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The Call of the Wild: What Went Wrong in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*

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No Longer at Ease as a sequel to *Things fall Apart*, carries the baggage of the discourse of colonialism farther through Obi Okonkwo, the '**too know**' (50)young man, who set out to conquer the western front, armed with a precious 'European post' and the yen to make his way 'straight to the top **without bribing anyone**' (23). Towards the beginning of his career, a policeman extracting his booty of two shillings from the driver of the ramshackle wagon bound for Umuofia made Obi glare indignantly at him because he had 'no right to take two shillings'(50) from anyone just because he is a policeman. At the outset of his career, Obi believed that 'the public service of Nigeria would remain corrupt until old Africans at the top were replaced by young men from the universities'(44)—young men like himself who had a goal to strive for—a mission to live up to. Yet, the novel ends with the deplorable abandon with which Obi grew used to receiving 'just small kola'(191) either in the form of a wad of bank notes or the warm body of a young female applicant whom he could glibly 'steer towards his bedroom'(192).

Corruption has a wily way of its own with human beings. The psychological tortuosity behind corruption is stunning in its intricate ramifications. Thus one feels compulsively intrigued to find out why Obi turned out like he did.

This dissertation will autopsy Obi from a kaleidoscopic range of psychoanalytical propositions posited by various psychoanalysts, thus launching an effort to figure out whether the opinions converge at some point, thereby to arrive at some sort of a conclusion as to why Obi ended up doing what he did.

Lawrence Kohlberg phases out the process of moral development in the human mind in three distinctive phases: 1. the Preconventional level, 2. the Conventional level and 3. the Post

conventional level. According to Kohlberg, the criteria for deciding right from wrong keeps shifting in the various junctures of life, thereby bringing in a changeability in a human being's capacity to reason about ethico-morality.

In the first stage, called 'the punishment and Obedience Orientation' stage, which occurs in adolescence, human beings fixate right and wrong in terms of consequences. Something that exacts punishment is considered wrong while something that doesn't compel punishment is considered right.

In the second stage, which Kohlberg pefers to call 'The Social Order Maintaining Orientation' stage,he notion of right and wrong largely depends on the law and norms of the social construct that we live in as members. Thus acts which impel legal penalty get labeled as 'wrong'. At this stage the penal factor often interfaces the ethical factor, blurring lines and merging the two so much so that what is legal seems right and what is illegal wrong.

The third stage, the post conventional stage, is when a human being formulates his own set of ideals of what is right and wrong along the principles of what is psycho-socially accepted as ethics. This stage which Kohlberg dubs the 'Universal Ethical Principle Orientation' stage finds morality judge in terms of human rights, which may transcend law and in terms of self-chosen ethical principles.

When interfaced with this theory, then, Obi Okonkwo's slipping down the maverick path of bribery and corruption would point at the third stage of the Kohlberg theory. Obi, towards the beginning of his service, set out with high-flown and ambitious ideals of ethicality, which suitably conforms to the second stage of Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development—the stage of 'Social Order Maintaining Orientation'. Like the 'good citizen', Obi had resolved to be a stickler for the social rubric of right and wrong. But gradually he gravitated towards what at that stage he would call 'wrong' and yet continued with it. It is then that as readers we realize that what Obi was into, was not a freak incident after all. Had it been so, he would not have repeated it any more. But the fact that he made it into a way of his life spells that he had just slipped out of one stage of moral development to the other—from the stage of 'Social Order Maintaining Orientation' to that of 'Universal Ethical Principle Orientation', ruled by self-chosen principles, often inostensibly and even unconsciously tailor-made to suit one's personal gratification. Bribery turned out to be lucrative to him. So he stuck with it. And people outside his life racked their brains trying to figure out why on earth he slid into wrong practices. Umuofia decided that 'he was, without a doubt, a very foolish and self-willed young man' (6). Snobs like Mr. Green decided that this was just a natural fallout of the

fact that 'The African is corrupt through and through' (3). But notwithstanding all these seemingly decisive conclusions, the fact remains that the readers who have been following Obi in ex cathedra analysis find it difficult to buy these oversimplified explanations for granted. Obi was neither foolish, as the Umuofia Progressive Union supposed, nor was he corrupt as Mr. Green concluded. Obi's ability in climbing up the academic ladder to a secure a good Government job for himself and his long arguments with Christopher, trying to make him get round to the point that bribery in any form was wrong, vouch for the fact that both, Obi's intellect and his conscience were in their places. Yet he accepted bribe—made it a way of life for himself.

The million-dollar-question then is, why?

The call of the devil—the enticement of Satan has forever intrigued the human mind. Thus humans have formulated as many explanations for the call of the evil as they have wriggled out ways to give in to it.

The psychological analysis of corruption brings a number of possible explanations to the fore. So mystifying and irresistible are the forces of corruption that men have found it imperative to analyse the reasons for the inexorable vice like grip that corruption tends to fix on human existence.

Noted criminologist Dr. Elizabeth Grobler sets forth the 'money-for-greed' vs 'money-for-need' theory. According to her, a man earns his money basically to suffice for his needs—the basic among which would include food, clothing and habitat. The rest outside this purview of 'need' comes to be set aside as 'greed'—and therefore extraneous. But, often when the needs that are taken care of, become the usual run of the day, therefore taken for granted, the radius of the 'need' factor starts expanding in a bid to include more and more objectives. Thus, things that could be done without, when the basic needs were yet to be taken care of, become indispensable and graduate into the position of 'basic needs' when the needs that were thought of as basic earlier, get provided for. Thus what was earlier 'greed' becomes 'need' and newer 'greeds' step in to fill the space. Lacan would call it objet petit a—the blackhole of never-ending desire which is so inscrutable that it is difficult to define. The never ending source of desire makes room for a never ending list of 'needs'. So when the source of income refuses to grow bigger at the ratio of the growth of desires, 'money for need' begins to make allowances for 'money for greed'. People look for devious means to grab that 'extra' bit of money needed to satisfy the extra needs. Corruption sets in.

Dr. Alwyn Hoerdyk who happens to be a lecturer of Organisational Psychology in Rhodes University, muses over a few other reasons which he supposes, could egg on this lustiness for corruption. According to Hoerdyk, a person could yield to the seduction of corruption for a number of reasons:

- Thrill-seeking behaviour that is reportedly innate in humans.
- Social conformity
- Need for instant gratification of desires
- Risk-taking bent of mind
- Strong need for power
- The socio-psychological norm of 'sharing-and-caring'.

Hoerdyk feels that this custom of 'sharing-and-caring' creates little 'corruption clusters' that endorse wrong-doing by dint of number. The fact that quite a number of people are engaged in doing something wrong with glib alacrity often strips away the cautionary voice of honesty from the human mind thereby lending an allowance of sorts to wrong deeds.

Hoerdyk's theory in furthered a notch by Dr. N.P. Upadhyay, who is the former chief psychologist in India's Public Service Commission. According to Upadhyay, two chief reasons exert a seminal influence over a man's choice of corruption over honesty. One of these reasons would be poor parenting, leading to bleak familial values, which makes corruption seem much less of an anathema. The other reason could be a severe disruption of ethico-moral behaviour as fallout of miserable social and economic conditions, in the face of which, mere personal survival gets prioritized above anything else.

Setting Obi Okonkwo against the template of this psychoanalytical rubric would prove interesting in the quest for the reasons for Obi's sudden lapse of morals inspite of his initial vaunts of scrupulousness.

Concentrating on Hoerdyk's principles first, the initial theory, that is, the concept of corruption because of 'thrill-seeking behaviour', does not really apply to Obi Okonkwo, because Obi resisted bribery as long as he could. He never really cared for an adventure with bending rules. As for the second catalyst factor for corruption, that is, 'social conformity', obi again does not fit the bill. His long arguments with Christopher as to the wrongness of bribery while Christopher tried hard to convince obi of the commonness and harmlessness of accepting and offering bribes vouch for the fact that conforming to the common social practice could not have been the trigger factor for Obi at the beginning. Neither does the theory of the 'risk-taking bent of mind' work in the case of the sombre and dapper Obi.

Again, as far as Dr. N.P. Upadhyay's points about familial influence and upbringing are concerned, there is no way at all that it can be inferred that Obi was handed down a devious bent of mind by his parents and his heritage.

Hoerdyk's theories of 'need for instant gratification of desires', 'strong need for power', and 'the socio-psychological norm of sharing-and-caring' are the only ones then, that do hold water as raison de etre for Obi Okonkwo's deviation.

Obi had bitten off more than he could chew. He failed to manage his funds. He failed to cut his coat according to his cloth, so to speak. His expenses outdid his income by far. He needed extra money badly to recompense his extra expenses. Hence he needed extra means of income. It was at this very juncture that bribery came knocking at his door. Obi could not resist it. He gave in. He turned into one of those unscrupulous bribe-happy Africans that he himself abhorred. The Hoerdykian principle of 'need for instant gratification of desires' ruled supreme as Obi, the face of debts, needed to bale himself out of the financial impasse that he had reached. Thus when he took his first bribe, he thought it would be a 'once only' affair. But then the habit stuck.

'Everybody wondered why'—Achebe tells us in the concluding paragraph of the novel. Why…is the question that we too, keep asking ourselves like 'the learned judge' who could not comprehend how an educated young man…'

The Finance Minister of South Africa, Mr. Pravin Jamnadas Gordhan, after delivering a lecture at the University of Johannesburg, worried that corruption is becoming a cultural problem in South Africa. As a reason, Mr. Gordhan cites a couple of very pertinent reasons. For one thing, bribery has shown up as an 'easy money-making policy'. On the other hand, it caters to the 'extra needs' of a person as a 'clever and innovative way of making money' without really entailing extra hard work, or hard thinking.

In Obi Okonkwo's case too, once the first squeals of conscience were silenced, things started looking easy for him. But the discerning readers can no longer be at ease as it becomes that Obi's case was not an isolated one. It was only an example of what Nigeria was grappling with in the late twentieth century with the vestiges of colonialism clinging fast.

Clinical psychologist Dr. Giada Del Fabbro lists out some pertinent personality traits that could act as aiding factors in this racket of bribery:

- Impaired empathy
- Self-centredness
- Manipulativeness

- Entitlement
- Buck-shifting

Impaired empathy, according to Del Fabbro, connotes the mistaken effort to place oneself in the shoes of others, thereby yearning for things and lifestyle that are cutr out for someone else with different socio-economic stature, rather that one's own means. By 'Self-centredness' she wished to pinpoint the yen to prioritise one's own needs and desires above anything else—even ethico-morality. 'Manipulativeness', according to Del Fabbro, slips in handy while planning out one's modus operandi in the act of bribery. 'Entitlement', in Del Fabbro's parlance connotes the idee fixe that one is meant for better things and deserves more than life has to offer. Last, but not the least, 'Buck-shifting' or skirting blame by accusing a number of other factors, thereby avoiding shouldering the responsibility of one's crime makes room for more wrong.

And when it comes to projecting blame, one factor often comes up as an euphemistic excuse—custom. People who tread the satanic paths—often gingerly at first and then, with practised nonchalance, mostly comfort heir dithering hearts by saying the million-dollar mot juste of a placebo—'oh, everyone does it'.

The former President of Nigeria, Olusegan Obasanjo pondered upon a unique tendency to treat bribery in Nigeria as 'Gift'. One remembers with a start how Obi grew used to bribery flippantly as 'just small kola'(191). The Africans are very particular indeed about the giving and receiving of gifts on seeing each other. Often this serves as subterfuge for treating bribery as a kind of gift—as if a person meeting another with a kola nut and a wad of bank notes were the same. Obasanjo iterated that bribery can never be passed off as an epitomisation of the African concept of 'appreciation and hospitability' which is a completely above-board system where the spirit of giving is valued, not the cost of the 'gift'.

Nigerian Public Protector, Thuli Madonsela blames 'competency deficit', 'lack of respect for rules and authority' and 'lack of consequences for wrong-doing'. This, of course, is a matter of consternation. If the populace of a country could dare to wallow in corruption at the drop of a hat, then something positively stinks in the administrative setup of the day. Rules and authority cease to be respected when they fail to be implemented with optimum enforcement, in which case, this whole rubric of right and wrong crumples. Again, if the probable consequences fail to make the miscreant dither in his boots, then there must be something wrong either with the judicial system or else with its implementation. There must have been

umpteen slips between the cup and the sip in the socio-psycho-judicial construct that vouch for lacunae in the system that devious minds can find ways to get around.

In *No Longer at Ease*, whites like Mr. Green snicker with disdain when they brand Africans as 'corrupt': 'they are all corrupt…'. This again brings to light the othering of the coloured people as invariably low and base, leaving room for a plethora of post-colonial analytical vistas.

No Longer at Ease, as a novel, thus raises a few very intriguingly ontological questions about the mystifying workings of the human mind, and leaves the readers in a delicious intellectual lurch with an open-ended finish that seems to be only the beginning of a whole new revelation about the human psyche.