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Available online at: <https://eduj.uowasit.edu.iq>Assist.Prof. Aneed
Thanwan RustamAl-Salam University
College

Email:

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**Chinua Achebe's "No Longer at Ease": The Conflict of Values in
Post-Colonial History of Nigeria**

A B S T R A C T

As a reaction to the European dominance on the African continent, African novelists showed a nationalistic feeling in their novels, and this national awareness gave them the opportunity to present the contemporary African experience. In the region that was occupied by the British, Nigeria in particular, the novelists' interest was to show the impacts of the settlement period on the peoples of that region. This paper presents the details concerning Chinua Achebe's novel No longer at Ease in which the conflict of values in post-colonial history of Nigeria is tackled and interpreted clearly. The aim of the paper involves representing the historical background of the historical conflict in Nigeria and identifying the role of literature and specifically Chinua Achebe's novel in portraying this conflict. Chinua Achebe was one of the most prominent Nigerian novelists who dedicated their novels to represent the psychological, social and cultural conflicts that Africans experienced as a result of the European intrusion into African life. The paper surveys the details of the novel and its representation of the reality of the Africans. The paper concludes that the novel No Longer at Ease provides a critique of post-independence Nigerian life and an assessment of what it inherited from the European settler. Moreover, it shows that the events of the novel deal with an African young man and the crisis he experienced as a result of the conflict between the European intellectual culture that he acquired during his studies in England and what he inherited of tribal and family traditions and values.

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رواية أجبينا أجبيني (لم يعد الأمر مريحا): صراع القيم في تاريخ نيجيريا ما بعد الاستعمار

أ.م.د. عنيد ثنوان رستم

كلية السلام الجامعة

مستخلص

كرد فعل على الهيمنة الأوروبية على القارة الأفريقية ، أظهر الروائيون الأفارقة شعوراً قومياً في رواياتهم ، وهذا الوعي القومي أعطاهم الفرصة لتقديم التجربة الأفريقية المعاصرة. في المنطقة التي احتلها البريطانيون ، نيجيريا على وجه الخصوص ، كان اهتمام الروائيين هو إظهار آثار فترة الاستيطان على شعوب تلك المنطقة. تقدم هذه الدراسة التفاصيل

المتعلقة برواية أجيئوا أجيبي (لم يعد الأمر مريحاً) والتي يتم فيها معالجة وتفسير صراع القيم في تاريخ نيجيريا ما بعد الاستعمار بوضوح. الهدف من الدراسة هو تقديم الخلفية التاريخية للصراع التاريخي في نيجيريا وتحديد دور الأدب وخاصة رواية أجيئوا أجيبي في تصوير هذا الصراع. كان أجيئوا أجيبي من أبرز الروائيين النيجيريين الذين كرسوا رواياتهم لتمثيل الصراعات النفسية والاجتماعية والثقافية التي عاشها الأفارقة نتيجة التدخل الأوروبي في الحياة الأفريقية. تستعرض الدراسة تفاصيل الرواية وتمثيلها لواقع الأفارقة. تخلص الدراسة إلى أن الرواية (لم يعد الأمر مريحاً) تقدم نقداً للحياة النيجيرية بعد الاستقلال وتقييماً لما ورثته عن المستوطن الأوروبي. كما تبين أن أحداث الرواية تتعلق بشباب أفريقي والأزمة التي عاشها نتيجة الصراع بين الثقافة الفكرية الأوروبية التي اكتسبها خلال دراسته في إنجلترا وما ورثه من التقاليد القبلية و القيم العائلية.

، صراع ، استعمار ، تاريخ ، رواية ، قيم

1.1 Introduction

With its primitive rituals, its impenetrable vegetations, the stillness of the wilderness, the shadow of the prehistoric earth, Africa became the dream of the introverted characters as they appear in European novels written about the dark continent. The European interest in Africa was evident in the accounts of what the explorers, traders, and missionaries discovered in Africa. The literary account was one in which the mystery and the contradictions of the continent were reflected. The colonial domination until the end of the nineteenth century was limited to the coastlines of Africa, and the Sahara of the north made a barrier between Europe and Africa, this contributed to the mystery that engulfed the image of the continent.

The European ideas about Africa started to take a different course when European powers in Berlin Africa Conference 1884-85 seriously set the imposition of the European rule on Africa through the partition of the continent into pieces for the political and economic interests of European countries. However, the colonial circumstances differed from one country to another, they all shared one aspect that in each type we have two views of considering the colonial reality. The one was that of the Europeans with their intentions of what to do with the economic sources of the colonies in accordance with the systems they brought from home countries, the second was of the natives who tried to evaluate the new colonial reality in terms of their tradition.

2.1 Problems of Merging Two Cultures

The contact of the two cultures (European and African cultures) under the colonial reality initiated so many problems. The destruction of the tribal structure made the African in need of security which he found in the European intruder. The European in his way exploited this for satisfying his needs. The European enhanced only those tribal administrative systems that responded to their policy. In Nigeria, for instance, they backed the feudal Muslim north and preferred it to the westernized Christian south for the reason that feudal chiefs were suppressing the demands of their societies and during the movement towards independence these chiefs showed reluctance to incorporate into the modern state.¹

In their attempt to strengthen their control on the Africans, the Europeans encouraged the fixed communities using the law as a means to enforce restrictions on them, with no opportunity to social change. Besides, even the missionaries who came to the place took part in destroying the tribal values and disrespected the tribal deities. They also, like the colonial

administrators, showed willingness to affirm the image of the savage black. The converts change their religion not because they believe in the new one but for the security the missionary educational system offered them. They were given the right to participate in the social and religious life of the new societies, a role they were denied to have either by the old tribal chiefs or the colonial administrators.

The colonial administrators found in educating the Africans in western culture a means to incorporate them into the European system. This offers another opportunity for the Africans to use their freedom, but soon they were frustrated by the limitations placed on their freedom to move within the new culture and by their oscillation between these two cultures. Their frustration turned to be a motive towards self determination. European powers had to retreat in front of the African powers towards national independence.

Another feature in the history of Africa goes back to the end of the fifteenth century, and precisely to the arrival of the Portuguese explorer, Vasco de Gama, was the slave trade. It came with remarkable social turbulence since it started with a long period of wars that lasted till the rule of the European powers. The conflicts over the slave trade disrupted the tribal structures and caused the encounter between the Europeans traders and their local agents. The years of the wars brought devastating effects on the continent, and their cruelty remained mysterious to the peoples of the region. Gakwandi attributed this mystery to the illiteracy widely spread in Africa.²

3.1 Africa in Literature

Though the African appeared in the literary writings about Africa as the 'noble savage', many race theories placed him at the bottom of human races, emphasizing the superiority of the white race and the backwardness and inferiority of the black one. This difference was exploited by the Europeans who stated that the African as a 'fellow creature', though fallen, was in need of the help of the white man.³ And when the Europeans proceeded further into the interior of the continent, the idea of the inferiority of the African started to dig deep, and they attributed every sign of past civilization in the place to the non-African sources. The failure of any attempt of contact between the two cultures is always attributed to the inferiority of the natives. Confronted with the complexities and misunderstanding aroused by the new colonial realities, the European, as Carroll suggests, could adopt two attitudes in his relationship with the African under the colonial situation:

He could insist that all men were equally rational and that, despite superficial misunderstanding, there was no reason why Africans should not be fully assimilated into the European culture he himself represented. The danger here is that genuine differences of culture are either ignored as irrational or indignantly corrected. When this fails the colonial power imposes stricter and stricter requirements for entry into the metropolitan culture. The opposite attitude is to assume that the two cultures involved in the colonial situation are mutually unintelligible.⁴

Both attitudes support the European's interest; the one responds to his psychological need as rational, the other helps to link the subjects to their colonizers since it helps the idea

of giving them freedom to a limited extent to administrate themselves through their chiefs who are linked to the colonial authority.

The eighteenth-century views of the British depending on slave traders presented the Africans as obstinate, rebellious, devilish and lazy.⁵ and the scientific studies of races during the first half of the nineteenth century anticipated what Darwin emphasized in his *Origin of Species* 1859. Edward Long gave the Africans an intermediate place between the humans and the apes. Long went further to say that Africans lack souls.⁶ This motivated the missionaries whose concern was to save souls. These missionaries depended on another source, Genesis IX in the *Bible*, to prove that Africans are the descendants of Ham, the son of Noah who saw the nakedness of his father. They are then the inheritors of his fall and slavery. This, for the missionaries, justifies enslaving and converting them.

The European as well believed that, though inferior to the white race, the Africans enjoyed the luxuriant life of the African coast. This luxury enticed some ambitious British to establish their states depending on the natural splendors of the coast. Due to poor tropical soils and tropical diseases, their plans never accomplished a noticeable success. Missionaries were also faced with the Africans' unwillingness and failure to recognize the European intelligence.

Among the harsh calls for exploiting the blacks was Dr. Robert Knox's view that " race is everything: literature, science, art- in a word, civilization depends on it". For him civilization was the achievement of the white men only, the blacks should be exterminated.⁷ What he called for represented the European racial arrogance towards the non -Europeans. The African culture, as they believed, was barbaric and the Africans who practiced it were barbaric and therefore inferior.

But among those culturally biased Europeans, there were the humanistic anthropologists who tried to show that the Africans are human and that European mind would change the African culture. Green Leonard suggests that though the Africans were in a state of barbarism they were not corrupt. Being underdeveloped was not due to their inferiority as it was the lack of opportunity to acquire civilization.⁸

The literary scene in Africa was closely associated with the historical and political activities in the continent. The African literature⁹ supported the African movements towards nationalism, and both literature and nationalism affected each other for their mutual aim of creating an awareness of the position of Africa in the world. Nearly all the African writers in the fifties of the twentieth century were concerned with the meeting of the African and the western values which usually assumed the form of a conflict. This conflict became less recurrent after the independence of many African countries. And the late literary works treated more the contradictions emanating from the co-existence of the differing values of the modern life which these countries inherited from colonization than the conflict of the two 'warring' cultures. It became a matter of fact that writers have to tackle the influence of colonialism on the cultural situation of the newly independent countries or of those countries which were in the eve of their independence. This necessity was emphasized by Aime' Ce'saire who said :

Whether we like it or not, we cannot pose the problem of native cultures without at the same time posing the problem of colonialism, for all native cultures are today developing under the peculiar influence of a colonial, semi - colonial or para - colonial situation.¹⁰

It was on the hands of those Africans who traveled to the west and came into contact with its culture that an awareness of what was going on in the continent came to exist. Their writings, which announced the rise of the new African literature, manifested the beginning of protest against the injustice of the Europeans. The intellectuals left their imprint on the history of the movements of African nationalism. Dr. William DuBois and Marcus Garvey were the first supporters of the idea of African nationalism and pan-Africanism. Dr. William DuBois in particular was considered ' the first major link between political consciousness and literary awakening."¹¹ Then two thinkers played a major role in organizing six conferences on pan-Africanism in Europe and America between 1900 and 1945. These conferences set eventually the idea of nationalism among African students abroad. The last conference held in Manchester in 1945 proclaimed political independence as the first goal of nationalism. A new literary movement grew as a result of the contact between the West Indians and African intellectuals which assumed the title of negritude. The pride in African culture and African blackness first found its expression in the writings of Edward Blyden who was the first African to attract the attention to the positive elements in the African history. Here are his Wordsworthian-like romantic view of the African world: "In visions of the future, I beheld those beautiful hills- the banks of those charming streams... in primeval innocence."¹²

Though the African novel is relatively new, it is the predominant creative form in Africa today. The African novelists displayed the influence of the other world literature they were acquainted with. Some of the world writers were quoted saying that they were influenced by the vernacular literature of the African countries. Critics like Janheinz Jan and Claude Wauthier asserted similar elements in the writings of African origin.¹³ Le Vine is of another mind for he attributed this similarity to the subjection of African culture to colonization that imposed on them certain forms of shared political and educational values:

There is no lack of documentation for the proposition that the colonial period in Africa produced several trans-territorial political cultures that survived the transition to independence and continued to affect the internal and external politics of the post-colonial African states. These trans-territorial cultures are modern rather than traditional in the sense that their participants are mainly the products of the westernized strata of the African society. They are elite political cultures involving only a small proportion of Africans, most of whom occupy positions of influence, and excluding the politically unsophisticated African masses. These elite cultures rest upon shared political values, common or similar political experiences, common educational backgrounds, shared national symbols.¹⁴

It was in their reaction against the dominant European rule that the African novelists revealed nationalistic sentiments in their novels. Nationalism offered the opportunity to these writers to approach the contemporary African experience. They put their writings in the service of the movement of liberation. The political theme became dominant in the African novel that dealt with the implications of freedom, justice and equality even after the attainment of independence of African countries.

4.1 Chinua Achebe and Nigeria

In the English-speaking area, particularly Nigeria, the primary concern of the African novelists was first an assessment of the effects of colonial history of the country. Nigerian novelists like Chinua Achebe condemned colonialism with an ambivalence in their attitudes towards the current values of their societies. Chinua Achebe's novels deal with the social and psychological conflict lived by individual as a result of the intrusion of the Europeans in the African life. The stuff of the novels was drawn more from the 'real' African life than from the world of imagination. He took the Ibo village as a backdrop against which the personal life of certain Ibo individuals was presented. The four novels he wrote are all about an African group of people from an Ibo origin in an era that extends from pre-colonial time till the present. The Ibo who lived in the southeastern Nigeria were one people speaking many dialects of one origin with many cultural aspects in common. The Ibo tribes lacked the centralized authority. They were divided into small groups each in a village that consisted of a number of hamlets and which was autonomous from other villages in almost all its affairs. The religious festivals were the only occasions that link these villages. Within the village as a social unit the system could be described as a pluralistic one in which the adult males could enjoy the freedom of expressing their views. But the lack of a centralized power may entice those individuals of ambition to manipulate their freedom for their wishes. Even though there were certain unifying factors among their villages such as marriage system which prohibited women from marrying men from the village she was born in, and the system of the titles which were acquired by payments. Titles became a source of unity since villagers could accept titled members from other villages. The other unifying factors were the shrines that scattered across many communities. Religion consisted of worshiping their great public deities, their personal deities, and their ancestors. Their spiritual world had an atmosphere in which the living and the dead, visible and invisible, the spiritual and the material interact.

The influence of the European life on the Ibo country started in 1885 when the oil Rivers Protectorate was established in the area of the Niger Delta. And at the beginning of the twentieth century protectorates started to spread over different parts of Nigeria till 1914 when the whole country came under the rule of Lord Lugard. Since the British did not succeed to find the powerful chiefs they need to control the country, they followed the system of direct rule through the native courts which practiced authority through its British district commissioners helped by native members like warrant chiefs, court clerks and court messengers. The British rule around 1918 became less direct when the warrant chiefs were given more power. But again and because of the chiefs' misuse of power, the British modified the native courts as to respond to the existing social structures.¹⁵

To understand the Nigerians, the British authorities resorted to the help of the anthropologists making use of their experience to reorganize their administration with more dependence on clans and village councils. After the First World War, the Nigerian intellectuals, headed by Herbert Macaulay, called for the formation of a legislative council that could control taxation. They protested to the British interferences in electing the chiefs and to the practices of discrimination in the civil service. In the 1930's a new generation of Nigerian leaders started to arise in Lagos. On the head of these was Dr. Nuamandi Azikiwe, an Ibo in origin. He and his followers were more enthusiastic in their protest to the colonial administration than their predecessors. Those Africans who participated in the Second World War were surprised to find white men among farmers, laborers, and servants. For them it was something that shock the belief in the superiority of the white man. The new constitution that was enacted after the end of the war founded three regional councils (in the north, east and west) under the central government in Nigeria. The war that lasted from 1967 to 1970 made tribalism as an inescapable reality. It ended with the autocratic rule in the north, the domination of the Ibo in the east and

Yoruba in the west. The traditional values of the Ibo society were different from the ideas drawn about it by the colonialists. These values were subjected to the examination of the historians and anthropologists. It was natural that African novelists questioned their ideas and they rebelled against the colonizers. They played an important part in the struggle their countries led towards independence.

Chinua Achebe wrote four novels all about the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial history of the Ibo society. *Things Fall Apart* (1958) deals with the old generation's resistance to British colonialism, *No Longer at Ease* (1960) with the results of the conflict between the European and the African values, *Arrow of God* (1964) with what the British did to save the country, and *A Man of people* (1966) with the events that happened in Nigeria of the 1960's.

5.1 *No Longer at Ease*

No Longer at Ease manifests more than Chinua Achebe other novels do the cultural conflict lived by the Nigerian generations. It gives criticism of modern African life and an assessment of the colonial inheritance in Nigeria on the eve of independence. The novel takes up the story of a young Ibo, a British graduate at the time when Nigeria witnessed a fast-tempo change and urban-industrial development. The core of the Ibo's crisis is that the collision between his intellectual insight which he acquired through his contact with the western culture and his lack of moral strength to support it. The ethical ideals that his European education offered him lack their practical application in a world whose pressures are beyond his ability to resist.

The opening scene of the novel presents the trial of Obi, the grandson of Okonkwo of *Things Fall Apart* for the crime of taking bribes making use of his position as a senior official in the civil service. The judge's interrogative remark in the early pages of the novel, "I cannot comprehend how a young man of your education and brilliant promise could have done this",¹⁶ is to speak of the minds of the majority of the people and at the same time it raises the question the novel is going to handle. The comment of Mr. Green, Obi's superior, on the event could be a judgment on the African's capacity for development. He said: "The African is corrupt through and through... They are all corrupt, repeated Mr. Green, I'm all for equality and all that. I for one would hate to live in South Africa. But equality won't alter facts." (p.3) Few lines later Mr. Green makes his statement rather liberal and sympathetic but still emphasizing the inferiority of the African and the high sense of charity of his countrymen:

The fact that over countless centuries the African has been the victim of the worst climate in the world and of every imaginable disease. Hardly his fault. But he has been sapped mentally and physically. We have brought him western education. But what use is it to him? He is"(p.3)

Placing Mr. Green's remark at the beginning of the novel, the writer wants to use the colonial views as a background for the reader's understanding of Obi's story. The remark expresses an ideal quite irrelevant to reality. It goes with the thematic basis of the novel which is summarized in Gareth Griffiths's words as "the distance between what is said to be and what is."¹⁷

In the first six chapters of the novel which cover the period from Obi's departure to England till his return to Umuofia, Achebe presents dramatically the conflicts already there in Obi's native background and those he has acquired by his education in England. To celebrate Obi's

departure, a Christian prayer meeting was held during which Mary , one of the most zealous Christians in Umuofia and a good friend of Obi's mother, leads them in prayer:

'O God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob' , she burst forth, 'the Beginning and the End . Without you we can do nothing. The great river is not big enough for you to wash your hands in. You have the yam and you have the knife; we can't eat unless you cut us a piece. We are like ants in your sight. We are like little children who only wash their stomach when they bath leaving their back dry.'(p.9)

In Mary's speech the Christian gospel is Africanized and this makes the religious synthesis evident and profound. Ikedi's prayer implies a prophecy that Obi's education in an English university will bring them power. But they are unaware that that education will also bring alienation. The confusion of values in the society of Umuofia is reflected in the farewell party by Ikedi's address in which he tells the gathering about the declining of feasts in the town since the invention of the invitation cards:

In times past...Umuofia would have required of you to fight in wars and bring home human heads. But those were days of darkness from which we have been delivered by the blood of the lamb of God. Today we send you to bring knowledge. Remember that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. I have heard of young men from other towns who went to the white man's country, but instead of facing their studies they went after the sweet things of the flesh. Some of them even married white women. A man who does that is lost to his people. He is like rain wasted in the forest.(Pp.10-11)

Though Ikedi's address reveals that these people show readiness to adjust themselves to the new values in the sense that they now prefer the learned man of the new state to the hero of the days of the tribal wars, they regard marrying a foreign woman as a betrayal to the tribe. Furthermore the tribal tradition brought into the world of the city is no longer effective in offering security to the villagers. The speech of the president of Umuofia Progressive Union and the behavior of its members in their emergency meeting in Lagos prove the lack of security and certainty:" We are strangers in this land. If good comes to it may we have our share... .But if bad comes let it go to the owners of the land who know what gods should be appeased."(P.6)

It is in this society with all its contradictions that Obi grows up , shows excellence in his early study and becomes the pride of his people who pay him money for his study in England. His patriotic sentiments are well expressed in the poems he has written in England, in his speeches in the meetings of the Students' Union, and his arguments with his friend Christopher in Lagos. But the betrayal of his laudable ideals starts soon after his coming back from England. The incidents and the situations he is involved in after his return suggest unacknowledged insincerity or naivety. Though his immediate reactions to these situations manifest a man who is enthusiastic to rid the country from its corruption, they betray at the same time an image of a self-defeated one. It is an invitation to the reader to view the hero ironically.

Obi's people expect that he will go to his village in Umuofia after his return, instead he goes to Lagos whose culture is a combination of both African and European cultural ingredients. The change in Obi is so clear the first time he sees the city as a rotten place. Recalling a poem he

has written in London about Nigeria, turning and looking at the rotten dog in the storm drain, he says: "I have tasted putrid flesh in the spoon." (p.17) This Lagos is different from the one he has written a callow nostalgic poem about :

How sweet it is to lie beneath a tree
At every time and share the ecstasy
Of jocund birds and flimsy butterflies
How sweet to leave over earthbound body in its mud,
And rise towards the music of the sphere,
Descending softly with the wind,
And the tender glow of the fading sun.(p.17)

These two conflicting attitudes towards his country indicate the instability of the hybrid hero and his search for a stable point of view.

The image he has in mind about his country is replaced by a false one after his return to Lagos which has witnessed social and economic changes. Money, success, luxury and social ranks are the key words for the new society. The Africans show an ability to adopt the western values as that of the Europeans themselves. Unexpectedly they manifest a desire for power and wealth by following legal and illegal means. This in a way disproves the idea that primitive societies such as the African society are uninterested in technological and industrial progress. Achebe, among other writers, calls for reconsidering such a view but he speaks for some perennial human values against the materialistic ones.

The time Obi reaches the country the customs official wants a bribe from him which he refuses and as a result he is roughly treated (Pp.30-31). And when he applies for a job, his friends advised him to go to someone high in the government which is the usual way to get a job. And when he is interviewed he is asked by the chairman of the Public Service Commission: "Why do you want a job in the Civil Service? So that you can take bribes?" (p.40) Obi's rejection of the question: "I don't know how you expect me to answer that question...I don't think it's a very useful question" (p.40) is out of his honesty and idealism. Besides, he doesn't know that his salary will not be enough for the demands of the new mode of living and for his obligations to his family. But the very choice of the civil service career in itself suggests the hero's insincerity.

When Obi travels home the driver of the mammy wagon bribes the traffic officer. The incident extracts his extreme revulsion against his country. The knowledge he has come back with helps him to understand quite well the essence of its decaying morality as his reflection on this same incident shows:

'What an Augean stable!' he muttered to himself. "Where does one begin? With the masses? Educate the masses? 'He shook his head. 'Not a chance there. It would take centuries. A handful of men at the top. Or even one man with vision- an enlightened dictator. People are scared of the word nowadays. But what kind of democracy can exist side by side with so much corruption and ignorance. Perhaps a half-way house- a sort of compromise'. When Obi's reasoning reached this point he reminded himself that England had been as corrupt not so very long ago. He was not really in the mood for consecutive reasoning. His mind was impatient to roam in a more pleasant landscape. (Pp.43-44)

His mood of thinking about the problems of his country suggests an attitude towards his countrymen not different from that a colonial has towards them. His passivity speaks of unwillingness of the generation of the elite, who realize quite well the shams of the social reality in their country, to make any sacrifice to change it. To them patriotism is, in Gakwandi's words, "only a sentimental indulgence cultivated in moments of loneliness."¹⁸

Achebe continues to probe his hero's mind to externalize the inner conflict he is undergoing. He listens to the traders' song in Ibo but it first appears without meaning. Only when he translates it into English he starts to understand its meaning. Achebe comments: "on the face of it there was no kind of logic or meaning in the song. But as Obi turned it round in his mind, he was struck by the wealth of association that even such a mediocre song could have."(p.46) Obi critically examined the song of traders as a critic or a student of literature. The novelist tells us that he is a graduate of English, he has read Shakespeare and Eliot and has chosen Conrad for his degree. The way Achebe describes Obi's critical approach of the song suggests that his novel itself should be approached by following the same register of critical discourse as Kofi Owusu says "*No Longer at Ease* suggests that the critic who examines the action of Achebe's texts critically ...would uncover a good deal beyond the author's well-documented accessibility and deceptive simplicity."¹⁹

5.2. The Theme of Corruption in the Novel

The question of the family commitment is the core of the matter of corruption in the novel. Attaining his job, usually held by a European, Obi aspires to live a European style of life, so his people perceive that he will be very rich. To live a European way of life, he has to follow the European code of dealing with all the pressures and problems of his new life. With his salary, he can live a rather comfortable life and meet his obligations to the others if he follows the European example represented by Mr. Green's way of managing his life affairs. But Obi leads a luxurious course of living with which he cannot satisfy the needs of his family or to pay the money he is indebted to his people. Obi found himself trapped between the obligation to his family and the European code he adopted. To come out of this crisis he has to put one of them ahead of the other. Both are moral errors.

Obi's sense of sincerity to his principles is that of a poet. He tells Clara, his girlfriend: "You know, you are a poet, Clara... . To meet people you don't want to meet, that's pure of T.S. Eliot."(p.20) His romantic sincerity is quite clear also in the image of the cyclist on whose bag is written 'FUTURE MINISTER'.(p18) The image reflects the contradiction between the hero's poetic world and the cyclist's world of intense life. The conflict is expressed in Obi's conversation with his friend Christopher in which he emphasizes his moral vision against the dishonesty of the civil service officials insisting on relating his intellectual education to his moral insight:

" The Civil Service is corrupt because of these so-called experienced men at the top' said Obi.

'You don't believe in experience? You think that a chap straight from the university should be made permanent secretary ?'

'I didn't say straight from the university, but even that would be better than filling our top posts with old men who have no intellectual foundations to support their experience... . To most of them bribery is no problem.

They come straight to the top without bribing anyone.

It's not that they're necessarily better than others, it is simply that they can afford to be virtuous. But even that

kind of virtue can become a habit.'(Pp.20-21)

Achebe shows him to be a failure in his relationship with his family, his clan, and his girlfriend, and in the way of facing his material crisis. The Umuofia have sent Obi to study in England and they have paid for his study. They expect change and they hope to enjoy "the great honor Obi had brought to the ancient town of Umuofia which could join the comity of other towns in their march towards political irredentism, social equality, and economic emancipation"(p.32).They see in Obi their savior from ignorance and social ills and a "fulfillment of prophecy" as it is indicated in Ikedi's poem:

The people which sat in darkness
Saw a great light'
And to them which sat in the region
And shadow of death
To them did light spring up. (p8)

Instead, the Umuofians are struck by his appearance and behavior. He comes to the welcome party held by the Umuofian Progressive Union to celebrate his return "in shirtsleeves" while "everybody expected a young man from England to be impressively turned out."(p.31) They are disturbed by his unimpressive speech of thanks "He spoke 'is' and 'was'." (p.32) and by his strange way of thinking or what Achebe calls "the values of education". Obi tells them: "Education for service, not for white - collar jobs and comfortable salaries."(p.32) He shows inability to reconcile his communal responsibilities with his personal life, rejecting the solution of the Union and defying its convention openly. In his attitude towards his people he proves to be inept in handling human relationship. "He is an individual with no sense of order, whose incapacity is contrasted to the strength of character of his hardly literate 'fellow Umuofians' which permits them to make sacrifice on behalf of a man who turns out to be weaker than them."²⁰ Instead of taking a rational resolution against his parents' view concerning his choice of an Osu girl for marriage, he is controlled by anger and resentment. This course of betrayal ends with the betrayal of his girlfriend. Her abortion symbolizes the abortion of his ideals, for after it he consciously starts the way of his moral deterioration.

Obi has to satisfy all the material demands his new life imposes on him: his debt over taxes, his new car, the money he has to send to his poverty-stricken family and his debt to his benefactors. Faced with these pressures which are beyond his ability to resist, Obi submits. his submission starts when he finds that he should account for his leave allowances on a per-mile basis:

Obi returned to his desk to do a little arithmetic, using mileage chart. He discovered that the return journey from Lagos to Umuofia amounted to only fifteen pounds. 'That's is just too bad', he thought. Mr. Omo should have warned him when he gave him twenty-five . Anyway, it was too late to do anything about it now. He couldn't possibly refund ten pounds. He would have to say that he spent his leave in Cameroons. Pity ,that.(p.155)

When he gets the job as a secretary to the scholarship commission many applicants offer him bribes to get scholarship awards. One of them' a female applicant even shows her readiness to sleep with him.(p.92) First he resists but his struggle is culminated with his surrender. He accepts bribes and his ideals collapse. Though *No Longer at Ease* is a novel that deals with a

personal story it has its roots in the eventual history of Nigeria. It delineates the alienation of the educated young generation in Nigeria at the dawn of its independence. The key word for the theme of the novel is 'corruption'. Corruption was the origin of the anarchy that dominated the life of the new nation dramatized in the hero's consciousness. The novel becomes a "parable of modern Nigeria, a commentary on apparently universal corruption and on the colonial judgment of the new African generation."²¹ The course of the events of the novel together with their external associations shows quite clearly that the hero is victim of the conflict between the vernacular and the metropolitan values. In this respect his fall becomes representative of the spiritual decline of his generation in modern Nigeria, especially of those westernized Africans trapped in the social drama of the new situation. His moral disintegration becomes an example of the failure of the young elite to provide an adequate leadership for the nation.

The educated Africans who were trained in the British schools became political leaders of their people in their rebellion against the colonial administration, nevertheless they initiated patterns of adopting the British fashions and ways of living. Herbert Macaulay, for instance, with his white suit, black bow tie, Panama hat, and white black shoes, set an example for the young generation of Lagos. His party was behind the privileges that the African official in the civil service enjoyed. In the novel Obi is given transportation allowance, interest loan for an automobile, and paid home leave. But if education was the first merit of the European colonialism, the British did not offer all the facilities for the university African graduates for they were afraid that they may lead political change in their countries. Honorable Sam Okoli, the young minister of state, owner of \$35000 house with a British Oxford graduate as an Assistant Secretary is an example of a corrupt politician who benefits from the colonial situation to improve his social status.

In presenting the social forces that destroy Obi's ideals, Achebe points out the fragility of the social structure evolved during the colonial rule. The idea of Nigeria as a unified nation remains abstract since each one is caring for his personal interests. The relationship between people and government is that of suspicion and disloyalty. Government is referred in the welcome party as 'they' and the writer tells us that "It had nothing to do with you or me. It was an alien institution and people's business was to get as much out of it as they could without getting into trouble."(p.33) Obi's behavior as well as the behavior of the young Nigerians of his generation shows no devotion to the general good of their country. Their behavior is not different from that of the colonial rulers who eloquently claim that they are doing people every favor while they in reality work for their own interests. The colonial officials take every mistake the Africans do to affirm their idea of the inefficiency of the Africans to rule themselves. In this sense, the novel becomes, as Achebe intends it to be, a call for a revolution of the new patterns of the social structure and an assessment of the behavior of the educated elite who are going to be in charge of the leadership of the new Nigeria.

Achebe's criticism is not limited to the young generation, rather it includes the less educated villagers who revealed a potential to adjust themselves readily to the values of new Lagos. Their only concern is to develop wealth without any regard to the affair of the country or any attempt to influence its life. Nepotism is another example of the moral deterioration that Obi sees in Nigeria. One of his people who offers a bribe to him expects special treatment. And the policeman who comes to harass Obi and Clara on the beach apologizes to him when he discovers that he is an Ibo like himself. The public reaction to Obi's trial for taking a bribe certifies that corruption is common in all social institutions. Achebe says:" Some civil servants paid as much as ten shillings and sixpences to obtain a doctor's certificate of illness for the day" (p.6), come to hear the judgment . His people blame him not for taking a bribe of twenty pounds as for the way he takes it as it comes on the tongue of the president of Umuofia Progressive Union:" I am against people reaping where they have not sown. But we have a saying that if

you want to eat a toad you should look for a fat and a juicy one ." (p.6) The shift from the Christian to the tribal aphorism in the proverb he implies in his suggestion indicates that they are caught between the Christian world and the tribal world.

The theme of corruption, then, is treated on a social level. The social milieu Achebe approaches is one in which the colonial interacts with the native tradition, the result is the appearance of heterogeneous values. The principles of sowing and reaping (drawn from the Bible) is not practically applied in such society. As for the second proverb in the speech of the President of the Umuofia Progressive Union, the individual's acceptance of bribes according to his clan is welcomed as far as it doesn't bring any offense to them. In the society of Lagos there is no restraint to anything that doesn't oppose the clan's interests. The individual has the liberty to do anything since no social law is effective.

The manipulation of the tradition exemplified by Achebe's recurrent use of proverbs in the novel is not only a clue to the inadequacy of the hero's moral world, it also accounts for the impracticality of the culture. The morality of the tribal community is defeated by their communal values:

We are not going to ask him to bring his salary to share among us. It is in little things like this that he can help us. It is our fault if we don't approach him. Shall we kill a snake and carry it in our hand when we have a bag for putting long things in? (P.80)

But if Obi openly defies the tribal world he is trapped by his world of individualism. Though he realizes that according to the European rational ideal it is nonsense not to marry his beloved for the mere irrational taboo, that she is a Christian girl, his decision is sapped by his passive reaction when she tells him that she is an Osu:

' I am an Osu.' she wept. Silence. She stopped weeping and quietly disengaged herself from him. Still he said nothing. ' So you see we cannot get married,' she said, quite firmly, almost gaily-a terrible kind of gaiety. Only tears showed she had wept. ' Nonsense' said Obi. He shouted it almost, as if by shouting now he could wipe away those seconds of silence, when everything had seemed to stop, waiting in vain for him to speak. (p.71)

The complexity of the situation Obi experiences is reflected in the complexity of the ' languages' Achebe uses in the novel. They range from speech habits of colonial officials and educated people in the city of Lagos who use little English to the traditional idioms modified to respond to the modern life of the people in the rural areas. The variety of the language reflects the way each of them behaves or thinks. In other words, the language becomes the key to their worlds as it comes in Achebe's comment on this point: " No man can understand another whose language he does not speak (and 'language' here does not mean simply words but a man's entire world view)"²² On the same ground, Obi fails to tell his parents his ideas because they cannot understand the only language in which he can express these ideas. Difference in education sometimes makes communication difficult even among intimate friends. Clara doesn't share Obi's interests in poetry and political discussions and he does not like to see film thrillers that she is interested to watch. Achebe specifically reveals the lack of communication between

ordinary people and their leadership. This lack of contact, Onyemaechi Udumukwu says, "has precipitated a condition of contrasts and an evenness in development."²³ The appearance of Mr. Green at the beginning and at the end of the novel is deliberate since Achebe wants to emphasize the division in Obi's nature: of the European individualism and the Umuofian tribalism. And since the emphasis from the very beginning is on duty, Achebe stresses Mr. Green's function as an example of fidelity:

Obi has long come to admit to himself that, no matter how much he disliked Mr. Green, he nevertheless had some admirable qualities. Take, for instance, his devotion to duty. Rain or shine, he was in the office half an hour before the official time, and quite often worked long after two, or returned again in the evening. Obi could not understand it. Here was a man who did not believe in a country, and yet worked so hard for it. Did he simply believe in duty as a logical necessity? He continually put off going to see his dentist because, as he always said, he had some urgent work to do. He is like a man who had some great and supreme task that must be completed before a final catastrophe intervened. It reminded Obi of what he had once read about Mohammed Ali of Egypt, who in his old age worked in frenzy to modernize his country before his death. (p.105)

Green's commitment to duty is something and his attitude to Africa is something else. He hates and rejects the idea of Nigeria's attainment of independence. He shows no tendency to give up his ideal of duty despite all changes in the real situation of Nigeria. In this respect the hero draws analogy between Green's behavior and that of Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*:

With a flash of insight Obi remembered his Conrad which he had read for his degree. 'By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded.' That was Mr. Kurtz before the heart of darkness got him. Afterwards he had written: 'Exterminate all the brutes.' It was not a close analogy, of course. Kurtz had succumbed to the darkness, Green to the incipient dawn. But their beginning and their end were alike. "I must write a novel on the tragedy of the greens of the century", he thought, pleased with his analysis. (p.106)

On the other hand, there is the tribal ethic of duty which is based upon the solidarity of the tribe. This could be considered in two ways. On one hand, it is a good continuation of communal solidarity into the modern city as expressed in the proverb of the snakes in Obi's speech in the meeting of the Umuofia Progressive Union in Lagos: "If all snakes live together in one place, who could approach them?" (p.81). Furthermore, when this solidarity shifted to the life of the town it turns to be self-interest and nepotism. Faced with these two concepts of duty, Obi experiences embittered alienation and his attempt to reconcile them leads him to prison.

6.1 Conclusion

The novel “*No Longer at Ease*” provides a critique of post-independence Nigerian life and an assessment of what it inherited from the European settler. Moreover, it shows that the events of the novel deal with an African young man and the crisis he experienced as a result of the conflict between the European intellectual culture that he acquired during his studies in England and what he inherited of tribal and family traditions and values. Moreover, the novel reveals the protagonist's lack of the moral courage to face the pressures of the conflict between the European materialistic ideals and the African traditions, which leads to his failure and moral downfall. In fact, the novel becomes an invitation, on the level of values, for an assessment of the behavior of the cultural elite that will take over the leadership of modern Nigeria and their ways to deal with the legacy of settlement. Finally, the novel reveals the protagonist's lack of the moral courage to face the pressures of the conflict between the European materialistic ideals and the African traditions, which leads to his failure and moral downfall. Further, the duality of behavior on the social level is accompanied by a religious one. The gathering in the same party pray for the Christian God

Notes

- 1-David Carroll, *Chinua Achebe* (New York : Twayne Publications, Inc 1970),p. 22.
- 2-Shato Arthur Gakwandi, *The Novel and Contemporary Experience in Africa* (London: Heinemann, 1977), P. 2
- 3-Carroll, *Op. Cit*, p. 18.
- 4-*Ibid* ,p.21.
- 5-See Robert M. Wren, *Achebe's World: The Historical and the Cultural Context of the Novels of Chinua Achebe*,(Longman, 1981),p.39.
- 6-For further discussion of this point see Wren,p.39.
- 7-Quoted by Wren,p.40. About the manipulation of education in the novel, see Seyed Mohammed Mrarandi and Reyhane Sadat Shadpour, 'Education as an Ideological Instrument: A Postcolonial Reading of Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*', *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research*, 12(7),Pp.938-944, 2012.
- 8-*Ibid*, p. 41.
- 9-About the definition of 'African Literature' see Chinua Achebe, *Morning, Yet on Creation Day*, New York: Anchor Press,1975,p.91.
- 10-Quoted and translated by Gakwandi, p.1.
- 11-Colin Legum, *Pan-Africanism*,London: Pall Mall Press, 1965.
- 12-Edward Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and The Negro Race*, Edinburgh; University Press, 1967,p. 189.
- 13-Claude Wauthier, *The Literature and Thought Of Modern Africa*, London: Pall Mall Press,1966,p.96.
- 14-Victor Le Vine, *Political Leadership in Africa*, Stanford: University Press, 1967,p.54.
- 15-For these historical details I am indebted to Carroll, Pp.25-30.
- 16-Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, London:Heinemann1962,p.2. All subsequent references will be to this edition and only page numbers will be parenthetically cited in the text.
- 17-Gareth Griffiths, 'Language and Action in the novels of Chinua Achebe' in *African Literature Today*, (ed.) Eldred Durosimi Jones, London: Heinemann, 1982,p.92.
- 18-Gakwandi, p.29. About the idea of the expectations and the disappointments that permeate the novel, see Amechi Akwanya, 'Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*: The question of Failed Expectations', *African Journal of New Writings*, Feb. 2006.
- 19-Kofi Owusu,'The Politics of Interpretation: The Novels Of Chinua Achebe' in *Modern Fiction Studies* Vol.37,No.3 Autumn,1991,p.436.

20-Abiola Irele, 'The Tragic Conflict in Achebe's Novels' in ULL Beier (ed.) *Introduction to African Literature*, London: Longman, 1967,p.173.

21-Wren, p.38.

22-Gakwandi, p.33.

23-Onyemaechi Udumukwu, 'Achebe and the Negation of Independence' in *Modern Fiction Studies* Vol.37, No.3 Autumn 1991,p.472.See also Adina Campu,' Tradition Versus Modernity in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* ',*Bulletin of the Transylvania University of Brasov*,IV, Vol.6, No.2, 2013

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