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Narrating Cultural Displacement in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* and V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*

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Abstract

The present study delves into the nuanced exploration of cultural displacement in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* and V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Man*. Through a comparative analysis of these seminal works, the research illuminates the ways in which the protagonists navigate the complex terrain of cultural identity, grappling with the impact of colonialism and the clash between tradition and modernity. By examining the characters' experiences of displacement and the ensuing identity crises, the study offers profound insights into the broader themes of post-colonial literature and the intricacies of cultural adaptation and assimilation.

Keywords: alienation; cultural displacement; *No Longer at Ease*; postcolonial literature; *The Mimic Man*

Introduction

The Mimic Men depicts the theme of the marginalization of the Third World and its fall into poverty and isolation. It also shows the failure of the nationalist and religious movements in postcolonial nations after independence. These movements were motivated by race and colour. This is what led the postcolonial subject to be a mere mimic man suffering a crisis of identity. In *The Mimic Men*, Naipaul is concerned with the homelessness and rootlessness of colonial subjects

(Devi 30). Ralph Singh narrates his experiences during his exile in London through writing about them. He lives in a gloomy hotel room in the suburbs of London. Hence, "home" for him can be no more than the books he writes (Gottfried 443).

Singh's personal failure to find home and origin is an indication of a larger national failure. Failure to locate oneself turns him towards writing. William Walsh states that *The Mimic Men* presents Ralph Singh as "an exiled, or rather a withdrawn politician, fatigued by disillusion rather than failure, writing his memoir in an aseptic, placeless London suburb" (Walsh 54). He writes his memoir as an attempt to create order and to escape his past. He strives to make meaning out of his experiences. Hence, the act of writing itself becomes an act of creation and discovery. It denotes Singh's desire to recover his selfhood and self-consciousness. As such, the personal and the political become an existential allegory of the modern man (Devi 31).

Naipaul told Patrick French, his biographer, that *The Mimic Men* was "an important book for the cultural emptiness in colonial people. But it is very dry". This confession highlights the importance of the novel in dealing with the cultural predicament of colonial people (Pritchard 436). Singh is described as an exiled individual in a London hotel writing his impressions of metropolitan life. The act of writing his story is an attempt to escape his external disorder. Rao asserts that "[t]he writing of his story, becomes the very means to endure the terror, shipwreck, abandonment and loneliness of his situation" (Rao 126). Singh's analysis of the disorder transcends the personal and extends to the political, the postcolonial condition of the Third World (Devi 31). As such, *The Mimic Men* depicts the social conflict taking place as individuals are brought together. This results in cultural displacement and mimicry (King, *V. S. Naipaul* 69).

> It was my hope to give expression to the restlessness, the deep disorder, which the great explorations, the overthrow in three

> continents of established social organiations, the unnatural bringing together of peoples.... But this work will not now be written by me; I am too much a victim of that restlessness which was to have been my subject. And it must also be confessed that in that dream of writing I was attracted less by the act and the labour than by the calm and the order which the act would have implied (*The Mimic Men* 30).

Singh describes his marriage to Sandra as an "episode in parenthesis" (*The Mimic Men* 274). They share the feature of being both hopeless and vulnerable. Just like Singh, Sandra has an ambition to "eradicate her past". Singh is drawn by the fact that she speaks English, "She was English. With her, the mere fact of communication was a delight" (*The Mimic Men* 44). Both of Singh and Sandra are presented as isolated.

> "She had no community, no group, and had rejected her family. She saw herself alone in the world and was determined to fight her way up. She hated the common.... To the end she had a cruel eye for the common" (*The Mimic Men* 12).

Singh thinks that this marriage relationship is going to make him find himself and escape the disorder and isolation. He goes back to Isabella with the hope of restoring his life to order. As he gets there, Singh is disappointed by his mother's disapproval of his marriage to a foreign girl (Devi 33). Singh's frustration is due to the fact that he is rejected by the society. He feels a state of abandonment and shipwreck, "The initial seeming warmth, acceptance and approval gradually disappeared in course of time for Isabella is an unstable, shallow, mixed and chaotic society" (Theroux 73).

As he fails to put together his destroyed self in England with his English wife, Singh leans back on Indian Aryan culture to explain his experience,

> "How right our Aryan ancestors were to create gods.... The larger erotic dream, the god, has eluded us. It is so whenever, moving out of ourselves, we look for extensions of ourselves.... We seek the

> physical city and find only a conglomeration of private cells. In the city as nowhere else we are reminded that we arc individuals, units. Yet the idea of the city remains: it is the god of the city that we pursue, in vain" (*The Mimic Men* 17).

Besides, the juxtaposition of the centre and the periphery is repeated in the novel, which acts as a combination of such opposites as order and disorder, reality and unreality, authenticity and inauthenticity, power and powerlessness. Singh frequently echoes these opposites between the centre which is presented as a symbol of order using the standard language, and the periphery which employs the edges of language (Devi 36). As such, *The Mimic Men* can be read as "a novel which incorporates an extreme version of the opposition between centre and margin" (Ashcroft et al. *The Empire Writes Back* 88-9).

From his childhood experiences, Singh recalls that his mother's family owns the Bella-Bella Bottling Works, and that they are the Isabella bottlers of Coca Cola. For this reason, Singh is attached to his mother's family, and he is conscious that he is privileged because of his association with the foreign (Devi 36). Because of his disagreement with his in-laws family, Singh's father leaves his family and job and goes to live in the hills as a preacher to a group of frenzied followers including the slaves, the dockworkers and the "volunteers" (*The Mimic Men* 136).

Subsequently, Singh's father, Gurudeva, begins his movement which is "a type of Hinduism that he expounded; a mixture of acceptance and revolt, despair and action, a mixture of the mad and the logical. He offered something to many people; ... His movement spread like fire" (*The Mimic Men* 214). The Gurudeva movement influences the people and brings respect to the family. It helps Singh start his later political career. The movement puts an end to authority and injustice in the island (Devi 37).

Singh is also haunted by the image of the shipwrecked man, and he wants to find escape of the disorder. He gets the idea that even the beautiful island he lives in is not indigenous. It was conceived by foreign visitors for enjoyment (Devi 40).

> Browne showed me that its tropical appearance was contrived; there was history in the vegetation we considered most natural and characteristic.... But we walked in a garden of hell, among trees, some still without popular names, whose seeds had sometimes been brought to our island in the intestines of slaves (*The Mimic Men* 158).

Singh's image of his displacement and loss is like the islander's image of "shipwreck" (Belitt 35). Singh attempts to escape his shipwreck by sustaining his bonds with the Aryan past. He tries to revive the Aryan tradition of sacrificing a horse in the Roman House.

> "In the feminine atmosphere of the Roman house all was goodwill and dedication. A sacramental quality attached not only to food and drink but to liaisons that had grown up among our courtiers.... Sex a sacrifice to the cause and a promise of the release that was to come" (*The Mimic Men* 212).

The Mimic Men is a novel of unconquerable darkness that Singh longs for a sense of home. His mind is haunted by the image of shipwreck. Devi believes that Singh's ability to creatively gather his chaotic experiences is a sign of hope. Besides, his awareness of his weaknesses is the victory over his disorderly and chaotic experiences (Devi 44).

Singh successfully portrays the political life in such hollow society as Isabella. He could see the emptiness of the island's independence. He discovers that freedom implies responsibility. He turns to dream about his role as a "leader and liberator, to find virtue in the poverty of the people, and to reduce them again to the level of slaves – status possibly more dangerous than their original slavery, since they remain unconscious of it" (Boxill 54). The people respond to whatever Singh

says with applaud. He declares that "So long as our dependence remained unquestioned our politics were a joke" (*The Mimic Men* 206).

As the situation gets problematic, Singh realizes that politics is a challenge and a trap at the same time. He finds himself unable to solve problems without the help of the centre. The latter is the source of finance. This makes of the Third World nations mere toys in the hands of foreign powers. Singh's criticism of politicians transcends the island. He believes that in most newly independent countries, politicians play the role of increasing the power of the colonizer (Devi 42). Singh says,

> on power and the consolidation of passing power we wasted our energies, until the bigger truth came: that in a society like ours, fragmented, inorganic, no link between man and the landscape, a society not held together by common interest, there was no true internal source of power, and that no power was real which did not come from the outside (*The Mimic Men* 224).

As such, Singh criticizes the Third World's politicians for weakening the power of their nations. He calls them mimic men. Their predicament is due to their ignorance of their defect. Singh distances himself from his colleagues and has one course of action: Flight and exile in London (Devi 43).

As a result, Singh starts a life of writing in London through writing his memoir. In this way, writing has become an escape trying to overcome the past experiences and to start a new life. He attempts to link the modern West Indian sensibility with his Aryan ancestors. He takes different roles in his narratives,

> "the Aryan chieftain of his childhood fantasies, the playboy of London school days, the childless husband who relied too heavily on his wife, the successful businessman, the politician, and finally, the recluse in a London suburban hotel—in which role he is now

> trying to put the broken pieces of his life into an order through the narrative" (Devi 43).

Through writing, Singh is brave to unveil the different layers of the masks he wears throughout his life (Devi 43).

It is noteworthy that Naipaul's politicians are to be compared to Achebe's in *Man of the People*. Whereas Achebe's politicians are revolutionary, Naipaul's are described as full of doubt (Devi 43). Singh is described as hesitant and fumbling at the opening of the novel. This denotes his strive to put in form his experiences. He is later presented as confident and tolerant of his situation. He states with fulfilment,

> It does not worry me now, as it worried me when I began this book.... I no longer yearn for ideal landscapes and no longer wish to know the god of the city.... I feel, instead, I have lived through attachment and freed myself from one cycle of events. It gives me joy to find that in so doing I have also fulfilled the four-fold division of life prescribed by our Aryan ancestors. I have been student, householder and man of affairs, recluse.... I feel that in this time I have cleared the decks, as it were, and prepared myself for fresh action. It will be the action of a free man (*The Mimic Men* 273-74).

The idea of disorder as a theme in the novel extends to its form. Naipaul's inversion of chronology in the novel suggests the lack of communication and human relationships between individuals in the novel.

Chinua Achebe's novel, *No Longer at Ease* (1963), set in the 1950s in the Nigerian city of Lagos and in the village of Umuofia, recounts the challenges facing a young educated Nigerian man who is troubled with his social and financial duties following his return to his mother country from England. The novel, a sequel to *Things Fall Apart* (1958), epitomises the conflict between two value systems within a society undergoing change on the eve of Nigerian independence. It

represents the detrimental effects of the colonizer's culture on African identity. Obi Okonkwo represents the plight of the Nigerian elite amidst this cultural abyss.

Moreover, the novel dramatizes the theme of cultural displacement. It narrates Obi's inability to function in the confluence of cultures. He is described as being torn between his European education and his traditional values. Obi was sent by the Umuofia Progressive Union (UPU) to study law so as to represent his people in land disputes. He, nonetheless, ends up with a degree in English, facing the cultural forces that bring about his fall. Gikandi (2008) stated that what is unique about the novel is its "evocation of an emerging postcolonial culture and the crisis of a young African trying to find a bearing in the chasm between a dying colonialism and stillborn independence" (p. i).

Echoing T.S. Eliot's idea of fragmentation and spiritual death in his poem "Journey of the Magi", *No Longer* epitomizes Obi's doubt and identity (de)formation on his return home from the Metropolitan city of London (Babalola, 1986, p. 142). Achebe's allusion to Eliot's poem reflects his preoccupation with the postcolonial dilemma in Obi's character.

> We return to our places, these Kingdoms,
> But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
> With an alien people clutching their gods,
> I should be glad of another death (Eliot, 1963a, p. 100).

Thus, Obi is put under pressure between the claims of tradition and the pull of modernity. After his homecoming, he fails in his attempt to reconcile his personal desires with the demands of his community. His story can be read in relation to his concern with western culture to denote the cultural disintegration of an individual and his nation during a unique transitional period in history.

In *No Longer*, Achebe pictures how Obi is alienated from his community because of his Englishness. His community's support is met with ingratitude and indifference. Obi, just like the African elite prior to a dying colonialism, fails to establish good rapport with his people and his nation. In his famous essay, "Morning Yet on a Creation Day", Achebe asserted that "expensive university education only alienates an African from his rich and ancient culture and puts him above his people" (p. 144). Indeed, the novel projects the failure of European education to provide the African elite with the necessary tools and cultural ingredients to function properly within a society undergoing political and cultural transformation.

Fanon considers the fact that European colonialism is reinforced by cultural imposition through the denigration and distortion of indigenous cultures and the promotion of the dominant alien culture. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (1967a) considered the imposition of the colonizer's language on the colonized as the starting point of cultural alienation, "to speak means to … assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization" (pp. 17-18). In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon (2004) argued that the culture of the nation has been irreversibly transformed by contact with the colonizing power.

> We cannot go resolutely forward unless we first realize our alienation. We have taken everything from the other side. Yet the other side has given us nothing except to sway us in its direction. […] To take also means on several levels being taken. It is not enough to try and disengage ourselves by accumulating proclamations and denials. It is not enough to reunite with the people in a past where they no longer exist. We must rather reunite with them in their recent counter move which will suddenly call everything into question (p. 163).

Hence, identity (de)formation leads to a state of alienation with the colonized internalising new cultural values. Fanon thinks that the only way to free the colonized from estrangement is to question their present unstable situation.

Fanon (2004) drew his insights on the colonizer-colonized encounter from his work in Algerian psychiatric hospitals, where he found that the colonial situation turned the French into torturers and the Algerians into dehumanised sufferers. He views the colonial world as divided into two worlds, "This compartmentalized world, this world divided in two, is inhabited by different species" (p. 5).

In his work, *Toward the African Revolution*, Fanon (1967b) asserted that the native culture endures a state of cultural mummification that will undoubtedly generate a mummification of individual thinking,

> The setting up of the colonial system does not itself bring about the death of the native culture. Historic observation reveals on the contrary, that the aim sought is rather *a continued agony* [emphasis added] than a total disappearance of the pre-existing culture. This culture, once living and open to the future, becomes closed, fixed in the colonial status, caught in the yoke of oppression. Both present and mummified, it testifies against its members. It defines them in fact without appeal. The cultural mummification leads to a mummification of individual thinking. The apathy so universally noted among colonial peoples is but the logical consequence of this operation (p. 34).

Hence, cultural hegemony becomes an important instrument of colonial domination. The colonizer creates images of European superiority to succeed in enslaving the colonized's body and spirit. This is only possible through the spread of Christianity and western education which Achebe underlined in his works. Admiration of European practices and beliefs will undoubtedly alienate the native from his culture and community. Therefore, cultural alienation leads to the creation of the concept of the estranged "black European" or "black Whiteman".

Obi represents Fanon's idea of cultural alienation of the African educated man who travels to Europe to endure cultural displacement and identity crisis. His friend Joseph affirms this

contending that Obi's "mission house upbringing and European education had made him stranger in his country" (p. 77). Obi is the son of Isaac Okonkwo (called Nwoye before his conversion), who is the symbol of Christian conversion and betrayal of native values in *Things Fall Apart*.

In his seminal essay, A Reconsideration of Achebe's No Longer at Ease, Babalola (1986) maintained that the image of the "black European" or "black Whiteman" is apparent in Achebe's narrative discourse in *No Longer* (p. 146). He explains that the African colonial experience had affected the African society and the African culture. The latter suffered defeat with African individuals renouncing their cultural values to an alien metropolitan culture. Nevertheless, cultural duality does not enable these Africans to be neither black nor white. It opens a stairwell of cultural ambivalence (p. 147).

Furthermore, Achebe employs the character of Mr Green as a symbol of the futility of the imperial project and its civilizing mission. Mr Green believes in the white man's burden to enlighten the dark places in Africa. He subscribes to the stereotype of inferiority and corruption of the African postcolonial subject, "'The African is corrupt through and through'"; "'[he]… has been sapped mentally and physically. We have brought him Western education. But what use is it to him?'" (p. 3). Hence, Mr Green feels the need for humanistic self-sacrifice to accomplish such a noble idea. However, Mr Green ultimately discovers that these are false ideals; he feels a sense of betrayal and disillusionment.

> It was clear he loved Africa, but only Africa of a kind: the Africa of Charles, the messenger, the Africa of his garden- boy and steward-boy. He must have come originally with an ideal---to bring light to the heart of darkness, to tribal head-hunters performing weird ceremonies and unspeakable rites. But when he arrived, Africa played him false. Where was his beloved bush full of human sacrifice? (p. 96).

Achebe here is alluding to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and the theme of the hypocrisy of western civilisation and British cultural jingoism. The character of Mr Green echoes Conrad's hollow man, Mr Kurtz. Both antiheroes symbolise the falsehood of the ideals of European civilisation (Rogers, 1983, p. 174).

Nonetheless, Mr Green is not the novel's only character bearing racist stereotypes about the Africans. In chapter nine, Obi recalls his sexual encounter with a woman in England who later said that, "she thought she had been attacked by a tiger" (p. 100). The narrator does not mention any further development of this relationship nor any psychological or emotional passion that ensues from it. Hence, this incident implies the concealed and ideologically constructed cultural and racial stereotypes about African sexuality (Lynn, 2017, p. 120).

Bhabha's ideas on identity are relevant to Fanon; they both stress its conflicting nature. Indeed, Bhabha's work *The Location of Culture* (1994) put forward his controversial theory on cultural hybridity. Hybridity as a term in postcolonial discourse is used to refer to a process of transculturation in colonial contact zones covering a variety of cultural exchanges. It results from the confluence of heterogeneous cultures and traditions. The image of the hybrid individual, text, or cultural expression is linked to ideas of metaphorical exile from the native culture and language, and the experience of self-division, dislocation or alienation experienced by the colonized (Bohata, 2004, p. 129). Bhabha pointed out that postcolonial identities are always fluctuating, and never perfectly achieved. He goes further to state that,

> 'the black skin white masks' is not 'a neat division'; it is a doubling, dissembling image of being in at least two places at once. [...] It is not the Colonialist Self or the Colonised Other, but the disturbing distance in between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness – the White man's artifice inscribed on the Black man's body. It is in relation to this impossible object

> that there emerges the liminal problem of colonial identity and its vicissitudes (p. 44).

Hence, cultural hybridity is a mixture of two or more identities within one individual. It constructs a liminal space between overlapping cultures, "without an assumed or imposed hierarchy"; this liminal ambivalent third space, "is the 'inter' – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture (pp. 4, 38). Therefore, identity is subject to change and transformation; it is never absolute and pure. Loomba (1998) argued that this understanding of cultural identity undermines both colonialist and nationalist assertions to a stable and fixed identity. The latter is rendered agonistic, hybrid, and ambivalent (pp. 91-92).

Gikandi (2008) viewed *No Longer* a pioneering work of postcolonial criticism owing to its reflection on the hybridity of postcolonial communities and the identity crisis (p ii-iii). In *No Longer*, the issue of cultural identity comes to the surface when Obi expresses his wish to marry Clara. Okonkwo refuses this marriage on the grounds that Clara is an osu (an outcast). Obi is not satisfied with his father's reaction to his marriage. He ponders over his father's words, and questions his reaction.

Okonkwo explains the fact that tradition does not allow for such marriage to take place and that these matters are beyond Obi's understanding, "'[b]ut why, Father?' 'My son,' said Okonkwo, 'I understand what you say. But this thing is deeper than you think'" (p. 120). Hence, as Obi questions the idea of his father's opposition to his marriage, he voices his disillusionment with the tradition. His friend, Joseph, contends that he has knowledge about English literature, but not about African tradition,

> ‘Look at me,’ said Joseph, getting up and tying his coverlet as a loincloth. He now spoke in English. ‘You know book, but this is no matter for book. Do you know what an *osu* is? But how can you know?’ In that short question he said in effect that Obi’s mission-house upbringing and European education had made him a stranger in his country---the most painful thing one could say to Obi (pp. 64-65).

Just like *No Longer*, Achebe’s short stories “Marriage Is a Private affair” (1952) and “Chike’s School Days” (1972) dramatize this cultural conflict between the Igbo traditional beliefs and European modern concepts of marriage. Whereas European concepts of marriage assume the right to individual choice and marriage for love, in the Igbo tradition, marriage is an institution based on communal norms and family expectations (Innes, 2011, pp. 10-11).

Obi is a great admirer of English literary modernism, and he visualizes his world and his experiences predominantly in the light of his literary studies. It is quite ironic that Achebe’s literary allusions in English literature are employed to create a commentary on Obi’s behaviour. Indeed, Obi undergoes a similar struggle and quest encountered by various English modernist antiheroes the story alludes to, namely Evelyn Waugh’s Tony Last (*A Handful of Dust*), Joseph Conrad’s Mr. Kurtz (*Heart of Darkness*), Graham Greene’s Scobie (*The Heart of the Matter*), W. H. Auden’s Icarus (“Musee des Beaux Arts”), and T. S. Eliot’s personae from “The Waste Land,” “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” and, of course, “The Journey of the Magi,” which provides Achebe’s title. All of these characters represent modern antiheroes in search of identity. Gikandi (2008) postulated that Obi’s life is a mosaic of cultural fragments, ranging from half-remembered oral stories to the works of modern literature and urban popular culture (p. vii).

Besides, Obi is the son of a Christian convert, Isaac Okonkwo, whose values are shaped by his father’s religion and more importantly by his interest in the white man’s power of the word, “Mr. Okonkwo believed utterly and completely in the things of the white man. And the symbol of the

white man's power was the written word, or better still, the printed word" (p. 115). Achebe's use of the written word here alludes to Conrad's famous passage in the Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1963), "my task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to make you see" (pp. xi-ii). This suggests that Obi is highly affected by his western education and English culture.

According to Obi's description of his parents' rooms, which are full of old books and mundane things, he appears to descend from a family of peasants living in a rural area (Babalola, 1986, p. 147). The description projects Okonkwo's devotion to the written word suggesting western culture, as well as Hannah's incarnation of African tradition,

> The result of Okonkwo's mystic regard for the written word was that his room was full of old books and papers […] Okonkwo never destroyed a piece of paper. […] Mother's room, on the other hand, was full of mundane things. She had her box full of clothes on a stool. On the other side of the room were pots of solid palm-oil with which she made black soap (p. 115).

Hence, the strain exerted on the African elite, who are educated in England, in what Geertz (1963) terms "a tradition of exogenous inspiration," (p. 2) stems from the difficulty to co-exist with the African masses in a changing community (Okechukwu, 2001, p. 144).

The clash between Obi's traditional knowledge and his English culture becomes very apparent as young Obi fails to tell a folk tale in class.

> 'Olulu ofu oge,' he began in the tradition of folk-tales, but that was all he knew. His lips quivered but no other sounds came out. The class burst into derisive laughter, and tears filled his eyes and rolled down his cheeks as he went back to his place (p. 53).

The fact that his father tells him that these heathen tales are not meant for Christian believers, Obi eventually has recourse to the stories he heard secretly from his mother and succeeds to tell

one. The scene is quite revelatory about Obi's estrangement and cultural distance. Therefore, this antihero undergoes a cultural dilemma as he is unable to position himself in the cultural zone (Rogers, 1983, p. 165).

Another important scene that conveys Obi's estrangement from his native culture is when his mother, washing his clothes in the river, gets her hand cut by a razor-blade he left in his pocket. Obi uses the razor to sharpen his pencils. Therefore, the pencil sharpening razor is symbolic about Obi's European education and his English culture. The act of causing his mother to bleed ironically represents his alienated relationship to his mother as well as to his traditional culture. She is depicted as his store for traditional knowledge. Hence, his mother's bleeding metaphorically represents his ambivalence about his cultural values (Rogers, 1983, p. 168).

Obi's favourite poem is "Easter Hymn" by English poet A. E. Housman. The poem discusses the image of Christ sleeping, unaware about people's suffering and pain in a fragmented and chaotic world. It relates to Obi's uneasiness and loss of faith. He is oblivious to his identity and culture. It also echoes his act of sleeping during his mother's funeral. Obi reads the poem when he fails to convince Clara that he loves her though she is an osu. He also reads it after he fails to stop her abortion. As a result, Obi's devotion to Housman's poem represents his ignorance of his cultural values as well as a betrayal of his mother's memory (Rogers, 1983, p. 168).

Moreover, Obi has an obsession with T.S. Eliot's poetry. He frequently expresses his dislike for Clara's taste in films. In one of their exchanges, he is fascinated by her resonance with T.S. Eliot in her answer to his request to meet one of his friends, "'I don't know why you should want me to meet people that I don't want to meet.' 'You know, you are a poet, Clara,' said Obi. 'To meet people you don't want to meet, that's pure T. S. Eliot'" (p. 17). Hearing this phrase, Obi

evokes Eliot's lines in his famous poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", "There will be time, there will be time/To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet" (Eliot, 1963b, p. 4).

Achebe's fascination with T.S. Eliot is also apparent in his title. "No longer at ease" is a phrase from Eliot's famous poem "The Journey of the Magi". Many critics read this allusion as an account of Obi's cultural ambivalence as well as an expression of the predicament of the African educated elite (Wilson, 1971, pp. 215-223). The novel's title also reverberates through Obi's own name Obiajulu which means, "the mind at last is at rest" (p. 6). His father believes that, on Obi's birth, he would further his family's line. However, the dramatic framed opening of the story announces ironically Obi's as well as his father's failed idealism.

In his famous essay, "Cultural Norms and Modes of Perception in Achebe's Fiction," Brown (1972) argued that Achebe deploys English idiom in his literary productions to reflect upon the postcolonial condition. Language is employed to function not only as a means of communication but also to reveal a whole cultural experience. In his examination of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*, Brown stressed the dialogic relationship between these works and T.S. Eliot's "The Second Coming" and in "Journey of the Magi" respectively. Hence, he believed that Achebe's works project African cultural norms in conflict with the European ones (pp. 23-24).

In addition to literature, Obi also displays much enthusiasm and admiration for "high life" music, which is a strong assertion of the heterogeneity of the postcolonial situation in Lagos. Sometimes referred to as a form of African jazz, it is a type of West African popular music in the twentieth century, which blends Afro-Caribbean and European musical elements with traditional African ones. Obiechina (1980), in his book *Culture, Tradition, and Society in the West African Novel*, pointed out that,

> The rhythm is largely traditional, but the instrumentation is largely Western (traditional drums with Western brass instruments). […] "High life" is essentially a democratically oriented music. Urban West Africans are "high lifers" all (p. 79).

In *No longer,* Achebe refers to some scenes of high life dance. One of these scenes is in Chapter ten, when Obi recalls his days in England and his conversation with a woman before their sexual encounter, "'I'll teach you how to dance the high-life when you come,' he had said. 'That would be grand,' she replied eagerly, 'and perhaps a little low life too'" (p. 80). As such, highlife music is one way in which the traditions blended to create something new.

Moreover, the influence of European culture on Obi's character is also manifested in his embrace of certain utilitarian and pragmatic attitudes. On his return from England, Obi shows impatience with the traditional attitudes of hierarchy and ceremony. During his welcoming ceremony, he is depicted as indifferent and unconcerned. His dress and speech were not suitable for the occasion. After his mother's death, Obi prefers to send money to his family than to go and attend the funeral. He pragmatically thinks that the money spent on petrol ought to be spent on the funeral (Rogers, 1983, p. 178). Hence, Obi's European values of utilitarianism appear to influence his decision,

> What was the point of going to Umuofia? She would have been buried by the time he got there, anyway. […] Obi wondered whether he had done the right thing in not setting out for Umuofia yesterday. But what could have been the point in going? It was more useful to send all the money he could for the funeral instead of wasting it on petrol to get home (pp. 146-147).

Obi's absence from the funeral for such a materialistic reason can be read as a betrayal to mother's memory and to traditional values. Mr Green would consider such decision as practical (Rogers, 1983, p. 178). Like Obi, Clara also exhibits affinity to western materialism by having an abortion. This act of abortion represents the characters' liability to vice.

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Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
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The Laboratory of Algerian Poetics

PRFU Team :The Continuous Conflicting Discourses between Eurocentric Literature and African and Eastern Postcolonial Literature

Organize the National Conference

Otherness and Dialogism in Postcolonial Literature

on February 6, 2023

Via Google Meet

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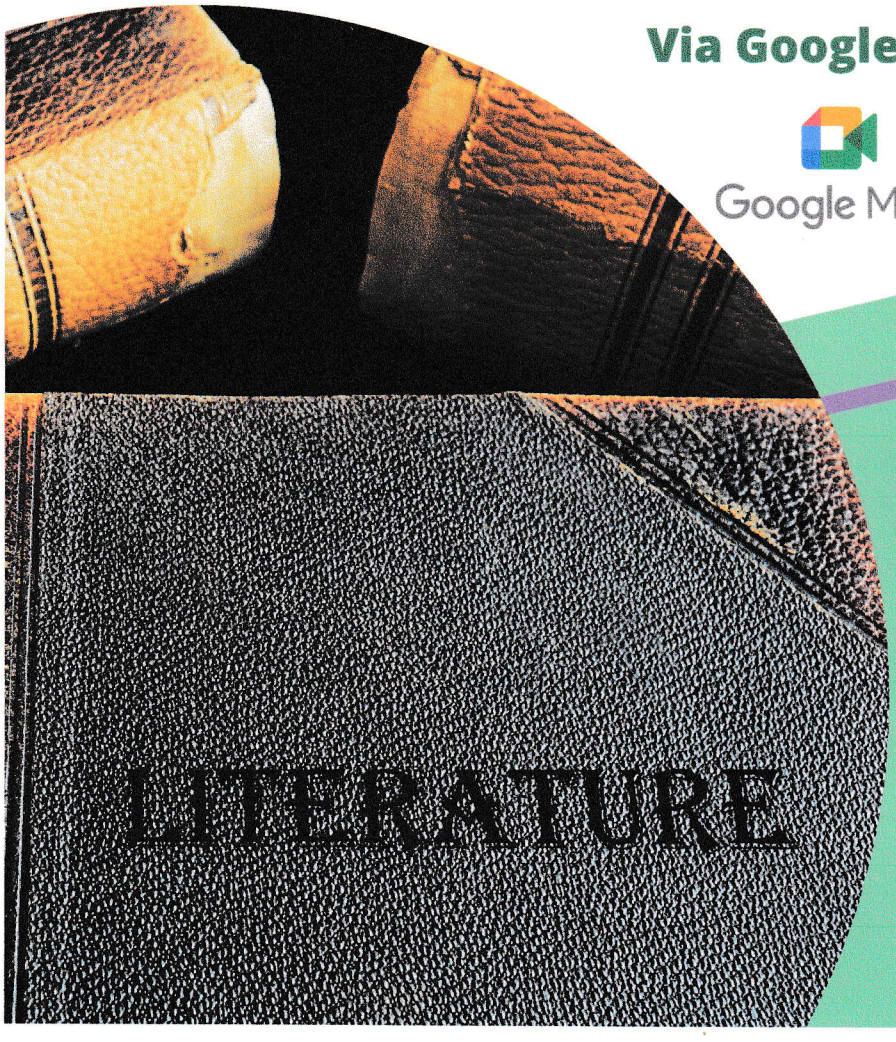

The Program of the Scientific Event

Welcoming Notes: 09:30 - 10:00

Dr. Houria MIHOUBI, President of the National Conference

Pr. Fathi BOUKHALFA, President of Algerian Poetry Laboratory

Pr. Ammar BELKOUREICHI, Dean of the Faculty of Letters and Languages

Session One: 10:00-12:00

Moderator: Dr. Bachir Sahed

Speakers	Title of the Paper	University	Allotted Time
Dr. Belfar Boubaaya Naciera	Dialogues and Multiple Voices to Reconsider the Other in Assia Djebar's *La Femme Sans Sépulture*	University Mohamed Lamine Débaghine, Sétif 2	10:00-10:10
Dr. Aziz Rabéa	Edward Said's "Strategic Location": Authors between Culture and Geography	Mouloud MAMMERI University of Tizi-Ouzou	10:10-10:20
Dr. Tayeb Bouazid	Key Terms in Post-Colonial Theory	M'sila University	10:20-10:30
Dr. Bachir Sahed	Narrating Cultural Displacement in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* and V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*	M'sila University	10:30-10:40
Dr. Abderrezzaq Ghafsi	Otherness and Dialogism in Bessie Head's Literature	M'sila University	10:40-10:50
Dr. Mehdoui Djamila	The Other and the Self in Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*	University of Moulay Tahar, Saida	10:50-11:00
Shahnez Soumaya Benelmouffok	A Dialogic Reading of the Dilemma of the Third Space in Postcolonial Counter Discourse	University of Moulay Tahar, Saida	11:00-11:10
Discussion: 11:10-12:00			

Session Two: 10:00-12:00

Moderator: Dr. Abderrezzaq Ghafsi

Speakers	Title of the Paper	University	Allotted Time
Dr. Djamila Benchennane	Othering : Can it be banned someday ?	University Mustapha Stambouli, Mascara	10:00-10:10
Dr. Nassima Amirouche	The Representation of the Other in J.M Coetzee's *Disgrace*	M'sila University	10:10-10:20
Dr. Bessami Hanane	"Why wasn't our story being told? So I thought I'd write the story of my life" Violence and Trauma in Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* (2010)	University of M'hamed Bougara of Boumerdes	10:20-10:30
Messaoudi Roumaissa	Dehumanizing the "Other" in E.M Forster's A *Passage To India*	Lounici Ali University Blida	10:30-10:40
Terbeche Yousra	Othering and Dehumanization: A Cruelty Special to Our Species	Ain Temouchent University	10:40-10:50
Hidouci Sarah	Otherness and diaspora in Buchi Emecheta's *The New Tribe*	University of Badji Mokhtar Annaba	10:50-11:00
Adla Houaria Lilya	Exploring multicultural literature in the 21st Century: Multicultural Aspects of Somaiya Daud's *Mirage*	Abi Bakr Belkaid-University of Tlemcen	11:00-11:10
Houda Belkhiri	Tell Them What They Want to Hear and Show Them What They Want to See: A War Against Oneself	University of Algiers 2	11:10-11:20
Dr. Houria Mihoubi	Orientalism in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*	M'sila University	11:20-11:30

Discussion: 11:30-12:00

12:00 - 12:30
Conclusion and Recommendations