. A true education system based on dialogue, participation produces critical mind. As a result of colonial education, the unquestioned knowledge seeps into the mind of the African without much resistance. The unchallenged knowledge rendered the uncritical mindset of the African people which helped the colonial power sail through the process of colonialism smoothly.

The schooling helped the oppressor to mould value and belief system according to the oppressor. It means passive receiving of colonial education was the acceptance of colonialism. It simply helped the colonial power trade on the African thought. The acceptance of itself is the surrender of one's own culture where people get stripped off from their older values. The antagonists turn into advocates of the oppressor. Their torture and class system look justified. The oppressed accept the oppression without any qualms. It all looks legitimate :

We too have changed our tune. We are the first in
the entire nine villages to send our son to the white
man's land. (*No Longer at Ease*, 21)

The above passage clearly shows the effect of colonial powers on the traditional life of Igbo people. The things which were the symbols of greatness in traditional life have now lost their value. Obi notices right from the time he lands in Nigeria that his country is no longer the Nigeria of his dreams but it has already advanced in corrupt practices such as taking bribe. When he returns from England, in the second chapter we find the contrast perception of Obi about Lagos before and after his trip to England. First as a young member of the village community, he accepts the romantic accounts of this place, the nearest thing to Europe where there is no darkness because at high the electric shines like the sun. But on his return he finds Lagos a place of dead dogs, bad smell and sewage.

Through educational system, the myth of inferiority complex is internalised by the colonizer. It means that the colonisers form the knowledge of their colonies.

In such a process, the colonised begins hating his selfhood, language, history, religion, and values. Therefore, the native elites accept the coloniser's attitude, morality, and values.

In a colonised country, European system of education trains native elites in a way to reject their traditional rules. The elites set a touchstone of the colonizer's value system as a scale to evaluate their assimilation within such a system. Self-esteem for the elites is the decolonization of mind and identity of the colonizer's bandage and the development of a real tribal and cultural identity. Educated people play an important role in tribal colonised society. In Achebe's Nigeria, education is considered as greatness and villagers compete with each to send their sons to European countries.

As Obi returns from England, he exhibits the first signs of his disrespect towards the local tradition, and he reshapes his previous belief that the Nigerian education system is capable of changing the society for better. Meantime, despite his family and Umuofia Progressive Union's contest, he decides to marry Clara that is another step in overlooking tradition. Indeed, the coloniser imposes his/her superiority on the natives who try to assimilate themselves with the coloniser. Achebe in his novel shows how this effort causes some binary relation among the characters. The novel shows the difference between two cultures, and Achebe puts emphasis on the superiority of English culture and depicts how colonialism and Western. Oriental's produce stereotyped images of Nigerians and Obi as corrupt. Consequently, such features have great impressions on the mind of Nigerians, which results in inferiority complex. Such characteristics invite the Nigerians to follow European's value and to forget their own culture, which results in the rejection of native values. Influence native youth are disinherited from their own folk culture, and are exposed to the alien value. Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* consistently argues :

Encounter of black and white people does not lead to the assimilation of black and white identity. For one thing, the white community does not allow the black community to become integrated into their supposedly superior culture. If such a thing happens, the colonisers' claim to political domination and economic exploitation becomes null and untenable. No genuine equality can be allowed, although some moments of controlled similarity will always be allowed to create momentary relief among the blacks. (*Black Skin, White Masks*, 17)

Fanon advocates a revolutionary and radical response on the parts of all oppressed and marginalised groups to return to one's traditions and values, and to reject the Settler's value. Thus the native discovers that his life, his breath, his heart beating heart are the same as those of the settler. He finds out that the settler's skin is not

of any more value than a native's skin; and it must be said that this discovery shakes the world in a very necessary manner.

Conclusion

In the name of education the European brought the odds in their favour without many qualms. The silent and unrealised ravage induced by the ideological centric of Education dimmed the logical faculty of the African. The consistent and systematic supply of information disarmed the Africans from their resistance, thus making the antagonist into the advocate of the western culture. Their westernised behaviour and inclination is well depicted in the character of Obi. His western education made him individualistic. As a result his way of looking at his own culture greets with revulsion. His new western belief made him alienated. Achebe believes that to fight against this hegemony, Africans should have their own education system and cultivate their own values.

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