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## Conflicts in the Select Novels of Chinua Achebe

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### Abstract:

Achebe's second novel, *No Longer at Ease* is intended as a sequel to *Things Fall Apart*, which is set in Nigeria's capital in the late 1950s and stars Okonkwo's grandson Obi Okonkwo, a young westernized bureaucrat divided between two cultures: the old and the modern. The new force is not an alien territory or administration, but rather the views of the young, urbanized Nigerian, who, having been released from tribal taboos via exposure to other values, begins to challenge his forefathers' traditions and belief systems. Achebe argues that the modern Nigerian is uncomfortable in a culture that is no longer recognizably his own and continually fails to meet his idealized expectations.

**Keywords:** idealized, Nigerian, uncomfortable, recognizably

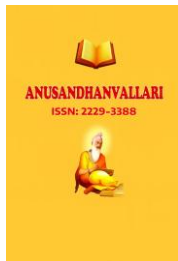
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### Introduction

Chinua Achebe is a renowned writer of African colonial, pre-colonial and post-colonial history and realities. He provides a more realistic knowledge of Africa's vibrant Igbo ancestry in south-east Nigeria. The author paints a detailed and empathetic depiction of traditional African village culture. The author aims to educate others about Igbo culture and his own people of its significance and value. *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease* mostly focus on cultural conflicts. Achebe has addressed various small problems, including religion, politics, education, war and tribalism. Characterizations, themes and language are used to effectively address all of these factors. Chinua Achebe's writings highlight the fight of caste.

### Objective

The objective of finding conflict in Chinua Achebe's works is to examine how the confrontation between traditional Igbo culture and European colonialism causes both external and internal instability,



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ultimately leading to the ruin of the heroes and their civilizations. Achebe utilizes warfare to challenge European preconceptions of "primitive" Africa by demonstrating the complexities of Igbo society and the tragic consequences of its disturbance.

### Significance of the study

The importance of studying conflict in Chinua Achebe's novels stems from the way Chinua Achebe explores the profound clashes between traditional African culture and the imposition of colonial forces, the conflicts between individual and societal values and the internal struggles of characters navigating this cultural shift. By analyzing these issues, Achebe offers a compelling and realistic perspective on cultural loss, identity difficulties and the terrible consequences of imperial dominance, cementing his place in the African literary canon. The fundamental conflict in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* is the collision between traditional Igbo culture and modern, Western influence, which causes Obi Okonkwo, the protagonist, to experience a personal and societal identity crisis. This is mirrored in Obi's struggle to balance the strains of his European education and professional position with his cultural background, finally succumbing to the corruption he set out to combat.

### Review of literature

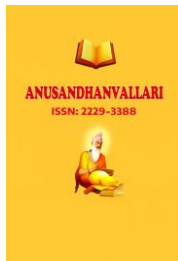
Abhijeet Dawle points out that Obi gives up the fight against colonial invaders and succumbs to corruption. Obi represents all young males in third-world countries ruled by colonial authorities. Achebe emphasizes the importance of African culture and proclaims its uniqueness. The white dictatorship demolished this pure culture.

Aneed Thanwan Rustam observes that the work illustrates the protagonist's lack of moral courage in confronting the demands of the struggle between European materialistic values and African customs, resulting in his failure and moral breakdown. Thus, the novel serves as a value-based invitation to evaluate the behavior of the cultural elite who would assume leadership of modern Nigeria, as well as their approaches to deal with the settlement legacy.

According to Somnath Sopan Lokare, Chinua Achebe criticized colonial rule and postcolonial hybridity. His writings realistically illustrate colonial control on the African continent. His works mostly address internal and external problems between the two communities. *No Longer at Ease* explores the tension between two civilizations.

### Methodology

Chinua Achebe's works employ a multi-layered approach to conflict, utilizing internal, cultural and foreign conflicts to investigate the impact of colonialism and cultural change. He uses the confrontations to demonstrate the catastrophic clash between traditional African (particularly Igbo) society and the forced Western civilization, as well as the resultant loss of tradition and personal identity difficulties. This methodology's key component includes a concentration on cultural realism, the use of foreshadowing to foretell tragic results and a narrative technique that rejects European-centric depictions of Africa.



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## Discussion

### Conflict between Tradition and Modernity

The main theme of *No Longer at Ease* is the struggle between tradition and modernity. On the one hand, the protagonist, Obi Okonkwo, is a product of his community, village and family. They reared him, paid for his education and expect him to return and contribute to the community. On the other hand, he is clearly a product of the English Colonial system. He is a Christian who was educated in England and understands English literature. He considers himself an individual, not a representative of his ethnicity or village. Corruption is another important issue in the tale. Obi operates in a system where corruption is taken for granted yet viewed as a unique flaw of the natural population. Obi is strong enough to fight it for a long time, but when he is at his lowest, he gives in and pays the price. Eustace Palmer points out: "Indeed, the White man's administration breeds corruption in African society" (70).

Achebe recognizes both the power and frailty of traditional Igbo society and he conveys the uncertainty of his perspective by alternating between respect and soft scorn. On the other hand, this society is selfless, close-knit and morally conscious. They tax themselves to raise funds to send their brightest young men and women to study in England. On the day of Obi's departure, the scholarship fund's beneficiaries meet in his home to wish him well and provide advice.

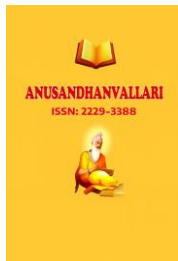
... heard of young men from their cities who went to the white man's nation, but instead of focusing on their academics, they pursued the pleasures of the flesh. Some even married white women. The audience expressed severe condemnation of such actions. 'A man who does that is lost among his people. He is like rain that has been wasted in the forest. I would have urged that you obtain a wife before leaving. However, time is running out. Anyway, I am confident that we have nothing to fear when it comes to you. We are sending you to study books. Enjoyment can wait. Do not rush into the joys of the world like young Antelope, who danced herself lame when the big dance was yet to come. (78)

The meeting concludes with the singing of 'Praise God, from whom all blessings flow'. The guests then bid their goodbyes to Obi, with many reiterating the advice he has already received. They have shaken hands with him and pressed their presents into his palm, to buy a pencil, an exercise book, or a loaf of bread for the journey, a shilling here and a penny there - substantial presents in a village where money is so scarce, where men and women have toiled year after year to wrest a meagre living from an unwilling and exhausted soil.

This is a gentle criticism of Umuofians' cultural and racial introversion, as well as their long-windedness, but there is praise for their lofty moral standards and selflessness. They ask him to study law in order to assist the people in settling their property disputes. Umuofians have offered Obi the scholarship based on their personal preferences. They consider education as a tool to help the clan and defend its rights against others, rather than as a means of developing the individual. When he returns, they want him to use his power as a senior civil officer on their behalf and secure jobs for members of society: "We are not going to ask him to bring his salary to among us. It is in little things like this that he can help us. It is our fault if we do not approach him. Shall we kill a snake and carry it in our hand when we have a bag for putting long things in?" (NLE 22).

The Umuofia Progressive Society members fail to recognize that by educating Obi, they provide him with the opportunity to develop more liberal beliefs. They have elevated him to the ranks of the elite and assisted him in living up to his status, in which they take pride. When he returns, they quietly attempt to detribalize him. They have bizarrely conflicted views about modernity. The Umuofians demand Obi to look like a European, not because they now accept European principles, but because it enhances their status. One of their members observes driving 'a pleasure automobile' increases their prestige. Obi admits:

... people had a sizeable point. What they did not know was that, having labored in sweat and tears to enroll



their kinsman among the shining elite, they had to keep them there. Having made him a member of an exclusive club whose members greet one another with “How’s the car behaving?” did they expect him to turn around and answer; “I’m sorry, but my car is off the road. You see I couldn’t pay the insurance premium. (NLE 99)

### Meeting the Demands of the Society

However, Umuofian society places the most impossible demands on him and drives him to meet its own standards. The conflict is over his marriage to Clara, an Osu. This issue exemplifies both the narrow-mindedness of conventional culture and the hasty tactlessness of modern man. Achebe’s artistic style is realistic. Examining people’s attitudes towards Clara and the Osu problem reveals how far Obi has grown in his community. Christopher and Joseph are both modern young men, but they are horrified by Obi’s marriage to an Osu. Mrs. Okonkwo threatens that she will commit suicide if Obi marries Clara during her lifetime and Mr. Okonkwo, who has once rebelled against his own father and tradition, has become so entrenched that he fails to see that Christianity opposes all forms of discrimination. Epounda Mexan Serge observes: “Obi’s conflicts are his intention to get married to Clara. In fact, the societal rule forbids a free-born from marrying an outcast like Clara. It is also important to know that society and other characters mentioned above do not allow Obi to get married to Clara” (24).

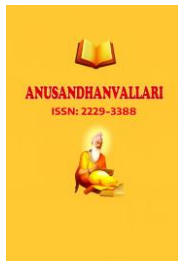
Obi expresses his rage by questioning his society’s right to intrude in his personal matters and he refuses to accept the offer to defer loan repayment. Almost all of his difficulties appear to derive from this. Obi, despite being liberated from traditionalism, has unable to fully escape the clutches of decadent modern Lagos. The scenes in urban Lagos are by no means as captivating as those related with traditional Igbo society in *Things Fall Apart* and the dream that Obi has experienced once.

On the other side of the street, a little child dressed in a cloth has sold cakes called akara under a lamppost. His bowl of akara lay on the dust and he has appeared to be half sleeping. But he isn’t, for as soon as the night-soil-man walked by, swinging his broom and hurricane light and leaving clouds of putrefaction behind, the youngster has sprung to his feet and began calling him names. The man milling corn has burst out laughing and the women have joined in. The night dirt man has smiled and gone his way, having remarked something quite unpleasant about the boy’s mother. During his winter in England, he wrote a callow, melancholy poem about Nigeria. He has grinned as he stares at the rotting dog in the storm drain after recalling this poem: ‘I’ve taster putrid flesh in the spoon’, he said through clenched teeth. ‘Far more apt’. At last Clara emerged from the side street and they drove away” (NLE 28-29).

The dead dogs, putrefaction and akara highlight the filth, but the section reflects the quality of modern Lagos. The filth contains genuine brother feeling and neighborliness and the name calling is light-hearted and without bitterness. The citizens of Lagos appear to have resolved to suffer together and the stoicism draws pity from the reader. Furthermore, Achebe responds to the liveliness of Lagos rather than the refined Ikoyi. Despite its magnificent bungalows and flats, as well as its lush flora, Ikoyi resembles a graveyard.

As a part of his description of Lagos society, Achebe depicts the aimlessness of characters such as Christopher, Joseph, Bisi, Clara and the honorable Sam Okoli, as well as their obsession with sex, vehicles and entertainment. To Obi’s credit, he is unique. The challenges of life in Lagos have proven too much for him. Obi must perform his part in the modern metropolis and achieve all levels of achievement, but he is also expected to play his position in the extended family system.

As a result, he must pay his car’s installments, refund twenty pounds per month to the Umuofia Progressive Union, pay his income tax, insurance and power bill and send ten pounds to his parents each month. He also pays his younger brother’s school tuition and bears a greater portion of his mother’s funeral costs. This



financial catastrophe strikes him with agony and sympathy. Faced with the need to make ends meet, he turns to bribes and corruption. At the start of the novel, everyone wonders why Obi does it. The narrative answers their questions. Achebe shows how the forces of modern and traditional Nigeria demolish Obi.

### The Decadence of the Modern Urban Environment

In *No Longer at Ease*, official corruption is one aspect of the decadence associated with today's urban environments. The concept of rural piety and stability contrasts with urban decadence and instability. The clash between tradition and modernity can also be understood as a fight between rural and urban values.

The major battle in *Things Fall Apart* was between Africa and Europe, particularly between the Igbo and the British. In *No Longer at Ease*, the conflict is between British-imposed modernity and African culture. The novel's appeal stems from Achebe's social concern, terse, ironic, lucid and unpretentious style and his scintillating wit, objectivity and maturity. He maintains a balance between admiration and contempt of Umuofia society. His words have sarcastic meaning, such as the greeting given by the Secretary of the Umuofia Progressive Union.

The officers of the Umuofia Progressive Union have offered a welcome address to Michael Obi Okonkwo B.A (Hons), London, on his return from the United Kingdom in search of the Golden Fleece.

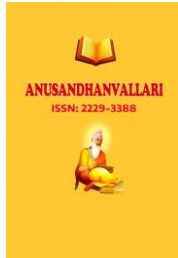
Sir, with humility and respect, we, the officers and members of the aforementioned Union, present this symbol of our appreciation for your outstanding academic talent. He spoke of the enormous honor Obi had bestowed on the historic town of Umuofia, which could now join the community of other towns in their quest for social equality and economic liberation. Needless to say, this presentation was frequently interrupted by shouts and clapping of hands. What a sharp young man! He deserved to go to England himself". He wrote the kind of English they admired if not understood (34-35).

Achebe's satirical manner is extremely economical and effective in conveying his thoughts. Achebe examines the difficulties facing young men in modern Nigeria with reality and intelligent objectivity. He sensibly refrains from addressing the dilemma of the two factions; the old and new will continue to exercise influence upon the educated elite.

Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* tells the tragic chronicle of the modern African state via the character Obi Okonkwo. The story combines a Nigerian 'modernity' the social, political and economic ramifications of the accommodation to colonial rule with an awareness of the price Nigerians have paid for their 'modernity. As an illustration of human existence, literature depicts the reality of human events, issues and relationships, with conflictual interactions serving as the focus of the research. Conflicts are undoubtedly prevalent in any literary work that distinguishes between internal and exterior conflicts.

### Conclusion

To conclude this work, it is important to recollect that it deals with the realm of conflict in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, particularly with the main character, Obi Okonkwo. Although he may have internal issues, the current study focusses on the exterior conflicts that Obi faces throughout the novel. As such, the primary goal has been to identify and analyze the various external conflicts encountered by Obi Okonkwo. The conflict in *Things Fall Apart* is the confrontation between traditional Igbo culture and the new forces of European colonization, represented by Christian missionaries and British legislation. This external tension reveals itself inside in characters, particularly the protagonist Okonkwo, who struggles with his fear of appearing weak and his inability to adjust to the changing social and political situation. The work also illustrates



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tensions between individual beliefs and society traditions, as well as among generations and different belief systems.

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