



# When Integrity Fails: The Tragic Dimensions Of Corruption In *No Longer At Ease*

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**Abstract:** Corruption is a widespread occurrence in postcolonial nations. The detrimental effects of European colonialism on Africa have been clear through corruption that affected every part of life. Corruption in Nigeria is regarded as a representative case of other African nations. As a result, literary works became important for showing the truth and depicting African communities during and after colonial times. This dissertation examines the issue of corruption in Africa during the post-independence era through Chinua Achebe's African novel, *No Longer at Ease* (1960). It analyses the author's portrayal of corruption as a postcolonial issue and the postcolonial elements inside his novel. He has not depicted an idealised Africa; rather, he presents a sympathetic yet candid perspective of a nation characterised by its own casualties. Achebe has endeavoured to convey a truthful picture of his society through this book. It focusses on the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised, as well as the main character's struggle within Nigerian society following independence. The book reveals how Achebe thinks that English culture is better than others and how colonialism and western orientalism create false impressions of Nigerians and Obi Okonkwo as corrupt. As a result, these traits have a big effect on the minds of Nigerians, which leads to feelings of inferiority. Achebe uses the problems of the main character, Obi Okonkwo, to show the problem of corruption in this book.

**Index Terms** – Corruption, Achebe, Postcolonialism, No Longer at Ease

## I. INTRODUCTION

Many African countries were ruled by Europeans in the 1800s. At initially, colonialism began as an issue of land and wealth and to exploit the natural resources of the colonized nations. But subsequently it took over not only the people but also their culture, identity, and political life during and after colonization. The problem of corruption became clear in many African countries, especially Nigeria, because of the effects of European colonialism. Corruption has been a problem in Nigeria and other African colonies for a long time. Chinua Achebe's work *No Longer at Ease* (1960) depicts the issue of corruption in Nigerian society, illustrating its pervasive influence on all facets of civil and economic organizations. Those say that colonialism is to blame for this widespread corruption, and the most convincing reason is that the way Europeans and Nigerians who worked in high positions lived made those in privileged positions take bribes and abuse their power. It was harder to say no to a bribe offer when these people had a lot of fancy automobiles, big mansions, and outfits. It was so strong that it forced Obi Okonkwo, a man of great morals and ideals, forget all of them to make money. Achebe's work introduces Obi Okonkwo, the main character, who combines the education he had in the west with the fine principles he learnt at home. Obi Okonkwo is a Nigerian man who wanted to get rid of problems like corruption in Africa. However, he became corrupt since he couldn't deal with the problems he met when he got back to Nigeria. Chinua Achebe is regarded as one of the most significant authors addressing African issues in the postcolonial era. He wrote on African culture and the problem of corruption that ruined the underlying political, cultural, and economic systems. This research is predicated on the corruption perspective through a postcolonial analysis, aiming to elucidate the portrayal of corruption

within the novel. A well-educated young man from Nigeria who felt he had to perform illicit things among the political system and Obi Okonkwo, the main character, can't find a way to balance the culture of his own country. Britain was the country where he had been studying. Achebe talks on how colonialism has made African countries corrupt. Achebe slowly shows the challenges that Obi Okonkwo has to deal with, which takes away his hope of becoming the first to change his country for the better and get rid of the corruption that old Africans do because European colonization makes them poor. He is also horrified by his mother's illness, his brother's school costs, and the union's loan payments. The book is about Nigeria after it became independent and how Nigerians struggled to construct their own country during this time. He does his best to live without corruption and care for his family, but the stress of the crisis kills him. He starts to receive bribes, which gets him caught by the police.

The Nigerian people lived under a new scenario called hegemony throughout the time between colonization and freedom. It began in Nigeria following independence. Preeti Maneck asserts in *Chinua Achebe's No Longer at Ease as a Postcolonial Novel* that "In the hegemonic phase of colonialism which begins after the country has achieved independence, the natives internalize western culture and the colonizers' entire system of values." (Maneck, p. 439) European colonialism in Nigeria was not only military in nature; it also influenced the indigenous people's traditions, values, language, culture, and way of life. Achebe's story portrays both colonialist attitudes towards Africans and the mental and psychological effects of colonialism on indigenous populations by fabricating a distorted representation of their lives. After that, the author shows how the colonizer and the colonized relate to each other in the postcolonial age.

At the start of the work, the author shows how the western people are better than the Nigerians. This is still true after independence, as shown by the two characters Mr. Justice William Galloway and Mr. William Green. Mr. Justice William Galloway is the judge of the high court in Lagos and the judge in Obi Okonkwo's trial.

The Judge was a European man, which means that he had a lot of power and was respected in Nigeria. Achebe's depiction of the Judge in the first chapter shows this:

"Whenever Mr. Justice William Galloway, Judge of the High Court of Lagos and The Southern Cameroons, looked at a victim he fixed him with his gaze as a collector fixes his insect with formalin. He lowered his head like a charging ram and looked over his gold spectacles at the lawyer." (Achebe, 2010, p. 1)

Achebe also talks about Mr. Green's attire and the Europeans seated in the same chapter. He says, "After the game, they went to the club bar. Mr. Green had a light-yellow sweater over his white shirt, and a white towel hung from his neck. There were many other Europeans in the bar, some half sitting on the high stools and some standing in groups of twos and threes drinking cold beer, orange squash or gin-and-tonic." (Achebe pg. 2)

The examples from the book above show how imperialistic the West is. Achebe also shows numerous pairs of opposites in the book, like Master/Slave, Superior/Inferior, and Civilized/Uncivilized. Hegel posited that for every group of slaves, there ought to exist a corresponding master group. The master requires the existence of a slave to affirm his own identity; without a slave, the master may cease to exist. The master and slave define their identities through their relationship, so the master's existence is contingent upon the slave's existence. Obi Okonkwo's work teaches readers that Mr. Green lived in a different time from the early colonial days, when a British official could treat Africans anyway he wanted. Mr. Green, on the other hand, was blind to the changes in Nigeria and still thinks like a typical imperialist. When he orders beer, he tells one of the men next to him, "one beer for this master" (Achebe pg.3). His use of coded master/slave language reveals that he has a colonial mindset and a wrong idea of the Nigerian people. This method of self-expression aligns with Edward Said's characterization of orientalism as a form of knowledge that stays oblivious to historical transformations. Said contends that the persistent emphasis on "Oriental backwardness" reinforces the preeminence of Western civilization. This acts as a justification for the west's imperialist and colonialist projects on a humanitarian foundation. This relationship between higher and lower status is predicated on a psychological inclination to establish a cultural hierarchy between the West and the East. At the same time, the weighted stereotypes in the literary works about the Orient have made the double-edged classification stronger. There is another scenario that shows the master/slave relationship between Mr. Green and Mr. Omo, the administrative assistant. It was the On Obi Okonkwo's first day at work, he saw how Mr. Green's words and actions with the old Nigerian assistant showed how they got along. Achebe writes about this in the seventh chapter: "Mr. Omo jumped to his feet as soon as Mr. Green came in. Simultaneously, he pocketed the other half of the kola nut he was eating. (Achebe pg.52) says, "Mr. Omo hesitated as he always did when the telephone rang, and then took it up as if it was going to bite." (Achebe

pg.50) Mr. Green loves Nigeria in his mind and his job because it lets him impose colonial rule on people. In the article, Dissemination of English Culture in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, Brahman Zarrinjooe and Sahahla Khatar argue that Mr. Green doesn't like genuine Nigerians, but the Nigeria he imagines. He likes Nigeria with its thick bushes, unclean inhabitants, and obedient servants. He likes his office because it makes him feel like a colonial master to have obedient laborers, stewards, and messengers around him. Mr. Green didn't want to love and welcome intelligent people like Obi Okonkwo because they didn't agree with his idea that Africa is behind the times. Obi Okonkwo was arrested and accused of taking bribes, and he was happy about it since it proved his view that Africans are corrupt and can't change. Green says that Nigerians go to college to get as much as they can for their families and themselves. They don't care that people in their own country perish every day from hunger and sickness. Mr. Green sees Nigeria as a typical oriental society that has neither past or progress in history. Corruption and sloth are so common that they make it hard for society to evolve and get over the bad things that come with being poor and behind the times. Some critics think that social reform can only happen with the help of colonial powers since they see the "orient" as a society without history. The colonizers think that Europeans are better than Africans. The British colonizers think they are the light in the dark Africa and the civilised people among the barbarous and primitive ones. They make Africans follow their way of life. Achebe writes in the opening chapter, "looked at a victim he fixed him with his gaze as a collector fixes his insect with formalin." (Achebe pg.1) This quote shows how the colonizer looked down on the colonized. They maintain their belief in the disparity between themselves, refusing to alter their perspectives, regardless of the education, English proficiency, or cultural retention of the colonized. In the seventh chapter, the author illustrates this relationship when Obi Okonkwo answered Mr. Green's phone call: "Obi took the telephone." Mr. Green wanted to know if he had been formally offered the job. "No," Obi answered. You call your higher-ups "sir," Mr. Okonkwo, and the phone dropped with a loud crash.

(Achebe pg. 52). When the British people spoke, the author chooses words that show power and superiority. The author says in the first chapter: "For hundreds of years, the African has been the victim of the worst climate and every disease you can think of." Not his fault.

But he has lost a lot of energy, both emotionally and physically.

We have given him an education in the West. But what does he get out of it? (Achebe pg.3)

The civilized/uncivilized dynamic is another relationship depicted in the literature. Some of the Nigerian people's mindsets show this connection. The first instance was in the reception of Obi Okonkwo, where speaking formal English is seen as civilized since older Africans are careful with their English to show their rank in society. Obi Okonkwo's English was casual when he received it, and he didn't care because he thought of himself as an educated guy who had studied in England and was civilized like the whites. Achebe writes in the fourth chapter, "Obi's English, on the other hand, was very unimpressive." He said "is" and "was." (Achebe pg. 26).

"The second generation of educated Nigerians had gone back to eating Pounded yams or garri with their fingers for the good reason that it tasted better that way. Also, for the even better reason that they were not as scared as the first generation of being called uncivilized." (Achebe pg.16)

This indicates that the first generation was described as uncivilized in contrast to the civilized white men. But Mr. Green says that even educated Africans in general and educated Nigerians in particular are not civilized enough to take care of their own lives and make their future. Achebe shows how Mr. Green told Obi Okonkwo about his insurance and that he would have to pay forty pounds a year. Mr. Green's job was not only to remind Obi Okonkwo, but also to say that he was not capable of leading a life even if he was educated. Achebe says in chapter ten, "Mr. Green said, 'You will do well to remember that at this time every year you will be called upon to cough up forty pounds for your insurance.'" It sounded like the voice of Joel, who was the son of Pethuel. Of course, it's none of my concern.

But in a country where even the educated don't think about the future, one has a clear duty. He made the word "educated" taste bad. (Achebe pg.76)

Achebe illustrates the issue of corruption in *No Longer at Ease* through three distinct dimensions: cultural, economic, and political. The book starts with the main character's trial scenario so that readers may see that Obi Okonkwo is a victim of a number of wars that he lost by fighting them. The author has portrayed the end first so that the reader can understand what happened in the past and why it happened. Chinua Achebe's postcolonial books portray Ibo traditions and the adherence of its people to their conventions.



He also seeks to emphasis on the culture of Nigeria that existed before colonization. Obi Okonkwo learnt about the West while he was studying in England in this book.

When he gets back from England, he attempts to copy the way people dress and talk in English in front of Nigerians. But the native people don't like these behaviors since they value their culture, traditions, and language. In the fourth chapter, for example, the Umuofia Progressive Union (UFU) threw a big party for Obi Okonkwo, who had just come back from England. Achebe calls Obi Okonkwo's first error "the educated man," and he says, "Everybody was properly dressed in agbada or European suit except the guest of honor, who appeared in his shirtsleeves because of the heat." That was Obi's first error. (Achebe pg. 25) The second mistake Obi Okonkwo made was talking to the president and Nigerian members in an informal way. The people of Nigeria also wouldn't let him marry Clara, who was a "Osu." This made Obi Okonkwo very upset because he really loved Clara. Joseph knew what would happen when Obi Okonkwo informed him that he would marry Clara nonetheless since he knew both cultures. He tried to tell Obi Okonkwo not to marry Clara and to think about it carefully. At first, Obi Okonkwo was so sure of himself that he was willing to do anything, even if it went against his culture and traditions.

He was really hopeful that he might convince his family. The author notes in the seventh chapter, "Obi knew better than anyone else that his family would violently oppose the idea of marrying an osu

." Who wouldn't? But for him, it was Clara or no one. Family ties were fine as long as they didn't get in the way of Clara. He thought, "If I could just get my mum to agree, everything would be fine." (Achebe pg. 60)

The worst thing Obi Okonkwo's mother said was in the fourteenth chapter: "She held up her hand for silence." "But if you do it while I'm still alive, you'll have my blood on your hands because I'll kill myself. She sank down completely exhausted." (Achebe pg.108) which causes him to have an internal conflict. The author depicts postcolonial characters to illustrate the severity of certain traditions that induce internal tensions within them. Obi Okonkwo's parents became Christians, which means they can't do some things that are part of their culture. Because they live in this community and can't completely separate from this culture, they act according to the culture of their community and not their Christian religion. Issac Okonkwo, Obi Okonkwo's father, told his wife not to tell their kids about their traditional folktales since they are against the law. Obi Okonkwo's mother, Hannah Okonkwo, is a very religious Christian woman. But while he was in school, he was humiliated since he didn't know any traditional stories, and his friends used to make fun of him for it. Hannah Okonkwo then told him some stories so he could join in, but she didn't tell her husband. "Obi loved these stories but he knew none which he could tell. One day the teacher called on him to face the class and tell them a story. As he came out and stood before them, he trembled. „Olulu ofu oge,“ he began in the tradition of folk- tales but that was all he knew. His lips quivered but no other sounds came out. The class burst into derisive laughter, and tears filled his eyes and rolled down his cheeks as he went back to his place." (Achebe, 2010, p. 47)

Colonialism made Nigeria very poor during the colonial period. Achebe demonstrates this in the narrative how the union gives scholarships to students who want to study abroad and then gets the money back when they graduate and find jobs, as occurred to Obi Okonkwo, which shows how poor Nigeria was at the time. Achebe states, "The first scholarship under this plan was given to Obi Okonkwo five years ago, almost to the day." They dubbed it a scholarship, but they had to pay it back. Obi owed eight hundred pounds, which he had to pay back within four years of coming back. (Achebe pg. 6)

Obi Okonkwo was quite hopeful that he might live a lavish life when he got a position with a big income in the public service when he returned to Lagos. The residents of his town and the Union will easily pay back his scholarship since he will be among the rich and educated class. He has to pay twenty pounds a month to the Union to pay back his scholarship. Obi Okonkwo finds out that his family is in a bad place; his mother is sick and in bed. His parents seem frail, but his father can still work at the church, which doesn't pay him much. Both of them are too old to work. Achebe gives a hint of it when he states,

"They have never relied on his father's small pension. He planted yams and his wife planted cassava and coco yams. She also made soap from leaching of palm ash and oil and sold it to the villagers for a little profit. But now they were too old for these things." (Achebe pg.48).

Obi Okonkwo spends a lot of money on himself every day, but he also takes care of his family. For example, he pays for his mother's hospital stay and his brother's school fees. But later, when Mr. Green tells him to pay the forty pounds for his insurance renewal, he has a lot of money troubles. Obi Okonkwo was really confused

about how he would pay because he didn't have enough money in his bank account and his wage wasn't adequate for it. He talked to Charles, who owes him money, and he sought to get a loan from the bank. Nigeria's finances, on the other hand, were not in good shape. Obi Okonkwo had to pay back his scholarship to the union so that he might give it to another student who wanted to study abroad. So, the only thing he could do was save money and adjust how he usually spends it. Achebe talked about the political conflict in the book as one of the main problems. He shows how crooked politics can be by receiving bribes in the book. When Obi Okonkwo comes back to Nigeria from England, he seems like an honest man who wants to get rid of corruption. In the novel, he says,

"Obi's theory that the public service of Nigeria would remain corrupt until the old Africans at the top were replaced by young men from the universities was first formulated in a paper read to the Nigerian Students' Union in London." (Achebe pg.31)

## II. CONCLUSION

Achebe depicts the act of accepting bribes by those in power who abuse their authority. He felt like a foreigner in his own home among them. He knows two African males who took bribes; one of them worked for the Public Service Commission. But Obi Okonkwo wanted to stay pure and thought of himself as a "pioneer." There was a lot of corruption in politics, first because the economy was bad and second because people wanted to get up in the political system. Obi Okonkwo's story ended when a man tricked him into taking a bribe and then surrendered him to the police. Obi couldn't stay pure since he was under a lot of stress from money problems, the death of his mother, and the loss of his love. So, the several kinds of corruption are the main ideas of the novel set in Nigeria after colonialism. Achebe uses the main character, who is a devoted Nigerian man, to talk about the problem of corruption. It concentrates on the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised and its effects during this time. The conflicts also show the issue of corruption in Nigeria and show how corruption is shown in the novel through the clash of cultures, the bad effects of the economy, and the governmental institutions that deal with bribery.

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