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" Moral and curtural dilemma in Chinua Achebe's arow of god and no longer at ease"

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UNIVERSITY OF BURUNDI
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Moral and Cultural Dilemma in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* and *No Longer at Ease*

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DEDICATION

To the Almighty to whom I owe what I am,

To my dearest parents for their endless love and support,

To my brothers and sister for their complicity and understanding,

To my charming daughters for the happiness they grant me,

To my cherished husband for his love, affection and patience,

This thesis is lovingly dedicated

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This thesis has been the result of a joint effort of a great deal of people. Although it is quite impossible to name them all, I wholeheartedly thank them.However, special thanks go to my supervisor Mr. Athanasius Ako Ayuk, lecturer at the University of Burundi, who despite his numerous duties, accepted to supervise this thesis. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude for his unfailing and professional assistance manifested in his availability and diligence in reading and correcting the form as well as the content of the work from its draft to its completion. I owe him a tremendous debt for having provided me the essential materials which I could not find in the central library of the University of Burundi.

I should not fail to express my gratitude to all teachers who taught me, from my childhood to the position I find myself today. Warm thanks are particularly due to the teaching staff of the English Department whose efforts have not been in vain while providing me with a good education.

Last but not least, I express my heartfelt appreciation to my classmates, friends, relatives for their moral support.

ABSTRACT

The work investigates the moral and cultural dilemma in Chinua Achebe's novels under study. It charts the argument that Achebe's characters in the texts can only affirm their identity by overcoming the inevitable moral and cultural dilemma that confront them. This identity is the only assert that remains in the turbulence of the moral and cultural corruption that rock their world. Written against the New Historicism theory, it concludes on the belief that both heroes are victims of an overwhelming historical force, to which they inevitably have no control. Their predicament is the result of their paralysis of the will in the face of an evolutionary process that occasions change by destroying tradition.

ABBREVIATIONS

Anon : Anonymous

D.N.A : Date not available

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the moral and cultural dilemma that characterise the heroes of Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* and *No Longer at Ease*. Against this background, a number of questions are raised as to the nature of this dilemma and moral shock that occurs as a result of the clash of cultures. Why is it difficult for the heroes in the two texts under study to affirm a particular moral stand in reaction to the encroaching culture? This uncertainly does it reveal the strength or the weakness of the protagonists? If not are they just the victims of the inevitability of history? Is their rebellion an assertion of their identity or a gratuitous portrayal of their paralysis of will. These are amongst the problems that this thesis raises and attempts to answer within the framework of the hypothesis.

This thesis charts the thinking that Achebe's characters in the texts under study can only affirm their identity by overcoming the inevitable moral and cultural dilemma that confront them. This identity is the only asset that remains in the turbulence of the moral and cultural corruption that rock their world. The relevance of the hypothesis can be seen in the very history that produced and sustained Achebe. Born in Nigeria in 1930 to catholic Christian parents, Achebe grew up to attend a succession of schools and colleges. He was admitted to Government College, Umuahia, in 1944. By 1948, he had already begun studies at University College, Ibadan; where he graduated in English, History and

religious studies in 1953. The following year, he was made talks producer, where he worked until 1957, where he became its head. In 1961, he became the Director of External Services in charge of the voice of Nigeria. During that period, Achebe travelled to many parts of the globe, especially to the United States, Brazil and Great Britain. Author of so many books, amongst which are *Anthills of the Savannah*, *A Man of the People* and *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, Achebe sort to dissert both colonial and post colonial politics in Africa.

The biography of the author interest us as it reflected in his works. His social background provides him with materials from his writings. We cannot easily separate the author and his works from his society. As stated by M.J.C Echeruo in *A Celebration of Black and African Writing*, "Behind his novels, short stories, and poems, there is this immense presence of a patrimony, a land, a people, a way of life" and he goes on saying

> Rather Achebe is the artist in the traditional communal sense of the term, the man of great wisdom, working within the limits and through the norms of his society. His 'truth', therefore, as much on the immediacy and the integrity of his society as on the universality of his own personal vision. That is to say, without that inner communal conscience, the ultimate veracity of his understanding of Igbo society and of traumas and conflicts it has experienced, Achebe would have had no

> worthwhile truth to relate, no essential theme to express.(151)

This passage is very meaningful about the impact of society on literature and on the author. Behind literature there is a way of life.

Gerald Moore has stated in *African Literature in the Twentieth Century*, "Achebe is essentially a heroic novelist, whose books are infused by the dominant presence of a man who expresses in his very flesh the tragedy of change."(qtd O.R Dathorne 69). Achebe's draw the picture of the new Africa to the opposition of the traditional one, where he shows the defiances carried by the society in confrontation to the new ideologies and this result in a clash.

Kolawole Ogungbesan observes in his *A Celebration of Black and African Writing* that "Achebe is concerned with recording the world-view-the mores, codes, attitudes-which shaped men's response not only to colonialism but to life itself..."(qtd in Toyi 4). Ogungbesan actually captures the essence of Achebe's writing in relation to the human difficulty. Achebe's fiction captures a vision of a humanity trapped in its own history. To him, the world is in constant mutation, and this evolution affects the very existence of the individuals in ways that might make reality unbearable. Cultures are in constant transformation as they struggle to marry or divorce others. In this light, the consequence is usually conflict generated by power struggle informed by cultural changes. This is the world that characterise Achebe's texts under study. *Arrow of God* is a serious comment on the difficulty imposed by the resistance to evading cultures, or

rather by the inability of the chief priest to take a stand that can change the course of history of his people. It enacts the drama of a people caught between extremes of which they have no control. In this case, Achebe dramatizes even his own dilemma as a colonised person caught in the web of history. In the same regard, in *No Longer at Ease*, Achebe is fascinated this time, not with the impact of colonialism, but with the supposed responsibility of the individual to his or her dispossessed community. Of course Obi Okwonko is overwhelmed by social forces in his community that push him to accepting bribes. Here, is the predicament of the new intellectual elite in a society which is at the mercy of an adverated political elite. His ability to withstand bribe will also determine his failure or victory in that society, and in this, Obi Okwonko falters.

There is a world of criticism on Achebe's works. The critical opinion vacillates between response to his critique of colonialism and the corrupt new post colonial government. G.D Killam in *The Writings of Chinua Achebe* argues about Achebe that he is: "...essentially moralist, concerned with considerations of right and wrong as they are revealed by the individual's responses to the circumstances which surround him"(13). Here, Killam's interpretations take cognisance of that the Achebe who is neither anti-colonialist nor anti-post independence African governments. And in this regard, his ideas are in our opinion tenable.

Simon Gikandi in *Reading Chinua Achebe* considers the position of Ezeulu, chief priest of Ulu. To him, "whenever Ezeulu considers the immensity of his power, we are told he wondered whether it was real: does the priest have the real authority over the temporal process or is he merely a watchman."(59). Gikandi evokes the difficulty of the chief priest who is caught between duty to a god and moral responsibility to his community. In more profound respects, Gikandi's comment touches on the chief priest's pride as he is determined to be recognized by his community as having power over them.

Again, Killam affirms that "Obi's ambiguous position is a merely reflection of the contradictions which inform the society"(38). To Killam, Obi is the personification not only of the contradictions of his society, but of those of society in general. In this case, Killam sees him as a representative human being caught between moral propriety and survival.

To Emmanuel Obiechina, in *Neo-African Literature and Culture* Obi Okwonko " is a contemplative idealist who thinks much and acts little. He keeps the even tenor of the surface life while inwardly, imaginatively, he is immensely alive, almost eat like, in his grasp of the nuances of corruption and decay"(122). Obiechina's attitude towards Obi is sympathetic probably because he sees him as a victim of circumstances beyond his control.

What is important to observe here is that the individual acts in his society. He establishes relation with others, but everything he does is conditioned by his society. So, external pressure forces the individual to act in social conformity.

Then, he lives in bondage of social system; more or less constraining according to the situation or the degree of socialization. This confirms T.Melone's comment in *Chinua Achebe et la Tragédie de l'Histoire* about Achebe's work when he says that

> Les romans d'Achebe et singulièrement *No Longer at Ease* revêtent un caractère on ne le soulignera jamais assez, un caractère nettement policier avec société répressive, justice attentive, scotland aux aguets(310)
>
> "Achebe's novels and particularly *No Longer at Ease* take on a character, it will never be stressed enough, clearly a police character with repressive society, attentive and pernickety justice, Scotland on the watch" (Translation Mine)

This is true since Obi Okwonko as idealistic as he was, finishes by being corrupt as the whole society.

Still in relation to the issues of culture, Cosmo Pieterse in *Protest and Conflict in African Literature* affirms that:

> When two cultures come into contact the people whom they influence form a comparison between the two and have to choose between values as they are put in practice and their effect, and assume one or other form of synthesis of the two cultures.(81)

This is where the precise conflict is found. In *Arrow of God*, it is the clash of the western and African cultures, and in *No Longer at Ease*, it is the educated African against his traditional community. In both cases, it is a matter of choice. That is to say, the success or failure of any of the protagonists hangs on the kind of choice each of them would make.

In all, criticism weighs on the issues of Achebe's response to colonialism and the clash of cultures that come with it. This thesis is just part on-going body of criticism that is determined on affirming the author's stand as both a firm and serious novelist. Our argument tends more towards seeing Achebe's heroes as victims of their personal choices, and as individuals fated by the history they had no hand in creating.

Two theoretical frameworks inform this thesis. The New Historicism and Psychoanalytical approach. Originally, New Historicism as a critical mode began to fashion itself with such scholars as Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault and Frederic Jameson. But it is with such scholars as Stephen Greenblatt, that New Historicism gained currency. This theory came to challenge traditional historical criticism that focussed its attention on facts, and also on finding out what really happened at a given time and place. New Historicism accuses historians of being subjective in their analysis, reason why the former sees history as a text that has to be understood in all its minute details. It moves from the premise of " what really happened" to more valid questions as "what do the interpretations tells us about the interpreters?"

In addition to the above, New Historicism challenges the whole question of the spirit of the age. And foremost amongst those who challenge this position is Michel Foucault because he believes that historians are equally "situated" and cannot therefore pretend to be objective in relating and interpreting events of which they were not real participants. This mode of thinking calls into place the question of objectivity and subjectivity. To those like Foucault, there cannot be a single view point at one particular moment. The dominant view point is always the one brought to us by those who write the history of their times. This explains why to understand an historical epoch, consideration has to be taken on other discourses. This is to New historicists the one possible way by which a text read within this framework could be understood.

In relation to the foregoing study, the texts will be read against the background of the historical, cultural and political forces that helped shaped the thinking of the writer and his conception of character and world vision. Without pretending to any grandiose New historicism interpretation of Achebe, we are however interested in how amongst other things, his own personal history as a human being during the period of colonization affected his theme.

On the other hand, it is important to know or rather to understand the nature of the character created by the writer. In attempting to understand what affects the character, we intend to understand the very difficulty of the writer as he struggles to dramatize the fate of a people abandoned to themselves. The original scholar of the human psyche is Sigmund Freud. But what he started was

to be continued by his students amongst whom are Alfred Adler, Otto Rank and Curl Jung. Their studies based on what Freud had done, attempted to understand the human psyche. They were interested in knowing why people acted the way they did. Of those who pursued this question, Jacques Lacan is the most significant. To Lacan, the very consciousness of a human being is shaped by language. Lacan saw human behaviour as shaped amongst many things by linguistic associations. In other respects, he holds that the language spoken by people is the result of what they probably feel.

To Lacan, the human being is a fragmented and incomplete character. According to Lacan, the human personality is achieved through three main components: the real, the imaginary and the symbolic, which correspond to the experience of need, demand and desire. In relation to Ezeulu and Obi, one can easily see the formation of their minds by social forces, the modification and realisation of the full human being trough circumstances.

More than Lacan's theory, Freud's discussion of the id, the ego and the superego helps in understanding Ezeulu's pride, Obi's moral confusion and the whole existential and moral drama.

This thesis is divided into five main sections: an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion.

The introduction comprises amongst other things, the review of literature and the historical frame against which the work is written.

Chapter one of the thesis entitled "Moral and Cultural dilemma in *Arrow of God*" investigates the tribulations of Ezeulu. It attempts to grapple with his difficulty in taking a firm stance in relation to the challenge posed to his authority as both chief priest of Ulu and as individual.

In the second chapter entitled " Moral dilemma in *No Longer at Ease*" we look at Obi Okwonko's struggle to come to terms with his sense of moral propriety and the exigent need for physical survival in a society given to acute corruption.

Chapter three entitled "Rebellion or Assertion of Identity" charts the argument as to whether the heroes decision not to conform to the standards demanded by their community, a form of rebellion or an affirmation of identity.

At the end, the conclusion re-states the major arguments and draws its major findings and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER ONE

MORAL AND CULTURAL DILEMMA IN *ARROW OF GOD*

Every society is unique in the precise balance of values and assumptions that characterise it. Some values might be good for one group and not for another. This explains why the white man considered the African as primitive and his way of living backward. Precisely because he thought that his own civilisation was better than that of the Africans whom he subjugated. It is precisely for this reason, that he considered for instance traditional Africans religion as barbaric and unethical, simply because it did not reflect the European perception of the metaphysical relationship between a human being and an Almighty creature. The spite against African religion and in more extrapolated circumstances, African world view had its origins from this European view of difference. Everything in Africa had its meaning and relevance, a fact which the Europeans either failed to recognise or decided to ignore.

In Africa, each occupation such as farming, hunting, making sacrifices, cult worship, in short every aspect of life has its explanation. This view is shared by John Mbiti who says in *Introduction to African Religion*

that African religion is found in rituals, ceremonies and festivals; in shrines; sacred places and religious objects; in art and symbols, in music and dance; in proverbs, riddles and wise sayings, in names of people and places; in myths and legends, in beliefs and customs; in all aspects of life (19-27). Thus,

the white settlement in Africa has its impact on the African society, hence, on his culture.

Christianity as many African scholars were to affirm later on ate its way into the fabric of Africa's cultural and moral social foundation with cunning and deceit. Ngugi's excerpt below from *A Grain of Wheat* is explicit:

> The White man came to the country, clutching the book of God in his hands, a magic witness that he was a messenger from the Lord. His tongue was coated with oil...People gave him- the stranger with a scolded skin-a place to erect temporary shelter. Hut complete, the stranger put up another building yards away. This he called the house of God where people shall go for worship and sacrifice. (11)

With the implantation of this new mode of worship, the African was caught between the western conception of the relationship between the creator and his creation, and his aim traditional conception of things. He is faced with the gradual and unavoidable erosion of the ancient values that have characterised his mode of life. But, the greatest pain in this was and is still his powerlessness in avoiding the complete erosion of age long values that have regulated moral and social behaviour. The dilemma resulting from this, both moral and cultural was to be the defining feature of the new social and cultural landscape of the new Africa. The Literature produced around and during this

time for the most part, if not in its entirety attempted to bring to light, the calamity that this dysfunctioning will occasion. It is therefore against this background that we interpret in this chapter the predicament of Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu in *Arrow of God.*

In this novel under study, Ezeulu, the chief priest of ulu is facing many troubles under the colonial regime. The strong –willed traditional man cannot adapt to the demands of new God and the new values. He is under pressure in the war between the new and the old conservative values of an isolated society. Ulu is a God created by six villages at the time they came together for protection against slave maids. It is important to point out that Ezeulu, who comes from the weakest village, was appointed to this religious office just to avoid dictatorship of a powerful village upon the others. This is no easy task at all. Ezeulu must maintain his own power and his god's in the face of village factions and the European imperialism. His own very survival depends on how much wisdom he demonstrates, and how far he either sticks successfully to the old way of doing things or tactfully embrace the encroaching tradition. But in all this, the chief priest is constantly under the menace of a fearful God, whose anger might know no limits. One can see that Ezeulu is a man caught not only between the two civilizations, but equally imprisoned by fear, and the greed for personal power.

In a land dispute with a neighbouring village, Ezeulu advises his clansmen not to go to war because their guardian duty will not hold them in a "war of blame." However, Umuaro does go to war. The fighting is brought to a sudden

end by Captain Winterbottom who gather all their guns and break them. Speaking to his friends who think that he has betrayed his people by testifying against them in the land case, Ezeulu says:

> Who brought the whiteman here? Was it Ezeulu? We went to war against Okperi who are our blood brothers over a piece of land that did not belong to us and you blame the whiteman for stepping in...We have shown the whiteman the way to our house and given him a stool to sit on. If we now want him to go away against we must either wait until he is tired of his visit and drive him away. Do you think you can drive him away by blaming Ezeulu? You may try. And the day I hear that you have succeeded I shall come and shake your hand.(3)

Here, Ezeulu is in conflict between honesty of conscience and unquestioning submission to the will of the clan but as a leader he thought that the foresighted and intelligent man's only course of action is to co-operate with the colonial administration.

Ezeulu is caught between the demands of a clan that is determined to assert its old sense of heroism, and the inevitable new political dispensation that dispenses justice through legal arbitration. He can be compared to a flickering candle in the wind, whose fate in real terms might not depend much on itself,

but by the forces that fight to either share or destroy it. As a chief priest of ulu, he seems to be loosing his powers because the people around him do not longer seem to respect his wishes. Their bent to go to war is a reflection of the tenacity of the traditional culture to assert its own self. More than anything else, Ezeulu is confused, but at the same time, he understands that the best way to come to grips with this new trend is to get a better knowledge of it. And the best recourse is that of sending his own son to the whiteman's school, so as to be his eye and ear in it.

His decision to send his son is grounded on the following argument:

> The world is changing ....I do not like it. But I am like the bird Eneke-nti-oba. When his friends asked him why he was always on the wing, he replied: "Men of today have learnt to shoot without missing and so I have learnt to fly without perching." I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eye there if there nothing in it you will come back. If there is something there, you will bring my share. The world is like a mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that saying who do not befriend the whiteman today will be saying had we known tomorrow. (45)

In Ezeulu's comments lay the whole philosophy of those like him in Africa who were and are still caught by the dilemma of finding themselves hedged between different cultures, each struggling to overpower the other. From statement to statement, Ezeulu reflects his distaste for the encroaching civilization. His bitterness and disappointment is unequalled. But within the same line of thought, from statement to statement, he underscores the inevitability of the implantation of this new civilization. The images of the bird "Eneke-nti-oba" and the "mask dancing" represent Ezeulu's desire to understand and come to terms with reality in its multiple vacillating facets. But at the same time, it exposes the chief priest's anxiety about the inevitability of change. Underneath this inevitability, is the priest own desperate attempts to hide his fears about the gradual disintegration of the culture to which he is supposed to be the foremost custodian. The concretisation of his thinking is seen when he acknowledges the necessity of people aligning with the "whiteman" if they intend to have a better tomorrow. This somehow foreshadows his own failure in retaining his people from sticking completely to tradition. But overall, are the chief priest dilemma both moral and cultural, as he cannot completely refuse the encroaching western civilization nor can he keep his own from being corrupted. His predicament is that of nearly if not all Africans caught between the Africans and the Western way of thought and action.

This is also seen in Onuora Nzekwu's *Blade Among the Boys* when uncle Ononye though he was very traditionalist and was very much aware of the

importance of education and encouraged his nephew Patrick to go to school. He says:

> You need education my son. Literacy is the hall mark of gentleman these days. The elders of our lineage can not read and write but we want you, the children of our lineage, to gain what opportunities we have lost. When the Christian missionaries first came our parents thought them queer, and wouldn't send us to school. Outcasts and poverty-stricken people went to them. Our parents sent their slaves. The result was that they became the first people to learn to read and write, wear good dresses and make plenty of money. (87)

This shows that whether traditionalist or modernist, the school had a great influence on the man of the future in the new emerging Africa.

However, Ezeulu shows great worry whenever it appears to him that Oduche is exceeding the bounds he has set him:

> But now Ezeulu was becoming afraid that the new religion was like a leper. Allow him a handshake and he wants an embrace. Ezeulu had already spoken to his son who was becoming more strange everyday. Perhaps the time had come to bring him out again. (42)

As a result, Ezeulu exercises due care to ensure that his son remains within the confines of the objective for which he sends him to school. The offence directly arising from Oduche's membership of the Christian community is the attempted killing of the python. Very appropriately, therefore, Ezeulu shows great horror and fright at the sacrilege. He is more aware than anyone else that an abomination has been committed and, naturally, he is most willing to do reparation for the sacrilege. His dilemma here, a very genuine one which makes the whole thing more overwhelming, is that there is no traditionally prescribed atonement for imprisoning the python. When an Umuaro man inadvertently kills the python, he arranges for its burial, as elaborate as that for a man of importance. There is no prescription for someone who wilfully kills it because it was not thought that anyone would dare as much. Here now was an act of intentionally imprisoning the python in a box, although the reptile does not die. For want of a prescribed act of appeasement, Ezeulu considers that the festival of the Pumpkin Leaves, due to take place in a few days 'time, will be sufficient for "this and countless other sins."' (60)

However, besides this dilemma, Ezeulu is not in good terms with his people since an abomination is a matter for general concern, the consequence of his decision is to further alienate himself, forcibly, from his people:

> The outrage which Ezeulu's son committed against the sacred python was a very serious matter; Ezeulu was the first to admit it. But the ill will of neighbours and

> especially the impudent message sent him by the priest of Idemili left him no alternative but to hurl defiance at them all. He was full of amazement at the calumny which even people he called his friends were said to be spreading against him. It is good for a misfortune such as this to happen once in a while,...so that we can know the thought of our friends and neighbours. Unless the wind blows we do not see the fowl's rump. (59)

As chief priest of Ulu, Ezeulu is confronted with a serious test to his power both as a parent intent on his children's welfare, and as a ruler who has moral responsibility towards his people. His actions, and these must be decisive, will make or mar him, and they will equally speak of him as both a ruler and a man. In all, Ezeulu definitely understands that his son's action are directly the consequence of his western education. Should he remove him from it or not, or does he even have the power to do so. These one some of the issues that eat him up, but which he must address if he has to keep an identity of his own, both as a steadfast chief priest and a reformer.

Another issue, that of withholding the new-yam festival is the one for which Ezeulu is most severely taken to task. In this matter of the new-yam festival, Ezeulu is the victim of double fraud: that of Winterbottom, the white District Officer and the white administration on the one hand, and that of Ulu, the deity on the other hand. While Winterbottom acts in support of a system he

does not believe in, Ulu is a nonentity. Thus, Ezeulu is the victim of Winterbottom's hypocrisy and the deity's ineffectuality. Better than anyone else, Winterbottom knows the capacity of the African members of the white administration for arrogating to themselves powers which do not belong to them and for using such powers for tyrannizing members of their own clan. Winterbottom's messenger, who goes to invite Ezeulu to hold preliminary consultations, preparatory to being appointed warrant chief, makes barrier which occasions Ezeulu's arrest and detention. However, Ezeulu rejects the post of warrant chieftain. This rebuff of the white administration certainly acquits Ezeulu of his adversaries charge of complicity with the white man in order to disgrace the village. Nevertheless, he is imprisonned and he does not eat two yams. He does decide not to watch out for the new moon, and is jubilant in the thought that Umuaro will answer to Ulu for the absence of his chief priest. One wonders how he could punish his people if not by withholding the harvest. Would he refuse the yams each adult had to offer to Ulu? It does not appear that he could have restrained his people from harvesting the new yams after he would have consumed the sacred yams:

> Whenever Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the year and the crops and therefore, over the people he wondered if it was reàl. It was true he made the day for the feast of the pumpkin leaves and for the new yam feast; but he did not choose the day.

> He was merely a watchman. His power was no more than the power of a child over a goat that was said to be his; As long as the goat was alive it was his; he would find it food and take care of it. But the day it was slaughtered he would know who the real owner was. No! The chief priest of Ulu was more than that, must be more than that. If he should refuse to name the day there would be no festival-no planting and no reaping. But could he refuse? No chief priest had ever refused. So it could not be done. He would not dare. (3)

Here, Ezeulu questions his power. As Simon Gikandi states it in *Reading Chinua Achebe*: "whenever Ezeulu considers the immensity of his power, we are told he wondered whether it was real: does the priest have the real authority over the temporal process or is he merely a watchman." (59)

One can notice Ezeulu's dilemma with his intention to punish the Umuaro people and his questioned power. Moreover, as he has accepted the directives of Ulu, however, in the end he is defeated by the god himself, for Ulu, the creation of the people at a time of intense need, is rejected by the people in like circumstances when he is seen to conspire against them.

One can also notice the limitations of Ezeulu's power, and equally the extent to which he is himself a victim of the power bestowed on him. The idea that he is merely a watchman, or that his power is like that of a child owner of a

goat and this is the evidence of why the reader can sympathize with the chief priest. He seems to believe in his power, but actually this power is not so real because the villagers can decide to do away with it. He believes that he can decide not to name in date for the new yam festival, and in actual fact, he can do so, but the tragedy of his believe lies in the fact that whether or not he does this, the village can take its own course. And by the end of this text, we see that the village actually does so, thereby sharing the futility of his power. In essence, we are saying that, more than Ulu and the villagers, Ezeulu is the victim of the history that unravels in Umuaro. He is completely neither powerless, nor is he really powerful. It is in this lack of real power that his own failure follows. Another example of the unconvincing power of Ezeulu is depicted in the conversation between Ezeulu's closest friend, Akuebue, and the noble man, Ofoka, Akuebue declares:

> "I know Ezeulu better than the most people. He is a proud man and the most stubborn person you know is only his messenger; but he would not falsify the decision of Ulu. If he did it Ulu would not spare him to begin with. So, I don't know."
>
> Ofoka replies: "Let me tell you one thing. A priest like Ezeulu leads a god to ruin himself. It has happened before."

> Akuebue: "Or perhaps a god like Ulu leads a priest to ruin himself."(213)

The last two speeches, that is, that of Ofoka and Akuebue portrays the extent of Ezeulu's dilemma. The predicament of his position and the responsibility given to him puts him in moral and cultural dilemma. He is torn between understanding and non- understanding of the will of ulu, and also between his believe and non-believe in the importance of the new education. Ezeulu is not really a diehard traditionalist, but is one who understands the need for this new education to only cohabit and not annihilate the old one. At the same time, he is a man with a strong sense of personal pride which sometimes, for purposes of local authority, borders on intransigence. Thus, he is a man with an evidently multiple personality, and this too is part of his predicament as the major player in the change that threatens the clan.

The last chapter deals with Ezeulu's heartbrokenness when he looses his most beloved son Obika. 'Ezeulu sank to the ground in utter amazement' and is torn out by the humiliation of being forsaken and abandoned by a god whose will he has been pursuing:

> Why, he asked himself again and again, why had Ulu chosen thus to deal with him, to strike him down and cover him with mud? What was his offence? Had he not divined the god's will and obeyed it? When was it ever heard that a child was scaled by the piece of yam its own

> mother put in its palm? What man would send his son with a potsherd to bring fire from a neighbour's hut and then unleash rain on him? Who ever sent his son up the palm to gather nuts and then took an axe and felled the tree? But today such a thing had happened before the eyes of all. What could it point to but the collapse and ruin of all things? Then a god, finding himself powerless, might take to his heels and one final, backward glance at his abandoned worshippers cry: "If the rat cannot flee fast enough let him make way for the tortoise."(229)

Ezeulu falls mad, the novel ends with the triumph of Christianity. Ezeulu finishes as a tragic hero which causes him to commit an error in judgement when he lets his personal feelings interfere with his usually keen of assessment of circumstances.

, one should say that *Arrow of God* is a dramatization of a double tragedy: the ruin of Ezeulu and the ruin, in essence, of the Umuaro clan. The ruin of the Umuaro clan is of the nature of a loss of cultural identity. John Lewis Gillin and John Philip Gillin's definition of culture in Taylor's *Primitive Culture* states:

> The customs, traditions, attitudes, ideas and symbols which govern social behaviour show a wide variety. Each group, each society has set a set of behaviour

> patterns(overt and covert) which are more or less common to the members, which are passed down from generation to generation and taught to children, and which are constantly liable to change. These common patterns we call culture, and it is in terms of the culture that we are able to understand the specific activities of the individual members in the social relations and also the activities of the group vis-à-vis other groups...(1)

With regard to this definition and the novel under study we can notice liable changes in Umuaro people's customs when they are no longer in the confines of the deity, they are having a Christian harvest.

> The Christian harvest which took place a few days after Obika's death saw more than even Good-country could have dreamed. In his extremity many a man sent his son with a yam or two to offer to the new religion and to bring back the promised immunity. Thereafter any yam harvested in his field was harvested in the name of the son.(230)

In the confusion that rocks Umuaro, the chief priest has failed, and by extension, Ulu too, has failed. The traditional Umuaro dispensation on which this society depended has collapsed, giving way to a new day. Life for people of Umuaro will never be the same again, as a new culture and ethic has been born. Moral

U. B.

responses to life and cultural behaviour henceforth in Umuaro will never be the same. This ineluctable fate that has descended on Umuaro, the brunt of which is borne by the chief priest, shows both his feebleness, and may explain his position as an arrow of God.

We notice then that in changing the religion one changes his culture. Christopher Dawson says in his book *Prevision in Religion*:

> A living religion always aspires to be the centre round which the whole culture revolves, and so that whatever is most vital in social institutions and activities is brought into relation with religion and receives a religious function. Consequently in so far as sociological prevision is possible with regard to the organic development of the society in general, it will be possible to foresee the social form that religion will tend to acquire in any given culture.(44)

In the same regard, he argues in *Progress and religion* that:

> The great civilizations of the world do not produce the great religions as a kind of cultural by-product; in a very real sense the great religions are the foundations on which the great civilizations rest. A society which has lost its religion becomes soon or later a society which has lost its culture.(233)

The dilemma in *Arrow of God* and in Africa in general lies in the contradictions at the coming of Christianity. The conflict between the Africans and the missionaries was due to a lack of understanding. The latter condemned various common practices that Africans were and are still attached to and could not give up at once. For example in Ngugi wa Thiongo's *The Black Hermit* ,Remi, the main character who is an educated ;an and lives in the city hesitates between staying in the city or going back home. Handling both the Bible left by the pastor and the small bundle of traditional medicine left by the elders he weighs them and considered both of them as pieces of superstition:

These-these-

Pieces of superstition

Meant to lure me home

Shall I find my peace and freedom there?

These are part of me,

Part of my life,

My whole.(76)

In a nutshell, the need of breaking down tribalism and customs became self-destruction and, finally, the alienated man who wanted to be a hermit in the city, refusing to bow before his customs found himself swallowed by the tears and sorrows:

'Thoni, what have I done?

I wish you had sent me the letter earlier

But I never gave a chance' (76)

The dilemma can also rise in the uncertainty of your beliefs. Some are caught in the constraints of the society and must alienate to one another theory. Onuora Nzekwu illustrates this in *Blade Among the Boys.* Patrick, Onuora Nzekwu in the novel, was born and educated in a catholic family but he has also been initiated in the religious practice of his clan. He is caught between two forces which attract him at the same time and do not know which part to take. He explains his dilemma:

> All the school life, despite the importance our parents attached to you being taught all about three R's, the school authorities impressed upon you that religion is the most important subject in the school curriculum. Force is used to make you learn about it and to practice it...For the same reasons you try to avoid participation in traditional ceremonies, which are condemned as sin from the pulpit and the altar,... But you never succeed in evading participation in these 'sinful' occasions, for the social and religious life of your purely traditional environment demands that you should...They really make life very miserable if you alienate them.(144)

Through *Arrow of God,* one learns about Western impact on traditional Africa. One becomes aware that the old traditional culture with its attendant

values is breaking up slowly and is being replaced by new culture. We can also notice that the major conflict consist in the confrontation of two religious systems as Christianity fights to discredit and eliminate the traditional religion. We observe the loss of societal cohesion as Christians try to operate their own rival community within the community, and the personal tensions and conflicts in the individual conscience. I would finally say that everyone must have a cultural identity without rejecting the contact of other cultures. One must, have inner conviction in his beliefs, be proud of them, and therefore be rational. In some respects, Ezeulu surprisingly seems to adjust to the new historical forces. His struggle is tainted by his pride, which is hurt in many occasions by both the European administration and their acolytes. His tragedy results from the pressure exerted on him by both the new cultural and moral exigencies of the colonial administration. At the end his demise is the collapse of a whole moral and traditional set up which has in doing so affirmed its own need evolves with the evolving times. And here is precisely where, read differently, Ezeulu builts his own identity: a man who unwitting occasions change and is paradoxically destroyed by it.

CHAPTER TWO

MORAL DILEMMA IN *NO LONGER AT EASE.*

The Postcolonial period is characterized mostly by the political struggle going on Africa. It is a struggle between the old and the new, between tradition and the hegemonic influences of the west. In fact, western education has been the best way to impose the western cultural ideologies. It is a struggle which has resulted in the cultural dislocation and confusion of the African. This struggle creates a kind of cultural schizophrenia. A cultural schism is created and within this schism dwells, isolation, alienation, loneliness and dispossession. *No Longer at Ease* addresses this gap, and the fallout of the dilemma that faces modern African society.

In fact, Obi, the main character is caught between two worlds: that of a traditional Africa and that other which is changing or evolving . There is also the more concrete struggle into corruption in the civil service and Obi's opposition and eventual giving in bribery. In *The Writings of Chinua Achebe* G.D Killam asserts:

> At one level of the novel reveals the wide gulf which exists between Obi's realism based on his western education, and the relevance of his status as an individual within a complex and contradictory society which many of the old values are still operative. (38)

Because of the influence of foreign education Obi moves progressively away from the nature of his society. He gets ideals that go against his tradition. He even pretends a marriage with a girl from an outcast tribe. This behaviour is going to be seriously opposed by his parents as well as the whole community. Then Obi is morally separated from his parents and his society. He is convinced to act personally and independently "Not even my mother can stop me". (65) He says,

> It was scandalous that in the middle of the twentieth century a man could be barred from marrying a girl simply because her great-great-great-grand father had been dedicated to serve a god, thereby setting himself apart and turning descendants into a forbidden caste to the end of the time. Quite unbelievable (65)

Having adopted western values, Obi believes that an individual has the right to choose his own wife. It is this that brings him into conflict with his parents and kinsmen. Obi's western education has made him an individual but his people still adhere to communal values. It is this individualism that brings his isolation. Obi's individualistic attitude is summed up in the saying "Ours is ours but mine is mine (67) to mean that he does not want any interference in his private affairs. At the end, Obi's dilemma lies in having to make choice between the old values and the new, between "ours" and "mine".

He was worked by this problem and any issue he proposed himself could not bring him happiness. His principles led him to his professional, social and moral

dilemma. In *The Writings of Chinua Achebe* G.D KILLAM states: "Obi's ambiguous position is merely a reflection of the contradictions which inform society." (38) Obi is able to articulate the ambiguity of his position and determine his conduct, both personal and professional, on the basis of the distinctions he is able to draw. At first he differs from those around him who either do not recognize inconsistencies in their behaviour as predicted by the clash between the old and the new, or, if they do, are not concerned to evaluate these inconsistencies, nor relate them to their personal behaviour.

In fact, Obi is in relationship with a young woman called Clara, a strong-minded lady. But the main conflict is that Clara is an Osu, which means she is an outcast that is not allowed to marry Obi. The latter suffers morally because he is in conflict with all social classes but particularly with his mother. Obi testifies to the Ibo adage. "Mother is supreme." He holds his mother in high regard and is constantly aware of her sacrificing nature. Yet, her vehement disapproval of his intended marriage to Clara, leaves him in shocked dismay. When she says that he will have her blood on him if he marries an Osu, Obi looses his strength.
It is the beginning of his real and great crisis in his life. He feels he cannot go against his mother's words though he knew quite well that she would not behave otherwise on such a matter. The following excerpt illustrates well his moral suffering:

> His mind was troubled not only by what had happened
> but also by the discovery that there is nothing in him to

> challenge it honestly. All day he had striven to raise his anger and his conviction, but he was honest with himself to realize that the response he got, no matter how violent it sometimes appeared was not genuine. It came from the periphery and the centre (124)

Obi does not want to hurt his mother's feelings. He suffers morally because he does not know what to do. He is in dilemma. He wants neither to abandon Clara nor to lose his mother. Yet Obi fails ultimately, because on the one hand unlike his heroic grand father Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, he was not decisive enough in his actions, and on the other, he lived at a time when an individual is rendered impotent about anything in life, either in personal affairs such as marriage or in public life where he cannot enforce the freedom of his will. One can say that Obi does not face the issues honestly and clearly, and has no consistent set of values or convictions on which to stand firm. Nor does he examine his own reactions deeply enough. For example his silence when Clara tells him of her origins betrays a prejudice within him as well as his society. He evades a full discussion with Joseph, his friend, and also evades the recognition that intellectual conviction and argument may not go to the heart. Again and again, Obi underestimates his own vulnerability while also underestimates the depth of conviction and strength of others.

At the root of all dilemma is a contrast between what being said, implied or suggested and what is actually the case. Consider Obi's theory on corruption

in the Nigerian public service: "He believes that this institution would remain corrupt until the old Africans at the top were replaced by young men from the universities". (35)

The problem here is not the validity or invalidity of such theories, but the error on which they are founded. There is no reflectiveness on Obi's part on the meaning of Nigeria , how its institutions came into being, and how people in the country have adopted and consider as natural certain practices such as corruption as part of what it means to be Nigerian. Obi's blindness and naivety here is astonishing for another reason his assumption that Nigeria is a stable and knowable community. Clearly, Obi's Nigerian is a fantasy challenged along the way. We are told, for example, that it was in England that Nigeria first became more than just a name for him.(11) Before he went to England, Nigeria existed in Obi's mind merely as an image or sign detached from its realities.

The irony, of course, is that England does not make Nigeria real for Obi; on the contrary, it replaces one image with another so that the Nigeria he returns to "was in many ways different from the picture he had carried in his mind during those four years"(11).

In the modern Nigerian society, unlike in the tribal communities, the "sharing" of any benefit took place only among the top people. They are completely disoriented because the moral values that hold together any society have disappeared. Indeed, instead of guiding, leaders turned out to be misleaders. The following extract illustrates it:

> In Nigeria the government ways "they". It had nothing to do with you or me. It was an alien institution and people's business was to get much from it as they could without getting into trouble. (30)

The common struggle of educated Africans, who stand confounded between acceptance and rejection, is evocatively portrayed in the torn character of Obi Okonkwo. He feels "terrible" after accepting his first bribe. But he was not able to fight the practice. He could not find for himself a balanced scale of values with the help of which he would have retained his integrity. In *Neo-African Literature and Culture*, Emmanuel Obiechina says:

> The man is a contemplative idealist who thinks much and acts little. He keeps the even tenor of the surface life while inwardly, imaginatively and intellectully, he is immensely alive, almost eat like, in his grasp of the nuances of corruption and decay. (122)

Hence, Obi's moral sufferings were not only the result of the loss of persons he loved, but his financial problems troubled his consciousness. He has to pay back as soon as he was engaged the loan to the Umuofian Progressive Union, for his tyres, for his income tax, for his mother's hospitals bills and later for her funeral etc,causes him much more depression than anything else in the book. In his attempt to find the way out, he fails. And this failure which occurs

in spite of his effort becomes for Obi a great frustration because, as Llyod puts it in his book *Africa in Social Change*:

> Frustrations arise when the individual fails to achieve his goal, though he may have followed the accepted means of attaining it, and added to this may be guilt felt in failing to the expectations of others. (100)

Likewise Obi is frustrated because he loses what he has tried to save and by doing so, he has failed to rise to his people's expectations. With the Umuofian Progressive Union support Obi has been educated so as he could be the leader and hence help the young generation in his town.

However, the practice of corruption has become so popular and its influence so strong that even those who pretend to be idealistic finish by renouncing to their ideals. One can notice that the driving force behind corruption is the eagerness of acquiring more and more things in modern Nigeria. Obi, who has for principles to fight all forms of corruption ends by renouncing to his ideals and he is seen taking bribes like all others he was criticizing before. Inspite of his principles he could not resist temptation which had won all other members of his society. Confronted with difficulties of different forms, such as financial and emotional problems, Obi was forced to compromise his principles. In fact, his contact with reality starts him on a process of disillusionment.

Obi finally falls into corruption. He is opposed to the protagonist of Ayi Kwei Armah's novel *The Beautyful Ones are not Yet Born* and the hero of Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*. The man as he is called in Armah's novel refuses corruption while his wife urges him to it so that they could meet up with their immediate needs. Of all the characters in the novel he is virtually alone in his decision to put into practice the official Party ideals of "Hard work, honesty and integrity." As well as Okolo, Gabriel Okara's character is concerned, he is isolated in his society because he refused categorically to be involved in corruption. Obi's isolation if it could last, was expected to be of the same nature. Unfortunately, he was unable to sustain his effort and found that it was impossible to escape the realities prevailing in his community. Being himself a member of a society in which corruption was a general rule, he did not find enough strength to stand on his grounds.

Indeed, Obi fails because he tries to apply new values where they are not applicable. If he fails to fulfil his goal, there is not fault of his own. He is just a victim of circumstances. In fact, as "a child of two worlds" he has been influenced by two different cultures of which he has tried to effect a synthesis as Cosmo Pieterse puts it in *Protest and Conflict in African Literature:*

> When two cultures come into contact the people whom they influence form a comparison between the two and have to choose between values as they are put in practice

and their effect, and assume one or other form of synthesis of the two cultures. (81)

Achebe's thirst for harmony is not only seen in the way Obi tries to reconcile the two cultures, but also in the way he tries to have good understanding between Obi and his family. Indeed, the conflict between them about the question on marriage results from their divergence in the ways of perceiving the world as they are the product of two eras. Obi seems stuck between the past and the future and this is precisely the dilemma that plagues him. His failure to formulate a coherent set of moral values ultimately destroys him. Here, Achebe portrays, through Obi's failure, which can be paralleled to post colonial failure to achieve the necessary synthesis of indigenous traditions and the imposed western values into a coherent and functional system. While individually tragic, it becomes clear that this lack also operates on a community and national level.

Colin Turnbull addresses the feelings of discontent which is so prevalent among Africans in his book *The Lonely.* He quite describes the dilemma of the African in saying that there is a void in the life of the African, a spiritual emptiness, divorced as he is from each world (old & new) standing in between, torn in both directions. According to him, to go forward is to abandon the past in which the roots of his being have their nourishment, and that to go backward is to cut himself off from the future. He continues saying that the African has been taught to abandon his old ways, yet he is not accepted in the new world, even

though he has mastered its ways, there seems to be no bridge, and this is the source of his terrible loneliness.

Obi's loneliness lies in the fact that he lacks a moral courage to support his intellectual assesment of the situation. G.D Killam in *The Writings of Chinua Achebe* has argued that:

> The core of the novel is the moral dilemma in which Obi finds himself and the conflict in the novel is produced by the clash between the strength of his moral awareness on the one hand and his almost lack of moral courage in sustaining it. (50)

If we leave aside the question of Obi's honesty and moral commitment, there is no doubt that his moral system is constructed around imaginary concepts. What this means, in regard to Achebe's character, is that Obi believes that he can exist outside the corruption that he sees around him.

Obi refuses to recognize the validity of those experiences that exist outside his moral and no doubt imaginary scheme of things. Consider the incident in which Obi, on his way home to Umuofia, travels in a lorry which is stopped by two policemen expecting a bribe from the driver. Obi is chastised by the driver of the lorry for having disrupted the transaction; here is Obi's reaction:

> What an Augean stable!" he muttered to himself. 'Where does one begin? With the masses? Educate the masses?"

> He shook his head... 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 reached this point he reminded himself that England has been as corrupt no so long ago. He was not really in the mood for consecutive reasoning. His mind was impatient to roam in as more pleasant landscape. (40)

The above quotation is a manifestation of Obi's narcissism. His conception of Nigeria as "Augean stable" does not allow for any other perspective; corruption here is thorough and only Obi Okonkwo has the cure for it; the uncorrupt individual exists independently of the corrupted social institutions. Of course, we realize that it is not based on moral insight but on Obi's inability to understand the society in which he functions. Hence, Obi takes England as a model and he dreams that this fictional sign can be actualized in Nigeria.

In any case, Obi needs to sustain his imaginary notions of Nigeria because he finds it dificult to comprehend and hence project himself into the real world; in effect, one might add, he is forced to create an illusion of his country because its realities remain out of his control. If Obi seems bent on creating a new, purer world, out of language and the imagination, this can be expressed in his poem called Nigeria:

God bless our noble Father land,

Great land of sunshine bright,

Where brave men chose the way of peace,

To win their freedom fight.

May we preserve our purity,

Our zest for life and jollity.

God bless our noble countrymen

And women everywhere.

Teach them to walk in unity

To build our nation dear;

Forgetting region, tribe or speech,

But caring always each for each. (94)

This poem was written when he was in England. When he comes back home, he does not find in Nigeria neither the way of peace "our purity" nor "zest for life."

Along with Obi's purely intellectual training, he acquires an attitude of thinking and acting for himself. This is an individualism of thought which brings him into direct conflict with his clans union where traditional usage still makes one man's problems everyone's problem. But even in this matter one has the impression that Obi's emancipation is very superficial. He objects to interference by people of certain category, and for some particular reasons. The Umuofia people in town are comparatively young people, and they cannot claim ancient wisdom and, being far below Okonkwo's own educational status, they

appear to have no substantial basis on which to offer Obi advice. In this situation, the impression that they are taking advantage of Obi's indebtedness to them in interfering in his affairs is almost inescapable, and Obi certainly does feel so. However, the kinsmen do come to Obi's assistance when he is bereaved. While they show no attitude of possessive patronage on these occasions, Obi certainly does not consider their intervention unwelcome interference, when it is to his advantage, Obi can still turn to the help of the tribe.

Regarding Obi's choice of a wife, everyone is of the opinion that it is too early to defy the traditional taboo on marriage between the outcast class and the free-born. Clara, herself already considerably European acculturated, has no illusion's about this: "I can't marry you'... I am an Osu... So you see we cannot get married" (63-64).

Joseph, Obi's long-standing friend strains to dissuade Obi against his course of action:

> What are you going to do concerns not only yourself but your family and future generations. If one finger brings oil it soils the others. In future, when we are civilized, anybody may marry anybody. But that time has not come. We of this generation are only pionners. (67-68)

Here Joseph tells his friend that the civilization must involve the whole society. Joseph is upset and appalled at Obi's not realizing what it could mean to the whole society to marry an outcast. Joseph thinks it is too early for a head-long

attack on the system in which one is brought up. Even his friend Christopher tells him one day :

> "You may say that I am not broad-minded, but I don't think we have reached the stage where we can ignore all our customs. You may talk about education and so on, but I am not going to marry an Osu." (130)

Obi's friends are aware that it is not time for such changes. They believe that there will be changes but that their generation are just "pioneers." Obi thinks, however that is precisely why it should be all right for him to take such a step, since to be pioneer means, "to lead." The changes have to begin somewhere and with someone, and Obi believes they should begin with him. Unfortunately, Obi was not courageous enough to be a forerunner of the changes and can not even succeed to convince them to think of a way to make changes.

In brief, *No Longer at Ease* shows how Obi as an enthusiastic and idealistic young Nigerian intent on serving his country through a highly idealized yet acceptable moral code. He had written, while he was at University in London, a paper in which he theorized on what would change the corruption of high positions in Nigeria. However, Achebe is not as optimistic as Obi because he ends the story with Obi fallen into corruption. The book begins on a negative note: starting with Obi's trial. It is as if Achebe, by beginning at the end, is saying that Obi was doomed from the start. Obi's position is a difficult one. He is born in Ibo, but he has been educated in England and often feel himself a

stranger in his own country. He has lost his love because of a rule of the past, he has suffered under great financial distress, he has exerted himself because of the expectations others have placed on him, and he lost his mother. All of this brings the protagonist of the novel to fall into what he once had believed was a terrible and corrupt act. Still,Obi always feels guilty at taking bribe, and he had decided to stop taking them. By having Obi caught, even amid an aura of repentance and guilt, Achebe further illustrates the hypocrisy of all who participated in bribes and now throw stones at Obi. At the same time, it tells us that, although he got caught, Obi is still a pioneer because he has sworn not to do it again. Still, perhaps Achebe may be saying that this is not true, and that Obi, ultimately, has failed at the task he set before himself.

No Longer at Ease seeks to show that the African educated of today cannot claim to be emancipated from the indigenous ways in which they have been brought up. With the realistic and easy-going ones, not even a conflict between the new and the old ways can be felt, but even the fanatics will still for sometime find themselves unable to suppress an inner voice in support of the older. Obi is only determined to change Nigerian society, both traditional and official but does not realized that society does not want to change. Furthermore, he does not know that the only way to survive in a world where two cultures have met is to allow a certain amount of mixture to be used in a positive regard. Whether the book is a tragedy(an unresolved situation) in Obi's definition or not is up to whether we believe that it is Achebe who is the greatest "pioneer" in the

novel. In other words, it is the author's critical voice that will lead others out of such corruption, if not by only making the world and younger generations Nigerians aware of it.

CHAPTER THREE

REBELLION OR ASSERTION OF IDENTITY

There are values and cultural patterns which control man in every society. The image of the individual is the result of his social and cultural heritage along with the socio-cultural transformation in process. Expanding on his view about the relation between man and the environment in which he lives, Frederick Skinner asserts that

> the social environment is obviously man-made it generates the language a person speaks, the customs he follows, and the behavior he exhibits with respect to ethical, religions, governmental, economic, educational and psychotherapeutic institutions which control him. (311-2)

Since the early stages, man is integrated in a social milieu through the process of socialization; a child continually learns the characteristics of his society in order to respond to its requirements. However, since « a man is different from other creatures in that he is aware of his own existence and knows that he has had a past and will have a future » (300). We can understand that he knows what he does. Therefore, he accepts and obeys the norms of his society, or else, rejects them once he finds them compromising. Society as a whole must safeguard its unity; it establishes its norms and predicts sanctions for those who fail to act or

behave accordingly. The norms are not easy to respect, because they consider the members of a society at the same level, disregarding the nature and the needs of each in particular. It is evident that it is not for the society to bend before the particular needs or problems of an individual. The society becomes like a machine, stern and ruthless. It holds on its traditional ways and is against or at least reluctant to change. The individual has to do his best to adapt himself; otherwise he is subjected to social sanctions. He is constrained and he cannot complain openly. He acts in a way which shows his discontent. The discontent may be on large scale. Then an internal conflict rises, and pushes the individual to become a rebel. In this chapter, in both novels under study, we are going to analyse the characters' behaviour against their respective societies in which they live.

In *Arrow of God* When the Umuaro people began to encounter the spreading European colonialists, most realized that the colonialists were not like the other enemies and that they could not be defeated in the same way. So, even those most fiercely opposed to the colonial presence at first eventually conformed to its power. However, Ezeulu was not the typical Umuaro villager. As the chief priest of the powerful deity Ulu, Ezeulu felt that he could be subordinate to no one and accordingly rose up in direct confrontation with both the colonialists and his own community. To see clearly the extremely involved viewpoint, Ezeulu's action should be seen in three perspectives:

Testifying against his clan, Umuaro, in the land case with their neighbours, Okperi; Sending his son to the missionary school while, as chief priest, he should be the chief custodian of the clan's rites; Withholding the new-yam festival.

The traditional rivalry between Umuaro and Okperi village over a land dispute leads to a war. Ezeulu warns his people not to fight against the neighbouring village and tells them that he can neither give them his support nor guarantee of his god's assistance. This was manifestation of the priest rebellion act since he refuses to ally himself with his people to go to war. This revolt leads to conflict between Ezeulu and the Umuaro villagers. Ezeulu's actions in this conflict would shape the future relationship between him and the colonial captain Winterbottom, called Wintabota by the villagers. Winterbottom interpreted Ezeulu's refusal to defend the actions of his villagers as honesty and accordingly, held Ezeulu in high esteem. Hence, he selected him to serve as warrant chief of Okperi. But Ezeulu refuses and thereafter is imprisoned. He rejects the post of warrant chieftain over his clan offered to him: « tell the white man that Ezeulu will not be anybody's chief except Ulu »(64). this rejection may be interpreted as a demonstration of Ezeulu's pride, and assertion of himself against the colonial administration when he tells them that he does not normally leave his hut and that the white man must come to him if he wants to see him. He is affirming his dignity in rebelling against the European administration and recognizing the only superior authority of his god Ulu. Eustace Palmer in *The*

Growth of the African Novel asserts: "His great dignity and pride are drawn partly from consciousness of his own worth and the strength of his institutions, and he makes what amounts to a stirring declaration of independence" (86)

Ezeulu acts as a leader and since he firmly takes decisions and does not permit any one alter his word even though sometimes elders may question the truth of his assertion. Moreover, he always remembers them that Ulu is still the guardian of their lives. To villagers' question whether Ezeulu the man or Ulu the god should be held responsible for the priest's actions, Ezeulu answers, « you cannot say: do what is not done and we shall take the blame. I am the Chief Priest of Ulu and what I have told you is his will not mine. » (208)

Here, Ezeulu reinforces his authority and reminds his people that his god is at the essence of his power. Ezeulu does not take into account the clansmen criticisms; he chooses either to ignore them or simply to defy them.

On the matter of Oduche's education, all of the people of Umuaro are against it. They accuse Ezeulu to have betrayed them and ally with the white man. But Ezeulu tells them that they should blame themselves since it is not him who brought the white man and that they have fallen to oppose him when he arrives. Ezeulu, even though traditionalist, recognizes that it is wise to have a look on what is going on in the European sphere. He had realized that no solution by force could be efficacious. The only solution would be to learn the white man's knowledge so that they could fight an enemy they knew. However, the European forces are strong enough. Hence, the new religion is the basis of

conflict within the society and has brought a certain frustration and suffering. And by giving issue and assurance to the new converts, the latter became the rebelling individuals and feel more at ease in the new community. The self assurance and confidence in the new community is a determinant factor for the disintegration of the clan. The reason is that the rebels feel strong enough and may face the clan. Thus, we see then the converts turning against the society, challenging the ancient gods, and accomplishing the most scandalous acts in the society. This can be illustrated here when Ezeulu's son Oduche attempts to kill the sacred python. Clearly, the message which Ezidemili sends to Ezeulu inquiring how he intends to atone for the abomination done in his household is an impudent one, and calculated to provoke. It is a further prosecution of his and Nwaka's personal vendetta against Ezeulu. An abomination is a matter for general concern and a message of Ezidemili's kind is not an action in good faith, towards a solution.

With regard to this matter, there is an inevitable confrontation between Ezeulu and his people. The following extract shows it:

> The outrage which Ezeulu's son committed against the sacred python was a very serious matter; Ezeulu was the first to admit it. But the ill will of neighbours and especially the impudent message sent him by the priest of Idemili left him no alternative but to hurl defiance at them all. (59)

Ezeulu acts with a measure of firmness and hardness of hand against his people because he wants to show that he does not receive orders from anyone else except his god even less his enemy the priest of Idemili. The power Ezeulu possesses and the role he fulfills has the effect of isolating him from the community. He lies on himself and does not expect his people's point of view; hence does not wish them interfere in his life. No one can affirm to know better the priest's personality. Even to Akuebue, his closest friend, Ezeulu remains a mystery. Ezeulu says:

> I have my own way and I shall follow it. I can see things where other men are blind. That is why I am known and at the same time I am unknowable. You are my friend and you know whether I am a thief or murderer or an honest man. But you cannot know the thing which beats the drum to which Ezeulu dances.(76)

Through the quotation above we can depict the various facets of the chief priest Ezeulu. In this extract Ezeulu is telling his people that no one can guess his opinions, ideas, positions he might take to a given issue. He is asserting himself that he is as a mystery as the god he represents. One cannot assert who is the chief that is what should give him a high esteem. He must stay indiscernible to his people and henceforth he should gain respect. Ezeulu is not only a mystery for his people in a sense that his character is beyond their

understanding but also that he lives like a hermit. "Ezeulu claims that loneliness is a familiar to him as are corpses to the earth." (qtd *Exile & Tradition* 156)

One can notice that Ezeulu does not consider living individually as a problem, and like corpses on the earth, it is natural for him and does not complain about it as he is too sure of his own area of authority. No one can dare compromise his authority or his opinion. His wife says about him:

> Ezeulu's only fault was that he expected everyone-is wife, his kinsmen, his children, his friends and even his enemies-to think and act like himself. Anyone who dared to say no to him was an enemy. He forgot the saying of the elders that if a man sought for a companion who acted entirely like himself he would live in solitude. (92)

Ezeulu has chosen loneliness and does not permit anyone challenge his ideas. He does not need to act, think, behave like his community and furthermore does not permit anyone refute his ideas. The clansmen must identify themselves through the chief priest and therefore they are still under protection and control of the god Ulu.

The last issue that of withholding the new-yam festival, Ezeulu rebels against the whole village. The latter has challenged his "chi" and Ezeulu knows that the world is changing and he is about to lose his power. He does decide not to watch out for the new moon and is jubilant in the thought that Umuaro will

answer to Ulu for the absence of his chief priest. All emphasis lies on the need for the old yams to have been consumed before new ones are harvested. This is what Ezeulu ultimately uses as a weapon of revenge. Then the titled elders and dignitaries of the clan authorize him to defy what is probably the most important taboo for the chief priest of Ulu. Ezeulu rejects the proposition: "What you ask me to do is not done. Those yams are not food and a man does not eat them because he is hungry. You are asking me to eat death"(84).

The taboo on the harvesting of the new yams is something inherent in the traditions and history of the clan. It is different from the decisions taken by elders at their councils. It has become institutionalised, and is watched over by a deity whose immediate representative is its priest. His position is not so nominal as the elders imply, and he cannot make over his responsibility at anyone's flippant suggestion or at any expediency he falls mad, Ezeulu through out the novel has struggle to affirm his personality and gain much respect from the people under his protection. Achebe describes him in an interview in *African Writers Talking* as follows:

> He is an intellectual. He thinks about why things happen – of course as a priest ; you see, his office requires this- so he goes into things, to the roots of things, and he's ready to accept change, intellectually. He sees the values of change and therefore his reaction to Europe is different, completely different, from Okonkwo's. He is

> ready to come to terms with the new-up to a point-except
>
> where his dignity is involved.(16-17)

Eustace Palmer in *The Growth of the African Novel* is of the same opinion. To him "That Ezeulu is an intellectual is incontestable. The clarity of mind with which he analyses the issues facing his society, particularly the forces making change is impressive. This determines his attitude."(91)

Surely as an intellectual, Ezeulu faces intelligently the forces which his society is encountering.

As for *No Longer at Ease*, Obi the protagonist tries to identify with the "new" Nigeria. However, the Nigeria he discovers on his return is different from what he has dreamed of. At many times, he has refused then to identify to this 'new' Nigeria and has rebelled from his society more than once. Like many members of the nationalist generation of the 1940s and 1950s, he struggles for a sense of self. Thus, the search of self becomes a struggle between individual and community. Obi is fighting for the yet unrealised community in which cultural, and ethnic differences are overcome. It often appears that in order to achieve his individuality, and hence inscribe himself as a Nigerian, he must reject kinship and regional ties. But that is not easy since Obi is an invention of his kinsmen. He has been educated by the U.P.U to serve their communal interests. However, this does not mean that Obi does not struggle to release himself from what he sees as the prison house of Umuofia. One can notice how the protagonist attempts to rebel against the community. Umuofians sent him to England to read

law so that when he returned he would handle all their neighbours' complaints. But when he got to England he read English. Obi has chosen not to read Law because it was not of his interest and thought he has the right to pursuit the study he wants. The union was angry but in the end they left him alone. Although he would not be a lawyer, he would get a "European post" in the civil Service' (6)

On his return to Nigeria, Obi fails to live up the image Umuofia created for him. Hence, he will become further isolated from his community, while the Nigerian identity he desires still remains unrealised. One can ask himself: does Obi have a community he can identify with? As an educated Nigerian in England, he has loosened ethnic and regional ties; as an African in search of his traditions, he values Igbo culture even though he cannot live up by its prescriptions. As a nationalist, he has revolted against the colonial ideology. It is then clear that Obi's education and the construction of his identity has always been split between his father's Christian doctrine and his mother's Igbo culture. For Obi to succeed in the colonial school, he needed to have some knowledge of his people's oral culture. (53) But Obi does not succeed to negate either the claims of tradition or of the colonial modernity in celebration of selfhood. However, Obi, like other Africans who went to the white man's schools were completely alienated and turned against tradition.

Schools were the factors of rebellion against the Ibo society. In fact, schools, through Christian teachings, developed individualism. Emmanuel Obiechina in *An African Popular Literature* says:

> Christian teaching in West Africa, as elsewhere, has tended to stimulate individualism. In as much as its effect has been to weaken the individual's attachment to the traditional religion which embodied the essence of collective tradition in old Africa, Christianity stimulated the individual to assert his separateness from others, and to pursue his own needs and aspirations.(108)

In fact, western education has been the best way to impose the western cultural ideologies and to detach children from their environment. In that process of assimilation, young people have lost their cultural identity because they are asked to abandon their beliefs and customs and to identify themselves with the white men. Those who go to their studies abroad, like Obi, accelerate their adjustment to the norms and values of modern society, and this of course means their being dislodged from those of their own society. Therefore, there is no wonder that those alienated and uprooted people will fail to adjust and meet the strong demands of their community to which they want to apply the imported values.

A striking example is when Obi wishes to marry Clara. His friend Joseph reproaches him with "You know book, but this is no matter for book. Do you know what an osu is? How can you know?"(64). But Obi in this matter is stubborn. He says: "I know about it than yourself, and I'm going to marry the

girl..."(65). Of course, Obi refuses to acknowledge that the community has the right over him: "don't dare interfere in my affairs again."(75) He tells the President of the Umuofia union when the latter was forbidding him to marry his fiancée. He eventually rebels at least against a part of the U.P.U demands in taking a unilateral decision to stop paying back installments of the loan to his clan's union. This creates the tension between the self and the community.

With regard to his stubborn decision to marry an osu, one can interpret it as a means of empowering himself by acting contrary to establish beliefs and this can be equated to the act of a man challenging his chi. He knows that his parents and all the Umuofian people, will not approve of his course of action. "Obi knew better than anyone else that his family would violently oppose the idea of marrying an osu. Who wouldn't?" (68)

Obi knows very well that his parents will not agree with his marriage with Clara, but he does not think of forcing his parents' hands, but of winning their approval: " ' If I could convince my mother', Obi thought, 'all would be well'"(68). This quotation shows Obi's lack of conviction in his course of action. In essence, Obi has no inner conviction on which to base his arguments. Clara very quickly sees this triviality and naivety and this is the reason for violence of her temper in returning the engagement ring, and for the uncompromising absoluteness of the break with Obi as from this moment. She knows the strength of the osu taboo too well to expect anyone to win parental approval against it. She knows that Obi knows this too. For anyone to act against

it, one must rebel and defy it. She expects Obi to be a rebel if he truly desires and wants her as a wife. She herself is prepared to defy it.

In *No Longer at Ease*, Obi is struggling to assert himself but he finds he cannot completely dissociate himself from the colonial culture which he has inherited from his father, nor can he totally identify with the Igbo culture of his ancestors. Moreover, Obi's ideals are imaginary in the sense that they are never shown to derive from the realities of his country, but are rather conceived in his imagination. Besides, his failure to achieve his assertion of identity reflects his inability to see himself as a subject who has an autonomous life outside his imaginary existence and unrealised ideals that mark his desires. Obi's assertion of identity would not succeed since he needs to be different and breaks the boundaries of culture and convention in attempt to transform the realities into ideals which are more likely from his imagination. Once he starts taking bribes, Obi has become aware of the illusory nature of his previous existence. Indeed, the greatest change that takes place in Obi at the end of the novel is his recognition that the self he thought was unique and original, not to mention moral, was a projection of other's desire-the union, his parents, the colonial culture, the nationalist movement, the collective desire for a new Nigeria.

In sum, Achebe's characters; Ezeulu in *Arrow of God* and Obi in *No Longer at Ease* rebel against their society. Ezeulu, as chief priest has a moral obligation towards his community. He is then the first touched by the forces in action. And Obi as a product of two eras is not also spared by the clash between

the old and the new. He is an individual in conflict between what he is and what he would like to be. The manifestations of this inner struggle are the characters' dissatisfaction. This quest for assertion of identity is not reached as the characters do not solve their problems.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The aim of this work has been to investigate the moral and cultural dilemma that the heroes of Achebe's *Arrow of God* and *No Longer at Ease* find themselves. Divided in three main chapters, and written against a New Historicism theoretical framework, it attempts an analysis of the dilemma that Ezeulu and Obi Okwonko unwittingly find themselves in.

Basically, for Ezeulu, it is the pride of his positions as chief priest of Ulu that blinds him from seeing the truth of the inevitable evolution of his society. We discovered that he could have compromised the two, that is, the traditional and the western, but he is weakened by the inevitable forces of circumstances. We equally affirmed that, Ezeulu is a man destroyed by circumstances that are above his own personal desires. He is betrayed by the very culture and people he is steadfast to protect. The discussion in that chapter shows that everything being equal, Ezeulu is a man more sinned against than sinning with respect to his community. Achebe demonstrates through him the strength and inevitability of the forces of change. He shows that both Ezeulu, his authority and those he is supposed to protect are victims of their own history. To Achebe therefore, since change is inevitable, the gods sometimes use a scapegoat through whom their desires are enacted, and given whatever situation, the chosen hero must fall under the weight of indecision. It is this same crisis that animates Obi Okwonko's life.

With Obi Okwonko, Achebe shows the tragedy of community help. Rather than serving an ideology that he has acquired from school, Obi Okwonko is caught between his own personal desires and those of his people.With Obi Okwonko caught in this dilemma, we discovered in the second chapter that Achebe is dramatizing the difficulty of man affirming himself in a community set up. Like Ezeulu, Obi Okwonko collapses under the weight of the pressure of his community. Achebe shows through this the difficulty of the hero rising above his community. To extrapolate this, the hero's predicament is of course that of his whole society. His failure, we concluded in that chapter, is the downfall and even the weakness of a whole community that is unable to sustain its own.

In the last chapter of this thesis, we looked at the responses of Ezeulu and Obi Okwonko as attempts at rebellion against social norms, and equally possibly attempts at affirmation of identity. Both heroes act in such a way as to tell their community that they insist on standing their own grounds. It is their identity as individual entities that is in question and any act of theirs is judged as individual weakness or individual strength. If these two heroes have to pretend to any form of survival, then they have to take certain actions which must show this strength of character. This is of course evident in Ezeulu's refusal to name the day of the New Yam Festival, and to allow the eating of the old yams. Obi Okwonko is obstinate to the decision of the community barring him from marrying Clara. We concluded here that their actions are both a reflection of rebellion against the

community and an affirmation of their sense of identity. All of this, we concluded equally is done at the expense of both the individual and the community.

Overall, Achebe's *Arrow of God* and *No Longer at Ease* dramatizes the tragedy of two heroes destroyed by the inevitability of historical forces. It is an indictment of personal greed and selfishness, but at the same time, the author evokes the readers' sympathy as he shows that the heroes are placed in absolutely difficult circumstances about which they can do nothing. Their responses and attitudes result from a paralysis of will, which Achebe sees as natural and especially sometimes inevitable. To him, these two heroes are at the cross road of the change that must come to be. They are the sacrifice that traditional African society pays in a bit to move with the changes occasioned by the moving world. For the communities that Achebe presents to form a new identity, to cope with the change imposed on them, they must forego something in Arrow of God, it is priestly authority, and in *No Longer at Ease,* it is the hero's professional decency. The two texts announce the dawn of the new era, while at the same time, they lament the death of the supposedly traditional and glorious past.

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