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MORAL RESPONSIBILITY AND TRAGEDY IN JOSEPH CONRAD'S LORD JIM AND CHINUA ACHEBE'S NO LONGER AT EASE

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Contents

ABSTRACT

This dissertation approaches the problem of morality and social responsibility as two related elements which have been a theme treated by many writers, notably in the Western world and Africa. I set out to discuss here two novels, namely Conrad's *Lord Jim* (1900) and Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1961), which provide a platform for discussion of morality and its relevance in the modern context.

This research work attempts to bridge cultural, social, and historical differences separating the two works, and brings to light the universality of morality, and the importance attributed to it by writers anxious to reassert traditional moral values in a degenerate present. The changes which have ushered in the modern world have had an important impact on traditional morality. The basic precept of morality, crystallized in 'The Golden Rule': 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you', is increasingly challenged by the modern conception of the individual's right to pursue his own happiness; moral behaviour does not always involve self-sacrifice for others, but when it does so, we are more able to recognize its worth and admire its beauty. Glorification of money and materialism, chaotic transformation under the impact of speed, hugeness and standardization, intellectual and scientific revolutions shaking prior conceptions of human nature, are characteristics of the modern word, in the face of which traditional morality is losing its hold on the individual.

Moral failure is the main theme addressed in the two novels. The two authors investigate the reasons for this failure, without, however, bringing clear-cut conclusions. The two approaches used in this work, namely, the socio-ethical and the tragic, is an attempt to cover the possible reasons of the protagonists' moral failure as advanced by the two authors. While Conrad and Achebe present a universal view of morality, i.e., the need to assert such notions as social responsibility and self-sacrifice, the socio-cultural factors play a crucial role in shaping the protagonists' destinies within their respective communities. While the two authors 'agree' on the basic tenet of morality, they are aware of the changes in the societies they live in. Western society as portrayed by Conrad is characterized by moral anarchy and skepticism. Conrad is aware of the difficulty of keeping to traditional moral values in view of the new modern realities, and deplores the Western society's loss of fortitude and spirituality. On the other hand, African society as portrayed by Achebe is losing its traditional cohesion due to its encounter with Europe, and is in search of a more tenable modernity. Achebe is aware that the path towards change is inevitable, but warns against a blind adoption of modern Western cultural precepts, and points out the importance of maintaining in some degree traditional identity and moral values.

In view of the similarities highlighted, and despite the differences noted, Conrad and Achebe transcend the disillusionment imposed by a chaotic present, and attain the stature of moral teachers.

Introduction

The present dissertation is a comparative study dealing with moral positions and with the notion of individual responsibility in society in intercultural contexts. It focuses on two well known works of fiction, namely Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim (1900)* and Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease (1960)*[1].

A comparative study between the works of two authors coming from two different worlds may seem, at first sight, a daunting task. In addition to the different socio-historical backgrounds of the two novelists, much has been written on the way in which Achebe reacted against and criticized Conrad's Western, colonial, discriminating discourse against Africa in one of his most famous works: *Heart of Darkness(1902)*. The present study is an attempt to go beyond this issue, and to demonstrate that both authors have addressed similar matters about the human condition, even if the situations described are very different in terms of time and location. The study that follows will, hopefully, investigate and elucidate the similarities highlighted in both works. We will also be concerned with significant differences, so that the works are not disconnected from their cultural and social specificities; these, in fact, play an important role in shaping the protagonists' fates.

Our intention is to offer a comparative study that treats on an equal footing content and style. Besides, we will take into consideration the impact of the socio-historical context on the worldview of both authors. The latter, as we shall see, is responsible for the main differences underlying the two works. *Lord Jim* and *No Longer at Ease* thus figure similar situations in which the protagonists fail to apply ethical values of the highest order to achieve their altruistic aims. The failure of the protagonists to cope with difficulties and to live up to personal (even heroic) and public expectations is also discussed from the part of the authors from the tragic view point.

The title of this dissertation, namely, Moral Responsibility and Tragedy, suggests the deep connection which exists between the two concepts. The two works present an insight into the moral failure of the main protagonists from different angles. The open possibilities of interpretation offered by the two novels is one of the features which highlights their modernist character. As we shall see, there is no attempt on the part of the two authors to offer to the readers what course of action one should take under such critical circumstances as the ones they present. On the contrary, Conrad and Achebe invite us to contribute to their questioning by offering us the possible options left to their heroes. The reasons

[1] The York edition of *Lord Jim* will be used (2002); the Heinemann edition will be used in respect of *No Longer At Ease (1987)*. Thereafter, the two novels will be abbreviated as L J and NLAE. All page references will be indicated in brackets in the text.

of the protagonists' failure and its consequences are presented from two different perspectives, the ethical and the tragic, hence the organization of the present work into two parts.

The field of moral philosophy is essentially concerned with the value of human life; morality enables individuals to make their lives more worth living. The primitive man's life is concerned with the fulfilment of base, i.e. imperative needs, as finding food, seeking shelter from dangers or enemies,...; he does not ponder on the meaning and the aims of his life. The task of the moralist is to highlight the meaning of one's actions, attaining, thus, mastery over natural instincts, and thus lead 'a moral life'. In the following passage, Durant Drake discusses the field of ethics, and its important role in human life:

> 'To know what exists, in its stark reality, is the concern of natural science and natural philosophy; to know what matters, is the field of moral philosophy, or ethics. The one group of studies deals with facts simply as facts, the other with their values. Human life is checkered with the sunshine and shadow of good and evil, joy and pain; it is these qualitative differences that make it something more than a meaningless eddy in the cosmic whirl. Natural philosophy (including the physical and psychological sciences), drawing its impartial map of existence, is interesting and important; it informs us about our environment and ourselves, shows us our resources and our powers, what we can do and how to do it. Moral philosophy asks the deeper and more significant question, What SHALL we do? For the momentous fact about life is that it has differences in value, and, more than that, that we can MAKE differences in value. Caught as we are by the irresistible flux of existence, we find ourselves able so to steer our lives as to change the proportion of light and shade, to give greater value to a life that might have had less. This possibility makes our moral problem. What shall we choose and from what refrain? To what aims shall we give our allegiance? What shall we fight for and what against?' [2]

Morality differentiates man from the other creatures; it enables him to escape the determining flux of existence, and to make life more worth living. Morality, then, is defined as the conscious obedience to the moral law, and a firm control of natural drives.

The origins of what Drake calls personal morality, crystallized in such virtues as courage, selflessness, industriousness, are internal and external. On one hand, these virtues are raised by natural, organic needs; for example, hunger and thirst counter the tendency towards laziness and promote industriousness. On the other hand, man's response to the dangers of his environment was another important incentive towards moral virtues: man had to act bravely, combating inward inclinations towards self-preservation, in order to face a natural, harsh environment. In addition to nature, man had to face hostile enemies. As Drake puts it, the 'struggles for supremacy have pricked cowardice into courage, demanded self-control instead of temper, supplanted gluttony and drunkenness by temperance'[3]. These virtues, that we consider today as the highest form of morality, have developed as

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[2] Drake, Durant. ''Introductory'', *Problems of conduct*. (Globusz Publishing, New York-Berlin,1914). <http://www.globusz.com/ebooks/Conduct/00000012.htm>

[3] Drake, Durant. ''Personal morality''. Op. Cit.

counter reactions to internal and external factors, and involved the redirection of human conduct in order to enhance his own welfare; hence, Drake calls these virtues personal. At this level, man acts morally in order to ensure his own survival.

Personal morality brings to light man's ability for moral judgement. He is able to counter instinctive drives in order to achieve certain aims. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant similarly advocates man's inner disposition to obey the moral law. According to him, man is impelled to act morally through what he calls the categorical imperative: the inner ability for moral judgement. Kant's focus on man's moral nature represented a break from prior moral theories developed by Aristotle and Plato. The latter assert that man looks beforehand at the consequences of his action, and then regulates his conduct; in other words, man acts seeking good. On the contrary, Kant asserts that man's consciousness of the necessity of moral obligation does not derive from a pre-conception of good; he argues that if man is to know the right conduct only after experiencing what is good and what is bad, he would decide for himself rules guiding him surely to the realization of his interest:

> 'If we had first to learn from experience what is good and what is bad, and if we had to wait upon experience in order to know what we ought to do and what we ought to avoid, we might perhaps feel obliged to adjust our actions as means to ends, we might even frame rules for ourselves in order to guide our conduct more surely towards the realization of those ends, but we should never experience that feeling of constraint which is the mark of moral obligation. We might know what it means to be prudent, but we should never know what it means to be moral.'[4]

Kant significantly links the moral experience to the feeling of constraint, as it indicates the repression of inward inclinations to act otherwise than morally.

This is how morality is viewed as far as the individual is concerned. However, man lives within society and interacts with other human beings; at this level, there are other moral requirements determining his conduct within the social sphere, crystallized in what is called social morality. Drake defines the latter as follows:

> 'By social morality we mean, concretely, such virtues as tender and fostering love, sympathy, obedience, subordination of selfish instincts to group-demands, the service of other individuals or of the group.'[5]

Social morality involves life with others; it requires of the individual to think of others than himself. Social morality is not a set of precepts imposed by society on the individual; Drake asserts that social

[4] Teale, A.E. *Kantian Ethics*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), P21.
[5] Drake, Durant. ''Social Morality''. Op. Cit.

morality, on contrary, is natural, i.e., instinctive. Contrary to how Rousseau presents the savage, as 'a happy-go-lucky individualist', Drake asserts that the most primitive man recognizes his duty to his neighbour, and that savage life is essentially a group-life.

The instinct of survival is presented by Drake among the main sources of social morality. It is through the spirit of cooperation, he asserts, that dangers and difficulties are overcome; a fact which is true to animals as well as men: 'Nature has socialized man by a repeated application of the method hinted at in the adage: 'United we stand, divided we fall'[6].

The struggle against enemies as well as against inanimate nature pushed individuals to come together and form a whole. The formed community, on its turn, promotes values, including personal values, and discourages bad behaviour, which may endanger its prosperity. Society, thus, plays an important role in the morality of its members. Drake comments on this point:

> 'It needs no great powers of observation to convince the members of a tribe severally that immorality of any sort-laziness, cowardice, unrestrained lust, recklessness, quarrelsomeness, insubordination, etc. in another member is detrimental to him personally. His own security and the satisfaction of his needs are thereby in some degree decreased. Contentment at the morality of the other members of the group, and anger at their immorality, are therefore among the earliest psychological reactions. No men, however savage, are insensitive to these attitudes of their fellows; and the emotional response of others to their acts is from the beginning a powerful force for morality. When contentment becomes explicitly expressed, becomes praise, commendation, honour; when anger becomes openly uttered blame, contempt, ridicule, rebuke, their power is well nigh irresistible.'[7]

Personal morality and social morality are, in fact, inseparable, because man is created to live within a social group. The personal values we have discussed, such as courage and self-sacrifice, are also moral precepts required by society. The treatment of each aspect of morality has enabled us, however, to shed light on the moral nature of man- his ability to make moral judgement and overcome his instinctive drives, as well as on his social nature- his need for others for the sake of survival and his sensitiveness to others' contentment or discontentment towards his acts. Morality, thus, is intrinsic to human nature, and promoted by society. Moreover, this highlights the universality of morality is universal, as it is recognized by every individual regardless of his socio-historical background.

In the works under study, Conrad and Achebe display a strong concern for morality. This can be explained, among other factors, by the fact that both authors lived in societies in transition. Indeed, the Igbo society of the late 20th century shares with the late Victorian and early Edwardian British society the traumatic transition from tradition to modernity. This transition is essentially marked by loss

[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.

of faith in traditional moral standards, and their replacement by the rising materialism and individualism.

In the West, scientific development shook religious and moral standards considerably. Man had been forced down from his high pedestal through two major scientific revolutions: On one hand, with the Copernican revolution, man no longer occupied the centre of the universe, but lived on a planet, among others, orbiting around the sun. On the other hand, man lost his divine essence through the Darwinian Theory which affirmed his animal origins. Moreover, Freud pointed to the mysteries of man's psychological world, which shattered his consideration as a rational and self-controlled being, and presented him as a creature controlled by inner, unconscious drives. These developments brought about a strong sense of disillusionment and depression. Traditional morality has received unredeemable blows and lost, consequently, its hold on the individual. Furthermore, technological advancement was making life increasingly easier, and enforced upon the minds material acquisition. Man's right to pursue his own happiness was given weight as opposed to the traditional value of self-sacrifice for the sake of communal good. Man acquired, thus, a new sense of freedom- that of serving his own interests and fulfilling his personal desires regardless of moral or social standards.

Loss of faith in traditional morality, together with technological developments, are reportedly the factors responsible for loss of community life and of moral degradation. The literature produced in the modern age reflects these changes, and their impact on the individual and society. As G. H. Bantock puts it, 'two basic themes of modern literature have been those of "isolation" and "relationship" within what has been considered a decaying moral order'[8]. Individualism[9]and individual alienation have become recurring subjects in modern Western literature.

For its part, African society was experiencing similar traumas at the time of Achebe's writings. The encounter with Europe has had dramatic impacts on African traditional culture. The advent of the 'white man's religion' contested with the local religious beliefs over people's mind. The stable social system reigning within villages and protected by supernatural authorities demonstrated, in certain aspects, harshness and even cruelty in order to maintain the individual's conformism to the group. The missionaries used certain violent practices to attract converts to a supposedly more just and humane religion. Putting into question the traditional religious authorities disrupted irremediably social cohesion. This can be reflected in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart(1958)*, where the main protagonist, Okonkwo, prefers to die instead of witnessing the downfall of the traditional moral standards due to the coming of the European culture.

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[8] Qt in: Cook, David. *African Literature: A Critical View*. (London: Longman, 1977), p6.

[9] The term "individualism" refers in this dissertation to the individual's self-centeredness.

The trauma resulting from European colonialism was long felt after independence. As John J. Su puts it in his *Ethics and Nostalgia in the Contemporary Novel*, 'in subsequent decades, trauma has become the prevailing metaphor in [the writers'] descriptions of African history'[10]. Besides, modern cities like Lagos and Ibadan were quickly developing, replacing the traditional enclosed villages; Individuals were lured unto material acquisitiveness and white collar jobs. The right to pursue one's own happiness was increasingly stressed in contrast to traditional social conformism.

We notice, thus, striking similarities between Western and African societies at a certain point of their historical development. The two societies shared the same transitional stage, characterized by loss of faith in traditional morality, irrational stress on the freedom of the individual, materialism and loss of communal ties. These are the features characterizing a society on its path towards modernity. However, these characteristics are much more marked in the Western context where we find more progress as far as science and technology are concerned. What is, then, the position of the Western writer with regard to such changing ethical values? Does he have to accept the present redefinition of moral positions? We will attempt to answer these questions through investigating Conrad's position towards these issues. In fact, in his work, Conrad expresses this loss of faith in traditional morality, and inquires into its impact on the individual and society. African society, for its part, is beginning to witness the same transformations, but still in their early stages. African writers like Achebe have concerned themselves with the dangers of moral anarchy and individual alienation to which their societies are exposed. We will attempt to study Achebe's position in this respect and bring to light the similarities and differences between the two writers' positions, as well as their significance.

Conrad and Achebe are aware that the changes characterizing their societies are unavoidable. However, their fiction displays a marked need to reassert those traditional moral standards which they judge fundamental. As W. W. Robson puts it, Conrad's work 'implies his own high moral and spiritual standards, and he assumed that his readers understood them'[11]. Indeed, throughout his work, Conrad promotes moral standards imbued with the late Victorian spirit including courage, self-sacrifice, devotion to duty,...Besides, Conrad writes at the end of the 19th century, and is considered among the forerunners of modernism. As a consequence, he is split between allegiance to romantic, chivalric moral standards, and doubt about their reliability and place in the modern age. Kenneth Graham provides the elements that link Conrad to another famous modernist writer and contemporary, Henry James; he mainly stresses the 'underlying skeptical anxiety about human culture and nature, the fascination with acts of betrayal and lying' and 'the downfall of the idealists'. He adds:

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[10] Su, John J. *Ethics and Nostalgia in the Contemporary Novel*. (Cambridge University Press, 2005), P141.
[11] Robson, W. W. *Modern English Literature*. (Oxford University Press, 1970), P36.

> 'In the exemplary shaping and analytic intensity of their fiction, they transmitted to their contemporaries the experience of being between two worlds: the American and the Polish expatriot, both brought up in their respective traditions of idealism and commitment to value-in-action, and now confronting with comparable intelligence and feeling and formal experimentation, in their new modern age, its broken bone and its heart of darkness.'[12]

Similarly to James, Conrad belongs to two worlds, the world of commitment to moral standards, and that of the disappointing experience of the modern age. Hence, we notice in his work an advocacy of moral standards as well as a hesitancy to maintain idealistic beliefs.

Similarly, Achebe can be described as belonging to two worlds; indeed, Achebe writes at a time characterized by a 'cultural clash'; traditional and modern cultures are in contention over the African space. Achebe does not show a zealous allegiance to Western culture, nor does he advocate complete reliance on traditional values. In his work, he displays his opposition to some aspects of African traditional culture, such as the caste system, as well as aspects of modern culture, such as individualism. In fact, Achebe rejects absolutism; for instance, he asserts that what leads Okonkwo to meet his tragic end is his lack of flexibility and his rejection of the 'new dispensation'. However, as John J. Su puts it, his rejection of absolutism does not conceal his advocacy of morality:

> 'The rejection of absolutism in Achebe's thought, however, does not imply a complete rejection of moral foundationalism. Over the course of his career, Achebe has inconsistently though repeatedly insisted on the existence of basic and universal moral distinctions. ''[T]he frontier between good and evil must not be blurred [...] no matter how fuzzy it may be to us, there is still a distinction between what is permissible and what is not permissible'' Achebe asserts.'[13]

Indeed, in his work Achebe calls upon the individual to assume a selective position towards tradition and modernity; the individual should be able to discern the "good" aspects characterising the two cultures, and achieve their reconciliation. This should be realized through the individual's ability of moral judgment, and not mere conformism to a particular culture. Adebayo Williams refers to Achebe's concern with morality, and affirms that he is 'A teacher by instincts and a moral crusader by inclination'[14]. Achebe asserts in his work the importance to stick to moral standards in order not to inherit the modern moral degradation that the West has experienced.

Thus, both Conrad and Achebe are writers concerned with the issue of traditional morality in increasingly skeptical environments. In the first part of this dissertation, we will focus on the writers'

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[12] Graham, Kenneth. Qt in: J. H. Stape, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*. (Cambridge University Press, 1996), P209.

[13] Su, John J. Op. Cit. p153.

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Williams, Adebayo. ''The Autumn of the Literary Patriarch : Chinua Achebe and the Politics of remembering. Harrow, Kenneth W. ed. *Research in African Literatures: Nationalism*. (Indiana University Press, 2001), P9.

investigation into the moral failure of the protagonists. The term 'investigation' is used on purpose, as is suggested in both novels through the presence of the court inquiry: both Jim and Obi are seen at court after the betrayal of the moral code.

The nature of the protagonists' moral idealism is social, in the sense that both promote altruistic values crystallizing in the help of others and self-sacrifice. This leads us to focus on the kind of relationship the individual has with society in the African and Western traditions in the first chapter. In fact, in both cultures, there is a marked urge to assert man's social nature and his need for a social group to realize moral success. Our investigation into the causes of the moral failure is to be conducted in the light of Immanuel Kant's moral theory; Although Kant asserts that every individual is naturally subordinated to obey the moral law by his own capability of reasoning, he is aware of moral failure, and presents in his theory two elements hindering man from acting morally: moral inculcation leading to a feeling of constraint and aversion, and the frailty of human nature- two elements strongly marked in both works, as we shall demonstrate. Regarding the social nature of the protagonists' moral standards, and their betrayal, the third chapter provides a discussion of the consequences of the protagonists' acts; i.e., their fate within their respective societies. We have elected in this chapter to focus on a definition of 'alienation' according to the Communitarian theory, as defined by Emile Durkheim.

Jim's and Obi's moral failure involves a break with the social contract which impels the individual to honour his duties towards society at the expense of his own interest. This social betrayal is also treated in tragic overtones by the authors, as they present it as inevitable, or rather, predetermined. In the second part, we will bring to light the authors' ability to treat the same issues, namely morality and social responsibility, through tragedy. Indeed, the works are identified as tragic novels, as they clearly display, as we will see, the conventional tragic plot: *hybris, hamartia,* and *nemesis*. Moreover, social change, as discussed in the first part, is considered as the most likely background to produce tragedy.

Fatality is intrinsically linked with tragedy. Indeed, if we have no feeling that the tragic hero is doomed from the beginning to failure and defeat, we miss an essential part of the tragic experience. In the following passage, A. C. Bradley discusses fatality, and its important role in producing the tragic effect:

> 'If we do not feel at times that the hero is, in some sense, a doomed man; that he and others drift struggling to destruction like helpless creatures borne on an irresistible flood towards a cataract; that, faulty as they may be, their fault is far from being the sole or sufficient cause of all they suffer; and that the power from which they cannot escape is relentless and immovable, we have failed to receive an essential part of the full tragic effect.'[15]

[15] Bradley, A. C. Shakespearien Tragedy. (England: Penguin Books, 1904), p41.

The heroes are unable to meet the demands of the reality because of a natural defect, inherent in their character. Conrad and Achebe express here a tragic vision of life which goes back even to Renaissance dramatists: the vision that nature endows man with defects for which he is punished and defeated. This vision can be summarized in the following passage from Fulke Greville's *Priests in Mustapha*(1596):

> 'Oh wearisome condition of humanity! Borne under one Law, to another bound: Vainely begot, and yet forbidden vanity: created sicke, commanded to be sound: what meaneth Nature by these diverse Lawes? Passion and Reason, selfe-division cause: is it the marke or Majesty of Power to make offences that it may forgive? Nature herself doth her owne defloure, to hate those errours she herself doth give. For how should man thinke that, he may not doe if Nature did not faile, and punish too? Tyrant to others, to herself unjustrr
> , onely commands things difficult and hard; Forbids us all things which it knows is lust, makes easie paines, unpossible reward.'[16]

Jim and Obi are presented as highly idealistic and virtuous; their endeavour to live along the moral code, within the surrounding moral scepticism, forces our admiration. Yet, they are predestined to moral bankruptcy because of a natural character flaw. Conrad and Achebe continue, thus, the ancient world view which brings forth the mysteriousness of the world order, which is not a simple distribution of reward and punishment. As Bradley puts it, 'tragedy would not be tragedy if it were not a painful mystery'[17]. Then, we will inquire to what extent the tragic novels achieve *catharsis*, an important element in classical tragedy; we will bring to light the authors' appropriation of this element as linked to their respective socio-historical backgrounds.

Fatality is also produced by another element that we will discuss, namely, social change. A culture in transition, as we will see, easily produces tragedy. This transition involves the questioning of the old order by the new rising one, and the entrapment of the individual between the two. Social change characterizes the socio-historical background of the two works; Conrad and Achebe present the protagonists as being helplessly caught between the two orders, namely, the traditional and the modern. Moreover, we will attempt to demonstrate the position that both protagonists are used as instruments of this transition; the failure they experience is in itself a questioning of the traditional moral code and its reliability in the new modern circumstances.

The two approaches used in this dissertation will enable us to take into consideration all the elements at stake in the novels. Being modernist works, as we have said, a simplified discussion of morality and of moral failure within changing environments is impossible. Moreover, the two parts assert the constant need on the part of the authors to advocate morality.

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[16] Qt in : Leech, Clifford. Tragedy. (Routledge, 1969), p17.

[17] Bradley, A. C. Op. Cit. p51.

We will attempt, in this work, to compare the attitudes of Conrad and Achebe towards morality, and hopefully explain the highlighted similarities and differences, as informed by their socio-historical backgrounds.

Part One

Moral Responsibility and Tragedy as Major Component of Social Interaction

Preamble:

Lord Jim and *No Longer at Ease* express Conrad's and Achebe's concern with morality, as both inquire into the failure of the main protagonists to live up to moral ideals.

Moral uncertainty characterizes the periods when these two writers produced their works. Indeed, Conrad writes at a time when scientists and psychologists, like Darwin and Freud, are questioning the nature of man, and where industrialization is transforming the surrounding world scene. The freedom of the individual is increasingly stressed as opposed to the value of leading a traditional communal life. The moral standards which have characterized the Victorian era, such as solidarity, courage, selflessness, are put into question. Faced with the surrounding moral degradation, Conrad presents in his work interrogations regarding morality, and the fading of moral standards in the changing social environment. Conrad is preoccupied with the maintenance of these moral standards, as he himself asserts that 'fidelity' to 'ideas' is the highest virtue :

> 'Those who read me know my conviction that the world, the temporal world, rests on a few, very simple ideas; so simple that they must be as old as the hills. It rests notably among others on fidelity.'[18]

Conrad speaks of the fidelity to simple and basic principles guiding the moral life of the individual. However, his work presents a contradictory view regarding this stated conservative position, as it often displays the defeat of characters attempting to live up to moral standards. Many critics refer to this contradiction, and to the resulting ambiguity of his work. As Jacques Berthoud puts it, Conrad was considered during his life-time 'alternatively a realist and a romantic'[19], two roles which contradict each other. The difficulty of defining his position suggests that he was both a realist and a romantic. On one hand he advocates romantic, Victorian moral standards, and, on the other hand, he is skeptical about their validity in the emerging modern era; as Tony Tanner puts it:

> 'Courage, self-sacrifice, the personal salvation of a confused society-are the true heroic values, values which Conrad by no means sets out to mock. But Conrad, who was something of a skeptical in temperament, started to write at a time when Western culture was no longer accepting the syndrome of romantic values unquestionably.'[20]

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[18] Warner, Oliver. *Joseph Conrad*. (Longmans, Green and CO. 1950), P29.
[19] Jacques, Berthoud. *The Major Phase*. (Cambridge University Press, 1978), P4.
[20] Tony, Tanner. *Conrad : Lord Jim*. (London: Edward Arnold, 1963), P9.

Conrad, thus, promotes moral standards, and, at the same time, assumes a questioning position towards them. His unwillingness to dispense with traditional moral values displays the importance he gives to morality, in contrast to the surrounding skepticism.

Similarly, Achebe writes at a time of moral confusion, which results essentially from the encounter with Europe. The Western values brought by colonialism clash with the local traditional standards and lessen their authority. Moreover, the increasing process of modernization loosens the traditional communal ties. Consequently, the individual Nigerian, who traditionally identifies himself essentially as a member of a communal group[21], is increasingly freed from the hold of the traditional community, and left to himself within the surrounding culture clash.

Colonialism and modernization are the factors which have caused moral anarchy in modern Nigeria. Like Conrad, Achebe promotes moral virtues and questions their validity in the changing environment. However, Achebe's position is rendered more complicated because he has to assume a selective position towards two sets of values, the modern and the traditional. Indeed, Achebe does not wholly repudiate African traditional culture, nor the Western one. In both cultures, there are virtues which compel one's admiration and meet one's sense of morality. For Achebe, it is morality, beyond mere allegiance to a definite culture, which is important. As G.D. Killam puts it:

> '[Achebe's preoccupation is] with the plight of the individual in a world characterized by uncertainty, pain and violence. Achebe is essentially a moralist, concerned with considerations of right and wrong as they are revealed by the individual's responses to the circumstances which surround him.'[22]

In his essay, ''The Writer and His Community'', Achebe displays his concern with morality, by highlighting the novel genre's concern with it. As a response to the Western claim that the novel has appeared as a reaction to specific circumstances in Europe, namely the decay of feudalism and the rise of capitalism, Achebe stresses its flexibility and universality by virtue of its moral nature. He approves of Anthony Burgess' opinion which says that ''the novel is what the symphony or painting or sculpture is not-namely a form steeped in morality''[23].

In *Lord Jim* and *No Longer at Ease*, the novelists present the failure of the main protagonists to live along moral standards they themselves heighten and defend. First of all, we will bring to light the nature of these moral standards. We notice that both protagonists share the same heroic idealism to be useful in

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[21] Frederick A.O. Schwarz, Jr. *The Tribes, the Nation, or the race- The Politics of independence.* (The M.I.T. Press, Massachussets Institute of technology, 1965),P6.

[22] G.D. Killam. *The Writings of Chinua Achebe*. (Heinemann Educational Books, 1969),P11.

[23] Qt in: Achebe, Chinua. *Hopes and Impediments*. (U. S. A., Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1988), P55.

their social environment. Hence, we will shed light on the nature of the relationship between the individual and society in the Western and in the African cultures.

In both novels, the authors try to depict the moral failure of the protagonists, by attempting to define its causes and its consequences. This is suggested through the court inquiry, present in each novel. The court inquiry symbolizes the authors' need to understand why such promising and virtuous individuals betray the moral code. We will attempt to present the causes of the moral failure in the light of Immanuel Kant's moral theory, as it deals with the two sides at stake, the moral code and the individual's human weakness. Then we will conclude by analyzing the consequences of the protagonists' betrayal in regard to their society; Jim is completely alienated whereas Obi is offered ways towards rehabilitation.

I. Individual Vs Society

The urge of the individual to be active and useful in his social environment has been at the heart of Western thought, as well as an important characteristic of the African traditional societies. Morality is deeply interwoven with society, as values such as courage and selflessness involve life with the others. A harmonious social life is an important factor for morality to prosper. Individualism is incompatible with morality, because when the individual is left on his own, he succumbs easily to his basic instincts. Moreover, individualism is a threat to a healthy and consolidated society. Hence, in both cultures, we notice the same urge to assert the social nature of man and discourage individualism, especially marked in the late modern era.

In Western culture, we find that the nature of man's relationship with his society has been debated in as early as the time of the Greeks. We will presently explore its development through what are considered to be the most important periods in Western civilization.

In ancient Greece, the notion of an active public life was very much marked, even before Plato and Aristotle, as the Sophists made it their task to prepare young adults to participate actively in society[24]. Ethical issues were increasingly gaining importance in early Greek debates. Notions as the origins of justice and law in human society, tension between nature and social morality, were debated among the Sophists; they advocated the freedom of the individual, and his need to assert his own individuality, however within society. Ancient Greeks held the concept of freedom as an important aspect in one's life; nevertheless, this did not exclude their knowledge of human limitations, and the implications emanating from the unavoidable fact of being a member of the community, to which conformism is due even at the expense of personal desires[25]. On one hand, the Greeks believed that man 'is a personality acting on his own judgment, responsible for his own acts and having to bear the consequences'[26]. On the other hand, they had a limited sense of freedom: man is free as long as he bears in mind that there are limits imposed on him; he must be conscious that he lives within a community to which he has 'binding duties'.

This belief that man must be free, and at the same time mindful of his limitations emanates from the Greeks' belief that man is essentially created in order to live within the community, and that he is naturally endowed to subordinate to its laws and order. Socrates assets that man's search for

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[24] Gagarin, Michael and Paul Woodruff, ed. *Early Greek Political Thought : From Homer to the Sophists. (*London: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p9.

[25] Max, Pohlenz, *Freedom in Greek Life and Thought*. (The Netherlands: D.Reidel Publishing Company, 1966), p1.

[26] Ibid. p55.

personal interest constitutes a threat to that order, and even to himself, since his well-being depends on the very well-being of the community. Socrates' role was important in bringing to the fore the freedom of man's intellect, as he demonstrated that man naturally possesses values which ensure his superiority over external things. However, for him there was no question of a freedom that would endanger the life of the community. The primary thing that man must seek is his fulfillment as a 'social' being before a 'free' being[27]. Similarly, Aristotle firmly advocated that man could live only within a community, as he described him essentially as a social being[28].

The Greeks, thus, assumed an ambivalent attitude towards freedom: man is free, but only within a restricted social zone. Since he is naturally endowed to live within a community, he is endowed with the necessary moral values.

The presentation of the individual primarily as a social being created, however, some revolting reactions among philosophers and thinkers. There is, for example, Plato, who presented Calicles in the *Georgias* as standing against any law or moral code 'that does not encourage the strong man to promote his interests and satisfy his own inflated desires'[29]. However, the general tendency of the Greek period was to promote man as part of a community to which he has to subordinate his self-interest. The Western notion of communal solidarity can be traced back to Democritus' *The History of Diodorus Sicilus*, where he gives the example of the first primitive societies, and the need for mutual help among individuals for the sake of survival[30]. Moreover, he goes on to assert that the individual must not seek to assert his power at the expense of the communal good, because a secure society is 'the most prosperous'[31].

During the Renaissance, the notion of man as a social being was still at the center of debates. Paradoxically, in this time of cultural and literary changes, people believed that their own age and the time of ancient Greece and Rome were the most advanced and civilized. The return of the secular attitudes of Greece and Rome, who emphasized the importance of an active public life, was a useful 'corrective', as Norman Hampson puts it, in a society which believed man to be wicked[32]. Renaissance humanists believed in the possibility to change society through the individual, and stressed, thus, the individual's social responsibility.

The Age of Enlightenment continued this concern. In his *Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, David Hume proclaims his view of natural religion and stresses its importance in organizing the life of the individual within society. Hume asserts that 'secular morality prescribes all the rules of conduct

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[27] Ibid. p64.
[28] Ibid. p96.
[29] Gagarin, Michael and Paul Woodruff, ed. Op. cit. P22.
[30] Ibid. P156.
[31] Ibid, P157
[32] Hampson, Norman. *The Enlightenment* (*London: Penguin Books, 1968),* P17.

necessary for man and society. Any form of authority was overthrown, and man has the freedom to live free and in harmony with his society'[33]. The individual's harmony with society is again stressed. The Enlightenment thinkers continue the Greek's paradoxical attitude towards the freedom of the individual. Indeed, what is supposed to be the age of individualism is, in fact, depriving man of his individuality. Hume declares that man's moral values are not innate, as Descartes asserts, but are the result of sense impressions: 'moral values arise from the sensations of pleasure and pain, the mind calling good what experience showed to be productive of pleasure'[34]. One of the most important implications of this philosophy is the fact that society plays an important role at promoting the moral improvement of its members. Moreover, the underlying belief of the time is that nature intended man 'to live peaceably in society and endowed him with the necessary sociability and with universal moral principles'[35]; this implies that there is no conflict between man and society.

The reign of Queen Victoria is another important era which marked the history of Western thought. Recognized by many scholars as 'an age of transition', it was considered as 'an era of new ideas, of swift if silent spiritual revolution'[36]. While progress was the watchword of the Victorian era, Freedom was another one. This period was characterized by two opposite aspirations: Utilitarianism, 'secular and rationalistic'; Evangelicalism, 'other worldly and fideistic'[37]. Despite their apparent opposition, these two aspirations met on a common point: individualism, or, in other words, the necessity for man to be free[38]. The Victorians shared the Romantics' concern with the individual, but were more realistic and concerned with facts. Consequently, they were not much dreamy and introspective, but cultivated social feelings, beginning with family affections, and reaching the unknown poor man at the bottom of the social pyramid. In fact, the Victorians thought it was their duty to help the deprived in society[39]. This notion of social responsibility corresponds to the implications of Utilitarianism, the ethical doctrine which assumes that 'the moral worth of an action is solely determined by its contribution to overall utility'[40]. Its origins are traced back to the Greek philosopher Epicurus, but as a school, it is generally attributed to Jeremy Bentham. According to this doctrine, the individual must not act before having considered the consequences of his actions, which is happiness for all. The Utilitarian philosopher Peter Singer argues that Utilitarian ethical reasoning has existed from the time primitive men had to make

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[33] Ibid. P103.
[34] Ibid.P39.
[35] Ibid. P111.
[36] Arthur, Pollard, ed. *The Victorians*. (England: Penguin Books, 1993), pVII.
[37] Ibid. pVIII.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid. P2.
[40] ''Utilitarianism'', *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 2007. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utilitarianism >

compromises and take group decisions in order to survive. Thus, consideration of others' interests has been a necessary part of the human experience; the Utilitarians assert that the individual's interests should be sacrificed for the interest of the community he lives in. In the following passage, Bentham explains this position:

> 'The interest of the community is one of the most general expressions that can occur in the phraseology of morals […] The community is a fictitious body, composed of the individual persons who are considered as constituting as it were its members. The interest of the community then is…the sum of the interests of the several members who compose it.'[41]

Moreover, Bentham traces the religious origins of the Utilitarian theory as follows:

> 'In the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth, we read the complete spirit of the ethics of utility. To do as you would be done by, and to love your neighbour as yourself, constitute the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality.'[42]

Utilitarians consider man as a rational being, always capable of discriminating between what is good and what is bad, and always thinking first about the community interests, rather than his own. This doctrine is, thus, a rewording of the old belief that man is essentially created to live within a community, and that any harm done to it affects him. However, as soon as the doctrine lost its connection with morality in practice, it received harsh criticism from early Victorian writers, like Dickens, Carlyle and Ruskin. These writers criticized Utilitarianism's connection with political economy, and the Utilitarians' aim to achieve profit rather than happiness for all[43]. Morality should be the underlying aim of the Utilitarian doctrine, otherwise, it is doomed to peril. Self-sacrifice for the sake of overall utility was put into question by Victorian writers, aware of the contradictions of the doctrine when practiced in the reality. Moreover, in *Hard Times*, Dickens asserts that Utilitarians are far removed from sensibility to human nature through their ignorance of the non-rational[44]. Man does not always give priority to communal good at the expense of his own, as he is naturally inclined to fulfill his own interests. This foreshadows subsequent questioning of and disillusionment with traditional morality in Western culture.

The scientific domain saw dramatic changes which have impacted the current of thought. One of the most important scientific revolutions was presented by Darwin. Darwin dethrones man from his divine stature, and claims his descent from primitive animal ancestors. This has put into question the religious doctrines of the times. Moreover, the natural process of evolution which Darwin depicts, consisting in 'the survival of the fittest', or the most capable of adaptation, has been applied to society. As A.O.F. Cockshut puts it in "Victorian thought", this development has lead to an increasing sense of loneliness,

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[41] Ibid.
[42] Arthur, Pollard, ed. Op. cit.p12.
[43] Ibid. p14.
[44] Ibid.

one of the most disturbing sensations of modern man[45]. However, some philosophers, like T.H. Huxley, have worked to reject the social evolutionary process by warning against its threats to society and morality. In *Evolution and Ethics* (1893), T. H. Huxley claims that the evolutionary process must be combated because it is opposed to the improvement of human civilization, and even to the existence of human institutions. He asserts that in order for man to remain human, he must fight this process[46]. According to him, the application of the natural process of evolution to society leads to 'the fanatical individualism of the time':

> 'The duties of the individual to the state are forgotten, and his tendencies to self-assertion are dignified by the masse of rights'[47].

The application of the evolutionary theory is, as Huxley puts it, in contradiction with the first principle of ethics. It destroys the prospect of a harmonious social life, and lets free the individual to operate according to his own instinctive desires:

> '[T]he practice of that which is ethically best- what we call goodness or virtue- involves a course of conduct which, in all respects, is opposed to that which leads to success in the cosmic struggle for existence. In place of ruthless self-assertion it demands self-restraint; in place of thrusting aside or treading down all competitors, it requires that the individual shall not merely respect, but shall help his fellows […] it repudiates the gladiatorial theory of existence. […] Laws and moral precepts are directed to the end of curing the cosmic process and reminding the individual of his duty to the community, to the protection and influence of which he owes, if not existence itself, at least to the life of something better than a brutal savage'[48].

When the individual discards his responsibility towards his fellowmen, he is reduced to the life of 'a brutal savage', whose main aim is the fulfillment of his base instincts.

In this retrospective look, which covered what are considered as the most important periods of Western thought, we have explored the nature of the relationship between the individual and society. In each period, there is a marked need to assert man's social nature. In other words, man is required to consider himself as a social being, which implies the adoption of moral standards of living, and a readiness for self-sacrifice for the sake of the others. However, with the development of science and industry, man's right to lead a private life has been increasingly stressed as opposed to his allegiance to his society. Individualism and individual alienation have become the most important characteristics of the modern Western culture. The theory which promotes the conformism of the individual has not resisted the changes characterizing the modern era.

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[45]Ibid.p20.

[46] Huxley, T. H. ''Evolution and Ethics'', *The Modern World.* <http://www.cis.vt.edu/modernworld/welch/Huxley.html>

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

Lord Jim presents the issue of the individual versus society in the Western context. The novel presents a conflicting relationship between the protagonist and the society he lives in. Conrad displays this issue through his use of relevant narrative techniques. For example, his choice of setting in this novel is significant as we see the main events happening only at sea, in an Eastern port, and in Patusan. Indeed, the novel's major events, namely, the moral betrayal, the inquiry, and the second chance happen in outer settings, far from the urban modern London. This creates a sense of spatial separation between the protagonist and his society, and suggests lack of social cohesion and individual alienation. Another technique Conrad uses to present the conflict between individual and society is the appropriation of the novel of education. J. H. Stape asserts that L J is Conrad's 'most sustained attempt to write a Bildungsroman, the novel of education tracing a youthful protagonist's confrontation with and painful initiation into the moral and social demands of adulthood'[49]. In the novel of education, we see the development of the protagonist's inner and outer world as shaped by different trials and experience[50]. This form has a marked social dimension as it presents the development of the protagonist in relation to his society. Moreover, the typical end characterizing the novel of education is social harmony. J. H. Stape asserts that *Lord Jim* has certain characteristics of the novel of education. However, he asserts that Conrad alters the traditional aspects of this form in *Lord Jim* in a number of ways, notably in its ''philosophical interest'- the question, as Stein formulates it, of 'how to be'- so complicates the novel that the positive movement towards restored social harmony characteristic of the novel of education becomes impossible'[51]. Indeed, in spite of his endeavours, Jim does not succeed in living harmoniously with his society. Conrad does approve of social harmony and cohesion; however, he inquires into its validity in a modern era characterized by skepticism and individualism.

As far as African culture is concerned, contrary to Western culture, tradition still plays an important role in the lives of individuals; Tradition promotes the individual's conformism to the group and banishes individualism. In traditional culture, the individual considers himself essentially as a member of a social group. By this effect, he shows respect and allegiance to the moral standards regulating conduct promoted by his group.

Life is essentially considered within the village. The individual's life, norms of behaviour, beliefs and values are inherited from the past with as little change as possible. Social institutions have been evolving so that no major change could take place. Traditional life is protected by religious authority and a strong sense of social conformity. The basis of the very existence of the traditional community is the willingness of the individuals to come together and form a whole. As Emmanuel Obiechina puts it:

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[49] Stape, J. H. Op. Cit. p63.
[50] Ibid. p64.
[51] Ibid.

> 'The existence of a traditional culture depends on the existence of a community, that is, the kind of society in which there is intimate face-to-face relationship and cooperation among people permanently resident in a single locality and who as a result experience what C.H. Colley calls 'a certain fusion of individualities in a common whole, so that one's very self, for many purposes at least, is the common life and purpose of the group''[52].

Social cohesion is the first condition to maintain traditional culture. The identification of the individual as part of a community, with which he shares its social and cultural outlook, represents the very essence of what is referred to as 'traditionalism'[53]. The individual acquiesces in the group's beliefs and customs, and subordinates his own interest to the overall interest of the group. The notion of self-sacrifice for the overall good of the community is an important traditional value; a value which, as Obiechina puts it, African novelists emphasize, and contrast with the opposite value of individual self-interest found in the modern urban context[54].

In *Tradition and Modernity*, Kwame Gyekye discusses the communitarian ethos characterizing the African cultures. He affirms that the African communitarian ethos is similar to the one which used to characterize the early Western philosophical tradition. He refers to Aristotle, who 'proclaimed centuries ago that the human being is by nature a social (political) animal, and that it is impossible for him to function as human outside society'[55]. Gyekye argues that African traditional cultures also maintain 'the idea that community or social life is a necessary condition for human existence-and natural to human kind'[56]. Sociability is intrinsic to human nature, hence the establishment of social arrangements that puts this human characteristic in concrete and practical terms. Communitarian social arrangements lead, as Gyekye puts it, to the development and practice of such socioethical values as mutual aid, solidarity, interdependence, collective action, and reciprocal obligation. The individual member of the group has the obligation to think and act for the welfare and survival of the group in general. The individual has to consider primarily the welfare of the group because, in the last resort, it is his own welfare. Individualism is discouraged, or even despised within traditional society.

In *Ethics in Nigerian Culture*, Elechi Amadi, who is a novelist of Igbo origin, presents the most important socioethical values characterizing the Nigerian traditional societies. He asserts that the concept of goodness within African traditional cultures is not defined as mere avoidance of bad behaviour. The fact that the individual abstains from crime does not mean that he is a satisfactory member of the

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[52] Emmanuel, Obiechina., *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel.* (Cambridge University Press, 1975), P202.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Gyekye, Kwame. *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflexions on the African experience*. (Oxford University Press, US, 1997), P252.
[56] Ibid.

community. Amadi asserts that '[to] be regarded as positively virtuous, one is expected to be helpful and useful to one's neighbours'[57]. Goodness is essentially defined within the context of life with the others. Communal solidarity is the first moral virtue, as is illustrated through the Igbo proverb: 'Both the eagle and the kite should perch; whichever denies the other the right should suffer a broken wing'[58]. This virtue enhances social cohesion and the welfare of the individual.

In *The Way of the Elders*, Adama and Naomi Doumbia refer to the importance of the communal solidarity within African traditional culture. The following passage puts to light this cardinal traditional virtue through presenting the readiness of the individual members of the group to help each others in critical times, and the strength this solidarity provides to the weak individual:

> 'Anyone who is ill, hurt, or weak affects everyone of us, and the entire community will participate in the healing. We chant, dance, and drum, and make offerings and sacrifices to communicate with the spirits for their assistance. The love and support of the community alone is often enough to bring about a quick recovery. We value generosity and acts of selflessness, which are essential to the well-being of our environment. Each person has a place in our communities. Everyone is needed, valued, and appreciated.'[59]

Thus, when a single individual is sick, the whole community is mobilized around him to help in his healing, through rituals and sacrifices. Every individual member is important because he represents one of the numerous pillars of the community. The individual benefits from a well-organized, secure and stable life within the community; in return, he has to submit to the community's obligations, customs, and tradition. The individual who offends his community's precepts is punished regardless of his stature. This is displayed through the main protagonist in C. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart.*

Many critics refer to C. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in order to provide a picture of African traditional society before the encounter with Europe. Indeed, the novel portrays truthfully the Igbo traditional life without an exaggerated idealization. The main protagonist Okonkwo represents the most important traditional values. Since his youth, Okonkwo strives to demonstrate his courage, through bringing honour and victory to his kinsmen in wrestling matches. Older, he contributes to his people's wars against their neighbouring enemies, and wins their respect, gratitude and affection. Having achieved material success through harvesting, he remains pious, as he performs his religious and secular duties punctually. However, despite these achievements, Okonkwo is not exempted from communal retributions when he commits mistakes. Okonkwo commits three big offences against the earth goddess. The first was when he beat his wife during the Sacred Week of Peace. Here, the priest of Ani

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[57] Amadi, Elechi. *Ethics in Nigerian Culture*. (Heinemann Educational Books, 1982) P50.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Doumbia, Adama and Naomi Doumbia. *The Way of the Elders: West African Spirituality and Tradition*. (Llewellyn Worlwide, 2004), P86.

orders him to bring to the shrine a she-goat, a hen, a length of cloth and a hundred cowries, as a punishment. When he kills Ezeudu's son by accident, he is ordered to quit his father's land, and his house and belongings are destroyed. Finally, when he commits suicide, he is not offered a traditional burial , but is buried 'like a dog'. The fact that the elders punish strongly one of their most prominent community members points to their primary concern with the welfare of the community as a whole. As Obiechina puts it, 'the traditional law is hard and no respecter of persons, but it justifies itself in the ground that social order must be maintained and the health of the community protected'[60].

The supernatural is an important tool that the community uses in order to keep its authority and social cohesion. Again, we refer to TFA to illustrate this point: following the murder of a female member of the Umuofian community by someone from the neighbouring village, a citizen assembly is held to solve the crisis. The supernatural is represented through the masked ancestral spirits, whose presence puts the stamp of unquestionable authority on the verdict of the community tribunal. Moreover, the spirits play an important role in the lives of the individuals as they serve as a corrective of their ethical behaviour. As the co-authors of *The Way of the Elders* put it:

> 'We do not use law to enforce ethical behavior; we live with the knowledge that our actions are visible to the realm of spirit. We understand that our ancestors are watching, and harmful conduct may have repercussions on our family, our community, and our environment.'[61]

The individual member, thus, is aware that he is watched by the spirits of his ancestors. This awareness prevents him from wrongdoing, averts risks to hurt others than himself, his family and community. Moral goodness, within the African tradition, involves, thus, life with the others.

Traditional culture, thus, promotes the conformism of its individual members. The individual has to show allegiance to his community's precepts, and in return benefits from the community's protection in times of need.

The communitarian ethos can have oppressive effects on the individual, who would like to affirm his individuality and freedom to care about his own interests. Nevertheless, man cannot live outside of the social sphere, because he is created, as Aristotle puts it, to live within the community. The communitarian ethos characterizing the African traditional culture is found also in Western culture, as we have seen. However, with the changes that the West witnesses, regarding science and industry, communitarian values have been replaced with the notion of individualism. The individual has the right to realize his aspirations regardless of social or religious standards. Consequently, the West has lost the sense of spirituality, substituted with material success. On the other hand, the African communalism has

[60] Obiechina, Emmanuel. Op. cit. p215.
[61] Adama Doumbia, Naomi Doumbia.Op. cit. P85.

been increasingly threatened by colonialism, which has aimed at the destruction of the traditional culture, and the increasing modernization. In the urban settings, the individual is far from his traditional community, and develops a sense of self-concern, or individualism. Thus, in Western culture, social cohesion is a lost ideal which must, for some, be achieved again, whereas in African culture, it is a reality which must be preserved.

No Longer at Ease presents an exploration of the African communitarian ethos, as well as the conflict between the individual and society. The African traditional social cohesion is presented through Obi's traditional Igbo community, and especially through the Umuofian Progressive Union (UPU). Achebe positively presents this traditional virtue and encourages it. The setting is in modern Nigeria, Lagos, where Obi starts his career after his studies in Europe. The context differs from the villages setting *Things Fall Apart*; however, Achebe puts it clearly in the novel that, in spite of the increasing modernization, the Igbo people have succeeded in maintaining their traditional standards. Moreover, Obi has close relationships with his people in Umuofia, as he manages to send his family financial help. However, his personal interests conflict with the interests of the group. Having been away during his studies, and living away from his people, Obi's sense of individualism is awakened as he wants to lead a private life; he does not show the willingness to sacrifice his own interest to the benefit of his community. Achebe puts into question the African traditional ethos in the modern context, through presenting its oppressive and restrictive effects on the individual. However, living alone, as we shall see, has more negative effects on the individual. In this novel, Achebe calls for social cohesion and harmony, and stresses the individual's responsibility to achieve a balance between his social and private life.

The novels we are dealing with present a confrontation between personal aspirations and social demands. They show, in contrast with the communitarian theory, the difficulty of the individual to fulfill his interests and live in harmony with his society. Moral values such as courage, responsibility towards one's fellowmen, altruism, are standards encouraging the individual to live harmoniously with his society. Indeed, the values promoted in the novels involve life with the others. High morality is the ability to achieve self-sacrifice for the sake of the others. This represents the major virtue characterizing the protagonists' moral idealism. Jim and Obi proclaim selflessness and sense of solidarity towards their fellowmen. Jim would save people in danger, even at the expense of his own life, whereas Obi would save his country from corruption. However, in times of crisis, both protagonists betray these moral standards. The novelists' concern is to depict the causes of the protagonists' moral failure. The question asked is whether the protagonists' moral failure has to be referred to the moral code and the way it is presented to them, or to character defects inherent in human nature?

II. Moral Failure

In the present chapter, we will be concerned with depicting the causes of the protagonists' moral failure as presented by the authors, and in the light of the moral theory of the prominent German philosopher Immanuel Kant. Kant is a fervent defender of morality; in his work, he expresses the need of the individual to live along moral standards, and his natural disposition to obey the moral law. His position towards morality resembles Conrad's and Achebe's positions, who seek to promote moral standards within increasingly skeptical environments. As R.J. Sullivan puts it in his *Immanuel Kant's Moral Theory*, Kant was not concerned with morality out of mere fascination with the topic, but developed his moral theory as a defense of morality against the skepticism characterizing his age, an age where scientific development was questioning traditionally received ideas[62]. Kant silenced the question 'Why should I be moral?' by stressing man's ability to exercise moral judgment, that is, to judge whether an action is good or bad. This human ability is crystallized in the Categorical imperative, which impels the individual to act morally[63].

According to Kant, every individual is naturally endowed with the desire to live a virtuous life. However, he does not neglect the existence of moral failure, and inquires into its possible causes. Indeed, despite man's moral nature, there are factors which hinder him from acting morally. Kant points out the nature of the moral code and the way it is presented to the individual, on one hand, and human weakness on the other hand. He thus offers a flexible moral theory which is close to practical reality.

The two factors that Kant mentions, the moral code and character defects, are clearly displayed in the novels. We will see that it is the combination of the two which leads, in fact, to the protagonists' moral failure.

1. *The Moral Code:*

In his moral theory, Kant asserts that there is a feeling within each individual that allows him to discriminate between good and bad. Kant defines this feeling as a principle of goodness, responsible for virtue and morality: 'an intimate feeling for the beauty and dignity of human nature and a composure and strength of mind to which as to a universal foundation one refers all one's actions'[64]. We can feel here the influence of Rousseau, who highlights the dignity of human nature, and who, as we shall indicate, had a strong influence on the development of Kant's moral theory. According to Kant, it is this

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[62] Sullivan, Roger J. *Immanuel Kant's moral theory.* (U.S.A., Cambridge University Press, 1989), P56.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Teale, A.E. Op. Cit. p40.

principle which makes man 'a moral being'. It cannot be denied or disapproved, but binds man towards certain criteria of conduct. It forces reason's approval, even when it is engaged in disregarding its prescriptions. This principle distinguishes man from animal, and, having recognized it as 'a law governing one's conduct', man becomes 'a responsible being'[65].

Kant takes the existence of an ordinary moral consciousness for granted[66]. He stresses the ability of man to make moral judgment through asserting that every human being is sensitive to the imperatives of duty. The individual becomes aware of duty as a set of precepts which, in prescribing to himself, can constantly will should be obeyed by all rational beings; as Alasdair MacIntyre puts it : 'The test of a genuine moral imperative is that I can universalize it- that is, that I can will that it should be a universal law, or, as Kant puts it in another formulation, that I can will that it should be a law of nature'[67]. The precept which is validated on a universal scale is the true moral imperative or, as Kant names it, the categorical imperative. Man is able to discriminate between a good and a bad action through testing it on a universal scale. With this, Kant affirms that every individual is rational, and predisposed to recognize and obey the moral law, which is 'universally binding on all rational being'[68]. However, the problem posed is that the standards man finds in his environment are not presented to him in order to be appreciated, but are imposed on him. That is why, as Kant explains, duty is felt as a constraint[69] exercised upon the human mind[70].

Kant dwells much upon this notion of constraint through referring to his own experience. Kant was of a traditional German Pietist family. Pietism is a fundamentalist reformist tradition within the Lutheran church characterized by a strong emphasis on duty and conscience. Pietism highlights the dignity of man regardless of his 'birth', 'rank', or 'situation'[71]. However, it was not through this inculcation that Kant awakened to its beauty, but it was through the appreciation of the theory of Rousseau, which advocated the dignity of human nature. This was an important revelation for him, and had great impacts on the development of his moral theory. Kant realized that 'it is vain and even mischievous to attempt to inculcate a feeling for morality, since indoctrination of whatever kind in no way facilitates a true appreciation of moral worth, and might even awaken aversion to the doctrine

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[65] Ibid, p38/39.
[66] MacIntyre, Alasdair. *A short History of Ethics; A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the Twentieth Century.* (Routledge, 1998), P122.
[67] Ibid. (PP123-124).
[68] Ibid.p123.
[69] 'Constraint', in this sense, is not raised as a result of repression of instincts, as we saw previously, but as a result of a wrong appreciation of virtue.
[70] Teale, A.E. Op. P40.
[71] Ibid, p42.

imposed'[72]. This personal experience has led Kant to focus on the way morality is presented to the individual, and the way it may lead to moral failure. The imposition of moral values on the individual creates in him a feeling of constraint, instead of a feeling for the beauty of the virtue presented. This moral inculcation may work as long as the individual is not confronted with a critical situation where he has to choose between allegiance to the moral law or self-interest. Once in such situation, the individual is unlikely to act morally, because he has not fully appreciated virtue. In the novels, Jim and Obi proudly claim their allegiance to moral precepts which are, in fact, categorical imperatives. Indeed, honour and self-sacrifice are principles universally recognized as moral. However, in critical situations, Jim and Obi give them up, and act immorally. This suggests that they have not appreciated these values or, in Kant's words, have not been awakened to their beauty.

Kant asserts that in every human being, there is 'a feeling which must be the necessary incentive to use our mental gifts regularly and well'[73]. Moral goodness is not to be inculcated if it depends on an inner feeling which loathes vice and elates goodness. The feeling for morality is original, and attempts to inculcate it would lead to its disappearance[74].

Kant's conception of moral teaching tells much about this point. He insists on the damaging effects of trying to teach morality in relation to duty because the subject would experience a moral constraint. Moreover, he asserts that it is wrong to urge young people to be morally good according to any motive. He recognizes that it is possible to deter children from bad actions through awakening them to the pain they would cause to others, and even promising any reward, but these means do not promote pure love of virtue; they lead them to regulate their conduct only according to their self-interest. We cannot even promote children's moral development through appealing to 'childish enthusiasms', 'loyalties', 'romanticism', and 'hero-worship', as these concepts can lead only to 'pride', 'vain-glory', and 'self-conceit'[75]. Kant presents these means as efficient only in primary stages, and then, 'we must bring before the mind the pure moral motive, because it teaches a man to feel his own dignity, and gives the mind a power unexpected even to himself'[76]- the power of self-control. As we shall see, the protagonists' appreciation of morality through romanticism and hero-worship plays an important part in their moral failure, as it has made them concentrate on the glory and sense of superiority they would obtain.

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[72] Ibid, p42.
[73] Ibid, p43.
[74] Ibid, p45.
[75] Ibid. P132.
[76] Ibid, p133.

The way the moral code is presented to the individual plays an important role in his moral success or failure. Its inculcation leads to a feeling of constraint, and its linking with any kind of romantic concepts as mentioned above leads to self-deception and vain glory. In this way, morality is still imprisoned in its theoretical aspect, and doomed to be betrayed in critical times. This displays Kant's concern with the practical reality, and his repudiation of utopian, metaphysical theories.

a) *Lord Jim*:

As a writer concerned with morals, Conrad provides in his work an implicit repudiation of traditional ethical philosophies. Among them figures the view that moral life is based on abstract, utopian principles[77]. He rejects any morality which belongs essentially to the spiritual realm without any relevance to the practical reality. In this novel, Conrad implies that Jim's moral failure is due, on one hand, to his adherence to a theoretical moral code. The sources of Jim's moral idealism are clearly highlighted in the novel, namely his Protestant origin and what is called in the novel light 'holiday' literature.

Like many ship commanders, as the first narrator puts it, Jim comes from those 'abodes of piety and peace'(p4), where religion and moral righteousness are kept intact because of their isolation from the external world. People who live in these unknown and isolated corners of the world are protected from moral confusion by ''an unerring providence''.

Conrad's repudiation of utopian theoretical morality is shown through the presentation of Jim's father. The first narrator asserts that the latter 'possessed certain knowledge of the Unknowable as made for the righteousness of people in cottages without disturbing the ease of mind of those whom an unerring providence enables to live in mansions'(p4). The first irony is drawn in the fact that Jim's father knows 'the unknowable', referring to those moral precepts appreciated only in their theoretical form[78]. The next irony lies in the fact that these moral precepts guide the lives of people and maintain them on the right way- people who live in isolated mansions, and to whom nothing can happen. These single-minded and confident people are later described by Marlow in a death like atmosphere, resembling soulless bodies exempted from the movement of life. He refers to them as ''placid, colourless forms of men and women peopling that quiet corner of the world as free of danger and strife as a tomb, and breathing equably the air of undisturbed rectitude''(p251). These people are like "dead" because they are allowed to lead a quiet and peaceful life, away from the real, living, practical world.

Jim grasped morality from these people to whom nothing came- he to whom so many things ''had come''. Contrary to them, Jim is not allowed to dwell much in that peaceful parsonage, as he is sent to

[77] Berthoud, Jacques. Op. Cit. P15.

[78] Stape. J.H. ed. Op. Cit. P70.

the real practical world. After the failure, Jim declares to Marlow that he would never go home again. His father ''would never understand''(p59). The latter's single mindedness and isolation from the reality prevents him from understanding that it requires more than simple theoretical moral teaching to affront real danger.

We come to the second source of Jim's morality: literature. The first narrator points out the fact that it was 'after a course of light holiday literature that Jim declared his vocation for the sea'(p4). The words 'light' and 'holiday' refer to the kind of stories promoting easy moral values, and an easiness of mind concerning life. This kind of literature awakened in Jim the need for an adventurous life, where he would be as 'unflinching' as the heroes he read about. Jim read sea stories about thrilling adventures and heroic achievements, and thus, was not aware of real danger, and the moral resources it demands from the individual to face it. A doom already hovers above Jim, as we see him leaving this untested corner of the world towards 'a training ship for the mercantile marine'(p5); as the first narrator indicates, Jim is 'sent at once' from the unpractical idealism forged at his parsonage towards the reality. Jim's moral values have a pure theoretical character and are inadequate, contrary to his belief, to face immediate dangers.

We can see the effects of this moral inculcation on Jim in his evasive day dreams. Disappointed by the lack of adventure at sea, Jim plunges into imagination, where he sees himself performing heroic feats:

> 'On the lower deck in the babel of two hundred voices he would forget himself, and beforehand live in his mind the sea-life of light literature. He saw himself saving people from sinking ships, cutting away masts in a hurricane, swimming through a surf with a line; or as a lonely castaway, barefooted and half naked, walking on uncovered reefs in search of shellfish to stave off starvation.' (p5)

As we saw earlier, Kant affirms that the inculcation of morality through hero-worship or romanticism leads to a dangerous vain glory and self-conceit. As we see in this passage, Jim delights in the glory he would gain from such heroic achievements. Jim has not acquired a true appreciation of virtue; he does not consider in these imaginary achievements the help he would provide to the others, but concentrates on the pride and glory he would receive.[79]

Real sea-life is different from the sea-life of light holiday literature. Contrary to conventional sea stories, Conrad gives the sea and the ship moral and psychological dimensions. He declares that ''the ship is the moral symbol of our life''[80], on which men must stick to their moral principles in order to

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[79] Berthoud, Jacques.,Op. Cit. P71.

[80] Galt Harpham, Geofrey. *One Of Us The Mastery of Joseph Conrad*. (U.S, The University of Chicago Press, 1996), P84.

survive in an unsure, uncertain element. Man has to rely on his spiritual resources in order to meet dangers. In the face of danger, Jim found nothing to rely on. The theoretical idealism does not resist the hardships of the practical reality. Conrad evokes the dangers of theoretical, unpractical morality. At the crucial moment when Jim has the occasion to put into practice his moral idealism, he acts in complete contradiction with it. He betrays his duty onboard as he leaves hundreds of helpless pilgrims doomed to perish.

In order to investigate deeper Jim's betrayal, Conrad resorts to showing the impact the incident has had on different characters. Captain Brierly is one of these characters whom Jim's experience has shaken the most, as he commits suicide.

Captain Brierly is presented as an example of the perfect seaman who has held a perfect career. However, Marlow indicates that Brierly has held a perfect career only because he has never been called to the test. The use of irony brings to light more strongly the significance of this point. Indeed, Marlow starts with introducing the reader with the character of Brierly by presenting his attributes and achievements:

> ''[Brierly] had never in his life made a mistake, never had an accident, never a mishap, never a check in his steady rise, and he seemed to be of those lucky fellows who know nothing of indecision, and less of self-mistrust […] the sting of life could do no more to his complacent soul than the scratch of a pin to the smooth face of a rock. This was enviable. […] his self satisfaction presented to me and to the world a surface as hard as granite. He committed suicide very soon after''(p42/43).

The juxtaposition of this perfect life with suicide suggests Brierly's self deception and lack of practical truth. The emphasis on the fact that he has never met an accident in his life, or made a mistake, suggests the untested theoretical character of his morality.

After this, we go back to Brierly before the suicide, in order to understand his act. His reaction to Jim is of irritation. He does not stand the fact that Jim stays and 'eats all the dirt', while his 'partners in crime' cleared out. He does not stand the sight of Jim, and offers to give him money to get him out of his mind. Jim's experience has revealed a breach in the decency of seamen in general. It has put into question the moral integrity of seamen in their own eyes and in the eyes of people -moral integrity crystallized in such idealistic moral values as selflessness, solidarity, courage, and devotion to duty. Brierly wants Jim to disappear because the latter is an exception, not in the sense that he is the only seaman who has gone wrong, but in the sense that he is among the rare ones who have been tested. He declares to Marlow: ''Such an affair destroys one's confidence. Man may go pretty near through his whole sea-life without any call to show a stiff upper lip. But when the call comes…Aha!...If I…'(p50). The last hesitating words suggest that throughout the inquiry Brierly has been thinking about himself. He recognizes that a seaman might lead a perfect and quiet sea career, as he did, without receiving the testing call that

requires to put into practice his so-called superior morality. He is anxious to get rid of Jim to maintain professional decency, especially in his own eyes: ''This is a disgrace. We've got all kinds among us-some anointed scoundrels in the lot; but hang it, we must preserve professional decency or we become no better than so many tinkers going about loose''(p50). Brierly, the man who has never experienced hesitation of any kind, is not certain about the righteousness of his perfect sea career. He realizes that he is perfect only because he has not been tested. Doubt has replaced his self-satisfaction and confidence:

> 'No wonder Jim's case bored him, and while I thought with something akin to fear of the immensity of his contempt for the young man under examination he was probably holding silent inquiry into his own case. The verdict must have been of unmitigated guilt, and he took the secret of the evidence with him in that leap into the sea. If I understand anything of men, the matter was no doubt of the gravest import, one of those trifles that awaken ideas- start into life some thought with which a man unused to such companionship finds it impossible to live''(p44).

Marlow emphasizes Brierly's tendency towards self-deception through adding: ''Who can tell what flattering view he had induced himself to take of his own suicide?''(p48). This further illustrates Brierly's tendency towards self-deception and lack of practical truth. Moreover, it is significant that Brierly chose to end his life by a jump into the sea, acting up Jim's jump from the Patna, and symbolizing the descent from the world of untested moral idealism to the harsh world of reality. Jim and Brierly share a point in common in the fact that both are self-deceived.

The sea, in Conrad's world, takes up, thus, moral and psychological dimensions. As Geoffrey G. Harpham puts it, "[f]or Conrad, the sea is merely a convenient locale for the staging of dramas whose real import is moral, psychological, philosophical, or linguistic"[81]; the sea is the symbol of life, characterized by movement and change, violence and quietness, and even indifference. The boat stands for the moral identity of the individual, on which he has to remain in order to affront the dangers of the sea, the dangers of life. The seaman represents, in Conrad's fiction, the idealist who advocates allegiance to Utopian moral standards, unaware of the reality. The majority of seamen, as the first narrator puts it, come from abodes of piety and peace, from where they acquire their moral virtues. They are, then, to put their moral idealism into practice in the sea, the true test, for Conrad, of moral integrity. Faced with a natural, changing element, once friendly, once indifferent, and once hostile, seamen must rely on their moral resources in order to survive and keep their moral and professional decency. However, not all seamen are tested, and are left to live with the certitude of their worth and moral integrity. Jim is tested, and fails. Brierly experiences moral failure at the prospect of a future test, and prefers to die rather than live on self-doubt. Conrad points to the dangers of theoretical moral

[81] Harpham, Geoffrey Galt. Op. Cit. p72.

inculcation. He warns against moral inculcation which does not lead to a true appreciation of virtue, but creates a dangerous wide gulf between theory and practice.

b) <u>No Longer at Ease:</u>

Achebe shows the same concern as Conrad with the gulf between theoretical principles and practice. He evokes the need to reconcile thinking and action in order to get out of the predicament of modern Nigeria:

> 'These two roles, these two views of the world are very much at the center of my thinking: action and reflection. It is these working together that can save the situation […] if we can create this consciousness that the two need to work out a way of surviving side by side, as I think our traditional societies tried to do, we would really be much better off.'[82]

Achebe repudiates morality when based on abstract idealistic precepts. Furthermore, he thinks that traditional societies sought the reconciliation between action and reflection. This is one of the numerous traditional traits that Achebe admires and advocates.

In this novel, Achebe presents a critical attitude towards education abroad. Education was considered a means among the Igbos to secure prestige and obtain white-collar jobs with government, posts in the native authority system, and positions in the British administration itself[83]. Achebe addresses in this way those educated young people who form the new elite on which Nigeria's future is based. Achebe wants to make them aware of their responsibility in the development of their country, and warns them against merely becoming copies of Westerners. He appeals to them to rely on their own personal resources to deal with the problems facing Nigeria, and not to rely on a set of theoretical ideals acquired during their sojourn in the West. In this novel, Achebe depicts the kind of knowledge Obi acquired there, and questions its relevance to the demands of practical reality.

Obi's experience can be analyzed in the light of Kant's moral theory because he has received a moral inculcation. The source of Obi's moral idealism is his contact with Western culture, more precisely, Western literature. Very early in the novel, Achebe asserts that Obi, who was in fact sent abroad by the UPU to study law, studied English instead. As Jim, Obi develops his heroic moral idealism through literature. However, Obi has not acquired vain glory and self-conceit from the heroes in the books he read. The literature he came in contact with is different from Jim's adventurous sea stories. The two novels he mentions - Evelyn Waugh's *A Handful of Dust* and Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*- are described in pessimistic tones, as the two heroes are defeated in the end. Tony, the former's protagonist, ends his life captive in the Brazilian jungle, reading aloud the works of Charles

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[82] Wilkinson, Jane. Ed. *Talking with African Writers*. (Oxford, James Currey, 1992), P48.

[83] Bascom, Wiliam R. and Melville J. Herskovits, ed. *Continuity and Change in African Cultures.* (U.S.A, Phoenix Books, The University of Chicago Press, 1959) P137.

Dickens in a tribal village; while Scobie, the latter's protagonist, a weak man with good intentions, commits suicide, discarding thus the teachings of the church. Obi drew his pride from his privileged knowledge of the white man's books, because ''greatness now is in the things of the white man''(p50).

Upon his return to Lagos, we can see the kind of moral standards Obi acquired during his journey in England. His position against corruption and his rejection of the traditional bride-price are taken as examples among others.

As we can see, corruption is a real scourge in modern Nigeria, as it affects the different levels of society; this is displayed in different instances throughout the novel: At the beginning, Achebe refers to the civil servants who paid ten shillings and sixpence to obtain a doctor's certificate of illness for the day in order to assist the court inquiry. Another example is found in Obi's arrival in Nigeria; in view of the time it would take to regulate the Customs formalities, a boy comes to attend Obi to offer his services to help him, in return for a bribe. Later, the chairman of the UPU offers to find a job for Obi through offering bribes to some of his countenances. Then, in the job interview, a member of the panel of interviewers asks Obi whether he wants the job so that he can take bribes. Through these details, Achebe demonstrates how interwoven corruption is with the lives of people, be they lawyers, doctors,.. and how difficult it would be to eradicate it.

At the beginning, Obi manages to decline the offers of bribery. His position towards corruption is demonstrated through his formulation of theories about the causes of bribery, and the means to eradicate it. According to Obi, it is due to the old men at the top, who are concerned with the privileges of the jobs they have, rather than with what they can offer to their country. For Obi, these old men have to be replaced by younger and educated men from the universities, like himself. However, Achebe shows that Obi's solution is too theoretical and idealistic through contrasting his arguments with those of Christopher. The latter, 'an economist from the London school of Economics', declares to Obi that his arguments are not based on 'factual or scientific analysis', which is 'not surprising since he has taken a degree in English'(p17). Christopher rejects Obi's arguments because of their theoretical aspect. He gives the example of a young man 'straight from the university', who has been jailed because of corruption. Obi simply rejects this example by claiming that it is just an exception, and asserts that the young educated men do not take bribes because ''they can afford to be virtuous''(p18). Through this contrast between the naïve idealist and the practical man, Achebe suggests that Obi is more concerned with the moral principle in its theoretical aspect, which can only be admired, rather than with its practical execution. Obi feels proud and superior because he is able to speechify against corruption. Achebe does not imply that the solution Obi offers is wrong, but suggests that it is out of touch with te reality, and that its practice would be much more complicated.

Another practice that Obi attacks is the traditional bride-price. He rejects it on the ground of its immorality and declares that he will not pay in order to get married. Once again, his theorizing is contrasted with his other friend's more practical mind. Indeed, Joseph is more aware of the importance of this traditional practice, and the difficulty of getting rid of it so simply. Here again, the utopian values that Obi keeps are far removed from practical reality.

Isaac, Obi's father, is an interesting case to explore in the light of Kant's moral theory, as it relates to Obi's case. The caste system still has a strong presence within the traditional community. An osu is a descendent of a man enslaved to a god. As Obiechina puts it, 'an osu is an outcast of society, an abominable human who cannot have normal human intercourse with non-osu[84]'. In order to get married, Obi has to obtain the blessing of his parents. For this, he knows that he has to convince them of the righteousness of his choice, through arguing that the caste-system has to be discarded. Despite the fact that Obi 'has very little religion now'(p20), he uses Christian arguments in order to convince his father. However, as H.T. Edmondson puts it in *The Moral of the Story*, 'his father, Isaac, opposes it, notwithstanding the fact that, as a Christian, he should be indifferent to an ancient, pagan superstition'[85]. Obi used 'the very words that his father might have used in talking to his heathen kinsmen'(p121), reminding him of the light of the gospel, and the equality it assures to all men. However, these arguments did not reach Isaac who, despite his religious faith, still considers osu as a curse; addressing himself to Obi, he declares:

> ''Osu is like leprosy in the minds of our people. I beg of you my son, not to bring the mask of shame and of leprosy into your family. If you do, your children and your children's children unto the third and fourth generations will curse your memory […] you will bring sorrow on your head and on the heads of your children.'(p121).

This passage shows the deep belief in the osu curse of this said fervent Christian catechist, who is shown earlier worrying about such details as eating 'kola nut' in his Christian house. Indeed, he vehemently rejects the practice of sacrificing a kola nut to idols, defining it as ''a heathen practice''. Furthermore, he forbids his wife from telling her children traditional folk stories. Ironically, Achebe presents Isaac as worrying about these superficial aspects characterizing the traditional life, and failing to recognize the immorality and absurdity of the traditional caste system. Isaac was not awakened to the pure love of virtue inherent in Christianity. This is due to the fact that he did not go towards Christianity out of conviction, but as a way out: He embraced the white man's religion as a means to reject his father,

[84] Obiechina, Emmanuel. Op. Cit. P84.
[85] Edmondson, H.T. ed. *The Moral of the Story*. (Lexington Books, 2000), P99.

especially after the cruelty the latter displayed when he killed Ikemefuna. Isaac received, then, an inculcation of moral virtues by the Christian missionaries.

Through Isaac's experience, Achebe implies that moral inculcation does not allow man to develop his capacity for moral discrimination. Man has to rely on his capacity for moral judgment to be able to discriminate between right and wrong, beyond mere traditional beliefs. Both Obi and Isaac have been, thus, exposed to an inculcation of moral standards. Isaac's failure to support his son foreshadows Obi's failure to live up to his ideals.

The fact that Obi's moral idealism is backed by no real conviction is revealed in his state of mind after the death of his mother. This event came after the increase of the economic burden and the break up with Clara. The financial and emotional crises Obi experiences affect considerably his hold to his moral idealism. The death of his mother is the final blow, as it is followed by, as Killam puts it, the death of his ''European' morality'[86]. In fact, it was not merely the death of his European morality that Obi experiences, but the death of any sense of moral consciousness. This is suggested in the way Obi remembers his mother. An event which bound him closely to her happened when he was young; he forgot a razor-blade in his pocket, and it cut badly his mother's hand when she washed his clothes. 'For some reason or other, whenever Obi thought affectionately of his mother, his mind went back to the shedding of her blood. It bound him very firmly to her'(p69). However, after her death, this event has lost its hold on Obi, as it is suggested in the following passage: 'The picture of his poor mother returning from the stream, her washing undone and her palm bleeding where his rusty blood had cut into it, vanished. Or rather it took a secondary place'(p150). This suggests the disappearance of the sense of guilt and moral consciousness- 'the period' of guilt is now 'over'. Obi wonders why he feels like 'a brand new snake just emerged from its slough'(p150). This image suggests that Obi is relieved from the moral idealism which oppressed him. Sticking to the moral standards he acquired in England is felt now, in a time of crisis, as a constraint. He is in a state of unconsciousness similar to Jim's at the moment of the jump. Obi starts taking bribes and thus betrays the moral code he set for himself.

In the following passage, Achebe mentions the death of Obi's moral standards and sense for morality. Moreover, he expresses his repudiation of the idealist who lives only in the world of illusion.

> '[Obi] no longer felt guilty. He, too, had died. Beyond death there are no ideals and no humbug, only reality. The impatient idealist says: ''Give me a place to stand and I shall move the earth''. But such a place does not exist. We all have to stand on the earth itself and go with her at her pace.'(p151)

Obi's education in England has provided him with idealistic moral standards. However these did not serve him to meet the demands of the practical reality in Nigeria. This moral idealism brought him to a

[86] Killam, G.D. Op. Cit. P40.

world of illusion, where he came to believe that he could bring about change by the force of his knowledge. Achebe ironizes the idealist who thinks himself capable of changing the world, if offered an opportunity. Achebe asserts that this opportunity does not exist, and suggests that the changes that Obi wants to achieve in modern Nigeria require some time to take effect[87].

Like Conrad, Achebe attacks easy, utopian morality, because in critical moments, it does not help to keep man on the right course. Attracted to its apparent beauty, Obi idealizes it and feels superior to his fellowmen. However, as Palmer puts it, this moral idealism crystallized in his urge to eradicate corruption and other traditional practices, like the bride price and the caste system, is too theoretical[88]. This prevents him from meeting the immediate demands of the reality.

Nigerian reality, notably characterized by culture clash, is complex and requires more than mere idealistic theories from young intellectuals. Indeed, Achebe does not call for the eradication of the Western moral standards; in fact, as Killam puts it, he 'implicitly recommends' them[89]. Despite the fact that there is no overt didactic discourse, the moral standards Obi defends force our admiration, and our recognition that they are indeed needed in a Nigerian society fraught with corruption and archaic traditional practices. What Achebe criticizes is the way they are presented to the individual in the form of impressive moral inculcation, and the consequent gulf they create between theory and practice. On the other hand, Achebe suggests that the traditional morality should be taken as an example, because it is drawn from practical experience. The moral standards characterizing traditional culture can be summarized in a set of proverbs, directly related to everyday life. Achebe argues that traditional proverbs issue from direct observation and experience, which explains their hold and effects on people's behaviour:

> '[Our] people are very observant about nature and all these proverbs, quite apart from how you can apply them as a metaphor and so on, are also very exact, actual observation of what goes on in nature and in society. This is what gives them their power […]'[90]

Achebe admires the fact that traditional morality is deeply interwoven with the practical reality, and is drawn from it. He calls then people to take this traditional characteristic as an example, and reconcile moral idealism with practical life.

In practice, Jim and Obi have quite different moral idealisms. Jim dreams about being a hero and saving people from dangers, whereas Obi dreams about saving his beloved Nigeria from corruption. In nature, these moral standards are similar, as they involve the help one would provide to his

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[87] Edmondson, H.T. ed. Op. cit. P100.
[88] Palmer, Eustace. *An Introduction to the African Novel*. (Great Britain, Heinemann, 1972), P66.
[89] Killam, G.D. Op. cit. P40.
[90] Wilkinson, Jane, ed. Op. Cit. P52.

fellowmen. However, both protagonists have acquired these standards through an impressive sum of moral knowledge. Jim acquired it from his protestant family, and also from literature; Obi acquired it from Western culture. Jim and Obi appreciated their moral standards in their theoretical form, and were attracted to their apparent, idealistic beauty. Moreover, they were attracted to the glory they would obtain if they acted along them. Jim delights in contemplating his heroic 'achievements', whereas Obi is proud of the knowledge he has, and his 'superior' consciousness. However, the contact with the reality is too harsh for these idealistic moral standards to resist. In times of crisis, both protagonists lose this sense of consciousness, and act similarly to those they used to despise; both 'jump' from the illusory idealistic world to face the reality, where 'there are no ideals and no humbug'.

Conrad and Achebe do promote the moral virtues of their protagonists; however they also bring to light their lack of practicability. The individual needs to consider the circumstances surrounding him, and has to rely on his own power of judgment in order to act morally. This can be achieved only when the individual has acquired the true sense of morality.

However, we cannot attribute the moral failure solely to the theoretical nature of the moral code, as there is another undeniable factor, human nature. We find in the novels a treatment of the protagonists' character defects which meets Kant's discussion of human weakness.

2. ***Human Weakness:***

Lord Jim and *No Longer At Ease* provide a discussion of the conflict between human nature and morality. Indeed, we see the two protagonists torn between these two contradictory incentives when they are pressed to make a moral choice.

Kant inquires into human weakness, and the role it plays in moral failure. Despite the fact that Kant gives utter primacy to the moral law in his moral theory- that is, all rational wills stand under it, he recognizes that man is not guided solely and always by reason, and that there is something in his nature which hinders him from obeying the moral law. His discussion of the notions of merit and demerit brings to light his position towards this issue. According to him, demerit does not merely indicate the absence of merit, but has a positive value, as it indicates the presence, not the lack of something. This definition of demerit runs against Spinoza's view of evil as a state of want, privation, 'an imperfection in the sense that a possible perfection is lacking'[91]. Kant argues that demerit implies the presence of a character defect, or human weakness:

> [Demerit] implies moral failure, not in the sense of a short-coming, a falling short of a perfection we might have achieved or within our reach, but in the sense of a falling away from a perfection achieved or within our reach. Moral failure is not merely an ineffectual

[91] Teale, A.E. op. cit. P37.

> endeavour, it is a relapse, a lowering of character. If merit implies moral success, and an achievement we can count as a step towards perfection, demerit implies moral failure and a defection for which we are no less responsible than we are for the perfection achieved in moral success.'[92]

Kant, thus, attributes moral failure to a character defect, a weakness inherent in human nature. This leads man to act against an inner principle related to reason, and urging him to honour the moral code. This character defect emanates from what Kant calls the incentive towards self-love. Kant asserts that while man has a predisposition to respect the moral law, he has also inclinations, and a self-love motivating him to satisfy these inclinations. Man, thus, has two contradictory incentives which come into conflict whenever he has to make a moral choice. A morally good person is one capable of giving priority to the natural drive to act according to the moral law over the drive to satisfy self-centered motivations; however, the latter's influence upon man's behaviour is undeniable.

Conrad and Achebe treat two character defects in their protagonists, namely cowardice and individualism. These two character traits emanate from the same source, which Kant calls 'the incentive towards self-love'. Cowardice is the individual's urge to preserve himself in times of danger, whereas individualism is his primary concern with the achievement of his interests.

Cowardice is presented as the inability of the individual to maintain his observance of the moral code in critical times. In *Lord Jim*, courage, the opposite value of cowardice, is defined by Marlow as 'that inborn ability to look temptations straight in the face-a readiness unintellectual enough […] but without pose- a power of resistance, […] an unthinking and blessed stiffness before the outward and inward terrors, before the might of nature, and the seductive corruption of men''(p32). Courage, thus, is the ability of man to overcome his fear and honour the moral code regardless of the dangers he might affront. It is presented as an 'unintellectual' and 'unthinking' ability because courage requires of the individual to shatter all inner impulses calling him towards self-preservation and to concentrate only on the task to be achieved. Marlow offers here a definition of courage which transcends the context of the novel. Indeed, it is not limited to sea-life where the individual has to keep his self-control before nature's harsh manifestations; Courage is presented in universal terms, being the ability to resist temptations. Temptations may differ along the socio-historical contexts, but the ability to resist them remains the same. We find in *No Longer at Ease* a discussion of moral courage, similar to the one presented in *Lord Jim* as it is also presented by Achebe as the ability to resist temptations. Far from the

[92] Ibid.

dangers of the natural elements, Obi faces corruption, which is as morally demanding as sea dangers. Obi fails to display moral courage and live up to his ideals in the face of the hardships he encounters.

On the other hand, the protagonists display a strong sense of self-concern. This is a trait which runs counter to the moral standards they profess, involving essentially self-sacrifice. As we shall see, Jim and Obi are presented as being highly individualistic, a trait that also contributes to disqualify them from honouring the code. Individualism in the modern Western culture is presented as an ideal, as the individual is encouraged to pursue his own happiness and to serve his own interests, regardless of others'. This modern Western cult of individualism is strongly discouraged in the African context, where communalism is still a marked feature, despite the increasing changes. Conrad and Achebe hold the same position towards individualism, as both protagonists are defeated in the end. However, the difference lies in the fact that individualism in *Lord Jim* is presented as inevitable, while in *No Longer at Ease*, it is rather discouraged.

After affirming man's moral nature and recognizing his weakness, Kant further investigates man's social nature, and the role society plays in his moral life. It is important to bear in mind that Kant considers morality as a purely inner matter. He is against the tendency to define merit and demerit as qualities implying 'success or failure to act in accordance with the expectations of the society in which we live'[93]. In this sense, the individual's actions are solely guided by his fear of approbation and disapprobation of his social environment. Kant argues that merit and demerit are qualities which can be applied only to creatures responsible for their actions, and who are able to appreciate the moral contentment involved in moral success, and are struck by remorse, involved in moral failure; remorse involves 'contrition', 'self-reproach, not reproach from others. It involves self-accusation, rather than censure and upbraiding from other people'[94]. However, Kant's consciousness of human nature and of its weakness led him to recognize that man may need more than a sense of morality in order to achieve moral success, notably, society:

> 'There is a clear recognition of the fact that genuine morality has such a slender hold on man that it might be lost entirely if it were not stimulated and sustained by sympathy, gratitude, pride, ambition, and sensitiveness to approbation and disapprobation […] these social impulses only serve to remind us of our moral vocation and to sustain an otherwise weak and vacillating spirit'.[95]

Society serves only as a helpful drive, and not the primary cause, in man's moral life. Kant insists on the differentiation between true, genuine virtues and the adopted ones resulting from social impulses. However, he recognizes the important role the latter can play in moral success; man's sensitiveness to

[93] Ibid. P38.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Teale, A.E. Op. Cit. p49.

the judgment of others regarding his behaviour is natural, and points to his social nature, and the close, intricate relationship society has with morality:

> "In view of the weakness of human nature, and of the small power which the moral feeling would exert over most hearts, providence has given us, as aids to virtue, certain helpful drives, which while moving even unprincipled persons to beautiful deeds, can give to those who are ruled by principles a greater incentive to virtue. […] [P]rovidence has given us a certain delicate feeling which can arouse us to resist self-interest and vulgar sensuality. This is the sense of honour, and its consequence, shame. The opinion others may have about our worth, and their judgment of our actions, is a great motivating force, and one which coaxed from us many a sacrifice.''[96]

Conrad and Achebe discus this issue in L J and NLAE; both protagonists are in fact presented as isolated from their society. Jim, as we have seen, is spatially separated from his society before and after the jump. Moreover, even on the boat, he is isolated from the miniature society constituted by the crew through his sense of superiority and tendency towards imagination. Obi, for his part, is isolated from his Umuofian community, as he lives in the modern urban Lagos. This separation has created in the protagonists a strong sense of individualism, which has brought about their insensitiveness to the social helpful drives presented by Kant. Torn between the contradictory incentives, and deprived of social, helpful drives, the protagonists succumb to their weakness and betray their ideals.

In the light of Kant's theory concerning human weakness, we proceed to analyze the character defects of Jim and Obi, and the part they play in their moral failure. Indeed, cowardice and individualism hinder them from achieving moral success. Moreover, as we shall see, their isolation from their society makes them insensitive to the social helpful drives described by Kant.

*A. **Cowardice:***

a) Lord Jim:

Conrad analyzes Jim's sense of honour when assaulted by hard external circumstances. He puts Jim to the test that brings to light his true inner worth as contrasted to the confident appearance he presents to the world. In order to understand more the significance of Jim's experience, it is important to know the kind of character Conrad admires. A.S. Collins argues that the characters Conrad upholds are 'simple souls, whose faith lay in courage, honesty, duty: they [are] men of honour, to whom self-respect [is] life

[96] Ibid. PP47-48.

itself'[97]. Conrad admires in men the ability to observe simple, but cardinal, moral standards, and overcome base instincts.

In appearance, Jim is presented as adhering to the type of characters that Conrad admires. He shows a devotion to duty and stiffness before temptations. Conrad emphasizes Jim's right appearance, and presents the impression it makes on those who encounter him. In the following passage, Marlow affirms that Jim, in appearance, belongs to those whose strength lies in their fidelity to simple ideas, notably courage and self-respect:

> ''I liked his appearance; I knew his appearance; […] He stood there for all the parentage of his kind, for men and women by no means clever or amusing, but whose very existence is based upon honest faith, and upon the instinct of courage.''(p32)

Marlow stresses man's courage in front of 'the outward and inward terrors', referring to his the outside circumstances and natural instincts.

The courage Conrad refers to lies in man's ability to resist inward drives towards self-preservation when put to the test. Indeed, Jim is put to the test which reveals the utter discrepancy between his appearance and reality. In order to emphasize this discrepancy, Conrad dwells much on Jim's self-consideration before the Patna incident. Jim believes he is different from the other members of the crew, because of their lack of moral virtues. He looks down on them from his superior position, affirming to himself that, contrary to him, they do not belong to ''the world of adventure''(p18). The crew members stand for those whose instincts have taken hold on their character. Marlow insists on the difference between Jim and those men and the distance separating them: ''The quality of these men did not matter; he rubbed shoulders with them, but they could not touch him; he shared the air they breathed, but he was different''(p18). However, this can be felt only in ironic tones. When the Patna hits an underwater object and threatens to sink, the crew members strive to free the life-boat, under the contemptible eyes of Jim. They instinctively react to the approach of danger: save their lives. As J. Berthoud puts it, at 'the first whiff of danger they become intoxicated with terror. Instinct manipulates them as puppets'[98]. On his part, Jim is anxious to keep the distance separating him from these men he despises:

> ''He wanted me to know that he had kept his distance; that there was nothing in common between him and these men. […] it was more than probable he thought himself caught up from them by a space that could not be traversed, by an obstacle that could not be overcome, by a chasm without a bottom. He was as far as he could get from them-the whole breadth of the ship.''(p77)

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[97] Collins, A.S. *English Literature of the Twentieth Century.* (London, University Tutorial Press LTD, 1951), P188.

[98] Berthoud, Jacques. Op. Cit. P76.

The final statement is ironic, as it describes the 'space' separating Jim from the crew, and which he believes, or tries to, could not be 'traversed', as being the breadth of the ship, which can, in fact, easily be crossed. This irony foreshadows Jim's near alliance with them. Indeed, as Berthoud puts it, while Jim stands far contemplating their efforts to free the boat, he 'seethes with loathing'[99]. This strong inner reaction towards them is explained by the fact that he starts to feel a pull towards his future 'partners in crime'; in other words, Jim detects in himself a slight inclination to go and join them, and is paralyzed by this discovery.

Moreover, Jim detects in the event a vengeful consciousness aiming at destroying him, and delighting in his near dishonour:

> 'In this assault upon his fortitude, there was the jeering intention of a spiteful and vile vengeance. There was an element of burlesque in this ordeal- a degradation of funny grimaces at the approach of death or dishonour.'(p78)

At this moment, Jim has to resist the external assaults of nature and the fear they engender, and respond to the moral urge to fulfill his duty in the face of this danger. As George A. Panichas puts it:

> 'The assaults of nature on Jim's outer situation are as vicious at this pivotal point of his life as are the assaults of conscience on his moral sense. These clashing outer and inner elements are clearly pushing Jim to the edge, as heroic aspiration and human frailty wrestle furiously for the possession of his soul.'[100]

Finally, Jim reaches dishonour as he jumps to save his life, and, 'by disdaining to fight 'in the ranks'', he has elected to associate himself with those who exist outside the ranks'[101]. He finally traverses the space that he anxiously sought to maintain by this leap into the sea, into dishonour. On the life-boat, Jim is repeatedly called 'coward' by his 'partners in crime'.

In the inner fight between morality and instinct, Jim gives up his responsibility towards the pilgrims onboard and obeys the instinctive urge to save his life. Marlow refers to Jim's inner fight between these two natural incentives as being two personalities struggling over their hold on his character:

> 'He was not speaking to me, he was only speaking before me, in a dispute with an invisible personality, an antagonistic and inseparable partner of his existence- another possessor of his soul. These were issues beyond the competency of a court of inquiry: it was a subtle and momentous quarrel as to the true essence of life, and did not want a judge. He wanted an ally, a helper, an accomplice. I felt the risk I ran of being circumvented, blinded, decoyed, bullied, perhaps, into taking a definite part in a dispute impossible of decision if one had to be fair to all the phantoms in possession-to the reputable that had its claims and to the disreputable

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[99] Ibid.

[100] Panichas, George A. "*The Moral Sense in Joseph Conrad's Lord Jim*". *Humanitas*. P17. < http://www.nhinet.org/pani13-1.pdf>

[101] Berthoud, Jacques. Op. Cit. p77.

> that had its exigencies. […] he appealed to all sides at once-to the side turned perpetually to the light of day, and to that side of us, which like the other hemisphere of the moon, exists stealthily in perpetual darkness, with only a fearful ashy light falling at times on the edge.' (PP68-69)

The struggle of these two personalities, symbols of the two incentives towards morality and instinct, is inherent in human nature. Marlow asserts that he cannot take a definite defensive position, because man can deny neither morality, nor the self-preserving instinct. Jim is caught between allegiance to the moral law and the urge towards self-preservation. A definite rejection of either side is not a perspective contemplated by Marlow, because both drives are part of human nature.

The novel dissuades our attempts to draw final judgments. Our tendency to sympathize with Jim is discouraged by the opinion another character has about Jim's experience, that of the French lieutenant. Indeed, the latter comes to affirm the need to maintain one's honour even at the expense of one's life. Berthoud presents him as 'Jim's complete antithesis', in the sense that 'he has done without fuss what Jim could not'[102]. The lieutnant asserts to Marlow that ''One has done one's possible'', when he has found the Patna, which in fact has not sunk, and tells him how he has saved the hundreds of pilgrims. The lieutenant has taken 'the succession' after those who have given up their duty and honour. In the frame of his personal inquiry into Jim's case, Marlow presents to this personage the facts, in order to take 'professional opinion'.

The way the conversation begins seems very promising for Marlow, who believes he has finally found someone to 'understand'. The lieutenant asserts that fear, under a ''certain combination of circumstances is sure to come''(p107). Fear can make man give up everything, implying even one's honour, in order to save one's life. He adds that ''Man is born a coward'' and that it ''would be too easy otherwise''(107). The lieutenant implies that Jim's failure can happen to everyone, because everyone can succumb to his fear, and that life would be too easy if there was no natural weakness to struggle against. He adds that ''the young man in question might have had the best dispositions''. Indeed, Marlow presents Jim as a promising and reliable young man, with a thorough knowledge of his duty. At this point, Marlow mistakenly takes the lieutenant's opinion as 'lenient', in the sense that Jim can be forgiven because he has failed to fulfill his obligation out of natural weakness. However, the lieutenant rejects Marlow's optimistic conclusions about his own position and advocates honour:

> ''The honour-the honour, monsieur!... The honour…that is real-that is! And what life may be worth when […] the honour is gone […] I can offer no opinion. I can offer no opinion-because-monsieur- I know nothing of it.''(p109)

[102] Ibid. p67

Through the lieutenant, Conrad affirms the importance of honour, and even its primacy over life itself. Honour must be kept at all costs, even death, because life is not worth living when one's honour is gone. Contrary to Marlow's hope, there is no simple excuse for Jim's betrayal. Moreover, through insisting on honour, Conrad points to the social drives that help man overcome his weakness. Man is born weak. At the approach of danger, the incentive towards self-preservation awakens and conflicts with the incentive towards morality. The lieutenant mentions ''the eye of others'' before which honour must be kept. Marlow asserts that Jim ''had none of these inducement-at least at the moment''(p108). Jim is left prey to his instincts, and doomed to fail, because he is not conscious of social approbation.

The novel is built around the opposition between the moral code and instinct, and attempts to offer possible solutions to resolve the moral crisis by asserting social inducements, such as the sense of honour. Moral success is not to be achieved by a self-sufficient individual, but 'under the eye of others'[103]. Moral success is to be achieved within society.

b) *No Longer at Ease:*

The situation Obi finds himself in is made more complex than that of Jim by the surrounding conflict between the native traditional culture and the Western one. Obi's absorption of Western moral ideals during his studies in England makes him reject certain traditional aspects, like the caste system and the bride-price. Achebe implicitly recommends Obi's moral idealism; however, he wants to put Obi to the test, in order to see whether he will honour his ideals regardless of the difficulties he may meet.

In this novel, Achebe presents an inquiry into the nature of the individual's commitment to the moral code. Regarding Obi's experience, which ends up with the betrayal of the moral code, Achebe implies that such a commitment requires moral courage and stiffness before hardships. Indeed, Obi lacks the moral courage to sustain his moral idealism. Killam presents Obi's moral idealism as contrasting with his moral cowardice:

> 'The core of the novel is the moral dilemma in which Obi finds himself and the conflict in the novel is produced by the clash between the strength of his moral awareness on the one hand and his almost total lack of moral courage in sustaining it.[104]'

The point which most strongly brings to light Obi's moral cowardice is his relationship with Clara. As D. Cook puts it, this point is 'the real test of his character'[105]. Indeed, Obi has to put his moral idealism into practice, and to strongly stand up for it, if he is to marry an 'osu', and deny the traditions of his people. Obi is on the verge of breaking up with a long-standing tradition in his culture; it requires of him courage

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[103] Ibid. p70.
[104] Killam, G.D. Op. Cit. P50.
[105] Cook, David. *African Literature: A Critical View*. (London, Longman, 1977), P91.

to proclaim equality in rights for all members of Nigerian society, and to call for the abolition of the caste system.

In appearance, Obi does display such moral strength. For example, in his conversation with Joseph, Obi affirms his desire to marry Clara, repudiates the traditional caste system, and asserts his ability to face opposition:

> ''Look at me', said Joseph, […] 'You know book, but this is no matter for book. Do you know what an osu is?[…]
> 'I know more about it than yourself, he said, 'and I'm going to marry the girl. I wasn't actually seeking your approval.' […]
> Obi felt better and more confident about his decision now that there was an opponent, the first of hundreds to come no doubt. Perhaps it was not a decision really; for him there could be only one choice. It was scandalous that in the middle of the twentieth century a man could be barred from marrying a girl simply because her great […] father had been dedicated to serve 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[…]' (PP64/65)

This passage is set in ironic tones, because the firmness Obi displays here contrasts with his eventual passiveness and inability to defend his ideals. Indeed, when it comes to convincing his mother, as Killam puts it, 'sheer terror replaces moral resolve'[106]. At the prospect of his mother's suicide, fear undoes him completely, and makes him unable to face his predicament. He discovers that he is facing 'the greatest crisis of his life', not because he does not have the blessing of his mother, but because he lacks the courage to stand up:

> '[His] mind was not troubled by what had happened but also by the discovery that there was nothing in him with which to challenge it honestly.'(P124)

Obi experiences moral confusion when he realizes that he lacks the moral strength required to face true critical situations. This is the first failure of Obi to live up to his moral standards. The term 'coward' is mentioned at this moment of realization. Achebe resorts to an Igbo saying which applies to Obi, who looks for his father to prove again his courage: '[W]hen a coward sees a man he can beat he becomes hungry for a fight'(p124).

Obi is unable to maintain his love relationship with Clara. Some critics refer to the episode when Clara leaves and breaks off her relation with Obi as a weak point in the novel. Eustace Palmer, for example, states that her motives are ambiguous, especially at the moment when the prospect of marriage seems realizable[107]. However, the reasons why Achebe makes Clara leave at that moment are implicitly indicated. On his return from Umuofia, Obi declares to Clara that his mother's mind has been

[106] Killam, G.D. Op. Cit. P51.
[107] Palmer,Eustace. Op. Cit. P70.

affected by her illness, and that she would soon accept. He adds that his father is won over, ''All we need do is lie quiet for a little while''(p129). The suggestiveness of inaction points to Obi's shrinking from action and the suffering it entails. In addition to the fact that Obi has failed to convince his parents, Clara faces a man who lacks the moral courage and strength when needed the most. Their marriage is at the mercy of his parents; she is horrified at the fact that Obi is unable to solve the predicament.

Obi's moral cowardice is further displayed in the fact that he does not want to suffer in order to honour his moral ideals. This is implied in his conversation with his father, when the latter tells him his past experience. Isaac was cursed by his father because he decided to leave home and join the church: ''I went through fire to become a Christian. Because I suffered I understand Christianity''(p125). Apart from the Christian context, there is an implicit message which relates to Obi's experience. Through Isaac, Achebe states the difficulty that the individual finds when he stands against his own people and his cultural tradition. He has to endure the rejection of his family and his clan. These are things that Obi does not seem to be ready to experience. He strongly proclaims moral ideals, but does not contemplate the prospect of suffering in order to honour them.

On the level of work and life in the city, Obi's moral idealism and inability to live along it because of his moral cowardice is clearly depicted. Obi maintains strongly his position against corruption at the beginning of his career, when things are easy. At this point, he ignores the fact that his salary won't be enough to cover his modern life and his kinship obligations. This is displayed in his rejection of the question concerning bribery in the job interview as absurd. As R.W. Wren puts it:

> 'He thinks it absurd because he has not lived through the experience of coping with the demands that will be placed on his salary, and he thinks his pay is generous. He is honest and idealistic; and he feels no false modesty about his virtue. What he does not realize is that when an African occupies a position previously held by a European, he has in some way to deal with the fact that he is perceived among his own people to be far richer than he is.'[108]

Obi is virtuous at the beginning and proudly states his moral idealism, because he has not yet faced true problems. He refuses bribes initially, because he can still afford to be virtuous. The easiness with which he takes the issue is exaggerated, as it reveals his ignorance of the difficulty of the situation he is on the brink to face:

> ''It was easy to keep one's hands clean. It required no more than the ability to say: 'I'm sorry, Mr. So and So, but I cannot continue this discussion. Good morning.'' (P81)

When the economic crisis reaches its climax, Obi comes to realize his predicament. The confrontation with the reality is unavoidable. The economic burden, allied with the emotional pressures, at the death

[108] Wren, Robert M. *Achebe's Word: The Historical and Cultural Context of the Novels of Chinua Achebe*.(Great Britain, Longman, 1980), P47.

of his mother and the break up with Clara, reveal his true inner dispositions. As G. D. killam puts it, now 'in neither his private nor his public affairs can he, at critical moments, display the courage, make the stand required of him'[109]. Through Obi's failure, Achebe illustrates that it is not so easy 'to keep one's hands clean' within the modern Nigerian context, it requires moral courage.

At critical moments, Obi turns away from suffering, and chooses self-preservation instead of respect of the moral law. He is not ready to produce efforts in order to solve the predicament. The moral ideals he professes are admirable, but are difficult to defend within the modern Nigerian context. To exist within two clashing cultures and achieve moral success requires moral strength. As A. Irele puts it:

> [NLAE] 'is the story of an individual […] who is caught up in this situation which demands from the individual that he creates a firm moral order out of the flux of values in the world in which he lives-a situation that demands an exceptional moral and intellectual initiative. Obi's dilemma is contained in the conflict between his developed intellectual insight and his lack of moral strength to sustain it.'[110]

Obi does not seem to be aware of such difficulties. The confidence he displays during his studies and at the beginning of his career is replaced by moral confusion; the test has revealed his weakness, moral cowardice.

NLAE is built around the conflict between moral virtue and human weakness. Moreover, like Jim, Obi lacks the social inducements which Kant asserts help man keep on the moral path. Indeed, Obi does not show any concern for the approbation or disapprobation of his social environment, and is betrayed by his weakness at the moment of crisis.

Jim and Obi, thus, display a lack of moral fortitude when they are tested. Both proclaim admirable moral ideals that need a strong moral resolve and courage to be put into practice. The protagonists show the same easiness of mind concerning their ideals, and delight in contemplating in imagination their achievements. However, both come to discover that, in reality, they lack the moral courage to honour their duty. The incentive which promotes self-preservation overwhelms and undoes them at crucial moments. The fact is that both protagonists lack the social drives that may help them overcome their weakness; both of them unconsciously yield to betrayal, without showing concern for their social environment. This is closely related to another character defect- individualism- that we will discuss in our next point.

B. ***Individualism:***

[109] Killam, G.D. Op. Cit. P51

[110] Qt in: Beier, Ulli.ed. *Introduction to African Literature: An Anthology of Critical Writing*. (Great Britain, Longman, 1967), P182.

a) *Lord Jim:*

The concern with the individual as a member of society has been emphasized in Western thought, as we have seen, since the Greek period. Individualism is feared and discouraged because it represents a threat to social harmony. The individual is urged towards giving primacy to social responsibility over his natural or instinctive tendencies towards personal interests. On the other hand, 19th century Britain saw the rising concern with the figure of the hero, who is elevated above his society by the scope of his individualism. Tanner refers to this point, and discusses its importance in grasping the full significance of *Lord Jim*:

> 'It is important to remember the significance of the hero for so many 19th century thinkers. Nietzsche's Superman and Carlyle's Great Man can be seen as summarizing the interest of the century with the hero, the great and lonely individual elevated above the common herd of society by the scope of his imagination, his dedication to dreams and ideals, his contempt for the prosaic trivia of day-to-day existence.' [111]

Paradoxically, the 19th century expressed the fear of individualism on the one hand, and idealized it through its veneration of the figure of the hero, on the other hand. The hero does represent the values promoted by society, such as solidarity, courage, altruism, self-sacrifice, but his very position isolates him from it and makes him yield more towards self-glorification. *Lord Jim*, as U. Lord puts it, treats the complex issue of 'a man struggling to live along the social moral code versus a notion of individualism'[112]. Lord adds that the novel presents 'the conflict between Romantic individualism and solidarity'[113]. Indeed, while Jim stands for the values promoted by his society, he displays a strong concern with himself.

After mystical morality, the other view that Conrad repudiates is individualism: 'the idea that individual man should be a self-sufficient unit acting from motives of competitive success'[114]. Moreover, as Berthoud puts it, the emphasis on the independence of the self 'is incompatible, of course, with the ideal of service'[115]- the ideal of service as crystallized in the notion of solidarity. The sea, for Conrad, is the school where basic moral virtues are taught[116]. Solidarity represents in seamanship one of its most important pillars. The survival of the crew in the face of sea dangers depends on each individual's sense of responsibility and self-sacrifice.

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[111] Tanner, tony. Op. Cit. P8.
[112] Lord, Ursula. *Solitude Versus Solidarity in the Novels of Joseph Conrad*. (McGill-Queen's Press - MQUP, 1998), P147.
[113] Ibid. p150.
[114] Berthoud, Jacques. Op. Cit. P16.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Collins, A. S. *Op. Cit.* P188.

Conrad gives this notion utter primacy, as he asserts that an individual who enters a seaman's life has to pass through ceremonies of initiation, because he will enter into 'a confraternity sustained and defined by a special tradition of service'[117]. The universal meaning inherent in seamanship is the ideal of human solidarity. In Berthoud's words, this ideal is 'impersonal, in that it is not motivated by a concern for the self; but it is human, for it seeks to express and develop man's latent capacity for comradeship and reciprocity'[118]. This is the ideal of service to which Jim fails to comply.

Conrad's repudiation of individualism explains his criticism of the 19th century images of heroism. In his important works, notably *Nostromo, Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*, Conrad expresses strongly this position through presenting the final defeat of the protagonists- heroes who seek success out of the social sphere.

Conrad treats in his work the discrepancy between heroism effected in the help and sacrifice for the others, and its underlying individualism. Ursula Lord argues that the 'shattering of the code of cultural solidarity is, in Conrad's world, inevitable' because of the excessive individualism of the protagonists. Lord adds: 'The concepts of heroism and betrayal are intertwined. The price of heroism is the loss of one's status within the community, as collective values are sacrificed in the quest for spectacular individual glory'[119]. While the hero is set to represent the values of his society, his elevated stature encourages an already present sense of self-concern, which reaches a dimension beyond his grasp, leading him to betray the values he himself promotes.

Jim is the typical representation of the 19th century romantic hero. Our first sight of him is in a high position looking down with contempt on the trivial day-to-day existence. He spends his time dreaming about a heroic life:

> 'He confronted savages on tropical shores, quelled mutinies on the high seas, and in a small boat upon the ocean kept up the hearts of despairing men- always an example of devotion to duty and as unflinching as a hero in a book.' (P5)

By standing apart from the crew and contemplating individual achievements, Conrad shows that Jim lacks the notion of solidarity inherent in the code of seamanship.

The first failure of Jim is presented by the first narrator at the beginning of the novel at the training ship. This episode tells about Jim's first experience at sea. The term 'training' is very suggestive, as it entails Jim's preparation to enter seamanship. It reaches the dimensions of the initiation rite that Conrad refers to as important to introduce the individual into the seamanship confraternity. However, this failure has not served Jim as a lesson because of his individualism. J. H. stape asserts that the

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[117] Berthoud, Jacques. Op. Cit. P14.
[118] Ibid. pp14-15.
[119] Lord, Ursula. Op. Cit. P63.

episode 'cruelly dissects Jim's naïve desire for 'heroic' stature and mocks his stereotypically youthful vapourings'[120]. Indeed, the narrator contrasts Jim's heroic dreams with the mocking reality: Jim's contemplation of his future heroic achievements is interrupted by a sudden incident, as a man is thrown overboard. Moreover, before the incident, there is a detailed description of the weather: The tumult and violence of the weather contrasts sharply with Jim's peaceful state of mind, allowed to dwell nonchalantly in the world of heroic imagination. Instead of immediately stepping into action, i.e. saving the man and acting like the heroes he imagines, Jim stands immobile and confounded. The notion of self-sacrifice claimed in his imagination vanishes. While he stands astounded at the suddenness of the event, the bowman becomes the hero. At the moment, Jim realizes his failure as he looks up at the captain 'with the pain of conscious defeat in his eyes'(p6). However, this consciousness does not last for long. Instead of learning the lesson and taking it as a preparation for the future, Jim manages to soothe the effects of his failure by convincing himself that he can 'affront greater perils'. His extreme self-pride leads him to despise the bowman's heroic tale, which he sees as 'pitiful display of vanity', and convinces himself that he is happy not to have contributed in it, 'since a lower achievement has served the turn'(p7).

Jim's excessive self-concern enables him to restore his self-image in imagining future, more adequate adventures for him. He does not benefit from the incident, as he fails to learn that in order to acquire the practical and adequate reaction required to achieve success in danger, he has to achieve self-sacrifice. Instead, Jim falls again into his heroic imagination, and asserts to himself that 'when all men flinched, then-he felt sure- he alone would know how to deal with the spurious menace of wind and seas'(p7).

The second, and major, failure of Jim occurs onboard the Patna. At the threat of sinking, the crew hurries to free the life boat to leave the ship. All through the events, Jim passively looks around him with the utter consciousness of his helplessness and doom. His looking with contempt at the crew members contrasts with his day dreaming where he would 'keep up the hearts of despairing men'. He passively looks at the hundreds of pious pilgrims trusting blindly the white man's courage and strength. They ignore what is happening around them. Jim chooses to remain silent and let them sleep, because he fears to create panic, a thing that *he* cannot handle.

Jim's attitude onboard the Patna contrasts sharply with the seamanship code which requires an effacement of the self before the fulfillment of one's duty. Jim is too self-preoccupied to honour his obligation. His mind is set on such considerations as remaining different from the crew, and not awakening the pilgrims. These considerations are unfitting in a time demanding self-sacrifice and

[120] Stape, J.H.ed. Op. Cit. P70.

allegiance to the code. Jim is too individualistic to honour the seamanship code of solidarity and self-sacrifice.

Furthermore, Jim's egoism is displayed in his position regarding his failure onboard the Patna. He exclaims to Marlow several times: ''What a chance missed!''(p61). Marlow declares that Jim ''had no leisure to regret what he had lost, he was so wholly and naturally concerned with what he had failed to obtain''(p61). Jim, as Marlow insists, is naturally concerned with himself. For him, the jump represents a failure to obtain the glory of his imaginary heroic achievements.

What is considered to be Jim's second chance is in Patusan, a remote island where Jim succeeds in establishing peace and gaining the trust and love of the Malays living there. He is surrounded by the love of Jewel, the friendship of Dain Waris, and the blind fidelity of Tamb-Itamb. However, the apparent commitment Jim shows towards these people hides an extreme concern with the self. Marlow asserts that Jim looks at Patusan with ''an owner's eye'', and the people with ''a fierce egoism''(p182). Here again, Jim is concerned with the glory he obtains from being heroic, and withdraws from the surrounding reality into his imaginary dreams. As Berthoud puts it:

> 'Despite his magnificent fidelity to the natives of Patusan […], Jim remains an outsider- a 'romantic' drawing inspiration from himself, not from the community he loves with what Marlow calls 'a sort of fierce egoism'. It is appropriate that he should become known as 'Tuan' Jim, for that title, attached to his personal rather his family name […], reflects the individualism that inspires his conduct'[121].

Jim's individualism leads him finally to abandon Jewel and the Malays. While she desperately urges him to save his life and remain with her, Jim egotistically seeks to end his life as a hero. As U. Lord puts it, even 'the strength of Jim's love for Jewel does not conquer his need to pursue his dream of heroism and impossible greatness. This private dream is the force behind his betrayal of his lover, and also his breach of faith with the native community of Patusan, of which she is a member'[122]. Jim's individualism disables him from leading a harmonious social life, as he constantly seeks to prove his superiority and gain glory in his own eyes. In his individualistic aspirations, Jim denies the commitment towards the people around him, which is the first principle of the code promoting social cohesion.

Critics differ in their interpretation of Jim's death: while some describe it as a final instance of his egoism, others stress its ambiguity, and the difficulty of drawing a final conclusion as regards its significance. T. Tanner wonders about the true meaning of Jim's final jump into death. Is it to be considered as 'a final ascent into triumph or another decent into shame, a consummation or an evasion?' However, he asserts its underlying egoism:

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[121] Berthoud, Jacques.Op. Cit. P91.
[122] Lord, Ursula. Op. Cit. P150.

> 'But either way he was 'egoistic' to the end. For like his jump from the Patna, his final jump out of life involves a betrayal, abandonment. For once again he leaves someone behind. He left 'a living woman to celebrate his pitiless wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct'. […]having once failed in his public duty he has now disregarded his private obligations. His 'exalted egoism' has, as before, made him oblivious to the claims and needs of other people'.[123]

J. H. Stape also asserts that Jim egotistically abandons Jewel, and leaves behind him a renewed political chaos in Patusan[124]. Jim's individualism strongly marks his character. His primary concern is with the realization of his heroic dreams. As Stape puts it, 'Jim's conception of the hero as a solitary individual braving the elements and overcoming his fears to sacrifice himself for the benefits of others is […] upheld by his society'[125]. However, Jim fails to live up to such a moral code because he is excessively individualistic. George A. Panichas argues that Jim's self-centeredness and isolation have a limiting impact on his moral sense:

> '[…]Jim's habit of detachment and abstraction manifestly rarefies his moral sense and diminishes and even neutralizes the moral meaning of his decisions and actions. His self-proclaimed autonomy dramatizes monomania and egoism, and makes him incapable of harmonious human interrelations, let alone a redeeming humility. His moral sense is consequently incomplete as a paradigm, and his moral virtues are finite.'[126]

Jim fails to apply to the imperative of the code underlying his heroism, which is self-sacrifice and solidarity, and concentrates on the glory he may get. His identification with the figure of the hero has the effects of nurturing his individualism. His isolation from society contributes to his moral failure. Moral success is not achieved by a self-sufficient individual, but by an individual within a social environment.

b) <u>No Longer at Ease:</u>

Communal solidarity is the major principle characterizing African traditional society. For the sake of social harmony, the individual's social conformism is enhanced by social and political institutions discouraging any deviation from the common will. *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God(1964)* illustrate the primacy of the community over the individual. Despite the fact the protagonists are powerful and play an important role in their society, they are severely submitted to punishment when they offend social institutions[127].

The contrast between the character type found in the rural novel and the one found in the urban novel brings to light the utter individualism of the latter, as a consequence of his detachment

[123] Tanner, Tony.Op. Cit. P55.
[124] Stape, J.H. Op. Cit. P76.
[125] Stape, J.H. Op. Cit. p70.
[126] Panichas, Geaorge A. Op. Cit. p30.
[127] Obiechina, Emmanuel. Op. Cit. P85.

from society. Obiechina highlights this point by asserting that characterization in the rural novel 'recognizes the corporate nature of the social environment and its conditioning influence on the traditional and therefore corporate individual'[128]. On the other hand, the character type found in the urban novel does not show such compliance with the social norms. The urban character, freed from a corporate social life, is more individualistic, and yields more easily to his personal aspirations:

> 'Characters in the modern urban setting tend to be marked by their extreme individualism. They appear as single and often isolated individuals. The absence of a unified cultural ethos leaves them with an immense degree of individual initiative and they are much freer in their thinking. […] [The individual's] lack of a unified vision of cultural (including moral) values leaves him free to indulge his instincts, drives and appetites'[129].

The individual found in an urban setting is, in general, utterly individualistic, because the concern with the others as promoted within the traditional life is replaced by an extreme concern with the self. Being far and isolated from his society, the individual is freed to be led by his instincts. The incentive towards self-love gains large primacy over the incentive towards the moral law. Hence, most characters in the African novels found in urban settings are more likely to experience moral decline.

Obi is the typical representation of the urban character type. He has been sent away from his community to receive a foreign education, and on his return, he lives in the modern city of Lagos. Indeed, Obi applies to the urban character type in the fact that he displays a strong sense of self-concern.

In his essay ''The Writer and his Community'', Achebe discusses the issue of individualism. He asserts its Western origin, and points out that it was first used by R.W. Emerson who presented it as 'a definition for the way of life which upholds the primacy of the individual'[130]. Emerson presents individualism in an approving, typically American optimistic way. Since then, the philosophy has spread over America and the Western world. Achebe presents this issue as essentially Western, and seems to show its dubious relevance to the non-Western context. Indeed, he criticizes it through analyzing the notion of fulfillment. According to modern Western individualism, the individual has to free himself from his society in order to realize self-fulfillment. As a response, Achebe asserts that individual fulfillment is achieved only in relation with the other:

> '[F]ulfillment is not, as people often think, uncluttered space or an absence of controls, obligations, painstaking exertion. No! It is actually a presence- a powerful demanding presence limiting the space in which the self can roam uninhibited; it is an inspiration by the self to achieve spiritual congruence with the other.

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[128] Ibid. p86.
[129] Ibid.102.
[130] Achebe, Chinua. *Op. Cit.* P49.

> When people speak glibly of fulfillment they often mean self-gratification, which is easy, short-lived and self-centered. Like drugs, it has to be experienced frequently, preferably in increasing doses.
> Fulfillment is other centered, a giving or subduing of the self, perhaps to somebody, perhaps to a cause; in any event to something external to it. Those who have experienced fulfillment all attest to the reality of this otherness. […] Artists, scientists and scholars may find fulfillment in their creative work, humanitarians in their service. But even more important, ordinary men and women have found fulfillment in their closeness to others- to children, to parents, to wife or husband, to others- and in social work of all kinds.' [131]

Achebe insists on the presentation of fulfillment as being realized only in relation to something external to the self. It is the complete opposite value of individualism. According to him, it is this kind of fulfillment which is durable and appreciated, and has the effect of liberating the self from the limiting natural drives urging it towards mere self-gratification. Fulfillment through care for others is spiritually rewarding. Individualism as promoted in the West is based on the freedom of the individual from society, and hence, the freedom to indulge in base instincts.

In NLAE, Achebe treats the issue of the acquisition of Western individualism by the African, and the devastating effects it has on him. We can refer to Hamidou Kane's *The Ambiguous Adventure* (1961), which clearly displays, as Achebe puts it, the 'philosophical dialogue between the West and Africa'. The novel tells the story of a young man caught between his tradition and the Western culture he comes in contact with through education. The Muslim rulers of the Diallobe people are defeated by the French imperial arms; pondering on the future course of their lives as a community, they decide to send their children to the new French school, not out of admission of their inferiority, nor with the prospect of imitating the French. However, Achebe asserts that they are ignorant of the devastating effect this would have on their children, which is symbolized through the experience of the main protagonist. Indeed, instead of acquiring the white man's knowledge, the latter becomes a hollow individualist. As Achebe puts it:

> 'The Hero of the novel, the deliverer-to-be- and paragon of the new generation, returns from France a total spiritual wreck, his once vibrant sense of community hopelessly shattered. Summoned to assume the mantle of leadership, his tortured soul begs to be excused, to be left alone. ''What have their problems to do with me?'' he asks. ''I am only myself. I have only me'' poor fellow; the West has got him!'[132]

There is the treatment of the same issues in *No Longer at Ease*. Like the Diallobe elders, The Umuofian elders worry about the future of their community because of the increasing pace of modernization. They send Obi to England with the goal of assuring their future within the modern environment, without loss of identity or admission of inferiority. Obi attains the dimension of the hero in whom the future and

[131] Ibid. P53.
[132] Ibid. p52.

development of his community lies. He is the symbol of progress, 'the paragon of the new generation'. Like Samba Diallo in *The Ambiguous Adventure*, Obi returns with a marked self-concern. As Cook puts it, Obi's education 'has made him see himself as an individual'[133]. In other words, Obi has come to see himself not as a social member, but as an individual on his own. Cook adds that, on his return to Lagos, Obi 'has to commute between the corporate world of integrated society and the lonely world of the individual consciousness'[134].

Obi's self-concern is displayed in his relationship with the UPU, the representatives of the traditional community in modern Lagos. Achebe mentions that, in order to send him to England, they have made tremendous efforts. Achebe is careful to insist on the sacrifice that the Umuofian people made in order to finance Obi's scholarship:

> '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 mercilessly.' (P6)

It is true that this scholarship is a loan that Obi has to pay back. However, Obi denies the fact that without their sacrifices, he would not have had the chance to study abroad. He is unable to feel gratitude or even sympathy towards his people. This point is suggested in Obi's conversation with Joseph:

> ''[R]emember you are the one and only Umuofian son to be educated overseas. We do not want to be like the unfortunate child who grows his first tooth and grows a decayed one. What sort of encouragement will your action give to the poor men and women who collected the money?'
> Obi was getting a little angry. 'It was only a loan, remember, I shall pay it all back to the last anini.'' (p68)

The positions of Obi and Joseph in relation to their people's help contrast sharply. Joseph exhorts Obi to think about his responsibility as the first Umuofian to be sent abroad. He exhorts him to think about his people's feelings who suffered to collect the money. However Obi's individualism makes him deaf to this kind of considerations, and deprives his people's help of any sentimental value-it is just a loan to be repaid.

As Achebe suggests at the end of the novel, 'We all have to stand on the earth itself and go with her at her pace'(p151); change, as far as traditional culture is concerned, is not to be achieved easily nor quickly. Obi refuses to endure the hardships that his pioneering position entails. All he wants to do is to realize his goal and interests, reminding us of the protagonists' words in *The Ambiguous Adventur*s: ''What have all these problems to do with me?''.

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[133] Cook, David. Op. Cit. P84.
[134] Ibid.

The call to assume social responsibility is made by the UPU elders themselves. They indirectly remind Obi of the necessity to sacrifice oneself for the sake of one's community: ''We are all pioneers building up our families and our town. And those who build must deny ourselves many pleasures''(p74). However, in opposition to the UPU's moral maturity, Obi displays selfishness. As Cook puts it, Obi 'fails to sense the need of him, the love for him- however obsessive- with which the air is charged. He is callow and entirely occupied with his own concerns'[135].

In his relationship with his family, the episode that most explicitly displays Obi's egoism is his behavior at the death of his mother. At this moment, Obi completely denies the pain that his father and all his family must feel in such a critical moment, and prefers to remain alone. His lack of human warmth is displayed not only by his absence from the rest of the family, but also by the fact that he contents himself with sending money to finance the funeral. He succeeds in soothing the feeling of pain at not attending the funeral through mere rationalization: by the time he arrived, his mother would be buried. Moreover, he does not consider the impact his absence would produce upon his father, his family, and the memory of his mother.

At critical moments, Obi displays an extreme selfishness. He has no real concern for the others, and this would inevitably make him unable to get out of his predicament, because he cannot handle it on his own. His individualism makes him fail to live along the moral code he promotes, so as to assume his position as a pioneer, which requires self-sacrifice.

Achebe may be warning against the individualism promoted by the West, because it is based on mere self-interest, a yielding to one's basic natural instincts. He advocates social responsibility, and points out the dangers of individualism, which leads to the moral decay of the individuals.

Jim and Obi display, thus, a strong sense of individualism. Both of them proclaim admirable moral standards, but which are appreciated only in their theoretical form. The natural incentive towards allegiance to the moral law is present at the beginning when life is easy; however, at critical moments, when self-sacrifice and suffering are required in order to honour the moral code, it is completely overwhelmed by the drive towards self-love. Furthermore, their isolation from their respective societies has made them insensitive to social approbation or disapprobation, presented as incentives towards virtue by Kant; as a consequence, they are left easy prey to their natural instincts.

The protagonists' selfishness has been nurtured by the Western idealization of individualism. Jim is influenced by the 19th century romantic figure of the individual hero, while Obi has absorbed individualism through Western literature, which is, according to Achebe, the vehicle through which

[135] Cook, David.Op. Cit. P87.

Western individualism is promoted[136]. This individualism runs counter to the communitarian ethos characterizing the African traditional society, and counter to Conrad's 'Ideal of service' which requires solidarity. The latter is close to the traditional communitarian ethos which calls for the social responsibility of the individual members to insure the survival of the community.

Conrad and Achebe, thus, despite their different social and cultural backgrounds, meet on the point that self-fulfillment is realized in one's commitment to something external to the self. Both are against individualism, and present the failure of the protagonists as being partly due to their excessive egoism. This position makes Conrad different from the Western writers, who proclaim and idealize individualism. His position as a seaman makes him closer to the cultural ethos of a traditional society, which emphasizes communal solidarity and self-sacrifice. However, he identifies with the Western novelists in the fact that he presents individualism as inevitable within a society which is losing its moral centre. In the African context, society is still healthy and consolidated, and thus, individualism is banished.

The causes of the moral failure as presented by Conrad and Achebe are, on one hand, the moral code, and the way it is presented to the individual. Its inculcation through romanticism and hero-worship leads to self-conceit and vain-glory, whereas its theoretical form makes it unfit to meet the demands of the practical reality. The protagonists adhere to moral standards imprisoned in their theoretical form. Their experience, however, proves that moral success does not rely on simple idealism and virtues. As Edmund Burke puts it, '[The] lines of morality are not like the ideal lines of mathematics. They are broad and deep as well as long. They admit of exceptions, they demand modifications'[137]. The protagonists' lack of experience in the real world, the world of action, deprives them from the ability to bring adaptability to the moral standards they profess, a virtue suggesting a sense of reality, which Jim and Obi, as we have demonstrated, seem to lack. On the other hand, moral failure is attributed to human weakness, represented through the protagonists' character defects: moral cowardice and individualism. Moreover, the protagonists are insensitive to the approbation or disapprobation of their society, because of their 'social isolation' and extreme individualism. They do not have the support of the social helpful drives that Kant describes.

The way society is presented in both novels is worth exploring, as it brings to light the main difference between the Western and African literatures, reflecting the difference which lies between the disintegrating Western society and the still more-or-less healthy African one. This point will be

[136] Achebe, Chinua. Op. cit. p52.
[137] Qt in : Panichas, George A. Op. Cit. P29.

developed in our next chapter, as it explains the different ends the protagonists meet: alienation for Jim and ways towards disalienation for Obi.

III. Alienation and Disalienation

Alienation in sociology and critical social theory is a concept referring to the individual's estrangement from his society. The alienated individual is unable to establish contact with his social group, and is thus unable to determine his social identity.

Sociologists and psychologists of the 19th and 20th centuries attempted to identify the reasons for the individual's alienation. For example, the French sociologist Emile Durkheim attributes it to a defective organic solidarity; the German sociologist Max Weber refers it to the industrial era's lack of spiritualism and faith[138]; The French psychoanalyst Jaques Lacan more precisely relates it to the concept of 'méconnaissance'- referring to the human crisis resulting from the contradictions characterizing the modern era[139]. Alienation, in general terms, is a state of estrangement of the individual in the new modern world.

Studies of the concept of alienation and its causes lead to shed light on the social nature of man. Lacan refers to the importance of society in forming the inner self-consciousness of the individual:

> 'Individuals are born with an ego, or a cogito. It is only because they are members of society that human beings are able to represent themselves as subjects. The individual is a social being whose consciousness is modeled by exterior forces conceived as either collective consciousness, ethos, or ideology. These forces emanate either from society, social stratum, or socioeconomic class. […] [T]he human being cannot be reduced to a cogito which functions outside the social context, because consciousness is in its essence social.'[140]

This quotation states that, from a psychoanalytic point of view, man's nature is essentially social. He cannot develop a consciousness, and eventually a sense of identity, unless he is part of a social group.

The social nature of man represents the main theoretical support of the Communitarian theory as presented by E. Durkheim. Communitarian theory advocates the fact that the individual realizes fulfillment only when he is socialized into a social group, with common values and identities, 'otherwise people live incomplete, normless, and relatively meaningless lives and one calls this condition alienation'[141].

The communitarian theory thus advocates the social conformism of the individuals. The individual's social nature makes him ready to live within society, and incapable to live on his own. Individualism, thus, runs counter to man's own nature.

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[138] Pettigrew, David and Francois Raffoul. *Disseminating Lacan*. (SUNY Press, 1996) P161.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid. p152.
[141] Geyer, R. Felix and Walter R. Heinz. *Alienation, Society, and the Individual: Continuity and Change in Theory and Research.* (Transaction Publishers, 1992), P54.

Sociologists proclaim the same Greek concern with the social nature of man. They confirm that man is naturally created to live within society. Indeed, regarding the alienation the individual experiences in his attempts to transcend his society, sociologists assert that fulfillment is realized only within a social circle. In a modern era characterized by the cult of individualism, sociologists warn against its dangers, and point to the need to assert man's natural need for his social group.

Sociologists recognize the existing conflict between individual aspirations and the goals of society. They are aware that society may exercise pressure on its individual members, and may hinder their personal development. However, they are capable of evading this issue by foregrounding a definition of human nature that sustains their view of society:

> 'The individual's very nature is therefore reduced to egoistic drives that require taming, or to a species-being whose natural goodness will be set free once the fetters of alienation have been cast off'.[142]

Sociologists claim that man has instinctive drives that need to be repressed in order to reach individual fulfillment, and that these drives are repressed by society. Moreover, a stable social life brings out the goodness inherent in the individual. Durkheim refers to man's instinctive drives, and presents them as the cause of alienation:

> 'Anomie[143] […] results from insatiable drives and impulses, conflicting passions, and limitless desires that crave satisfaction, leading to general feelings of dissatisfaction, instability, and anomic uncertainty'[144].

According to Durkheim, functional unity, order, and stability of social relations are achieved through the repression of the conflicting drives and passions of the individual by a superior force. The external force which limits the individual's instinctive drives is society.

In a modern era characterized by individualism and individual alienation, Communitarians like Durkheim evince the individual's natural need for his community. While the Individualists present society as oppressive and proclaim that individual fulfillment is to be achieved in its rejection, the Communitarians view this disconnection between the individual and society as alienating.

Individualism and individual alienation are concepts which have marked the Western world since industrialization. The latter has had important impacts on family structures, people's relationships, and religious faith. The individual has lost touch with the consolidated society which played an

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[142] Pettigrew, David and Francois Raffoul. Op. Cit. P152.
[143] E. Durkheim prefers to use the term 'anomie' in order to differentiate it from alienation as presented by Individualists. Anomie refers to the individual's loss of community and social identity, while Marxists present alienation as the state of the oppressed individual within the society.
[144] Geyer, R. Felix and Walter R. Heinz. Op. Cit. P54.

important role in limiting his instinctive drives. Individualism, instead of social solidarity, becomes the new adopted doctrine.

T. Carlyle strongly criticizes the 19th century British society. He denounces the spiritual breakdown which appeared after industrialization. Carlyle especially denounces the resulting individualism and loss of sense of community: ''Our life is not a mutual helpfulness'', he complains, ''but rather, cloaked under due laws-of-war; named 'fair competition' and so forth, it is mutual hostility''[145]. The process of industrialization has benefited the Western world in its technological advances and material wealth, while it has destroyed morality. Under the banner of democracy and free capitalism, the individual is freed from social bonds and, as D. McMahon puts it, is 'chasing an illusory happiness without success or fulfillment'[146]. The loss of community is the first element of a chain of circumstances leading to moral degradation and individual alienation; the individual is free to indulge in instinctive and limitless pleasures; this creates in the individual a state of eternal dissatisfaction, and leads him to discard the social moral code, and is consequently estranged from his society.

On the other hand, communalism is a major feature of African traditional society. The individual is required to consider himself primarily as member of a social group, and contributes to the overall benefit of the community at the expense of his own interests. The conformism of each individual is the first condition to ensure social harmony and stability; hence there is no consideration for individual fulfillment outside of the community. However, African traditional society is under threat. On one hand, there has been the factor of colonialism, which has sought to eradicate traditional culture. On the other hand there is the universal process of modernization which runs counter to its basic features, as it is steeped in individualism. We have observed the devastating effects of modernization on the Western world, and wonder whether traditional African society is doomed to the same fate: loss of community and individual alienation.

Western and African literatures provide a treatment of these issues. While Western literature depicts a reigning individualism, African literature reflects the fear to inherit it. The issue of the individual versus society is thus treated in both literatures in different perspectives.

In both literatures, the protagonist is an individualist in the sense that he is at odds with his society. However, the apparent similarity hides an essential difference. As David Cook puts it:

> '[T]he protagonist in a typical nineteenth-or twentieth-century British, or French or American novel has as a rule a quite different relationship to his society at large. A lone individualist in a work of African fiction is an exceptional figure. A lone individualist in a Western work of fiction

[145] McMahon, Darrin m. *Happiness : A History*. (Grove Press, 2006), P364.
[146] Ibid. p364.

> is representative of the inescapable position in which all mankind, it would appear, finds itself.'[147]

Western literature promotes individualism in a society which has lost spirituality and moral values. In the face of a dehumanized social machine, the Western artist stresses the individuality of the protagonist, and presents his alienation from his society as the only alternative to individual fulfillment. His loneliness leads to his final destruction. As A. Hauser puts it in *The Social History of Art*, 'The Western Novel ends with the description of the individual estranged from society and collapsing under the burden of his loneliness'[148].

On the other hand, African fiction presents the protagonist as an exceptional figure in a society characterized by social cohesion and conformism. The protagonist contrasts unfavourably with a society presented in a rather positive way. The traditional society is still a group of conforming individuals, but the increasing modernization is leading it on the Western path towards spiritual death and individual alienation. The African artist reasserts African communalism as a means to promote features of the traditional culture, and a rejection of the European individualism:

> 'The notion of African collectivity should also involve a retreat from Eurocentric preoccupations with the individual to the strength and interdependency of African traditional communalism[149].

The goals of the Western and African writers stand in utter contrast. While the former see society as oppressive and dehumanized, the latter present it as healthy and close-knit. The outcome of these perceptions for the hero is consequently different: the Western hero is alienated, and does not succeed to establish contact. The African hero attempts to establish his own individuality and is eventually defeated; he reaches a state of alienation from his society, but is offered, however, ways towards reintegration.

The characteristic ends of the African and Western novel implicitly assert man's need for society. Even if the Western writer depicts individualism and individual alienation, and present them as inescapable, the final defeat of the hero is a recognition of the impossibility for the individual to remain isolated.

The works of Conrad and Achebe represent well the Western and African approaches to the issue of individual versus society. Despite his rejection of individualism, as we have seen in the previous chapter, Conrad presents individual alienation as the only alternative in the face of a society which has lost its spirituality. Achebe promotes African traditional communalism, and warns against inheriting the Western myth of individualism. We will proceed to illustrate these points in *Lord Jim* and *No Longer at*

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[147] Cook, David. Op.Cit. p5.

[148] Hauser, Arnold. *The Social History of Art*. (Grove Press, 2006), P82.

[149] Hall, Budd L., George Jerry Sefa Dei and Dorothy Goldin Rosenberg. *Indigenous Knowledges in Global Contexts: Multiple Readings of Our World*. (University of Toronto Press, 2000), P194.

Ease, by first drawing a picture of society as presented in the novels, then analyzing the hero's conflicting relationship with it, and finally bringing to light the resolution of the conflict between the protagonists and their society.

1. Picture of society:

a) Western society:

Conrad draws a picture of society through the depiction of some minor characters. Moreover, he presents these characters as contrasting in one way or another with Jim. These contrasts render more strongly the negative picture of the society Jim finds himself in, and foreshadow his final and inevitable alienation from it.

There is, for example, at the beginning of the novel, the presentation of the Patna skipper. The exaggerated repulsive appearance of the skipper stands in contrast with Jim's white and neat appearance:

> '[The] skipper had come up noiselessly, in pyjamas and with his sleeping-jacket flung wide open. Red of face, only half awake, the left eye partly closed, the right staring stupid and glassy, he hung his big head over the chart and scratched his ribs sleepily. There was something obscene in the sight of his naked flesh.' (P16)

The appearance and attitude of the skipper contrasts with the decency and dynamism that his work demands. The words 'noiselessly', 'half-awake', 'sleeping', point out to moral passivity and laziness. This contrasts with the traditional image of the ship's captain who displays moral alertness and physical vitality, inspiring confidence and reliance. The word 'obscene' suggests his immorality, cancelling thus a sense of duty and moral responsibility. These impressions are reinforced by his description by Marlow as 'the incarnation of everything vile and base that lurks in the world we love'(p16).

While the Patna skipper contrasts with Jim's perfect appearance, the chief engineer contrasts with the latter in more subtle ways: Marlow informs us that he has experienced a shipwreck. The circumstances of the accident are not told, but the engineer's responsibility in the incident is vaguely suggested at:

> ''He had been stranded out East somewhere- in Canton, Shanghai, or perhaps Yokohama; he probably did not care to remember himself the exact locality, not yet the cause of his shipwreck. He had been, in mercy to his youth, kicked quietly out of his ship twenty years ago or more, and it might have been so much worse for him that the memory of the episode had in it hardly the trace of misfortune. Then stream navigation expanding in these seas, and men of his work being scarce at first, he had 'got in' after a sort.'' (P18)

We are struck in this passage by the extreme unconsciousness and carelessness of the chief engineer in relation to this incident. The fact that he was somehow responsible for the shipwreck, and that he was 'kicked out' did not much affect him; he did not even care to remember where it happened. Moreover,

he manages to reintegrate seamanship, simply because men of his craft were lacking at that time. This utterly contrasts with Jim's state after the Patna incident. Indeed, Jim experiences moral confusion, suffering, and instability. He keeps moving from ship to ship, leaving bread and shelter, at the slightest mention of the incident before him. This contrast denotes the engineer's utter immorality and shallowness- as Marlow puts it, he is ''all hollows''(p17).

The West Australian Chester is another instance of society's moral degradation. Chester promotes a philosophy of life characteristic of the industrial, modern world. He gives primacy to man's individualistic interests, and discards with any kind of moral standards. According to him, in order to survive in this harsh, savage world, man has to rationalize everything, and avoid falling into self-reproach or self-questioning. His immorality and extreme pragmatism are displayed in his scorn towards Jim, who, for him, takes things 'to heart':

> ''That never made a man. You must see things exactly as they are- if you don't, you may just as well give in at once. You will never do anything in this world. Look at me, I made it a practice never to take anything at heart'. (P119)

Chester is the complete opposite of the idealist Jim. He advocates that moral sense and consciousness hinder man from leading a good life in the modern world. Chester represents the materialist, pragmatist, and individualistic features of modern society. He further sustains his position by advocating his admiration for 'Old Robinson', the dehumanized, 'emaciated patriarch' who has been labeled as a 'cannibal' after a shipwreck, as he was found out alone in a deserted island. According to Chester, Robinson has had the right attitude. Indeed, contrasting again with Jim's state of mind after the Patna incident, 'Old Robinson' assumes an indifferent, cold attitude towards people's opinion about him:

> ''Three weeks afterwards, he was as well as ever. He didn't allow any fuss that was made on shore to upset him; he just shut his lips tight, and let people screech. It was hard enough to have lost his ship, and all he was worth besides, without paying attention to the hard *names* [Italics mine]they called him. That's the man for me.'' (P120)

The insistence on the fact that Robinson did not mind what people said about him and about his failure contrasts with Jim's suffering. Robinson's shutting his lips and letting people 'screech' contrasts with Jim's violent reaction towards Marlow when he heard the latter saying ''Look at that wretched cur'', and who was in fact referring to a dog. Jim declares to Marlow that he won't let anyone call him '*names*' outside of the inquiry.

These characters are characterized by lack of morality and conscience. They are the products of the spiritless, industrial world which gives primacy to materialism over moral sense. This kind of characters form the background of Conrad's other important work, *Heart of Darkness.* Their hollowness reminds of, for example, the company Chief Accountant. The latter appears to Marlow as a kind of

'miracle', a white apparition contrasting with the desolation of the 'grove of death', where natives are allowed to die. This impression is reinforced by the fact that he went out 'to get a breath of fresh air'[150]. Conrad provides here a vehement criticism of the materialism and lack of humanity characterizing modern society. He further stresses this hollowness through the manager. Marlow ironically admires the latter because of his remarkable health within the surrounding illnesses:

> ''He was great by this little thing that it was impossible to tell what could control such a man. He never gave that secret away. Perhaps there was nothing within him […]. Once when various tropical diseases had lead low almost every 'agent' in the station, he was heard to say, ''Men who come out here should have no entrails.''[151]

Conrad presents hollowness as a strength here because it can keep man alive. There is no moral sense, no physical or moral sensitivity to the external circumstances. This unconsciousness is the condition to survive in the harsh, violent world. At the end of the novel, Marlow presents a picture of modern society with all its pretence and superficiality:

> "I found myself back in the sephulchral city resenting the sight of people hurrying through the streets to filch a little money from each other, to devour their infamous cookery, to gulp their unwholesome beer, to dream their insignificant and silly dreams. They trespassed upon my thoughts. They were intruders whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating pretence, because I felt so sure they could not possibly know the things I knew. Their bearing, which was simply the bearing of commonplace individuals going about their business in the assurance of perfect safety, was offensive to me like the outrageous flauntings of folly in the face of a danger it is unable to comprehend.[152]

Conrad presents here a clear criticism of Western modern society; he presents the impact of industrialization and capitalism on individuals whose major aspiration in life is the pursuit of material acquisitiveness and instinctive satisfaction. He denounces their shallowness, and describes them as walking robots manipulated by a dehumanizing capitalist machine.

In most of his major works, Conrad presents Western society in negative terms. He denounces its lack of spirituality and morality, and its concern with materialism. He denounces also its lack of solidarity, where each individual pursues his own personal desires. In *Lord Jim*, society contrasts unfavourably with Jim who, with his white, neat appearance and moral consciousness, is elevated above it.

b) <u>African Society:</u>

In *No Longer at Ease*, as in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe does not aim at idealizing traditional society. He rather attempts to present it in a truthful and natural way, allowing room for the reader's freedom of reaction. Indeed, Achebe presents contrasted features of traditional society. Contrary to Conrad who

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[150] Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. (Penguin Books, 1902), P26.
[151] Ibid. p31.
[152] Ibid. p102.

vehemently criticizes Western society, Achebe can afford to assume both a praising and a denouncing position towards it.

In response to the colonial stereotyped picture of African society as primitive and anarchic, Achebe presents in *Things Fall Apart* an ordered and well-organized society with its own traditions, customs, and values. As A. Irele observes, Achebe depicts in this novel the 'coherence and order that make social life one long ceremonial, the intense warmth of personal relationships and the passionate energy of the religious life'[153]. This is a refutation of the colonial racist view concerning traditional society, and a recommendation of its values which are currently under threat within an increasing modern era.

In *No Longer At Ease*, Achebe shows that this traditional society has not disintegrated, but has managed to survive and adapt to the new circumstances. As Palmer puts it, 'the traditional way of life represented by Obi's home village and the Umuofian Progressive Society is strong and durable. It has its own culture and values, and can draw on its recorded wisdom for support. It is not a dying society'[154]. The first quality that Achebe highlights is the Umuofians' strong sense of solidarity and selflessness. This traditional trait is first of all demonstrated in the fact that they mercilessly tax themselves in order to send their talented young people to study abroad. Achebe stresses the Umuofians' readiness to sacrifice themselves for the sake of survival and progress of their community. They essentially view themselves as members of a social group which must be preserved and consolidated. Obi belongs to their project of progress and development within the modern sphere; they send him to study law so that he would handle all their land cases. Achebe does criticize their denial of individual's aspirations, as they definitely determine Obi's future life. However, they do offer him a chance to pursue foreign studies that he would never have had alone. Thanks to his community, he can receive a higher education and occupy a post in the civil service, instead of the traditional land farming. Thus, on one hand, Achebe denounces the pressures that the community puts on the individual; the Umuofians see Obi as a symbol of progress, and not as an individual on his own. On the other hand, Achebe recommends their sense of solidarity and self-sacrifice which motivate their enterprise, a quality lacking in the urban modern setting.

The Umuofians' sense of social unity is further displayed in the fact that they organize a ceremony on the occasion of Obi's departure for England. Obi's family holds a praying meeting at home where the latter is reminded of his celebrated traditional origins:

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[153] Beier, Ulli.ed. Op. Cit. P181.
[154] Palmer, Eustace. Op. Cit. P64.

> ''In times past Umuofia would have required of you to fight in her wars and bring home human heads. But these days were days of darkness from which we have been delivered by the blood of the lamb of God. Today we send you to bring knowledge.''(P9)

This passage shows that, despite the advent of Christianity which has put an end to some traditional practices, the Umuofians are still attached to their traditions, and have adapted them to suit the new modern setting. Now it is knowledge, and not human heads, which is needed. Achebe points here to the Igbos' efforts to adapt to new circumstances without necessarily losing their identity. Moreover, the speeches delivered turn around questions of morality, as in the following passage:

> ''I have heard of young men from other towns who went to the white man's country, but instead of their facing their studies they went after the sweet things of the flesh. [...] [A]nyway, I know that we have no fear where you are concerned. We are sending you to learn book. Enjoyment can wait. Do not be in a hurry to rush into the pleasures of the world like the young antelope who danced himself lame when the main dance was yet to come.''(PP9-10)

Mr Ikedi's speech takes on the characteristics of a father's final words to his son leaving to face the unknown. The Umuofians' concern with their interests through sending Obi to study law is overshadowed here by their concern with morality. They are aware of the temptations Obi may find on his way, and are anxious to remind him of the necessity to stick to moral virtues.

At the end of the ceremony, once again, the Umuofians display their strong sense of self-sacrifice:

> 'The guests then said their farewells to Obi; many of them repeating all the advice that he had already been given. They shook hands with him and as they did so they pressed their presents into his palm, to buy a pencil with, or an exercise book or a loaf of bread for the journey, a shilling there and a penny there- substantial presents in a village where money was so rare, where men and women toiled from year to year to wrest a meagre living from an unwilling and exhausted soil.' (P10)

Achebe forces the admiration of the readers for these people who, despite their poverty, not only manage to tax themselves to assure Obi's scholarship, but also give him presents on his departure.

Achebe is aware of the weakness of the Igbo society, and overtly mentions their setbacks in the novel: their narrow mindedness, their denial of individuality, and their exclusionary practices. However, we cannot but admire the way he depicts their selflessness and moral maturity. Achebe does not promote a return to the past traditions; he is aware of the inescapability from change and the need to adapt to it. However, he presents traditional society with the positive qualities which are under threat- qualities lacking in the western world. As David Cook puts it, 'time and again it is the values of traditional society, with its non-materialistic base and its absence of vested interests in any communal

sense, that are stressed-virtues to which most Europeans would surely be bound at least to pay lip-service'[155].

The traditional sense of solidarity and selflessness is assaulted by the modern individualism characterizing the West and the African urban setting. The modern Nigerian finds himself caught within a culture clash, where he has to use his moral judgement in order to select the best in each culture, the traditional and the modern. As Palmer puts it, 'it is up to the individual to use his personal resources to withstand the demands made on him by both'[156]. Now, it is up to the new elite, as represented by Obi, to strike a balance between the two clashing cultures, by the strength of his awareness of the traditional as well as the Western culture.

As we have seen earlier, sociologists like Durkheim, Weber and Lacan, attribute the reasons of alienation to, among others, a defective social solidarity and lack of spiritualism. These are features characterizing the modern, Western society. In *Lord Jim,* these traits are displayed through the minor characters, presented as lacking any sense of morality, and less social responsibility. Jim is different, and this very difference isolates him from his fellowmen. In *No Longer at Ease,* society is still maintaining its organic solidarity and cohesion. Here, it is Obi, the individualist, who contrasts unfavourably with it. However, the presence of his people and their rallying around him points out to future ways towards reintegration.

2. Conflict between the protagonists and their society:

a) Lord Jim:

From the beginning of the novel, Jim is presented as a man in a state of isolation. Before the trivialities surrounding him, Jim prefers to stand alone and explore his imaginary heroism. He claims to possess a sense of adventure and moral values that others do not. In his eyes, this makes him different and superior. Jim delights in these heroic dreams because they keep him isolated from society, deprived of morality and spirituality. In the novel, it is society which compares unfavourably with Jim. His dedication to ideals elevates him above a spiritless, materialistic machinery. His isolation from society is necessary for him to keep his mind on higher things. It protects him from the moral wickedness characterizing his social environment, and allows him to keep faith in idealistic moral standards.

Jim's elevation above society by the scope of his moral idealism is suggested by a recurring metaphor in the novel: The butterfly Vs the beetle. This metaphor is introduced by Stein, Marlow's most trustworthy acquaintance, and a learned collector of butterflies and beetles. Stein is another agent in

[155] Cook, David. Op. Cit. P91.
[156] Palmer, Eustace. Op. Cit. P64.

the novel, as Brierly and the French lieutenant, who helps shed light on a certain aspect of Jim and his experience. Here the aspect highlighted in Jim's personality is romanticism. Compared to Brierly and the lieutenant, Stein reacts differently to Jim's case by asserting: ''I Understand very well. He is romantic''(p155). The butterfly stands for the romantic, the idealist, while the beetle stands for the realist, the pragmatist.

Jim's solitude is emphasized by the fact that he represents the butterfly living in a world infested by beetles, as represented by the minor characters we have explored previously. Tanner refers to this metaphor and presents it as referring to two standards of conduct:

> 'Consider butterflies as beautiful, frail, aspiring creatures soaring above an earth which beetles crudely hug: beetles however are completely at home in the dust, the mud, the earthly element: they are ugly and repugnant but they have a hard defensive shell and are capable of a dogged persistence in the dense and hampered element of earth which the butterfly could not emulate. Here we have a central metaphor for the extremes of conduct and values in the book: the frail aspiring idealist with his glamorous 'markings', and the cynical self-preserving empiricist with his thick skin and foul vigour. Stein's first comment on the rarity of one of the butterflies he is scrutinizing contains a warning, a melancholy note. 'Only one more specimen like this they have in your London, and then- no more.''[157]

The beetles symbolize the dehumanized products of the modern world. They are the products of the machinery and immorality characterizing the modern era. They are fit to survive in a world which requires pragmatism rather than moral sense in order to survive. This metaphor reinforces the negative picture of modern society. The beetles are in plenty, while the butterfly type is rare, even on the brink of extinction. Stein's observation that there is only one specimen left is melancholic and warning: It implicitly relates to Jim, the rare specimen, the romantic, the 'rare' idealist, who is on the verge of destruction.

Moreover, Jim differentiates himself from the people surrounding him by the quality of 'endurance'. As G. Panichas puts it, despite the fact that Jim betrays himself and betrays others in that jump into the sea, he is never betrayed by 'endurance in facing the darkness in himself and in the world around him'[158]; indeed, Jim shows an unflinching willingness to persevere in his 'belief in the axiomatic principles of honour, of loyalty, prescribing the need to transcend inner and outer moral squalor'[159]. This is what pushes him to stay and face the court inquiry, and to face so many dangers in that unknown corner of the world he is sent to. This quality of endurance elevates him above earthly failings, above a corrupt society, and makes the prospect of rehabilitation possible, even if not realized in this world:

> 'In *Lord Jim*, Joseph Conrad portrays a fitful but ascendant process of transfiguration in the life of a solitary hero whose courage of endurance contains the seeds of redemption. Such a life

[157] Tanner, Tony. Op. Cit. PP40-41.
[158] Panichas, George A. Op. Cit. P30.
[159] Ibid.

> recalls the eternal promise of the Evangelist's words: "He that endureth to the end shall be saved"[160].

Through this quality, Conrad ensures Jim's moral elevation above the common people, forces our admiration for him, and makes us accept his final death; Jim finally succeeds to 'save from fire what his moral identity should be' through dying for his ideals.

b) <u>No Longer at Ease:</u>

No Longer at Ease treats the same conflicting relationship between the individual and society, but differently. Here, it is the individual who compares unfavourably with society. There is the same state of isolation and solitude of the main protagonist as presented in *Lord Jim*. As we have seen earlier, Obi's studies in England have impacted his relationship with his traditional community. The distance and the education he received abroad have severed the ties which traditionally bind him with his community. On one hand, he has acquired moral idealistic standards which are admirable; on the other hand, it has made him highly individualistic.

Obi's experience abroad has alienated him from his traditional society. He comes to resent his kinship obligations, in a society where 'there is no higher moral obligation than duty to the clan'[161]. This sense of duty towards the clan, the most important trait characterizing a traditional member of a community, has been replaced in Obi by self-concern. His foreign education has had on him a different impact than that expected by the Umuofians, as it has illuminated his individualism. Despite the idealistic aspirations to eradicate corruption and archaic traditional practices, Obi has never really thought about anything except himself. On his return from England and at the beginning of his career, Obi manages to fulfill his responsibilities towards his clan, because he can still afford to do so. However, when the financial problems start to become stronger, he sees the help he provides to his kin as a constraint. For example he resents the help he provided to his mother's hospitalization:

> ''No one can say I have been extravagant. If I had not sent thirty-five pounds at the end of last month to pay for mother's treatment in a private hospital, I would have been all right-or if not exactly all right, at least above water.''.(P98)

Obi has lost the traditional sense of fellowship and solidarity of his people. In times of crisis, he comes to question the help he provided to his mother, an attitude which a traditional member of the group would never have had. He has honoured his obligation towards his mother, but within himself, he sees this act as being contrary to his interests.

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[160] Ibid.

[161] Wren ,Robert M. Op. Cit. P48.

Obi's ambivalent attitude towards his traditional culture, showing compliance with it on one hand, and repudiating parts of it on the other hand, reveals the fact that he has been alienated from it; moreover, he is not willing to recognize it. This is suggested in the novel by the assertion that 'one of the most painful things one could say to Obi' is that his 'mission-house upbringing and European education had made him a stranger in his country'(p65). The contradictory attitudes he takes towards the UPU reveals the inner moral confusion he experiences. On one hand, he shows conformism, and on the other hand, self-interest. This is clearly displayed in the episode when Obi asks the UPU for a reprieve concerning the repayment of his loan. He asserts that he is one of them through starting his speech with an old saying emphasizing communal solidarity:

> ''Our fathers also have a saying about the danger of living apart. They say it is the curse of the snake. If all snakes lived together in one place, who would approach them? But they live everyone unto himself and so fall easy prey to man.''(P73)

Obi refers to the need of the individuals to stand together for their survival, and banishes individualism which exposes the individual to dangers. Ironically, Achebe puts this speech in the mouth of an individualist who strives to achieve personal interest outside of his social environment. Indeed, what comes after this introduction reveals Obi's true intentions. He immediately and disrespectfully leaves the meeting because the elders 'dared' interfere in his 'private life' concerning Clara. He acts exactly in contradiction to what he proclaimed at the beginning of the meeting: he frees himself from the traditional society and chooses to remain on his own. As Palmer puts it, almost 'all his problems can be seen to stem from this'[162]. Obi has got 'the curse of the snake', as he is on his own, and becomes an easy prey to dangers, namely bribery. In the following passage, Chinwe Okechukwu explains the implications of Obi's freedom from his society and considers its advantages and inconveniences:

> 'Achebe seems to be saying that the result of Western education is the loss of group cohesion and solidarity. However, this tendency to abandon the group comes with a penalty: that of standing alone and losing one's emotional center or value center. When this center is lost, the individual disintegrates, becomes dissipated. The individual succumbs to outside forces, which could have been surmounted had the individual remained within the fold. But being in the fold has its sacrifices: the most important being the loss of one's privacy. In the communal setting, every action is public knowledge, and the individual is both strengthened and weakened by the group. Obi Okonkwo dispenses with communalism-its benefits and its restrictions- hence he becomes vulnerable to the outside forces of bribery'[163].

Obi's anger against his elders' interference with his private life can be justified. Traditional society does not allow much room for the individual's privacy. However, as C. Okechukwu asserts, the individual,

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[162] Palmer, Eustace. Op. Cit. P67.

[163] Okechukwu, C.Chinwe. *Achebe the Orator: The Art of Persuasion*. (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001), PP89-90.

when left on his own, is weak and easy prey to the outside forces. Obi refuses the help of the union - the help which would have saved him from falling into corruption.

Obi's standing alone from his society has its liberating but also stressful implications. He is free from social conformism and the oppression it may exercise on him. On the other hand, his freedom from traditionalism has had more negative than positive repercussions. From the moment he claims his privacy, a succession of events seem to lead inevitably towards his final fall. Achebe makes it clear that Obi succumbs to outside forces because he is alone.

Unlike Jim, Obi is not the idealist at odds with a wicked society. In the African novel, society has not become entirely corrupt. However, a selective position must be sought in order to retain the good in each culture, the modern and the traditional.

While Jim loses contact with his community and attempts to re-establish his belonging to it, Obi seeks to assert his individuality within the close-knit society. D. Cook aptly articulates this point by drawing the essential difference between the Western and the African novel:

> 'In the [Western] case the writer sees his society as permanently fragmented, and takes one or more fragments as his centrepiece in their efforts to cohere; in the [African] case the writer sees the body of society as healthy and consolidated, so that the outsider is a sad, even a potentially tragic exception, desperately asserting himself where individualism is rare and unwelcome. Neither type of protagonists chooses his basic position. One is born into a disjointed society and yearns for real human contact. The other is ordained to live in a contentedly conforming group and finds himself restless within it.'[164]

Thus, the protagonists do not consciously choose their situation. Both are born to societies, one disjointed and the other consolidated, and this impacts on their position: while the Westerner attempts to belong, the African attempts to detach himself. Consequently, the resolution of the conflict between the individual and society in the Western novel differs from the one found in the African one. In the former, the protagonist does not manage to establish contact, and remains alienated. He is elevated above a disjointed, disintegrating society by the scope of his individualism. In the latter, the protagonist's separateness is the cause of his failure; the recognition of his need for his community counters his individualism. Reconciliation is sought and a balance between allegiance to the community and individual aspirations must be realized. The African protagonist is thus offered ways towards disalienation.

3. Alienation and disalienation:

[164] Cook, David. Op. Cit. p16.

In response to the protagonists' individualistic tendencies, society, in both novels, claims their belonging through the phrase: ''one of us''. This phrase reveals an implicit link between the two novels. Gerald Moore argues that Conrad's masterpieces tend to be reduced to a few famous 'catch phrases' or 'mottoes' (like Kurtz's 'the horror' or Marlow's 'one of us')[165]. Achebe's use of Marlow's motto in NLAE points out the similarity of the issues treated, notably the individual versus society. Many critics, such as T. Tanner, have interpreted 'one of us' as including mankind in general. Others have read the 'us' as a reference to the social group. J. H. Stape, for example, stresses 'social vision that urges the priority of communal rights and obligations'[166]. Both interpretations are possible but, regarding our concern in the present chapter, we shall consider the 'us' as a reference to a social group.

a) <u>Lord Jim:</u>

In *Lord Jim*, it is Marlow who repeatedly asserts that Jim is 'one of us'. Marlow is a representative of the community and its values. He has, as A. Guerard puts it, 'a strong sense of community obligation'[167], a quality which contrasts with Jim's egoism. Moreover, Marlow stands for a society experiencing moral confusion; indeed, Jim's experience has shaken his trust in 'a fixed standard of conduct'(p38). He attempts to understand Jim's experience and analyze the elements at hand, arriving alternatively at two contrasting conclusions. On one hand, he sees Jim clearly and asserts that he applies to social standards: ''I liked his appearance; I knew his appearance; he was one of us''(p32). On the other hand, his betrayal shakes this clear vision of him, and he becomes unidentifiable. J. Berthoud refers to Marlow's attitude as follows:

> 'This ambiguity is defined by the two phrases which he applies to Jim with the regularity of *leitmotifs* throughout his narrative: Jim is 'under a cloud', but he is also 'one of us'. His use of these phrases is demonstrated by his very first sight of Jim. The young man's vigorous physique, clear-cut, dogged look, and immaculate bearing seem to declare him 'one of us'- a member of the community that lives by the code. But Marlow knows what he has done; and from that point of view, he is 'under a cloud'- not only in the primary sense that he is in disgrace, but also with the implication that what he *really* is can no longer be perceived.'[168]

Before the Patna incident, Jim identified himself with those who live by the moral code. This is suggested by his 'good' and neat appearance. However, the jump, the betrayal of the moral code, has separated him from those who conform to the group. It has made him akin to the members of the crew, the representatives of the beetles, who do not conform to any moral order. However, he remains different from them, through the strength of his suffering and his

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[165] Qt in: Stape, J. H. ed. Op. Cit. P224.
[166] Ibid. P78.
[167] Guerard, Albert J. *Conrad the Novelist*. (Harvard University Press, 1965), P141.
[168] Berthous, Jacques. Op. Cit. p80.

attempts at rehabilitation. Jim, thus, belongs to neither group, hence the difficulty of his classification. The betrayal has alienated him from his society.

Marlow is the only link that Jim has with society after the jump. After the inquiry, Jim attempts to offer Marlow another vision of his experience, transcending the external and superficial with which the court inquiry has dealt. He provides him with his inner feelings and states of mind in the hope to be understood: ''I don't want to excuse myself; but I would like to explain- I would like somebody to understand- somebody- one person at least''(p60). Jim would like somebody from his community not to excuse him, but at least to understand him. Contrary to the French lieutenant who condemns him as a 'coward' and Stein who classifies him as a 'romantic', Marlow does not draw a final judgment about Jim. The latter's confessions have raised in him sympathy, but have not made him understand; at the end of the novel, Marlow maintains that Jim remains 'under a cloud'. Jim's attempts to explain to Marlow his experience reveals his attempts at reconciliation with his society after his betrayal of the code. The fact that Marlow ends up drawing two contradictory views about him suggests that the community can no longer see him as 'one of them'. It asserts his alienation and foreshadows his final defeat and death in Patusan.

Jim's life after his "fall from grace" occupies much of the novel's space. His alienation occurs when he betrays the moral code, when he jumps from the Patna. At this moment, he becomes a social outcast, and his efforts to achieve rehabilitation are in vain.

Jim's being a social outcast is foreshadowed even before the jump when he obeys the crew's calls from the life-boat for George who was in fact dead. As Berthoud puts it, 'by substituting himself for a corpse, Jim has unwittingly anticipated his future (posthumous) existence as a social outcast'[169]. By taking up the identity of a dead man, Jim anticipates his future social death. Moreover, the jump is described as an everlasting leap, without return, as irreversible as death: '[He] had indeed jumped into an everlasting deep hole. He had tumbled from a height he could never scale again'(p83). Furthermore, the emphasis on the irreversibility of the jump is suggested by the fact that Jim, as well as the other members of the crew, are in utter darkness on the life-boat as 'they were blinded and half drowned with rain'(p83). They were made unable to see that the ship has not, in fact, sunk, and that there was still light on it. Jim claims that he was prevented from swimming back and getting his chance by the darkness:

> ''The lights did go! We did not see them. They were not there. If they had been, I would have swum back- I would have gone back alongside- I would have begged them to take me onboard...I would have had my chance [...] there was not a glimmer-not a glimmer'', he protested, mournfully.''(p99)

[169] Berthoud, Jacques. Op. Cit. p78.

The fact that Jim is made unable to see that the boat has not sunk, and that he could get onboard again suggests that the jump, the betrayal of the code, is irreversible, and that there is no prospect of redemption. The fact that all members of the crew have not seen the lights on the boat is skeptically received by people, who are sure that they would lie about the event. Like Marlow, they could not understand how they can be prevented from seeing a boat 'though they were well within range'(p100). Marlow's insistence on the total blindness of these men on the life-boat indicates their irreversible status as deserters, betrayers. There is no second chance for someone who prefers to save his life, instead of sacrificing it to honour the code; the betrayal represents a violation of the moral code and a threat to the principles of community. As George Panichas asserts, the 'boat itself epitomizes abject failure and alienation from mankind'[170].

Jim is different from his 'partners in crime', as he chooses to stay and face the court-inquiry. He does not escape like the others, because he wants to achieve redemption; he wants to be punished, so that he can be forgiven and forgive himself. As Marlow puts it, ''I became positive in my mind that the inquiry was a severe punishment to Jim, and that his facing it- practically by his own free will- was a redeeming feature in his abominable case''(p51). However, the verdict he receives does not have the effects he expected, as it allows no room for redemption. The court decides to cancel his certificate. This verdict is, as Berthoud puts it, 'an execution of his public self for it deprives him of his role in society'[171]. The court's verdict, thus, falls on Jim and alienates him from his community. He is a social outcast. He loses the prospect of leading a stable social life. After this, Jim keeps moving from ship to ship, and is unable to go back home.

The second part of the novel is set in Patusan, an Eastern remote corner of the world where Jim, as Marlow puts it, achieves greatness. Far from being irrelevant, as some critics claim, including F. R. Leavis, Patusan completes the novel. J. H. Stape argues that Patusan provides the novel with a thematic coherence, as it deepens and expands earlier ideas[172]. After Jim's betrayal and the execution of his social life, Conrad explores the idea of redemption. Does Jim succeed in establishing rehabilitation, when offered all the proper circumstances? :

> ''He left his earthly failings behind him and that sort of reputation he had, and there was a totally new set of conditions for his imaginative faculty to work upon. Entirely new, entirely remarkable. And he got hold of them in a remarkable way.''(p160)

[170] Panichas, George A. Op. Cit. p18.
[171] Berthoud, Jacques. Op. Cit. p84.
[172] Stape, J. H. ed. Op. Cit.p76.

Guerard refers to Patusan as 'the fairly common dream of a second chance and total break with the guilty past: ''A clean slate''[173]. Jim is offered the second chance that he has dreamed of, and wants to prove to the world and to himself that he can be heroic.

The achievements of Jim in Patusan are undeniable. In fact, these achievements stand as contrasting mirrors to his past failures. He fearlessly enters Patusan, torn in civil wars, and succeeds in establishing peace there. After having secured his position as an ally of Doramin and protector of the Malays, Jim provokes the fear of his enemies. For example, he risks his life by visiting his enemy and drinking his coffee. Jim displays here a strong sense of self-sacrifice in order to honour his obligation towards the people left in his charge. The fearlessness and self-sacrifice he displays in Patusan contrasts with the paralyzing fear and the urge toward self-preservation he experienced on the Patna. Moreover, there is a strong emphasis on the trust surrounding him, and in which he delights: ''Look at these houses; there is not one where I am not trusted. Jove! I told you I would hang on [...]'(p181). Jim's insistence on the trust of the people surrounding him is explained by the fact that he has lost the trust of the pilgrims left in his charge. Moreover, he is surrounded by the love of Jewel and Tamb-Itamb and the friendship of Dain waris, being substitutes for the family he has lost. Generally speaking, every failure and loss Jim experienced in the Western world is faced with success in Patusan. Hence, Jim's achievements in this remote place give him 'the certitude of rehabilitation'(p182).

However, despite the success and happiness surrounding him, Jim is conscious that he is alienated from his community. He asserts to Marlow that he has never forgotten why he is in Patusan, and that 'the very thought of the world outside is enough to give [him] a fright''(p223). He knows that he is not forgotten, nor forgiven, whatever greatness he may achieve in Patusan. This leads the reader to regard skeptically Jim's great achievements.

Conrad draws a picture of Jim's idealistic success, rendering his prospects of rehabilitation realizable. However, this picture is stained by the arrival of Gentleman Brown. Once again, Jim gets higher only to experience a harder fall. Brown is the reminder of the world Jim left; he is the reminder of the guilty past from which Jim has escaped. Brown is the representative of the beetles with which Jim allied himself at the jump. He feels an irrational and strong hatred towards Jim which pushes him towards destroying the kingdom of peace he built. Moreover, his subtle intelligence makes him kill the one person that would prepare the way for Jim's final death, Dain Waris. As Tanner puts it, Brown is ''an emissary' from the factual world 'pursuing' Jim to his 'retreat''[174].

[173] Guerard, Albert J. Op. Cit. p128.
[174] Tanner, Tony. Op. Cit. p54.

Jim's dreams of success and rehabilitation are destroyed by a reminder of the world he left, and the past he escaped. Despite the greatness he achieved in Patusan, his betrayal of the code has to be punished. His failure to ward off danger alienates him from the Patusan community, which has received him to its heart. Like the pilgrims on the Patna, the Malays lose trust in him. Moreover, the death of Dain Waris eminently anticipates his death if he does not escape. The shelter under which he hides from society he left disintegrates in the end.

In Patusan, at the height of his success, Jim is conscious of his alienation from his society. This is suggested through the vain attempts to communicate with it through Marlow, who states: "You remember that when I was leaving him for the last time he had asked whether I would be going home soon, and suddenly cried after me: ''Tell them!''... I had waited-curious I'll won, and hopeful, too- only to hear him shout, ''No- nothing.'' That was all then- and there shall be nothing more'' (p250). Jim's last words to Marlow suggests his desperate need to reassert his status with the society he has left, as well as his consciousness that his moral betrayal is without going back. Moreover, faced with imminent failure, he tries to write a letter, but in vain: ''He made it, it is true, once more attempt to deliver himself, but that, too, failed''(p250). When a reminder of the world comes Jim is offered the choice between saving his life or dying as a hero; he chooses to deliver himself in a suicidal act to Doramin. Jim prefers to answer with his life the test for which, as Marlow puts it, he has always been waiting. Indeed, this notion of 'test' follows him in Patusan. Panichas argues that 'Jim never ceases to react to charges of cowardice and of irresponsibility; never ceases to strive earnestly to prove his moral worthiness. He seems never to be in a state of repose, is always under pressure, always examining his tensive state of mind and soul'[175]. Jim's moral worth is always under check; he is constantly required to prove his idealism, even in his retirement to Patusan.

Marlow's ambiguous attitude towards Jim's death leads to a variety of interpretations. Whether it is a triumph or a failure, an ascent or a descent is not clarified; as Marlow asserts, the last words must not be said. Whatever approach we may adopt about it, the fact is that Jim dies, and fails to establish human contact and reconciliation with his society. Jim is finally spiritually and physically alienated from his society. The betrayal he committed is not forgiven, and it has separated him forever from his society. He does not achieve rehabilitation even at the expense of his own life. As P. Riviale puts it, in *L'énigme du Dix-neuvième Siècle* :

> *'Lord Jim* conte l'histoire d'un homme qui ne parvient pas à se racheter, au prix même de sa vie, la frayeur de la mer qui le frappa d'exil et le sépara à jamais des siens. Il a commis une lâcheté irréparable, à ses yeux comme aux yeux de ceux qui savent. […] tout comme Hamlet il

[175] Panichas, George A. Op. Cit. p29.

> devient par sa mort un héros. Il entre de plain pied dans le légendaire, en abjurant la civilisation'[176].

Indeed, at the end of the novel, Conrad leads the reader to admire Jim and his achievements, and even his final death as a hero, as he finally chooses honour rather than mere survival. Jim heroically dies for his ideals, instead of escaping, once again, from failures. As Marlow puts it at the end of the novel, Jim ''goes away from a living woman to celebrate his pitiless wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct'(p307). Leaving his earthly failings behind him, and leaving an uncompromising society, Jim finally marries perfection through his final death. The rehabilitation of his moral identity is the final message that Jim sends to ''the impeccable world''(P250), as symbol of the universal moral order. There is no prospect of rehabilitation within the Western social cntext.

b) <u>No Longer at Ease:</u>

In *No Longer at Ease*, Obi similarly receives the community's claims of belonging. The UPU affirms that Obi is and remains a member of the group despite the individualism he displays. Noticing that Obi is getting away from his traditional culture, they try to remind him of his belonging to them:

> ''You are one of us, we must bare our minds to you. I have lived in this Lagos for fifteen years [...] Lagos is a bad place for a young man. If you follow its sweetness, you will perish.''(PP74/75)

Apart from their irrational discrimination against the 'osu', Achebe wants to throw light on the Umuofians' concern for their individual member which transcends the material. They worry about the moral health of Obi, and warn him against falling prey to his instincts. This serves as a balance to the claim that they sent him to England solely for their own interests. Moreover, Achebe refers to the importance of each individual within the traditional community, and the spontaneous, natural readiness to rally around one of them when he faces problems. Here, 'one of us' comes from a healthy and consolidated society, contrary to the disjointed and confused one depicted in *Lord Jim.*

The end of *No Longer at Ease* differs from that of *Lord Jim*, especially in its openness. The author does not offer a clear resolution of the issues treated, but provides us with elements allowing us to draw our own interpretation. Like Jim, Obi is taken to court after his fall into bribery. However, the difference lies in the fact that in NLAE, the final verdict of the court is not pronounced. As we have seen, in L J, the judge cancels his certificate and makes of him a social outcast. In NLAE, at the beginning of the novel and at its end, the judge is still wondering how an educated man like Obi could have done this.

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[176] Riviale, Philipe. *L'énigme du Dix-neuvième Siecle : Un Jeu de Patience*. (Harmattan, 2002) P241.

The court stands as a symbol of society inquiring into the deviations of its individual member. Achebe omits to present the court's verdict and, instead, concentrates on the incomprehension of the judge regarding Obi's crime. The concern of the court is not with the superficial 'how', but with the fundamental 'why' of the affair[177]. Achebe stresses the court's emphasis on Obi and the factors that might have lead him towards his fall, rather than, for example, the way he accepts bribes, or how many he has taken. The court does not treat Obi as a criminal who has to be immediately punished for his crime, but as an individual who has gone wrong, and whom it tries to understand. Unlike Jim, Obi is not deprived of his role in society. On contrary, there is hope in the fact that the court tries to understand the causes of his failure, and optimism regarding the young man's future reconciliation with his people.

Moreover, the attitudes of the two protagonists in court, when compared, indicate different outcomes for their predicaments. Marlow describes Jim as being 'very still' and 'extremely attentive'(p118), concentrating on the condemning words of the judge. Obi appears 'unruffled' and 'indifferent'(p1) to the proceedings of the court. However, Obi comes to react to the judge, as he sheds tears at the mention of education. Contrary to *Lord Jim*, where the court has dealt only with externals, in NLAE, the judge has put his finger on a sensitive point: the court has succeeded in reaching Obi's inner consciousness by reminding him of the true meaning of his fall- the betrayal of moral ideals. Contrary to Jim, Obi is allowed to shed tears in front of the court- an act suggesting regret, and pointing to a possible redemption.

The presence of the UPU and their will to help Obi out of his problem is another element suggesting future reconciliation and disalienation. Despite Obi's condemnable attitude towards the Umuofians' elders and his egotistic aspirations, they are present when he meets problems. Achebe shows the Umuofians' concern for their individual member by presenting them, at the beginning of the novel, organizing several meetings over Obi's case. They rally together and discuss what they can do for him. Moreover, Achebe shows their awareness of Obi's insolent attitude towards them, and even wonder whether they should help him:

> 'At the first meeting, a handful of people had expressed the view that there was no reason why the union should worry itself over the troubles of a prodigal son who had shown great disrespect to it only little ago. '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 called together again to find more money for him. [...] My opinion is that we have already done too much for him''. (P4)

The Umuofian elders do condemn the behaviour of Obi, and resent his egoism and lack of respect. However, Achebe displays their anger towards Obi only to bring to light more strongly their concern for

[177] This contrasts with the Court's concerns in *Lord Jim(p42).*

him. Obi has behaved disrespectfully towards the Umuofian elders by angrily proclaiming his right to a private life, rejecting their help, warning them against interfering with his privacy, and rushing out of the meeting. Obi has thus betrayed one of the most important traditional values: respect for the elders. Elechi Amadi discusses the importance of this virtue within the traditional culture by arguing that in 'Nigeria respect for elders is considered very important, and a child who does not observe this cardinal article of the code of behaviour is not likely to turn out well'[178]. Obi's disrespect for his elders shows his alienation from his traditional culture. However, despite his betrayal of the traditional code of conduct, the elders dismiss the view that they should not help him:

> 'This view, although accepted as largely true, was not taken very seriously. For, as the president pointed out, a kinsman in trouble had to be saved, not blamed; anger against a brother was felt in the flesh, not in the bone. And so the Union decided to pay for the services of a lawyer from their funds.'(p4)

Achebe insists on the Union's will to help Obi despite the difficulties they would meet, and despite the fact that it is 'a bad case', '[t]he men of Umuofia were prepared to fight to the last'(p5). The novel displays the Union's solidarity and willingness to help Obi. As Wren puts it, 'the UPU remains loyal to Obi'[179]. Contrary to *Lord Jim*, in the African context, there is room for punishment, but no room for individual alienation. The individual remains a member of the group despite his wrong doing, and has to be reintegrated. Contrary to the alienating end that a Western protagonist, as Jim, experiences, 'a valid happy ending is available for the African protagonist by an appropriate reconciliation with society'[180]. A clear happy ending is not drawn in NLAE, but Achebe draws it through means of suggestion as we have argued.

Moreover, an open ending suggests that the two ways of life, the traditional and the modern, will continue to clash. As E. Palmer puts it:

> '[Achebe] wisely refrains from resolving the dilemma, implying that these two forces, the old and the new, will continue to exert a pull on the educated elite, and that they will need all their individual resources to carry through unscathed'[181].

After the hard experience Obi has gone through, he has gained the intellectual consciousness that would allow him to negotiate a better ethical conduct in his changing society. The UPU's solidarity towards him will lead him to recognize and appreciate the traditional aspect of his culture more closely. On the other hand, he will honour the moral ideals acquired from the West, now that he has regretted his fall into corruption. Moreover, with the help of his people, he will be able to 'afford to be virtuous', and lead a

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[178] Amadi, Elechi. Op. Cit. p54.
[179] Wren, Robert M. Op. Cit. P49.
[180] Cook, David. Op. Cit. P8.
[181] Palmer, Eustace. Op. Cit. P72.

modern life. Obi has gained, thus, the intellectual consciousness that would allow him to assume the selective position towards the two clashing cultures that Achebe promotes.

Achebe, thus, presents a different ending to his novel from *Lord Jim*. He offers his protagonist the possibility to get out of his dilemma, and to achieve reconciliation with his society. As Claudio Gorlier puts it, Achebe is 'against the literature of alienation, of estrangement'[182]. Achebe rejects the alienation of the individual characterizing Western literature. In his essay ''the writer and His Community'', Achebe asserts that individualism and individual alienation found in Western culture are the 'inevitable price to be paid for the enormous advances made by the West in material wealth, in technology, in medicine, etc[183]. He asserts that the 'dialogue' between the individual and the community must have existed since humans began to live in groups. However, the difference lies in the way people resolved it at particular times[184]. While in the Western context, primacy is given to the individual, in the African one, it is given to society. In order to illustrate this point, Achebe points to the different ends that the heroes meet in the Western and African novel:

> 'Of course a Westerner would be most reluctant to destroy in 'a page or two'' [185] the very angel and paragon of creation- the individual hero. If indeed he has to be destroyed, it must be done expansively with detailed explanations and justifications, not to talk of lamentation.[…] The non-Westerner does not as a rule have these obligations because in his traditional scheme and hierarchy the human hero does not loom so large. Even when, like Ezeulu, he is leader and priest, he is still in a very real sense subordinate to his community.'[186]

Indeed, we notice this difference in *Lord Jim* and *No Longer at Ease*. Conrad provides a long section to Jim after the fall, and the elements that led to his final death. Moreover, his death is presented as a loss to his society. As Stape puts it, it is society which has shrunk, and it is Jim who attains a state of purity and perfection[187], prevented from any profane contact with a wicked society. However, Conrad is a writer who belongs to the two worlds: the world of modernism and the world of commitment. Indeed, despite the fact that he presents negatively the Western society, and compares it unfavourably with Jim's noble character, he does assert the individual's need for his society for the sake of survival through Marlow and Stein. The former asserts that 'we exist only in so far as we hang together'(p164) and the latter insists that 'we must fight in the ranks or our lives don't count'. Conrad offers, thus, a double discourse in *Lord Jim*, offering a harsh criticism of Western society and encouraging the individual

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[182] Qt in: Emenyonu, Ernest. and Iniobong Uko. ed. *Emerging Perspectives on Chinua Achebe: Isinka, The Artistic Purpose: Chinua Achebe And The Theory Of African Literature.*(Africa World Press, 2004), P52.
[183] Achebe, Chinua. Op. Cit. P54.
[184] Ibid. p56.
[185] Here, Achebe quotes John Updique, who asserts that the unexpected destruction of Ezeulu in 'a page or two' is 'an ending few Western novelists would have contrived'.
[186] Ibid. p57.
[187] Stape, J. H. ed. Op. Cit. p77.

alienation from it on one hand, and, recognizing the individual's natural need for his belonging to a social group on the other hand. The former aspect identifies him with many Western, modernist writers, whereas the latter makes him closer to many African writers, notably Achebe. In NLAE, Achebe does not provide much space for Obi's life after his defeat, and, as we have seen, the presence of his community to help him out of his predicament is strongly marked. Here, Achebe asserts that it is the individual protagonist who has shrunk in front of the strength and solidarity of society, and affirms his natural weakness, and hence his need for social belonging.

The individual alienation in the Western world is expressive of the devastating effects on the individual of the disintegration of a solid communal life. Jim, despite his failure, attempts to live along the moral code in order to reassert his belonging to his society; however, the betrayal of the code cannot be forgiven, and Jim's own sense of rehabilitation is realized only through his death. Obi's predicament is his inability to define his social identity within the culture clash. Contrary to Jim, he wants to assert his individuality within a corporate social structure; however, this separation makes him more vulnerable to the assaults made on his moral sense, and he falls into corruption. Through Obi's experience, Achebe expresses the need to retain traditional social life, and adapt it to the modern context, warning against the resulting Western individual alienation. Morality is to be maintained within the social sphere.

The socio-ethical approach adopted in this part has enabled us to bring a discussion of the issue of individual Vs society as defined in the Western and African context. As we have seen in the first chapter, in both traditions there is a marked need to assert man's social nature and thus social cohesion. The moral standards Jim and Obi aspire to live along are universally recognized to be the basic principles of morality: notions of self-sacrifice, honour, courage,… At the same time, these principles are encouraged by society, as they ensure social cohesion and stability. The protagonists' moral failure is due to the blending of different factors; on one hand, it is due to the moral code, and the way it was presented to them; on the other hand, it is due to human weakness. Moreover, the protagonists' standing apart from their society has weakened them, and made them easy prey to temptations. The betrayal in both cases is considered as a social betrayal, and hence its consequences are seen in terms of social estrangement: Jim is considered as a social outcast, and dies with no prospect of reintegration; Obi is still surrounded and supported by his people, despite his arrogant behaviour towards them, and is offered ways towards reintegration. The outcomes that the protagonists meet bring to the fore the different, socio-historical realities: the disjointed and disintegrating Western society offers no room for

the individual's reintegration, whereas the still consolidated African society offers ways towards disalienation for its individual deserters.

The moral failure of the protagonists is presented as a complex issue in both novels. Indeed, being modernist works, the novels offer different layers of interpretation. Both novels have been seen by many critics as tragedies. Hence, in the following part, we will attempt to investigate how far the protagonists identify with tragic heroes, as victims of hybris, and instruments, of social change, and the extent to which catharsis is achieved in both novels. This part will enable us to treat from another standpoint the issues broached in the first part; moreover, it will allow us to explore in another way the authors' perceptions of the human condition, especially when such notions as honour and moral failure are at stake.

Part Two

Tragedy as Viewed by Conrad and Achebe

Preamble:

Tragedy is deeply interwoven with morality. Tragic works often present us with virtuous heroes who do not succeed in living successfully a harmonious life. Tragedy displays the difficulty to achieve happiness through the cultivation of virtue; it demonstrates, as A. Kosman puts it, 'the frailty of virtue and the vulnerability of the happiness which we seek through its cultivation'[188].

However, Tragedy is a means used by tragic poets, since its appearance, to teach moral values. From the Greek period up to the modern era, tragic writings have undergone many transformations, as each tragedy within a given period of time reflects the particular concerns of a culture. As R. Williams puts it, '[t]ragic experience, because of its central importance, commonly attracts the fundamental beliefs and tensions of a period, and tragic theory is interesting mainly in this sense, that through it the shape and set of a particular culture is often deeply realized'[189]. C. Leech, for his part, has provided a useful survey of the development tragedy has witnessed as far as theme is concerned, and demonstrates, thus, the form's deep representative power of a specific culture. However, despite the differences we may notice, for example, between a Greek and a Renaissance tragedy, there is a continual and marked concern with morality.

In the Middle Ages, tragedy had the dimensions of moral teaching. Indeed, it was used as a vehicle through which a moral lesson was taught in order to help the individual on his way towards salvation. Tragedy was much imbued with Christian precepts, affirming 'God's promises' and 'God's plan'[190].

Later, the English Renaissance dramatists, attempting to imitate Senecan tragedy's dreadfulness, stressed the helplessness of man in front of a harsh and capricious natural order[191]. However, despite the fact that man is fallible, and that he is created in a tragic situation, his moral responsibility is not concealed. The official Renaissance view, as Leech puts it, was didacticism. Despite their apparent pessimism with life, Renaissance dramatists aimed at teaching moral virtue and discourage bad behaviour through tragedy.

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[188] Qt in Eagleton, Terry. *Sweet Violence: the Idea of the Tragic*. (Blackwell Publishing, 2003), P78.
[189] Williams, Raymond. (U.S.A.: Stratford University Press, 1966), p45.
[190] Leech, Clifford. Op. Cit.p15.
[191] Ibid. p17.

The moral character of tragedy is further displayed in the fact that what is commonly considered to be the first English tragedy was in fact a 'political morality', giving over didactic concerns about the right governance of a kingdom. *Gorboduc* (1561), by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, closely follows models of the morality plays and Senecan tragedy. It is considered to have served as the main source for Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The play was performed before Queen Elizabeth, with the implied recommendation for the queen to leave an undisputed heir to the throne. *King Lear*'s plot is close to *Gordobuc*'s, in the fact that the king decides to divide the kingdom among his sons and causes unexpected ruin. *King Lear* touches more complex issues than does *Gorboduc*; however, it is testimony to the morality tradition prevailing in the time[192].

In the following passage, Chapman asserts the morality of tragedy:

> 'And for the authentical truth of either person or action, who (worth the respecting) will expect it in a poem, whose subject is not truth, but things like truth? Poor envious souls they are that cavil at truth's want in these natural fictions; material instruction, elegant and sententious excitation to virtue, and deflection from her contrary, being the souls, limbs, and limits of an authentical tragedy.'[193]

Chapman affirms that tragedy is primarily concerned with morality, as it encourages the individual to cultivate virtue and discourages its opposite. Tourneau's *The Atheist's Tragedy* (1611) presents the fall of an atheist, warning against dangers of moral or religious skepticism. The end that the main protagonist meets, killed by the axe he intended for his prisoners, is unexpected, and enforces upon the minds superior, divine retribution upon sinners and wrongdoers.

The tragedy of the late 17th century brings to the fore 'poetical justice', through which the hero merits his defeat because of his moral transgression. Poetical justice, thus, continues in the same vein the moral purpose of tragedy.

Racine, for his part, is much aware of the fact that man is created to face tragedy, in the sense that he finds himself enclosed in a universe he cannot affront. Leech asserts that Racine's work presents us with 'what we feel to be tragedy today', in the sense that he has anticipated modern conceptions. However, he asserts, on the other hand, tragedy's moral purpose:

> 'What I can give assurance of is that I have not elsewhere put virtue forth more clearly that here. The slightest faults are here severely punished; the very thought of crime is here regarded with as much horror as crime itself; the weaknesses of love are here shown truly as weaknesses; the passions are presented to the view only to show the total disorder that they can cause; and vice here is depicted everywhere so as to make one recognize and hate its deformity. This is indeed the proper end that anyone who works for the public must propose

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[192] Best, Michael. ''Elizabeth, Lear, and Gorboduc''. Internet Shakespeare Editoions, University of Victoria. 1998-2005. <http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/drama/gorboduc.html>

[193] Qt in Leech, Clifford. Op. Cit. p4.

> to himself, and it is this that the earliest tragic poets have primarily had in mind. Their theater was a school where virtue was taught no less than in the schools of the philosophers'.[194]

The passage states an important view: the role that the tragic writer has as a moral teacher and a guide towards virtue. Tragedy has an undeniable moral purpose.

However, change came with 19th century philosophers. Indeed, as Leech puts it, Hegel, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche had brought the foundations for a new attitude towards life, and hence, tragedy[195]. They are the precursors of what is now recognized as the new modern conception, which meets the new modern world. These philosophers stress the fact that man is essentially created in an evil situation, going beyond previous notions of moral didacticism and poetical justice. They brought to the fore a tragic vision of life, where happiness is not realized in the cultivation of virtue. As T. Eagleton puts it, in the modern conception, 'you are a tragic hero only because you are a member of the species'[196].

The change that tragedy has undergone in the modern period mirrors the changes that have given birth to the modern era. The scientific development has shaken prior conceptions of human nature and man's situation in the universe. This has led to disillusionment with traditional morality, or what Nietzsche calls 'nihilism'. However, we cannot simply affirm that the modern era has completely done away with morality. As Eagleton writes,

> 'We do not really expect that virtue will be rewarded in our sort of world- not even these days, in fiction; but it is testimony to what one might call a weak utopian impulse that we still cannot help feeling mildly scandalized when it is not'[197].

In other words, what Eagleton meant here is that, despite modern disillusionment, virtue is still present in modern minds. Similarly, there is a kind of moral didacticism in modern works, although not overtly expressed. Modern tragic writers are aware of the contradictions characterizing the modern era, notably the discord between theory and practice. Their works do not explicitly condemn crime and reward virtue. However, they make us admire virtue and hate crime.

Lord Jim and *No Longer At Ease* are widely considered as tragic novels. C. Leech asserts that Conrad's *Lord Jim* and *Nostromo* 'are among the examples that come most readily to mind' when we think about tragic novels. Terry Eagleton refers to the 'absolutist, uncompromising fiction' of Conrad, which makes it akin to the fatalistic characteristic of tragedy. In respect of Achebe, A. Irele asserts that the latter has chosen the tragic medium to deal with Africa's encounter with Europe, while Killam argues that *No Longer at Ease* is essentially presented as a modern tragedy. Indeed, the novels display the

[194] Qt in Leech, Clifford. Op. Cit. p20.
[195] Ibid, p21.
[196] Eagleton, Terry. Op. Cit. p94.
[197] Ibid. p106.

desperate attempts of the protagonists to live along moral ideals, together with the increasing questioning of the old traditional order and the entrapment of the protagonists between the two- issues mostly treated in tragic overtones by the authors.

In this part, we will investigate to what extent the authors use tragic elements for moral didactic purposes. As we shall see, through their tragic experience, the protagonists are forced into the moral world through the clash their ideals experience with the reality. As George Panichas puts it, man's 'encounters with destiny entail both risks and moral instruction', reminding the tragic heroes in ancient Greek drama[198]. In the first chapter, we will concentrate on presenting tragedy as an inevitable consequence of Hybris. The tragic plot is characterized by the three tragic elements, namely: hybris, hamartia, and nemesis. The protagonists have tragic defects in their characters, which lead them to commit a mistake for which they are subject to punishment. Indeed, this tragic plot is strongly marked in the two novels. The second chapter is about catharsis, the emotional relief we are supposed to experience after a tragedy. This chapter will bring to light the difference between the two novels, as related to their socio-cultural backgrounds. As we will see, catharsis is experienced in *No Longer At Ease*, and it is more problematically felt in *Lord Jim*. Social change is another aspect in the novels which is treated in tragic overtones; in fact, a culture in transition, from an old order to a new one, is the most likely background to produce tragedy. We will investigate how Conrad and Achebe use this element to represent the change their societies witness, and how they conceive of the role of the tragic hero in such circumstances.

[198] Panichas, George A. Op. Cit. p14.

IV. The Tragic Heroes as Victims and Offenders

Aristotle presents the tragic hero as a good man; he asserts that 'tragedy is a representation of people who are better than ourselves"[199]. According to Aristotle, the tragic poet must emulate the good painters when representing the tragic hero, in the sense that while he presents the hero's tragic defect, he must also bring to light his goodness:

> 'These, while reproducing the distinctive appearance of their subjects and making likenesses, paint them better-looking than they are. In the same way the poet, in portraying men who are hot-tempered, or lazy or who have other defects of character, must bring out these qualities in them, and at the same time show them as decent people: Homer, for instance, portrayed Achilles as a good man, but also made him an example of harshness.'[200]

As C. Leech puts it, 'Aristotle was generally perceptive: he wanted primarily, as he did throughout the world of nature, to describe what he found'[201]. Throughout the tragedies he read, Aristotle deduced general characteristics concerning the tragic hero which can be applied to different tragic works in general terms. He presents the tragic hero as follows:

> '[A] man not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgment, of the number of those in the enjoyment of great reputation and prosperity […]. The cause of [misfortune] must not lie in any depravity, but in some great error on his part; the man himself being either such as we have described, or better, not worse than that'.[202]

Aristotle asserts that the cause of the hero's downfall is hamartia, a mistake or an error of judgment, which proves to be fatal to him.

On the other hand, there is 'hybris', which in ancient Greece refers to excessive self-pride, self-confidence, or arrogance. In ancient Greece, hybris was considered as one of the greatest sins. It is an act of offence against the gods or the established moral order. In Greek tragedy, hybris is often referred to as a character's flaw which leads to 'nemesis', the destruction of the hero. Hybris, thus, is a flaw in character, a defect which leads the hero to perform an act which brings about his own destruction. In Aristotelian terms, this act is hamartia.

Aristotle employs the term 'hybris' but not in his writings about tragedy. In his tragic writings, he concentrates more upon hamartia. This can be explained by the fact that he accorded more importance

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[199] "Aristotle: Poetics". Classical Literary Criticism. Trans. Murray, Penelope and T.S.Dorsch. (Penguin Books, 1965), p77.
[200] Ibid.
[201] Leech, Clifford. Op. Cit. P14.
[202] Ibid. PP1-2.

to plot than to character. For him, 'it is events which are tragic, not characters'[203], and hamartia occurs in action, not in the hero's soul.

The change of concern from plot to character was gradual, and was most marked with Marlowe and Shakespeare. Indeed, the tragic writers of the 16th and 17th centuries display a deeper concern with the tragic hero and present him as responsible for his tragic defeat. In other words, they describe a tragic flaw within the hero's protagonist, or 'hybris', which makes him unable to deal with the circumstances he finds himself in. On one hand, the tragic hero is presented as virtuous and strong; on the other hand, there is a weakness in his character which proves to be fatal to him. As N. Frye puts it, 'if the hero was not sufficient to have stood, the mode is purely ironic; if he was free to fall, the mode is purely romantic, the story of an invincible hero who will conquer all his antagonists as long as the story is about him'[204]. *Hamlet* provides a clear illustration of hybris, as the protagonist himself declares that man may be pure and virtuous, but is doomed to be corrupt by this particular defect and ends up in tragedy. Hamlet defines this particular defect as a vicious mole which irrevocably brings about the final destruction. He presents this point early in the play, and foreshadows, thus, his own end. Indeed, Hamlet is presented as possessing many qualities, and is admired and loved by all. However, a vicious mole in his nature prevents him from dealing effectively with the circumstances of his life, and ends up in tragedy. Hamartia is thus the act, the error, or the fatal mistake that the hero commits. It is an offence against the moral order operating in his environment. Critics define hamartia as a liberating act in the sense that the tragic hero frees himself from the moral code through its violation. Michel Foucault asserts that the acts are 'the real behaviour of people in relation to the moral code imposed on them"[205]. By acting in contradiction with the moral code, the individual liberates himself from it. However, he is doomed to lose that freedom because, by offending the moral order, he has disturbed a balance which must be set right. The tragic hero finds himself in the hands of higher powers which operate in order to restore the moral order through his destruction. As C. Leech puts it, what comes after hamartia is 'beyond human control'[206]. This process is called 'nemesis'. Thus, as N. Frye puts it: 'On one side of the tragic hero is an opportunity for freedom, on the other the inevitable consequence of losing that freedom'[207]. Through hamartia, the hero gains apparent freedom in the sense that he breaks with the moral code operating in his society. But then he loses it, because, as a consequence of that 'liberating act', he is punished and defeated. The tragic plot is essentially formed of three tragic elements: 'hybris', 'hamartia', and

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[203] Eagleton, Terry. Op. Cit. P77.
[204] Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*. (Penguin Literary Criticism, 1957), PP211-212.
[205] Foucault, Michel, *Ethics*. Rabinow, Paul. ed. Huley, Robert and others. Trans. (Penguin Books), 1994 P263.
[206] Leech, Clifford. Op. Cit. P40.
[207] Frye, Northrop. Op. Cit. p213.

'nemesis'. The tragic flaw in the hero leads him to perform an act for which he is finally punished. This plot is identifiable with tragic works in general, and is clearly displayed in the novels we are concerned with.

Jim and Obi correspond to Aristotle's definition of the tragic hero, who is a virtuous man enjoying reputation and prosperity. Indeed, in the two novels there is an emphasis on the protagonists' reputability and elevation above common people, at least on the moral scope. In the novel, contrary to classical tragedy, the hero gains a superior stature through his endeavours, and does not inherit it[208].
Jim and Obi are presented as virtuous men who are anxious to assert their moral values. However, they are created in a tragic situation and a doom hovers over their lives. Despite their efforts to live along the moral values, they are defeated. A. Kosman argues that tragedy demonstrates the frailty of virtue and the difficulty to live along moral standards in a violent, unjust world[209]: Tragedy is 'a recognition of the inability of agents to guarantee their well-being and happiness on the cultivation of moral virtue and deliberation'[210]. Aristotle was against Plato who asserted that the virtuous person cannot be harmed, and recognized that considering the virtuous man as safe is only a pretension.
Jim believes himself different and superior to the other people by virtue of his moral awareness. In other words, he knows the rules of a good moral conduct. He contrasts sharply with the other members of his society who are presented as worrying only about daily trivialities. Moreover, despite his moment of weakness, i.e. jumping into the sea, Jim maintains his superior stature, and sustains our admiration through his suffering. Similarly, Obi is presented as a brilliant and promising young man, confident about his moral standards. He is revolted by the corruption affecting his country and by certain traditional aspects as the caste system. Moreover, even after falling into corruption, he still attracts our sympathy through his suffering and feeling of guilt.
Our two protagonists are thus in an elevated position, above the common people, because of the strength of their moral awareness and virtue. They remain superior even in their fall; as C. Leech puts it, the tragic hero induces awe, 'a sense of being 'above'' even at the fall[211].
We will presently explore the three tragic elements in the two novels and attempt to demonstrate links between them despite their different socio-historical backgrounds.

1. Hybris:

[208] Leech, Clifford. Op. Cit. p40.
[209] Qt in: Eagleton, Terry. Op. Cit. P78.
[210] Ibid.
[211] Leech, Clifford. Op. Cit. P34.

There is a flaw in the tragic character which makes him err and bring about his own destruction. The hero is not simply overwhelmed by external forces, nor merely by some error produced in action. As we have already stated, the change from action to character was most marked with Shakespeare; as A. C. Bradley writes, 'the idea of the tragic hero as a being destroyed simply and solely by external forces is quite alien to [Shakespeare]; and no less so is the idea of the hero as contributing to his destruction only by acts in which we see no flaw'[212]- a fact that we witness In the works under consideration. The error that the tragic hero commits must be caused by a defect in his natural constitution; the fact that the hero causes his own ruin through a fatal flaw for which he is not responsible helps enhance the sense of fatality so typical to tragedy.

We can go deeper into this tragic flaw and the effects it has on the tragic hero. N. Frye categorizes the tragic hero as follows:

> '[The tragic hero] usually belongs of course to the alazon group, an impostor in the sense that he is self-deceived or made dizzy by Hybris. In many tragedies, he begins as a semi-divine figure, at least in his own eyes, and then an inexorable dialectic sets to work which separates the divine pretence from the human actuality'.[213]

N. Frye thus refers to hybris as a character flaw or defect which prevents the hero from seeing himself and the world around him in reality. He is made blind or dizzy by this particular defect or vicious mole. The tragic hero is 'an impostor', in the sense that he presents an image of himself to the world which departs from the reality because he is himself self-deceived.

The flaw which characterizes both Jim and Obi is an overworking imagination. In Greek tragedy, hybris mainly refers to pride. There is, indeed, pride in the protagonists' characters. However, it is not the sole trait that leads them to their final tragic defeat; in fact, it is intrinsically linked to their over working imaginative faculty, which makes them consider their superiority and enhances their contempt for common people. Moreover, this particular character trait cuts them off from the reality- about themselves as well as about the world they live in.

A.C. Bradley asserts that the hero's tragic defect 'is also his greatness'[214], in the sense that it makes him different and superior to common people. Frye discusses this point and asserts that the tragic hero is on top of the human landscape, in the sense that he is in communion with something greater than human society, while he still belongs to it: 'The tragic hero is typically on top of the wheel of fortune, half between human society on the ground and the something greater in the sky'[215]. The

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[212] Bradley, A. C. Op. Cit. P37.
[213] Frye, Northrop. Op. Cit. P217.
[214] Bradley, A.C. Op. Cit. P37.
[215] Frye, Northrop. Op. Cit. P207.

tragic hero does not completely belong to either world. His tragic flaw makes him different and even greater than the common people around him, and prevents him from living in a world to which he belongs, though. Paradoxically, it is his strength and his weakness at the same time. This definition can be applied to our two protagonists. Indeed, we notice that Jim and Obi are superior to others by the scope of their imagination, while it is this quality which proves to be fatal to them.

N. Frye asserts that Jim is 'a linear descendant of the miles glorious, of the same family as Shaw's Sergius or Synger's Playboy'[216]. These characters belong to the alazon type- an impostor who is self-deceived.

In Marlow's words, Jim's appearance inspires reliability and trust at first sight:

> ''He was the kind of fellow you would, on the strength of his looks, leave in charge of the deck- figuratively and professionally speaking. I would have trusted the deck to that youngster on the strength of a single glance, and gone to sleep with both eyes.''(p34)

Jim's youth, physical strength, white and neat appearance make him identify with those who live by the code- those who are ready to sacrifice themselves in order to honour their duty: ''He was gentlemanly, steady, tractable, with a thorough knowledge if his duties''(p8). This appearance, however, is only a pretence, as Marlow recognizes that trusting the deck to Jim 'wouldn't have been safe''(p34). Marlow experiences horror at the discovery that Jim's appearance has no essence. There is something in the constitution of his nature which prevents him from acting according to the reliability he inspires in appearance. In the novel, there are two references to this particular defect.

The first reference to Jim's character flaw is made by Marlow, who declares that Jim ''looked as genuine as a new sovereign, but there was some infernal alloy in his metal. How much? The least thing- the least drop of something rare and accursed; the least drop!''(p34). Marlow puts it clearly that Jim has a particular defect in his character, beyond his control, which prevents him from living up to his ideals. He insists on the fact that this 'alloy' is rare and accursed. Jim's tragic flaw, an overworking intellectual faculty, is rare; hence it makes him different and superior to the common people. However, while it makes his greatness, it makes his doom. This character trait is transformed to a fatal tragic defect because it is not fit to meet the demands of the real, practical world. Moreover, Marlow insists on the appearance of Jim as 'a new sovereign', with all the trust, reliability and promise it inspires. The insistence on the right appearance of Jim suggests that without this flaw, Jim would not have been doomed to tragic defeat. The alloy is infernal because it is uncontrollable and strong enough to bring about inevitable destruction in a world requiring practicability.

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[216] Ibid.P40.

The second reference in the novel to Jim's character defect is 'the lame'. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator mentions that 'Jim, disabled by a falling spar […] spent many days stretched on his back' (pp8-9), and that 'he felt secretly glad he had not to go on deck', where action waits for him. T. Tanner refers to this point, and asserts that Jim's lameness is a sign of a tragic defect. Moreover, he compares it with Oedipus's tragic flaw:

> 'The greatest of all tragic heroes, Oedipus, at the height of his powers gave visible evidence of his flaw by his limping and his ''swollen foot'' (his name means just that): it is a physical defect which reveals his fatal past. Just so, Jim's laming underlines some basic unsteadiness in his make-up, some ill-footed ill-at-ease-ness in the world, some flaw in his confidence'[217].

Jim's lameness, like Oedipus's, denotes a weakness in his character, a flaw which causes uneasiness in the world, in the sense that it makes him incapable of existing effectively in it. It reveals Jim's 'fatal past', when he delighted in repose and imagination, rather than in the challenge of action. After the incident, Jim is left behind, in the East, where his tragic defect, imagination, is exerted freely. This episode in the East displays clearly Jim's tendencies towards imagination and shrinking from action. First of all, the East for Conrad is the place of peace and rest, and Jim is left in a hospital 'on a hill', which is, in T. Tanner's words, 'an ideal place for dreaming'[218]. Here, Conrad provides a detailed description of the sight that Jim is given from the hospital, a description which suggests rest and peacefulness:

> '[Jim] looked every day over the thickets of gardens, beyond the roofs of towns, over the fronds of palms growing on the shore, at that roadstead which is a thoroughfare to the East- at the roadstead dotted by garlanded islets, lighted by festal sunshine, its ships like toys, its brilliant activity resembling a holiday pageant, with the eternal serenity of the Eastern sky overhead and the smiling peace of the Eastern seas possessing the space as far as the horizon.'(P9)

Jim delights in contemplating this dream-like sight where activity resembles 'a holiday pageant'. He is glad to be allowed these quiet moments of indifference and peace. He is cut off from the outside world of events and dangers, and contemplates the even more dangerous world of imagination and leisure.

Then, Conrad emphasizes Jim's passive tendencies through presenting the kind of men he encounters here. The first analogy between Jim and these men is the fact that they, like Jim, found themselves there through some accident. Then the reader is left to draw the following consequent analogies: These men enjoy the peace and immobility they are offered, and are unable to get back to the life of action:

> 'They had now a horror of the home service, with its harder conditions, severer view of duty, and the hazards of stormy oceans. They were attuned to the eternal peace of Eastern sky and sea. […] They shuddered at the thought of hard work, and led precariously easy lives[…] in

[217] Tanner, Tony. Op. Cit. P20.
[218] Tanner, Tony. Op. Cit. P20.

> their actions, in their looks, in their persons-could be detected the soft spot, the place of decay, the determination to lounge safely through existence.'(p10)

The main short coming common to these men is their hatred of action, and their desire for rest and passivity. They shrink away from duty and its constraints, and delights in repose and dreaming. As these men, Jim turns his back from the demands of hard active life and, as Tanner puts it, 'succumbs to the dreams and repose of the east'[219].

Through this episode in the Eastern port, Conrad clarifies Jim's tragic flaw: imagination. It permits him to escape into a world of heroic adventure, to realize heroic achievements, without enduring the hardships and without really facing dangers. Marlow asserts that Jim "wouldn't let [him] forget how imaginative he was" (p164). N. Frye's affirmation that the tragic hero is made dizzy with hybris is illustrated through Jim who is made blind to the demands of the real world by his overactive imagination. Jim's character flaw, namely his imaginative faculty, makes him deceive himself in believing that he can affront any kind of danger, and prevents him from living in the world of actuality. It leads him to 'romanticize', as Goeorge Panichas puts it, 'what it means to be a sailor, what duty is, even what cowardice is. The fact is that he is too 'noble' to accommodate real-life situations'[220]. This makes him identify with N. Frye's definition of the tragic hero as being between something higher in the sky and human society. The imaginative faculty of Jim makes him greater on the moral scope, as it elevates him above mere earthly interests of common people. However, he does belong to this society, and this faculty prevents him from living successfully in it.

Some critics have asserted that Obi does not reach the stature of a tragic hero. A. Irele, for example, argues that Obi lacks the nobility of his grandfather, and that he is 'a passive sufferer of his fate'[221]. However, I think that to present Obi as an anti-tragic hero is reductive and inadequate, as it does not correspond to our experience when reading the novel.

As we have seen in part one, Obi is presented to us as a successful young man, a member of the elite upon which Nigeria relies for its progress and development. He is 'the pride of Umuofia'. There is an insistence in the part of the author on presenting Obi as the hero of the new modern times, as he is sent to bring the white man's knowledge. As A. C. Okere puts it, 'Obi is […] seen by Umuofia as a hero of the new dispensation, a great man of the new Uguedo'[222]. He is educated abroad, and is therefore made

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[219] Ibid. p21.
[220] Panichas, George A. Op. Cit. P29.
[221] Beier, Ulli.ed. Op. Cit. p184.
[222] Emenyonu, Ernest. Ed. *Emerging Perspectives on Chinua Achebe: Omenka, the Master Artist*. (Africa World Press, 2004), P157.

responsible to reconcile the two worlds, the traditional and the modern[223]. However, Obi does not seem to be aware of the task assigned to him. As in the situation of Jim, Obi's mind is obscured by hybris, which is his overworking imagination.

There is a reference at the beginning of the novel to Obi's tragic defect. Contrary to the plans of his community, he has chosen to study English rather than law. The significance of such a choice lies in the fact that Obi has a tendency towards thought rather than action. This runs counter to his community's expectations that he would handle their land accounts. This natural tendency prevents him from dealing with the actual demands of modern Nigeria. Moreover, during his stay in England, Obi creates in his mind an idealistic image of Nigeria, which he embodied in a poem:

> ''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,
> Descending soft with wind,
> And the tender glow of the fading sun'. (p15)

Achebe insists on the fact that Lagos is part of the Nigeria Obi had in mind in order to emphasize the contrast between his idealistic image and the harsh reality: 'Here was Lagos, thought Obi, the real Lagos he hadn't imagined existed until now'(p14). This contrast between imagination and reality is to be found again and again, and represents the heart of Obi's predicament. Obi's imaginative tendencies have placed him in an idealistic world dangerously far from the reality. Obi grasped pompous Western ideals during his education abroad; he has come to idealize his country and idealize his own motives to eradicate corruption and archaic traditional practices, and does not, consequently, concentrate on the immediate demands of the situation. He is completely disconnected from the immediate reality, and consequently acts without measuring the proportions of his acts.

Another reference in the novel which further confirms Obi's character defect occurs towards the end, in the mention of the character of Obi's father. Indeed, the latter is presented as a man of thought:

> 'His father, although uncompromising in conflicts between church and clan, was not really a man of action but of thought. It was true he sometimes took precipitous and violent decisions, but such occasions were rare. When faced with a problem under normal circumstances, he was apt to weigh it and measure it and look it up and down, postponing action.' (P150)

Obi has thus inherited the character trait of his father, in the fact that he postpones action and gives primacy to thought. Isaac has well succeeded in his life because he is put in the circumstances where

[223] Cook, David. Op. Cit. P85.

this character trait is not a hindrance. On contrary, it is even a quality regarding his position as a man of religion. Obi, however, is put in the circumstances where this character trait becomes a tragic defect. This enhances his stature as a tragic hero, who is put in the circumstances he cannot meet.

Our two protagonists are further linked by their connection with one of the greatest classics of tragedy: *Hamlet*. Indeed, many critics argue that Jim and Obi share Hamlet's overworking intellectual faculty, and its paralyzing character. Schlegel and Coleridge attribute Hamlet's tragedy to his constant delay of action and irresolution, and the cause of this irresolution is attributed to an excess of the reflective or speculative habit of mind. Coleridge defines in Hamlet ''an almost enormous intellectual activity and a proportionate aversion to real action consequent upon It''[224]. Hamlet does have the intention to avenge his father, but ''the native hue of resolution is sicklied o'er with the pale caste of thought''[225]. A. C. Bradley remarks that Professor E. Dowden makes a significant observation on Hamlet's character as following:

> ''When the play opens he has reached the age of thirty years… and he has received culture of every kind except the culture of active life […] He has slipped on into years of full manhood still a haunter of the university, a student of philosophies, an amateur in art, a ponderer on the things of life and death, who has never formed a resolution or executed a deed''.[226]

Similarly, Jim has a background of reading light holiday literature, and has formed his moral ideals through it. Obi has studied English, which has appealed more to theoretical speculation than action. Both of them were 'ponderers' on 'the things of life and death' who have never 'formed a resolution or executed a deed'. And then, they embark on the life of adulthood and are required to form resolution and to move to action.

Critics such as John Batchelor argue that *Hamle*t is the closest Shakespearean play to *Lord Jim*. The link between *Hamlet* and *Lord Jim* is suggested in the novel in the fact that Jim carries with him 'a complete Shakespeare', and in Stein's words: 'How to be?'. This link is demonstrated through the insistence on Jim's imaginative, static faculty, which reminds us of Hamlet who continuously gives priority to thought over action. Indeed, whenever Jim is required to move to action he is paralyzed. A. J. Guerard puts it, 'this faculty, combined with other temperamental traits, tends to immobilize him in crisis. He seems radically incapable of acting properly at the important junctures of his life. Sometimes he cannot act at all'[227]. There is the episode of the training ship, where Jim stands confounded by the sudden call to

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[224] Bradley, A.C., Op. Cit. P107.
[225] Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet : Prince of Denmark*. (Penguin Books, 1994), P82.
[226] Bradley, A.C., Op. Cit. P107.
[227] Guerrard, Albert. J. Op. Cit. p141.

action, and the Patna episode, where he is paralyzed by his thoughts, which were mainly about the panic the incident would engender in the passengers.

With regard to NLAE, the Nigerian critic Michael Echeruo likens Obi's defect to Hamlet's irresolution, that is, his inability to act spontaneously and avenge his father's murder[228]. Obi's instance of paralysis is clearly provided in the episode where Clara is taken by the doctor to undergo the operation: 'Obi wanted to rush out of his car and shout: 'stop. Let's go and get married now,' but he couldn't and didn't'(p135). At this moment, Obi is overwhelmed by his thoughts and is unable to move to action. As it appears in the novel, at the moment when he sees Clara, he is 'paralyzed by his thoughts'(p134), and is unable to move into the action that would have saved him from his fall.

Thus, Jim and Obi have a character defect which prevents them from existing effectively in their society: an over-active imagination which makes them unable to meet the demands of the real world. Imagination is a noble character trait which enables the individual to transcend mere superficial interests. However, the authors investigate its fate in a modern age requiring pragmatism. Addressing himself to his audience, Marlow, fearing that the latter won't be able to understand his tale, declares:

> ''Frankly, it is not my words that I mistrust but your minds. I could be eloquent were I not afraid you fellows had starved your imaginations to feed your bodies. I do not mean to be offensive; it is respectable to have no illusions- and safe- and profitable- and dull. Yet you, too, in your time must have known the intensity of life, that light of glamour created in the shock of trifles, as amazing as the glow of sparks struck from a cold stone- and as short-lived, alas!'' (P165)

Imagination is synonymous with illusion; it is 'respectable', 'profitable', and 'safe' not to have illusions, and to concentrate only on the reality. Moreover, imagination is synonymous with youth and lack of experience which gives life intensity and meaning; however, as Marlow puts it, this lasts only for a short moment because disillusionment is the final outcome. Is moral idealism so dangerous and doomed to defeat in a modern, unspiritual world?

In the next point, we will explore how this tragic flaw hinders them from dealing with the reaility and brings about their failure.

2. <u>Hamartia:</u>

Aristotle defines hamartia as an error of judgment on the part of the tragic hero which brings about his tragic defeat. Contemporary translations of the *Poetics* point to the connection between hybris and hamartia, in the sense that the tragic hero makes a fatal mistake because of his character defect:

> '[…] The hero must not deserve his misfortune, but he must cause it by making a fatal mistake, an error of judgment, which may well involve some imperfection of character but not such as to make us regard him as ''morally responsible'' for the disasters although they are

[228] Emenyonu, Ernest and Iniobong I. Uko. Ed. Op. Cit. P156. (volume one)

> nevertheless the consequences of the flaw in him, and his wrong decision at a crisis is the inevitable outcome of his character. (cf. Aristotle. Poetics. 6.24.).''[229]

In a situation of crisis, the tragic hero takes the wrong decision. The tragic flaw leads him to perform the act which will bring about his own destruction. Hybris and hamartia are thus deeply interwoven.
In L J and NLAE, hamartia is the cause of the protagonists' downfall. The fatal mistake in both novels is the hero's violation of their moral ideals. Jim's moral idealism is filled with Victorian values as devotion to duty, selflessness and sense of solidarity. However, at the moment when Jim is required to honour these values, he jumps off the Patna and saves his life. Obi's idealism is manifested in his concern with the future of his country, where there would be no corruption nor caste system. However, at the moment of crisis, he gives up his moral idealism and takes bribes.

There is a sense of fall in both novels, a downward movement from idealism to reality, or from innocence to experience. This downward movement, as N. Frye puts it, constitutes the main plot of tragedy. Frye defines four types of mythical movement: the one within the world of romance, and "the analogy of innocence"; within the world of realism and "the analogy of experience"; and the two movements "up" and "down". The upward movement characterizes the comic, whereas the downward movement characterizes the tragic. He adds that the 'downward movement is the tragic movement, the wheel of fortune falling from innocence toward hamartia, and from hamartia to catastrophe'[230]. The tragic hero thus falls from the world of innocence to the world of experience. Both Jim and Obi fall to hamartia, as they betray their moral ideals, and fall to the world of experience, in the sense that they associate themselves with the people they used to despise. Through hamartia, Jim and Obi are forced to acknowledge kinship with the common people. As Tanner puts it, with a single jump, Jim 'has aligned himself with the basest of his kind'[231]. The jump represents the fall of the idealist into the world of experience, 'the fall from the star, from the top of the proud tower, the drop from the dream to the lower elements'[232]. And with a single acceptance of a bribe, Obi associates himself with those he despised the most, those who are essentially concerned with what they would get from their positions rather than with what they could provide to their community. Jim and Obi fell from the idealistic world of innocence to the base world of experience. Both, thus, descend from their superior position to live in the world of actuality where they are forced to abandon their pretences and face the reality.

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[229] ''Hamartia'', *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, 2009.
< http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamartia#cite_ref-6>
[230] Frye, Northrop. Op. Cit. P162.
[231] Tanner, Tony. Op. Cit. P33.
[232] Ibid.

Fatality is one of the main characteristics of tragedy. The tragic hero is bound to commit that fatal error, hamartia, which brings about his own destruction, because he is put in circumstances he cannot handle. As A. C. Bradley puts it, 'to meet these circumstances something is required which a smaller man might have given, but which the hero cannot give. He errs, by action or omission; and his error, joining with other causes, brings on him ruin'[233]. Conrad and Achebe have appropriated 'hamartia' to the socio-historical realities of their environments. Hamartia is the betrayal of the moral code, the fall from innocence to experience and from idealism to the reality. The betrayal of moral standards of these idealistic, imaginative characters is inevitable, because idealism is not fit to the real, modern world. What does the protagonists' fall signify as far as morality is concerned? In the next point, we will explore the process which works on to provide the heroes' tragic defeat: nemesis.

3. Nemesis:

The two novels present us, thus, with the downward movement from the romantic world of innocence to the realistic world of experience. A tragic flaw in the heroes' character leads them to perform an act which brings about their tragic defeat. The tragic defeat is inevitable because through hamartia, the protagonists have disturbed 'a balance […] which sooner or later must right itself'[234]. The restoration of the disturbed balance is a process referred to by the Greeks as nemesis. In Greek mythology, nemesis is the spirit of divine retribution against those who succumb to hybris[235]. It is a vengeful fate symbolized through a remorseless goddess. In Greek, the term 'nemesis' means 'to give what is due'[236].

Bradley asserts that tragedy meets our sense of justice. He argues that, above accidents and circumstances, human action is the central fact in tragedy and the main cause of the catastrophe. There is a strong connection between the hero's actions and their consequences. In other words, these actions hold the agents responsible for their defeat:

> 'The critical action is, in greater or less degree, wrong or bad. The catastrophe is, in the main, the return of this action on the head of the agent. It is an example of justice, and that order which, present alike within the agents and outside them, infallibly brings it about, is therefore just. The rigour of its justice is terrible, no doubt, for tragedy is a terrible story; but in spite of fear and pity, we acquiesce, because our sense of justice is satisfied.'[237]

In his *Modern Tragedy*, R. Williams brings to light the conscious individuality of the tragic hero which is gained through the violation of the moral order. He asserts that this conscious individuality is the condition of tragedy through which the essential tragic action can occur, 'an action of

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[233] Bradley, A. C. Op. Cit. P37.
[234] ''Nemesis'', *Wikipedia : The Free Encyclopedia*, 2009. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nemesis_(mythology)>.
[235] Ibid.
[236] Ibid.
[237] Bradley, A. C. Op. Cit. p45.

necessary conflict and resolution'[238]. This conflict occurs between the moral order and the hero's individuality. The resolution of this conflict involves 'the restoration of 'ethical substance and unity in and along with the downfall of the individuality which disturbs its repose'[239]. Through violating the moral order operating in his environment, the tragic hero asserts his individuality and gains freedom from it. However, he loses that acquired freedom because he has activated a process of restoration of the balance he has disturbed, which will work to destroy him. Therefore, the order regains its equilibrium through destroying the individual who has offended it and put it at risk.

The agent through which nemesis operates differs from one tragedy to another; as Frye puts it, 'the agent or instrument of nemesis may be human vengeance, ghostly vengeance, divine vengeance, divine justice, accident, fate, or the logic of events'[240]. In *Lord Jim*, nemesis is effected through human vengeance, whereas in *No Longer at Ease*, it is rather through the combination of events.

In both novels, we feel the presence of a mightier power before which the heroes are helpless. This mighty power first puts the heroes in those circumstances where hybris is fatal to them. They inevitably commit that mistake for which they will be punished and destroyed.

In *Lord Jim*, we feel the presence of this mighty power strongly. It is mainly symbolized through the natural element. Nature is presented as having a conscience, a purpose or intelligence, which is in close contact with Jim's mind. On the Patna, nature seems to encourage Jim's imaginary heroism: ''A marvelous stillness pervaded the world, and the stars, together with the serenity of their rays, seemed to shed upon the earth the assurance of everlasting security''(P13). Indeed, Nature offers Jim the quietness and certainty which further stimulates his imagination. Jim is glad and thankful to the natural element for offering him such fine weather, and the possibility to exercise his imagination plainly:

> ''Jim on the bridge was penetrated by the great certitude of unbounded safety and peace that could be read on the silent aspect of nature like the certitude of fostering love upon the placid tenderness of a mother's face. […] At such times his thoughts would be full of valorous deeds: he loved these dreams and the success of his imaginary achievements.''(PP13/15)

Jim gets far into his imaginary heroism, too far to see the coming event and deal effectively with it: 'his eyes roaming about the line of the horizon, seemed to gaze hungrily into the unattainable, and did not see the shadow of the coming event'(P14). Nature makes him lose enough contact with the real world and suddenly interrupts his reveries, as 'the sky, without a cloud, appeared formidably insecure […] as if

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[238] Williams, Raymond. Op. Cit. P33.
[239] Ibid.
[240] Frye, Northrop. Op. Cit. P213.

poised on the brow of yawning destruction'(p19). Nature seems to be angry at the pretence that Jim displays, and is anxious to test it and punish him.

After the jump, Jim is sent to Patusan, a place which, Marlow precises, was once used as 'a grave for some sin, transgression, or misfortune'(p161). The mention of this at the beginning of the Patusan episode leads us to regard with suspicion Jim's achievements there. The place Jim considers to be his second chance is in fact the place of his punishment, where he has to pay the price for his desertion. Moreover, and ironically, Patusan is fit for Jim's hybris, i.e, imagination; as Tanner puts it, Patusan is the place where Jim is allowed to exercise his imagination freely[241]. This fact further illustrates the order's consciousness of Jim's tragic flaw; doom already hovers over him, unconsciously manipulated by an invisible hand which leads him helplessly towards his final ruin. Indeed, Jim is finally destroyed in Patusan; nemesis comes through a human agent, Gentleman Brown, the emissary from the 'real' world.

Brown is the agent through which the disturbed moral order rights itself. He is the agent responsible for Jim's final suicidal act. On one hand, Brown is first presented by Marlow as belonging to ''certain forms of evil''(p253). His association with evil is further emphasized by his presentation as ''a kind of accomplice of the Dark Powers''(p260). The evil character of Brown is displayed in the fact that he expresses a deep hatred towards mankind in general. He even feels deep hatred for Jim, and is utterly displeased by his white appearance and superiority. Moreover, he is contemptuous of Jim, who has not killed him at first sight: ''he had me there- but he hadn't devil enough in him to make an end of me''(p253). Brown feels an irrational hatred of the idealist and frail Jim.

On the other hand, similarly to the strange intelligence noticed in the natural element and its penetration into Jim's mind, Brown has a kind of malevolent ability to detect Jim's week point at first sight: ''Brown […] had a satanic gift of finding out the best and weakest spot in his victims''(p284), as he is able to dissect Jim's flaw through asking Jim what brought him to Patusan, what scared him into this corner of the world, and even manages to say words which inevitably reminds Jim of the Patna:

> ''When [Brown] asked Jim, with a sort of brusque despairing frankness, whether he himself- straight now- didn't understand that when ''it came to saving one's life in the dark, one didn't care who else went- three, thirty, three hundred people''- it was as if a demon had been whispering advice in his ear.''(p285)

A. J. Guerard describes the encounter of Jim and Brown as 'one of the great dramatic scenes in Conrad: the cynical Brown's unerring discovery of his antagonist's weakness'[242]. Consciously or not, Brown tells Jim disturbing words which remind him strangely of his fatal mistake; at this moment, Jim is caught by

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[241] Tanner, Tony. Op. Cit. P44.
[242] Guerard, Albert J. Op. Cit. p150.

the past he sought to escape. Brown is endowed with the necessary malignancy by the 'Dark Powers' to bring down Jim from his high position. Consequently, he kills the one person that would irremediably ruin Jim's kingdom of peace: Dain Waris, the only son and pride of Jim's protector Doramin.
Brown is thus an instrument through which the moral order brings about Jim's punishment of his sin; indeed, Brown is presented in a dehumanized manner, as an incarnation of evil, in order to enhance his stature as an agent through which nemesis operates. Furthermore, Marlow declares that Brown's attack in the camp ''was not a vulgar and treacherous massacre; it was a lesson, a retribution''(p298)[243].

Jim is finally caught up by the past he sought to escape, and is punished. If Jim escaped as Jewel urged him to, he would be pathetic. But the fact that he chooses to die makes him reach the stature of a tragic hero. Jim is elevated above the earthly life, and finally meets with 'the something in the sky'.

In *No Longer at Ease*, the presence of a stronger power or moral order is felt, but in a more implicit way. Here this power is not manifested through nature as in *Lord Jim*. NLAE presents a more sober setting than does *Lord Jim*, in the cosmopolitan city of Lagos. However, even if it is not explicitly manifested, the order is felt through the plot, which is typical of a classical tragedy.

After studying English literature through a scholarship in Britain, Obi returns to his country, full of moral ideals and determination to contribute to its development. He is a celebrity in his village since his prime youth. A higher power puts Obi in the front position, and imposes on him the responsibility to reconcile the two sets of values operating in his environment. Obi is unable to handle this situation because of his hybris which puts him dangerously far from the reality. Another man, such as Joseph, would have dealt with Obi's predicament more easily. Joseph is more pragmatic, and more capable of dealing with the reality as it is.

Like Jim, Obi explores his imaginative idealism, and affirms that bribery is a practice specific to the old men holding top positions. He feels superior because of his knowledge. However, there is a mightier power which cannot leave Obi's moral idealism unchecked, and provides a sequence of events which, through their connection, bring about his downfall. On one hand, there is the increasing economic crisis. Occupying a white man's post, he is considered rich and is expected to bring financial help to his family and assume his life in modern Lagos. Obi cannot ignore that he has a serious and urgent need for money. At this moment, when the economic burden starts to increase, Obi is put to the

[243] Brown's role in the tragedy of Jim reminds us of Iago's in the tragedy of Othello. Indeed, both share the same disgust at goodness and beauty, and are driven towards its destruction. Bradley offers an interesting analysis of Iago's character and motives, explaining that the latter is driven by an extreme sense of superiority and absolute egoism. This may help shed light on the apparently incomprehensible hatred Brown feels towards Jim, who, with the goodness he displays, shakes his creed, and, perhaps, reminds him of a world he has long deserted: the moral world.

test, and is offered a bribe. At the first test, Obi manages to refuse and feels elated at his self-control and success, but it is far from being the end. Moreover, this test makes Obi ascend higher in his moral idealism, only to make the coming fall more dramatic. On the other hand, the emotional crisis Obi undergoes makes the test more severe. We venture to say that neither the economic burden nor the emotional crisis alone could have defeated Obi. A mighty power has made the combination of these burdens, depriving Obi of any support, and leaving him alone with his imagined moral ideals. Like Jim, Obi is brought down from his moral pedestal, as it were.

Ironically, at the moment when his consciousness starts to exert pressure on him to stop, and at the moment when he decides to take the last bribe, he is caught: 'Obi realized that he could stand it no more […] the money lay on the table. He would have preferred not to look in its direction, but he seemed to have no choice. He just sat looking at it, paralyzed by his thoughts'(p154). The mention of thought at this critical moment just before his arrest is significant; it points to his speculative habit of mind and suggests its undeniable contribution to his defeat. We are left wondering why Obi had not had this moment of realization just a moment before the arrival of the visitor. In this case Obi would have been safe and left unpunished, a thing that tragedy does not allow to happen. Here we feel strongly the presence of a mighty power bringing about nemesis at the moment when Obi decides to repent. A feeling of justice, although hard and uncompromising, pervades at this moment.

Obi and Jim are tried and punished for crimes which are considered normal occurrences in their environment. Jim jumps off and leaves hundreds of pilgrims to their fate, but he is not alone to do so, since all members of the crew preceded him. Obi commits a crime by taking bribes, but he does what is considered a common practice among his people. Our two protagonists are made responsible and are punished for their wrong doings because they stand in the frontal position as representatives of the right code of conduct. The tragic hero is to serve as an instrument for an order anxious to enforce the respect of moral standards. Despite their awareness of the contradictions charactering the modern era, Conrad and Achebe are anxious to reassert traditional morality. The failure of the protagonists to honour the moral code is a questioning of its reliability in the new, modern circumstances; however, their defeat, at the end, is a reassertion of it. Through nemesis, the authors point to the presence of a moral order within the unspiritual, materialistic modern era.

Jim and Obi attain the stature of classical tragic heroes: a tragic flaw makes them unable to deal with the circumstances of their lives; they err, and they are punished for their error. In the following chapter, we will investigate whether the tragic novels achieve 'catharsis', or purging of the emotions, an essential element of tragedy, as asserted by Aristotle. We will see how the writers' use of this element is crucial in revealing their own positions towards their society as well as morality.

V. Catharsis

Aristotle reminds us that catharsis is part and parcel of the tragic process:

> 'A tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, having magnitude, complete in itself; […] with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.'[244]

Pity and fear and their catharsis are important elements characterizing tragedy. A good tragedy for Aristotle is one capable of arousing in its audience these emotions, and achieving their purgation. The emotional element constituted a matter of controversy between Aristotle and Plato. The latter would ban tragedy from his 'ideal city' especially because of its rising of emotion. For Plato, the free release of emotions is bad, as it would make people cowards[245]. According to him, tragedy weakens in people virtues such as courage and sobriety. In response to this, Aristotle argues that, on the contrary, tragedy achieves exactly the opposite effect on people, that of relief and sobriety[246].

What are, then, the elements in tragedy that are responsible for raising pity and fear? Aristotle discriminates between a good and a bad tragic plot in relation to whether it achieves the emotional impact or not. He asserts that pity and fear are raised through the destruction of a hero who is neither too virtuous nor basically wicked. A person who is too virtuous is too removed from us to affect us, whereas we do not pity the fall of a villain, as we would feel that he deserves his misfortune. These points indicate that our emotional response to a tragedy is defined by the degree of familiarity we can achieve with the hero.

Terry Eagleton refers to the sense of familiarity and identification through quoting Schopenhauer who, according to him, is one of the few philosophers to have recognized 'tragic ordinariness in drama':

> ''In tragedy, [Schopenhauer] writes, we see the greatest misfortune, not as an exception, not as something occasioned by rare circumstances or monstrous characters, but as arising easily and of itself out of the actions and characters of men, indeed almost as essential to them, and this brings it terribly near to us! There is no need for colossal errors or unheard of accidents, simply that 'characters as they usually are…in circumstances that frequently occur, are so situated with regard to each other that their situation forces them, knowingly and with their eyes open, to do one another the greatest injury, without anyone of them being entirely in the wrong'.'[247]

We feel pity and fear because we discover with the tragic heroes a sense of kinship and common fatality. What happens to them can happen to everyone. The tragic realm is not, thus, limited to the

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[244] Leech, Clifford. Op. cit. P1.
[245] Kaufman, Walter. *Tragedy and Philosophy*. (Princeton University Press, 1968), P50.
[246] Ibid.
[247] Eagleton, Terry. Op. cit. p92.

aristocracy. Catastrophes do not occur only to princes and kings. The emotional response, thus, is an affirmation of the human scope of tragedy. As A. O. Rorty asserts in *Essays on Aristotle's Poetics*, we pity, and fear for, 'the tragic hero, ourselves, and the humanity'[248].

We pity the tragic hero because we feel that he suffers an undeserved misfortune, not in the sense that he is not responsible for his downfall; as we have seen, the protagonist, out of character flaw and fatal error, is considered to contribute to his fall. However, we have the strong feeling that, if put in different circumstances, the tragic hero would have acted differently, and thus not been subjected to catastrophe. He is faced with circumstances he cannot handle and he sustains disaster as a result of his weakness.

On the other hand we experience fear for the protagonist because we are somehow made to understand his predicament. We 'feel', thus, through empathy, the suffering and pain he passes through. The tragic hero shows us something about ourselves through inviting our 'reflective identification'[249].

The achievement of catharsis is the argument that Aristotle develops to counter Plato's claim to ban tragedy. Catharsis is one of the most controversial points discussed by Aristotle, regarding the insufficiency of the materials dealing with it, and the author's own lack of precision. The term in itself offers many possibilities of interpretations. O. Rorty summarizes these interpretations in the following passage:

> 'The classical notion of catharsis combines several ideas: it is a medical term, referring to a therapeutic cleansing or purgation; it is a religious term, referring to a purification achieved by the formal and ritualized, bounded expression of powerful and often dangerous emotions; it is a cognitive term, referring to an intellectual resolution or clarification that involves directing emotions to their appropriate intentional objects. All these forms of catharsis are meant, at their best, to conduce to the proper functioning of a well-balanced soul.'[250]

Whatever approach we take towards catharsis, however, the process involves cleansing, purification, and a resolution of the conflicts. At the end of a tragedy, Aristotle maintains, we are relieved and purged from the emotional tension. The aim is to achieve harmony in the soul. Catharsis does not mean the elimination of emotions from our system, but their channeling to a right and healthy functioning. By this virtue, tragedy contributes to the optimal functioning of society. When pity and fear are appropriately felt, they can achieve, as Rorty asserts, their 'natural psychological and civic function'[251].

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[248] Rorty, A. O. ''The Psychology of Aristotelian Tragedy'', *Essays on Aristotle's poetics*. (Princeton University Press, 1992), P13.
[249] Ibid.
[250] Ibid, p14.
[251] Ibid.

This view of tragedy, which is the temperance of the dross in emotions in ourselves, and their reduction to their just measure, is endorsed by John Milton, who asserts that tragedy is

> 'said by Aristotle to be of power by raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and such like passions, that is to temper and reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight, stirr'd up by regarding or seeing those passions well imitated'.[252]

At the end of a tragedy, thus, we are supposed to feel a kind of emotional harmony. We accept the downfall of the hero and his defeat, because the balance he has disturbed through his actions is righted. We are left with a restored picture of the world he has unsettled.

The question posed now is whether we have this kind of emotional response in reading LJ and NLAE. As we have seen in the previous chapters, the novels do contain essential elements of tragedy. We will presently explore the emotional impact they produce on the readers, and whether they achieve the catharsis so emphasized by Aristotle.

1. Pity and Fear:

Pathos is raised when we see virtue being prey to misfortune. In other words, however virtuous the hero may be, he is nonetheless put in circumstances he cannot handle. He is in the hands of mightier powers which work to put his integrity to 'the test'. When the hero betrays his ideals, we undeniably recognize that he could not have acted otherwise. The fatal mistake, or hamartia, which is closely connected to his character defect, brings about his own disaster. Despite the goodness and virtue he may have displayed, he has to be punished and destroyed because he has transgressed the moral order which he champions. The fatal act cannot be undone.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, Jim and Obi are elevated above the common people by the scope of their moral awareness. However, both fail to live along their moral ideals, and are defeated. Our emotional experience is guided and fashioned by the two novelists who highlight the protagonists' virtues and incite our admiration.

In *Lord Jim*, our emotional response towards the hero is guided by Marlow. In the first four chapters, we are presented with general information about Jim. For example, we get to know about his Protestant origins, his vocation to be a sailor, his dreams to be a hero, the jump into the sea and the subsequent inquiry, and his wandering, escaping the terrible fact. We are presented with all that we have to know about Jim- or at least the 'externals'. Then Conrad retells the story of Jim from a subjective point of view. His use of the frame-narrative has the virtue of involving us emotionally; Marlow holds his own inquiry into the case of Jim, as if telling us not to condemn him so easily for what he's done. Indeed, Marlow comes to know Jim closely, and offers us a facet of him hidden to the rest of

[252] Qt in : Leech, Clifford. Op Cit. p47.

the world. Through Marlow we are able to know the subjective, internal world of Jim: his thoughts, regrets, and fears. Behind the confident and right appearance, we are faced with the real, inner reality, the human soul with all its complexity, immensity and frailty. Marlow thus plunges us into the world of a young man, full of hopes, of dreams and good intentions. He repeatedly asserts that Jim is a representative of virtue. When he evokes Jewel's thoughts of approval about Jim, he adds his comments of admiration and openly asserts Jim's superior stature:

> ''She knew him to be strong, true, wise, brave. He was all that. Certainly. He was more. He was great-invincible- and the world did not want him, it had forgotten him, it would not even know him. (p233)

Moreover, Marlow insists on describing Jim's state of mind after the jump. The latter seems to look back with fear and horror on his deed. Mixed feelings of guilt and regret overwhelm him. He wants to face his failure, and decides to stay and endure the court inquiry. He wants to be punished so that, he thinks, he can be absolved for his crime. Our sympathies are drawn towards him because of this desperate need to be punished. Once the court announces its verdict, Jim does not reach the state of peace and relief he expected. The punishment does not have the virtue of absolving the criminal; it has cut him off forever from his community. In the following passage, Marlow refers to Jim's punishment and to its lack of classical absolving features:

> ''There was no high scaffolding, no scarlet cloth […], no awe-stricken multitude to be horrified at his guilt and be moved to tears at his fate- no air of somber retribution.'' (PP115-116)

The passage clearly refers to the destruction of the classical tragic hero, raising fear and pity in the audience and achieving thus the hero's purification from crime. Jim is not administered this kind of retribution; at least not initially. His suffering is made to go on longer and to intensify. Jim is not able to forge again his own moral identity, and spends his time escaping his past. The intensity of his suffering reminds us of the intensity of his dedication to ideals. Out of weakness, and in extreme circumstances, Jim has performed an intolerable act in his eyes. The suffering that we witness is not that of a common man, but on the contrary, an affirmation of his virtue; Marlow asserts that Jim's suffering stresses his uniqueness, and explains thus his interest in him:

> ''He was-if you allow me to say so- very fine; very fine and very unfortunate. A little coarser nature would not have borne the strain; it would have had to come to terms with itself-with a sigh, with a grunt, or even with a guffaw; a still coarser one would have remained invulnerably ignorant and completely uninteresting.'' (p130)

Marlow affirms that we witness Jim's virtue being assaulted by misfortune, and leads us to pity him for this. The sense of pathos is intensified because we see the hero's internal distress and pain. Subjectivity

is an aspect characterizing the modern world, and an element skillfully used by the author to affect our emotions.

In *No Longer at Ease*, the spectacle of virtue being prey to misfortune is also clearly displayed. Like Jim, Obi is put in circumstances he cannot handle. Our pity is raised because we witness in Obi the struggle of a virtuous man to remain true to his ideals. The narrator asserts that Obi succeeds in the beginning to remain virtuous. As we have seen earlier, Obi succeeds in declining proposals of corruption. As A. O. Okere puts it, 'Achebe's paragraph beginning ''It was again the season for scholarships…'' in fact suggests that he had withstood the temptation of the first season'[253]. Achebe emphasizes the fact that Obi is struggling to stand by his ideals despite the rising difficulties of his situation; Achebe underscores Obi's determination to do so by providing him with the stature of a 'determined moral crusader'[254]:

> 'Unlike most theories formed by students in London, this one survived the first impact of homecoming. In fact within a month of his return Obi came across two classic examples of his old African.'(p35)

We feel that Obi has been severely tried, and we pity him for not succeeding in keeping to his ideals in the end, despite his commitment to do so. The chain of mishaps that befall him indeed leads him to a dead end. As Echeruo puts it, 'Obi's tragedy is that of a man caught between the ideal in which he believes and a reality which impels him to compromise that ideal'[255].We note that a member of the Civil Service Interview Board reminds Obi that it is more difficult to refuse bribes than to accept them. Bribery is perhaps an issue more pondered over by Achebe than what can appear from a superficial reading of NLAE. Indeed, bribery is a practice existing in different parts of the world, and whites are reported in the novel to be as corrupt as the local people[256]. Corruption is a constant temptation assaulting Obi's ideals from the beginning, and wins over his resistance when he is least capable of fighting.

Moreover, similarly to Jim, Obi utterly suffers after the crime. Our sympathy is drawn towards Obi when we are told that he has not really taken to bribery. The following passage refers to Obi's state of mind after the betrayal:

> 'The wad of notes lay where he had placed it for the rest of the day and all night. Obi placed a newspaper over it and secured the door. ''This is terrible'' he muttered. "Terrible!" he said aloud. He woke up with a start in the middle of the night and did not go back to sleep again for a long time afterwards.'(153)

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[253] Qt in: Emenyonu, Ernest. Ed. Op Cit. p164.
[254] Ibid.
[255] Ibid, p165.
[256] This shatters Mr Green's unfounded and racist thesis that the African is naturally corrupt.

As A. O. Okere writes, '[there] is in Obi's utterance and the fact of his sleeplessness, a strong indication of an oppressed mind'[257]. The idealist in him has not been completely destroyed. Our sympathies, thus, replace possible, previous thoughts of condemnation. We feel that Obi, like Jim, is "very fine and very unfortunate". His suffering affirms his virtue and raise pathos.

Pity is raised thus in both novels, where we see two virtuous and unfortunate heroes. Indeed, in his definition of 'eleos', Aristotle asserts that this emotion is raised especially when we think that the hero is virtuous, and in a sense, does not deserve his misfortune[258]. Thus, both Conrad and Achebe are intent on sustaining our admiration and sympathies towards the heroes despite their weakness.

Fear is the other emotion stressed by Aristotle. It takes place when there is identification with the tragic hero. In other words, we have the strong feeling that what happens to him can appear like an ''accident'' to which common man is subject.

There has been controversy among critics regarding the social status of the tragic hero, and its effect on our emotional response. Some argue that we are not affected by a tragedy of a king or an aristocrat because he is far removed from us. Others assert that we are not touched by the tragedy of common people; for example, Elder Okon argues that we cannot highly value the characters of E. O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* because they are too ordinary[259]. However, at a time when tragedy displayed mainly characters from the noble class, Aristotle focused on the fact that the audience had to identify with the hero, regardless of its social status. While coming from different walks of life, the spectators are able to recognize human sufferings and identify with it. This identification is the key for raising fear. In the following passage, C. Leech refers to this identification, which is due to the hero's closeness to us as human beings:

> 'The tragic hero- as Conrad said of Lord Jim in the preface to the novel where Jim is the focus of regard- is 'one of us'. He is not necessarily virtuous, not necessarily free from profound guilt. What he is is a man who reminds us strongly of our humanity, who can be accepted as standing for us.'[260]

Lord Jim and *No Longer at Ease* are set in modern times. Contrary to actors of a classical tragedy, the protagonists are ordinary men. In both novels, the authors carefully present the heroes so that we can identify with them. In L J, this is effected through the repeated use of 'one of us' as leitmotif. It is significant that this is repeated by Marlow before and after he gets to know him. Jim is 'one of us', as a virtuous and idealistic young man, and he is 'one of us', as a human being who has some

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[257] Ibid.
[258] Kaufman, Walter. Op cit. p47.
[259] Eagleton, Terry. Op cit. p85.
[260] Leech, Clofford. Op cit. p46.

weakness. Similarly, in NLAE, Obi is presented as an ordinary young man, full of ideals about serving his country. As a reaction to the reigning corruption, he wants to bring change and contribute to the realization of a democratic and modern Nigeria. He is full of optimism and hope for the future. His failure to honour these ideals says much about his human weakness. Like Jim, Obi is not really different from us.

Jim and Obi are, thus, not too virtuous, and not wicked. Their experience displays their weakness and humanity. We can easily accept Jim and Obi 'to stand for us'. The modern setting of the two novels has the virtue of bringing the heroes even nearer to us, than can be heroes of classical tragedy, because they are in an environment familiar to us. This factor helps in intensifying our fear.

Pity and fear are present, thus, in both novels. This further asserts the novels' tragic dimension. Now the question is whether catharsis, so emphasized by Aristotle, is achieved.

2. Catharsis:

In Patusan, the supposed second chance, Jim does not feel purified from guilt and elevated. He continues to feel guilty and is plagued by a heavy conscience. He does not succeed in forgiving himself and forgetting the terrible event. The memory of his failure is quickly detected by the murderous Brown. The latter finally succeeds in destroying the Kingdom of peace that Jim has difficultly establishing through a treachery that he was not able to anticipate, because of his noble character. In other words, Jim dies for his ideals. As Z. Najder points out:

> 'Jim's final death is a consequence of his principles. […] The voice of his conscience, a source of his honesty and humility in dealing with others, was the noblest trait of Jim's character, and also the direct cause of his débacle. The murderous Brown was quick to spot the weak point in Jim's defenses: pity aroused by the memory of his own fall. If he, Jim, was permitted to redeem his old error by later perseverance and sacrifice, Brown must not be denied a similar chance. To avoid the trap, Jim would have had to betray his principles. But he did not waver.'[261]

There is a kind of fatality at the end of the novel. It is Jim's goodness that turns out to be the source of his final destruction. Jim understands that the coming of Brown and his destructive intentions is the last chance for him to honour his ideals. He *chooses* to trust Brown and nobly offers him a clear road, unable to guess the latter's wicked intentions, and thus contributing to his own death. His own philosophizing that '[men] act badly sometimes without being much worse than others' may be true in his case, but misleads him completely in dealing with Brown. His refusal to deal with Brown suggests his refusal to recognize their common humanity. As Mark A. Wollaeger puts it, Jim displays 'a refusal to acknowledge

[261] Najder, Zdzislaw. *Conrad in Perspective : Essays on Art and Fidelity*. (Cambridge University Press, 1997). PP92-93.

that human nature includes Brown, and that Jim himself contains 'the opposite poles of that conception of life which includes all mankind'. To think of Brown as a part of himself is to destroy the fantasy of having turned his idealized self-image into a sovereign power free of all infernal alloys'[262].

The final scene of his death is full of pathos and has a cathartic effect on us. In the following passage, Z. Najder asserts that:

> 'When Tuan Jim, one-time chief mate of the Patna and the present ruler of Patusan, stops before Doramin saying: 'I am come in sorrow', we feel this is the way it had to be. In the sudden flash of the Malay's ancient pistol the truth about Jim appears complete and clear. The tragic catharsis, a rare guest in modern times, responds to the call of a twentieth-century writer.'[263]

Indeed, there is catharsis at the death of Jim, who resembles many classical tragic heroes. He is given a high social status, and the fate of a people depends on him. He is noble and chooses to die for his ideals. In addition, there is a sense of inevitability, as we feel that all events have led to this very moment. Jim knew what to do and how to die. 'He was inflexible, and with the growing loneliness of his obstinacy his spirit seemed to rise above the ruins of his existence. […] he was going to prove his power in another way and conquer the fatal destiny itself'(p302). In the total ignorance of those surrounding him, Jim chooses to deliver himself to Doramin, to honour his ideals, instead of saving his life. At the moment of his death, he 'sent right and left at all those faces a proud and unflinching glance, as a vindication of a final triumph'(p306). As Marlow puts it:

> ''Not in the wildest days of his boyish visions could he have seen the alluring shape of such an extraordinary success! For it may be very well that in the short moment of his last proud and unflinching glance, he had beheld the face of that opportunity which, like an Eastern bride, had come veiled to his side''(p306).

His last act corresponds to the idealistic image of himself. He dies as a victim of a hostile fate, but ready to die for his ideals. Jim has finally realized his dream of being a hero.

However, this does not close the novel. In classical tragedy, the hero's destruction and the emotional catharsis are followed by a restored picture of the world he leaves. In the case of Jim, the world he leaves is that of renewed chaos. The peace and stability he succeeds in establishing is disrupted, and the people of Patusan plunge again in internal strife. Besides, Jim dies in incomprehension on the part of those surrounding him in Patusan. Moreover, he leaves Jewel ''leading a sort of soundless, inert life in Stein's house''(p307), unable to understand nor to forgive him. Catharsis,

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[262] Wollaeger, Mark. A. *Joseph Conrad and the Fictions of Skepticism*. (Stanford University Press, 1990),P118.

[263] Najder, Zdislaw. Op. Cit. P93.

thus, does not close *Lord Jim*. 'Having lifted his hero onto the tragic pedestal, Conrad shuns any simple-minded illusions'[264].

The end of NLAE is quite different. Not all tragedies end with the death of the hero, of course. Moreover, Aristotle asserts that tragedies ending happily are the best. According to him, happy ending has everything: 'phobos, eleos, recognition, reversal, more surprise than the Oedipus type of plot, plenty of additional emotions at the end, and hence as much of a cathartic effect; and for all that, this is less shocking'[265]. The end provided in this novel is close to what Aristotle describes as a happy ending. We have already demonstrated that the novel does arouse emotions that befit tragedy. Obi is a tragic hero with whom we can identify, and whose virtue is prey to misfortune. Moreover, the end further heightens these emotions: Obi is caught at the moment he decides to stop taking bribes. The last fateful bribe was a trap to catch him and bring him to justice. On the other hand, the element of recognition, or 'anagnorisis', is very much stressed at the end. Obi has come to realize the nature and consequences of his actions, as he sheds tears at the mention of 'education'. Up to that moment he has displayed indifference to the court's proceedings and, in fact, prepared himself to face this moment. 'But now when the supreme moment came he was betrayed by treacherous tears'(p2). After the emotional strain he went through, namely, the loss of his mother and Clara, Obi thought he was 'a different man, able to look words like 'education' and 'promise' squarely in the face'(p2). However, he discovers that the idealist in him has not died, as he unintentionally responds to the judge's words. Moreover, tears have the virtues of purification, cleansing and relief. Through this, Achebe succeeds in achieving an emotional catharsis.

Some critics refute this conclusion on the ground of what Obi himself says about tragedy:

> 'Real tragedy is never resolved. It goes on hopelessly forever. Conventional tragedy is too easy. The hero dies and we feel a purging of emotions. A real tragedy takes place in a corner, in an untidy spot, to quote W. H. Auden. The rest of the world is unaware of it. Like that man in a Handful of Dust who reads Dickens to Mr Todd. There is no release for him. When the story ends he is still reading. There is no purging of the emotions for us because we are not there' (p36).

The concern of Obi here, as A. Okere points out, is to present the European chairman with the concept of tragedy as seen by the Igbo people, for whom suffering is worse than death[266]. Moreover, the aim behind quoting Auden is to stress the absence of human response to the suffering of others. Obi's predicament is far from happening in the indifference of others. His people rally around him in a sustained effort to help him out of his predicament. Obi is making correlations between his culture and

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[264] Ibid.
[265] Kaufman, Walter. Op cit. p71.
[266] Qt in: Emenyonu, Ernest. Ed. op cit. p154.

the tragedies he read during his studies. He is not predicting his own end and assuming that there is no catharsis. At the end, Obi is surrounded by his people, recognizes his failure, and seems to reach a state of purification. Compared to what he describes to be real tragedy, the end of the novel is quite different. Contrary to Jim, Obi is offered the chance to redeem himself.

Thus, the novels differ when it comes to catharsis. This difference tells much about their socio-historical backgrounds. In L J, Conrad reaches the tragic catharsis with the death of the hero, but presents us with a chaotic, instead of a restored, picture of the world he left. By this effect, Conrad discourages any simplistic conclusion. This relates to his position towards his society. Closing L J similarly to classical Greek tragedy would mean that the hero has disrupted a harmonious and stable order through his tragic hamartia. L J, as we have seen in the previous chapters, presents a declining social and moral order. Conrad allows Jim, the individual hero, to reach a state of purification through his death, but in isolation. The Western world has not forgiven him, nor have the Malays. Conrad, thus, has not found that the end of conventional tragedy would meet his vision of a modern Western writer. He insists on the triumphant look of Jim when he meets his heroic death. As far as Jim is concerned, we feel catharsis, but as far as Western society is concerned, we have no illusion. Conrad has adapted thus conventional tragedy to the beginning of the 20th century, a time of uncertainty and skepticism. On the other hand, Achebe winds up his novel with an emotional catharsis. We feel a relief of tension through Obi's shedding of tears, and we are offered the opportunity to imagine with optimism that Obi, having reached recognition of his wrongs, would succeed in dealing with the conflicting Western and African cultural elements which are the cause of his predicament. In addition, the fact that Achebe ends his novel in the manner of a Greek classical tragedy emphasizes the still harmonious order of African society, contrary to the declining Western one. Moreover, this ending stresses Achebe's position of a teacher, engaged in guiding his society on its path towards modernization, and warning against blindly following the European modern path. The novel does not end, hence, in despair.

Once again, we are offered a deeper insight into the points differentiating Conrad and Achebe, as standing for Western and African cultures, through their appropriation of the tragic medium. In the next chapter, we will focus on another aspect of tragedy much marked in the novels: social change. In fact, social change represents the most likely background to produce tragedy, when the old values are increasingly questioned. Moreover, we will explore to what extent the heroes are presented as instruments of this change.

VI. The Tragic Heroes as Instruments of Social Change

The present chapter focuses on another element of tragedy: social change. Many critics have stressed the transitional character of tragedy. In his *Sweet Violence*, T. Eagleton claims that tragedy does not result from the disruption of order, but from 'that order being caught up in a complex transitional crisis'[267]. He further asserts that tragedy is essentially a product of clash between 'the old' and 'the new', or between moral idealism and reality:

> 'It is, then, an essentially transitional form, the fruit neither of cosmos nor chaos. It is the product neither of faith nor doubt, but of what one might call skeptical faith. It may spring, for example, from the clash between a remembered sense of value and what seems a predatory degenerate present. Tragic disenchantment is possible because idealism still is. Or it dramatizes the deadlock between the asphyxiating burden of the past and a wistful striving for the future, between which the present is squeezed to death'.[268]

Tragedy occurs essentially at periods when there is lack of stable beliefs. It is the consequence of the fact that the established traditional beliefs are being contested by new, rising ones, creating, thus, what Eagleton calls 'skeptical faith'; disillusionment results from the clash between idealism and a degenerate present. R. Wiliams refers to this point, and asserts that '[The] ages of comparatively stable belief, and of comparatively close correspondence between beliefs and actual experience, do not seem to produce tragedy of any intensity'[269]. Moreover, tragedy does not occur in periods of open conflict nor of complete stability. Old beliefs are not totally rejected, but are still strongly present. However, they can no more be accepted without questioning:

> 'Important tragedy seems to occur, neither in periods of real stability, nor in periods of open and decisive conflict. Its most common historical setting is the period preceding the substantial breakdown and transformation of an important culture. Its condition is the real tension between old and new: between received beliefs, embodied in institutions and responses, and newly and vividly experienced contradictions and possibilities. If the received beliefs have widely or wholly collapsed, this tension is obviously absent; to that extent their real presence is necessary. But beliefs can be both active and deeply questioned, not so much by other beliefs as by insistent immediate experience. In such situations, the common process of dramatizing and resolving disorder and suffering is intensified to the level which can be most readily recognized as tragedy.'[270]

Tragedy, thus, occurs in the period preceding the total collapse of the traditional, received values. These traditional standards are being questioned because they no longer fit in with the new, changing environment. Moreover, tragedy occurs when the clash between idealism and the reality is intense,

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[267] Eagleton, Terry. Op. Cit. P143.
[268] Ibid. p145.
[269] Williams, Raymond. Op. Cit. P54.
[270] Ibid. p54.

because traditional values are still strongly marked. As R. Williams puts it, they are not necessarily questioned by new rising ones, but by 'immediate experience'. Jim's and Obi's moral idealism remains intact until it clashes with real experience, which demands its concrete application.

Some critics assert that the social, economic and political circumstances characterizing modernity do not provide 'fit meat for tragedy'[271]. As Eagleton puts it, 'it is no longer the valorous, spectacular stuff of the feudal or absolutist order but bloodless and bureaucratized, a matter of committees rather than chivalry, chemical warfare rather than crusades'[272]. With modernity, tragedy has lost its noble character, but has not disappeared, in fact, with the advent of the modern age, tragedy has been multiplied: The result of democratization is that tragic heroes can now be found anywhere, since every individual's fate is as important as any other's. Modernity's concern with universal equality and the unique value of each individual made it possible for anyone to be a tragic figure. With past tragedy, the fall of the great, the patrician, reminds us that our own lot is secure. Modern tragedy reminds us that no one is safe[273].

On the other hand, the Novel is also a sign of a culture in transition. Ian watt, in *The Rise of the Novel*, asserts that the novel's formlessness is essentially due to its concern with and faithfulness to human experience[274]. He further asserts that the novel is the emblematic sign of cultural change, because it is itself a rejection of past heritage:

> 'The novel arose in the modern period, a period whose general intellectual orientation was most decisively separated from its classical and medieval heritage by its rejection- or at least its attempted rejection- of universals'.[275]

'Universals' in the Middle Ages were the true, unchangeable realities concerning the world and man, which are accepted as definite, and by everyone. In modern times, such universals are not accepted so easily; on contrary, the individual is considered to discover the truth, the meaning of existence, by himself through his senses. The pursuit of truth is considered as a purely individual matter. It is a modern conception, ''logically independent of the tradition of past thought, and indeed as more likely to be arrived at by a departure from it'[276]. Watt further asserts that 'from the Renaissance onwards, there was a growing tendency for individual experience to replace collective tradition as the ultimate arbitrer

[271] Eagleton, Terry. Op. Cit. P93.
[272] Ibid.
[273] Ibid. p86.
[274] Watt, Ian. *The Rise of the Novel*. (Penguin Books, 1957), P14.
[275] Ibid. p12.
[276] Ibid. p13.

of reality; and this transition would seem to constitute an important part of the general cultural background of the rise of the novel'[277].

The shift of emphasis from the collective to the particular, from the group to the individual, is the main characteristic of the modern period, a characteristic manifested in the change that tragedy has undergone, and in the rise of the novel. What came to be called the tragic novel represents the modern era, and an adaptation of tragedy to it. It is a mixture of genres which have met in the modern period in a common issue: the position of man towards past, traditional ideals in an increasingly industrialized, new environment.

1. ***Cultures in Transition***:

Despite their different socio-historical backgrounds, *Lord Jim* and *No Longer at Ease* treat the same issue, as they present us with two protagonists unable to live up to their moral idealism. The socio-historical backgrounds of the two novels reveal a culture in a transitional stage, where traditional moral values are put in question.

The increasing loss of values as a consequence of a culture in transition from a corporate world to a world of individuals is the spirit of the time of Conrad's writing. This loss of faith in values is indeed strongly marked in his works, as we can see in *Lord Jim*.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries in the West were times of growing philosophical development, characterized by newness and detachment from past traditions. One of the most prominent philosophers of the time, Nietzsche, asserted that the task of the philosopher was to question the traditionally and commonly accepted values, since they no longer fitted into the world we live in[278]. Indeed, Nietzsche points to the inevitable disillusion with traditional morality. For him, the latter gave an overestimation of the value of man and the world he lives in. Nietzsche implies here that the moral values promoted by traditional morality do no longer fit modern man. This disenchantment with moral idealism has led to nihilism- a state of pessimism where life is considered pointless and human values worthless. However, contrary to Schopenhauer's pessimism about the value of life, Nietzsche argues that nihilism is just a transitional stage towards the radical counter to it-that is a revaluation of values[279]. Nietzsche has highlighted thus the fact that the traditionally received values cannot be so easily accepted, and that Western culture is passing through a transitional stage.

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[277] Ibid. p15.
[278] Schacht, Richard. *Nietzsche*. (Routledge, 1983), P348.
[279] Ibid. p344.

Ian Watt, for his part, further mentions this transitional character, but in a more specific way. Watt refers to:

> '[T]hat vast transformation of western civilization since the Renaissance which has replaced the unified world picture of the Middle Ages with another very different one-one which presents us, essentially, with a developing but unplanned aggregate of particular individuals having particular experiences at particular times and at particular places.'[280]

Watt more specifically refers to the rising individualism which characterizes the modern period. He asserts that individualism has replaced traditional social life, characterized by the social responsibility of every member and sense of solidarity. The values, thus, that used to be active in such a social life are no longer operational in 'an aggregate of particular individuals', concerned primarily with their own lives and interests. Traditional standards are thus put into question. This move from a unified world towards an aggregate of individuals is the result of the process of industrialization. In *Culture and Anarchy*, Mathew Arnold evokes the mechanical and external character of the modern world, and asserts that these characteristics are worse in England where '[faith] in machinery' has replaced moral or religious faith, 'as if it had a value in and for itself'[281]. Industrialization has impacted the social structure, as it has given rise to individualism. This has further affected moral traditional values, which no longer meet the new circumstances.

Lord Jim presents this questioning of traditional moral values. Jim is unable to fulfill his ideals. As we have seen above, traditional values are put into question by experience. The failure of the virtuous and the idealistic Jim is a questioning of the reliability of traditional morality within the modern context. Moreover, the discord between theory and practice is at the center of the novel, a discord which is treated, as T. Eagleton puts it, with 'tragic overtones' by Conrad[282].

Similarly, Achebe writes at times of gradual and increasing change, due mainly to Africa's encounter with the western world. Colonialism has seriously affected African traditional culture. In his works, Achebe depicts the African-European contact at its different stages, providing thus a clear picture of the traditional society, and the changes it has undergone. As Killam puts it, Achebe's novels 'form a sequence and reflect, broadly speaking, the changes which have taken place in Ibo, and by implication Nigerian life as a result of what Achebe calls the 'chance encounter' between Europe and Africa during the colonial imperial period'[283]. Achebe's novels form a sequence because they treat the different stages of European colonialism. *Things Fall Apart*, for example, set at the beginning of the 20th century, treats

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[280] Watt, Ian. Op. Cit. P34.
[281] Arnold, Matthew. *Culture and Anarchy*. (Great Britain, Cambridge University Press, 1932), P50.
[282] Eagleton, Terry. Op. Cit. P212.
[283] Killam, G. D. Op. Cit. P2.

Europeans' first coming to Africa. In his first novel, Achebe brings to light a picture of the Ibo society, with its strength and weaknesses, as truthfully as possible, and beyond this, a picture of an organized society before the spread of European culture. As R. Wren puts it:

> 'Achebe portrays a civil, ordered society based upon a hierarchy of gods, ancestors, elders, and families. It is an agricultural community, subject to the order and the vagaries of the seasons and weather. It has times of hard work, times of civil crisis, occasions of crime and discord. It has complex but effective means of dealing with the problems both of prosperity and adversity. It has, too, times of leisure, of courtesy, of fantasy, folk tale and song, dance and music'[284].

However, this well established order is disturbed by the coming of Europeans. Bringing with them their own systems of government, their own religion, and their own system of values, Europeans have created division and confusion within the traditional system. They have brought with them, above all, individualism, which puts into question the traditional values of solidarity and self-sacrifice upon which traditional society relies for its existence and stability. Culture clash is more marked in *No longer at Ease*, where we see two cultures contesting over the African cultural space: The past, traditional culture and the modern, European one. Similarly to the early 20th century Britain, African society is living through a transitional stage, moving gradually from the corporate world of organized society towards the modern world of individuals. The way towards modernization easily produces tragic situations. As Abiola Irele puts it:

> '[The] immediate subject of Chinua Achebe's novels is the tragic consequences of the African encounter with Europe. […] His novels deal with the social and psychological conflicts created by the incursion of the white man and his culture into the hitherto self-contained world of African society, and the disarray in the African consciousness that has followed.' [285]

We can notice this confusion in the experience of Obi, who is caught between compliance to his traditional culture, and to the modern, European one. Moral confusion characterizes African society as it witnesses the gradual collapse of its traditional values.

2. ***Instruments of Social Change:***

Within the changing socio-cultural environment, what is the role of the tragic hero? We will presently attempt to elucidate this question through highlighting the stature of the tragic hero as an instrument of social change, and then we will investigate to what extent Jim and Obi attain this stature.

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[284] Wren, Robert M. Op. Cit. p10.
[285] Qt in: Beier, Ulli. Ed. Op. Cit. P177.

Hegel asserts that tragedy involves 'a conflict of ethical substance'[286]. He argues that in ancient tragedy, the individual seeks to achieve purposes which have a universal value. The tragic resolution thus meets our sense of justice, by virtue of the restoration of the disturbed balance and the achievement of reconciliation within the individual. He contrasts it with modern tragedy, where the ends are more personal. In this case, the tragic resolution is hard to define, and our sense of justice is made more abstract. In other words, Hegel claims that the world-spirit in modern times has lost its general and objective character because it has been internalized within the individual: Modern tragedy concentrates upon the individual, and does not have a general character. However, under the influence of Marx, the world-spirit has been given again its general and objective character, and the difference drawn between ancient and modern tragedy becomes negligible:

> 'The conflict of ethical forces, and their resolution by a higher force, were seen in social and historical terms. Social development was seen as necessarily contradictory in character, and tragedy occurs at those points when the conflicting forces must, by their inner nature, take action, and carry the conflict through to a transformation'.[287]

Marx describes a social process as a reaction to Hegel's description of a spiritual process even in modern tragedy. The ends that the tragic hero seeks to attain are not personal, as Hegel contends. On the contrary, the tragic hero's internal conflict is itself the conflict of ethical substance; in other words, the tragic hero internalizes the confusion characterizing his social environment, and represents it through his tragic experience.

The Marxist literary theorist G. Lukàcs presents the tragic hero as the 'world-historical individual…whose own particular purposes contain the substantial, which is the will of the world-spirit'[288]. In Marxist terms, the tragic hero is the individual whose 'personal passions centre upon the content of the collision'[289]- the collision between the old and the new, or between the traditional and the modern. In these terms, the tragic hero is presented as an instrument rather than victim of social change.

The tragic hero embodies the traditional moral order characterizing his environment, but with his failure, he questions it. He is left with the task of achieving the transition from the 'traditional' to the 'new', even if it is done at his own expense. The tragic hero is a bearer of the new by his experience and failure, and is doomed to suffer because of the newness he brings[290].

Our two protagonists, Jim and Obi, internalize, thus, the conflict existing in their environment. The collision between the old and the new characterizing society is also to be found within themselves. This is demonstrated through the discrepancy between their theoretical idealism which

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[286] Qt in: Williams, Raymond. Op. Cit. P33.
[287] Ibid. P35.
[288] Ibid.
[289] Ibid.
[290] Eagleton, Terry. Op. Cit. p149.

promotes traditional moral values, and the failure they experience when they try to live along these values in reality.

Lord Jim:

In his *Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*, J. H. Stape declares that poised 'at the close of an increasingly skeptical century, *Lord Jim* exposes a series of cultural illusions of which Jim is the heir, symbol and victim'[291]. Indeed, Conrad writes at a time when such values as solidarity and self-sacrifice can no more be accepted without questioning, because the corporate world of well organized society, where the individual worth is measured by his conformism to social norms of conduct has been, through the increasing process of modernization, transformed into a world where the individual's self-interest is the first moral necessity. The values promoted by the code regulating conduct refer to a world which does not exist anymore. The sense of community life has lost its strong hold on the individual in the modern world. Hence, values such as honour and selflessness, which are essentially social in nature, have become mere 'cultural illusions'. Through Jim, Conrad explores these cultural illusions, and brings to light their dangers on the individual living in a modern amoral world. Jim is the 'heir' in the sense that he inherits them from his cultural environment; he is 'the symbol' in the sense that he represents them through his endeavour to conform to them; he is their 'victim', in the sense that he is finally destroyed by them. However, as a tragic hero, he is an instrument, rather than a victim of culture change.

The fact that the moral values are mere cultural illusions is represented through the insistence on Jim's appearance. As we have seen previously, Marlow keeps repeating that Jim has 'the right appearance', and that he is 'one of us', i.e., a member of the community who conforms to the moral code. His appearance inspires sympathy and trust wherever he goes. Marlow asserts that Jim 'was outwardly so typical of that good, stupid kind we like to feel marching right and left of us in life'(p33). However, Jim represents the moral code of his society only through his appearance, and hence the novel's insistence on this white and innocent *appearance*. Indeed, the novel is built on the paradox between appearance and experience. Behind moral and physical strength hides a man who instinctively moves towards saving his own life before the others'. The Patna incident reveals Jim's true self, beyond the apparent conformity to the code. Onboard the Patna, Jim despises the crew's efforts to free the life-boat and stands immobile, hating them. The intensity of this hatred demonstrates that they awakened in him a feeling of kinship. He was paralyzed by the appalling discovery he made within himself: 'The heroic ideal is steadily approaching the sordid fact, the shining knight is beginning to dance to the tune

[291]Stape, J. H. ed. Op. Cit. P69.

of the doss house'[292]. Before jumping off the Patna, Jim has experienced an inner fall, as he has come to recognize his fear and his hidden impulse to save his life.

In Patusan, Jim is guided and strengthened by the feeling that as long as he continues to live in his superior role, nothing can touch him. He tries there to live along the traditional moral values he betrayed in the West, and succeeds in regaining confidence in himself. Indeed, it is this regained confidence in himself which is the key of his achievements there. His fearlessness makes him gain the confidence of the people, and the fear of his enemies. In Patusan, Jim incarnates the moral code, and it is this adherence to this code which makes him gain the love and trust of his people. However, Jim is not allowed to live his dream to the last. Contrary to what he believes, keeping straight is not enough, as he is unable to fend off the danger brought by Brown, coming from the Western world he left.

After the Patna incident, Jim has been struggling to save from ruin his moral identity. In Patusan, Jim has been able to regain confidence in himself and the values he represents. And now, he won't let this failure in front of Brown destroy his recovered moral identity. He detaches himself from the earthly failings by cutting off all bounds attaching him to this world. Answering Jewel's plea to save his life, Jim declares: 'nothing can touch me'(p304). In a suicidal act, Jim goes to Doramin, and dies. Jim refuses mere survival, in contrast to his previous jump to save his life. Stape considers that Jim's death is a loss to his society:

> 'Conrad's closing rhetorical strategies none the less have a contrary pull: the final pages express an overwhelming poignancy, an almost unbearable loss for Jim, who has been needed-by Marlow, by Jewel, and by the society in which he has attained prestige and a position of influence. […] [A]t the conclusion of Lord Jim […] it is not the protagonist who is chastened, becoming smaller in his identification with a conforming group, but the world itself which has shrunk. […] [T]he tone of lamentation and the heightened, even lush, rhetoric of Marlow's grief further indicate that Jim's passing is not that of a mere individual, but in part, the death of a belief held by the community at large. The mood of somber finality occasioned by Stein's weary drift towards death in the novel's concluding sentence also implies that Jim's death entails a larger loss'[293].

The fact that Jim's death is presented as a loss to his community stresses his representative stature of the traditional moral code. Moreover, his death is proof that the lofty moral idealism regulating conduct refers to a fictitious world; it proves the impossibility of the moral man to live in the modern morally collapsing world. What does Conrad mean, then, by Jim's death? Does he express his utter disillusionment and pessimism concerning morality in the Western modern world?

R. Williams points out the mythical dimension of tragedy. He argues that

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[292] Ibid. p76.

[293] Stape, J. H. Op. Cit. P77.

> '[T]he meaning of the tragic action […] is a cyclic death and rebirth, linked to the seasons and centering on a sacrificial death which through lament and discovery becomes a rebirth: the death of the old is the triumph of the new […] At the centre of this 'ritual' action, after all, is the tragic hero, whose inner conflict is the whole tragic action and whose crisis and destruction can be seen […] as the ritual tearing-to-pieces and sacrifice for life.'[294]

Jim's death applies very well to William's definition as it is clearly displayed as a sacrificial death. Having recognized the impossibility to live along the code, Jim chooses death, a death that may symbolize the death of the old order. However, the heightened lament and melancholy suggests recognition of the importance of the values he represented, and thus indicates mythical rebirth. As Raymond Williams puts it, the tragic hero 'is destroyed by society', but is the one 'capable of saving it'[295]. Through Jim's death, Conrad implicitly recommends traditional moral values, and stresses their importance in modern society in contrast to the reigning skepticism and disillusionment; beyond physical destruction, the will survives.

No Longer at Ease:

In *No Longer at Ease*, Achebe depicts the moral confusion of a nation experiencing change at its different levels. Indeed, the Nigeria of the late 1950s experiences an increasing lack of stable beliefs, as a result of its encounter with the West.

The discussion of the impact of modernity on the African cultural tradition is one of Achebe's most important themes. Achebe recognizes that Africans are fated to live in a modern society, but the issue he tackles concerns the price that must be paid for modernity. Achebe declares:

> 'I don't see much room for argument about that (modernity). What can be, and is, vigorously debated is the quickest and safest route for the journey into modernization and what items should make up the traveler's rather limited baggage allrace.'[296]

This passage explains clearly what Achebe is doing in his work. He presents the 'journey into modernization' of the Nigerian society in particular, and the African one in general. *No Longer at Ease* presents an instance of this journey, where the individual has to assume a selective position towards the two clashing cultures. As a tragic hero, Obi internalizes the conflict found in his environment. As Killam puts it, 'Obi's personal story reflects and embodies the ambiguities, uncertainties, and contradictions in society as a whole'[297]. Indeed, Obi is presented as a modern Nigerian pulled between two sets of values, the traditional and the modern. Thus, as a tragic hero, and as the embodiment of the world-historical spirit, i.e. change, Obi is assigned the task of effecting the transition from tradition to modernity. However, the transition does not imply the total disintegration of the old order. Obi's delicate task is to

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[294] Williams, Raymond. Op. Cit. P44.
[295] Ibid, p45.
[296] Qt in :Moses, Michael Valdez. *The Novel and the Globalization of Culture*. (U.S., Oxford University Press, 1995), P108.
[297] Killam, G. D. Op. Cit. p26.

be able to live effectively in the modern world, while retaining the positive characteristics of traditional culture. Hence, the end of the tragic hero differs from that found in *Lord Jim*.

Being a member of the Igbo traditional community, Obi is sent to England where he absorbs Western modern values. Once in Nigeria, Obi faces the still marked traditional values of his community. He aspires to live a modern life following the Western type, and seems to ignore that to achieve modernity is not a simple and easy process. Achebe makes it clear that there are traditional values that should be eradicated and others to be preserved.

The traditional aspects that should be banished are those which give rise to corruption and social discrimination. Obi's main idealistic aspiration is to eradicate corruption. It is interesting to notice that bribery is a common practice, not totally rejected by the traditional community. Indeed, bribery is hard to distinguish from the traditional practice of giving and receiving gifts named kola[298]. Moreover, as Wren puts it, bribery remains acceptable as long as it serves their interests[299]. The institution Obi stands against is deeply ingrained in the social structure. Achebe highlights the need towards the eradication of this scourge, while implying that it would not disappear through mere theorizing. Obi is led to learn this through his own experience, as he comes to be aware that his salary won't be enough to support his own survival and the obligations towards his kinsmen. It is not through a simple 'No' that one is going to keep 'one's hands clean', but it requires strength and sense of practicability. Moreover, Obi stands against the traditional caste system by aspiring to marry an 'osu'. He is the first to defy the traditional community to give up this old and well established institution.

On the other hand, the traditional values that should be preserved concern essentially the communal sense of solidarity. This is contrasted with Obi's individuality developed during his education abroad. Indeed, Obi does not behave like 'a member of the group' regarding the UPU. While sent to England with their own money to study law and help them defending their land cases, he chooses English. On his return, he disappoints them by appearing in 'shirtsleeves'. On his mother's death, he prefers to stay home, and neglects the suffering of his family. However, every time Obi makes these mistakes, the sense of solidarity and human warmth of his people is displayed. They forgive his choice of English and his individualistic behaviour at his mother's death. Despite the fact that he disappoints them, the UPU elders continue to stand before him and help him at all costs, even their financial ruin: 'When the time of warning came the men of Umuofia could be trusted to give it in full measure, pressed down and flowing over'(p5).

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[298] Hefferman, William C. and John Kleining. Ed. *Private and Public Corruption*. (Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), P83.
[299] Wren, Robert M. Op. Cit. P49.

Through these different events, Achebe succeeds in presenting to the reader the conflicting situation in which Obi finds himself. Obi is presented as the symbol of the new elite. He is a pioneer, in every sense of the term. He is the first to be sent abroad for studies, the first to occupy a white man's post, and the first to want to marry an osu. Obi does recognize himself as a pioneer, and the responsibility assigned to such a status: ''What is a pioneer? Someone who shows the way. That is what I am doing'' (PP67-68). However, Obi does not seem to be aware of the implications of this responsibility. As we have seen earlier, the bearer of the new is doomed to suffer. It is indeed suffering, not death, which is presented at the end of the novel.

The end of the novel contrasts sharply with the end of *Things Fall Apart*. This point of divergence is significant, as it highlights the novels' historical background. TFA is set at the time of the first encounter with the colonial powers when African traditional culture is intact. Okonkwo is a symbol of the traditional society, and his death implies the death of this culture. In the following passage, Killam refers to this point:

> '[The heroic tragic responses] of Okonkwo imply a fixed society or a society at the point where irrevocable change is about to take place, change recognized by a character who is the epitome of that society who dies and in whose death is symbolized the death of the old ways'[300].

And as A. C. Okere puts it, 'Okonkwo commits suicide because de does not want to see the culture and values he believes in destroyed by missionaries'[301]. Many critics refer to Okonkwo's extreme inflexibility as the tragic flaw which brings about his destruction. Okonkwo was destroyed, contrary to the Igbo society, because he was not open to change. In one of his interviews, Achebe points out to the necessity to accept change in order to survive:

> 'Life has just to go and if you refuse to accept changes,
> Then tragic though it may be, you are swept aside.'[302]

Achebe makes the point that Igbo culture has to be open to change in order to survive and adapt to the changing environment. Okonkwo's single-mindedness is fatal to him. Through his death, Achebe demonstrates that it is no more possible to stick to the traditional values and reject everything new. Okonkwo is not able to change, and he is not ready to accept change among his people. However, his death does not imply the death of the Igbo traditional culture, which managed to survive and adapt to the new conditions. His death represents the death of the enclosed, inflexible traditional way of life. Contrary to his grandfather, Obi does not stand for one set of values, but for two, the traditional and the

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[300] Killam, G. D. Op. Cit. P56.
[301] Emenyonu, Ernest and Iniobong I. Uko. ed. Op. Cit. P167. (Volume 1)
[302] Qt in: Emenyonu, Ernest and Iniobong Uko.Op. Cit. P75.

modern. The tragic death would not represent the solution for the moral confusion characterizing the society.

We see Umuofia's attempts of adaptation in NLAE through the development of the Umuofian Progressive Union. Umuofia does survive, although differently from its original form. Obi is a man of two worlds; he is the symbol of the Umuofian survival and struggle to find a compromise between the traditional and the modern.

The end of the novel implies that the struggle will continue to affect African society and engender suffering. However, as a committed writer, Achebe's purpose is far from ending his novel on a pessimistic note. In his discussion of the main purpose of Achebe's work, Alistair Niven asserts that 'Achebe advocates knowledge as a way of getting out of the tragic quagmire in which his society has found itself'[303]. According to Niven, the call that Achebe makes in ''The Novelist as Teacher'' is not just a 'clarion call to his African leaders to remember their heritage but […] an even larger statement about the perpetual urgency for human beings to attain maximum knowledge in their search for a way out of their tragic spiral'[304]. The portrayal of the African individual is 'politically tragic in much of its destiny to date, but culturally and humanly so rich that the underride of tragedy, which is self-knowledge and an eventual accession to a better future, was inevitable'[305]. Obi's pioneering experience as a man of two worlds has made him gain self-knowledge, as he is aware, contrary to others, of the predicament in which society finds itself. He is made conscious of the struggle between the traditional and the modern to possess the cultural space. An easy solution is not affordable, but at least, he is made conscious of the need to reconcile the two elements. What happens after the court inquiry is not known, but we may venture to say that Obi will not neglect the strong presence of corruption and will not take bribes either. Moreover, we do not expect him to discard his traditional society, regarding the UPU's efforts to get him out of his predicament. Obi is left with the task of transmitting his knowledge to his fellowmen to show them the way.

Through Obi and his experience, Achebe attempts to teach the elite he represents; he warns them against excessive idealism and naivety in trusting the attractive Western moral idealism and warns them against mere rejection of the traditional values.

Broadly speaking, Jim and Obi's tragedies are similar, stemming from the fact that both try to cling to values they themselves betray in the end. They are not morally made disreputable for this. The tragic heroes are not elevated above their societies through their aristocratic origin or material wealth, but through their moral consciousness. More than mere idealism, however, is required from

[303] Okechukwu, Chinwe. Op. Cit. P159.
[304] Ibid.
[305] Ibid.

them in order to survive in the real world. Their experiences shatter their naivety and make them aware of reality. Jim chooses to die because he does not want to live in the real world, and lose his moral idealism. Obi lives on and has to use his knowledge in finding a way out of the moral confusion. Contrary to Western society, African society still clings to its traditional values. The African writer works to avoid the moral disintegration characterizing the Western world.

Jim and Obi identify with tragic heroes as victims of hybris, and as instruments of social change. On one hand, imagination becomes a tragic flaw when put in the modern circumstances, where sense of practicability is important; on the other hand, Jim and Obi are held with the task of effecting the transition from the old to the new order. While the authors seem to express similar tragic views of life, they advocate moral standards, and adapt tragic elements to transcend the moral degradation their environments witness. Through the element of catharsis, however, Conrad and Achebe express divergent views regarding their societies: while Conrad is pessimistic about the moral restoration of his society, Achebe is not: Western society has reached a state of moral anarchy, well in advance of African society, which still clings to basic moral standards.

Despite being modernist writers, Conrad and Achebe are fervent defenders of morality. Their awareness of their environments' contradictions is well displayed in both works; however, it did not lead them to mere skepticism, but, on the contrary, it made them react through reasserting the need for the upkeep of moral standards. We might conclude here that Conrad and Achebe are akin to classical tragic poets, as defined by Racine, who teach virtue and abhor crime. Tragedy, thus, reasserts their position as moral crusaders.

Conclusion

This comparative study has aimed at analyzing, on an equal footing, the works of Conrad and Achebe- authors historically, socially, and culturally separated. It has enabled us to bring to light the attitudes of the authors towards morality, and its relevance in the modern context. We have, hopefully, given due consideration to similarities and differences as far as this issue is concerned; the latter elements, in fact, relate to the socio-historical circumstances at the time the authors produced their works.

Conrad and Achebe express their advocacy of traditional moral standards which are assaulted by the new circumstances characterizing the modern era. Through the experience of Jim and Obi, they show the difficulty to fulfill standards promoted by the moral code despite having ''the best dispositions'' to do so. The moral idealism of both protagonists is assaulted by inward and outward terrors; both heroes are not left claiming high moral standards but are severely tested. Their experience in the real world of action makes them, for the first time in their lives, doubt about their own moral identity, as they ally with those for whom mere survival, rather than virtue, is the most important. Suffering differentiates them from this corrupted lot, but does not, however, cancel their moral betrayal. The novels center around the latter, presenting its possible causes, its consequences, as well as its significance.

We have resorted to the use of two approaches, the socio-ethical and the tragic, in order to take into consideration the most important factors taking effect in the moral life of the protagonists. The socio-ethical approach used in the first part has enabled us to discuss issues marked in both novels, namely the moral responsibility of the individual as well as his social nature. As far as these elements are concerned, Conrad and Achebe share the same view; indeed, in both novels, the authors highlight human weakness and the frail hold morality may have on man, on one hand, and the role society plays to promote morality in its individual members, on the other hand. However, the resolution of the conflict, individual vs. society, differs; while Jim loses his social status as he dies with no perspective of rehabilitation, Obi, on his part, is offered ways towards social reintegration. This is essentially due to the fact that African society, contrary to the Western, still has an organic structure into which the individual can be reintegrated; Western society, for its part, consists of social groupings in which individualism is a salient feature.

Moreover, the authors share the same vision of life: both seem to see limitations to individualism, and make their protagonists interact with their respective societies. For Conrad, as we have seen, virtues

such as selflessness and solidarity are fundamental principles underlying his conception of seamanship. The crew onboard symbolizes a miniature society, whose life depends on the cooperation of individuals to face the unpredictable and dangerous violence of the sea. Achebe for his part makes us admire this fundamental trait in traditional culture, through the sustained efforts of Obi's people, represented through the UPU, to help an individual member when he is in distress. The similarities highlighted concerning the causes of the individuals' moral failure, as well as the authors' position towards individualism, point to the universality of morality and its transcendence of socio-historical barriers. On the other hand, the different fates the protagonists meet lead us back to the socio-historical circumstances of the novels; despite their shared position towards the issues discussed, the authors are realistic, and cannot detach themselves from their respective societies.

On the other hand, the tragic approach adopted in the second part has allowed us to regard the works from a different perspective. Here, the moral failure depicted in both novels is treated in more fatalistic terms, since it is due, on one hand, to hybris, and, on the other hand, to social transition. Conrad and Achebe hold the same position towards idealism, which is the practical outcome of the protagonists' character flaw, namely, imagination. While it makes their greatness, as it elevates them above common trivial interests, it makes their doom, because it unfits them from dealing effectively with the reality. Consequently, they betray the moral order, and are punished. Moreover, the authors view the tragic heroes as instruments of social change. Through resenting the tragic heroes as instruments of social change, they express their societies' need to transcend the moral disarray caused by modernity through maintaining basic moral standards and adapting them to the new circumstances. In *Lord Jim*, this is achieved through Jim's death, and the survival of the will at the metaphysical level; in *No longer At Ease*, Obi is held with the task of reconciling the two sets of values through the knowledge acquired from his experience. The difference noticed as far as catharsis is concerned leads us back to the socio-historical backgrounds of the novels; catharsis is present in NLAE, and "spoiled" in L J. The former ending is an indication of the restoration of the social and moral order, whereas the latter is simply an indication of the absence of such orders.

The two approaches used are different in emphasis. However, seen as a whole, they bring deeper meaning to the issues treated. The two authors combine ethical issues with tragic elements in order to express their points of view as far as man, society and morality are concerned.

Human weakness, crystallized in the natural urge towards self-love, massive, theoretical inculcation of moral virtues, as well as a tragic character flaw are the causes presented by the authors as leading to the moral failure of the protagonists. Indeed, individualism and cowardice, characteristic features of human nature, hinder the protagonists from fulfilling their duty as dictated by the moral code. Moral

inculcation, on the other hand, leading to focus on the glory obtained rather than on virtue for its own sake, creates in the individual a dangerous discrepancy between idealism and the reality. Furthermore, the protagonists' tragic flaw, namely, their imaginative faculty, makes them easier prey to the factors just mentioned. It leads them to focus on higher things, on their superiority over mere trivialities of common people, and more important, to romanticize the moral standards they claim to represent as it blinds them to their true implications: self-sacrifice, suffering, effacement of the self. Moreover, it blinds them to their own true nature. The awareness of one's weakness and its outcomes is a strength; this is illustrated through the character of the French lieutenant who recognizes that 'man is born a coward', but expresses sheer horror and disgust towards loss of honour which is, to him, life itself. In addition, the protagonists' imaginative faculty heightens the impact of moral inculcation, as it widens the gulf between theory and practice; in other words, they are predisposed to focus on the theoretical character of morality, rather than on its practicability. It is, in fact, the combination of these factors, and not each individually, which leads to the protagonists' moral failure. The authors have succeeded to adapt the tragic elements to express their views regarding the moral life of man as well as the modern world. This can be seen through the very choice of the character flaw. The protagonists' imaginative faculty is in itself admirable, but is transformed to a tragic flaw when put in the modern context, which requires sense of reality and practicability. Through this choice, the authors seem to deplore the modern world's materialism and lack of spirituality.

Social change characterizes the backgrounds of both novels. *Lord Jim* and *No Longer At Ease* were set during times when society was effecting its rapid and dramatic transition from tradition towards modernity. Consequently, traditional moral standards are questioned by a skeptical environment increasingly foregrounding the cult of individualism. The moral failure of the protagonists is, in itself, a questioning of the standards underlying the moral code as it sheds doubt on their relevance in the modern environment. The authors force our admiration of these two protagonists, and the moral virtues they promote, but are aware of the inescapability of change. However, they evade mere moral disillusionment through presenting the protagonists as tragic heroes, as the latter attain the dimension of the world-historical spirit; in other words, they embody the contradictions characterizing their environment, and are held with the task of effecting the transition. The protagonists' experience is not a mere moral failure; by putting into question traditional morality, their experience calls for a revaluation of values, and their readaptation to the modern context, which amounts to a reformulation of moral standards.

The main difference highlighted in this study is the different ends that the protagonists encounter. In the first part, we have discussed this point in Chapter 3, through presenting the concepts of "alienation"

and “disalienation”. The contradictions characterizing the modern era, loss of faith and spirituality, and loss of community life, are the main factors leading to the individual alienation. Since the West is more in advance in terms of science and technology, loss of the collective spirit is more marked, hence alienation is a feature often displayed in modern Western literature. African society, in its early stages towards modernity, still maintains its cohesion. After his betrayal, Jim is deprived of his social status, he leaves the Western society, and he ends his life in a remote, Eastern island. There is no attempt on the part of the author to restore him within his social context. On the contrary, after his moral fall, Obi’s people gather around him to help him out of his predicament. Achebe makes us admire the social solidarity of the Umuofians in order to be preserved within the modern context. The protagonists’ alienation and disalienation reflect respectively a disintegrating and a still cohesive social structure. These social circumstances are further displayed through the authors’ appropriation of the tragic element of catharsis. While it is “spoiled” in *Lord Jim*, it is successfully achieved in *No Longer Art Ease*. Catharsis involves the purgation of the emotions, and a restoration of the disturbed social order, a course of action that, contrary to Conrad, Achebe can still afford to achieve. Thus, when it comes to the fates of the protagonists within their social environments, Conrad and Achebe differ. Despite their shared position towards morality, the causes of the moral failure and its significance, they display divergent views regarding the restoration of the conflict between the individual and society- views essentially informed by socio-historical realities.

The results of this comparative study have revealed the fact that Conrad and Achebe have shown, at certain socio-historical circumstances, their anxious concern for morality. The Western society of the early 1900s and the African society of the 1960s witnessed the same traumatic transition towards modernity, together with the resulting questioning of traditional moral values. Through the experiences of Jim and Obi, the authors have investigated morality in relation to human nature as well as in relation to society, offering, thus, broad perspectives of interpretations. Regardless of the differences we have discussed, which relate mainly to the societies of the time, Conrad and Achebe show the same attitude towards such notions as moral responsibility, human frailty, as well as human social nature. They have not accepted moral anarchy as helpless, but have striven throughout their work to present “causes” and “consequences”, so as to avoid the deadlock of moral disenchantment, and achieve an implicit form of moral didacticism. This feature differentiates them from many modernist writers.

The common experience of the main protagonists, their young age, their promising future, their entrance into manhood, their idealistic aspirations, and their betrayal, together with the presence of such catch phrases as ‘one of us’, and the court of inquiry in both, would suggest the elements of influence. However, to regard the similarities witnessed throughout this work as mere results of

Conrad's influence on Achebe would be reductionist, whereas a study based on an equal thematic comparison has given us broader prospects of investigation and interpretation.

Morality is universal; it forces the allegiance, or at least the recognition that every man must conform to a common ground of morality regulated by laws, regardless of his origins. Conrad and Achebe commonly advocate the individual's moral responsibility, and the importance to abide by moral standards in the face of perilous situations. Moreover, both novelists stress the individual's need for his society to remain examples of abnegation to be followed.

We have tended to refer throughout this work broadly to African and Western literature, as represented by Conrad and Achebe. However, the question to be posed is how far are both authors representative of their culture? Indeed, the hybrid discourse to be found in both writers could constitute another interesting debate to be tackled.

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ملخص

عنوان المذكرة :

المسؤولية المعنوية و التراجيديا في رواية *الملك جيم* لجوزيف كونراد و رواية *دائما غير مرتاح* لشينوا اشيبي

هـذه المذكرة تعالج مشاكل القيم و الأخلاق و المسؤولية الإجتماعية كعوامل متصلة تناولها الكثير من الأدباء خاصة في العالم الغربي و إفريقيا. حاولت في هذا الصدد التطرق إلى هذا الموضوع من خلال تحليل رواية جوزيف كونراد تحت عنوان *الملك جيم* (1900) و رواية شينوا أشيبي *دائما غير مرتاح* (1961).

هاتان الروايتان فتحتا المجال لمناقشة موضوع القيم و الأخلاق و مكانتهما الإجتماعية في السياق الحديث.

هذه المذكرة تحاول تجاوز الإختلافات الثقافية و الإجتماعية و التاريخية التي تفرق بين الروايتين و تسلط الضوء على نقطة أساسية, و المتمثلة في عالمية الأخلاق و القيم, و هذا ما أكده الأدبين حيث كان هدفهما إحياء هذه القيم و الأخلاق التي كانت موجودة في الماضي بينما هي غائبة في الوقت الحاضر المتدهور. مجمل التغيرات التي أفرزت العالم المعاصر أثرت على القيم و الأخلاق و احدثت خلل في القاعدة الذهبية التي تقول: "تعامل مع الآخرين كما تحب أن يتعامل الآخرين معك", و التي تراجعت بسبب مواجهتها للمفهوم المعاصر لحق الفرد في تحقيق منفعيته الذاتية. هذه القاعدة لا تتطلب دائما التضحية بالمصالح لأجلها, لكن عندما تتطلب هذا فإننا نقترب من القيمة الحقيقية لها و نتبناها .إن سمات العالم المعاصر المتمثلة في تقديس المال و الجانب المادي و كل التغييرات الفوضوية الناتجة عن السرعة,العولمة,النهضات العلمية و الفكرية, كلها قلبت المفاهيم السابقة للطبيعة الإنسانية و جعلت القيم و الأخلاق تتلاشى و تفقد مكانتها بين الأفراد.

دهور القيم و الأخلاق هو الموضوع الأساسي المتطرق إليه من طرف كونراد و أشيبي, حيث حاول الأديبين البحث في أسباب هذا التراجع دون إعطاء نتائج حاسمة. ومن هدا المنطلق, اعتمدت على جانبين أساسيين لمعالجة هذه العوامل: الجانب الأخلاقي-الإجتماعي و الجانب التراجيدي. من جهة, قدما الاديبان نظرة عالمية للقيم و الأخلاق, و من جهة

أخرى, فإن العوامل الإجتماعية و الثقافية تلعب دورا مهما في تكوين مصير شخصيات الراويتين في محيطهما الاجتماعي_ وهنا كان الإختلاف بين الراويتين. بينما توافقا الأديبان على القاعدة الأساسية (القيم و الأخلاق), فإنهما واعيين لحالة مجتمعيهما. فالمجتمع الغربي مثلما صوره كونراد يتميز بفوضى القيم و الشكوك, و هو مدرك لصعوبة العيش وفق القيم الماضية بسبب الظروف الحالية المعاصرة, و يتأسف على فقدان المجتمع الغربي للتضامن و الجانب المعنوي. من جهة أخرى, المجتمع الإفريقي مثلما صوره أشيبي في حالة فقدان للتضامن الاجتماعي الذي وجد سابقا بسبب إحتكاكه مع المجتمع الأوروبي, رغم انه يحاول الوصول الى العصرنة مع الاحتفاظ بقيمه. أشيبي واعي بأن تيار التغير لا يمكن تفاديه, لكن يحذر من التقليد الأعمى للمفاهيم الثقافية الغربية المعاصرة, و يلفت الانتباه إلى أهمية التمسك إلى حد ما بالهوية الإفريقية و القيم الأخلاقية الأساسية.

بالنظر الى النقاط التي جمعت بين كونراد واشيبي و النقاط التي فرقت بينهما فان الاديبين استطاعا تجاوز كل الاحباطات المفروضة من الواقع المعاصر الفوضوي ووصلا إلى مكانة 'معلمي الأخلاق'.