
**A Comparative Gaze on Cultural Diversity, Identity and Religions
at Odds in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at
Ease***

Kemealo Adoki*

&

Patchani Essosimna Patabadi

Abstract

This work is a critical analysis of Chinua Achebe's writing techniques in *Thing Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*. It shows how characters' culture, and identity shaped by society's principles, and religious power, leads to alienation and isolation. It analyses identity dynamics of characters in relation to their social, cultural, religious, economic and psychological duties. It also aims at showing the effects of religious difference and traditional downfall. The analysis details how the loss of -religious identity by the Igbo people in Nigeria is influenced by the colonial impact and Christianity. The article leans on semiotics approach to interpret signs, symbolic tools to colonialism as a disfiguring force of cultural identity. Adopting a comparative reading of both novels, this work also reflects on the awareness of the conflicts between tradition and modernity and the impacts of colonial power in post-colonial fiction.

Keywords: Colonization, culture, identity, religion, resistance

Résumé

Ce travail est une analyse critique des techniques d'écriture des œuvres intitulées *Things Fall Apart* et *No Longer at Ease*. Il montre comment la culture et l'identité des personnages façonnées par les principes de la société et le pouvoir religieux conduisent à l'aliénation et à l'isolement. Il analyse la dynamique identitaire des personnages en relation avec leurs devoirs sociaux, culturels, religieux, économiques et psychologiques. Cette étude vise également à montrer les effets de la différence religieuse et ceux de la chute traditionnelle. L'analyse détaille l'impact colonial et l'influence de la perte d'identité religieuse des peuples Igbo au Nigeria. L'article s'appuie sur l'approche sémiotique pour interpréter les signes, outils symboliques du colonialisme comme une force défigurante de l'identité

* Université de Kara (Togo), reineadoki@gmail.com

culturelle. En adoptant une lecture comparative des deux romans, cet ouvrage réfléchit également sur la prise de conscience des conflits entre tradition et modernité et des impacts du pouvoir colonial dans la fiction postcoloniale.

Mots-clés : Colonisation, culture, identité, religion, résistance

Introduction

Critical discourses of African literature have examined aspects of identity dynamics without paying enough attention to the negative influences of colonialism on characters' social perceptions of self and others which influence community life and interpersonal relations in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease* and results in alienation, a form of identity crisis. Emmanuel Obiechina for instance, in his approach to both novels relates Igbo identity to culture and tradition that metamorphosed into postcolonial cultural alienation when the forces of colonialism strained characters' lives forcing European culture on indigenous people (1975: 80). Simon Gikandi is another critic who articulated ways in which colonialism reshaped characters' cultural habit as they were brought by the imperatives of colonial occupational laws to readjust their traditional practices and internalize imported values (Gikandi 34). As for Dan Izevbaye, he addressed alienation in *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease* by laying emphasis on the responsibility of the African – Igbo community to be precise – in not cooperating with the colonial forces as these turned to be beyond their control (Izevbaye 2009: 33). In their various approaches the three critics mentioned above did not discuss identity as a dynamic phenomenon in the two novels by Achebe especially when adopting a comparative view. They overlooked aspects of the critical interpretation where culture influences identity in *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease* inviting thereby a comparative analysis of diversity, identity and religion as these elements actively operate in the consciousness and sub-consciousness of characters from their African indigenous state to their condition as postcolonial hybrid subjects. That is why we will analyse in this study the identity markers that determine and characterize the characters' lives and social behaviours in both novels to compare and contrast their functioning mode in the colonial and postcolonial settings respectively of *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*.

The theoretical and methodological approaches which lean on the semiotic interpretation of characters' behaviour and language in the novel will also borrow from postcolonial critical approach suggested by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin.

Semiotic theory will offer an account of the role of the reader in interpreting signs. It provides tools that describes the style, the meaning of words and their functions.

Kristeva posits that meaning is more readily apprehended through visual models rather than narrative discourse. This organisational element is “the unity that has the unity of meaning in context, a texture that expresses the fact that it relates as a whole to the environment in which it is placed” (Michael and Ruqaiya 293). Afterwards, a close attention will be paid throughout our work to the context, especially the context of situation, in which language is used. With regards to identity, culture and how they are interwoven.

Postcolonial criticism sustains the resistance discourse against colonial subjectification. Concerning this very issue of power relationship between the colonized and the colonizers, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin emphasize that postcolonial literary criticism is “[...] the determining condition of what we refer to as postcolonial cultures [...] the historical phenomenon of colonialism with range of material practices and effects such as transportation, slavery, displacement, emigration, and racial, and cultural discrimination” (Bill Ashcroft et al. 7).

The first part of our analysis deals with the paradigm of identity dynamics under the strain of colonial and postcolonial forces and the second one analyzes the markers of conflicts in the ideological perception of characters.

1. Identity and Culture Dynamics under the Strain of Colonial and Postcolonial Forces: *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*

Human society is made up of a variety of cultures. This mosaic of culture refers to divergences among people which are due to their racial or ethnic background, language, dress and tradition. Identity is the characteristics that determine who or what a person or thing is. According to (*Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary* 779), identity is “who or what something is” or “the characteristics, feelings or beliefs that distinguish people from others”. In this case, identity is a sense of national, cultural,

personal or group identity. (*Mac Milan Dictionary*) defines the concept identity as “the qualities that make someone or something what they are and different from other people”. It can also be the difference or character that marks off an individual from the rest of the same kind, or selfhood. A person can be identified by his name, his mask or appearance that he presents to the world and by which he is known. This means that the sameness which some individuals share to make up the same kind or universal and the qualities, beliefs, etc. distinguish or identify a person or a thing. In this situation, lets us follow Hall who opines that:

All [these] cultural practices and forms of representation have the black subject at their centre, putting the issue of cultural identity in question [...] What recent theories of enunciation suggest is that, though we speak, so to say ‘in our own name’[...] Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. This view problematises the very authority and authenticity to which the term ‘cultural identity lays claim (Hall 392).

Clearly, Hall confers the problematic of identity which is not a complete process. Thus, it can be stated that the question of identity is not an irreversible accomplishment, it is rather a perpetual change. In connection therewith, Chinua Achebe displays the matter of culture and identity throughout his narratives and characterisation. In *Things Fall Apart*, Igbo people are identified by their culture and organization, Achebe shows that this people are known as an ethnic group well organised. This precolonial identity is made visible and the way of life shows their culture. The narrator recounts that Igbo people believe in the God ‘Chukwu’ and the wooden god ‘chi’, the messengers. The following passage is illustrative:

During the planting season Okonkwo worked daily on his farms from cockcrow until the chickens went roost. Okonkwo’s prosperity was visible in his household. Apart from his own hut or ‘obi’ he had three more huts built for his three wives, near the barn, he had a ‘medicine house or a Shrine where Okonkwo kept the wooden symbols of his personal god-Chi, and his ancestral spirits. He worshipped them with sacrifices of kola nuts, food and palm wine and

offered prayers to them on behalf of himself [...] (*Things Fall* 11)¹

The above quotation serves as an artistic indication of pre-colonial Igbo people. One can infer that, the Igbo have cultural identity. This explains why they have traditional ethics, religion and beliefs. Thus, *Things Fall Apart*, deals with how the prospect of change affects some characters. John Povey is right, then, when he says that “in spite of our general sympathy Okonkwo is not a lovable man” (Povey 100). In this perspective and in relation to the character Okonkwo’s identity change, the literary critic exhibits the protagonist’s refusal to show the feelings and emotions that engendered his harsh reactions. In *No Longer at Ease* the novelist portrays Igbo people, their traditional beliefs, the social and cross-cultural skills through inharmoniousness.

While talking about the protagonist Obi’s two dual forces in *No Longer at Ease*, Achebe creates a character with a given identity. Though Obi embraces Western values as evidenced through his education and his adherence to Christianity, the reader can see how this decision withdraws his attention from his traditional Igbo culture. For Obi, to establish the identity with Western culture means that he rejects a number of cultural traditions. Indeed, it is our belief that this custom includes polygamy, paying bride-price. And this traditional concept is misunderstood by the British as ‘buying a wife’. This attitude confirms the hegemonic point of view or colonial discourse about colonized people to legitimate colonial domination. In this vein, Williams and Chrisman viewed this issue as handling the discourse and identity when they write:

The theorisation of post-colonial cultural discourse and identities cannot escape [...] a conflation of description and prescription of cultural processes and values [...] Debates on identity continue and develop many of the nativist/essentialist, socialist, humanist and anti-foundationalist arguments found in historical debates on colonised cultures (Williams and Chrismans 373).

The above excerpt points to the fact that, when one handles the problem of identity and culture in post-colonial era. Obviously, the ambivalent position of the protagonist, as an educated Igbo individual who holds two identities is seen in his tradition as an alienation.

¹ All references followed by ‘*Things Fall*’ will be known as Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, London, Heinemann 1958, 11.

Henceforth, he rejects his customs, tradition and way of living in order to accept western values. As he deems these values superior, he is ‘no longer at ease’ living in discomfort and feeling uneasy.

Consequently, it is not surprising when Obi sees himself as a pioneer. By making visible the transformation of Obi Okonkwo’s life, it can be said that Achebe shows the influence of a negative change as features of malevolence. The fact of leading a corrupt system of bribery and nepotism, and the desire to marry a girl who is an outcast. Besides, Obi’s ideals are too theoretical so that he is tied up to be disappointed. Illustrating this position, Eustace Palmer substantiates that, “Umuofia society is determined to make the most impossible demand on him and to force him to conform to their own standards, a clash is inevitable, and the struggle crystalizes in the dispute over his proposed marriage with Clara, an osu” (Palmer 66). From this allusion, it is obvious that education plays a metamorphic role in the shaping of individuals’ mind and contributes to worthy of being, noted changes in the society. As a matter of fact, rules, rights and duties of the individual in his community are beyond doubt and people dream to embody the community values.

In *Things Fall Apart*, another form of identity is viewed. As a man’s status is determined by cultural stance in a traditional society Achebe represents Okonkwo who resists in order to protect his identity. About this perception of socio-cultural identity, Okonkwo’s attitude has denoted the interconnection between sociology and psychology, this is the environment and the character. In other words, the identification of an individual related to the basic criterion of a community. It could be assumed that the pursuit of self-interest deviates human being from the common norms. In fact, “the social environment is one of the factors that determine a character’s behaviour in a literary work” (Awesso 177). In this perspective, Okonkwo the main character appears as someone who has the attributes of a community, especially the fusion of interest and the state of mind of the members. So, this characteristic can be read through the following passage:

The identification of the individual with the group of which he forms part, and with its social and cultural outlook, is the very essence of traditionalism. It finds expression in the individual’s acquiescence in the beliefs and customs of the group and his sharing with the rest of the group and his sharing with the rest of the group a

feeling of social unity. His individual self-interest is always subordinated to the overall interest of the group (Obiechima 202).

It is perceptible from the quote above that both social and psychological features allowed to identify any individual. Achebe's treatment of Okonkwo is subsequent shows and interpretation of human psychology. Unfortunately, his psyche influences his character by inflicting serious injuries on him. This impact on Okonkwo brought fear, weakness of being overtaken by ruin. The narrator in *Things Fall Apart* reveals this state of mind as follows:

[...] his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness [...] Okonkwo's fear was greater than these. It was not external but lay deep in himself. It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father (*Thing Fall* 12-13).

At this level of discussion, it can be inferred that horror dominates Okonkwo and metamorphoses him. Moreover, it can safely be said that the problem of Igbo society lies in cultural detachment whereby Obi places little values on his own culture and desires that of imposed colonizing nation. In the same vein, Aliou Sow's words reported by Mamadou Kandji, show that "in traditional Igbo society, the individual must act and react as his ancestors would in any circumstances. Ancestral deeds are the reference and jurisprudence book for society. That is why a few characters in Achebe's novels face the delicate problem of adaptation and strategies building in unexpected situations" (Sow 287). Since the near at hand correlation between the individual and his community is taken as read and considering that ancestral law should be taken as a legal system based on the principles, Obi in *No Longer at Ease* ought to obey them but he woefully escaped. In such a way, Obi thought during the prayers with his father that he can no longer believe in his society's divinities. In this framework, he puts, "What would happen if I stood up and said to him: Father, I no longer believe in your God" (*No Longer* 51)?² It should be stressed that the world is made up of some tempting situations. This is the case of the protagonist who is unable to resist to be lured. In the light of this attitude, it is clear that the question of identity change is raised.

² All references followed by 'No Longer' will be known as Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease* London, Heinemann 1960, 51

Achebe takes a look at it in many of his writings on Igbo society. We can see how much this identity meant to the protagonist in *No Longer at Ease*, when he cried after the judge who asked how a man of such ‘education’ and “promise” could have accepted bribes. He has failed. In fact, the tangible result of Obi’s misbehaviour is exemplified when he was found guilty in such a way that the judge was worrying about this downfall. Thus, and so, the narrator tells us:

I cannot comprehend how a young man of your education and brilliant promise could have done this’ that a sudden and marked change occurred. Treacherous tears came into Obi’s eyes. He brought out a white handkerchief and rubbed his face. But, he did as people do when they wipe sweat. He even tried to smile and belie the tears. A smile would have been quite logical. All that stuff about education and promise and betrayal had not taken him unawares. He had expected and rehearsed this very scene a hundred times until it had become as familiar as a friend. (*No Longer 2*)

The foregoing shows the judge’s and the Umuofia people’s disagreement on the future inclination of Obi. Though, he was found guilty, Obi was not worrying about the event in the court during his trial. His neglected attitude let the judge wonder about the legitimacy of Obi’s status. This is how identity change brought Obi’s failure. Eustace Palmer backs this point when he writes:

The failure to take us close enough to Obi’s consciousness is the basic cause of our ignorance of the mainspring of the hero’s actions and this, in the turn, results in a number of psychological implausibility in the novel. Was it really necessary or plausible, for Obi to be roused to such uncontrollable anger at the meeting of Umuofia Progressive Society? One is even more doubtful about the question of bribery. (Palmer 69)

This passage speaks for itself. Throughout the above statement, Eustace Palmer displays some flaws related to social stratification.

No Longer at Ease depicts issues of identity in many forms: social identity, masculine, feminine, religious and cultural ones. The author explores the identity of Igbo people. They live in conservatism. Obi’s isolation accounts for his identity crisis and it remains as one of the examples of the identity of Igbo people in Nigeria. Being depicted in manifold, Obi underwent many types of identity. Then, “social identity

explains how identification, seen as a social process works individually and institutionally” (Jekins 264). Social identity allows people to be part of groups and gain a sense of belonging in their social world (*our emphasis*). These identities play an important role in moulding self-image. So, the more people identify with a particular group, the more that group plays a role in shaping how people feel about themselves. As, an individual’s social identity indicates who that person is in terms of the group to which he is affiliated, we can deduce that social identity groups are usually defined by some physical, social and mental characteristics of individuals.

In this perspective, it is stated that “perfection as culture perceives it is not possible while the individual remains isolated”. (Arnold 48) Furthermore, the kingship and ethnicity of Igbo people in the colonial period determine their social identity. This matter ‘coat’ enables them to keep their social custom and values safe. Then, the issue of acceptance led the Umuofia people to sacrifice themselves for Obi’s happiness. In point of fact, they sent Obi to study Law in England. Before, Obi left, his people had organized a farewell church service. The narrative states as follow:

Obi’s going to England caused a big stir in Umuofia. A few days before his departure to Lagos his parents called a prayer meeting at their home. [...] The gathering ended with the singing of ‘Praise God from whom blessing flows. The guests then said their farewells to Obi, many of them repeating all the advice that he had already been given. They shook hands with him and as they did so they pressed their presents into his palm, to buy a pencil with, or an exercise book or a loaf of bread for the journey, a shilling there and a penny there-substantial presents in a village where money was so rare, where men and women toiled from year to year to wrest a meagre living from an unwilling and exhausted soil. (*No Longer* 11-10)

Despite Umuofia’s pauperism they brought their means together in solidarity to send their son to study in England. This is a proof that social identity is set up in order to put their community forward. It is clear that the novelist bears some attributes inherent to African society, and Nigerian one.

Cultural identity is culture which is the shared features of a group of people, which encompass place of birth, religion, language, social behaviour, art, literature and music. Hence, “cultural identity refers to identification with, or sense of belonging to a particular group based on

various cultural categories including nationality, ethnicity, race, gender and religion” (Vivian). This question can be linked to the system of education they adopt by sending Obi abroad. Obi is sent to England as his people,

wanted him to read law so that when he returned, he would handle all their land cases against their neighbours. But when he got to England, he read English; his self-will was not new. 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. (*No Longer* 6)

This explains the motivation and mobilization of youth by ethnic community as the means to protect the self-image or the identity. This issue is explored when we realize that this community shares the same language and tradition. The narrative abounds with references and allusions: ‘Che sarà, aso ebi, ori oda’ (*No Longer* 15), ‘osu’ ‘chi’ (*No Longer*), ‘nwa jelu oyibo. (*No Longer* 29)

A close scrutiny of the foregoing points lets the reader hold that decolonized people develop a postcolonial identity that is based on cultural interactions between different identities, Achebe through the portrayal of the protagonists who have difficulties to live in harmony because of two entities, Nigerian tradition and England culture, shows post-colonial theory. With the understanding that, post-colonial issue refers to “post-colonial studies as a strategy of investigating the trace of colonial effects in our postcolonial time” (Scott 386), Obi questions his society’s traditionalism and its weaknesses or disintegration.

Given that identity map serves as a state of affairs existing between people having relations and concerns, their social, cultural, religious, economic and psychological duties are called upon. As a matter of fact, the issue of cultural diversity has brought the existence of a variety of cultural or ethnic groups within a society and has increased new tastes and experiences. In point of fact, culture defines the characteristics of a person’s identity through a set of norms and values.

As human being is endowed with some attitudes that prevail at home and in the surrounding community, these features determine the quality of an individual or a citizen. Still, when an unaware person experiences the events of the real life, he is unable to make up his mind. Eventually, some incidents may occur, this is the case of the protagonist Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* and Obi Okonkwo in *No Longer at Ease*. He

experienced the arrival of Christian missionaries in this fictitious setting Nigeria/Umuofia as well as the acceptance of a new religion by Igbo people.

It has become a shared view that writers and scholars are against this background. In this regard, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease* uncover Africans and their local culture facing the new world of capitalism, business, and western values.

Along this line, the writer makes use of issues related to the aesthetic expressions of colonialism, exploitation, Western and African cultural values. The title *No Longer at Ease* reflects the discomfort felt by the main character, Obi. As well, Hannah Okonkwo's dream symbolizes the damage that modern customs do to traditional way of life. Whereas in *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo's death symbolizes his failure vis-à-vis the people and the goddess, Ani, the locusts are compared to the colonists who came to Umuofia, and Ekwugwu, the decision maker.

In fact, these issues reveal the controversial of the concepts, identity and culture and their impediments on the society at large and distinct individuals. It is our conviction that the foundation of masculine identity lies on the culture control with some customs and beliefs. In Africa context, men have hegemony meaning that they are associated with cultural supremacy. This patriarchal system and division of gender roles give men a dominance. This is illustrated through the attitude of this society whereby males are more important than females. A woman is a victim of patriarchal thinking. For this reason, the notion of dowry is revised upwards. Unfortunately, this measure has the opposite effect to that intended. This is what happened in Africa as confirmed by Laure Clemence Capo-Chichi in the extract below:

Joseph Okeke, l'ami d'enfance d'Obi affirme. : « Elle [la loi sur la dot] a fait monter les prix, c'est tout » (*No Longer* 37) Alors le montant fixé pour la dot des jeunes filles nubiles varie proportionnellement au salaire que perçoivent ceux d'entre les fiancés qui sont fonctionnaires dans l'administration coloniale. Joseph Okeke en donne les différentes spécificités : « On [paie] une dot de cent trente livres sterling et on est seulement un fonctionnaire de deuxième classe, [...] On te [Obi] demandera probablement de verser cinq cents livres, quand on saura que tu es un haut fonctionnaire ». (*No Longer* 37-38) (Capo-Chichi 94-95)

Which translated into English is as follows:

Joseph Okeke, Obi's childhood friend says. "It [the bride-price law] pushed up the price, that's all" (*No Longer*,37) Then the amount fixed for the dowry of nubile girls varies in proportion to the salary received by those of the fiancés who are civil servants in the colonial administration. Joseph Okeke gives the different specificities: "You [...] paid a hundred and thirty pounds and you are only a second-class clerk, [...]They will probably ask you [Obi] to pay hundred, seeing that you are in the senior service". (*No Longer* 37-38)³

In fact, the foregoing excerpt examines an axiom which is no more useful in post-colonial Africa. Traditional and socio-economic logic is therefore abandoned in favour of that of the West. In a subtle way, this change in economic dynamics is detrimental to women.

In *No Longer at Ease*, femininity is seen through the portrayal of female gender. This is an increasing preoccupation of the author. Clara's image is an example of the empowerment of Igbo women by educating herself abroad. We can notice that though she is an *osu* or banished from her society or an outcast, she offshoots the derogatory perception of herself. Here, her identity is elucidated through her attitude towards Obi. She is sincere and professional without self-pity and the possession of self-pride and integrity. In this framework the narrative puts 'I can't marry you', she -Clara- said suddenly as Obi tried to kiss her, she had no coyness in her. Not much as such, anyway. That was one of things Obi liked about her. She had seemed so sure of herself that, unlike other women, shed is not considered how quickly or cheaply she was captured'. (*No Longer* 56)

This quotation shows that Clara doesn't want to see Obi in trouble due to her low caste status in her society. On account of this, the moral identity of women is questioned and influenced by modernity in the manner of dancing, drinking beer kissing and making fun. "[The girl] was my girl-friend for-let's see [...]' he counted off his fingers '[...] March, April, May, June, July – for five months. She made these pillow-case (*No Longer* 13). As a consequence, this feminine identity changes the public sphere and modifies the dominant patriarchy. For instance, in *Things Fall Apart*, female gender is supposed to be the followers of the men, but males are aware of their importance which is in-born. Subsequently, this

³ Our translation

endowment redefines the personal and collective identity as the narrator reveals another identification of the protagonist, Okonkwo by advancing that: “His [Okonkwo] mothers had been very kind to him, and he was grateful. But that did not alter the facts. He had called the first child born in exile Nneka- ‘Mother is supreme’- out of politeness to his mother’s kinsmen”. (*Things Fall* 130)

Moreover, the religious identity can be shown through the title *No Longer at Ease* ‘Journey of the Magi’ meaning that an abandonment of the old religion does not necessarily lead to an unqualified embracing of a new religion. Obi is caught into the two religions- traditional and Christianity. Obi is confused about the two religions and states as follows: ‘Father, I no longer [...]. hypocrite’ (*No Longer* 45) Obi’s ideas of revolt against Christianity and traditional ethics are an effect of the generation gap between his father and himself. Thus, the position of obi’s father who is a Christian should not resist Obi’s choice and the refusal of his mother not to marry Clara elucidate their traditional conception. In normal circumstances, the religious affiliation should guide Isaac Okonkwo in his decision making. But through the narratives which showcase Obi’s parents’ disagreement with marriage with Clara, an Osu, there is a proof that they are tied to their old roots and are afraid of the outcomes of such marriage.

Given, Obi’s background and his own character, we think that this impacts on his choices and determines his identity. Then, he comes from a heritage that values community, loyalty, and tradition, but moves away from those things. He takes a stand on some things, such as not accepting bribes and staying with Clara, but proves unable to sustain those commitments. He is weak, proud and ignorant. He is full of excuses for himself, and even in his moment of clarity that he thinks he has, does not truly get at the root of his inaction. Similarly, in *Things Fall Apart*, the identity of the village is based on Okonkwo’s fame during his wrestling contests. His fame and determination are obvious when it is said that. “Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on his solid personal achievement [...] he [...] was a great wrestler” (*Things Fall* 1). Here, the identity of famous and wealthy person is part of this society. It allows Okonkwo give titles and supremacy. Eventually, he is considered as the ‘king of the crops’ (*Things Fall* 18) and

the threat on Okonkwo's identity let him in despair. One can conclude that changes occur and destroy the Igbo's clan.

By the time the novel comes to a close, Obi's growth as a character appears limited, if visible at all. He claims that he does not want to take bribes anymore, but his identity is still ill-defined. It is unclear where he will go after this, as he has no great passion, no great goals or strong beliefs. This part has pointed out different forms of identity and culture and their effects on an individual. These changes bring about many cultures that led to clashes and moral decay.

2. The Aesthetics of Conflicts in the Construction of Ideology and Ethical Values in *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*

Conflict in this case emerges from the fact that Obi lives in two worlds or two cultures: traditional Africa and modern England on the one hand and on the other hand Umuofia village. As, *Things Fall Apart* is shaken with internal division when the white Christian missionaries came, it is worth noting that, the loss of the religious identity by the Igbo people in Nigeria is influenced by the colonial impact and Christianity. Besides, the emergence of religious diversity has created a dismal environment giving rise to a bone of contention. Such conflicts are harmful to the overall credibility of religion and may cause religious apathy or disintegration.

In connection therewith, Taiwo exhibits the religious beliefs in Igbo land and how Christianity influences their traditional conception. This is showcased when Obi Okonkwo's father declared that:

when a new saying gets to the land of empty men, they lose their head over it [...] This sort of behavior was true of the first converts to Christianity, who often thought salvation lay in the mere act changing from one religion to the other. But often these converts did not altogether desert their idols. They followed the tenets of Christianity when convenient and consulted their own gods when they wanted to. This is still the position nowadays. (Taiwo 137)

The above quote is inherent to religion in Igbo traditional society. The latter takes fully all in the features of world traditional religion, including its beliefs, and other realities. It is our belief that, they believe in many gods as they practice and believe in Igbo divinities and at the same time believe in the Almighty God. Achebe depicts such an environment

in order to reveal the reality of the geographic and time setting that prevailed even caused disagreement.

In this context, Palmer observes that “Achebe is still preoccupied with the social forces at work in his society, particularly the clash between the old and the new. But, this attitude of the young, urbanized Nigerian who, having been liberated to question the traditions and beliefs of the ancestors”. (63) The excerpt about both ideologies matches well with the depiction one encounters in the novel wherein the modern Nigerian is “ill-at-ease in a society which is no longer recognizably, his own, and which consistently fails to conform to his idealized picture” (63). A critical consideration of this matter held, shows how the inhabitant felt uneasy in both environments. This can be an expression of disappointment or a complete loss of hope inherent to the broken order in the Umuofia society by western religion. It is worth considering the narrative stating clearly that “he has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart”. (*Things Fall*, 160) What can be inferred is that the advent of the white man and his new religion and administration led the Umuofia traditional society to weaknesses or ‘fall apart’.

In this context, *Nwoye* is renamed Isaac in *No Longer at Ease*, but the inhabitants promote Obi through education to bring them a status and empower them. The clash between Christianity and the Igbo religion gives birth to the hybrid culture in Nigeria. Instances of collision are shown throughout, Obi’s father position. He refuses to celebrate Obi’s arrival, and to offer kola-nut to the wooden idols. So, he calls them ‘heathen’ food. Inside this attitude stands the conflict between the two cultures. The description of Igbo people on western clothing reminds the outcome of Western culture. When Obi returned from England, “everybody was properly dressed in *agbada* or European suit except the guest of honor who appears in his shirtsleeves because of heat” (*No Longer*, 25) in order to welcome him. Moreover, Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* artistic sense makes Okonkwo’s absence from his fatherland co-occur with the white man’s establishment. In this vein, it is acknowledged that:

The missionaries had come to Umuofia. They built their church there, won a handful of convert and were already sending evangelist to the surrounding towns and villages. That was a source of great sorrow to the leaders of the clan [...] None of the converts was a man whose word heeded in the assembly of the people. None of them was a man of

title. They were mostly the kind of people that were called *efelefu*, worthless, empty men. The imagery of *efelefu* in the language of the clan was a man who sold the matchet and wore the sheath to battle Chielo, the priestess of Agbala, called the converts the excrement of the clan, and the new faith was a mad dog that had come to eat it up. (*Things Fall*: 130)

The foregoing proves the history of colonialist exploitation in Africa and the confrontation between traditional Umuofia society and the outside forces. The white man uses a system that marginalized Africans, as ‘none of them was a man of title’. They even reduce Africans to nonentities ‘efulelu’ meaning worthless and empty men. This under consideration engenders the notion of revolt. Similarly, cultural collisions are represented in fictional world in *Things Fall Apart*. A close scrutiny of the protagonist and his son reveals this issue. Okonkwo is qualified as being “a man of action and a man of war” (*Things Fall* 10) whose values are restricted to physical power. Whereas, his son Nwoye is portrayed as a role model, successful, flexible and empowered to be able and skilful to adjust the opponent’s culture. The account of moral portrayal as described here is an evidence that Achebe’s two character’s reactions enhance the characters’ identity. The concept of identity challenged by the cultural collision and the social mood prevailing bring social disintegrations. In common conditions, any society is multicultural. Thus, they coexist and interact. These interactions and coexistence, instead of entrenching culture, have a negative effect and lead to tragedy in this fictitious environment.

This analysis shows the supremacy gained by the newly ushered in values of the west such as their language, lifestyle and rational thoughts. Thereby, Achebe contrasts white and black culture in his novels. Here, Nigerian culture is associated with a valuing of the past, communal support, tradition, and loyalty. However, for all of his acclaim of the values of Nigerian culture, Achebe does acknowledge that it is very much mired in the past and cannot yet evolve. A case in point in *No Longer at Ease* is Joseph response as he calls himself and Obi "pioneers", and Obi’s awareness on how ridiculous it is to either pay for a wife or be denied marriage to a wife of one's choosing. These behaviours let us conclude that Obi is caught between two cultures, wherein lie his difficulties.

This conflict is displayed to contrast Igbo and Christian ethical values. Obi Okonkwo is influenced by Lagos educated class the elite which made him follow the modern ethical values against Christian principles. It is a proof that the foreign modernity keeps the traditional on the toe leading to diversities in cultural patterns. Instances in the novel are when Clara tells Obi that she can't marry him because she is an *osu*. This is also revealed when Obi Okonkwo *does* not believe in the traditional ethics that would prevent them from getting married and he believes that traditional taboos are burdensome. By exhibiting the traditional values of Igbo people, make Obi to think about an outdated. Within this frame, he substantiates that: 'it was scandalous [...] the end of the time. (*No Longer* 57). Hence, one can say that the western education has made him a stranger in the traditional Igbo society. His thoughts about modernity make him experience frustration to follow the native idealism.

Likewise, Obi's refusal to attend his mother's funeral is a shameful and immoral in Africa. Just as ethical values require morality, it is undeniable to advocate morality in a given society, for the reason that it deals with good and bad, right and wrong in human conduct. With that knowledge in mind, Green, reported by David Little and Summer B. Twiss asserts that:

First we assume that morality 'functions' to guide the conduct of persons and human groups in such a way that it constitutes an institution or shared system of expectations for regulating behavior. Second, we take morality to be an action-relational action, that is, with the mutually interacting and impinging conduct of persons and groups. (Green 273)

It is obvious from an examination of the above quotation that, a good citizen is identified through a virtue. It is a principle that guides a community and reassures its integrity. This quality should be part of human beings. Given that ethical values are beyond doubt, those who fail to comply with this obligation undergo a misfortune. This aspect is noticeable when Achebe depicts Obi who incurs a downfall. By making visible the conflicts and permutations of Obi, caused by his disloyalty to the tribe, Achebe poses the question of antagonism between traditional culture and culture of the metropolitan European authority.

To cut a long story short, this work mirrors cultural diversity of identity with conflict that can be engendered in Nigeria in the cusp of

independence. It elucidates individual dilemma versus social patterns of Igbo people in the form of issues of identity and culture. It is apparent that the identity of any community determined its culture, but the traditional obligations do not permit this cultural change.

Conclusion

The purpose of this investigative study has consisted in analyzing individuals' culture, many identities and their influence on the society. It has also highlighted the religious difference and traditional downfall. Thus, by creating a set of characters that underwent misfortunes in both novels, the author of *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease* has succeeded in creating a society with its social patterns and its changes.

Obi's identity underwent many changes. Achebe laid bare social forces in his environment. Furthermore, the work has coped with cultural metamorphosis and shown that the ideas interchanges bring conflict and moral decay. This is contingent upon the protagonists, Obi Okonkwo and Okonkwo who face the dilemma that implies both the old and the new forces.

As a result, the colonial power through western education posed the question of cultural identity and made people think about the social change. Then, the issue of socio-cultural identity is dynamic. These changes are helpful in the identification of people with difference. But, the refusal of identity dynamism can cause a disruption. In this case, the native youth are disinherited from their own folk culture and exposed the alien values in the form of the dislocation of culture. Also, Obi's misfortune epitomizes the change in the cultural patterns in Lagos. The duel of the fulfillment in Igbo traditional obligations is responsible for their culture dislocation in general and that of Nigerian in particular. To facilitate social cohesion, we should accept new principles, so that there would be understanding and unity as well as justice and peace among families and nations.

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