

Forms of Encounter on the Colonial Contact Zone In Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*

BENDJEMIL Khawla,
Université d'alger 2

ملخص:

تعالج رواية أشيبي "لم يعد مرتاح" بعض قضايا ما بعد الاستعمار الحاسمة في نيجيريا. بالإضافة إلى استغلال أراضي المواطنين والقوة البدنية والمواد الخام، يحاول المستعمر، باستخدام كل الوسائل المتاحة، فرض ثقافته "العليا والمتحضرة" على حياة الناس. إن نتيجة هذه الإستراتيجية هي غموض ثقافي وفكري يعيش فيه المجتمع النيجيري. فالعيش بين ثقافتين متعارضتين هو عدم ارتياح يعاني منه كل من كبار السن والشباب و النيجيري. وعليه فقد يخلط المفكر النيجيري بين تعليمه الغربي وقيم مجتمعه وتقاليد الجامة. فهذا المقال هو محاولة لتحليل طرق التواصل المختلفة بين المستعمر و المستعمر في رواية أشيبي. كما يسلط الضوء على حالة المثقفين النيجيريين الذين يبدو أنهم أكثر وعيا بوضع بلادهم. **الكلمات المفتاحية:** ما بعد الاستعمار، تواصل، الصراع الثقافي، والهوية.

Abstract:

Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* deals with some crucial postcolonial issues in Nigeria. In addition to exploiting the natives' lands, physical force, and raw materials, the colonizer tries, using all means available, to impose his "superior, civilized" culture on the people's lives. The result of such a strategy is a cultural and an intellectual ambiguity in which the Nigerian society lives in. Living in between two clashing cultures is an unease that both old and young Nigerians suffer from. The Nigerian intellectual is confused between his Western education and his society's rigid values and traditions. This article is an attempt to analyze the different ways of encounter between colonizer and colonized in Achebe's novel. It also highlights the case of the Nigerian intellectuals who seem to be more aware of their country's situation.

Keywords: postcolonial, encounter, cultural clash, and identity.

The novels of Chinua Achebe (1930–2013), *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, *Arrow of God*, *A Man of the People*, and *Anthills of the Savannah*, are widely read in Africa, as well as in Europe and North

America. Through his fiction, Achebe points out the negative impacts that the colonizer has caused to the Nigerian society specifically, and to all Africa in general. His work also presents the fact that the relationship between the colonizer and the (ex) colonized is far more complex than it may seem. Achebe's aim is to accentuate the fact that the ex-colonized peoples are only officially independent but not mentally and/or intellectually so. Indeed, this is one of the main objectives of postcolonial writers who believe that they should take part in the de-colonization process of their people to help liberating their minds from the foreign culture the white man has imposed on them. In her *Colonialism /Postcolonialism*, Ania Loomba claims that such writers have "challenged and revised dominant definitions of race, culture, language and class in the process of making their voices heard" (Loomba, 1998, 5). Actually, the white man's culture may not all be disastrous to the natives' traditions and national identity. However, the colonizer's consistent attempts to (mis)represent the other's culture that is different from theirs as inferior is one of the threats that Africans should be aware of in order to fight it back. In this respect, Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1960) presents the cultural clash that the traditional Ibo society experiences due to the intrusion of the European values through the lives and stories of the novel's characters. The clash between two different systems of traditions, customs, values, and so far leads the whole society to live in both personal and national ambiguities. Moreover, its effect is more serious on the intellectuals who think consciously about the contradictions that happen in Nigerians' daily life.

No Longer at Ease deals with the clash between traditional Ibo and Western European values, and the way Achebe portrays it. Indeed, this latter presents the consequences of such cultural clash on the novel's protagonist Obi Okonkwo. In his *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*, Emmanuel Obiechina asserts that Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* deals with the influence of the white men's culture on the

young Western-educated Nigerians and their identities. Indeed, Obi's situation is seen from two different perspectives. Some critics consider him a tragic hero who is torn between two sets of values that prevent him from being "at ease" in his own country. Whereas, others think that he is an intelligent intellectual who can find a way to obtain what he wants with fewer losses. This means that the clash between the Ibo and the European different cultures is not responsible for the whole dilemma of Obi since he is capable of finding an in-between space for himself. However, such solution that he may come up with is not always an immediate one. He has to make mistakes, trembles and gets confused first before finding a way out.

G. D. Killam, in *The Novels of Chinua Achebe*, agrees with the above point of view related to the serious situation that Obi, the protagonist, has to face while living in his 'beloved' country Nigeria. For he has a Western education that leads him to think idealistically about his dear country. But at the same time, he lives within a contradictory society that is proud of him to have the white man's views and education, yet wait from this same 'Westernized' intellectual to respect and practice all the Ibo traditions and customs.

Palmer Eustacee focused on the young Nigerians who are living in-between two different cultures. But although he agrees that "Achebe demonstrates that this modern Nigerian is ill-at-ease in a society which is no longer recognizably his own, and which consistently fails to conform to his idealized picture," (Eustacee, 1973, 99) he does not see that all what happens to Obi is because of the cultural clash he experiences in his own society. Concerning this matter he confirms that:

Achebe wishes to show that Obi's love affair with Clara is destroyed by his society's conservatism. However, Achebe does not demonstrate that social forces are to blame . . . The affair is destroyed, not by the clash between the old and the new, but by Clara's unreasonable behaviour. (Eustacee, 1973, 107)

Hence, for him, Obi's misfortune is not wholly because of his double identity. Some causes of his miseries are rather sometimes because of some other character's actions; whereas, for other times, they are because of Obi's inability to act wisely. But, I think that Clara's unreasonable behavior is mainly because of the cultural clash that she lives in that she is no longer able to bear.

This article deals with the colonial encounters between the Nigerians and the white men on the contact zone in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*. It also examines the perturbed situation of postcolonial Nigeria in particular, and all of Africa in general. Moreover, it tackles the difficult condition of the new intellectual elites who are torn apart between their Western education and their traditional Ibo values.

No Longer at Ease is set in the 1950's Nigeria few days immediately before the independence. It opens with the trial of its main character Obi Okonkwo for accepting bribes. Then it takes the form of a flashback in order to explain the circumstances behind this trial. Obi is a twenty-six years old Nigerian who gets a scholarship from the Umuofia Progressive Union to study law in England. During the four years he spends there studying English instead of law, many things happen to Obi that affect his whole life when he goes back to live in the Nigerian city of Lagos.

The relationship between the whites and the Nigerians in the novel is typically the one between colonizer and colonized; the one that is based on power and dominance of one party over the other and a binary opposition that differentiates whites from Blacks. It is interesting how the British are referred to as "masters" (like in pages 3 and 6) throughout the novel. Hence, the native is the "mastered." When the British Council man ("the master") shows his inability to understand why the educated Obi accepts bribes, Mr. Green tells him that he can easily do so and yet cannot understand why some of the other British "refuse to face facts" that:

'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.'

'What facts?' asked the British Council man, who was relatively new to the country. There was a lull in the general conversation, as many people were now listening to Mr Green without appearing to do so.

'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 ...' (Achebe, 1960, 5)

The African is corrupt while the Westerner is not. And despite the attempts of the West to educate Africans, their corrupt nature is stronger, as Mr. Green believes. Just like any colonizer, he even backs up “his fact” by scientific proofs. The African is, then, corrupt despite the fact that it was not his fault. The white man is therefore always the enlightened, the intelligent, the strong, and powerful whereas the natives are the weak, the darkened, and the stupid. This is what represents the binary oppositions that the colonizer uses to distinguish himself from the natives. Thus, Mr. Green represents the colonial mentality of power and superiority. He is described in the novel as an arrogant and patronizing person. On the first day of Obi's civil service, he tells him to use his brain in order to succeed at work, if he has one. This is because Mr. Green, the white colonizer, is the one responsible for bringing education and enlightenment to the “inferior non-educated” Africans, despite the fact of their certainty of the stupidity of those people. Moreover, the other is inferior to the superior white: this is what Mr. Green always tries to stress out. He reminds Obi to pay back his fees in a country like Nigeria where even the “educated have not reached the level of thinking about tomorrow” (Achebe, 1960, 73). Indeed, this

strategy of ‘othering’ those who are separate from the self is typically colonial:

The existence of others is crucial in defining what is ‘normal’ and in locating one’s own place in the world. The colonized subject is characterized as ‘other’ through discourses such as primitivism and cannibalism, as a means of establishing the binary separation of the colonizer and colonized and asserting the naturalness and primacy of the colonizing culture and world view. (Ashcroft et al., 1998, 4)

What Achebe shows us in the novel is the real face of the whites in Nigeria. For while Mr. Green accuses Africans to be naturally corrupt, whites do also accept bribes just like Obi and others. When Obi applies for a job, the vice-president of the Umuofia Progressive Union of his native village assures him that he will get it since he has education without the need to give any of the board’s members a bribe. The president tells him that Obi will not be in need of seeing anyone before his interview since the board’s members will mostly be whites. So, the vice-president responds to him: “You think white men don't eat bribe? Come to our department. They eat more than black men nowadays” (Achebe, 1960, 27). So, the whites that Mr. Green thinks they are all good are even more corrupt than Africans who he tries to explicate their corruption.

Corruption is widespread in the city of Lagos and Nigeria. People take bribes as natural as they do. The consumerism and the materialism that the white man has made abundant can be one of the causes that led Nigerians to resort to bribery. As a boy, Obi used always to hear about its piles of money, its lights, its cars, its fast-paced life with all its dancing, and women. At the same time, when Obi goes back to Lagos from England, there is a vivid description of the slum surrounding Obi—the remains of a dog on the street that has been run over by a taxi, street vendors, meat stalls, and so far. This can be related to the great failure of the civilizing

mission. The white man has claimed that he came to help the Africans to civilize themselves, but the result is not obviously positive.

As a result of the colonial encounter of the two different cultures of both the natives and the British, a cultural clash between the “old” and the “new” occurs, influencing the people (colonizer or colonized) who live in the contact zone. This clash is apparent in the lives of the novel’s characters as well as in their behaviours and attitudes. In the novel, Nigerians are actually more damaged according to the crisis that their identities experience. To begin with those who did not receive an education from the white man, yet they are still influenced by him. For the mere presence of the colonizer on the contact zone leads to a mutual effect between the two cultures. Examples are those of Obi’s both parents, Obi’s friend Joseph, and the Umuofia Progressive Union.

Obi’s father, Isaac Okonkwo is a catechist who converted to Christianity after finding what he could not find in his father’s Ibo religion. He is very sensitive towards his new religion. The fact that he has only one wife can be a good example of his sincerity. However, traditions seem to be still deeply engraved in his identity. The fact of naming his child Obiajulu reflects his hybrid identity. The name means "the mind at last is at rest;" because Isaac is finally delighted to have a boy after so many girls. In Christianity both boys and girls are gifts from God, and no one has the right to question God’s will. But the pious Christian “Isaac” is delighted to finally have a boy because it is the boy who is going to bear the family’s name. In addition, Isaac has always refused everything that is related to his pagan father, Okonkwo. However, he sticks to some beliefs and sayings that link him to his father (Achebe, 1960, 10).

Isaac is against Obi’s marriage to an *osu*. This is absolutely contrary to Christians’ values. And this is the argument Obi uses against his father. He thus explains to his father that with Christ there is no judgment of the sort he is making against Clara. He also adds saying that just because their

ancestors had made mistakes in the past does not mean that they have to continue on the same “wrong” path since they are now Christians.

Many of the Umuofians do not agree with Isaac when he refuses everything that contradicts Christianity. During the welcome back party he organizes for Obi, the old men argue with him to serve kola nuts. Isaac finally finds a compromise and serves kola nuts to his guests. He tells one of the old men, Ogbuefi Odogwu: 'Do not trouble yourself, Ogbuefi Odogwu,' said Okonkwo to him. 'I am not refusing to place a kola nut before you. What I say is that it will not be used as a heathen sacrifice in my house' (Achebe, 1960, 40). In the same party, they also argue on different other matters related to their native beliefs that contradict those of the Christian faith. An old man asks Isaac Okonkwo: “Perhaps you will also tell me that some men cannot send thunder to their enemies?” (Achebe, 1960, 38). Isaac sees it part of foolishness to believe such a thing saying that: “What Satan has accomplished in this world of ours is indeed great, [f]or it is he alone that can put such abominable thought into men's stomachs” (Achebe, 1960, 38). The old man also mentions the fact that no Umuofian was killed by thunder because their forefathers made a medicine that protected both them and their coming children. But, Isaac refers to it as the work of God and nothing much (Achebe, 1960, 38). But, most of Isaac’s guests criticize him for cutting himself and his family out from most of their traditions and customs. One of the men says: “He is not the only Christian we have seen, [b]ut it is like the palm-wine we drink. Some people can drink it and remain wise. Others lose all their senses.' 'Very true, very true,' said another. 'When a new saying gets to the land of empty men they lose their heads over it” (Achebe, 1960, 38).

They, thus, consider Isaac Okonkwo and those like him who blindly accepted Christianity rejecting their traditions of their forefathers to be on the wrong side. This is what Bhabha refers to as hegemony of the colonizer’s

culture over the colonized who adapt it and consequently accept its power over them:

Consent is achieved by the interpellation of the colonized subject by imperial discourse so that Euro-centric values, assumptions, beliefs and attitudes are accepted as a matter of course as the most natural or valuable. The inevitable consequence of such interpellation is that the colonized subject understands itself as peripheral to those Euro-centric values, while at the same time accepting their centrality. (Ashcroft et al., 1998, 5)

The preparations to welcome Obi back are all set. However, there is a concern that it rains and the day may get spoiled. In fact, many guests wish it to rain in order to prove to Isaac that! “Christianity had made him blind. He was the only man who failed to see that on an occasion such as this he should take palm-wine, a cock and a little money to the chief rain-maker in Umuofia” (Achebe, 1960, 37).

Like her husband, Hannah, Obi's mother, is another example of the hybrid identity that the Nigerians have. Even though she is a devout Christian, she does not accept Clara as her daughter-in-law for the same reason of Isaac's. The Christian Hannah also prevents her children from accepting any of the food their neighbours give them making her children an exception in the village. Her reason is that the neighbours, “the people of nothing,” offer their food to idols. Hence, her children cannot eat it since they are “the people of the church” (Achebe, 1960, 45). Also, even though she is Christian, Hannah tells her children folk stories that she learned from her mother till the time her husband, Isaac, forbids her to do so. She stops because “[s]he was loyal to her husband and to her new faith” (Achebe, 1960, 45). However, we read on a different occasion that Hannah does tell Obi (secretly from his father) a folk story so that he says it to his classmates during the “Oral” class. Tradition is thus not only preserved at home, but at school as well. Achebe gives space to this folk story to be part

of his novel (in pages 45–46) since it mark the specificity of the Nigerian culture.

The feast organized to welcome back Obi to his town is Christian in tone. Obi's people give him blessings after saying the Christian prayers. Yet, Umuofians also sing traditional songs to Obi, and they offer the guests kola nuts. So, this means that everything Nigerians do in their daily life is a mixture of both cultures present on their land. For even a religious ceremony is mixed up with the traditional rituals.

Obi's friend Joseph Okeke is a clerk in the Survey Department, but who has not had the same kind of Obi's education. Most of his deeds show his closeness to tradition than to the white man's culture. When Obi arrives at Lagos straight from London, Joseph does not offer Obi his room to stay at with him just like he did before going to London; the matter is different now since Obi comes back from London. But Obi wants to stay with him. Joseph likes it but he adds: 'What will the people of other towns say when they hear that a son of Umuofia returned from England and shared a room in Obalende?' (29). Obi asks him not to care because he himself does not. Obalende is a neighbourhood in Lagos for Nigerians only; those who have European posts in it live in a different neater neighbourhood that Obi will be living at when he starts his job. Also during Obi's welcome-back party, Joseph looks at Obi and believes him to be underdressed for the occasion not respecting by his appearance the traditions of their village. In addition, and just like Obi's father, Joseph shows a sincere disagreement of Obi's marriage to an *osu* because of traditions.

The Umuofian Progressive Union represents the traditions that Obi has to face before he marries an *osu*. This union is against this marriage, but Obi cannot understand who has given the right to its members to meddle in his life. But, because they are the source of sponsoring his scholarship, and they consider Obi "a brother," they should teach how to respect the traditions. Indeed, one of its members exclaims: "We paid eight hundred

pounds to train him in England, [b]ut instead of being grateful he insults us because of a useless girl (Achebe, 1960, 7). The Union and traditions are thus one thing despite the misleading name of the Union, that has "progressive" in it. But, its members do not seem to progress or easily accept to try to do so.

To consider it a very special occasion in the town of Umuofia to send one of its men to study in England shows the weight of hegemony that the white men's culture has on Nigerians of the novel. This hegemony is emphasized when the Progressive Union members prepare a big party for him to celebrate his travel to England. The party represents both the happiness and the pride of Obi's fellow Umuofians. Later, when Obi goes back to his town, he is given an unusual importance for the mere reason that he studied in England. In addition to his car now, Obi is a source of pride for his fellow Umuofians. His people greet him with cheers, and seat him next to the president. However despite the fact that they are so proud of Obi to have been educated in England, they are also delighted to see him come back alone without a white wife. Umuofians are aware that Obi has been fed with the white man's education, yet wait from this same 'Westernized' intellectual to respect and practice Ibo traditions and customs.

The intellectuals' case, like Obi's, is far graver than ordinary Nigerians who would be proud to mimic the white man in something yet refuse to accept other things of his. For they are people who are living in an "in-between" space. They are torn between two contradicting cultures not always certain of what to be: either Nigerians or English.

Michael Obi Okonkwo gets his idealism from his western education: "[t]he Western education . . . has distanced him linguistically, socially, and psychologically from [his people]" (Tejumola, 2011, 7). Back in England, Obi misses his country so much. When far from it Nigeria becomes "more than just a name" for him (Achebe, 1960, 12). He even

starts writing nostalgic poems about it. But after spending four years in London, Nigeria is no longer the one he remembered or dreamt of: “the Nigeria he returned to was in many ways different from the picture he had carried in his mind during those four years. There were many things he could no longer recognise, and others---like the slums of Lagos--- which he was seeing for the first time” (Achebe, 1960, 12). He even laments the Nigeria he used to know in one circumstance when a boy on the train wants to take a bribe from him for no reason. He says to himself: “Dear old Nigeria” (Achebe, 1960, 25).

Obi cares a lot for his country and values the importance of educating his people. On different occasions in the novel he expresses this belief. On the way to one of his short visits to Umuofia, he has a conversation with the driver of the lorry that leads him to think about the solution to the problems of Nigeria:

'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. (Achebe, 1960, 35)

He believes in educating the young generations as the key to the development of the country. He also states his opinion more than once about the necessity of getting rid of those old generation people who are ruling them. When he gives a speech to the Students' Union, he tells them about the significance of education: “Education for service, not for white-collar jobs and comfortable salaries. With our great country on the threshold of independence, we need men who are prepared to serve her well and

truly” (Achebe, 1960, 27). He emphasizes the idea that young men and women should educate themselves for the good of their country and not for getting jobs and money out of them.

The Western education that Obi receives changes him in different ways. In fact, language is one of them. When in England, he always tries to use his native Ibo language as much as possible especially with his countrymen despite the fact that English is his specialization. When he meets a non-Ibo Nigerian, however, he is obliged to use English in order to be able to communicate with them. When doing so, he lowers his voice so that “the proud owners of that language” will not hear him. To Obi, he thinks that if they hear him speak English with his fellow Nigerians, they will think that: “one had no language of one's own” (Achebe, 1960, 39). During his welcome-back party, “[h]e wished [the British] were here to-day to see. Let them come to Umuofia now and listen to the talk of men who made a great art of conversation” (Achebe, 1960, 39). Yet, still, English has indeed become a part of Obi. He once understands a traditional song he has always known only after he translates it to English. In this case, English does not distance him from his people but on the contrary makes him closer to them. So, Obi uses the language of the foreign learned culture to understand an aspect of his own native one. And it is indeed interesting how Nigerians consider speaking in English a betrayal (Achebe, 1960, 36)!

When his people prepare for him a welcome-back party, the “Westernized” Obi makes many social "mistakes," as a matter of fact. First, he arrives in a short-sleeved shirt because of the heat although everyone else is dressed properly. Obi even changes his religion; “He had very little religion nowadays” (Achebe, 1960, 19). England, the country of the white man who brought Christianity to Nigerians has distanced Obi from the religion instead of getting him closer to it. He even thinks of his father’s reaction when he learns about this. He asks himself: “What would happen if I stood up and said to him: ‘Father, I no longer believe in your God?’ ”

(Achebe, 1960, 44). Instead, Obi gets closer to his grandfather's religion. When it rains in one of the days of November, he thinks to himself that: "It was as though the deity presiding over the waters in the sky found, on checking his stock and counting off the months on his fingers, that there was too much rain left and that he had to do something drastic about it before the impending dry season" (Achebe, 1960, 48).

Obi is compared to his grandfather Okonkwo in many occasions throughout the novel. And he is so proud of it. One of his father's guests, Odogwu, talks about it in front of everyone during his welcome-back party:

'He is the grandson of Ogbuefi Okonkwo who faced the white man single-handed and died in the fight. Stand up!'

Obi stood up obediently.

'Remark him,' said Odogwu. 'He is Ogbuefi Okonkwo come back. He is Okonkwo *kpom-kwem*, exact, perfect.'

Obi's father cleared his throat in embarrassment. 'Dead men do not come back,' he said.

'I tell you this is Okonkwo. As it was in the beginning so it will be in the end. That is what your religion tells us.'

'It does not tell you that dead men return.'

'Iguedo breeds great men,' said Odogwu changing the subject. 'When I was young I knew of them [...] These men were great in their day. Today greatness has changed its tune. Titles are no longer great, neither are barns or large numbers of wives and children. Greatness is now in the things of the white man. And so we too have changed our tune. We are the first in all the nine villages to send our son to the white man's land. Greatness has belonged to Iguedo from ancient times.' (Achebe, 1960, 42)

The old man confesses that power is dictated by the white man and the natives have to follow the rules that are put by him. Consequently, they are proud to be the first village to send one of their sons to the white man's land

to get education. However, the situations of Obi and his grandfather are not exactly the same. As Raman Singh claims:

Obi Okonkwo, the grandson of the folklore warrior and son of the converted Christian, Nwoye, is engaged in a conflict, but it is not fought on the same level as his grandfather's. Whereas the old man Okonkwo was never for a moment tempted by the principles and values of the Christian word, Obi, instead, is torn between the demands and attractions of the old and the new. (Achebe, 1960, 165)

Obi's enlightening education enables him to think critically about his country's situation. He is well aware of the failure of the civilizing mission and its fakeness. For when Obi is back to Umuofia, he thinks that the British should "come and see men and women and children who knew how to live, whose joy of life had not yet been killed by those who claimed to teach other nations how to live" (Achebe, 1960, 39). This is actually a serious criticism of England's empire and its colonial desires. In many cases, we discover Obi as someone who is very critical of the British despite his Western education. His stay in England, for example, makes him notice things not all ordinary men can; he thinks: "What a waste of water. A microscopic fraction of the Atlantic would turn the Sahara into a flourishing grassland. So much for the best of all possible worlds. Excess here and nothing at all there" (Achebe, 1960, 22). He is aware of the injustices of the colonizers who only exploit the colonized and never think of sharing with them anything. When a child, obi gets punished for writing a letter to Hitler. When he is old and wise, he says:

What was Hitler to me or I to Hitler? I suppose I felt sorry for him. And I didn't like going into the bush every day to pick palm-kernels as our "Win the War Effort"!' [...] 'And when you come to think of it, it was quite immoral of the headmaster to tell little children every morning that for every palm-kernel they picked they were buying a nail for Hitler's coffin'." (Achebe, 1960, 30)

Obi disagrees with what the British did to them when they were young. Indeed, this revolutionary spirit of his stays with him as he grows up. When Joseph does not like how Obi behaves in the interview for a job, he tells him: “a man in need of a job could not afford to be angry,” Obi answers him by saying: “‘Nonsense!’ [...] ‘That’s what I call colonial mentality’” (Achebe, 1960, 32). He does not accept to be controlled and be obliged to hinder the truth out of fear not to get something.

Obi’s intelligence and ability to analyze things is apparent in the following conversation he has with a white man who asks him about Graham Greene’s *The Heart of the Matter*. Obi answers him saying that it is:

'The only sensible novel any European has written on West Africa and one of the best novels I have read.' Obi paused, and then added almost as an afterthought: 'Only it was nearly ruined by the happy ending.'

The Chairman sat up in his chair.

'Happy ending? Are you sure it's *The Heart of the Matter* you're thinking about? The European police officer commits suicide.'

'Perhaps happy ending is too strong, but there is no other way I can put it. The police officer is torn between his love of a woman and his love of God, and he commits suicide. It's much too simple. Tragedy isn't like that at all. I remember an old man in my village, a Christian convert, who suffered one calamity after another. He said life was like a bowl of wormwood which one sips a little at a time world without end. He understood the nature of tragedy.' (Achebe, 1960, 31–32)

This conversation is revealing of Obi’s attachment to his Ibo traditions and old sayings. He is Ibo after all and it is so interesting how Achebe, through the voice of Obi, points out the “other” perspective of looking at the ending of the novel. Obi is not shy or ashamed of his different opinion and he bravely talks about it explaining it reasonably to the white Chairman.

Obi has not become a total European after all. For despite his Western education, and the time he spent in England, he still likes to eat the Nigerian food, he is rather nostalgic to it. He asks his friend Joseph:

'Do they serve Nigerian food here?'

Joseph was surprised at the question. No decent restaurant served Nigerian food. 'Do you want Nigerian food?'

'Of course. I have been dying to eat pounded yams and bitter-leaf soup. In England we made do with semolina, but it isn't the same thing.' (Achebe, 1960, 28)

Also, he does not see himself higher in class than his people although his social status changes as soon as he gets a “European post.” He is still humble to want to share the same room with his friend, Joseph, who has not received the same level of education of his.

Obi embraces two cultures at the same time. This means that Obi has a hybrid identity that is reflected in different circumstances in his life. What happens with Obi is actually ironic. For although Obi disobeys his father's Christian (English) religion by learning and enjoying folktales (which represent his African roots), he studies English in England when he gets older. This reflects the problem of the identity crisis that the intellectuals, specifically, suffer from that is resulted from the contact between two contradicting cultures. This is what Emmanuel Obiechina affirms asserting that: “Even though Obi Okonkwo’s education, social status and job mark him out as middle class, the long shadow of rural Umuofia, materialized in Lagos as the Umuofia Progressive Union, falls over him and makes him partly middle class and partly a villager” (Achebe, 1960, 9).

Obi declares it very clearly when he says that his education has made him a stranger in his country. Obi says this when Joseph is upset and appalled at Obi's inability to realize what it will mean to the Umuofians if he marries an outcast like Clara. Obi is set apart from the Umuofians in

many respects, and this is one of them. He cannot understand why it is important that Clara should suffer because of her ancestry. Joseph says it is not time for such drastic changes. He believes that there will be changes but that their generation (Obi's and Joseph's) are just "pioneers." Obi says, then, that that is precisely why it should be all right for him to take such a step in order to lead. The changes have to begin somewhere and with someone, and Obi believes they should begin with him.

Obi shows a sincere disapproval concerning the matter of bribery. Despite the fact that bribery has become something very ordinary in his society, he sticks to his idealism, which he has taken from his Western education and before it from his traditions and Ibo values of his grandfathers. Many instances in chapter nine, for example, talk about the offers given to him to accept money to help this or that. He is, in fact, angered by those offers, but he seems to be alone in his idealism. He is against everybody who sees it very normal to take bribes. Even the Minister of State, the Hon. Sam Okoli has once told Obi that it is often worse to refuse or not follow through with a bribe than to accept it (Achebe, 1960, 52). After his situation becomes very serious, Obi takes his first bribe, not without guilt, however. He accepts fifty pounds for helping a man's son with a scholarship. "This is terrible!" (Achebe, 1960, 118). He tells himself after that first bribe. Then, the reader learns that he took more bribes including those from women who exchange their bodies for favors. The bribes came and went, and he paid all of his debts, living comfortably, but with a severe sense of guilt. Finally, on the day he has decided to take his last bribe and never do such a thing again because he cannot stand it anymore, he is arrested.

All the educated Nigerians in the novel (like Christopher, Obi's friend, and Clara) are distinguished from their other fellow men in many ways. One of the most prominent reasons is because they have a Western education that is considered to be superior to the natives'

traditions and beliefs. Distinctions are made at the level of housing, for example. For those who are educated do not live in the same neighbourhood as the rest of Nigerians. This is another face of hegemony and power. The European is the “superior master,” on the one hand. On the other hand, the Nigerian is certainly the “Inferior Other.” Yet, having a “European post,” allows you to live at Ikoyi. Obi, Christopher, and Clara live there among other whites in the novel. Therefore, having a European education means that you are like the European in a way which means that you have a kind of power that makes you different from the others, and consequently higher in status than your fellow men. Christopher, Clara, and Obi, like the Europeans in Africa, also have servants and stewards.

The colonial encounters can be manifested in various forms. The latter can, thus, be negative, positive, ambiguous or neutral. In fact, Africans do admit the positive side that the white man has brought to the natives’ countries. This is evident in many dialogues between the characters of this novel. For example, when Obi and Sam Okoli are introduced for the first time, they talk about the issues of their country, Nigeria. Okoli tells Obi that the white man has done some good things for Nigeria, but it is time for him to leave them free in their country. This is an opinion that Okoli verbalizes twice (Achebe, 1960, 51–52).

Obi’s end is tragic, but not totally pessimistic. For although he is a person who lives in an in-betweenness because of which he must suffer, he is making an easier path for the generations that are to follow. All what happens to him may be related to his country’s history:

Obi’s experiences testify, in situations which are sometimes comic, sometimes pathetic, sometimes grim, to the oppressive weight of doubt, guilt, shame and regret that the colonial experience has imposed on modern Nigeria, particularly on young men in the city where the effects of this history are most carefully organized and acutely felt. (Killam, 1973, 53)

This represents the repetitive nature of history. All because of colonialism, Isaac disobeyed his father's religion as well as traditions to embrace Christianity that was brought by the Europeans. It is indeed ironic how after several years, Obi does the same thing disobeying the traditions of his father to follow something accepted by Christianity. But, on some other different occasions, Obi gets closer to traditions and his grandfather Okonkwo. This can only mean that change is occurring and that Obi is right to believe that the future of a postcolonial Nigeria is in the hands of those who can "come to terms with", or an understanding of, their "double heritage" (Achebe, 1960, 84).

Works Cited

- Achebe, Chinua. (1960). *No Longer at Ease*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Bill Aschcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. (1998). *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Killam, G. D. (1973). *The Novels of Chinua Achebe*. London: Heimann.
- Obiechina, Emmanuel. (1975). *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Olaniyan, Tejumola. (2011). The Paddle that Speaks English: Africa, NGOs, and the Archaeology of an Unease. *Research in African Literatures*, 42 (2), 46–59.
- Loomba, Ania. (1998). *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Palmer, Eustace. (1973). *An Introduction to the African Novel: A Critical Study*. London: Heinemann.
- Singh, Raman. (1989). *No Longer at Ease: Traditional and Western Values in the Fiction of Chinua Achebe*. *Neohelicon*, 16 (2), 159–167.