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Dichotomy, Achebe's Fashion of Narration, a Study in *No Longer at Ease*

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Abstract:

Achebe, a Nigerian writer and spearhead in exposing to the world outside the rites, rituals, of interior Africa is well known for his elucidation of folklore, storytelling and projection of conflict between colonials and colonized. The present paper is written to reflect one of the Craft's consciously or unconsciously, Achebe embarks in his works, i.e. duality or Dichotomy. Comparing things and then offering Contrast a method, which is profusely used in Reading Comprehension exercises by testers is used in the works of Achebe in particular in the Novel, 'No Longer at Ease', through multiple characters and situations. Hence, the present article showcases, Morning yet on Creation day's story line "wherever something stands, something else will stand beside it" in drawing out dichotomy.

Keywords: Dichotomy, Achebe, No Longer at Ease, Ibo, Obi, Clara, Conflict

Albert chinualumogu Achebe is a reputed, well known author, novelist, poet, short story writer, professor and critic to the English literary circles. It is not exaggeration to state that, it is *Mr. Achebe* who elevated the importance of writing novels or short stories on indigenous themes in and around Africa and in many other places as well.

Most of his works reflect typical Africans or Nigerians ethnic life style and changes affected it besides their socio, economic, political conditions and their belief on super natural power (chi) in Ibo, his culture. *Chinua Achebe* is a man of native Proverbs and folklore, he is known well for his style of narrating things and in keeping them two fold particularly. The present paper attempts to surface the special skill "Dichotomy" employed by Achebe in one of his early novels "No Longer at Ease".

¹Dichotomy means a partition into two differing parts. In literature, the author frequently practices dichotomy to generate conflict. Occasionally the dichotomy appears centered even in one character itself, but often the author will use separate characters to represent the opposing sides

With the above notion, the conflict edged in the characters of *Obi, Issac Okonkwo, Hon. Sam, Mr. Green, Mr. Jones* separately and relatively in 2nd fictional master piece by the African literature revitalizing hero, *Chinua Achebe's, No Longer at Ease*, is explained such as ²*Christopher Marlowe* in *Doctor Faustus, Conrad's Heart of Darkness, William Shakespeare* in *As You Like It*, whose master pieces are abundant with dichotomy.

No Longer at Ease, is a story of a Nigerian born, missionary educated civil servant, who got strangled in corruption due to familial, societal pressures and expectations, this also brings to our notice, deeds done damn result in once doom.

The protagonist of the novel, *Obi's*, family is very big with a converted Christian father, *Issac Okonkwo*, an old, bonny mother, *Hannah Okonkwo*, a younger brother and six sisters. He is the only one to say richly educated in the family and expected to support the family in all ways.

The tale began with a trail in a court to find out the facts on the allegation made over *Obi Okonkwo* taking bribe. "*Umuofia*", a big village, from which *Obi* hails, is one among many villages in Nigeria that has fought for power over neighboring villages in ancient times. *Odogwu*, one of the elders of *Iguedo* village in the reception arranged during *Obi's* first visit to his native village, recalls the past pride and comparing it with changed times. Hence *Achebe* explains the duality that exists in the native tribe about the changes that occurred in various aspects.

"Today greatness has changed its tune. Titles are no longer great, neither are barns or large numbers of wives and children. Greatness is now in the things of the white man."

(NLaE-62)

As time changed their fight changed from brawn to brain. Everyone felt it is prestigious to have educated men in their clan for psychological supremacy.

Umufoianseconomic status was not that satisfactory to afford their scions education abroad. Hence, to provide the economic support Umufoians, working in all parts of Nigeria formed a Union and the president of the union determined to collect money for raising fund. This fund is used to send one of their promising sons to higher education. *Obi Okonkwo* is the first in the Umuofia for his merit in school and college, to be given this scholarship, which has been agreed to pay back to the union after his return and procuring a job. The money thus retrieved is decided to use again in transforming many *Obi's* i.e. educated men by the Union. They spent 800 pounds to get him educated but only to realize that he is not promising child of Umuofia but a Prodigal Child in the wake of *Obi's* Scandalous life.

"They wanted him to read law so that when he returned he would handle all their land cases against their neighbors. 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."

(NLaE-8)

UPU members were of the conception that if they have a man of them, who studied law, it is easy to face tribunal in court whenever there is an issue on them, and they can defend themselves for justice. In fact *Obi Okonkwo* did not contemplate over his tribe's expectations and went ahead with his will. The metamorphosis of the sentiments stuck between *Obi* and his fellow tribe's men is precisely apparent with this episode. Union members who were very angry upon his selfish and senseless decision to study English than law was scorned in their minds silently but immediately convinced with the fact and reasoned out by saying, he would be at least settled in white collar job, which is better than menial jobs thus, the dichotomy is first surfaced in the novel with the above mentioned lines in italics.

Obi Okonkwo's foreign education influenced him to be foreign in his behavior and manners towards his tribe's men upon his return from England. Umuofian Progressive Union hosted a reception acknowledging the giant leap that the union has taken in turning a native son to be one in elite class. The guest of honor of the function, *Obi Okonkwo* surprised and shocked everybody over there at reception by coming in sleeves due to humidity but others dressed formally in European Coats to note that it is a formal meeting. *Obi's* stubborn attitude to not heed the suggestions of the president in one of the meetings of the union over *Clara's* affair and rebuking the president's dominance and interference in his personal life and putting down of president's suggestion to pay the scholarship in 8 installments than 6, eventually his role in the scandal incapacitated the faith and hopes on *Obi* by the Union, It culminated with his accusation of greasing his own palm (accepting bribe).

In the wake of above event, in one of the meetings arranged by UPU, ³*a handful of People had expressed the view that there was no reason why the union should worry itself over the troubles of a reckless lad* but subsequently the president persuaded the angry mob over *Obi's* indulgence in the allegation by saying ⁴*a Kinsman in trouble had to be saved, not blamed, anger against a brother was felt in the flesh, not in the bone*. Through the members of the Union the idea of leaving *Obi*, who went corrupt to his own fate, and at the same time contrary to the members view, the president's determination to help *Obi* in his crisis indicates the *Achebe's* magnificent class of using dichotomy.

Obi's stay in England for four years was like a decade for him. He felt he was alienated in the new world and wrote a nostalgic poem keeping in mind, what he saw and what he heard of Lagos and Nigeria in the following verse

*“How sweet it is to lie beneath a tree
At even time and share the ecstasy
Of jocund birds and flimsy butterflies,
How sweet to leave our earthbound body in its mud,
And rise towards the music of the spheres,
Descending softly with the wind,
And the tender glow of the fading sun”.* (NLaE-19)

But to his utter distaste what he beheld after he returned to Lagos from England was quite contrasting to his dormant vision of the place. In one of his visits to Lagos suburban, when *Clara* wanted to meet her seamstress, to get clothes stitched for her, *Obi* escorted *Clara* to that place, it's there he was corporeal spectator to rotting dog in the sewer which was in its semi putrefied state emanating foul smell, dark streets, and a boy selling akara under a bleak lamp post give opposing picture to his visual virtual delight of Lagos landscape.

Obi decides to have a life-long association with '*Clara*' the girl whom *Obi* loves, by marrying her but ends the relationship by the end of the novel paradoxically to what he desires. Eyes of *Obi* had fallen on *Clara* first in some public get-together organized by "A BRANCH OF NATIONAL COUNCIL OF NIGERIA" at Camerons, London. People belonging to Nigeria and few white acquaintances of them gathered at a place as part of their periodical gatherings in England. Men and Women congregated there were stepping on the dance floor to the tunes that were played there.

It was here that *Clara* and *Obi* fortuitously met for the first time and teamed up to dance, *Obi* knows no dance, *Clara* was not at ease with *Obi* while they were dancing, divergent to it, *Obi* was stimulated to be in *Clara*'s company for more time. *Obi* tried to find *Clara*'s specifics but she was not fascinated to reply to his inquiries, at the end of the program, to get good impression, *Obi* escorted *Clara* up to her car and opened door of the vehicle himself, but those determinations of him went in vain. *Clara* left without any advantageous rejoinder to *Obi*.

The second encounter of *Clara* and *Obi* took place on their way from England to Nigeria, it was a voyage. *Obi* and *Clara* looked at each other on board; initially *Obi* wants to remind her of their first meeting and wanted to develop some rapport with her but his conscience stopped him to go ahead by reminiscing how the first meeting ended between them. However, '*Obi* was on Cloud nine' by fancying a strong relationship with *Clara* at the beginning of the trip but felt dejected in no time by seeing the reaction of *Clara* to him, the warmth of the emotion was not reciprocated by her as that of him. She was in the company of *Mrs. Wright*, an elderly woman and *Macmillan*, an administrative officer in South Nigeria. *Clara* treated *Obi* just like all other fellow passengers, this led to cultivated derision in *Obi*'s mind over *Clara*'s conduct, and at this juncture, *Obi* comes to know *Clara*'s native name '*Ms. Okeke*'. All the men and women who were converted to Christianity or follow it have both names; one is native or tribal just like *Ms. Okeke* and a polished one in the circles of educated elite like *Ms. Clara*.

"I have enough for all the passengers", she said. "I gave some to Mr. Macmillan and Mrs. Wright." But then she had spoken in Ibo, for the first time, as if to say, "we belong together: we speak the same language". And she had appeared to show some concern" (NLaE-29)

Obi assumed to better his intimacy with *Ms. Clara* at first but ceased glancing at her, when he read from her actions that she was treating him just like all others on board. On the second day of the voyage, *Obi* confined himself to his cabin, suffering from dizziness due to journey on waters, it's at this stage of the novel *Achebe*, unearths the interest of *Clara* on *Obi*. *Clara*, wants to reciprocate the emotional looks and talks as *Obi*, hesitates first but transports a spark of fondness on *Obi* by speaking in Ibo with him after handing over medicine, is another glimpse of dichotomy portrayed by *Achebe* through the character and actions of *Clara*.

Obi was used as an object of Dichotomy for exhibiting contrast attitudes at several instances in the progression of the novel. Before being eloquent in his relationship with *Clara*, *Obi's* love life in England with a Nigerian, a West Indian girl, a few English girls picture *Obi's* vacillating tendency in his liaison with the girls in the early stages of his intimacy with them but once the association seasons his view changes, signposts the dichotomy prevailing in his impulsive love life.

“One half of Obi might kiss a girl and murmur: “I love you,” but the other half would say: “Don’t be silly” “ (NLE-80)

White men, the colonizers have bossy tendencies over the colonized and wielded initially their supremacy of knowledge, later their power in regime and society, over their unequal, illiterate natives of Africa just like many a colonies in past. As time passed by things changed and all across the world the suppressed started rebelling in various degrees over colonizers boorish methods. Whites who enjoyed their unquestioned customs and moors over aborigines eventually forced to act bit liberal the style which they loathe, during their tenure in colonial time.

“Today few white men would dream of slapping a headmaster in his school and none at all would actually do it. Which is the tragedy of men like William Green, Obi’s boss.” (NLE-74)

Achebe discussed the clash of colonizers inner self with their outer self, with the characters of *Mr. Jones*, Inspector of Schools, Umuofia and *Mr. Green*, *Obi's* boss. *Mr. Jones*, who was known for his stern action over his underlings even for pretty faults, was once slapped by *Simeon Nduka*, the head master of Bush Mission School, Umuofia. It was said for some anonymous reason *Mr. Jones* during his visit to B.M. School went furious over *Nduka* and slapped him, unlike other native teaching fraternity, *Nduka* left his palm impression on white cheek of *Jones*, since then any white men who ever had the feeling of physically punishing the black, started vacillating just like *William Green*.

“It was clear that he loved Africa, but only Africa of a kind: the Africa of Charles, the messenger, the Africa of his garden boy and steward boy. He must have come originally with an ideal to bring light to the heart of darkness, to tribal headhunters performing weird ceremonies and unspeakable rites. But when he arrived, Africa played him false.

Where was his beloved bush full of human sacrifice? There was St. George horsed and caparisoned, but where was the dragon? In 1900 Mr. Green might have ranked among the great missionaries; in 1935 he would have made do with slapping headmasters in the presence of their pupils; but in 1957 he could only curse and swear” (NLE-121)

In chapter eleven, *Achebe* weaves a dialogue with the characters of *Obi*, *Chris* and *Ms. Tomlinson*, *Mr. Green’s* secretary and *Obi’s* colleague, who share the same cabin at workplace. *Ms. Mary Tomlinson*, shares with *Obi* the contradiction, which she noticed in *Green’s* behavior on illiterate Nigerians and literate natives. Paying school fees of his steward’s son, saving a messenger from being sacked upon his allegation of sleeping while on duty indicate his soft corner towards the Nigerians of a kind but he says “the most outrageous things about educated Africans” reiterates *Achebe’s* portrayal of *Mr. Green’s* contradictory behavior. In chapter one, *Mr. Green* and a friend of him, who works for British Council, had a discussion over *Obi’s* trial where *Green* opined, ⁵“*They all are corrupt,*” repeated *Mr. Green*. *I’m all for equality and all that. I for one would hate to live in South Africa. But equality won’t alter facts*”, conveys the duality in *Green’s* treatment of natives. *Green* wants to show his resentment over his educated subordinates from Africa just like Jones but he with great contempt advocates the policy of equality also testify the Dichotomy exposed by *Achebe* in *No Longer at Ease*.

The Hon. Sam Okoli, Minister of the state in chapter seven shares his ardent supposition over the then political condition. *Obi* and *Clara’s* visit to *Sam*, brings to the notice of the reader the dichotomy prevailing over white and their contribution in the mind of minister of the state. In the conservative Ibo land women are not treated as equals to men nor considering them central in any social conventions like get to gathers’ or functions. But the missionary school education and the white’s manner of treating women in first place influenced largely all cadres of the society gradually as time passed by.

“I respect the white man although we want them to go” (NLE-77)

Hon. Sam invited *Clara* and *Obi* to his place for drinks to rejoice over *Obi* acquiring a new Car, on a loan. Before the advent of whites in the Ibo land, whenever two tribe’s men meet each other as per their custom, ⁶the host offers kola-nut to drink and eat that to for men but in this context, *Clara*, a woman was offered the drink first, depicts the clash of cultures. The fact is natives stopped being grouchy of a few manners of white and consuming those as theirs.

Issac Okonkwo, the father of *Obi* and *Obi* himself keep swaying in their integrity between heathen (native) beliefs to that of Christian or Missionary principles. Marking *Obi’s* first visit to his village after he finished his education in England, the people of Igeugo village assemble in the compound of *Obi’s* father who was a Christian convert to share their happiness over their fellow brother’s marathon feat of receiving a degree from foreign University. According to Ibo cult offering Kola-nut to guests is a moot, but this was strictly rejected initially by *Issac Okonkwo*

stating it is heathen's cult but in chapter fourteen *Issac* forbade *Obi's* idea of marrying Clara, a girl belonging to ⁷ OSU, an outcast, as per Ibo custom and recalls and shares the abominations committed against Ibo beliefs ruined the persons and families taking the example of his father *Okonkwo*, in "*Things Fall a Part*" is a dimension of dichotomy, that Achebe textured through the character of *Issac. Okonkwo*

Obi, though missionary school educated, being a member of Christian convert family, foreign returned bears his propensities of liking, though not rigid towards Ibo, than Christian belief system, the system in to which he was born and brought up. *Obi's* dislike to his father who didn't respect the custom of offering a Kolanut to fellow clans men and allowing a bevy of girls who sang a heathen song in the compound of *Obi* during one of his visits to his village to see his unwell mother, not being serious in reading verses in Bible, not attending church and offering prayers to Christ as regularly as his father and others do, all specify that *Obi's* proclivity towards Ibo faith structure though he is literate. But in his affair with an *Osu*, (an outcast community) girl, *Clara*, he switches to Christianity over Ibo belief system and questions his father who forbade him marrying an outcast girl quoting Bible, *Obi* says ⁸ "*We are Christians, ...the Bible says that in Christ there are no bond or free*" "is atangible paradox sketched with the character of *Obi* against his father by Achebe.

As *Major Arthur Glynn Leonard*, in "*The Lower Niger and its Tribes*" (1906), stated the duality of the natives in one of the chapters of the book:

⁹ "...it is in their own personalities most of all that they see and feel this dualism... one life in other words- two factors of opposite yet attracting forces are essential."

Thus the technique of duality or dichotomy utilized by Achebe, flawlessly for the effect of drawing out sublime emotion in narrating things to the reader is laudable. It is all the more evident through the Character depiction of *Obi*, expects quick governance and righteous administration blames and resolves not to take bribe in his initial days of career. Nevertheless, *Obi* does all, in contrast to his ethical thinking and the novel concludes as it started painting *Obi* as an object to scandalous life echoes the Achebe's style, which singled Achebe's works, unique among his fellow African's workings and in presenting things in two fold.

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