
RESEARCH ARTICLE

The World of Conflicts in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer At Ease*

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ABSTRACT

The history of human experience shows that it is only through fraternal relationships that human life can progress or flourish. However, that idea of fraternal relationship is only meaningful in a societal setting where men interact together and have mutual concourse with one another since a man is a man who thanks others, and life exists when you are together, alone you are an animal. But this life cannot go forward without troubles or conflicts, as advocated by many critics in their literary productions. To this effect, literature being an illustration of human life, presents the reality of human situations, problems, and relationships wherein conflictual relations constitute the subject matter of my study. It is certain that conflicts are inherent in every piece of literary work where internal and external conflicts are distinguished. That is why this research paper aims to identify and analyze the various degrees or levels of conflicts existing in Chinua Achebe's novel *No longer at Ease*, especially interpersonal ones centered on the protagonist Obi Okonkwo.

KEYWORDS

Conflicts, relationships, external, Obi Okonkwo, custom, and outcast.

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1. Introduction

The present study is about The World of Conflicts in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, the author's second novel published in 1960. However, it is germane to recall that Chinua Achebe is a product of three main eras, the African pre-colonial period, which he knew through the stories from his father, and remnants of the past one could still observe while Achebe was growing up, the British colonization period he was born in and the era of the newly independent country. This provides him with a large scale for the selection of his subjects and enables him to oscillate between this remote past, the immediate past, and the present time. Hence, *Things Fall Apart*, and *Arrow of God* deal with the remote past, *No Longer at Ease* with colonized Nigeria, *A Man of the People* with the newly independent State, and *Anthills of the Savannah* with present time issues. Thus, referring to the subject matter, it is evident that the conflict matters to literature as it provides the basic materials for the construction of the plot. Therefore, defined as a fight or a struggle between two or more forces that creates tensions that must be resolved in one way or another, the conflict often opposes a man against a man, a man against nature, and a man against self. Accordingly, Abbott (2008: 87) nearly suggests the same conception of the term conflict. To him, "Conflict is most visible between two or more characters, usually a protagonist and an antagonist or enemy or even villain, but can occur in many different forms. A character may as easily find himself or herself in conflict with a natural force, such as an animal or a weather event, like a hurricane". However, in any case, the literary purpose of conflict is to create tension in the story, making readers more interested by leaving them uncertain which of the characters or forces will prevail. In this study, the conflict is centered on the character of Obi Okonkwo, the protagonist of *No longer at Ease*, who completes his higher studies in England under the sponsorship of Umuofia Progressive Union, a group of Umuofians residing in Lagos. Indeed, conflicts are necessary for literature. That is why acknowledging and raising this relationship, Graham Little (1981: 2), in his book *Approach to Literature*, states that

Literary works, like a novel or a play, consist of characters that have their own characteristics. Those characters have the potential to create conflict which needs to be solved. Reading a novel deeply can help readers to understand some kinds of aspects emphasized by an author in the character or conflict of the story. Literature

is very important for human beings because it reflects human problems in life, such as love's problems, death, and failure.

Owen G. Mordaunt, though he led a study on Achebe's *Arrow of God*, had probed the different conflicts contained in this novel. If the main character Ezeulu conspired with the white man, his people vehemently opposed this deliberate step because he is operating outside the collective solidarity of people who share common customs and beliefs, and world view. Then, this act brings him into conflict with his friend and confidant, Akuebe, but Ezeulu puts self-interest before the traditional group and its interests. In this connection, Akuebe's warning matters when he says: "But if you send your son to join strangers in desecrating the land, you will be alone. You may go and mark it on the wall to remind you that I said so". (AOG: 151). Accordingly, Mordaunt writes:

It is only when Ezeulu chooses and acts accordingly to his own will that he steps out of the boundaries laid there by his society and of which he is a member. This is the basic conflict; all other conflicts merely set the scene where the action is going on (p. 170).

In addition, Chinua Achebe himself expresses a kind of conflict in his writings. It is in this perspective that Yohanes Baskoro, in his undergraduate thesis entitled "The Significance of the Conflict to the development of the Main Character as Seen in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*" backs up the author's wordings. Thus, quoting the author, Yohanes confesses that

Achebe used his novel as a means of resistance to any practices of imperialism or colonialism. He also wanted to show his objection to the politic of narration that caused detriment to subaltern people in producing their stories and history. He focused on the way European writers built the image of African society and culture as what they liked... The result was that they could achieve fame or produce their stories as what they liked (2000: 7).

It is known that characters often experience two types of conflicts in stories: internal and external conflicts. However, in the current study, I will be concerned only with the second type of conflict, centered on the main character of the novel who has shown conflict all along with the story with the main question formulated as follows: What are the external conflicts appearing in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*? The fact is that in *No Longer at Ease*, Obi Okonkwo experiences resistance as the novel is a conflicting one and sequel to *Things Fall Apart* the author's first novel. Indeed, the evaluation of *No Longer at Ease* reveals different intensive tensions but what matters is the way they are presented.

Thus, to deal with the methodology, the structuralism approach will be useful as it emphasizes the relationships among component elements of a literary work. Moreover, in his book *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, Guerin reduces the complex idea of structuralism as 'the study of relationships'. Literature, being a mere reflection of society, I will also allude to the sociological approach as it establishes the relation existing between literature and society. I will not also ignore the analytical approach for study since it breaks the conflict down into the elements necessary to solve it. As to the limitation of this study, *No Longer at Ease* is the basic source of reference. However, I will also refer to any helpful source for the improvement of this study. Concerning the plan, I will deal with the interpersonal conflicts existing between Obi Okonkwo versus Umuofia Progressive Union first, then conflicts between Obi and his parents as well as Clara, and finally, conflicts between Obi and the administration.

2. Conflict between Obi Okonkwo and Umuofia Progressive Union (UPU)

To begin with, let us recall that Obi Okonkwo is the hero of *No Longer at Ease* who completes his higher studies in England under the sponsorship of Umuofia Progressive Union, a group of Umuofians residing in Lagos, Nigeria. As a matter of fact, Umuofia Progressive Union is an association created by people from Umuofia with the purpose of assisting their fellow young brothers in pursuing studies abroad. But Umuofians did so because they read from *No Longer at Ease* that greatness depends on how well a man is literate for him to be able to rule their country. The choice of Obi Okonkwo was not random. In fact, Obi's life has been marked by his cleverness and brightness, which led his clansmen to choose him as the first recipient of allowance, as we can read in the following extract:

Six or seven years ago, Umuofians abroad had formed their Union with the aim of collecting money to send some of their brighter young men to study in England. They taxed themselves mercifully. The first scholarship under this scheme was awarded to Obi Okonkwo five years ago, almost to the day. Although they called it a scholarship, it was to be repaid. In Obi's case, it was worth eight hundred pounds, to be repaid within four years of his return. They wanted him to read the 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 selection of the first candidate hadn't presented any difficulty to the Union. Obi was an obvious choice. At the age of twelve or thirteen, he had passed his Standard Six examination at the top of the whole province.

Then he won a scholarship to one of the best secondary schools in Eastern Nigeria. At the end of five years, he passed the Cambridge School Certificate with distinction in all eight subjects. He was, in fact, a village celebrity, and his name was regularly invoked at the mission schools where he had once been a pupil. (NLE: 14-15).

Obviously, Obi was well educated, a hard worker, and eventually sent to study law in England, and his departure for England was still a pride for his people as they openly stated, 'We are the first in all the nine villages to send our sons to the white man's land'. Through these wordings,

Achebe shows that these people, amidst the conflicting situations of the country, are integrated into their values and views. Thus, before leaving for England, the villagers advise him in this way: 'We are sending you to learn books. Enjoyment can wait. Do not be in a hurry to rush into the pleasure of the world like the young antelope who danced herself lame when the main dance was yet to come'(12). Unfortunately, once in England, obi has changed his field of study; he read English instead, which bothered the Union and made them become angry. Naturally, learning English rather than law, the wish of Umuofians was the starting point of conflicts between Obi and them.

In addition, when Obi got back from England, he straightaway needed his involvement in the Union's activities. This behavior doesn't meet Umuofians' approval, then reinforces the conflicting atmosphere. So far, Obi displeased his fellow Umuofians at his welcome from England, for he speaks common or clear English that anyone could understand while they expected him to speak bombastic English or to utter words of advanced level. From there, the relationship between Obi and UPU was gradually on the decline. But despite this, the position he was granted in the civil service didn't silence the Union; rather, it urged them to assist him when he was jailed because they expected Obi to bring recognition of value or honor to the clan. Though some Unionists violently objected to this idea, some opined otherwise in the following way:

We paid eight hundred pounds to train him in England, said one of them. But instead of being grateful, he insults us because of a useless girl. And now we are being called together again to find more money for him. What does he do with his big salary? My opinion is that we have already done too much for him. (NLE: 13).

This opinion, though approved, was not taken for granted. But the wordings of the President of the Union stand conciliatory. For him, a kinsman in trouble had to be saved, not blamed; anger against a brother was felt in the flesh, not in the bone. On this basis, the Union decided to pay for the services of a lawyer from their funds, and Obi and the Union seemed to cooperate again. This is to say that when a clan is unified, the suffering of one member grieves all the others as if one finger brings oil, it spoils the others. Therefore, Obi's imprisonment afflicted all the union. In this connection, John Mbiti (1969:108)'s words are relevant when he states:

In traditional life, the individual doesn't and cannot exist alone except corporately. He is simply part of a whole. Whatever happens to the individual happens to the group. And whatever happens to the group happens to the individual.

The analysis of *No Longer at Ease* reveals that the Umuofians experienced an unexpected fact because they expected Obi to hold ancestral values once back from England. They couldn't, unfortunately, believe that by sending him abroad, he would acquire and practice western culture. In this connection, the following quotation from Palmer Eustace (1972: 65) serves as evidence:

The members of the Umuofia Progressive Union failed to realize that by educating Obi, they gave him the opportunity to acquire ideals that were bound to be more liberal than theirs. They also fail to realize that they have transformed him into one of the elite and that he will need to live up to his status.

We can realize with Obi that the conflict mainly occurs because he chooses to ignore traditional practices and to behave like a Nigerian during the four years he has been abroad. So far, the study also revealed that Obi's various conflicts stemmed from societal marital issues based on prejudices that prohibited him from marrying the woman he loved. Indeed, another prominent issue in the relationship between Obi and the Umuofia Progressive Union is his determination to get married to Clara, an osu. He is aware that the law of the clan bans a free man from marrying an outcast or vice versa. With his western education, Obi seems to disregard the clan's culture to the detriment of westerns'. This intention is noticed through the answer Obi gives to the president when the latter tries to remind him of the clan's law:

I could take you to court for that. I am not going to listen to you anymore. I take back my request. I shall start paying you back at the end of this month. Now, this minute! But don't you dare interfere in my affairs again. (NLE: 82).

The above comment makes us think of Ezeulu, the main character of Achebe's *Arrow of God*, whose reactions look like a betrayal of his own people, causing a conflictual atmosphere. As a matter of fact, Ezeulu couldn't recognize the assistance of his people who elected him guardian of the clan though his behavior had been far from contenting the clan. And the people noticed Ezeulu's betrayal when reacting to the land issue where the chief priest, the representative of the clan Umuaro claims that the land belonged to Okperi. He confessed that 'it was Okperi people who gave us a piece of land to live in, they also gave us their deities, and it is unjust to put hands in it' (1960: 7). And then, Ezeulu's declaration creates murmurs of approval and of disapproval, as Nwaka (1964: 16) declared in the following passage:

My father told me a different story. He told me three or four different places where they sojourned for a while and moved on again. They were driven away by Umuofia, then Abame and Aninta. Would they go to day and claim all those sites?

Likewise, Obi Okonkwo in *No Longer at Ease*, Ezeulu also experienced conflicts with his clan. He decided to send his child to join the white man's religion without consulting the clan. This, therefore, led to another source of conflict with his people. As to Obi, his conflict with Umuofians forecasted his own collapse because he despised the elders' advice once at the meeting of the Umuofia Progressive Union, advice he had to pay attention to with life in Lagos. Despite this behavior, Obi proved himself thankful to the Union for the scholarship they granted him. In fact, he thanked them for the sacrifices they had made to send him to England. He would try his best to justify their confidence. However, the Union's interference with Obi's dream to marry Clara was also a leading cause to conflict. This is evident for the Unionists since a free man cannot marry an outcast like Clara. This displeases Obi and leads him to react, telling them it is no longer their business violently. Accordingly, Obi said:

I am not going to listen to you anymore. I take back my request. I shall start paying you back at the end of this month. Now, this minute! But don't you dare interfere in my affairs again. And if this is what you meet about, "he said in Ibo, you may cut off my two legs if you ever find them here again." He made for the door. A number of people tried to intercept him. "please sit down." "Cool down." "There is no quarrel." Everybody was telling at once.

That is a small matter. "Said someone". Four months is a short time. A debt may get moldy, but it never decays." (pp. 82-83).

In his speech, Obi asks for a delay of four months to pay back the loan to Umuofia Progressive Union as he didn't want them to talk of his intention to marry Clara. All the members consented as the President said at length: "your words are very good; I do not think anyone here will say no to your request. We will give you four months..." (p.81). However, the conflict with Umuofians, considered a societal conflict was not the sole Obi had known in the story. Some others also of great importance exist, such as the one with his parents that we are going to probe shortly.

3. Conflicts between Obi Okonkwo and his parents and Obi with Clara

Apart from the disagreement between Obi and Umuofian Progressive Union resulting in a conflict, Obi Okonkwo also had known tensions leading to conflicts. But, it is important to recall that right from the beginning, Obi shared good relationships with his parents, mostly his mother, with whom they kept some confidences. It was with this feeling of certainty that Obi paid a visit to her mother when she was ill, a gesture any lovely child can do for his parents. In the case, Obi showed his affection with tears from his eyes as the narrator declared in the following extract: 'As he looked at his mother on her bed, tears stood in Obi's eyes. She held out her hand to him, and he took it, all bone and skin like the bat's wing' (p. 122). Isaac Okonkwo and Annah Okonkwo were Obi Okonkwo's parents. However, he was deeply attached to Annah rather than Isaac, though he loved both. This is because Annah plays a crucial role in Obi's life. As such, he couldn't engage himself in any enterprise without his mother's consent. We can realize it through the following passage when Obi sounded out his mother on "CLARA" issue, Clara, that he intends to marry:

There was a special bond between Obi and his mother. Of all her eight children, Obi was nearest to her heart. Her neighbours used to call her 'Janet's mother' until Obi was born, and she immediately became 'Obi's mother'. Neighbours have an unflinching instinct in such a matter. As a child, Obi took his special relationship very much for granted. But, when he was about ten, something happened which gave it concrete form in his young mind. He has a rusty razor blade with which he sharpened his pencil or sometimes cuts up a grasshopper. One day he left this implement in his pocket, and it cut his mother's hand very badly when she was washing his clothes on a stone in the stream. She returned with the clothes unwashed and her hand dripping with blood. For some reason or other, whenever Obi thought affectionately of his mother, his mind went back to that shedding of her blood. It bound him very firmly to her. (NLE: 76).

The story is centered on Clara, an Osu that any free man cannot intend to get married with. But Obi was aware that everyone from his family would violently oppose his idea of marrying Clara. And the family ties were all very well as long as they did not interfere with Clara. Therefore, to show his affection to his mother, Obi says to himself: 'If I could convince my mother, all would be well'. (NLE: 76). His parents also, to show their satisfaction with their child's journey to Lagos, organized a prayer meeting so as to let him under the protection of God. Till now, everything is going well, and Obi is on good terms with his parents.

However, it is known that Obi's intention to marry Clara is the most debatable issue in *No Longer at Ease*. Thus, after praying, Isaac Okonkwo calls Obi to discuss the activities of Lagos, and together they discuss his wedding project with Clara Okeke. His father fiercely set himself against that proposal.

Being aware of the danger that follows when a marriage is made between a free person and an Osu, Isaac Okonkwo doesn't stop advising his son. In fact, fearing the clan, he doesn't allow or consent Obi to marry Clara by presenting the aftermaths of such a deed in the following terms:

Osu is like leprosy in the minds of our people. I beg of you, my son, not bring the mark of shame and of leprosy into our family. If you do, your children and your children's children unto the third and fourth generations will curse your memory. It is not for myself I speak; my days are few. You will bring sorrow to your head and to the heads of your children. Who will marry your children? Whose daughters will your sons marry? Think of that, my son. We are Christians, but we cannot marry our daughters. (NLE: 127).

As we can see, getting married to an Osu symbolizes bringing a mark of shame and leprosy within the family or clan, and this is what Isaac fears for his family since it is a kind of curse that goes from one generation to the next. This raises a conflict that resembles the one Nnaemeka experiences in Achebe's short stories '*Marriage is a Private Affair*'. In fact, Nnaemeka is the main character of this short story and falls in love with Nene Atang, a teacher in Girl's school in Lagos, after refusing the girl his father has shown him. Conversely to his father's will, Nnaemeka declines the offer as Achebe (1972: 23) puts it, 'I am engaged to marry another girl who has all of Ugoyes's good qualities. She is a good Christian, and she teaches in a Girl's school in Lagos'. The conflict is clearly stated when Nnaemeka retorts that 'Marriage today is different'.

The conflict was raised between Nnaemeka and his father, but Nnaemeka won over his father as he realized in the end that it is useless to defend traditional values. This state has been ascertained by Professor Thomas Méloné (1973: 45) in these terms:

C'est ainsi que malgré l'opposition de son père Nnaemeka se mariera quand même... L'acte du jeune évolué qui n'a pas de précédent inaugure, l'on s'en doute, une période irrévocable d'irrespect vis-à-vis de la tradition et signifie la mort inéluctable du vieil ordre.

It appears that Nnaemeka's case looks like the one Obi Okonkwo has experienced. Both cases tackle the conflict of generation between the old order and the new order. But in his concern, Obi believes in his parents' ignorance and, with them, that of the whole clan to forbid such an alliance in present days. Although cherished by his mother, the latter also disapproved of Obi's intention to get married to Clara Okeke since she was divinely informed in advance. One day, as soon as Obi woke up in the morning, he went to see his mother. It was six o'clock by his watch but still dark. He groped his way to her room. She was awake, for she asked who it was as soon as he entered the room. He went and sat on her bed and felt her temperature with his palm. She hadn't slept much on account of the pain in her stomach. Suddenly, Obi's mother raised herself up and said:

I dreamt a bad dream. A very bad dream one night. I was lying on a bed spread with a white cloth, and I felt something creepy against my skin. I looked down on the bed and found that a swarm of white termites had eaten up the man and the white cloth. Yet, termites had eaten up the bed right me. (NLE: 128)

Till now, this dream seems gloomy to Annah Okonkwo, Isaac Okonkwo's wife, Obi Okonkwo's mother. On occasion, Hannah Okonkwo tells Obi about the letter sent by Joseph and his chat with Okonkwo always on this issue: Obi's intention to get married. In the end, Obi's mother opines in the same sense as we can understand through this quotation:

I did not tell anybody about that dream in the morning. I carried it in my heart, wondering what it was. I took down my Bible and read the portion for the day. It gave me some strength, but my heart was still not at rest; in the afternoon, your father with a letter from Joseph to tell us that you are going to marry an Osu. I saw the meaning of my death in the dream. Then I told your father about it. She stopped and took a deep breath. I have nothing to tell you in this matter except one thing. If you want to marry this girl, you must wait until I am no more. If God hears my prayers, you will not wait long. (NLE: 128).

From this extract, Annah also shows her disapproval of Obi's intention to marry Clara. For Annah, whatever qualities Clara possesses, she couldn't become her daughter-in-law, then cannot marry Obi. So far, Annah swears to commit suicide if Obi acted his dream. This can be read through her wordings when she writes: 'But if you do the thing while I am alive, you will have my blood on your head because I shall kill myself'. (NLE: 129). Thus, aware of her state, Clara couldn't act otherwise rather than begging Obi. Accordingly, the narrator said Clara begged him not to misunderstand her. And she said that she was taking her present step because she didn't want to ruin his life. However, the conversation between Sarah and Obi helps them realize that she knew the appreciation of Obi's parents about their possible union:

I have thought about the whole matter very carefully. There are two reasons why we should not get married. What are they?

Well, the first is that your family will be against it. I don't want to come between you and your family.

'Bunk! Anyway, what is the second reason? She could not remember what it was. It didn't matter, anyway.

The first reason was quite enough. I will tell you what the second reason' is, said Obi.

'What is it?

'You don't want to marry someone who has to borrow money to pay his insurance. (NLE: 119).

Concerning this second reason given by Obi, he knew that it was a grossly unfair and false accusation, but he wanted her to be on the defensive. Moreover, with Isaac Okonkwo, the conversation began after the family had prayed in Annah's room, for she felt very weak and unable to join the others in the parlor. As a matter of fact, Isaac Okonkwo's point of view about Obi's intention of marriage will be determined in the story through the following conversation between him and Obi:

'... You wrote to me some time ago about a girl you had seen. How does the matter stand now?'

'That is one reason why I came. I want us to go and meet her people and start negotiations. I have no money now, but at least we can begin to talk'. Obi had decided that it would be fatal to sound apologetic or hesitant.

'Yes', said his father. 'That is the best way'. He thought a little and again said yes, it was the best way. Then a new thought seemed to occur to him. 'Do we know who this girl is and where she comes from? Obi hesitated just enough for his father to ask the question again in a different way. 'What is her name?'

'She is the daughter of Okeke, a native of Mbaino.'

'Which Okeke? I know about three. One is a retired teacher, but it would not be that one.'

'That is the one,' said Obi.

'Josiah Okeke?'

Obi said yes, that was his name.

His father laughed. It was the kind of laughter one sometimes heard from a masked ancestral spirit. He would salute you by name and ask you if you knew who he was. You would reply with one hand humbly touching the ground that you didn't, that he was beyond human knowledge...

Obi's father's laughter vanished as it had come without warning, leaving no footprints.

'You cannot marry the girl,' he said quite simply.

'Eh?'

'I said you cannot marry the girl.'

'But why, Father?'

'Why? I shall tell you why. But first, tell me this. Did you find out or try to find anything about this girl,'

'Yes.'

'What did you find out?'

'That they are *osu*.'

You mean to tell me that you knew, and you ask me why?

'I don't think it matters. We are Christians.' This had some effect, nothing startling, though. Only a little pause and a slightly softer tone.

'We are Christians', he said. But that is no reason to marry an *Osu*.'

'The Bible says that in Christ there are no bond or free.'

'My son,' said Okonkwo, 'I understand what you say. But this thing is deeper than you think.' (NLE: 125-126).

It is evident that neither Obi's mother nor his father agrees with his intention to marry Clara Okeke for the above-mentioned reasons. It is the story of contrast not only between Obi and his parents but also between Obi and his clan as such, for they are members of the community. In fact, Obi felt better and more confident in his decision, for he tended to revolutionize the clan's system. For him, traditional customs are no longer valid in the twentieth century, as we can read from the following passage:

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-great-grandfather had been dedicated to serving a god, thereby setting himself apart and turning his descendants into a forbidden caste to the end of time. Quite unbelievable. And here was an educated man telling Obi he did not understand. 'Not even my mother can stop me,' he said as he lay down beside Joseph. (NLE: 72-73).

From this passage, Obi advocates change in his country and, as such, stands against ancestral culture and values, an attitude that bears a descending order for he will no longer live in harmony with his clan. Despite the fact that Clara was an Osu, Obi longs to marry her, which is an abomination according to their customs. In the same token, likewise, Obi's parents, Joseph, Obi's friend, tries to persuade him but in vain, as we can discover in this conversation between them:

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

"What is a pioneer? Someone who shows the way. That is what I am doing. Anyway, it is too late to change now".

"It is not", said Joseph. "What is an engagement ring? Our fathers did not marry with rings. It is not too late to change. Remember you are the one and only Umuofia son to be educated overseas..." (NLE: 73).

Despite these compliments, Obi has not backed up their traditional values, leaning himself on the bible as it is said 'in Christ, there are no bond or free'. To him, all need to change, and in ten years, things will be quite different from what they are now. As to his dream about Clara, Obi still wonder about the difference. Accordingly, he puts: 'What made an Osu different from other men and women? Nothing but the ignorance of their forefathers. Why should they, who had seen the light of the Gospel, remain in that ignorance? (NLE: 127). This leads to understanding that Obi Okonkwo could consent with his parents on some issues, but his intention to marry Clara Okeke remains a conflicting problem as his parents keep showing their disapproval. By the same token, Joseph also tries to help Obi understand the evil he might bring once he gets married to an Osu. In fact, their conversation shows that the entire community was against such an alliance:

"Look at me," said Joseph, getting up and tying his coverlet as a loincloth. He now spoke in English. "You know book, but this is no matter for book. Do you know what an Osu is? But how do you know? (p. 82).

Concerning Obi's conflicts with Clara, it is germane to say that their conflicts are multidimensional. To begin with, Obi and Clara started quarreling about the choice of hobby. As a matter of fact, Obi was fond of poems and wanted Clara likes poems too. This couldn't go since Clara's preference was rather than movies. As Obi insists on convincing Clara, she finally feels bored, upset, and moody. Thus, a conflicting atmosphere stems and affects their relationship, as we can realize in the following extract:

Obi knew very well why she was moody. She had suggested in her tentative way that they go to the films. At this stage in their relationship, Clara never said: "Let us go to films. 'She said instead: "There is a good film at the Capitol." Obi, who didn't care for films, especially those that Clara called good, had said after a long silence: "Well, if you insist, but I'm not keen." Clara didn't insist, but she felt very much hurt. All evening she had been nursing her feelings. (p. 25).

From the foregoing, we can notice that Obi and Clara are at loggerhead about preferences as they oppose each other through an argument. Actually, Obi offers to read poems to Clara, but she often declines, and after all, she would say sometimes, "I don't quarrel with you when you start reading your poems to me." (p. 25). Additionally, another conflict starts when Clara becomes aware of her identity, which is being an osu, therefore banned from getting married to Obi. Indeed, this reality bothered Clara, who couldn't even eat once having dinner with Obi. She finally could not help weeping, and as the narrator puts it:

"What's the matter, Clara? Tell me." He was no longer unruffled. There was a hint of tears in his voice.

"I am an osu," she wept. Silence. She stopped weeping and quietly disengaged herself from him. Still, he said nothing. (p. 81).

In fact, Clara's will is now to break up her relationship with Obi for her status, but Obi pretends to underestimate her as he believes they are to be married. So far, the conflict becomes more intense when Obi takes an overdraft from the bank without Clara's knowledge. This is perceived in the narrator's wordings when he writes:

That evening he had a serious disagreement with Clara, he had not wanted to tell her about the overdraft, but as soon as she saw him, she asked what the matter was. He tried to fob her off with some excuse. But he had not planned it, so it didn't hold together...

"Why didn't you tell me?" she asked when he had told her about the overdraft.
"Well, there was no need. I'll pay it easily in five monthly installments." (p. 116).

Above all, Clara was upset regarding Obi's behavior. We may be tempted to believe that Obi could have financial problems. Hence, he decided to get a loan from the bank so as to resolve these problems. However, Clara, aware of her status, doesn't want to trouble Obi's family. She would rather think of breaking off his relationship with Obi. As it can be seen, Obi didn't limit himself to having conflicts with the Umuofia Progressive Union, his parents, and Clara. In the same vein, he also challenges the new administration. It is this conflict between Obi and the administration that I will be concerned with shortly.

4. Conflict between Obi Okonkwo and Administration

The story of *No Longer at Ease* reveals that Obi Okonkwo, the protagonist experienced more than one conflict. Therefore, apart from the conflicts he had known with Umuofia Progressive Union, his parents, and Clara, he also undertook striking relationships with the administration on which he depended. In fact, Obi was given the job of secretary to the scholarship commission with William Green as Headmaster, a colonialist belonging to the epoch of pioneers devoted to justice. One of the occurrences showing his presence in the administration is when his mother dies. When Obi's mother passed away, Obi didn't go and attend the funerals for he wasn't granted permission, as we can learn from the following passage:

On top of all came his mother's death. He sent all he could find for the funeral, but it was already being said to his eternal shame that a woman who had borne so many children, one of whom was in a European post, deserved a better funeral than she got. One Umuofia man who had been on leave at home when she died had brought the news to Lagos to the meeting of the Umuofia Progressive Union. 'It was a thing of shame', he said. Someone else wanted to know, by the way, why that beast (meaning Obi) had not obtained permission to go home... (NLE: 149).

As it can be seen, Obi was granted all advantages by his headmaster with regard to his function. That is why he owns a good-looking house and a new car that he hurries to get to the office. Unfortunately, this evening turns out badly for Clara doesn't want to marry Obi. But, one thing more surprising comes to Obi; while he was going on, the Umuofia Progressive Union (some unionists) saw him in a luxurious car, then required four months of moratory for the repayment of his debt. This upsets Obi, and he starts quarreling with the union. However, the real financial pressure comes after the breakup of his engagement with Clara. Obi has then to find thirty pounds for the abortion, and he wants to pay Clara back fifty pounds as it is revealed:

... Later that morning, Obi went to consult Mr. Omo about a salary advance. Mr. Omo was the authority on General Orders and Financial Instructions and should be able to tell him whether such a thing was possible and under what conditions. He had taken a firm decision about Clara's fifty pounds. He must find it in the next two months and pay it into her bank. Perhaps they would get over the present crisis, perhaps not. But whatever happened, he must return the money. (NLE: 145).

From this extract, we can realize Obi's conflicts versus the administration, especially financial administration, where he inquires about the possibility and conditions of getting an overdraft. This is because Obi wanted to rescue Clara, who found herself in hospital. However, Mr. Omo said that it was possible to give an officer a salary advance under special conditions, and it was late that Obi realized that the allowance was not a free gift to be spent as one liked. Of course, Obi gets money from the bank as he wishes but with difficulties causing some misunderstandings. This is a way to show that Obi also experiences a conflicting atmosphere with the administration as such.

5. Conclusion

To bring this work to a close, it is necessary to recall that it has dealt with the world of conflict in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, especially with Obi Okonkwo, the main character. Although he could have internal conflicts, in the present study, I have concerned myself with external conflicts that Obi experiences throughout the story. As such, the main purpose has been to identify and analyze the different external conflicts experienced by Obi Okonkwo. Thanks to structuralism, sociological and analytical approaches, I have come to realize that Obi was in conflict with not only the Umuofia Progressive Union, his parents, Clara, and the administration but also with his society, knowing that Umuofia Progressive Union and his parents are embedded within the society. Thus, it matters not to forget that the central starting point of Obi's conflicts is 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. A deeper look at the novel reveals that it is western education

that influences Obi to be self-confident to argue that he is right in his intentions. Put differently, about the marriage, Obi's education convinces him that everyone can marry any individual, whatever his or her origin or nature. As we can see, this study has raised Obi's conflicts versus other characters of the novel, but it has also shown that Obi has a different view from the others concerning the marriage issue. From a perspective view of present-day Africa, who from Obi Okonkwo and other characters is right? The future would tell.

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