



Characters' Motivational Status Level and Dead End in Anglophone African Literature

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Abstract: This article considers in Anglophone African Literature what may constitute both characters motive boost and their stumbling block. There will be the introduction of the concepts of “the Arousal of reactance” and “Learned Helplessness”. The sociological, sociolinguistic, anthropological and psychological approaches will be applied. This research paper intends to scrutinise to what extent the forbidden or restricted things and conditions, and rejection may increase the characters' quest level for these ones and how some characters in front of a painful challenge, they give up, because they feel like being in a dead end.

Keywords: “Anglophone African Literature”, “The Arousal of Reactance”, “Learned Helplessness”, level, and dead end.

Résumé: Cet article examine dans la littérature africaine anglophone ce qui constitue d'une part, un facteur stimulant des personnages et une pierre d'achoppement de ceux-ci, d'autre part. Il y aura la présentation des concepts suivants: “the Arousal of reactance” et “Learned Helplessness”. Les approches sociologiques, sociolinguistique, anthropologique et psychologique seront utilisées. Ce travail de recherche aborde dans quelle mesure les choses et conditions interdites ou limitées, et la le rejet peuvent augmenter le niveau de recherche de celles-ci par des personnages et comment face au défi douloureux, certains personnages abandonne, car ils se sentent dans une impasse.

Mots Clés: “Littérature africaine anglophone”, “the Arousal Reactance”, “Learned Helplessness” Niveau et Impasse.

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to explore in Anglophone African Literature what may constitute both characters motive boost and their stumbling block.

This research paper intends to scrutinise to what extent the forbidden item or condition, and rejection may increase the level of quest and how some characters in Anglophone African literature in front of a painful challenge, they make a decision to give up.

This article underscores factor which increases the reactance of characters and what convinces them that they are in a dead end. The following questions may be considered as the central questions of this article:

- What do the concepts of “the Arousal of Reactance” and the “Learned Helplessness” stand for?
- What is the factor that increases the motivational status in characters' behaviour?
- How may a character feel like being in dead end?

This article pinpoints the psychological process which is going on in some Anglophone African Novels characters, which either boost their reactance or gives them the impression to be in a no way-out situation.

Chidi Amuta, in article entitled “History and Dialectics of narrative in the African Novel” from *The Theory of African Literature Implications for Practical Criticism*, writes:

The issue in correctly characterizing and understanding the African novel, therefore, transcends the narrow and wrong-headed controversy as to whether the novel is alien or indigenous to Africa. On the contrary, the general framework within which explorations into the identity of the African novel should

be pursued is the whole matter of literary development, its modes and patterns as these are inexorably conditioned by socio-historical developments. (1989:125)

Here, it is highlighted, the importance of describing the distinctive nature or features of anything which related to African novel and understanding the novel as well. In fact, the characterizing and understanding according to Chidi Amuta is above the controversy of knowing whether the novel written by an African is stranger to its immediate social environment or not.

LLOYD W. Brown in his article entitled 'Buchi Emecheta' from *Women Writers in Black Africa*, underpins the meaning of Emechecha's rhetoric of protest as follows:

In addition to these lapses in style and tone, Emecheta's rhetoric of protest often betrays symptoms of uncritical response to Western modes of perceiving, and describing Africans. Africans appear too often as "naives" in her works, and there are the familiar Western contrasts between "civilization", on the one hand, and Nigerian "superstitions" or crudeness, on the other. This acceptance of the old Eurocentric standards is all the more disconcerting, and self-defeating, in a writer who is so obviously preoccupied with inequality and oppression as they are manifest in both language and social custom. Note, by way of contrast, how carefully she integrates the nuances of everyday language with pervasive habits of female submissiveness. (1981:37)

Lloyd points out that Emecheta's rhetoric of protest reveals some features of absence of critical response to how Western world view and describe Africans. In Emecheta's works Africans are depicted very often as "naives". He continues by showing that Emecheta's writings present the acceptance of the old Eurocentric standards, as sending Africans astray and destroying their own standards, and to some extent the African perception of life.

Helen Chukwuma in her article entitled "Positivism and the Female Crisis: The Novels of Buchi Emecheta" from *Nigerian Female Writers A Critical Perspective*, underscores Emecheta's characterisation as follows:

There is a strong delineation between male and female characters and this permeates both children and adults. In most of her novels, female characters are protagonists and actions resolve around them. They are therefore given strong character traits to carry the story through. The woman is presented in her accepted social roles as daughter, sister, wife, mother, aunt, and mistress. The distinctive point in Emecheta's female characterisation is its uniqueness. The woman excel in their roles, they are forceful and articulate, thinking beings whom the reader is brought to recognize and appreciate as individuals not types. Each character brings to bear on a stifling situation her own peculiar way of solving problem, hence we appreciate them for what they are and have become not so much what they are supposed to be. (1989:9)

Helen Chukwuma elaborates that in Buchi Emecheta's technique of constructing her characters, most of main characters are female. The woman is depicted as mistress, aunt, mother, wife, sister, and daughter, which roles are accepted in her social environment. She presents Emecheta's characters' capability to bear difficult situations and their way of solving problems which seems different to what is expected. But characters are able to handle and bear challenging situation.

Bu-Buakei Jabbi in his article entitled "Fire and Transition in *Things Fall Apart*" from *Critical Perspective on Chinua Achebe*, underpins the manliness complex in the lines below:

Okonkwo's attempts to stand in the way of change and resist transition spring from the peculiar conditions of his character, shaped partly by communal elements in his environment. For some of his characteristic shortcomings are also shared by the clan as a whole. In spite of relative individual exceptions and the many evident values of Igbo traditional society in the novel, Umuofia still betrays a few trait or symptoms of rigidity and moral indifference in some of its customs. The shows of manliness which characterize Okonkwo's actions are only one shade of a general streak in the beliefs and customs of his clansmen as a group. We may call it the manliness complex; but it involves a whole gamut of other attitudes and socio-cultural features over and above a mere preoccupation with strength and physical prowess as such. A complete embodiment of that complex, both in some of its best and some of its worst attributes, is Okonkwo himself. And, in connection with him, the image for it in the minds of the people is the "roaring flame" or "flaming fire". Achebe borrows this image from the popular speech of the village and works it into a central artistic symbol with which to explore his subject and convey its meaning. (1979:135-6)

Bu-Buakei shows in the above lines that Okonkwo, a character of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, tries to resist against wave of transition from specific conditions, forged to some extent by common elements in his social environment. He suggests that the aspect of rigidity and moral indifference which are perceived through Okonkwo's attitude is one shadow of the general feature of his community members' collective mind. The manliness complex according to Bu-Buakei, implies a range of other attitudes and socio-cultural streaks which are beyond and above a simple concern regarding strength and prowess as such.

Roderick Wilson in his article entitled "Eliot and Achebe: An Analysis of some Formal and Philosophical Qualities of *No Longer at Ease*", elaborates about the failure of Obi Okonkwo to bring a new perception of life to replace the old. He makes it clear in the lines below:

Though Achebe has not, up to now, been concerned to deal with this latter process specifically, he nevertheless in *No Longer at Ease* does show its participation in the fragmented state of modern Nigerian society. The new culturally-diverse society of late and post-colonial Nigeria is a paradigm of the "mere anarchy" which began in the world of *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe is concerned not only to show that Ibo society has lost its wholeness, both spiritual and moral, both political and social, but also that Obi Okonkwo, the young protagonist of the story and the grandson of the already very distant Okonkwo of *Things Fall Apart*, fails to bring back any fresh imaginative synthesis from his western education, any new vision to take the place of the old. (1979:161-2)

Roderick points out how Chinua Achebe's *No longer at Ease*, depicts the fragmentation of state of modern Nigerian society. How the post-colonial Nigeria is a pattern of the an anarchy which started in the world of *Things Fall Apart*. He presents to what extent, Achebe portrays how Ibo society has not only lost its spiritual, moral, political, and social integrity, but also that Obi Okonkwo has failed to bring a new perception of life to replace the old one.

It has been analysed in the above lines, some themes written by some critics and researchers such as Chidi Amuta, Lloyd W. Brown, Helen Chukwuma, Bu-Buakei Jabbi, and Roderick Wilson However, First they do not bring out clearly with concrete terms and words that the forbidden or restricted thing and condition may lead to an increase level of attractiveness or desire of the forbidden choice, object or thing. This increase level of motivational status is called the arousal of reactance. Second, they do not point out, how a person or character who is in a constant quest of his or her deprived choice or item, is highly attracted by these ones. He or she has no way to give up, unless there is a dead end. This is how the "giving up" notion is the result of the "learned helplessness" concept developed by Wortman and Brehm (1975).

2. CONCEPTS OF "THE AROUSAL OF REACTANCE" AND "LEARNED HELPLESSNESS"

In any human society, every community member's wish is to have freedom of choice, beliefs and actions. Sometimes, the level of motivational status of a person or character depends on the importance of the freedom as far as he or she is concerned. However, there are some cases where there is no way out regarding choices. In this regard, the concepts of the arousal of reactance and learned helplessness (Wortman and Brehm-1975) presented in *Psychological Reactance A Theory of Freedom and Control* by Sharon S. Brehm and Jack W. Brehm, will be insightful:

Having learned that Hondas are subject to import quotas, the individual will perceive the Honda to be more attractive or desirable than before receipt of this information. The arousal of reactance, according to the original formulation, is maximal when a freedom is eliminated altogether. That is even when there is no way to restore the freedom, reactance is aroused and has the consequences of making the lost option more desirable. (...). This theoretical problem has been dealt with in part by a recent modification of the theory. Portman and Brehm (1975), noting the research on "learned helplessness" that demonstrates a "giving up" when outcomes are uncontrollable, suggested that giving up can be the end product of elimination of a freedom. (...). Presumably, however, giving up a freedom occurs only when the individual becomes absolutely convinced that there is no way to restore the freedom. (1981:4)

In the light of the above lines, it is clear that when in a given community a person has been imposed to behave in a specific way. This leads to the loss of other option of lifestyle and choices. So, the level of motivational status is also impacted, because the lost option becomes more desirable and there is an increase level of eagerness of freedom choice. As illustrated in the quotation above, in the society where Hondas are subject to import quotas, there is an increase attractiveness and desire to possess a Honda

brand vehicle. Also, there are some cases where a person or a character is tired in his or her quest of forbidden choice, object, and thing, merely, because there is no way out. Sometimes, there is a clear dead end perceived by the concerned person or character.

3. CHARACTERS' MOTIVATIONAL STATUS LEVEL

The analysis in this subheading, will enable the reader to understand in a specific perspective to what extent the forbidden thing or rejection may increase the desire of the deprived person. Nwokocha Agbadi, a character of Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, is the perfect illustration. This analysis pinpoints the presence of forbidden thing or rejection, then, how the forbidden thing or rejection increases the desire of a person or character to possess it. In this regard, the following lines from *The Joys of Motherhood*, are insightful:

One of these mistresses was a very beautiful young woman who managed to combine stubbornness with arrogance. So stubborn was she that she refused to live with Agbadi. Men being what they are, he preferred spending his free time with her, with this woman who enjoyed humiliating him by refusing to be his wife. Many a night she would send him away, saying she did not feel like having anything to do with him, even though Agbadi was not supposed to be the kind of man women should say such things to. But she refused to be puzzled by his wealth, his name or his handsomeness. People said that Nwokocha Agbadi spent all his life on this earth courting his Ona. (1979:6-7)

Here, it is an account about Nwokocha Agbadi, a character of Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. He is wealthy, handsome, and respected in his community. He eagerly wishes to taste Ona's beautiful body. So, being a respected man in his social environment; the only way to make it possible is to marry her. However, Ona does not feel like having anything to do with Agbadi's social status and handsomeness. She rejected any marriage proposal coming from him. Agbadi is confronted with Ona's rejection. Despite, Ona's refusal, Agbadi does not give up. On the contrary, in his sickbed, he has the opportunity to be alone with Ona. The presence of his lover at his bedside, increases the level of Agbadi's desire of exploring her beautiful body. He achieves his lifetime dream regarding Ona. The narrator makes it clear in the passage below:

He knew he had reduced her to longing and craving for him. He knew he had won. He wanted her completely humiliated in her burning desire. And Ona knew. So she tried to counteract her feelings in the only way she guessed would not give her away. 'I know you are too ill to take me, she murmured. 'No, my Ona, I am waiting for you to be ready'. She felt like screaming to let free the burning of her body. How could one's body betray one so! She should have got up and run out, but something was holding her there; she did not know what and she did not care. She wanted to be relieved of the fire inside her. 'Please, I am in pain. 'Yes', came his confident reply. 'I want you to be'. She melted and could say no more. She wept and the sobs she was trying to suppress shook her whole body. He felt it, chuckled, and remarked thickly, 'please, Ona, don't wake the whole household. (...). He came deceptively gently, and so unprepared was she for the passionate thrust which followed that she screamed, so piercingly she was even surprised at her own voice: 'Agbadi, you are splitting me into two!'. (1979: 17-18)

In light of the above quotation, the narrator is depicting the case of Nwokocha Agbadi, who is in a sickbed. He is almost dead. So, the community members make a decision to allow Ona, his lover to take care of him. In fact, they know that there is nothing which could please Nwokocha Agbadi more than the fact of having Ona at his beside. Some think that he spends all his lifetime courting his Ona. This is a perfect occasion for them to allow her to care for him. If Agbadi has to die, at least he will die happy with his lover at his bedside taking care of him. However, when, he starts recovering his strength; one night he comes to realise that Ona is right there at his disposal, while everyone is sleeping. Ona's beautiful body, a forbidden thing is right in front of Agbadi. Her presence increases his sexual desire. Agbadi with his expert hands takes Ona and succeeds to explore her beautiful body. This is how Agbadi's motivational status level increases in presence of his lover and he makes all what is possible to explore Ona's body, the forbidden thing. This is how the concept of the arousal of reactance is noticed through Nwokocha Agbadi, a character of Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*.

Chike a character of Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price*, is another example of how motivational status level increases in front of a forbidden thing, restrictions, and rejection. He is a slave descent. He lives in the Ibo community where there is no room for a slave or slave descent to get married with a free

woman. This restriction instead of persuading him to avoid any attempt of having a love affairs with a free woman; on the contrary, this increases the level of attractiveness of such a relation. The narrator makes it clear in the lines below:

The lasting effects of such old-fashioned ideas about slavery were not new to Chike ; he had heard it all before and was not too concerned about it. He was handsome and though women knew that he came from “oshu” family, a slave family, they pretended not to see it. Had not his family produced many professional men? Did not his half-brothers and sisters own biggest and longest cars the town of Ibuza had ever seen? In fact, he looked down on most of the local girls. Yes, he had slept with lots of them in his late teens, and even still had a few mistresses among the younger wives of many old chiefs. His conscience did not worry him on that score, for these wives still in the flush degree to be a good politician. (1976:83)

In the light of the above lines, the narrator tells the reader how the forbidden thing or restriction is perceived by Chike, a slave descent. For him, slavery and all what goes with, are outdated and do not matter. As illustration, it is not allowed a slave descent like Chike to have either a love affair or a marital union with a free woman. However, this restriction leads to an increase of the level of Chike's motivational status regarding free women. Despite, his being an ‘Oshu’, Chike succeeds to sleep with many free women in his late teens. He has been able to seduce younger wives of several old chiefs. This love affair and marriage restriction, gives more attractiveness and eagerness to Chike, for exploring free women's bodies, which constitute the ban. This is how the forbidden thing or restriction leads to an increase of Chike's motivational status level. In this regard, there is the manifestation of the arousal of reactance through Chike's attitude.

4. CHARACTERS' DEAD END

In some societies, it may happen that some of the community members may be considered as being themselves strangers in their social environment, because they may find there is no way out in their perception of life. This may lead them to give up their struggle to make understand their view of life, sometimes, in a very tragic manner. This is the case of the character named Okonkwo who experiences the feeling of being not understood by his community, and he starts to consider himself as a stranger in his own land. This pushes him to commit suicide. This point is made clear in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*:

Worthy men are no more, Okonkwo sighed as he remembered those days. Isike will never forget how we slaughtered them in that war. We killed twelve of their men and they killed only two of ours. Before the end of the fourth market week they were suing for peace . Those were days when men were men. (...). Then they came to the tree from which Okonkwo's body was dangling, and they stopped dead. Perhaps your men can help us bring him down and bury him, said Obierika. We have sent for strangers from another village to do it for us, but they may be a long time coming. The District Commissioner changed instantaneously. The resolute administrator in him gave way to the student of primitive customs. Why can't you take him down yourself? He asked. 'It is against our customs, said one of the men. It is an abomination for a man to take his own life. It is an offence against the Earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansmen. His body is evil, and only strangers may touch it. (1958:145,151)

The above passage illustrates how Okonkwo feels himself strangers in his forefathers'land, due to the encounter with the western world. The community has changed a lot as far its opinions, beliefs and lifestyle are concerned. No room is left for a conservative man who is deep rooted in ibo traditional perception of life as Okonkwo. That is why, Okonkwo's death in *Things Fall Apart* may be viewed on new perspective. It is related to some extent to the fact that Okonkwo thinks there is no way out for any return to old time standards. He refuses all tentatives of restoring something. He decides to give up his struggle. According to him, his fate and destiny are known in advance. This is how the concept of learned helplessness is manifested through Okonkwo's suicide. This is how Character's dead end is noticed.

Clara is a character of China Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*. Clara has been brought up in the Ibo community where rules and standards were crystal-clear. An “Osu” is an outcast. The one who is a slave or a slave descent, therefore, she or he is not allowed to get married with a free man or woman. This following account from *No longer at Ease* fits into the context:

Obi was undressing absent mindedly. Anyhow, you are lucky to know at the beginning. No harm is done yet. The eye is not harmed by sleep, Joseph said somewhat pointlessly. He noticed that Obi was not paying any attention. I am going to marry her, Obi said. What! Joseph sat up in bed. I am going to marry her. Look at me, said Joseph, getting up and trying his coverlet as a loincloth. He now spoke in English. You know book, Do you know what an sou is? But how can you know? (1960:232)

It is obvious that a marital union between a free man or woman with an Osu who is a slave or a slave descent is strictly forbidden in the Igbo Community. In fact, there is no room for such an union. Rodrigue Judicael ELE underpins this aspect in his article entitled "Community's Expectations Challenged by Anomie in Anglophone African Literature" from *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research* as follows:

In fact, a slave is like a pariah which every member of the community has to avoid; in order to preserve one's family against mark of shame. By kissing a slave girl, Obi is crossing the community's red lines. Ibo community's expectations do not allow even a love affair between a free man or woman with a slave one. This means Obi is beyond what is normal according to his community when he starts kissing a slave descent, Clara. (2024:2408)

The above quotation may be considered from a different outlook. Indeed, Clara knows that she is an Osu or a slave descent. Her condition does not allow to get married with a free man. She allows herself to be kissed heatedly by a free man, Obi.

Obi's father Isaac Okonkwo contributes in his attitude to put his son's fiancée, Clara in a desperate situation by refusing to allow marriage between Obi and Clara. The of narrator of *No Longer at Ease* makes it clear in the lines below:

You cannot marry the girl, he said quite simply. Eh? I said you cannot Mary the girl. But why father? Why? I shall tell you why. But first tell me this. Did you find out or try to find out anything about this girl? Yes. What did you find out? That they are osu. You mean to tell me that you knew, and you ask me why? I don't think it matters. We are Christians. This had some effect, nothing startling though. Only a little pause and slightly softer tone. We are Christians, he said but that is no reason to marry an osu. (...). Obi's father turned down the wick a little and then resumed his silence. After what seemed ages he said: I know Josiah Okeke very well. He was looking steadily in front of him. His voice sounded tired. I know his wife. He is a good man and great Christian. But is osu. (1960:284)

Here, it is obvious that Obi's father, Issac Okonkwo refuses to give an authorisation for a prospective marital union between his son and Clara, an osu girl. He embraces the new faith, christianity but he is still deep rooted in the Ibo traditional perception of life. Obi comes to his father for marriage clearance; but he does not find any good news. He receives a strict refusal of such a union from Isaac Okonkwo.

Clara comes to realise that her tentative to have a marital partner who is a free man, is a dead end. In such circumstances, Clara makes a decision to give up. This aspect is made clear through the narrator's words:

All we need do is lie quiet for a little while, he said. Clara had listened in silence, rubbing her engagement ring with her right fingers. When he stopped talking, she looked up at him and asked if he had finished. He did not answer.

Have you finished? She asked again.

Finished what?

Your story.

Obi drew a deep breath by way of answer.

Don't you think... Anyway, it doesn't matter. There is only one thing I regret. I should have known better anyway. It doesn't really matter.

What are you talking about Clara? Oh, don't be silly, he said as she pulled off her ring and held it out to him.

If you don't take it, I shall throw it out of the window.

Please do.

She didn't throw it away, but went outside to his car and dropped it in the glove-box. (1960:289)

In the light of the above passage, Clara who is an "Osu" meaning a slave descent ; she is not allowed according to the Ibo community norms and standards to get married with a free man like Obi. Despite, this restriction, Clara gives herself to Obi and even accepts to be kissed by her fiancé as it is noticed in one of the quotations above. In Clara's mind, she might think that because both lovers are educated persons from England, this may matter in order to be accepted by her prospective in-laws as Obi's wife to be. Moreover, Obi's father is a christian and a friend of Clara's father. The acceptance of Clara by Obi's family may illustrate that they are genuine christians and modern people, who do not care about the traditional Ibo cast segregation. However, Clara faces a painful challenge of being rejected by her future in-laws due to her cast, an "Osu. Obi's father, Issac Okonkwo is the first to oppose to such intermarriage. So, Clara is aware that she is in a no way out situation as far as her marriage project with Obi is concerned. She makes a decision to give up. This how the above character feels like being in a dead end and displayed a "Learned Helplessness".

5. CONCLUSION

Characters' motivational status level, has analysed in this article through the notion of arousal of reactance. The above-mentioned notion has been considered with regard to the forbidden thing, and rejection through characters of Anglophone African novels, such as Nwokocha Agbadi, and Chike. Agbadi is a wealthy, handsome and respected man in his community. Despite, his respectable social status, and handsomeness; Ona rejected anything coming from him as far as marriage is concerned. Agbadi has always dreamt about Ona's beautiful body. He has eagerness to explore it. Ona's body constitutes for Agbadi, a forbidden or restricted thing. This leads to an increase of the level of motivational status. Agbadi will wait longing for an opportunity to have sexual relation with his lover, Ona, and he achieves this goal as analysed above, thanks to the high level motivational status, that is the arousal of reactance.

Chike is another character who manifested through his attitude the high level of motivational status. Despite, his being an 'Oshu', Chike succeeds to sleep with many free women in his late teens. He has been able to seduce youngers wives of several old chiefs. This love affair and marriage restriction, gives more attractiveness and eagerness to Chike, for exploring free women's bodies, which constitute the ban. This is how the forbidden thing or restriction leads to an increase of Chike's motivational status level. In this regard, there is the manifestation of the arousal of reactance through Chike's attitude.

However, characters dead end, has presented to what extent characters may wish to reach a specific goal, but feel like in a no way-out situation; and makes a decision to give up. This attitude is manifested by the following characters: Okonkwo and Clara. In returns from exile and finds a very great change as far as opinions, beliefs, and lifestyle are concerned. No room is left for a conservative and deep-rooted man, with an Ibo traditional perception of life, as Okonkwo. He refuses any attempt to be highly attracted to anything of old time. He feels like a stranger in his forefathers' land. Okonkwo is in a no way-out situation, that is a dead end. He decides to give up in a tragic way, by taking his own life. This is how the notion of the 'learned helplessness is seen through Okonkwo's behaviour. Clara is a character of Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, she is aware that a marital union between a free man or woman with an 'Osu' who is a slave or a slave descent is strictly forbidden in the Igbo community. Despite, the fact that both lovers are educated persons from England, and Issac Okonkwo, Obi's father being a christian like Clara's father, Josiah Okeke ; Issac Okonkwo refuses to give a marriage clearance for Obi and Clara, an 'Osu' girl. Clara realises that she is in a no way-out situation regarding her marriage project with Obi. She decides to give up, by breaking up the engagement with Obi. This how Clara displayed the 'learned helplessness'.

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