

**ACHEBE'S NO LONGER AT EASE: A POST-COLONIAL READING**

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This article is an effort to bring in light the theme of corruption, alienation and rootlessness generated by colonial conflicts in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*. The novel directly deals with distress and difficulty of Nigerian youth amidst contemporary social, economic and political problems of Africa. The purpose of this paper is to show how colonial conflicts and resurgent changes in post-colonial life bring changes in the life of natives and how they accustom to corrupt practices and began to alienate from their own roots.

Keywords: *Post-Colonialism, Corruption, Alienation, African Culture.*

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INTRODUCTION

Chinua Achebe, "the cultural ambassador of Africa" (Panigrahi 162), is a prolific postcolonial writer. The writings of Achebe are a rich mine of postcolonial studies. *No Longer At Ease*, a masterpiece of Achebe bears significant features of postcolonialism. Ascroft asserts:

The postcolonial text is always a complex and hybridized formation. It is inadequate to read it as a reconstruction of purer traditional values or simply foreign and intrusive. The reconstruction of 'pure' cultural values is always conducted within a radically alerted dynamic of power relations (109-110).

Achebe inserts the traits of "postcoloniality in the space of difference in decolonized terrain" (Spivak 2). He represents the voice of the marginalized 'other' – the Africans. But the representation is a complex phenomena as it is related to psycho-socio-historical aspects. "The centre of such a study would neither be the sovereignty of national culture, but a focus on the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present" (Bhabha 12).

No Longer At Ease depicts a socio-psychological picture of African culture tossing between two strands – the modernization brought to Africa by colonial rule on the one hand and at the other the age-old pulses of tradition. The novel directly deals with distress and difficulty of Nigerian



youth amidst contemporary social, economic and political problems of Africa. In the words of Innes, *No longer at Ease* is the story of a young man who, educated by the British, attracted by much of what British civilization has to offer, employed by the British, seeks to live up to a new inflated image created by his position, falls into debt, takes bribes, is caught, tried and convicted (Achebe 42). Obi, the protagonist of the novel represents the postcolonial voice of Africa. His identity revolves round the traditional Igbo culture of Umuofia, the Christianity of his father, the idealism of English literature, and the corrupt sophistication of Lagos.

The novel receives its setting at the time of Nigeria's independence in Lagos. The place holds the imprints of European and African cultures. The independence brings freedom to the country, but by that time colonialism inserts the traits of materialism, pursuit of advantage and the worth of money in the mind of simpleton rustics. Obi is tossed between two conditions – financial instability and genetic values on one side and at the other the path of corruption and the changing social norms. It is therefore fitting that Achebe's title is drawn from Eliot's *The Journey of the Magi* :

We returned to our places, these kingdoms,
But **no longer at ease** here, in the old
dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods,
I should be glad of another death (Emphasis
added)

Obi is "no longer at ease, in the old dispensation". The story is about the practical difficulties of Obi as a representative of post-independence ethos. Achebe comments on the character of Obi, "His abortive effort at education and culture, though leaving him totally unredeemed and unregenerated, had nonetheless done something to him-it had deprived him of his links with his own people whom he no longer understood and who certainly wanted none of his dissatisfaction or pretension. (Ghosh, 45)

As Okonkwo, his grandfather in *Things Fall Apart* stands for the vanishing traditional African; Obi in *No Longer at Ease* stands for the vanishing idealist in a world of compromise. Okonkwo represents, what Panigrahi in his *Crucifixion of the Nation's Self and the Politics of Recognition: A Fanonian Study of Achebe's Things Fall Apart* discusses:

Okonkwo is the voice incarnate of Fanonian nationalism (phase II of colonialism): the

symbolic replica of "fiery nationalistic instinct", the "Babel of protest" and "the sign of sovereignty" ... (166).

Obi represents the younger generation of African societies that have turned to corrupt practices to support a lifestyle ushered in by westernization. The onslaught of western influence causes the displacement of the traditional societies, degeneration of age-old values and unending traumas. Obi no longer belongs to the old society. He receives a similar education and is selected by Igbo community to study in England. After getting western education he considers himself an independent youth, with a Western concept of government and administration. He remains in an undone state who neither accept his parents' values nor reject them. He rejects the old orthodoxies, but while accepting the modern he falls prey to corruption and accepts bribes, one of the undreamt practices of African culture. Ultimately he feels isolated. Khayyoom remarks the typical feature of postcolonial African novel representing the issue of isolation:

The isolation of the individual in African novel makes him typical and representative of his society.... It is the will of the majority that consciously contributes towards a coherent and organic African society. But the problem for a sensitive, self-conscious creative being is how to decline himself from his group and to assert his individuality (26).

The novelist depicts a psychological snapshot balancing dream and nightmare, enthusiasm and alienation, urges and frustration to evoke a theme of the "moral dilemma" (Killiam 50) of a post-colonial youth.

CONCLUSION

Thus the crucial problem of a post-colonial society is posed in the novel that westernization brings into the life of African society a kind of adulterate living. In the words of Abiola Irele: Obi's dilemma is contained in the conflict between his developed intellectual insight and his lack of moral strength to sustain it... His weakness of character is reflected in his inept handling of his human relationships and of his material problems; he is an individual with no sense of order.... Obi is never really prepared to engage in any sort of sustained effort,



with the result that he flounders through his life (Cook 85). Achebe's incisive analysis of the politics of power and psychology of corruption holds a mirror to the socio-political scenario prevalent in the post-colonial African society today.

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