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Intellectuals Power and Responsibility in Obi Egbuna's the Madness of Didi

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Abstract:

This paper questions the role and responsibility of African intellectuals in their communities as depicted by Obi Egbuna in The Madness of Didi. Although set in the 1980's, the novel is dealing with a reality that is still relevant to contemporary Africa. The legitimate questions among many others are: should African intellectuals cross their hands and watch, as mere spectators, the socio-political life unfolds in their communities? Do they have a part to play in the advocacy of issues of their times? Do they have the power to make things happen or to change the course of things? The present article tries to answer these interrogations.

Keywords: Intellectuals, responsibility, power, social progress

1. Introduction

The years that followed independences, African people entrusted the fates of their countries to the Black elite that emerged from the colonial period. This elite came to power and controlled the political and economic power in the new States. But very soon, problems such as corruption, bad management and social injustice began threatening the future of the newly independent countries. A clear demarcation line has been drawn between the ruling body and the masses. Glaring forms of injustice show a deep desire of those in power to maintain the masses in eternal oppression and servitude. Then, in many societies, some people, especially intellectuals volunteered to fill the task of awakening people's awareness on the urgency of a struggle for a reversal of roles.

The Madness of Didi is set in the Africa of the 1980's, and the easy optimism and cynicism which characterized the early years of independence had been replaced by the awareness of a diseased society and a firm desire to seek alternatives to these problems. Obi Egbuna's novel belongs to those types of novel which suggest the revolutionary action as a solution to the socio-political crises in postcolonial Africa, and as commented by Imelkeddeh, 'it is not optimism, in itself that distinguishes these novels; it is the positive manipulation of group action that signals the possible advent of a new order. To that extent, they express a new reality which marks them out as imaginative strides towards an African recovery.'¹

The Madness of Didi is showing intellectuals as playing central roles in the enlightenment of the masses, and in the betterment of their situations. An outstanding characteristic of Egbuna's novel is the ability of its intellectual characters to get connected with the illiterate characters. Egbuna assigns enlightened intellectuals' significant roles in imagining alternatives to the problems of the African masses. He holds that an enlightened leadership of intellectuals could be very useful in leading Nigerians and Africans in general beyond the impasses they have reached. Thus, Egbuna is calling upon African intellectuals to use their knowledge constructively in order to ensure the continent's full development. In the light of the Marxist critical approach, this article is assessing the role, responsibility and impact of African intellectuals in the social progress of their communities as presented in *The Madness of Didi*. This work is structured around (1) intellectuals and inspiring leadership (2), the responsibility of intellectuals in social progress and (3) indicators of the power of intellectuals in social change.

2. Intellectuals and Inspiring Leadership in the Madness of Didi

For the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, leadership is 'the state or position of being a leader.'² In his critical book *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Chinua Achebe, a Nigerian writer and critic defines a leader in these terms: 'leaders are in the language of psychologists, role models. People look up to them to copy their actions, behavior and even mannerism.'³ A leader is then a person who shows the path for others to follow. In *The Madness of Didi*⁴, Obi Egbuna has built a story and put at its center a Christ-like character, Professor Didi, in the sense that he accepts to lead

¹Imelkeddeh, 'Ideology and Revolutionary Action in the Contemporary African Novel', in Samuel OmoAsein and Albert OluAshaolu (eds), *Studies in The African Novel: Modern Essays on African literature*, Ibadan University Press, (Ibadan; 1936) P.37.

²A. S. Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, Sixth Edition, Oxford University Press, (New York; 2000), P.23

³Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble With Nigeria*, Fourth Dimension Publishing Co., Ltd. (Enugu; 1983), P.37.

⁴Obi Egbuna, *The Madness of Didi*, Fontana Books, (Glasgow; 1980). Page references to this edition will be made directly in the text.

the masses and he even gives his life in sacrifice for their cause. He is an intellectual who rebels himself against the unjust behaviors of the ruling body towards the poor masses. He sides with the poor and the needy to fight injustice and misuse of power. Throughout the novel, he is of all the battles to ensure the welfare of the masses. Professor Didi symbolizes what intellectuals should be in our modern African societies. He is a well-educated person who went abroad to further his studies. His level of education and degrees are stated in the novel as follow:

He came to this country on a church scholarship, you know. He was going to be a priest. Brought over from Africa by some missionary. An Irish priest called father O'Dennehy. Owed everything he got to that priest. His entire university studies. First Class Honours Degree, would you believe it. Then followed strings of other degrees. They even made him a professor (P.179).

From these lines, it appears obvious that professor Didi is a well-educated person who got many degrees and university titles, which qualify him as an intellectual. In *The Madness of Didi*, Professor Didi is at the root of the socio-political change that took place in the novel. In the eyes of the villagers, he is a hero and students consider him as an inspiring leader. When he came back from England, Obi Egbuna made him live on a hill called "haunted hills" (P.88); but Didi was then able to transform the place into a 'temple of knowledge' (P.88) as called by the youth. Students who had a deep admiration for Professor Didi were all the time going to his place to learn from the 'old man' (P.88) as they affectionately called him. Professor Didi also enjoyed these moments of share with the young people as he puts: 'how can I miss this opportunity to learn from the young if it means no more than seeing a reflection of what I used to be' (P.85) This clearly shows that, as an intellectual, Didi has understood that he can play a significant role in his community and especially towards the youth, he can be an as an inspiring leader to them. A good leader is a person who has the ability to gather people around himself and show them the path or the way to take. People always want to consult him before undertaking whatever. In the narrative of *The Maddness of Didi*, students were in the permanent company of Didi as the narrator reveals in the following extract:

It also became a common sight to see long-trouserred or attractively-skirted students in our village. Because the college where he taught was so close, his students were always coming to his house to see him. That he was very popular with the students was plain to see. They came to see him, whether they have something important to see him about or not. And he was ever ready to receive them. They were fascinated by his style of life and loved the way his house was made up. It attracted them like a magnet (P.88)

The above abstract makes it clear that students have a deep admiration for Professor Didi because he proved as a medium for them to communicate with one another and to exchange points of view over crucial social issues of their times. Leaders should be closely in contact with the masses because the latter have many expectations from them and their lives are the reflection of the way they are ruled. That is what is articulated by Obi Egbuna in *The Madness of Didi*. A leader is thus a person who is ready to give more than receive. What matters most for a good leader is the welfare of the people he is leading. In *The Madness of Didi*, Professor Didi was also very near to peasants and the illiterate people who lived in bad conditions. Their welfare is his first and foremost concern, and many of them see in him an efficient torch bearer who can help them to come out from their situations. So Didi is not only popular with his students or his intellectual likes, but also with the common people. The narrator describes Didi's attitude towards the masses in the novel as follows:

But his popularity with the students was nothing in comparison with his popularity with our village community. He knew the peasant's souls even more than he understood the students' intellect. He got the students with the sharpness of his mind and the common villagers with his disarming simplicity. People never stop talking in the village about how our Didi was different from other men who had been abroad to study and had returned. He was unassuming and natural which contrasted sharply with the condescending ostentation of others. (Page 85, 86)

It is clear from the above statement that Professor Didi is a person who had a concern for all the villagers: intellectuals and illiterate people as well. This is very admirable in the novel but when we come back to reality, what we observe is that, in most cases, it is not all intellectuals who accept to mingle with common people. Many of them consider themselves superior to illiterate people. They forsake their duty of educating and fighting for the masses' welfare. They rather shut themselves in ivory towers whereby people could not reach them. As Achebe will wonder: 'As a class, you and I and our friends who comprise the elite are incredibly blind? We refuse to see what we do not want to see. That is why we have not brought the changes which our society must undergo or be written off'.⁵ But Obi Egbuna holds that the masses problems should also be intellectuals' problems. In the class division that we witness in our modern societies, intellectuals ought to be on the side of powerless in order to help them in their fight for survival.

A leader is a person whose life should inspire admiration and imitation. He should incite in people the desire to be like him and people should have a good testimony of him. In *The Madness of Didi*, little Obi and Nkechi are two children who had a deep admiration for Professor Didi and this greatly influenced their lives in the novel. They affectionately called him Uncle Didi. Obi once said that: 'Uncle Didi was different from any other man I have ever known and was humble about it as well' (P.84). As indicated here, people and especially the young ones have a great respect for Professor Didi. If people so entrusted him, it is because he is worthy of it. Since the first day that little Obi met Professor Didi, he made of him his role model. He admired Professor Didi's way of life and philosophy. Thus, Didi has contributed a lot in the building of little Obi's character and personality. It is him who has transformed his life. Indeed, Obi was an orphan and when he met Didi; the latter became as a father to him. He gave him advice and inspiration that directed him in the choice of his future career. It is then without surprise that we read toward the end of the novel that Obi has decided to become a writer, just like Didi himself. Obi told Uncle Didi at the hospital when the latter was dying that: 'you came in my life when I needed a father, when I needed a good head on my shoulders. And you have given me both. I want you to see for yourself what new tongue

⁵Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble With Nigeria*, op. cit. P.30.

you have put in my mouth, what new thirst for knowledge you have put in my brains, what a new man you have made of me.' (P.205). As we can understand from this extract, it is Didi who has transformed the life of Obi and it is important to underline that, the future of a country lays in the good education of its children. So, leaders, especially intellectuals should be conscious enough of this reality, to become a source of inspiration for children. It is the same point of view that is expressed by Ngugi a Thiong'o, a famous Keynan writer when he wrote:

Children are the future of any society. If you want to know the future of a society, look at the eye of the children. If you want to maim the future of any society, you simply maim the children. Thus, the struggle for the survival of our future. The quantity and quality of that survival in the measurement of the development of our country.⁶

The above quote clearly shows how important the youth is for the future of a country. So, intellectuals should implement all actions necessary in the building of the character of the young people. This is part of the kind of leadership that Obi Egbuna is promoting in *The Madness of Didi*. It is the same advice that Chinua Achebe in his critical work *The Trouble with Nigeria* when he said: 'it is the duty of enlightened citizens to lead the way in the discovery and to create an atmosphere conducive to their emergence if this conscious effort is not made, good leaders like good money will be driven out by bad.'⁷

2.1. The Responsibility of Intellectuals in Social Progress

According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, 'responsibility' reads as the fact of 'having the job or duty, of doing something or taking care of somebody or something so that you must be blamed if something goes wrong.'⁸The part of the definition that fits the analyses in this article is 'the duty of doing something or taking care of something.' Generally, in life, we are sometimes inevitably responsible for something or somebody who is under our care. That is why for example, parents are often responsible for their children, and leaders are responsible for the people they lead. So, responsibility here refers to the ability of some people who are equipped with some prerogatives to protect others and to guide them in whatever they do. In the preceding discussions, we put it that professor Didi in *The Madness of Didi* is looked at by the masses as an inspiring leader. Now we will see how he has used his position of leader to help people and raise their consciousness on crucial issues undermining their community.

An important responsibility which Obi Egbuna has endowed professor Didi with, in the novel, is that of educating the masses. The writer depicted Didi as a very peaceful man who believed strongly in freedom and brotherhood. Thus, he made him play a great role in the lives of all people around him especially in the life of young people. Didi is, as said earlier, an inspiring leader to the youth of the fictional village of Aguna. Thus, we understand that for Obi Egbuna, the first role intellectuals should play in their communities is that of education towards the masses and especially the youth, because if the young people are educated, it is the future of the countries that is thus ensured. In the novel, when professor Didi came back from England, Obi Egbuna made him live in a forbidden place called the 'Haunted Hills' (p.88). This place was considered forbidden because of the terrible things that happened there. In fact, Didi as a child used to live there with his parents; but an influenza epidemic killed all his parents and this place became in the eyes of the villagers a 'haunted one'. The narrator described the place in the novel as follows: 'No man ever went up there. Everyone in the village knew this. The whole world knew about that hill. It was a haunted place. Nothing up there but ruins. All the kids were constantly warned never to venture up there.' (P.27). So, through this passage, we see where Obi Egbuna made professor Didi live. But what is remarkable about it is that, when Didi moved there he has been able to transform this cursed place into a near paradise; for we are told that he destroyed the ruins and built a new house. And he changed the 'Haunted hills' into a 'Temple' as the following passage reveals it in the novel: 'They soon stopped calling the place the 'Hill of Haunted Ruins'. The new affectionate name for it because the Temple' (P.88). This change is meant by the author to show how an intellectual can change the course of things and give back vitality to despaired situations of life. He was also able to confront some negative superstitious beliefs that are keeping African societies back. People believed that, the hills were haunted just because an influenza epidemic has swept over there. Another interpretation that could be made of this situation in the novel is that, through this sequence, Obi Egbuna is urging Africans to be patriotic, and to love their countries and homelands, whatever happens. The behavior of Didi can be qualified as true patriotism. An outstanding characteristic of a developed country is the patriotism of the people. And a patriot in the terms of Chinua Achebe is:

A person who loves his country is not a person who says he loves his country. He is not even a person who shouts or swears or recites or sing his love of his country. He is one who cares deeply about the happiness and well-being of his country and all its people.⁹

So, the first responsibility of professor Didi in the education of the masses was that of instilling in them the sense of patriotism. Didi himself, as we can notice, is a person who has a deep love for his native soil and there is a certain kind of telepathy between his native soil and him. In this sense, the narrator said about him that 'he felt this land was again reconciled to his soul, that this soil of his fathers had once again become part of him... yes, he was a man in love with his native land after being away from it for many years' (P.46). It is then clear from this passage that professor Didi is a man who cares a lot about the welfare of his country. The fact that Professor Didi decided to rebuild the house on the haunted hills is very symbolic. It is true that, it is only a house but, Obi Egbuna is using this instance to urge African to love their countries and to put themselves at work in order to rebuild all what have been destroyed. For the author, it is necessary for Africans to become conscious of these realities and behave accordingly. Professor Didi is an intellectual who owns many degrees that could have ensured him a good job in a University in England where he studied. He could have even chosen to remain in Europe as many Africans do today. But Obi Egbuna made him come back to Africa and especially, live

⁶NgugiWaThiong'o, *Moving The Center*, Heinemann, (London; 1993) P.76.

⁷Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble With Nigeria*, op. cit. P.30.

⁸A. S. Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, Sixth Edition, op. cit. P.1002.

⁹Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble With Nigeria*, op. cit. P.18.

in his village where he could contribute to the building of his community. Hence, he is sending strong signal to African intellectuals. He is telling them that they should not be separated from their societies or consider themselves superior to the poor masses. Their superiority which is symbolized by their education, Egbuna seems to say, should be put at a good use for the people. That is to guide people and help them in the making of their choices. Intellectuals should be at the center of the changes that are being operated in their societies. In the same line of thinking, Chinua Achebe declared in his critical book *The Trouble with Nigeria*:

But arduous as the task is, Nigerian educated elite must understand that they have no choice but to address themselves to it or receive history's merciless indictment. All those enlightened and thoughtful Nigerians who wring that hand in daily anguish on account of our wretched performance as a nation must best is themselves to the patriotic action of proselytizing for decent and civilized political value.¹⁰

This statement made by Achebe is calling upon the responsibility of intellectuals in our contemporary societies. The building of a nation cannot be done without the contribution of intellectuals. It is rather around them that everything should be built. And it is their duty to build peaceful societies. That is the intention of Obi Egbuna when he depicted professor Didi as a very simple, peaceful and comprehensible person. He was deeply admired by the people of his community because of the role he has been playing among them. Even though he is a highly educated person with many degrees he never boasts of his knowledge; on the contrary, he is a very humble man, who still wants to learn from others, especially from the youth. In this sense, one of his favorite sentences in the novel was: 'Which is why I dare say Socrates is called the wisest man that ever lived. Because it was, he who said: 'the only thing I know is that I do not know' (P.93). This passage sheds more light on the humility of professor Didi.

What we also remark in Egbuna's novel is the behavior adopted by its intellectual characters towards the ruling power. In fact, throughout the various conflicts that opposed him to the political power, professor Didi has always reacted like a rational and well thought person, because he knew the young people are looking and copying his behavior and manners. He never encouraged any kind of violence. When he came back from Europe and settled in his village, he was in perpetual conflict with the ruling power. One such special man who had a deep hatred for Didi was Chief Ndumezay. He is a very powerful politician who belongs to the world of the 'Haves'¹¹. The novel underscores that:

He was a lawyer and a businessman and had taken the title of chief in a ceremony where, according to eye-witnesses, he slaughtered over twenty cows and three horses. He was so rich he had now given up going to court himself. With so many young lawyers working for him, he had left all the legal to-do the 'kids', to allow himself more time, to devote to his business, and 'count my moneys', as he had been quoted saying. (P.91).

From this extract, we clearly see the kind of person that chief Ndumezay is. It is plain to see that he belongs to the group of the rich people in the novel. He symbolizes the ruling elite in modern Africa. Those people who own many houses and who drive luxury cars. They live in abundance as opposed to the great number of people who hardly find their daily bread. It is said in the novel that this man had his daughter, Agatha-Rose, among the pupils of Professor Didi. She was, in the terms of the latter, 'among the most promising of my students.' (P.91). chief Ndumezay confronted Didi with the fact, it was him who was putting erroneous ideas in the head of his daughter; because she has refused to marry the man, he was proposing her. He then threatened professor Didi with waspish words, but the latter manifested no anger. The following dialogue from the novel highlights this:

'Aghata-Rose must marry that boy. I don't care how you do it, or if you talk to her, but you must get her to change her mind again. She will do anything you tell her, damn it!'

'I am afraid you flatter me with more power than I can boast. The power to deny a woman the right to change her mind. I do appreciate the flattery, believe me, chief Ndumezay, but I fear I can't live up to your expectations. Sorry.' (P.92).

As indicated in the foregoing, professor Didi's answers show that he is a very peaceful man; and it is this peaceful behavior that he tried to instill to people who follow him. Didi never encouraged any kind of violence from his pupils. He rather taught them to be peaceful people. An illustrative episode of this idea in the novel is seen when St John a faithful disciple of Professor Didi had a bitter argument with MrsNdumezay. The Woman slapped St John as an expression of her power and authority. Generally, in African societies, it is unacceptable for a woman to slap a man; but this woman did it to show the crowd present there that she was the wife of the powerful Chief Ndumezay. But as St John wanted to fight the woman back, professor Didi who witnessed the entire scene advised him against doing so. He said it in these terms: 'Don't do it St John ... let her go... I saw what happened. It doesn't matter. Let her go. Whatever happens, she is still Agatha-Rose's mother. So, if you won't do it for me, do it for Agatha-Rose.' (P.116). This extract from the novel, confirms the peaceful character of professor Didi.

In depicting the central character of his novel this way, obi Egbuna is showing his readership that, intellectuals should be the correctors in their societies. It is part of their responsibility to show the way to the building of peaceful societies. When Didi advised St John to let the woman go, the latter understood and behaved accordingly. So here again, it is the responsibility of intellectuals to show the path with objectivity and tell people around them what to do exactly. It is the same point that is made by Chinua Achebe when he said in *The Trouble with Nigeria* that: 'An absence of objectivity and intellectual rigor at the critical moment of a nation's formation is more than an academic matter. It inclines the fledgling state to disorderly growth and mental deficiency'¹². It is worth putting an emphasis on 'critical moment' in this statement

¹⁰ Ibid, P.69.

¹¹ Julius Nyerere. 'The Second Scramble' (1961), in Freedom and Unity: a Selection from Writings and Speeches, 1965-1967, Oxford University Press, (Dar es Salaam; 1966) pp. 207-208.

¹² Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble With Nigeria*, op. cit. P.14.

by Achebe. It means that, intellectuals are more needed especially when things become tougher. It is their duties to overdramatize the situations.

About the responsibility of intellectuals in social progress, Egbuna has also described how intellectuals can directly intervene in the lives of people. The writer used the character of a poor old woman to show how professor Didi is determined to play a role in the social development of his community. In fact, this old woman belongs to the group of the 'Have-nots'¹³. People who manage to make the two ends meet. The following is the depiction of the woman in the novel:

The misery showed on the woman's face. She was dressed in rags, and her feet were not just bare, they seemed sliced down to stumps with continuous wear from limping. Her stick thumped the earth below against the background of bussing of the flies, as she hobbled slowly forward from her hiding place. She was such a sorry sight that even Uncle Didi stared at her, mouth agape, from where Oputa was cutting his hair. (P.105).

As this passage suggests, this old woman like many others in African societies, is living in very poor conditions, starving. And this made her go to a butcher to look for bones that will help her to survive. She met professor Didi there and the latter, usually concerned with the welfare of the people, helped her. He first gave the woman the money necessary for her to take good care of herself and then, he found a job for her. When we later encounter the old woman in the novel again, we can notice that she has undergone a significant change. Here is her new description in the novel:

We could hardly recognize her. She looked twenty years younger, clean, neatly dressed, hair plaited with real thread. She still walked with a limp, and carried a walking-stick, but the bandage on her foot was speckles, her toenails as trim as a nun's. Her eyes, so tired and lifeless that last we saw them, were now filled with a soft and tender light. (P.214)

This passage shows us the systematic change that this old woman has undergone because of the intervention of Professor Didi in her life. The social progress of a society is very often measured by its members' life conditions. In the contemporary postcolonial context, it is proving difficult for people to survive because of the extreme poverty in which they are living. This old woman is an undeniable illustration in this respect. What is more revolting about it is the fact that the ruling class is not taking significant resolutions to help eradicate this extreme poverty. Independence has bought no alleviation to the poor conditions in which people are living in Africa. In *The Madness of Didi*, Obi Egbuna lets his reader see what should be the responsibility of intellectuals in such societies. It is their responsibility to give a direction to the life of the people. Professor Didi has helped this woman to regain hope and live a more decent life. Now the woman is independent, and she no more needs to go and beg for food.

2.2. Indicators of the Power of Intellectuals in Social Change

In *The Madness of Didi*, Obi Egbuna has created a decayed society where the ruling body uses its power wrongly for the sole purpose of satisfying its own interests. But at the same time, he has endowed his intellectual characters with the capacity to be vectors of change in the society. In fact, that society has undergone significant changes since the coming back of professor Didi from England and his settlement in the village. A new sense of awareness and responsibility has swept over the minds and behaviors of the people. As can be noticed, professor Didi is not a 'contemporary intellectual of futility'¹⁴.

All began when professor Didi accepted to be a lecturer in the new college of Advanced Studies: the students began making demonstrations for such or such issues. Professor Didi has taught them how to assume responsibility and to take their lives in their own hands. The narrator explains how the students were faithful to professor Didi's leadership in these terms:

They came in little groups of their own, sitting and talking around the lake. You could tell a long way off they were there, from the sound of their voices.... Mostly, it was talk, nearly all of which I couldn't make head nor tail of, I tell you. Yet veins stood out on their necks as they talked. (P.89).

So, when these young people went to him, professor Didi used his power to advise them on crucial issues. And this has borne its fruits because in a very short time, the students started being in the news. They started holding students' demonstrations; on whichever issue these demonstrations could be, it is important to note that, the change is only possible when people question the old ways. In the same sense, NgugiwaThiong'o notices, quoting Hegel that: 'Without struggle there is no progression.'¹⁵ In *The Madness of Didi*, students made demonstrations to show their disapproval on some issues related to the socio-political field. And this has had a tremendous impact on the ruling body. So, Professor Didi has been able to give a new shape to the society in which he was living. In the same line of thinking, having in mind the power and the role of writers and intellectuals in the society, KolawoleOgungbesan will have it that: 'The African writer has been very much influenced by politics probably because the African intellectual is a part of the political elite.'¹⁶ This statement highlights our understanding of the issue. An important value that professor Didi always instills in the mind of his followers is the standing for truth. He used to tell them that whatever happens, they should be loyal and truthful as if to implement the following statement by IkennaNzimiro, a Nigerian writer: 'Blessed are the youth of nascent Africa who see in truth a virtue of virtues, and sacrifice even life so that falsehood and its concomitants may be eradicated from the face of earth, for they shall be replenished with knowledge and wisdom.'¹⁷ And this piece of advice by professor Didi was

¹³Julius Nyerere. 'The Second Scramble', op. cit. pp. 207-208.

¹⁴Chinua Achebe, *There Was a Country A Personal History of Biafra*, Penguin Books, (London; 2012) P55.

¹⁵NgugiWaThiong'o, *Moving The Centre*, op.cit. P.10.

¹⁶KolawoleOgungbesan, 'Politics and the African Writer' in C.L. Innes, and BernthLindfors (eds) *Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe*, Heinemann Educational Books, (London; 1979) P.37.

¹⁷IkennaNzimiro, 'Zikism and Social Thought in the Nigerian Pre-independence period' in OniguOtitte (ed) *African Social and Political Thought*, Fourth Dimension Publishers, (Enugu;1978) P.298.

put in practice by Nkechi, a little girl, in the episode where Oputa was trying to save Professor Didi from the flames. Many villagers doubted the capacity of Oputa to save Professor Didi, because they said, he was a cripple. An old man even insulted him in these terms: 'I am speaking my mind as one of the family heads of the village. Oputa must give up this nonsense. He can't make it. He is not man enough. He is a cripple. He has refused to face this fact all his life...He is a cripple, cripple, cripple!'

It is important to underline that this statement is made by an elder of the village; this is to say one of the power holders. But what is more remarkable in this episode is the way little Nkechi reacted to this. She told him: 'you're more of cripple than he is' (p. 145). So, this little girl has dared confront the old man to teach him a lesson. What Nkechi was trying to tell him is that, in such moments what should be recommended is solidarity instead of the useless thing he was saying. Hence, professor Didi has been able to ignite in even little girls like Nkechi a sense of responsibility. People should not be afraid of telling the truth. Although this old man felt offended in the beginning, it is remarkable to see that he recognized his error and excused himself as follow:

You did not insult me. You merely said that I was more of cripple than Oputa. No one can now deny that for a fact. The gods have had the last word on the simple truth, my child. And to speak the truth is not to insult. Least of all an Elder like myself who should be a defender of the truth. I have no anger in my heart for you, my good child. (pp. 153-154)

This statement by an elder is a testimony of the significant change the society has undergone with the significant help of professor Didi.

As Obi Egbuna wanted to show intellectuals' power functions, he moved the setting to England where Professor Didi lived for a certain time. Here again, Obi Egbuna shows how intellectuals can ignite actions that could lead to changes in a society. As said in earlier comments, Didi was an orphan brought to England by a catholic priest, father O'Denneyi. But once he got there, Didi broke contacts with the church; he rebelled against the church; and the following lines are the illustration of how professor Didi behaved towards the church in the narrative: 'He turned rebel. Broke with the priest. Cut off all ties with his sponsors in Dublin. Defied his contract to join the church. Renounced his priestly vows.' (p.179). As this passage indicates, Didi has decided to choose another way for his life. This is very significant because as the saying goes, 'Knowledge is power'; and the power resides in the individual's capacity to think by himself. As an intellectual, Didi has a philosophy of life that people often call 'Didi's independent philosophy of life'. (p.124). according to him, Schools, churches and prisons are brain washing centers which the ruling body makes use of in order to crush the oppressed people under the load of servitude and eternal silence. That is the reason why, Didi took this first step towards his search of identity and freedom. After breaking with the church and all its patterns of restrictions, Didi found the necessary courage to undertake his isolated action of revenge against the white supremacist ideology. If he didn't take this first step, he couldn't have been able to undertake this significant action. In fact, Didi faced the whole community in England with his ideological madness. He killed six white people, imagining that he was green person, and on this basis, he was bound to kill people who were not the same colour as him.

What Didi was trying to do in this sequence was to hold a mirror in the hand for the White people to see how unjust they have been toward Black people. Didi explained his actions in the novel in this way.

I want to know why a man leaves his own home, goes to another man's homeland, and starts plundering and murdering with impunity. To know what makes a man capture fifty million people from a continent that doesn't belong to him, drag them away in chains as slaves, continue in this for two hundred years, and then genuinely believe the victims of his savagery to be savages, rather than himself...It's not me they'll be putting on trial at the Old Bailey. It's themselves. Any verdict they bring in on me is the custodians of civilization. Only they won't know what they're redoing ...till too late. (p.189)

So, as this passage shows, professor Didi killed the six white people to mock the civilization whose foundations are laid on injustice and misuse of power. This action by professor Didi can be questioned by many critics. Why has Egbuna made his intellectual character a criminal? This has sullied his integrity. But what matters most for us in this episode, is the fact that Obi Egbuna has assigned his intellectual character the task of confronting in a significant way, the historical injustice that has been done to Black people. An analysis of the writer's idea reveals that, he is just indicating that changes are possible even through isolated and vigorous actions. An illiterate person couldn't have been able to undertake such an action from this ideological stand. The power which Obi Egbuna has endowed his intellectual character with is an historical one for, very often in front of white people, Black people are somewhat embarrassed and alienated as confirmed by the following statement made by Chinua Achebe in *Hopes and Impediments*: 'The moral inferiority of colonized peoples, of which subjugation was a prime consequence and penalty, was most clearly demonstrated in their unwillingness to assume roles of responsibility'¹⁸. So, Obi Egbuna has stood to ridicule this situation, through the character of professor Didi. Furthermore, Didi has been able to show to the face of the world that Africans are also able to undertake revolutionary actions to defend the integrity of their race. The implication of all this is that Obi Egbuna is giving the African intellectuals the power to chart the issue of a new beginning. He holds that African intellectuals have the power to redefine an identity for the continent.

3. Conclusion

In his novel, Obi Egbuna is suggesting that it is time African intellectuals came to the realization that to be an intellectual in a society is a real burden that should however be borne with enthusiasm and commitment. He has demonstrated this through the role he has assigned Professor Didi and his disciples all over the novel. It is therefore

¹⁸Chinua Achebe, *Hopes And Impediments: Selected Essays 1965-1987*, Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., (Ibadan; 1988), P53.

necessary to see how Professor Didi has been able to lead the masses; and how he has assumed power and responsibility. He even devoted his life to the cause of the masses and though his enlightened leadership, people of different sides came together. Furthermore, Obi Egbuna holds the idea that the African intellectual should constitute a hope for his people; thus, for the future of Africa. All things put together, it can rightly be said that Obi Egbuna has created a revolutionary novel and as indicated by Mao Tse Tung,

Revolutionary literature and art should create a variety of characters out of real life and help the masses to propel history forward. For example, there is suffering from hunger, cold and oppression on the one hand, and exploitation and oppression of man by man on the other. These facts exist everywhere and people look upon them as commonplace. Writers and artists concentrate such everyday phenomena, typify the contradictions and struggles within them and produce works which awaken the masses, fire them with enthusiasm and impel them to unite and struggle to transform their environment.¹⁹

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¹⁹Mao Tse-Tung. 'Talks at the Yen'an Forum on Art and Literature' May 23, 1942, in Anne Freemantle (ed), *Mao Tse-Tung: An Anthology of his Writings*, A Mentor Book, The New American Library, (Peking 1962) P. 25.