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RELOCATION OF THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE : A PORTRAIT OF OBI IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S NO LONGER AT EASE

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Achebe's *No Longer At Ease*(1960) marks the story of a young eastern nigrian, Obi Okonkwo, a promising representative of his generation. He is brilliant boy of his village, who returns from his studies in England to try to live up to the outlook of his family and his tribe and at the same time to breath the wicked ambiance of lagos. As a civil servant, an esteemed post as a finance of Clara, the girl he met on the boat; he has much to look ahead to. Nevertheless, Obi falls victim to be corruption of the capital. Like its precursor, Things Fall Apart, the present novel tells the story of an African, tragically under pressure from a changing wall.The title of *No Longer At Ease* is adopted from Eliot's poem, *The Journey of the Magi*. According to Roderick Wilson, the novel sets a 'flashback set within the frame an existential present moment' (1971:222).

Obi Okonkwo returns to Nigeria after four years of studies of Law in England and lives in Lagos with his friend Joseph. He takes a job with the Scholarship Board and is almost immediately offered a bribe by a man who is trying to obtain a scholarship for his little sister. When Obi Okonkwo indignantly rejects the offer, he is visited by the girl herself. Thus, instead of trying to purge his society he succumbs to corruption under duress. The Umuofia people are perversely derent towards Obi when he is sentenced jail. In fact, he is not blamed for accepting the bribe, but criticized for having stooped for the petty amount involved. On the other hand, people of Umuofia philosophize that if a man wants to eat a toad he should for a fat and juicy one. The president said it was thing of shame for a man in the senior service to go to prison for twenty pounds: He repeated twenty pounds, spitting it out; They pity his naivety and indiscretion in doing- "*What everyone does without finding out how it was done*" and they further said: "*He should not have accepted the money himself. What others do is tell you to go and hand it to heir houseboy.*"(5)

The novel then jumps to a scene between Mr.Green, Obi's boss (who is also a crown withness in the case) and a member of the British Council, who are playing tennis and having drinks. It is mentioned that it is strange for Mr. Green to be playing tennis because he is always working; however, this day was different because he was playing with a friend from the council. Mr.Green, an Englishman in Nigeria, claims that he is not surprised at Obi's behaviour because, according to him, Africans are thoroughly corrupt. Traditional society does not encourage individualism. The individual is only a corporate being, a part of the social pattern and contributtes to the communal good. And the society will take care of the individual cripped by socio-economic problems. Obi is a nonconformist with come degree of eccentricity becomes an outcast and is excommunicated from the society. In *Facing Mount Kenyatta* says:

"*An individualist is looked upon with suspicion and is given a nickname of 'mwebongia' one who works only for himself and is likely to end up as wizard.....In the Gikuyu community there is no really individual affair, for everything has a moral*

and social referenc." [Kenyatta, Jomo:1938: 119] "*[I wrote] No Longer At Ease purely from personal experience and a bit of imagination and not from a historical point of view describing history."*[Dennis Deuerden:1965:1] Of course, native customs and anthropological details in the novels of Achebe thus reflect the philosophy of life and the attitudes of people. The story of the novel, after the scene of Mr. Green, jumps to a meeting of the Umuofia Progressive Union. Achebe explains that Obi was from a town called Umuofia in Western Nigeria. It is also explained that for those who leave the village (which many inhabitants call a town) in order to work elsewhere in Nigeria, there is always a local branch of the Umuofia Progressive Union. The union is meeting to discuss the case of Obi Okonkwo, which, it becomes clear, is a 'lost case'. By way of back flashes, we became aware that the union had been paying for Obi's legal services even if it was against the will many of its members. The Union and Obi were not on good terms, but it was the duty of the Union to assist its 'brother'. Clara is discharged from the hospital after five weeks, but Obi has been advised against seeing her. He receives a parcel from the Commission of Income Tax to whom he must pay his taxes, and to top everything off, Obi's mother dies.

"*The peace that passeth all understanding.*" [149] Obi's guilt ends, and he feels like a new man. He no longer holds the image in his mind of his mother returning from the wash bleeding because of his razorblade. Obi now saw his mother, or remembered her rather, as a- *"woman who got things done."*[150] 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 !'[153], he tells himself after that first bribe. Achebe then jumps forward in time to illustrate that he took more bribes, including those from women who exchange their bodies for fevers. The bodies came and went, and he paid all of his debts, living comfortably, but guiltily. Finally, on the day he has decided to take his bribe and never do such a thing again because he cannot stand it anymore, he is arrested. The novel ends at the beginning. The people of Umuofia, the judge, the British Council man, everyone is asking themselves why a man of such promise committed such an act. Of course, the entire novel is answering this question by tracing Obi's life, but there are really no answers in the end. The most pessimistic aspect of the novel is that it is cyclical. Sometimes cycles can mean rebirth, but in this case, the cycle is one of the repletion and endless mistakes. One might ask him or herself why it is that Achebe has done this and whether or not there can be a break in that cycle. To answer these questions is to understand the novels. Achebe has the novel be cyclical to indicate a continuous sense of desperation and even stagnation. In the end, Obi finds himself expelled from his old idealistic self and in a mode of complacency, and the circle emphasizes the danger of that complacency. Thus, the novel according to S.A. Khayyoom, records the unavoidable circumstances that forced Obi, "*.....to face serious financial crisis, and fall a victim to corruption only to be caught red-handed, convicted and sentenced to prison"*.[1999:74]

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