

Education in 'an unnamed post-independent African country with clear resemblances to Nigeria'

Márta Roman

"Brassai Sámuel" High School, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

rmarty2002@yahoo.com

Abstract

Education is one of the basic institutions of any modern state. Therefore, its importance and role in society is unquestionable. But what happens if a culture, which formerly did not rely on an institutionalized education system, is made to adopt that of their oppressors? The present paper examines how different social categories relate to the issue of education in the context of a post-colonial African country depicted in Chinua Achebe's novel *A Man of the People*. The aim is to prove that similarly to other cultural elements that come from the White Man, education has an ambiguous position in both social and political spheres. It actually becomes a marketing product that can be sold or bought, publicly praised or denounced in order to achieve personal benefits. The paper shows that in Achebe's novel education is a means through which the broader topic of political corruption is approached, thus making it one of the most important elements of both corruption itself and the possible struggle against it.

Key words: postcolonial literature, Nigeria, education, postcolonial politics, neo-colonialism

Introduction

Much has been written about postcolonial literatures in recent decades, since the relationship between oppressors and the oppressed, dominating and dominated peoples has proved to be extremely fruitful. Postcolonial criticism showed how canonical texts of Western literature conveyed a stereotypical and thus basically flawed picture of colonized cultures in order to legitimate colonization (see Fanon 1968; Said 1978; Said 1993; Richards 18; Innes 9). At the same time, postcolonial literature tried to "write back" to the empire, expressing the natives' side of the events, together with their points of view and interpretations of the colonial situation. In this context, the present paper aims to analyse the rapport between the society of an African post-colonial state and a socio-cultural element that is the result of white domination: education.

Education is one of the basic institutions of any modern state. Therefore, its importance and role in society is unquestionable. But what happens if a culture, which formerly did not rely on an institutionalized education system, is made to adopt that of their oppressors? It is common knowledge that the first schools in African countries were established by missionaries and colonizers, a process that led to the development of a whole education system. So what could be the reaction of local people to this imposed situation? Would they try to abolish the white man's education as soon as Western domination is over, or would they incorporate it into the institutional system of their new free country? And how could freedom influence people's attitudes towards education? What functions, if any, can this colonial remnant play in a newly independent post-colonial state? This paper will look at how different social categories relate to the issue of education in the context of a post-colonial African country depicted in Chinua Achebe's novel *A Man of the People*. The aim is to prove that similarly to other cultural elements that come from the White Man, education has an ambiguous position in both social and political spheres. It

actually becomes a marketing product that can be sold or bought, publicly praised or denounced in order to achieve personal benefits.

The present paper is a shortened and slightly changed extract from my B.A. thesis. Its title comes from a critical response to *A Man of the People*, stressing the universality of the political situation depicted in the book (see Burt 360). I think this universality also applies to the roles fulfilled by education in the context presented in the novel. This is why I chose to use Burt's phrase in the title.

Contextualisation

Chinua Achebe's fourth novel was published in 1966 and belongs to the so-called period of "deception", when the newly independent Nigeria proved to be incompetent and unwilling to fulfil the dreams and expectations of those who fought for its liberation. It belongs to the category of independent/ modern postcolonial literature in Ashcroft's terms (6). It is written in "english" (see Ashcroft et al. 7-8) and, as most postcolonial writings, it foregrounds the perspective of the "Other." In Innes's terms, it is an example of the so-called "literature of disillusionment"¹ (17, 161-164). In a broader approach, it can be labelled as an Anglophone novel coming from Africa (see Shaffer's categorisation 17-22) that has already become a canonical text of English literature².

The novel is about a young school teacher called Odili Samalu who gets involved in the muddled political life of his postcolonial homeland. The story is set around 1964 at three places. One of these is a village called Anata, which is 300 miles from the capital city, and which is the homeland of the other main character, Chief M.A. Nanga. The other places where the events take place are Bori, the capital city, and Urua, a village 15 miles from Anata, which is Odili's birthplace. In the course of the novel the simple school teacher, Odili, who resents his former tutor, M.A. Nanga, for becoming a corrupt politician, almost becomes friends with and consequently similar to the person he originally disliked. But a personal matter turns things upside down and he will become Chief Nanga's greatest political opponent in the coming elections. The novel does not end with the electoral victory of either candidates, but with a military coup that puts an end both to the machinations of a corrupt political class and the aspirations of a young intellectual. This triggered a whole range of critical responses to the novel that focused on the roles and meanings of the coup in the context of the story and post-colonial countries in general. Some critics saw it as a prophecy (especially because there was a military coup in Nigeria two days after the book's publication). Others considered it a means to create an "African parable" or a way to emphasize the fact that in such situations democracy cannot exist. There were also critics who interpreted the coup as something positive: the only way out from a situation in which none of the options is good enough to provide a solution³. This way, the main topics of corruption and post-independence disillusionment were mostly discussed in the light of the military coup from the dénouement. In the following sections I will try to explain how the issue of education is connected to all this and what functions it has in the socio-political context presented in the novel.

The Issue of Education in *A Man of the People*

Although the major theme of the book is corruption, education seems to be an almost equally important topic: a lot of characters are closely connected to different levels of education,

and education itself is a widely discussed issue in the context of the novel's political discourse. First of all, the main character, Odili Samalu, is a schoolteacher at Anata Grammar School. He has always been a good enough student to win scholarships during his school days, which makes him proud of his achievements. Now he has applied for a scholarship to continue his studies in England and to visit Europe. Thus, his stance on education seems obvious: people should try to learn as much as possible, become professionals and be open to all kinds of knowledge. In his case the differentiation between black and white knowledge in education does not exist. However, it must be mentioned that the post-graduate course he applied for is not as important for him, as the opportunity of visiting Europe:

And in any case it wasn't too important whether I did the post- graduate course or not. As far as I was concerned the important thing was going to be the opportunity of visiting Europe which in itself must be a big education. My friend Andrew Kadibe, who did the same course the previous year, seemed to have got a big kick out of it. I don't mean the white girls---you can have those out here nowadays---but quite small things. I remember him saying for instance that the greatest delight of his entire visit to Britain was when, for the first time in his twenty-seven years, a white man---a taxi-driver I think---carried his suitcase and said 'Sir' to him. He was so thrilled he tipped the man ten shillings. We laughed a lot about it but I could so easily see it happen. (Chapter 2)

This shows not only the fact that education is a wide concept for Odili, incorporating travel experiences that do not necessarily provide formal tuition, but also the fact that he has applied for this grant first of all for the sake of a European trip, and not because of the post-graduate course. Consequently, foreign education opportunities in his case are in fact a means, a tool to achieve another goal: that of freely visiting Europe. Thus, education for professional development purposes is substituted by education for personal experiences and travelling opportunities.

Moreover, he admits having gone to university in order to become rich and have a comfortable life. However, his attitude changed by the time he finished university:

I had gone to the University with the clear intention of coming out again after three years as a full member of the privileged class whose symbol was the car. So much did I think of it in fact that, as early as my second year, I had gone and taken out a driver's licence and even made a mental note of the make of car I would buy. (It had a gadget which turned the seats into a bed in a matter of seconds.) But in my final year I had passed through what I might call a period of intellectual crisis brought on partly by my radical Irish lecturer in history and partly by someone who five years earlier had been by all accounts a fire-eating president of our Students' Union. (Chapter 11)

At the same time, education is what provides Odili the necessary knowledge and intellectual skills to realize how society and the political system in his country really function. At first he only says that "I had felt, like so many other educated citizens of our country, that things were going seriously wrong, without being able to say just how" (Chapter 4). By the end of the novel, however, his personal experiences in the world of politics will make him realize how and why things are getting worse and worse. He realizes that not only political corruption, but people's infinite passivity and self-interest are what make the country stagnate.

In another flow of ideas, it is also worth mentioning that Odili's way of thinking is that of a typical intellectual. For him, the best way to acknowledge the value of a martyr is to name a school

after him. Leaders of the military regime pronounced Max “a Hero of the Revolution.” Upon this event Odili thought that: “Max was indeed a hero and a martyr; and I propose to found a school --- a new type of school, I hasten to add --- in my village to his memory” (Chapter 13). However, the fact that he emphasizes “a new type of school” shows that he does not agree with the current state and ways of education. He sees that education is in fact a political tool, and deeply disagrees with such an approach. This might be one of the reasons why he does not accept Nanga’s offer to take the scholarship with some pocket-money, and travel abroad, instead of opposing him in the local elections. This is obviously bribery, in which “education abroad” functions as the currency.

Odili’s appreciation of education is also apparent from the way he thinks about a possible female partner. He does not believe that higher education is absolutely necessary for a potential girl-friend, but appreciates it, and thinks that a certain amount of tuition is essential. This becomes obvious at two occasions: when he thinks about introducing Edna to Max, and when he writes his last, insulting letter to her. In the former case he expresses his view that:

Edna might not be a lawyer or sophisticated in the nail-varnish, eyebrow- shadow line like Eunice but [...] as far as I was concerned she had just the right amount of education. I had nothing against professional women--in fact I liked them in their way--but if emancipation meant people like that other lady lawyer who came to sleep with illiterate Chief Nanga for twenty-five pounds a time (as he confided to me next morning), then they could keep it. (Chapter 12)

However, when he wants to insult her, Odili calls Edna stupid and uneducated, and thus unworthy of the friendship of a university educated intellectual:

'Dear Edna,' I said, 'I wonder who ever put it into your beautiful empty head that I want to take you from your precious man. What on earth do you think I would want to do with a girl who has no more education than lower Elementary?' (Chapter 12)

All this shows a kind of pride in his status as an intellectual, in spite of the general anti-intellectual atmosphere of the country. Moreover, dismissingly calling Chief Nanga “illiterate” expresses his rejection of this anti-intellectualism and lack of proper knowledge in general. This is also expressed in the way he reflects on Chief Nanga in Chapter 2: “Just think of such a cultureless man going abroad and calling himself Minister of Culture. Ridiculous. This is why the outside world laughs at us.”

All in all, we can say that despite a few attempts to use education to achieve some private goals (that of travelling to Europe, or gaining Mrs. Nanga’s confidence to get some information about Edna), Odili values education and the status of being an intellectual. He has got a positive attitude towards it, and even refuses to realize his dreams, when education is offered to him as bribery.

Chief Nanga, on the other hand, has more confusing connections with education. He was a schoolteacher, and probably had spent some time studying abroad. In the novel he is on the point of getting a doctorate title from an American university, which makes him very proud:

'They are going to give me doctorate degree,' he announced proudly. 'Doctor of Laws, LL. D.'

'That's great,' I said. 'Congratulations.'

'Thank you, my brother.'

'So the Minister will become "Chief the Honourable Doctor M.A. Nanga",' intoned the journalist [...]

'You no see say the title fit my name pem,' said the Minister with boyish excitement, and we all said yes it suited him perfectly.

'But the man wey I like him name pass na "Chief the Honourable Alhaji Doctor Mongo Sego, M.P.",' said the Minister somewhat wistfully. (Chapter 2)

Similarly, being called "Owner of book" by one of his admirers makes him proud, as this meant "the ownership of the white man's language" (see Chapter 1).

Furthermore, in some cases he expresses his appreciation of educated people; he thinks that they should occupy leading positions in the country. This is why he suggests that Odili should take up a public services job in the capital. He also tries to sound more English in the presence of Mrs. Akilo and sends his own children to English Grammar Schools. He even wants a more educated second wife to accompany him to public events, as the current Mrs. Nanga is "too bush" for that. Moreover, in the company of teachers he praises their job and expresses his regrets for leaving his position in order to take up a government office:

Sometimes I use to regret ever leaving the teaching field. Although I am a minister today I can swear to God that I am not as happy as when I was a teacher. [...] True to God who made me,' he insisted. 'I use to regret it. Teaching is a very noble profession.' (Chapter 1)

This, however, does not seem to be an honest declaration, as the listeners started laughing. But Nanga assures them of the seriousness of his thoughts:

At this point everybody just collapsed with laughter not least of all the Honourable Minister himself, nor me, for that matter. The man's assurance was simply unbelievable. Only he could make such a risky joke---or whatever he thought he was making---at that time, when teachers all over the country were in an ugly, rebellious mood. When the laughter died down, he put on a more serious face and confided to us: 'You can rest assured that those of us in the Cabinet who were once teachers are in full sympathy with you.' (Chapter 1)

Yet, when his interests require, Chief Nanga sustains that university education is of no value and that people should not be too concerned about it because professionals graduating universities are worthless, and common people without any formal preparation can become Ministers and occupy leading positions in governmental offices. However, Odili mentions about Nanga's attitude towards education that:

In 1948 Mr. Nanga could admit, albeit light- heartedly, to a certain secret yearning for higher education; in 1964 he was valiantly proving that a man like him was better without it. Of course he had not altogether persuaded himself, or else he would not have shown such excitement over the LL.D. arranged for him from some small, back-street college. (Chapter 2)

This shows that his attitude in fact changes so as to meet the taste of the people he is talking to and according to the general opinions and feelings of the country in the matter. Thus, in a time of "a general anti-intellectual feeling" he has to be anti-intellectual. But in my opinion, trying to conform to the majority's taste does not excuse Nanga for being completely ignorant of cultural and intellectual matters that his position would require. His deep disinterest in and scorn for the

first ever book exhibition in the country by local authors is only one example of how uncultured and uneducated he really is:

'Book exhibition?' asked Elsie. 'How they de make that one again?'

'My sister, make you de ask them for me-o. I be think say na me one never hear that kind thing before. But they say me na Minister of Culture and as such I suppose to be there. I no fit say no. Wetin be Minister? No be public football? So instead for me to sidon rest for house like other people I de go knack grammar for this hot afternoon. You done see this kind trouble before?' (Chapter 6)

The almost encrypted message of this conversation in pidgin is that Nanga feels that the book exhibition he has to open is unimportant and he would rather stay at home and rest, but his position as Minister of Culture requires him to be present. Odili's subsequent comments make it even clearer that Nanga had nothing to do with literature or writers: "I had expected that in a country where writers were so few they would all be known personally to the Minister of Culture. But it was clear Chief Nanga hadn't even heard the man's name before" (Chapter 6).

In addition, he tries to bribe Odili with offering him the scholarship for the foreign post-graduate course he has applied for. Thus, we can say that in several ways Minister Nanga uses education both in its conceptual and pragmatic forms as a currency in exchanging favours and achieving his political goals. His attitude towards education is obviously contradictory and can be seen as a result of his desire to be popular and thus keep his position of power. He is a typical corrupt politician who has no principles and who changes his words and opinions according to how they best suit his goals.

Women appearing in the novel are also strongly affected by the issue of education. Mrs. Nanga, for example, is an Igbo woman with no special training. Some of her major concerns, however, are explicitly educational. One of these is the fact that her children cannot speak their parents' native language. They only understand English. This is why she tries to expose them to the Igbo culture and traditions as much as possible.

Secondly, as she confesses to Odili, she could not continue her studies in her youth because it was considered unnecessary for a woman. Thus, she was practically forced into getting married:

'I passed the entrance to a secondary school,' she said wistfully, 'but Eddy's father and his people kept at me to marry him, marry him, and then my own parents joined in; they said what did a girl want with so much education? So I foolishly agreed. I wasn't old enough to refuse. Edna is falling into the same trap. Imagine a girl straight from college not being allowed to teach even for one year and look around. Anyway what is my share in it? Let her come quick-quick to enjoy Chief Nanga's money before it runs away.' She laughed bitterly. (Chapter 9)

It is obvious that she regrets not continuing her studies, especially now, that her lack of education is one of the main reasons she cannot fulfil the social duties that the wife of a politician should. Consequently, her husband has decided he needs another, educated wife, who can accompany him to public events. As Mrs. Nanga has no special training, she has to accept another woman in her marriage to fulfil the extra duties the status of being the wife of a public personality requires.

Another female character with close links to the educational issue is Edna. She is young, beautiful and underwent some kind of education, considered to be enough for the wife of a Minister. She is too young and could have a bright future if she continued her studies, but her father made a deal with Mr. Nanga, and now she has to marry him. In spite of having some basic

education, she acts as a traditional Igbo woman who has to obey her father at all costs. It takes a great deal of pressure to make her act according to her feelings and own needs, instead of mechanically obeying men. She can be seen as a kind of transition between Mrs. Nanga (completely traditional, mostly uneducated) and Eunice, Max's fiancée, a law school graduate with full control of her actions and decisions, and who helps Max organize the new political party and his campaign for the elections. She can also use a gun, and eventually shoots Max's assassin.

It is obvious thus that the issue of female education is closely related with the roles women can fulfil in the society depicted by the novel. In the context of a very segregated world in terms of gender roles and rights, it seems that education is a way for women to become valued and appreciated. It is interesting that, theoretically, men and women are considered to be equal, but as it explicitly appears in the text, woman-equality only refers to equality at the polls. In other aspects of life they are inferior to men and have to act accordingly: cook, look after the children, accept new wives and obey their husbands. Moreover, even the accepted level of their education has a limit: while a university degree can offer them a relatively high degree of independence, autonomy and respect, most men consider that a doctorate degree is not for women. For example, when Chief Nanga's future title is discussed, Odili asks about it being used for his wife as well. The rest of the conversation shows how the other men reason against such a thing:

'What about "Chief Dr Mrs"?' I threw in mischievously.

'That one no sweet for mouth,' said the Minister. 'E no catch.'

'Wetin wrong with am?' asked Mrs. John. 'Because na woman get am e no go sweet for mouth. I done talk say na only for election time woman de get equality for dis our country.'

'No be so, madam,' said the journalist. 'You no see how the title rough like sand-paper for mouth: "Dr Chief Mrs". E no catch at all.' (Chapter 2)

It is undeniable, however, that education has a very important role in the way women are treated and expected to behave. It seems that the more educated a woman is, the more equally she is treated. Educated women are accepted to make their own decisions, seduce men for the sheer pleasure of the flesh and to interfere in their set programmes. Mrs. Akilo, for example, is a highly educated native lady in the presence of whom Mr. Nanga tries to sound more English than ever before and for the sake of whom he cancels in the last minute the dinner party he was to attend. Furthermore, a more open sexual behaviour of educated, autonomous women is regarded as normal. They can choose or change their partners, have equal roles in a relationship, or even have several different men in their lives. For example, Elsie has several other sexual partners while being engaged, and Eunice seems to be Max's equal in their relationship. In case of traditional families, however, this is unimaginable, as the role of women is reduced to giving birth to children. Therefore, it seems that the only way for a woman to gain independence and autonomy is to graduate a university and have a career. Also, it seems that female sexuality is more openly accepted in case of educated, independent women.

Education and the attitude towards school and learning can also be seen as a marker of the gap between generations. This can be observed at two levels. First of all, Odili openly admits that he could never understand his father who only seems to be preoccupied about new wives, more children and social status. He has been an interpreter of the District Officer during colonial rule, and is now a pensioner involved in the local branch of the P.O.P. Odili, on the other hand, is mainly concerned with his own education which according to his father is already too much. He thinks his son should not waste his time teaching or trying to learn more. Since Odili has already got more

training than the majority of the leading politicians, Hezekiah Samalu would rather see his son working at a well-paid government office and owning a car.

Secondly, education and the attitude towards it also mark the gap between the old and young ways of perceiving political duties and leadership. Old politicians, like Nanga, have only got basic education and are only concerned with keeping their positions and getting richer. They have an ambiguous attitude towards education, and use it as a tool and a means of propaganda to reach their goals. They are corrupt and try to take advantages of the great social network they are part of, using, among other things, education as a currency to exchange favours. In their case, personal ambition is only about money and power. It has nothing to do with their individual or a general intellectual development, and is obviously superior to the nation's needs. Young educated people, on the other hand, want no compromises, no corruption and no empty performance. They believe in the professional opinion of university educated people (see the case of the Minister of Finance), and do not agree with the way the country is led. They consider that politicians should work for the country instead of taking advantage of its situation. They want no corruption, no favours and no compromises. Consequently, the clash between these two will inevitably be violent.

Finally, education seems to be one of the defining aspects of the social context presented in the novel. All the major political and social events as well as the atmosphere of the country are somehow related to education and learned knowledge. First of all, a "general anti-intellectual feeling" characterizes this country, where educated professionals are either pushed aside (like the Minister of Finance who proposed a plan to avoid inflation), or simply do not get involved into politics. This anti-intellectual atmosphere is first of all sustained by the leading political elite, who lack appropriate training for the positions they fulfil, and thus want to secure their government seats by other means. They associate education with the "white man" and a "foreign enemy" who wants to take control of the country. This is why the only professionally trained member of the government is declared a traitor when he tries to do something for the benefit of the country instead of following the personal interests of some politicians. Thus, in connection with the fired Finance Minister who had a Ph.D. in public finance, the Prime Minister declares that: "Never again must we entrust our destiny and the destiny of Africa to the hybrid class of Western educated and snobbish intellectuals who will not hesitate to sell their mothers for a mess of pottage..." (Chapter1). Moreover, newspapers that are highly controlled by the leading political party will also convey the same message for the public:

The Daily Chronicle, an official organ of the P. O. P., had pointed out in an editorial that the Miscreant Gang, as the dismissed ministers were now called, were all university people and highly educated professional men. [...] Let us now and for all time extract from our body-politic [...] all those decadent stooges versed in text-book economics and aping the white man's mannerisms and way of speaking. We are proud to be Africans. Our true leaders are not those intoxicated with their Oxford, Cambridge or Harvard degrees but those who speak the language of the people. Away with the damnable and expensive university education which only alienates an African from his rich and ancient culture and puts him above his people...

This cry was taken up on all sides. Other newspapers pointed out that even in Britain where the Miscreant Gang got its 'so-called education' a man need not be an economist to be Chancellor of the Exchequer or a doctor to be Minister of Health. What mattered was loyalty to the party. (Chapter 1)

Secondly, schools and political activity are closely connected in this novel. Party meetings and campaign speeches are not only held on school premises, but many teachers and principals are

actively involved in politics. The Proprietor of the school where Odili works at the beginning of the novel is “active in politics at the local council level” (Chapter 1). Therefore, in the hope of some kind of reward, he organizes a huge reception festivity upon Nanga’s visit to Anata:

He insisted that the students should mount a guard of honour stretching from the main road to the school door. And the teachers too were to stand in a line at the end of the student queue, to be introduced. Mr Nwege who regularly read such literature as 'Toasts---How to Propose Them' was very meticulous about this kind of thing. (Chapter 1)

Odili mentions about the Proprietor’s motives that he:

...was always grumbling because his services to the P. O. P. had not been rewarded with the usual prize-appointment to some public corporation or other. [...] Perhaps he was hoping for something in the proposed new corporation which would take over the disposal of all government unserviceable property (like old mattresses, chairs, electric fans, disused typewriters and other junk) which at present was auctioned by civil servants. (Chapter 1)

Another way in which education and politics are intertwined in the context of the novel is expressed by the fact that many ministers, such as Nanga, have been teachers before becoming politicians. It is not their knowledge or education that made them fit for the position, however, but “talking.” Chief Nanga mentions at a certain point that politics and teaching is the same, as both of them are about talking: “Talking is now in my blood ---from teaching into politics---all na so so talk talk” (Chapter 6). Thus, in the context of this novel, the job of both teachers and politicians seem to be reduced to (empty) talking.

In addition, the social and political situation depicted in the book is shown to be highly corrupt. This corruption, however, is expressed in terms of a specific knowledge, which also accentuates the anti-intellectual atmosphere. In this respect Odili remarks in Chapter 2 that: “A common saying in the country after Independence was that it didn’t matter what you knew but who you knew.” Reading through the events of the story will prove this saying to be true, as Nanga is an almost completely “illiterate” person who in his position of Minister of Culture does not read and does not care about literature, culture or anything connected to his area of activity. Everything can be reduced to a wide personal social network and “friendship”.

All in all, I would say that it is no wonder the narrator puts so much emphasis on the educational details and intellectual capacities of the characters he presents, as education is one of the main driving forces of this society. Unfortunately its value is turned upside down in every possible way, and it has become an essentially ambiguous (though preponderantly negative) element of this post-colonial country.

Conclusions

As we have seen, the main topic of the novel is political corruption presented from the point of view of an intellectual. Thus, the issue of education and knowledge become a powerful means through which to approach the main theme. Education seems to have an extremely ambiguous status in the socio-political context of this story, accentuating the hybrid character of this post-colonial country. First of all, as the product of colonization, education, especially higher education, is regarded as something negative, and connected to white domination. Adding to it the relative ignorance of political leaders, education and intellectualism become symbols of foreign domination

and threat. This way they are used to consolidate the power of the local political elite by naming an enemy against which they fight for the wellbeing of common people. Thus, education is presented as an ideological tool in the hands of local politicians to create a general atmosphere that secures their power position despite their corruption and incompetence. However, this general anti-intellectual attitude also impinges the country into neo-colonialism, as its leaders are so preoccupied with their personal wealth and benefit, that they do not even realize how their American “benefactors” and European business partners in fact take advantage of them.

On the other hand, when interests require it political attitude towards education changes completely. We have seen how happy Nanga is about his American doctorate degree, or how he pretends to care about teachers when he is among them. He even becomes nostalgic about his previous educational career, saying that he regrets giving it up for politics (see Chapter 1).

As the result of this powerful anti-educational propaganda, at times even intellectuals become sceptic about it. They are highly passive in matters of politics, and those who get involved are either corrupt or expect to get some advantages or benefits out of it. Even Odili has an ambiguous attitude towards it.

At the same time, we have seen how education is closely related to the status of women in this country. Despite all the negative propaganda, school and higher education seem to be the only way for women to achieve autonomy and independence from under male domination.

All things considered, we can say that education performs several functions in the postcolonial society depicted by the novel, having a basically ambiguous status in the socio-political scene. It is a political tool through which power is secured and people are united against a “foreign enemy.” It is also an exchange currency with which benefits or favours can be traded, thereby becoming a powerful element of corruption. Thus, we can say that it is in fact so intertwined with politics that it rather serves political ambitions and goals than valuable intellectual development. Through its effect on women’s lives, however, it retains something of its positive aspects: it is a social force that can improve life quality. In addition, the high number of contradictory opinions and statements about education shows that it is in fact an important social institution but the population of this young independent country does not yet know how to relate to it. It is a remnant of the white man’s domination in a country that traditionally had no institutionalized education, and thus it is natural that people have doubts or fears about it. It is also unsurprising thus, that it is used for manipulation.

In my opinion, this contradictory and ambiguous status of education that the novel presents is not only an important aspect of post-independent socio-political scene but it also serves as a statement on behalf of the author. Achebe thus brings critique against the silent and passive intellectuals who let the situation to get out of control. This is best expressed in the last chapter when Odili ironically mentions after the military coup that: “Overnight everyone began to shake their heads at the excesses of the last regime, at its graft, oppression and corrupt government: newspapers, the radio, the hitherto silent intellectuals and civil servants---everybody said what a terrible lot...” Moreover, as not even Odili proves to be more adequate for political leadership than Nanga, Joe Obi’s view of intellectuals escaping the author’s criticism (see Morrison 128-129) cannot be sustained any more. Their exclusion from power is not an excuse for their passivity, and using education for personal welfare (e.g. travelling to Europe) is not better than the machinations of the present government that uses it for political purposes. Therefore, one of the fundamental problems of this post-colonial country is the attitude towards education, as in its proper status, this could constitute an effective means to fight corruption, inflation or the

spreading of neo-colonial domination. In its absence however, the only alternative solution seems to be a military coup.

Works Cited

- Achebe, Chinua. *A Man of the People*. (1966). Print.
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge, 1989. Print.
- Burt, Daniel S. "Chinua Achebe." *The Literary 100 Revised Edition: A Ranking of the Most Influential Novelists, Playwrights, and Poets of All Time*. New York: Facts on File, 2009, 357-361. Print.
- Fanon, Frantz *The Wretched of the Earth* [1961]. Trans. by Constance Farrington. New York: Grove Press, 1968. Print.
- Innes, C. L. *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print.
- Irele, F. Abiola and Simon Gikandi (Ed.). *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature*. Vol. I-II. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004. Print.
- Izevbaye, Dan S. "West African Literature in English: Beginnings to the Mid-Seventies." *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature*. Irele and Gikandi vol. II. 472 – 503. Print.
- Marx, John. "Postcolonial literature and the Western literary canon." *The Cambridge Companion of Post-colonial Literary Studies*. Ed. Neil Lazarus. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008, 83-96. Print.
- Morrison, Jago. *The Fiction of Chinua Achebe: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Print.
- Richards, David. "Framing Identities." *A Concise Companion to Postcolonial Literature*. Ed. Shirley Chew and David Richards. Malaysia: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, 9-28. Print.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Random House, 1978. Print.
- *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993. Print.
- Shaffer, Brian W. *Reading the Novel in English 1950 – 2000*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006. Print
- Wright, Derek. "African Literature and Post-Independence Disillusionment." *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature*. Irele and Gikandi vol. II. 797 – 808. Print

Notes

¹ For details about the characteristics of this type of literature see Izevbaye 494-495; Wright 797-808.

² According to John Marx, the canonization of postcolonial literatures is a process of three kinds of relationship between postcolonial literature and the western canon: the "repudiation" of the western canon by postcolonial texts, the "revision" of the western canon through rewriting its texts and the "mainstreaming" of postcolonial literature in form of a new multicultural canon that is included into university curricula. (83 - 95)

³ For a comprehensive synthesis of the critical responses to Achebe's *A Man of the People* see Morrison 113-130.