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Cultural Hybridity and Displacement in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*

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Abstract:

*Hybridity is an essential condition of post colonialism. It is an aftermath condition of colonialism. Sometimes it is easy for the coloniser and coloniser to find intermediate spaces in between in the form of cultural interchange. However, the colonized identity in general is left diffused, confused and displaced unable to find a balance between the two states. Several postcolonial texts have created such displaced or 'in between' characters to use the words of Homi Bhaba. Homi Bhaba has dealt at length with the problem of hybridity and mimicry. The colonial condition distorts the identity of the colonised, and to follow Fanon's analysis, the distance creates anger that legitimizes violence. It also creates a 'third dimension'. The post colonial condition is one of split identity. Yet it can lead to a potpourri culture as in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. In this context the paper tries to study the displacement of Obi O'Konkwo in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer At Ease* and his discomfiture at the hybrid condition.*

Keywords: *in-between, displaced, hybrid, rootless, decolonisation*

In the socio-cultural milieu 'hybridity' is used as an explicative term meaning the flow of information and the movement of people in this ever evolving, interconnected and interactive world that has been a profound reason behind the formation of a new culture. Thus it is a term that serves as a useful tool in forming a discourse of 'racial mixing' which could not be thought of, for instance, at the end of 18th century. During this time hybrid meant the offspring of a 'black' and 'white' parents. Hybridity as a racial phenomenon condones the thesis that identity is constructed through a negotiation, recognition, and adaptation of differences and the presence of fissures, gaps and contradictions is not necessarily a sign of failure. Hybridity thus has been taken up a positive bearing.

In postcolonial terms according to Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin (2006) hybridism occurs as a result of economic and political expansion and control when the coloniser 'diluted' the indigenous, social, governmental religious practices of the colonised people to change and assimilate into a new social mould. Homi Bhaba (1994) however claims that it is difficult to assume that differences in cultural practices within different groups may easily be fitted together. However, if one sees the context of Malaysia, a pluralistic country, one would notice that the Malaysian society has proven its ability to be one of the select few that has been able to prove that differences in cultural practices could be a catalyst, not a hindrance amongst different groups to co-exist. Thus as Bhaba says, though it is dangerous to limit oneself in understanding the ways cultural diversity coexists, the process of cultural hybridity may give rise to new and unidentifiable, a totally new era of negotiation of meaning and representation. Bhaba opines that controversies are inevitable in a multi-cultural society but there is also a space for negotiation. The implication of western colonial legacy which had changed cultural ideology of a former colonised nation is central to the discourse of hybridity.

In the long essay *The Uncolonised Mind* taken from the book *'The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism'* (1983) by Ashis Nandy,¹ the well-known social psychologist presents the case of Rudyard Kipling as an ambivalent self. Nandy observes how colonisation and its process shapes the identity of the ruling and the ruled people. Any nation which has undergone the colonial process has to grapple with the loss or recovery of self. The case of Kipling is one such case. Kipling on the one hand believed in the coloniser's role as a patron and ruling body. In the poem *The White Man's Burden* Kipling assigns it as a duty to the coloniser to be a civilising force for the non west. Yet in a work like *Kim* he expresses his magniloquent desire and love for India. Kipling thus is a member of the 'ruling' caught between the identities of the ruling and the 'ruled'. This duality was a result of his growing up years in India and Britain. Brought up in an Indian environment, by Indian servants, he looked an Indian. His relationship to his Victorian parents was troublesome. His British education tried to instill in him the instincts of a 'Sahib' who would rule over Indian subjects. Ironically Kipling developed within himself an admiration for England that had taught him to be a 'bicultural Sahib'. However, the sadism of English people did not allow him to identify with the British. Instead he identified with the Indians. Although he attempted to search for cultural roots through service rendered to imperial authority, but the softer, creative happier part of Kipling was Indian. Kipling admired English culture but loved India. His love for India equipped him to write captivately about India. Colonialism which had inculcated this biculturalism in him was very much reflected in his novel *'Kim'*.

Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* expresses in many ways the wonder and amazement for India through the eyes of an orphaned boy named Kimball O' Hara, shortly named Kim who develops a strong spiritual bond with a Tibetan lama; who in turn is in search for the River where the arrow fell, the River of Arrow and salvation from the Wheel of Things. Kim, a white boy, of Irish descent, becomes a 'chela' of the Tibetan monk and together they embark on a journey for Enlightenment traversing great parts of India. On the way Kim

is assigned by Mahbub to carry a message as far as Umbala, the message being 'The pedigree of the white stallion is fully established.' ⁱⁱKim is seen here in double identities. He is spiritually bonded to the Tibetan lama, but at the same time he is excited at carrying out duties which will influence state policies. They hear of the Red Bull on the green grass which is another part of the search. The Red Bull on the Green grass is the symbol of the regimental flag. While the Indian looks for spiritual salvation, the white child looks for the regimental flag. Thus the contrast between the colonized mind and colonizer is brought out. Kim, just a child has a strong sense of the colonial superiority of the Regiment and at the same time a strong attachment towards the first relic of India, the Tibetan lama. So Kim although a 'chela' is actually a patron of the Tibetan lama as a representative of the 'Sahib' Thus Kim is the other self of Kipling himself and represents the duality of identity that colonisation leads to even in the self of the coloniser.

There are numerous instances of colonial wonder in Kim. The wonder of Kim at the Ajab Ghar in Lahore is an instance. The first instance of Indian splendence, can be seen as the view seen from the Grand Trunk Road:

It was beautiful to behold the many-yoked grain and cotton wagons crawling over the country roads: one could hear the axles, complaining a mile away, coming nearer, till with shouts and yells and bad words they climbed up the steep incline and plunged on the hard main road, carter reviling carter. It was equally beautiful to watch the people, little clumps of red and blue and pink and white and saffron, turning aside to go to their own villages, dispersing and growing small by twos and threes across the level plain. (P-55)

There is definitely a colonial flavour in such a description, the narrator through Kim's eyes reveals a wonder and consequent desire for the Indian colony. The lama is not only a figure of reverence but there is something of the Buddhist splendence in their form of the jewel on his fingers. India through the narrator's eyes emerges not only as naturally rich but materially rich.

The strangest thing is the Red Bull on the green flag becomes synonymous with salvation. The colonial regimental flag is the path to 'Nirvana'. This is a colonial's attitude of projecting the colonial superiority and the Red Bull on a background of Irish Green is a symbol of war. The implication seems to be that the Indian search for freedom is suppressed by the colonial cry for war with a false reassurance that it means salvation and Kim, the Irish boy is a symbol of this colonial superiority over the Indian mind for in the garb of the 'chela' he is the patron.

The whole search had been an illusion, the colonizer's way of weaning the Indian into obeisance, into training to be a 'Sahib' as the lama is asked to do, to conscript in war and end up churning sahibs out of Indians through a process of colonial patronage. The colonizer with false promises of salvation creates its own superiority over an obviously superior country by leading the Search to an end of regimental triumph, The Red Bull on A Green Flag. Kim is thus a 'sahib' child caught between love for the colonized country and reverence and awe for the strength and might of his own country. Kim thus represents the hybrid situation from the coloniser's angle.

This kind of duality of experience can be seen in modern African novels and short stories too. '*Killing Time*' is a short story penned by Nasibu Mwanukuzi, a Tanzanian writer, poet and musician. In '*Killing Time*' a young narrator sitting in a cafe, spending time lazily, watches a man of fifty or above, sitting with a glass of beer. As time goes by, the narrator notices that the man is lost in thought and is seriously involved in some personal dilemma. Soon after, the cafe is filled with smoke and the old man starts rising up in the air with the table and half emptied glass with him. Whether the vision is real or not is questionable. Nasibu in '*Killing Time*' is interweaving reality with magic. This can be an instance of adding the colour of fantasy to a newly emerging culture which is from an African point of view, dull and dry. Once western culture is introduced, its rationalized logic makes the illogical, supernatural, primitive indigenous cultures insignificant and leaves the natives in hand of a culture which is artificial, rational, and detached. Killing time through the short story '*Killing Time*' represents the irony of a post-colonial hybridised culture that seeks to recover some of the harmony and myth of the earlier culture that seems to be lost or hidden somewhere under the dominating culture.

Bhaba in '*The Location of Culture*' exploits and engenders the moments of postcolonial ambivalence that structure social authority. Bhaba shows how the legitimizing narratives of cultural domination can be displaced to reveal a 'third space'. Here the most creative forms of cultural identity are produced on the boundaries 'in-between', the intersection and overlaps that exist between class, gender, race etc. Bhaba describes the identity of a postcolonial as an 'enigmatic question' ⁱⁱⁱ The colonial situation gives rise to a perverse situation of alienation arising out of similar acts of the civil government. The shadow of the colonised man is thus a split identity. 'I want to suggest, the image of a post-Enlightenment man, tethered to, not confronted by his dark reflection, the shadow of the colonized man, that splits his presence, distorts his outline, breaches his boundaries, repeats his action at a distance disturbs and divides the very time of his being.' ^{iv}In this context Bhaba analyses Fanon and says that the myth of Man and Society is fundamentally undermined in the colonial situation. Everyday life exhibits a 'constellation of delirium' that mediates the normal social reactions of its subjects: 'The Negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation.'^vThis creates a sense of difference, alienation which explains the validity of violence in the colonial relation.

In the context of colonial otherness Bhaba says the disturbing in-betweenness is the white man's artifice inscribed on the black man's body. This kind of intermixture Bhaba calls 'doubling' which he says leads to a 'third dimension'. Making a survey of Said, Fanon, Lacan, ... in this book Bhaba comes to the conclusion that culture is translational.

In '*The Midnight's Children*' Rushdie sees the doggerel postmodern, post-colonial India through the perforated sheet of Dr. Aziz. Saleem Sinai, the protagonist, becomes the archetypal symbol of alienation in modern postcolonial society; the fragmented individual, caught in a time warp, belonging everywhere and nowhere. The world seen through the symbol of the perforated sheet is a medley of Muslim, Hindu, rituals, lifestyles in a medley of postcolonial madness, that was India. Coming at a time when Indian literary scene was really languishing, Rushdie's novel was instrumental in reshaping the literary landscape of postcolonial India by diving headlong into the partition narrative and subsequently tracing the growth of a very different kind of post-independence national consciousness. The novel a classic example of 'magic realist' literature follows suit of Gabriel Garcia Marquez' '*Hundred Years of Solitude*' (1967)

and G.V.Desani's *All About H. Hatter*. (1948) At once a bildungsroman and a political satire, it is narrated by Saleem Sinai, Rushdie's protagonist, one of the thousand and one infants born at the exact stroke of midnight on 15 August 1947. In the opening page itself Saleem declares 'On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. Clock hands joined palms in respectful greeting as I came. Oh spell it out, spell it out: at the precise instant of India's arrival at independence, I tumbled forth into the world.... thanks to the occult tyrannies of those blandly saluting clocks I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country. For the next three decades, there was to be no escape.'^v The moment Saleem is born his fate becomes intertwined with the fate of the emerging country, but initially he is dashed into the cooking pot of Dr. Aziz and Naseem Ghani. The family history of Aziz is brilliantly interwoven with the tapestry of post-independence India trying to find its identity. Instead of trying to find a monolithic identity Saleem advocates the embracing of a chaotic, multifaceted existence. Saleem insists 'I have been a swallower of lives; and to know me, just the one of me, you'll have to swallow the lot as well. Consumed multitudes are jostling and showing inside me.'^{vi} Thus Saleem is the 'melting pot' of postcolonial India. Saleem's journey flashes back to the story of his grandparents, Aadam Aziz and Naseem Ghani in Kashmir and then chronicles the story of his mother Mumtaz/Amina who marries Ahmed Sinai and is forced to flee to Bombay on the occasion of the freedom movement. Saleem later in the novel calls himself 'the living proof of the fabulous nature of this collective dream in the context of the rigmaroles of Bombay; but adds 'for the moment I shall turn away from these generalized, macrocosmic notions to concentrate upon a more private ritual; I shall not describe the mass bloodletting in progress on the frontiers of the divided Punjab (where partitioned nations are washing themselves in one another's blood.) I shall avert my eyes from the violence in Bengal and the long pacifying walk of Mahatma Gandhi. Selfish? Narrow minded? Well, perhaps; but excusably so, in my opinion. After all, one is not born every day.'^{vii} Saleem plays his role of connecting the confused picture of macrocosmic India in a pitiable, miserable, undirected state of hybridity with the coconut festival of Bombay and concentrates on the latter rather than nothing but gazing upon the blood bath in the rest of the country helplessly. Saleem however hesitant at first assumes his new role. Saleem becomes further a representative of pot pourri Indian culture and subculture when it is revealed that he has not got a Muslim identity, but happens to be the son of an Englishman William Methwold, switched at birth by his nanny Mary Pereira with Ahmed and Amina's real son Shiva. Shiva is another child with special powers like Saleem, but he languishes in the streets of Bombay. That is how the doggerel Bombay street life becomes projected in the novel. As the narrative follows the 'children of midnight', especially Saleem, Shiva and Parvati-the Witch, through their life amidst the monumental historical events shaping the country- like the Indo Chinese war of 1965, the Indo-Pakistan war of 1971 and especially the Dark Years of Emergency imposed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi—these so called arbiter's of the nation's destiny are revealed to be impotent and powerless in the state of tyranny. Yet Saleem does not give way to fatalism, linked to the multiple cultures of Muslim lineage, English inheritance, Hindu counterparts Saleem stands as a hybrid mixture like the Indian melting pot.

Jean Rhys' *The Wide Sargasso Sea* is another story of displacement and resultant loss of identity. Based upon the British novel Jane Eyre's alienated character Bertha Mason, Rhys looks at the displacement of Antoinette another 'creole' woman. Jane Eyre's Bertha Mason is almost a dangerous and bestial figure, despised and feared, and who has been given no utterance. In the rigid regimes of white domination of the Victorian Age she finds herself silenced, alienated and isolated. Jean Rhys' rereading of *Jane Eyre* gives rise to a second Bertha Mason as she explores this problematic issue of creole (woman's) identity in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The novel actually foregrounds the dialectic between place and displacement which has been at the centre of postcolonial societies and literatures. Displacement generates the crisis in self-image. In Rhys' novel this Creole woman gets a chance to narrate her own story. Rhys places Bronte's faceless, pastless, rootless lunatic spatially and historically and gives her a voice, a past a name and finally an identity. It is pointed out in the narration that her name is not Bertha which is a British name given by her British husband, but she is Antoinette. Antoinette has been displaced from her island home when an English gentleman had married her by trickery. She has been 'uprooted and shipped off' to England and kept locked up in an ugly room without a looking glass so that she misses her 'self-image' and she is branded as a lunatic and away from her lush green islands she has to live a dull, drab life. The trauma of her painful marriage and subsequent attic prison makes her lose her sense of self identity. To create the beguiling world of Antoinette's island, Rhys drew on her own West Indian memories, glimpsed only fleetingly in her metropolitan novels. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* the vision of her childhood blooms into the overwhelmingly lush and tragically ravaged Eden of Coulibri in 'Jamaica'. 'It was a beautiful place, even Rochester is driven to rhapsodize, 'wild, untouched, above all untouched, with an alien, disturbing, secret loveliness.'^{viii} From such a place Antoinette is displaced to become a non-descript 'Bertha'. The Looking glass motif plays a part here. / 'There is no looking glass here and I don't know what I am like now'. Also she cannot find answer to her questions "What am I doing in this place and who am I" "Why have I been brought here? For what reason? ...What is it I must do?" The past comes rushing back to her when she sees her old red dress. 'the colour of fire and sunset'. The past comes back upon her 'The scent that came from the dress was very faint at first, then it grew stronger. The smell of vetivert and frangipani, of cinnamon and dust and lime trees when they are flowering. The smell of the sun and smell of the rain.' all come rushing back upon her as she is taken back to her roots through the dress and she finds her own identity. The identity which is lost through displacement can only be saved through the fire that consumes her. At the end of another dream she comes to a self-recognition "I know now". Antoinette as the child of a creole mother and British father had an insecure childhood which was intensified by domestic situation and social climate of the colony. The lonely girl grew up in an unstable world where the father had died relatives had deserted, and the house was burnt out one night by an angry mob. The terrified child grew up as a sad girl with an already shattered self-experience which her husband found easy to 'break up'. Antoinette's attempt to be merged in to some collective identity by means of relating herself to the metropolitan white turns out to be devastatingly frustrating. The creole woman under the yoke of racial, sexual, imperial domination realises that ultimately her identity lies with the black women in the islands and not with the metropolitan whites.^{ix} Bertha is thus a displaced character who is a victim of hybridization for she cannot accommodate the two spaces within her and suffers from a loss of identity.

In this context if we look at Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* we find Obi Okonkwo's is the story another displaced character, Obi Okonkwo the African turned European, the grandson of the reactionary Okonkwo who had killed Ikenmefuna with his matchet. Obi Okonkwo is the son of Isaac Okonkwo who had been converted into a Christian against his father's wishes. Obi Okonkwo his son has been brought up with western education. He was the choice of the Umuofian Progressive Union to be sent to England to study law at the expense of the Union which he was to repay by and by. However, Obi did not study law. He studied English which angered the Umuofian Progressive Union. But still they accepted it because studying English would earn him a place in the Civil Service. Obi was thus the son of Umuofia who having been brought up with western education had visited England 'the land of the spirits' and had returned to serve the Civil Service. Obi is the representative of the typical hybrid. Umuofian at heart having been brought up with western education and having visited England he does not know where to place himself. Having received western ideals there are many things he does not like about the Umuofians. He does not like their corrupt habits. He had brought back with the new theory 'that the public service of Nigeria would remain corrupt until the old Africans at the top were replaced by young men from the universities.' 9

Obi had been an obvious choice of the Umuofian Progressive Union. 'At the age of twelve or thirteen he had passed his Standard Six examination at the top of the whole province. Then he had 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 school where he had once been a pupil.' (p-7) Obi's going to England caused a great stir in Umuofia. The Reverend Samuel IKedi said that it was the occasion of fulfilment of prophecy

'The people which sat in darkness
Saw a great light,
And to them which sat in the region and shadow of death
To them did light spring up'

Western education and visit to England was regarded as 'light' in darkness. Obi's going to England was commemorated by a feast given by his father Mr. Isaac Okonkwo. Isaac Okonkwo had been a catechist of the Church Missionary School for twenty-five years and then retired on a pension of twenty-five pounds a year. He was the first man to build a 'zinc' house in Umuofia. Obviously it was expected he would prepare a feast. What is striking is that Nigeria which was anti-Christian in Obi's grandfather Okonkwo's time had become almost fully Christianized in Obi's time.

Obi as a Umuofian choice has a mind of his own. He can place himself neither as an Umuofian nor as a European. Mr. IKedi had told him he was being sent to England not to bring back human head like their ancestors but to bring back knowledge. However, Obi does not comply with the Umuofian Union's wish to study law. He comes back with an Honors in English. England was not a very pleasant experience for Obi. He was in England for four years and all the while he missed Nigeria, 'It seemed more like a decade than four years what with the miseries of winter than his longing to return home took on the sharpness of physical pain.' As it is Lagos is like an African England and he has great admiration for Lagos. Lagos had been a place of electric lights, motor cars, and brightly dressed girls. Obi had to stop at Lagos before moving to United Kingdom. It is not that Obi does not like Lagos. Obi has a fascination for this Westernized city. He cannot link it to the Lagos of slums and dead carcasses of dogs when he comes back. More than England it is Lagos and Nigeria which Obi has in his mind and he had written a poem on Lagos:

'How sweet it is to lie beneath a tree
At eventime 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...'

Thus even in England Obi's mind was focused on Nigeria and he could not enjoy England in the true sense. This fact comes out in many of his actions and gestures later. When he returns from a reception took place on Saturday afternoon at 4 p.m. Everybody was properly dressed in 'agbada' or European suit except the guest of honour Obi Okonkwo. He appeared in his shirt sleeves because of the heat. 'That was Obi's mistake Number One. Everybody expected a young man from England to be impressively turned out.' (p-28) The Welcome Address presented by the Secretary of the Union to Michael Obi Okonkwo B.A. (Hons) London was mellifluous with eloquent English. In contrast Obi's English was unimpressive. He spoke 'is' and 'was'. He told the Umuofians about the value of education of education for service, not white collar jobs. When he sat down the audience clapped from politeness.' It indicates that Obi had adapted the English only for necessity and to meet the expectations of his village people. He had no real love for the language which is why he had not adopted it in his soul as the Secretary of the Umuofian Progressive Union had done. It thus shows the predicament of the Western educated individuals who have to adopt Western ways to meet the expectations of his countrymen rather than out of love. When they sat for dinner Obi wanted Nigerian food. He told his friend Joseph 'I had been dying to eat pounded yams and bitter leaf soup. In England we made do with semolina, but it isn't the same thing.' He further added in the hearing of some English folk "'I am sick of boiled potatoes' with emphasis on the word 'boiled' on which he poured all his disgust. (pg. 31) The same applied to language. Four years in England had filled Obi with a greater longing for Nigeria. This feeling was so strong that sometimes he felt ashamed to study English. Whenever he got the opportunity he spoke in Ibo. Nothing gave him greater pleasure than to find another Ibo speaking student in a London bus. When he had to speak in English with his fellow tribal he lowered his voice because he felt it was humiliating to speak to one's countryman in a foreign language. It seemed as if they had no language of their own. Thus like Antoinette of 'Wide Sargasso Sea' Ibo is also a displaced individual in England who has had to imbibe western learning to maintain the order of the day, but at heart who belonged to his own little village.

Mr. Green is another interesting character in this ethos of hybridism. He is Obi's European boss who had a distinct disdain for the Umuofians. 'Mr. Green would say 'The African is corrupt through and through'. 'They are all corrupt' 'I'm all for equality and all that. I for one would hate to live to live in South Africa. But equality won't alter facts'. Obi is to some extent at one with Mr. Green's opinion that Umuofians were corrupt. But he could not go against his own people too as Mr. Green being a European could do. One of the tactics of the British civil service was to appoint many secretaries were planted to spy on Africans. 'One of their tactics was to pretend to be very friendly and broadminded. One had to know what one said.' (p-77) This tactic was adopted because the African civil servants had the habit of taking bribes. This was one habit of the Africans which Obi looked upon with disdain. In fact, at the beginning of his career he was offered a bribe for admitting the sister of a gentleman named Mr. Mark to obtain the Federal Scholarship which Obi very firmly declined. Even when the girl herself appeared and literally offered her body he was firm. This was Obi's grounding in the Western ideals which turned him totally against the habits of his own people. He had totally adapted the ideals of honesty and integrity in service of the Westerners. It comes out again later when he revolts against the Umuofian Progressive Union for opposing his engagement to Clara as she was an "Oshu". However Western lifestyle demanded some expectations from him regarding his lifestyle. 'Obi admitted that his people had a sizeable point. What they did not know was that, having laboured in sweat and tears to enroll their kinsman among the shining elite, they had to keep him there. Having made him a member of an exclusive club whose members greet one another with 'How's the car behaving? Did they expect him to turn around and answer "I'm sorry, but my car is off the road. You see I couldn't pay for my insurance premium"?' (p-90) Obi had led an extravagant life and had run into debts simply to maintain his western standards and now he was on a loan from the Umuofian Progressive Union which he had to repay and he could have taken a four month's grace from the Union, but he could not do so because he flared up in a quarrel with them over the issue of Clara. Mr. Green's comment on this matter is significant 'You know OKonkwo, I have lived in your country for fifteen years and yet I cannot begin to understand the mentality of the so-called educated Nigerian. Like this the young man at the University College, for instance, who expects the Government not only to pay his fees and fantastic allowances and find him an easy and comfortable job at the end of course; but also pay his intended.' (p-106) The fact remains that the so called educated Nigerian remains a Nigerian in the eyes of the European and the effort to make him a European is entirely on the people of his own country, not on the British because of a natural adulation the Nigerians have for the European education, manners and lifestyle.

Obi's decolonisation begins after the death of his mother when forgetting western ideals, he begins to take bribes one after another. Finally, he gets caught and nobody understands why Obi had given up his standard and ideals in this fashion. However, Obi's civil career is very much attached to his personal life. The problem of marrying Clara, his mother's demise and unacceptance of the match, his mother's bleeding finger which metaphorically becomes her bleeding heart that Obi was marrying an 'Oshu' all decolonise the fake Western lifestyle attitudes in Obi's mind and because he was severely in debt he starts taking bribes till he gets caught.

The situation was somewhat similar in India. The **Indian Civil Service (ICS)** for part of the 19th century officially known as the **Imperial Civil Service**, was the élite higher civil service of the British Empire in British India during British rule in the period between 1858 and 1947.

Its members were ultimately responsible for overseeing all government activity in the 250 districts that comprised British India and were appointed under Section XXXII of the Government of India Act 1858, enacted by the Parliament of the United Kingdom. The ICS was headed by the Secretary of State for India, a member of the British cabinet.

At first almost all the top thousand members of the ICS, known as "Civilians", were British, and had been educated in the best British schools. By 1905, five per cent were from Bengal. In 1947 there were 322 Indians and 688 British members; most of the latter left at the time of partition and independence.

Until the 1930s the Indians in the service were very few and were not given high posts by the British.^[5] Wainwright notes that by the mid-1880s, "the basis of racial discrimination in the sub-continent had solidified". Historians often rate the ICS, together with the railway system, the legal system, and the Indian Army, as among the most important legacies of British rule in India.^[vii]

These Indian Civil Servants were trained in the pattern laid down by Macaulay's Minutes of Education and were Indians in the garb of Europeans rendering service to British India. Many of their situation may be taken as a hybrid situation as Obi's. For a long time, only British officers were appointed to all covenanted posts. In 1832, the posts of *munsif* and *sadar amin* were created and opened to Indians. In 1833, the posts of deputy magistrate and deputy collector were created and opened to Indians. The ICS Act of 1861 established the Indian Civil Service. The Act of 1853 had already established the practice of recruiting covenanted civilians through competitive examinations.

It was a daunting task to compete in the Civil Service Examination. However, Satyendranath Tagore from Bengal first did it. Satyendranath was selected for the Indian Civil Service in June, 1863. He completed his probationary training and returned to India in November 1864. Satyendranath was posted to Bombay presidency, which then covered western parts of present-day Maharashtra, Gujarat and Sindh. After initial posting of four months in Bombay (now Mumbai), he had his first active posting at Ahmedabad.

With postings at numerous towns he travelled across the country. Because of his long stay away from home many in his family visited him and stayed with him for long periods. Amongst his regular visitors were his younger brothers Jyotirindranath Tagore (1849–1925) and Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), the Nobel Prize-winning poet, and his sister Swarnakumari Devi.

His posting outside Bengal helped him to learn several Indian languages. He translated Bal Gangadhar Tilak's *Geetarahasya* and Tukaram's *Abhang* poems into Bengali.^[i] Rabindranath Tagore had also translated some poems of Tukaram. Satyendranath took an active interest in the activities of the Brahma Samaj wherever he was posted, as for example at Ahmedabad and Hyderabad, Sindh.^[ix]

While in the Maharashtra region he had close contacts with many of the leading reformers and Prarthana Samaj figures —Mahadev Govind Ranade, Kashinath Trimbak Telang, Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar and Narayan Ganesh Chandavarkar.

He served in the ICS for about thirty years and retired as Judge of Satara in Maharashtra in 1897.^[xi]

Satyendranath also worked hard for women's emancipation. All this goes to show that Indian civil servants like Satyendranath in spite of serving under the British had a strong attraction for their own country and own culture which he cultivated in spite of having British overlords. We may here draw a similar parallel to Obi's case although Obi's case was more of a personal tragedy than anything else. (5760 words)

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- ix. Rhys, Jean, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Penguin Books, 1966 Introduction p ix
- x. Essay: *Jane Eyre and Jean Rhys: Gendering the Subalternity*, Kundu, Rama ed. P. Mallikarjuna Rao, *Postcolonial Theory and Literature*, Atlantic Publishers, 2008
- xi. Achebe Chinua, *No Longer at Ease*, African Writers Series, 1960, 2008 (Rpt.) p-7 All other references are marked in the text.