

Okonkwo's Reincarnation: A Comparison of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*

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Volume 21 Issue 4 (June 2019) Article 1**Mary JanePatrick Nwakaego Okolie and Ginikachi Christian Uzoma,
"Okonkwo's Reincarnation: A Comparison of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*"**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol21/iss4/1>>

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Abstract: In their paper, "Okonkwo's Reincarnation: A Comparison of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*," Mary JanePatrick Nwakaego Okolie and Ginikachi Christian Uzoma explore the reincarnation myth, a global concept founded basically in religion and tradition. It was especially vibrant in the ancient times in places like Egypt, Greece, and in continents like Asia and Africa, which possess varying understandings of the myth. In Igbo tradition, for example, it is believed that reincarnation occurs within a family. Within this tradition, some of the marks of reincarnation are usually the possession of the birthmark or certain other physical features and the exhibition of character and behavioral traits of a deceased person by a living member of his/her immediate or extended family. Thus, reincarnation entails the return to life of a deceased person in a new body. Sometimes, revenge is the mission of a reincarnated body. Bearing other reincarnation intentions in view, we study Achebe's Okonkwo as one who falls within this category of reincarnation for revenge, having reincarnated through the body of his grandson Obi in *No Longer at Ease* to avenge himself against Umuofia and to suffer his son Nwoye, who now fathers him as Obi, for perhaps having had the effrontery to have left him and his ancestral tradition for the religion of the white man.

Mary JanePatrick Nwakaego OKOLIE and Ginikachi Christian UZOMA

Okonkwo's Reincarnation: A Comparison of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*

With the publication of the literary masterpiece, *Things Fall Apart* (as well as the other two—*No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God*—together with which it makes up a trilogy), came a tremendous impact on the fortification and dissemination of modern African literature throughout the global academic community. Little wonder therefore why so many literary scholars acclaim Achebe to be the father of modern African literature, although with a very minute exception. These publications have also resulted in a tremendous enlargement in the body of literary criticism in that their emergence on the literary platform has attracted so far a very great number of literary criticisms from the global literary community. Most of these criticisms have seen each or a combination of the texts as embodying the question of culture clash. Some have seen in the text(s) the horrors of imperialism, racial dispute, and communal disunity. Some still have discussed, pertaining to the texts, the issues of ambiguity, ambivalence, identity crisis, otherness, identity formation, and the return of the repressed. But none has thought to see the Obi of *No Longer at Ease* as the incarnate of the Okonkwo of *Things Fall Apart* who has returned through the body of his grandson Obi to punish first Umuofia for treating him with reckless abandon when he needed them the most, and second his son Nwoye for letting go the ways of his ancestors in pursuit of the white man's ways. In the next few paragraphs, we will present a review of some of these criticisms on *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*.

Let us start with the issue of personal struggle and fate in *Things Fall Apart*, on which Igboin Benson Ohihon argues that irrespective of the struggles of Okonkwo against an ill-fated end, he is still not any better than both his father Unoka and his son Nwoye in terms of the status of meta-existence. Ohihon puts it thus: "Circumstantially, Unoka could not become an ancestor; inadvertently or deliberately, Okonkwo could not become one either; and consciously, Nwoye refused to become one" (151). He makes this argument in the bid to assert that the character of Unoka gives a firm prop to the structure of the story of *Things Fall Apart* irrespective of the author's attempt to present him as so effeminate a character that his life ends in just the first chapter of the entire novel. So Ohihon points out that "the meta-life of Unoka formed an original and inevitable basis for the thought and consequences that pervaded the life of Okonkwo and his first son, Nwoye" (151). Although this seems personal, it, however, transcends the communal cultural struggle that pervades the lives of the people of Umuofia. Singh Rahul believes that *Things Fall Apart* "is a response to, as well as a record of the traumatic consequences of the western capitalist colonialism on the traditional values and religious institutions of the African people" (272). In his essay, Rahul traces the hazards of imperialism down to the consequence that the cultural and religious beliefs of Ibo people become distended, thereby resulting in a dis-unification of the once unified people. On this theme of cultural debasement, Lame Maatla Kenalemang argues that "Achebe blames the white missionaries' colonial rule and/or invasion for the post-colonial oppressed Igbo culture; this oppression can be seen in terms of the oppressed social coherence between the individual and their society" (4).

From the above which may stand in for the criticisms of *Things Fall Apart* that dwell mainly on the novel's portrayal of African culture and its encounter with the counter cultural norms of the Western sphere, Linda Strong-Leek's essay deviates in that she avers through the lenses of feminist criticism that the novel also portrays "the horrors and injustices Okonkwo inflicts" not only "upon the men in his life" but also upon his "wives" (30), and that these women command certain level of "importance as individuals in their community" (30).

On *No Longer at Ease*, Ilyas Omar Abubakar investigates the portrayal of "the clash of ideologies between the indigenous culture and the imperial culture" in order to ascertain how Achebe has been able to "depict from an African perspective the internal struggle of the indigenous culture and identity to survive under the imposing and usurping weight of colonial modernization and education" (1-2). Abubakar's argument in his essay is centered around Obi Okonkwo and the formation of his identity as well as the eventual moral collapse he suffers. And Preeti Maneck's essay, although an entirely different one, also conforms to the critical thought presented in Abubakar's. For Maneck, the novel depicts "the tensions and complications involved in the encounter between two cultures" (438), so that the effect is the thrusting of Obi onto the outer space where both cultures meet, where he is seen as "a stranger in his own country" (441). Anuradha Basu's essay, however, takes a different turn parallel to the foregoing, arguing that Achebe's postcolonial novels rather portray a "cultural and political adaptation and appropriation" far more than their hitherto celebrated subject of "repression and regression" (51). This argument is structured on the provisions of Said's *Orientalism* (1979) in which Said professes the

eschewing of "the manufactured clash of civilizations" and the "need to concentrate on the slow working together of cultures that overlap" (51).

From the foregoing, it is quite easy to pinpoint the dimension of study which the criticisms on Achebe's novels, especially *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*, have been geared towards by critics. What we have done is akin to what, in statistics, is known as sampling, seeing that a review of all that has been written on the novels since their publications is not attainable in this paper. And from this simple review—as well as other factors not represented here—it is obvious that no research has been carried out on both novels, exploring the Obi Okonkwo of *No Longer at Ease* as the incarnate of the Okonkwo of *Things Fall Apart*. It is the exploration of this thought that this paper is set to undertake.

Insofar as it has always given rise to serious thought in religion and philosophy, the concept of reincarnation has assumed a universal platform. Although this universal platform has not given a total and absolute credence to it as a globally accepted doctrine due to the radical variations in the regional religions of the world, there is no arguing the fact that there are no people that have not been confronted with the question of reincarnation either physically or thoughtfully. The concept is said to have assumed a universal platform because of its entry into the disciplines of philosophy and religion which are themselves globally acclaimed subjects. So, what then is reincarnation? One may ask. And what gives it this level of global importance? Presenting a detailed examination of the doctrine of reincarnation in his dissertation, Hasskei Mohammed Majeed agrees that "the doctrine of reincarnation suggests that there is a stable part of a person that constantly and consistently is not subject to death. The part is also believed to be spiritual, and distinct from the body. This immortal part, often understood as a soul, a rational soul, is that which takes on flesh repeatedly in a person's cycle of rebirths. In this case, the 'person' who is believed to consist in the soul survives in different bodies as a completely rational being" (7). In this sense, he further agrees, reincarnation connotes "the rebirth of a human being in a human form" (9). And this belief cuts across numerous cultures, religions, and philosophies in which it is widely believed that "death, or the absence of life, is necessary if reincarnation is to be conceivable" (2).

That reincarnation is a universal concept is solidified by Majeed in his tracing of the doctrine to such global regions as Egypt, Greece, China, India, and the Inca. The Inca may be seen as representing the West who seem to tread the doctrine underfoot merely as barbaric. And that the doctrine assumes the status of global importance is hinged upon its relatedness to the notion of life, death, and what happens after death; thoughts that have refused to be dismissed as effeminate since the beginning of human philosophy which is itself as old as mankind. Because of its troubling nature to human comprehension, scholars and thinkers have pushed it into such disciplines as philosophy, religion, eschatology, where it receives devoted attention. And then since literature is such a discipline that cuts across every other discipline as well as every concept available to human thought, it is not unlikely therefore to have literature play the intricacies of the concept of reincarnation. Even in Majeed, we see, for instance, that "thoughts about the concepts of life, death, rebirth, and the moral as well as practical significance of these to the evolution of humanity pervade various literary works of Hindu origin" (25). But we have said, from the onset of this paper, that our argument here will be conditioned on the Igbo's aspect of belief in reincarnation. What then does this purport for this study? It purports that although these regions mentioned above, as contained in Majeed, believe in the doctrine of reincarnation, they still have some differences in their beliefs. For instance, as Majeed presents, "in Egyptian philosophy, no clear mechanisms were found that explained or determined how a person became re-embodied in the human frame although ... the notion of re-embodiment could not be alien to the people of that culture.... In Greek philosophy (especially, with Empedocles) as well as in Hindu and Buddhist philosophies the dynamics for reincarnation are predicated on moral action.... [And] while Buddhism does not deny the reality of a next world *per se*, it would reject the claim that *there are souls, and that such souls have some afterlife existence*" (49-50).

In like manner, there are differences in the belief in reincarnation in the Sub-Sahara African sphere. In his research paper, "The Belief in Reincarnation Among the Igbo of Nigeria," Ian Stevenson observes that "the Igbo believe that reincarnation usually occurs within the same immediate or extended family [and also believe] in a group of souls called *ogbanje* who are born, die in early life, and are reborn in the same family, often repeatedly" (13). The Igbo concept of *ogbanje*, known as "repeater children," is also realized in the cultures of other peoples of Nigeria. The Edo, for instance, "call such a child an *igbankhuan*, [and] the Yoruba call one an *abi-kú*" (Stevenson 23). It is this concept of *abi-kú* that is played out in both Soyinka's "Abiku" and Clark's "Abiku". Achebe also portrays this concept, as *ogbanje*, in his masterpiece, *Things Fall Apart*, in which he takes out a portion to display the power of traditional medicine in curtailing the excesses of an *ogbanje* by showing how Ezinma, the daughter born to Okonkwo by Ekwefi, is saved from the possessing power of the intolerable cycle of deaths and rebirths. He describes *ogbanje* as "those wicked children who, when they died entered their mothers' wombs to

be born again" (TFA 68). While this aspect of the novel is obvious, the aspect we are engaged with exploring here seems to have eluded the readers of *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease* as the first and second series in Achebe's trilogy. And then there is Ben Okri's novel, *The Famished Road*, wholesomely limning the intricacies of the concept of *ogbanje*. Okri presents *ogbanje* in his novel as one who stands at the threshold of the discarnate realm, seeing and communicating with both the living and the dead. Okri's "ogbanje" is different from Achebe's in that Okri's does not go and come back in the sense of dying and being born again as we conceive of Achebe's but rather its own coming and going is the possession of a special ability to retain life while at the same time visit the discarnate realm. But this is far from the kind of reincarnation we are set to discuss in this paper. We are rather engaged with calling to the fore certain resemblances that could lead to the conclusion that Obi Okonkwo is the reincarnation of his grandfather, Okonkwo.

Achebe chooses W.B. Yeats's poem, "The Second Coming," as a pedal for his first novel and masterpiece, *Things Fall Apart*. But rather than see this poem as merely a pedal, we are meant to see it as an integral part of the novel in which, because "The falcon cannot hear the falconer;/ Things fall apart; [and] the center cannot hold" anymore (lines 2-3). It is this understanding that has helped many critics to view the text from the point of view of post-colonialism, since colonialism presents a text as one which vehemently rejects the outcome of the mingling of the West and the Orient, an outcome that is suffused with distensions, disunity, and identity displacement among the Orientals. And it is this outcome that Okonkwo has already foreseen, which has imbued him with the fortitude to stand resolutely against the white man's administration and (eventual) domination over his fatherland, Umuofia. But when the time finally comes for the war to be fought—the war Okonkwo has envisaged that would redefine their place as the fiercest, battle-ready village among the nine villages of Umuofia; the war that would distinguish them from such cowardice village like Abame; the war in which he would prove himself again as the chief warrior of Umuofia and maybe add to his dream of becoming one of the lords of the clan (a dream an inch away from the posthumous position Obierika has accorded him upon his death: "one of the greatest men in Umuofia" (TFA 185)—when that time comes, Okonkwo falls to the most shocking moment of his life, the moment of communal abandonment and blame. The narrator vividly observes: "Okonkwo stood looking at the dead man. He knew that Umuofia would not go to war. He knew because they had let the other messengers escape. They had broken into tumult instead of action. He discerned fright in that tumult. He heard voices asking: "Why did he do it?" He wiped his matchet on the sand and moved away" (185).

It is this moment that changes the course of events and introduces a new conflict which launches the second novel in Achebe's trilogy, *No Longer at Ease* (from this moment on, this title will be represented with the abbreviation, *NLE*.) But this very conflict seems to have eluded the thinking horizon of the readers of *NLE*. Achebe has so configured the character of Okonkwo that the latter becomes construed as one who must not suffer offense from others. As such, Okonkwo is bent on carrying out revenge against any wrong he suffers from someone. The first revenge he is shown to bear on his head is a communal one when a daughter of Umuofia is killed by the people of Mbaino and Okonkwo has been chosen by Umuofia as their emissary of war. The depiction of this very scenario shows that Okonkwo could not have been happier acting in this capacity, as "the proud and imperious emissary of war" (TFA 10), in stark contrast to his father's personality. He takes revenge on anyone, women not excluded, whose offense is capable of making him seem weak or gullible. This other aspect of him manifests in his relationships with his wives and children. On one occasion during the Week of Peace, he has beaten his wife, Ojiugo, "very heavily" (25) for having not made his food ready when expected; and on another occasion, he has shot at his second wife out of anger for murmuring "something about guns that never shot" (33). But the crown of his revengeful attribute is the time when he disowns his own son, Nwoye, for abandoning his ancestral religion for the Whiteman's. All these are traces to the point that Okonkwo's revenge knows no bound, not even his own family.

So, when it happens that Umuofia abandons him to face the Whiteman alone, a fight he knows too well that he cannot win, Okonkwo deems suicide the only available option left for him. Although no record bears what he had said or thought before carrying out that sacrilegious act of suicide, it would be deduced from the nature of his character that he must have sworn to return to Umuofia and avenge himself of that momentary offense that has resulted in that taboo of him taking his own life. For if he would go to the length of killing Ikemefuna for the fear "of being thought weak" (TFA 53), against Ogbuefi Ezeudu's admonitory advice not to "bear a hand in [the] death" of a "boy [who] calls you father" (TFA 49), what else can he not do to a whole lot of clansmen who abandon him when he needs them most, and consequently present him to be weak, gullible, and effeminate? Clansmen who "cast [him out of the] clan like a fish on to a dry, sandy beach, panting" (TFA 117). And above all, cast him out at death as a stranger to the strangers: "It is against our custom," said one of the men. "It is an offense

against the Earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansmen. His body is evil, and only strangers may touch it. That is why we ask your people to bring him down, because you are strangers" (184).

In his research, Stevenson has found that while "some Igbo believe that not everyone reincarnates, [such as] those who have led worthless, ineffective lives, especially if they have never married and had children; and those who have 'died accidental deaths, committed suicide, or died prematurely'" (17), most others "like living and wish to live a long life; and they die they hope to return quickly from the discarnate realm and resume their endeavors towards the attainment of a higher social status" (17). The Umuofia community in *Things Fall Apart* fall within the latter category, for if they believe that no "worthless" man reincarnates, Okonkwo and Obierika would not have entertained the same line of thought that Nwoye has "too much of his grandfather" (58) in him, which implies that Nwoye is the reincarnation of Unoka. But Okonkwo would not admit it openly because "whenever the thought of his father's weakness and failure troubled him he expelled it by thinking about his own strength and success" (58). So, if Unoka - who "had no grave" but "was carried to the Evil Forest and left there to die" (15) - could reincarnate, what then could stop Okonkwo from returning to seek revenge if they (his descendants) were to abandon him and his ancestors for "the strange faith and the white man's god" (128)? The wiping off of his descendants cannot be envisaged as merely a passing statement. The attributes of Okonkwo's character are indications that he means every word he says. He "was not the man to stop beating somebody half-way through, not even for fear of a goddess" (25). The narrator's apt description of Okonkwo's utter disappointment with Nwoye and his resolution of revenge suffices here:

But on further thought he told himself that Nwoye was not worth fighting for. Why, he cried in his heart, should he, Okonkwo, of all people, be cursed with such a son? He saw clearly in it the finger of his personal god or *chi*. For how else could he explain his great misfortune and exile and now his despicable son's behavior? Now that he had time to think of it, his son's crime stood out in its stark enormity. To abandon the gods of one's father and go about with a lot of effeminate men clucking like old hens was the very depth of abomination. Suppose when he died all his male children decided to follow Nwoye's steps and abandon their ancestors? Okonkwo felt a cold shudder run through him at the terrible prospect, like the prospect of annihilation. He saw himself and his fathers crowding round their ancestral shrine waiting in vain for worship and sacrifice and finding nothing but ashes of bygone days, and his children the while praying to the white man's god. If such a thing were ever to happen, he, Okonkwo, would wipe them off the face of the earth. (137)

This wiping off is symbolic of the disappointments he intends to bring to his son Nwoye, who christened Isaac in *TFA* left him in Mbanta and went back, as a convert to the strange faith Okonkwo opposes, to the very community that holds him (Okonkwo) in high esteem. Disappointment is also intended for the entire village of Umuofia. So, he chooses the body of Obi, Isaac's son, for this mission.

The message of "the second coming" which precludes Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is rather unveiled in his *No Longer at Ease*. It is the second coming of Okonkwo, whose first coming has been cut short by a force foreign and strange to him and his people but which he has rather seen as occasioned by his people. And interestingly too, the excerpt from T.S. Eliot's "The Journey of the Magi" which precludes *NLE* ends with a thought-provoking line: "I should be glad of another death" (line 4). This entails that Okonkwo's second coming is not accompanied by the fear of the failure that had encumbered and beclouded his first coming; since he is no longer at ease, he is ready for whatever, even a second death. This becomes evident in the life of Obi, who never shows any remorse or shamefacedness for the disappointments he brings his father and Umuofia in *NLE*. The only remorse Obi feels at any time is for himself and for Clara, and not for Umuofia nor for his father.

NLE thrives peripherally on the effects of western education on local culture, showing how Obi Okonkwo, who has left Umuofia for the Whiteman's education intact, returns home a divided personality. But beneath this periphery lies a depth of figurative semantics, in which Obi's "divided personality" is seen to have been conditioned at home and, by extension, from birth. How do we know this? Obi has been selected by Umuofia, under the first scholarship scheme that has come to them from England (kudos to his exceptional academic brilliance), "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" (*NLE* 7). In these words - "his self-will was not new" - lie the core of Obi's personality. His personality has already been conditioned at home in Umuofia, and at the fore of this personality is located that same spirit of resoluteness (or self-will) which is the core part of Okonkwo's personality. Obi's self-will remains unmalleable, even while in a foreign land, just as Okonkwo's unyielding loyalty to "grand, old way" (*TFA* 150). What he carries with himself to England is what he returns with: that old

self-self-will of his. If one must talk about change, then one must think of a societal change that looms large and swallows up an individual because "the Nigeria [Obi] returned to was in many ways different from the picture he had carried in his mind during those four years" (13).

From the beginning of this paper, we have been hinting at the two dimensions of Okonkwo's revengeful plan as he returns in the person of Obi. One of these dimensions is his revengeful plan against his son Isaac who fathers his new self as Obi. Okonkwo has meant what he said concerning his children who would abandon the ways of his ancestors for any foreign religion. He has vowed to "wipe them off the face of the earth" (TFA 137). Now Isaac is old as poverty has dealt miserably with him and his wife while Obi studies abroad. Obi wonders upon his return, but in ridicule amazement, why "after nearly thirty years" service in the church his father should retire on a salary of two pounds a month, a good slice of which went back to the same church by way of class fees and other contributions" (NLE 55). In point of fact, Obi has not heartedly believed in the God of his father, Isaac, because he is not a true son of Isaac. Just as Okonkwo had envisioned his father Unoka in his son Nwoye, so would one envision Okonkwo in Nwoye's son Obi. And so, Okonkwo's retaliation through Obi is to likewise reject Nwoye's religion as he had rejected his; so he thinks, during his conversation with Isaac: "What would happen if I stood up and said to him: 'Father, I no longer believe in your God'?" (NLE 56). However, Obi does not make an open admittance of this thought. But evidently, he means every word of it; for the four years he sojourned in England on academic purpose, he never read his Bible (NLE 57). Obi does not lack the boldness to tell his father what he thinks of him as well as his God, but he simply chooses not to make a show of this thought. By denouncing, though inwardly, the God of his father, Obi has consequently denounced his father; just like the way Nwoye denounced Okonkwo by denouncing Okonkwo's religion. But that Obi does not make an open denouncement of his father has a bonding resemblance with Okonkwo's own attitudinal attribute in not making an open denouncement of his own father, Unoka, who he has envisioned with vehement hatred for leading a life of failure and ridiculousness. Okonkwo possesses an exceptional attitude for parental respect and, in reincarnating, he does not leave this attitude behind. So, while in Obi, he still carries on with this aspect of his character that admits parental respect.

While the just-mentioned scenario about Obi may be seen as intrapersonal in the course of Okonkwo's revengeful mission, Obi's intention to marry Clara is an open confrontation against tradition; it is intended as an attack on Umuofia's tradition and as a test of Isaac's Christian faith. We have noted that Obi does not believe in the God of his father Isaac, as is wont a son whose self-will is bent on following adherently his own thought. But in the absence of belief in God, one must believe in something. However, we are not made to know what else Obi believes in. Perhaps he does not believe in anything because he has not come to bring improvement on anything but to create disappointments where there may be specters of hope. In his previous life, he has attempted to fight "the white man" who "has put a knife on the things that held us together" (TFA 158), but the people he has fought for turn their back on him. The knife has rather torn him into shreds, and things can no longer be the same. So, he has returned now but as a broken soul, not seeking the greatness of his land anymore but its folly, wearing the mask of hopeful prospects.

When Clara tells Obi that she is an *osu* and therefore cannot marry him, he responds with a shout of "Nonsense!" (NLE 71) in the same spirit as he has responded with "Let them say what they like" (NLE 36) when Joseph has asked him: "What will the people of other towns say when they hear that a son of Umuofia returned from England and shared a room in Obalende?" (NLE 36). Truly, Obi does not care what people say. In this regard, he fits well into the frame of Okonkwo who never really cares what people think whenever he is pursuing his thoughts. Obi shouts "Nonsense!" and proceeds with his line of thought. He "knew better than anyone else that his family would violently oppose the idea of marrying an *osu*. Who wouldn't? But for him, it was either Clara or nobody. Family ties were all very well as long as they did not interfere with Clara" (NLE 75). This resoluteness is a reflection of Okonkwo's in terms of his pursuance of his personal goal. Obi does not even think about tradition, just as Okonkwo never reasons the consequences of his actions whenever he is angry and set to do anything; "Okonkwo was not the man to stop beating somebody half-way through, not even for fear of a goddess" (TFA 25). This is not to say that Okonkwo never really cares what people think about him. In fact, he really does whenever the thought is connected to his societal status. This explains the reason why he kills Ikemefuna; for fear of being "thought weak." And this same attribute persists in Obi of whom it is said: "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 round and answer: 'I'm sorry, but my car is off the road. You see I couldn't pay my insurance premium?'" (98). It is obvious here that that same character of pride resident in Okonkwo is not lacking in Obi. It is this pride that leads Okonkwo to his tragic end; it is the same pride that he has imbibed in Obi to bring about the disappointments he has purported.

When Obi visits home to see his sick mother and also discuss his marriage prospects with his father, his father has told him in the course of the discussion that he "can not marry the girl" (*NLE* 120). But then he uses the content of the doctrine of his father's own religion to question the grounds on which his father has made the decision. He reminds him that "the Bible says that in Christ there are no bond or free" (133) and goes ahead to impress his reason upon him: "Our fathers in their darkness and ignorance called an innocent man *osu*, a thing given to idols, and thereafter he became an outcast, and his children, and his children's children for ever. But have we not seen the light of the Gospel?' Obi used the very words that his father might have used in talking to his heathen kinsmen" (133). After his argument with Isaac his father, Obi finds that "his father had not appeared as difficult as he had expected...he had clearly weakened" (134). Nothing would have made the Okonkwo in Obi happier than to see Isaac defeated, weakened, and disappointed. This is one part of the two-dimensional purpose of Okonkwo's reincarnation, the groundbreaking aspect of this purpose being the moment Obi goes behind bars. Without being told, one must realize that this is the worst moment in the life of Isaac Okonkwo. But Obi's intention is never to hurt his mother. This is why he feels very hurt himself when his mother tells him: "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 ... But if you do the thing while I am alive, you will have my blood on your head, because I shall kill myself" (135-36). And unfortunately, his mother even dies without the marriage taking place.

The next segment in the purpose of Okonkwo's reincarnation, we have already hinted, is his retaliation against Umuofia as a community, for backing him at the crucial moment he had needed them the most. This aspect of his retaliation, we have also pointed out, is equally perpetrated through the agent of disappointment. And to attain the level at which he must create a communal disappointment for the people, Okonkwo must retain in his second coming his physical qualities of industriousness and determination. And seeing that his community is changing, he must play along with them. Therefore, he invests these qualities, not into farming again, but into education. He grows the best in academics among his equals—just as he has done in his previous life in terms of farming and wrestling, the two concepts that are gradually becoming less important among his people—and attracts the scholarship that comes to them from England. Umuofia contribute "eight hundred pounds," although it is "to be repaid within four years of his return" (7). And they agree that he will go and study Law. But he gives them their first disappointment by opting in for English instead of the proposed Law. Their next disappointment is to see him return with an *osu* and vow to marry her even against the dictates of their tradition. And their greatest disappointment—just as Isaac must have felt—is to see him soil his hands with bribery and get locked behind bars for it. So, none of the aims and hopes of Umuofians for sending Obi to study in England eventually comes true. He pays them back with the other side of the coin, just as they had paid Okonkwo with disappointment in the form of abandonment.

In conclusion, the aspects of Obi Okonkwo's character (in *No Longer at Ease*) which resemble those of Okonkwo (in *Things Fall Apart*) have been utilized here in an effort to argue that Obi is the reincarnation of Okonkwo who, we have argued, returns to carry out a revenge or to retaliate against both Okonkwo's son Nwoye and the community of Umuofia. Okonkwo has returned for Nwoye to try his new-found religion (into which he finds him not completely engrossed since he still retains certain beliefs in the Igbo traditional religion such as the belief in *osu*) and to give him the kind of disappointment he had given him in *Things Fall Apart*. Also, he has returned for Umuofia to pay them in the same coin they had paid him in *TFA*, the coin of disappointment. We have made use of the concept of reincarnation according to Igbo traditional belief—a concept that is at the same time incorporated within the world literary space—to drive home our point. But this study has not been wholesomely grasped in that in the process of reincarnation, the discarnate soul does not take hold of the terrestrial body through which it intends to reincarnate holistically. There is still left some aspect of the mindset of the terrestrial being that is not enveloped by the discarnate soul. It is this aspect that sometimes says or does things contrary to the characteristics of the previous life of the discarnate soul. In Obi Okonkwo, this scenario occurs. This is the aspect, which this study does not cover, and which therefore calls for further research.

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