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**The Figure of the “Been-to” in Chinua Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease* (1960), Ayi Kwei Armah’s *Fragments* (1969) and Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North* (1969).**

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## Dedications

To :

My grandmother Zaina for whom I wish long life,  
My parents especially my lovely mother,  
My brothers: Ali, Karim, Beka, and my sister Celia,  
All my friends,  
To you reader.

*Dihia Yacine*

To :

My father Said, my mother Ouerdia and my brother Micipsa,  
My teachers especially my supervisor,  
All my friends,  
To you reader.

*Macissilia Yessad*

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## Abstract

This dissertation has dealt with the traumatic experiences and problems that have been faced by the African intellectuals during the post-independent era. Many African literary works reflect the state of disorder and confusion into which the “been-to” returners were submerged as it is the case of Obi in Chinua Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease* (1960), Baako in Ayi Kwei Armah’s *Fragments* (1969) and Mustafa Sa’eed along with the unnamed narrator in Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North* (1969). Using Bhabha’s theory “*Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse*” (1994), we have tried to study some of the common themes that are cultural clash, alienation and isolation and finally identity that lie between the three novels. The novels are written by three distinct authors belonging to three different cultures. Yet, these novels expose nearly the same social and cultural dilemmas that those African “been-tos” have gone through after their return home. Achebe’s, Armah’s and Salih’s novels are lucid portraits of the Africans’ daily life in neo-colonial Africa. These writers portray the “been-tos” as alienated individuals whose life turn into a real nightmare due to their Western acquired education and to the social changes that occurred in neo-colonial Africa. Abroad, the “been-tos” intensively mimic the white man that they come to forget about their cultural heritage and their well rooted communal values and they start to adopt that of the western man. As a matter of fact, on their return home, the “been-tos” face problems of social and cultural reintegration because they are not able to defend any of these two opposing cultures that can never meet. By a close reading of the three novels and by making reference to Bhabha’s theory, we have tried to show that though they are written in three distinct countries by three different writers, the “been-tos” suffer from nearly the same problems: clash of cultures, alienation and identity crisis.

## **I. Introduction**

This dissertation consists in a comparative study of three African novels with a specific focus on the young African intellectuals' fragmented life after their return home in the post-independent Africa. Chinua Achebe, Ayi Kwei Armah and Tayeb Salih are among the most prominent voices in postcolonial African literature thanks to their writings that gained an international recognition. Novels such as *No Longer at Ease* (1960) by Chinua Achebe, *Fragments* (1969) by Ayi Kwei Armah, and *Season of Migration to The North* (1969) by Tayeb Salih depict the danger of Western influence upon African immigrants. The three protagonists Obi Okonkwo in *No Longer At Ease*, Baako in *Fragments*, and Mustafa Sa'eed in *Season of Migration to The North* may be referred to as "been-to" characters.

African young people, as it is the case of the three protagonists, were fascinated by the luxurious life in the Western world. Thus, they left their home countries opting for a better educational degree and for better living conditions for themselves and for their families as well. After being in a direct contact with the Westerners, African students start to forget about their cultures and their sense of belonging. The Africans coming back from the Western world are expected to be more knowledgeable and rich than they used to be. On their return, those "been-to" characters find themselves under pressure, for they could no longer reintegrate in society either morally or culturally.

Though they do not share the same belonging, beliefs and traditions, Achebe, Armah, and Salih take their pen and choose to engrave in history their voices as well as the painful cries of their ancestors to make it heard each time it seems necessary. The three novels *No Longer at Ease*, *Fragments*, and *Season of Migration to the North* portray the cultural and social pressure which their populations underwent at the dawn of independence. The three novelists write in quite a similar way, for they concentrate on the protagonists whose bad choices and lack of experiences lead to their fall.

## 1. Review of the Literature

The three novels: Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1960), Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments* (1969) and Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1969) have received a lot of critical attention. Concerning *No Longer at Ease*, Moanungsang in "Death of Native Cultures in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*" asserts:

Obi is born into this society where the old values no longer proves[sic] useful and is therefore dead. He finds himself at the "cross-roads of culture". Achebe has brought in the picture of death to symbolize the death of a society that has been caught up in the dynamic world of change. The old order has certainly died making way for a new and transitional society, which is full of pitfalls, which the average man finds very difficult if not impossible to escape from [...] *No Longer at Ease* studies the deeply personal dilemma that modern tribal societies face as a result of rapid westernization and the central character epitomizes the death of native cultures.<sup>1</sup>

According to Moanunugsang , one can understand that Achebe uses the central character as a reflection of the Nigerian corrupted society, the clash between the Igbo culture and the Western one and the alienation in which the young intellectual elite is caught.

In addition to this, Seyed Mohammad Mrarandi and Rayhane Sadot Shadpour in their article "Education as an Ideological Instrument: a Postcolonial Reading of Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*" try to show "how education is manipulated in the hands of colonizers and how the colonized who has been educated through this system gradually loses his identity"<sup>2</sup> The two critics mentioned above, view education as a tool that the ex-colonizer uses to manipulate the ex-colonized's minds with the aim of driving them away from their traditional worldview and lifestyle.

Dr.Sakshi in his "Colonial Conflicts Leads [sic] to Alienation and Rootlessness in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*." says:

The protagonist, Obi Okonkwo, grandson of Okonkwo, the tragic hero of *Things Fall Apart* is also a product of alienation from his own community, society and culture. It was due to his western education and new ideas and way

of life developed by his education. He tries to negotiate between his communal living and new way of thinking but never succeeds.<sup>3</sup>

Being the construction of his kinsmen and having received a Western education at the same time, Obi finds himself in a constant battle against the world in which he was born. Thus, when he returns home after four years spent in England, the protagonist finds it difficult to find a place in the new Nigeria because the Western culture and the Nigerian one are completely in opposition to each other.

Many studies have been conducted on Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments*. For instance, Richard Priebe in his "*Demonic Imagery and the Apocalyptic Vision in the Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah*" says:

[...] we do find that all of his [Armah] novels deal with characters who live on the margins of society, a veritable brotherhood in opposition to the values by which those inside society live their lives[...] In *Fragments*, Baako confronts the futility of existing as a bearer of spirituality the world has lost.<sup>4</sup>

This statement claims that Armah uses the character Baako to account for a state of alienation in which the modern societies sink. Baako fights the widespread phenomenon of corruption. He considers it as being one of the major reasons which have led to Ghana's moral and cultural collapse. Another illustrative critic to Armah's novel is Kirsten Holst Petersen in "*Loss and Frustration: An Analysis of A. K. Armah's Fragments*." He asserts:

As friends and neighbours are escorting Baako to the mental hospital one of them says, 'a been-to, returned only a year ago'. It seems fitting that just as the year has come full circle Baako has reached the logical end of his development.<sup>5</sup>

The character Baako in *Fragments* is portrayed as becoming a mad intellectual a year after his return from England. He was no longer at ease to reintegrate within his society. Kofi Owusu in his article: "*Armah's F-R-A-G-M-E-N-T-S: Madness as Artistic Paradigm*" claims: "In *Fragments*, the phenomenon of madness is multi-faceted. Baako is almost always ill at ease, and we get the impression that his "madness" is a reflection of dis-ease"<sup>6</sup>



Baako, the “been-to”, once returning from the West, is shocked by the changes that occurred during his absence. Thus, he tries to change the situation and get rid of corruption that has extended in the nuclear and extended family. The result is that he becomes mad because he can no longer support the situation.

Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North* has also received a considerable criticism. Musa Al-Halool in “*The Nature of the Uncanny in Season of Migration to the North*” affirms:

Through the fears he [Mustafa] generates in the narrator, we learn that Mustafa is somehow the personification of the former’s alter ego, which he had left behind in England. Hence, Mustafa’s unexpected presence disturbs the recently returned native son very profoundly. In this light, it is natural that Mustafa’s most frightening utterance comes when he is drunk, that is, when his subconscious is freed of all restrictions.<sup>7</sup>

Mustafa can be considered as the alter ego of the unnamed narrator –thoughts that remind him of the life and experiences he had in England- which the narrator wants to escape and vanish from his memory and mind. Mustafa is the double of the narrator or more profoundly, Mustafa and the unnamed narrator are almost the same.

Shadi Neimneh in his “*Cultures, Identities, and Sexualities in Leslie Sliko’s Ceremony and Tayeb Salih’s Season of Migration to the North.*” Claims:

Mustafa in *Season* absorbs white culture and ideologies in Europe and becomes a sexual predator away from his native land [...] the narrator[...] exorcizes Mustafa as a man whose life has been poisoned by colonial contact [...] In fact, Mustafa [...] undergo [sic] traumatic experiences of identity crisis in foreign cultures [...] as a product of imperial education.<sup>8</sup>

One can understand that the Western ideas are of a great impact on the protagonist’s mind, creating in him problems of reintegration in the homeland. Mustafa is portrayed as being caught in between his ancestral values and traditions and the modern Western practice of life.

Wissam Khalid Abdul-Jabbar, in “*The Mimetic Discourse in Tayeb Salih’s Season of Migration to the North*” views:

Mustafa’s character not as a neurotic avenger in the west as it is generally conceived, but as a colonizer who seeks to go native, that is in this case, to become completely westernized. This self-sought cultural transformation, to Mustafa, does not happen without a complete identity shift from the colonized to the colonizer.<sup>9</sup>

The main character Mustafa Sa’eed strives in vain to become a Westerner; he refuses to be conceived as the “other”. He himself wants to be a native in the West.

According to the above review of the literature, the three protagonists are studied from quite similar perspectives. Obi in *No Longer at Ease* is a typical Nigerian educated youngman whose Western education creates in him feelings of loneliness and isolation among the members of his society. Baako, in *Fragments*, considers his social materialist expectations as being meaningless. Thus, he sinks into depression as a kind of a mental rejection to that phenomenon. Then, Mustapha Sa’eed in *Season of Migration to the North* is torn between the two opposing cultures that he becomes a stranger among his people. He also wants to become a Westerner during his journey in England. In addition to this, the unnamed narrator is viewed as being the double of Mustapha. Therefore, in this dissertation, we intend to join the three works together and continue in the same direction as the reviewed literature.

## **2. Issue and Working Hypothesis**

We have seen in the review of the literature on the three novels, namely Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease*, Armah’s *Fragments* and Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North*, that the confrontation of the old traditional values with the new alien culture brought by the Western intruders results in the protagonists’ unexpected fall. The “been-tos” acquire European cultures in addition to the traditional cultures of their fore-fathers. They went to the West looking for an education that may equip them with the tool to meet the demands and

requirements of new independent nation. Back home, these returners face a dual society that is grappling with the demands of the new cultures and way of life while at the same time, striving to keep their rooted cultural way of life. After receiving a foreign education from the West, the “been-tos” become conflicted as they try to readapt to their new African nations. Thus, they suffer from crisis of identity, alienation and clash of cultures due to the impact of Western education and way of life on them.

Just like the “been-tos” in the three chosen novels, a “been-to” is expected to be back with the cargo, more importantly, he is expected to transform the poverty of his family into a sudden wealth. But instead of bringing back materialistic goods, he brings with him a new education and new mode of thought. Abroad, the “been-to” returner is exposed to the new Western culture and education. Thus, while he is back home, he is not able to regain his place within his country. Only because he strongly mimics the white man during his journey abroad that he thinks and acts as the white man does. He comes to reject his rooted traditional values and starts welcoming that of the white man. To our knowledge, no previous study has yet put the three novels namely *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Fragments* (1969) and *Season of Migration to the North* (1969) together. Thus, we intend to deal with the affinities between these works in a comparative way to study the protagonists as they are thrown into chaos and troubles due to their experiences in the West.

To reach our aim, we have suggested Bhabha’s theory “*Of Mimicry and Man*” for it seems relevant to our study. In fact, in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994) Bhabha speaks of the colonizer’s desire to have the colonized subject partially similar to it. The notion of mimicry in terms of similarities and differences between the East and West is present in the three novels.

Accordingly, our work will be divided into three sections. In the method and material section, we will include a short summary of the theory that will be borrowed. We will also include brief summaries of the three chosen novels. In the results section, we will give an overview of our findings. The last section will be the discussion that will be divided into three chapters wherein the first one is about cultural clash in the three novels, the second will be devoted to alienation and isolation, and in the last chapter of the same section we will try to discuss the theme of identity crises along with the “been-tos’ ” malaise in the three novels in the light of the chosen theory. Finally, our humble work will be ended by a general conclusion as a restatement to our work.

#### **Endnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> Moanungsang, *Death of Native Cultures in Chinua Achebe's No Longer at Ease*, (2011), 213. Viewed 15 March 2015. <<http://www.inflibnet.ac.in/ojs/index.php/JLCM/article/viewFile/1091/1111>>.
- <sup>2</sup> Seyed Mohammad Mrarandi and Reyhane Sadat Shadpour, *Education as an Ideological Instrument: A Postcolonial Reading of Chinua Achebe's No Longer at Ease*, (2012), 938. Viewed 17 March 2015. <[www.idosi.org/mejsr/mejsr12\(7\)12/5.pdf](http://www.idosi.org/mejsr/mejsr12(7)12/5.pdf)>.
- <sup>3</sup> Sakshi, *Colonial Conflicts leads to Alienation and Rootlessness in Achebe's No Longer at Ease*, (2013), 26. Viewed 07 April 2015. <<http://www.iosjournals.org>>.
- <sup>4</sup> Richard Priebe, *Demonic Imagery and the Apocalyptic Vision in the Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah*, (1976), 103. Viewed 15 April 2015. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2929654>>.
- <sup>5</sup> Kirsten Holst Peterson, *Loss and Frustration: An Analysis of A.K.Armah's Fragments*, (1979), 53. Viewed 26 January 2015. <<http://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol1/iss1/8>>.
- <sup>6</sup> Kofi Owusu, *Armah's F-R-A-G-M-E-N-T-S: Madness as Artistic Paradigm*, (1988), 362. Viewed 20 January 2015. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2930968>>.

<sup>7</sup> Musa Al Halool, *The Nature of the Uncanny in "Season of Migration to The North"*, (2008), 34. Viewed 19 April 2015. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41859034>>.

<sup>8</sup> Shadi Neimneh , *Cultures, Identities, and Sexualities in Leslie Sliko's Ceremony and Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to the North*, (2012), 6. Viewed 19 Jun 2015. <<http://www.cpcc.edu/taltp/winter-2012-5-2/cultures-identities-and-sexualities-in-leslie-silko2019s-ceremony-and-tayeb-salih2019s-season-of-migration-to-the-north-1-31/view>>.

<sup>9</sup> Wisam Khalid Abdul Jabbar, *The Mimetic Discourse in Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to the North*, (2012). Viewed 23 April 2015. <[www.academia.edu/3797850/The\\_Mimetic\\_Discourse\\_in\\_Tayeb\\_Salih's\\_Season\\_of\\_Migration\\_to\\_the\\_North](http://www.academia.edu/3797850/The_Mimetic_Discourse_in_Tayeb_Salih's_Season_of_Migration_to_the_North)>.

## II. Methods and Materials

### 1. Theoretical Concepts

In the light of the postcolonial theory, Homi Bhabha's theory is the chosen one to sustain our analysis. In "*Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of the Colonial Discourse*" (1994), this theorist puts an emphasis on the inevitable destructive aftermaths imposed by the colonial power on the colonized. During the post-independent era, the ex-colonized blind imitation of the white man resulted in the African's ambivalence in culture; for they are caught between the Eastern traditional way of life and the Western modern one. As a result, the African people are unable to reintegrate themselves in their homeland along with their native people. Those torn people feel themselves alienated and they witness a crisis in identity. Individuals' assimilation of Western culture leads them to a crisis of identity since it is generally agreed that it is not possible to borrow those essence without losing their own culture, identity and way of life.

In "*Of Mimicry and Man: the Ambivalence of the Colonial Discourse*", Bhabha analyses the ex-colonized's regular imitation of the Western world which is a result of the encounter between the East and West. For long, the colonial discourse was an authoritative voice, thus African intellectuals run to the west to gain more knowledge. It is the strategy used by the west to maintain its supremacy as Bhabha asserts: "mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge"<sup>1</sup>. Throughout history, the colonizer manages to maintain its power over the "other". The former tends to dehumanize, humiliate and mock on these persons whom he considers as inferior. In this sense, Bhabha says: "it [colonialism] repeatedly exercises its authority through the figures of farce".<sup>2</sup>

Bhabha defines colonial mimicry as “the desire for a reformed, recognizable other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite”<sup>3</sup>. The former colonizer wants the ex-colonized to be like him, but at the same time, always inferior and dependent on the West. They want the colonized to change his behaviour. They no longer behave in an unacceptable way; instead they have to behave as Westerners by changing their traditions and customs. “Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizes power”<sup>4</sup> Bhabha introduces to us the concept of “flawed colonial mimesis” in which he argues: “to be anglicised is emphatically not to be English”<sup>5</sup> it means an imperfect imitation of the Westerners that is intentional. It is worth noting that this intentional imitation enables the colonized countries to be always in need of the colonizer’s mission of reform and regulation.

According to Ashcroft, mimicry “has come to describe the ambivalent relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.”<sup>6</sup> Bhabha on the other hand, tries to give a precise definition to the word “ambivalence” which turns the certainty into an uncertainty generating in the people’s mind a feeling of confusion resulting in his mixture of things. The former colonizer considers eastern imitation as a threat when it became out of his power; for the mimic man is always and all time trying to resemble this modern white man in all aspects of life. Mimicry has a great impact on the authority of postcolonial discourse. This effect is a disturbing one because “mimicry is never very far from mockery; since it can appear to parody whatever it mimics”<sup>7</sup>. Unexpectedly, mimicry, in a way or another, acts as a “menace” to the white man’s power and authority as it is better illustrated by Bhabha “mimicry is at once resemblance and menace”<sup>8</sup>.

After accounting for the theory, we shall give short definitions of four recurrent words that appear in our discussion that are: “been-to”, cultural clash, alienation and identity. First, we start by defining a “been-to”: According to Kirsten Holst Petersen in her article *Loss and*

*Frustration: An Analysis of Ayi kwei Armah's Fragments* a "been to is a person who has been to England or America, usually to study, and is expected to come back, laden with all the wonders of Western technology: radios, stereo equipment, refrigerators, deep freezers and cars"<sup>9</sup>. From this quotation one can understand that a "been to" returner most of the time stands for that young man who has studied abroad at the expense of his elders. Once home, the "been-to" is expected to turn the poverty of his family into a sudden wealth; he is expected to get rich and to be transformed into a mature man at the expense of the whole community. Kirsten Holst explains that the "been-to" only conveys the goods, he does not produce them. He is not the maker, but an intermediary."<sup>10</sup> As such, the "been-to" is viewed as an engine that transfers goods like refrigerators, radios, TV sets, and deep freezers from West to East. He is no longer viewed as that young man who went abroad looking for spiritual wisdom. Rather, he is viewed as a machine that pours out the materialist commodities which took the throne to the old gods.

Due to their appetite for material things rather than moral values, the ex-colonized countries find themselves unable to get rid of the colonial dependency. Following such strategy, the ex-colonizer still submits the previously colonized countries into his will even after independence. Thus, this may be the reason why the "been-to" returner is unable to regain his society that is distinct from the one he left behind him while he went abroad; the society he returns to has lost its ancestral communal values. Adding that, he shows suspect towards his culture and customs. For, he is no longer able to recognize himself nor he is capable of understanding his fellow men and their practices and even their way of perceiving things. He is hesitating whether to stick to his rooted traditional ideals or to adopt the modern Western thoughts.

Second, cultural clash according to Mohamed Saidi in his article: *The Decolonization of African Culture* in *African Culture: Algiers Symposium*:



colonialism's military, economic and political presence in Africa gave rise to new complex and contradicting cultural situations that can be described as colonialism's cultural arm, which played a substantial part in strengthening the foundations of old-style colonialism and has become one of the most effective arm of neo-colonialism.<sup>11</sup>

Another explanation of the phenomenon of cultural clash is the one provided by René Depestre in his article *The Socio-Cultural Bases of our Identity* in the previously mentioned book "Under colonial domination, there arose in our various societies depressing attitudes"<sup>12</sup>

From these quotations, one can understand that the phenomenon of cultural clash derives from the lasting years of colonialism the ex-colonizer went through. The ex-colonized is torn between his African origins and his new acquired background. Worse still, he is unable to bridge the differences and to get them into contact. For, they are both distinct from each other in the sense that their social essences and mode of life differ from the Western world to the Eastern one. As a matter of fact, the ex-colonized is in a constant search for his lost national heritage that is inscribed in his mind for long before the coming of the white into the land of his ancestors. Due to this sudden shift in the national view point and way of life, the society on the one hand, is broken into units and in the other hand, customs and beliefs are deteriorated. Therefore, this results on the Africans moral instability resulting in their feeling of social and national ambivalence.

Third, according to *the Dictionary of Contemporary English*: "Alienation [is] the feeling of not being part of society or a group, somebody becomes less friendly, understanding or willing to give support as the result of something that is done or happens."<sup>13</sup>. Another definition given by *The Unabridged Dictionary* is "Alienation [is] the state of being withdrawn or isolated from the objective world, as through indifference or dissatisfaction."<sup>14</sup> These two definitions share the view that alienation stands for a feeling of isolation and estrangement of the individuals from their environment. They reject the values established among their own societies. Therefore, they feel as foreigner in their native land. Dr. Sakshi in his "*Colonial Conflicts leads [sic] to Alienation and Rootlessness in Achebe's No Longer at Ease*" defines man's alienation as "his [man's] dehumanization, his estrangement from his own community, society and eventually from his own self."<sup>15</sup>

Lois Tyson, on the other hand, in his book *Critical theory today: A User Friendly Guide* (2006) assumes that “ex-colonials often were left with a psychological “inheritance” of a negative self-image and alienation from their indigenous cultures, which had been forbidden or devalued for so long that much pre-colonial culture had been lost.”<sup>16</sup> Colonialists’ attempts to keep the Western superiority over the Eastern one result in the colonizer’s total imitation of the West. Consequently, he suffers from a psychological problem that consists of self-abasement and self-denigration. As a matter of fact, this mimic man withdraws and isolates himself from society since he is neither understood nor welcomed by his community.

According to the *American Heritage dictionary of the English language* “Identity [is] the collective aspect of the set of characteristics by which a person is recognized or known”<sup>17</sup> Another definition given by *Unabridged Dictionary* is “the condition of being oneself or itself, and not another.”<sup>18</sup> The two definitions agree on the fact that identity is what makes a person distinguishable and different from the others in this sense Erikson adds identity as: “ego identity [...] is the awareness of [...] self-sameness and continuity of one’s meaning for others in the immediate community.”<sup>19</sup> The white man has never ceased to impose himself on the African territories. This latter is dictating to the “other” his conduct and culture which cause the Eastern’s loss of identity and sense of belonging. Therefore, the ex-colonized people have an ambivalent identity; for they are unable to situate themselves in a distorted society caught between two cultures that can never meet. Clearly, those people suffer from what is called by Erikson “identity crisis”.

## **2. Materials**

### **a. Summary of *No Longer at Ease***

*No Longer at Ease* begins with Obi Okonkwo’s trial for corruption and bribery. Then, we go back to Obi’s return to Nigeria after studying for four years in England. The Umuofia

Progressive Union gives him a scholarship as a loan to study law abroad. In England, he has changed his course of study to English and he feels that he is nostalgic for his family and Nigeria as a whole. On his return, he meets Clara, an *osu* woman, in a boat and they start a relationship. Once in Nigeria, obi gets a job in the civil service and stays in Lagos. Quickly, Obi realizes that he is different from his Kinsmen; for the UPU expects him to power their position within government and to accept bribes, whereas Obi believes in the duty to stop corruption in Nigeria. As a result, Obi is alienated from his society and culture due to his way of thinking.

After the events drug on, Obi begins to face many problems. First, he faces financial problems; for he has to pay back his school loan, pay his mother's hospital fees, buy Clara's engagement ring and also pay his car insurance. Soon, Obi becomes unable to face all these duties. Worse still, his parents do not agree on his marriage with Clara because of Ibo traditions. Obi tries to oppose his traditions but he fails and he finally understands that traditions are so important in the eyes of his society. As a matter of fact, he becomes further alienated and it is clear that he is lost between two distinct cultures.

While in Lagos, Clara breaks up with Obi and aborts her baby. Obi, who is deeply in debt and in despair, renounces his principles and begins to accept bribes. He pays all of his debts and he decides that he cannot stand it anymore. It is at this moment, however, when he takes his last bribe, that he is caught, which brings us to the beginning of the novel.

#### **b. Summary of *Fragments***

In *Fragments* (1969), the protagonist, Baako is a "been-to" who has been to the United States for five years where he follows his studies. His Twi surname Onipa stands for "a man". He remains nameless for he is incapable to reintegrate himself into the community to which he returns. Back home, Baako finds himself unable to satisfy the expectations of his family

and society. Baako is alienated from other “been-tos” because unlike the other returners, the only thing he has brought with him from America is a typewriter, a suitcase and a guitar. Thus, this may explain his family’s disappointment since they are only interested in the cargo he is supposed to have brought from America. And this may be also the reason why Baako has not announced his return; instead of going back home to meet his family members, he takes a room in a cheap hotel.

In the United States of America, Baako suffers from a mental distress. When he returns home, he consults a psychiatrist named Juana who later on becomes closer to him and with whom he builds a romantic relationship. In Ghana, Baako faces difficulties in finding a job because of the carelessness on the part of the administrators. But later on he has got a job in the Ghanavision. Thanks to his acquired education in the West, Baako comes to an understanding of the practices and intentions of his society members. This leads to his second mental breakdown since he refuses to behave the way his fellow Ghanaian men have done. Furthermore, Baako is not able to settle the long lasting conflict between his own expectations of becoming clever and wise and those of his family members.

At the end of the novel, it is not clearly explained whether Baako will enter the psychiatric hospital under Juana’s care, or he will sink into madness or he takes the drugs by force.

### **c. Summary of *Season of Migration to the North***

The novel starts with the return of the unnamed narrator to his homeland, a small village near the Nile in northern Sudan, after studying in London for Seven years. He is very happy to be back, but during his meeting with the villagers, he notices a new face among them, it is Mustafa Sa’eed who seems to be mysterious and not much is known about him. The narrator, Mahjoub and Mustafa meet at a drinking session. It happens that Mustafa gets

drunk then he begins to recite English poetry. This incident pushes the narrator to be too inquisitive. He insists on Mustafa until he agrees to tell him his story.

Mustafa is a genius at the elementary school. His head master arranges for him to attend secondary school in Cairo where he has lived with Mr Robinson and his wife. Then, he goes to London where he gains more knowledge, culture and becomes graduated from Oxford University what allows him to teach economics and does many researches on different fields such as literature and politics. He has an effective way of seducing women in England. He has relationships with three girlfriends Isabella Seymour, Sheila Greenwood and Ann Hammond whom end their lives with suicide. Concerning the fourth, Jean Morris, he marries her and at last he eventually murders her. As a matter of fact, he is sentenced to seven years jail, and he leaves England after his release to live in this small village at the bend of the Nile.

The story returns to the narrator's perspective after the disappearance of Mustafa Sa'eed in a flood. The narrator finds a job in the ministry of Education in Khartoum where he spends most of his time. But as he is the guardian of the widow of Mustafa and his two sons, he is obliged to return to the village from time to time. One time, during the narrator's presence in the village, he knows of Wad Rayyes' willing to marry Hosna, the widow of Mustafa Sa'eed. The nameless narrator asks Hosna about her opinion and she radically rejects the idea. But wad Rayyes insists that he will marry her since her father accepts it. Thus, the narrator does not intervene and decides to go back to Khartoum.

One month later, the narrator receives a telegram from Mahjoub informing him about Hosna's death. He quickly returns home to know about the incident. He hardly gets informed by Bint Majzoub that Hosna was forced to marry Wad Rayyes, thus she has stabbed him to death and then she kills herself by implementing a knife in her heart.

The narrator feels himself weak. He goes to Mustafa's house and opens the private room where he recalls more of Mustafa's story and where we learn more about his relationship with Jean Morris. In fact, the narrator becomes convinced that Mustafa has never left his past behind him.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 122.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>6</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), 139.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 123.

<sup>9</sup> Peterson, *Loss and Frustration*, 59-60.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>11</sup> Mohamed Saidi, "The Decolonization of African Culture" in *African Culture: Algiers Symposium* (Algiers: Société Nationale l'Édition et de Diffusion, 1969), 226.

<sup>12</sup> René Depestre, "The Socio-Cultural Bases of our Identity" in *African Culture: Algiers Symposium* (Algiers: Société Nationale l'Édition et de Diffusion, 1969), 252.

<sup>13</sup> *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*. New Edition for Advanced Learners. (Edinburgh Gate: Pearson Education Limited, 1978), 41.

<sup>14</sup> *Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* (New York: Random House, 1987), 53.

<sup>15</sup> Sakshi, *Colonial Conflicts leads to Alienation and Rootlessness in Achebe's No Longer at Ease*, 26.

<sup>16</sup> Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: A User Friendly Guide* (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), 419.

<sup>17</sup> *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*. Paperback ed. (New York: Dell, 1981), 350.

<sup>18</sup> *Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*, 950.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Seth J.Schwartz, *The Evolution of Eriksonian and Neo-Eriksonian Identity Theory and Research: A Review and Integration* (2001), 8. Viewed 17 April 2015. <[www.sethschwartz.info/pdfs/Identity\\_Review\\_Paper.pdf](http://www.sethschwartz.info/pdfs/Identity_Review_Paper.pdf)>.

### III. Results

This dissertation is a study of Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1960), Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments* (1969) and Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1969). We had tried to put an emphasis on the social and cultural problems that the "been-tos" face after their return home. To reach our aim, we had borrowed Homi Bhabha's theory developed in his most outstanding work "*Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of the Colonial Discourse*" (1994).

In fact, the three authors dealt with the state of instability and confusion from which many Africans suffered during and after colonization especially the "been-to" returners whose journey abroad seemed to be of a strong effect on them and on their surroundings. Unwillingly, they found themselves torn between two completely opposing cultures namely the African and European cultures. They were unable to balance between their old ancestral values and the new acquired ones. This led to their alienation from their societies and a creation of an identity crisis. During their journey abroad, they had adopted the Westerners' way of life and thoughts, and assimilated the European culture. They did not feel at ease in their homeland and among their native people. For, they did not share the same beliefs as them. This rendered them strangers in their homeland. From all that has been said, we come to the results that Achebe, Armah, and Salih's "been-tos" faced nearly the same problems of resettlement after their return home; for they had continuously mimicked the Westerners. They spoke, behaved and thought like the white men whom they considered as being perfect. This engendered their malaise among their native people. As a matter of fact, the three works can be compared in the light of the theory of Bhabha.

At first glance, *No Longer at Ease*, *Fragments*, and *Season of Migration to the North* seemed to be different from each other; *No Longer at Ease* was published by a Nigerian



writer, *Fragments* by a Ghanaian writer and *Season of Migration to the North* by a Sudanese writer. However, this difference did not prevent from dealing with the same themes and characters. That is to say, the three authors deal with the problems that the “been-tos” faced as regards their culture, traditions and identity and the way they lost them. Achebe for instance, believed that it is his duty as an author to raise awareness and concern in the people and to denounce the sicknesses his society suffers from aiming for a change in all fields of life. Obviously, the three novels: *No Longer at Ease*, *Fragments* and *Season of Migration to the North* are rich in terms of themes. However, this modest work was limited to the discussion of only three themes cultural clash, alienation and identity within the novels.

## **IV. Discussion**

This section of our dissertation intends to explore thematically the three novels. We focus on the “been-to” characters who find problems of reintegration after their return home. They are not able to identify themselves in their societies and among their countrymen. That is to say, they neither belong to their own societies nor to the Western one due to their ambivalent behaviour and mode of thinking. Therefore, the “been-tos” intensive imitation of the ex-colonizer results in the “been-to” returners’ cultural clash, alienation and crisis of identity. Thus, the themes that are going to be discussed are: cultural clash, alienation and isolation, and identity that most “been-to” characters suffer from after their return to their homeland.

### **1. Cultural Clash**

One of the crucial themes in the three works is mainly that of cultural clash. The “been-tos” have known various upheavals in recognizing their own culture. They are struggling between two different worlds, East and West. An intensive look into the experience of the “been-to” characters in the three novels *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Fragments* (1969) and *Season of Migration to the North* (1969) shows that they were much influenced by Western culture when they were in touch with it during their studies abroad. Hence, once home they cannot reintegrate and accept their native culture. It is this clash between the native culture and the newly acquired one that leads to cultural clash in their lives.

In *No Longer at Ease*, the “been-to” character is confronted to two different cultures. Obi, the main character is unstable because of the impact of his native culture and the foreign one on him. That is to say, during Obi’s childhood; he learns his native culture, he comes to know about Ibo customs and traditions, and he believes in them. After his journey in England, he also acquires European culture and way of life. He acquires the English language and speaks it fluently. So, his experience lets him wave between two contradicting cultures the

African culture which is based on some principles and beliefs that are unchangeable and the Western culture which calls for modernization and individualism. Consequently, he cannot identify himself neither with his native culture, nor with the values of the Western world.

Abroad, Obi creates a positive image of Nigeria. He writes nostalgic poetry about Lagos and the sun and the trees of his homeland. He is very proud of his people. In one situation, he says:

Let them come to Umuofia now and listen to the talk of men who made a great art of conversation. Let them come and see men and women and children who knew how to live, whose joy of life had not yet been killed by those who claimed to teach other nations how to live.<sup>1</sup>

Obi feels honoured by his people; he considers the conversations of his people as so important and of crucial value. Life in his homeland has meaning, and it is not affected by the Westerners who consider themselves superior and intellectuals. So, Obi is very proud of his origin, his culture and language. Unfortunately, in his return home, he discovers that Nigeria is no longer that of his dreams. He is surprised by the still existing old traditions. He claims:

What is this thing? Our fathers in their darkness and ignorance called an innocent man *osu*, a thing given to idols, and thereafter he became an outcast, and his children, and his children's children for ever. But have we not seen the Light of the Gospel?<sup>2</sup>

From this we may understand that Obi's view towards his native culture has largely been changed. In this sense, Bhabha comments

These instances of metonymy are the non-repressive production of contradictory and multiple belief[sic]. They cross the boundaries of the culture of enunciation through a strategic confusion of the metaphoric axes of the cultural production of meaning.<sup>3</sup>

That is to say, the "been-to" are exposed to multiple beliefs that may be contradictory which affect them and lead them to announce some beliefs of their native culture.

The change in Obi's way of perceiving things is obvious. "I'm not paying five hundred pounds for a wife. I shall not even pay one hundred, not even fifty"<sup>4</sup> the fact that he is against paying the bride price means that he no longer sticks to his traditions. He goes further by claiming that he wants to marry an *Osu* girl, which is forbidden in the Ibo traditions.

It was scandalous that in the middle of the twentieth century a man could be barred from marrying a girl simply because her great-great-great-great-grandfather had been dedicated to serve a god [...] Quite unbelievable."<sup>5</sup>

He sees the Ibo traditions as abnormal and odd. He no more gives importance to traditions as he considers them as unimportant. It is the impact of Western education. He mimics the white man at a point where he forgets about his belonging. Obi sees the act of marrying an *Osu* as normal because of the influence of culture and education "the visibility of mimicry is always produced at the site of interdiction."<sup>6</sup> Here Bhabha notes that mimicry is visible when the Western educated intellectuals go face to face with the interdictions of their native culture. It is the case of Obi. He is torn between two cultures and he does not recognize what is forbidden and what is allowed. He maintains his position. He thinks that he may marry anyone he wishes without taking into consideration the other's point of view.

As a Western educated young man, Obi rejects a number of cultural traditions. Moanungsang says: "He has forgotten how to act in his home or simply does not agree with its ways: he wears a short-sleeved shirt and sees nothing wrong with it, for it is hot"<sup>7</sup> under such circumstances, Obi clearly shows allegiance to Western culture. Unconsciously, he starts to behave like the white man. He finds the heat as a justification to wear such kind of clothes instead of getting dressed in "agbada" or suit. In this case, one can deduce that Obi clearly adopts the Western mode of life. He does not show any respect to his native culture and he does not care for the image his fellow Nigerian men can have on him and his behaviour. Obi, in *No Longer at Ease*, may be considered as a reference of those young intellectuals who left

their countries to study abroad but whose return home is marked by a great change on them. Those returners cannot live in a well arranged and stable world. They rather live in confusion and in a moral uncertainty; for they are unable to draw a link between two divergent worlds, a world that calls for modernity and individualism and the other that aims at keeping the ancestral well rooted traditional values.

Obi is not only astonished by the old traditions but also by the changes that occurred within the Nigerian society. The influence of the other cultures is visible in Lagos. When he is sitting in a restaurant with his friend Joseph he asks: “Do they serve Nigerian food here? Joseph was surprised at the question. No decent restaurant served Nigerian food.”<sup>8</sup> The restaurants in Lagos do not serve Nigerian food. In addition to it, even their owners are not from Lagos or Nigeria. It is clear that the Nigerian society undergo a great shift. This is due to the great impact of western colonialism. After his departure from Nigeria, the colonizer left behind him people that want to live like the Westerners by adopting their way of life. They eat foreign food and drink European imported beer. This change is more visible in towns than in the villages like Umuofia.

Mr Ikedi had come to Umuofia from a township, and was able to tell the gathering how wedding feasts had been steadily declining in the town since the invention of the invitation card.<sup>9</sup>

In fact, the Nigerians begin to lose their traditions. The wedding that used to be prepared together, that is to say prepared by the whole family and neighbours, is now losing its charm. It is no more a collective event that creates joy in individuals and unites them. In addition to this:

A man could not go to his neighbour’s wedding unless he was given once of these papers on which they wrote R.S.V.P-Rice and Stew Very Plenty –which was invariably an over-statement.<sup>10</sup>

The invitation card is something inherited from the colonizer and it contributes in the marriage’s loss of importance and charm. In fact, the inheritance from the colonizer leads to

the decline of moral values among people and creates in them growth of individualism and corruption.

All these images change the opinion of Obi about his country and people. His disillusionment is the reason of his alienation. Toward the end of the novel, Obi opens his personal book

The book opened at the place where he had put the paper on which he had written the poem “Nigeria” in London about two years ago.[...] He quietly and calmly crumpled the paper in his left palm until it was a tiny ball, threw it on the floor<sup>11</sup>

This act means that Obi is fed up. He discovers that the image he has about Nigeria is an illusion, the reality is more like a nightmare to him.

The clash of cultures between traditional life and modern society is the subject of many African writers among them Ayi Kwei Armah in his novel *Fragments*. He provides a vivid image of a neo-colonial Ghana under the “fatal legacy of Western capitalism and consumerism, which distorts time and communal values marked by seasonal and cyclical ritual”<sup>12</sup> This quotation sends back to the seeds from which the clash between cultures stem. The corrupt government along with its corrupt leaders who “sit on their bottoms doing nothing”<sup>13</sup> seem to be the only benefactors from independence in addition to the change of values which later on become the source of all the social ills and confusions.

After independence, the ex-colonized countries started to import and imitate the western men; for they are firmly persuaded that:

European goods (cargo) ships, aircraft, trade articles, and military equipment were not man-made but had to be obtained from a non-human or divine source<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, this may explain the ex-colonized’s total imitation of the former colonizer. In this context, Bhabha says “imitation is at once resemblance and menace”<sup>15</sup> Meaning that the ex-

colonized is no longer the “illiterate” the colonizer used to meet since he is now trying to develop his moral capacities. The colonized is strongly attracted by the luxurious and easy life the Western countries maintain. Furthermore, those third world countries are badly affected by the Western’s practices and habits; they are imitating the Westerners in their way of eating, speaking, behaving and way of getting dressed.

Baako is the Ghanaian “been-to”, who on returning home, finds problems of reintegration; he is torn between Western education and unmaintained promises brought by the former colonizer to Africa. Again, he is increasingly affected by the cultural encounter between Ghana and West. Throughout the events of the novel, Baako is presented as being lost between two divergent ways of life and way of perceiving things. Worse still, Baako is portrayed as being undetermined since he is unable to make a decision whether to stick to his African communal values or to reject them and in return to adopt those of the ex-colonizer; “I’ve [Baako] thought a lot about it. In fact I went all the way round the bend trying to make up my mind”<sup>16</sup>

Confronted with the foreign culture, at home, Baako witnesses a feeling of uncertainty and “fear of the return”<sup>17</sup>. He is afraid of disappointing his family members and society since they want him back wise and strong but without forgetting about his ancestors rooted way of life. Besides, he worries of not coming in terms with the expectations of his family. Indeed, he does not know if he is able to do anything worthwhile. According to Bhabha “uncertainty [...] fixes the colonial subject as a “partial” presence by “partial” I [Bhabha] mean both “incomplete” and “virtual”<sup>18</sup>. This means that the ex-colonizer in, a way or another, causes the uncertainty of the ex-colonized about his values and capacities. Thus, the ex-colonized man is always putting into question his moral capacities and self-awareness. This is a kind of strategy followed by the colonizer to submit the ex-colonized colonies to his will even after independence.

Throughout the novel, we see Baako in a continuous struggle, he is incapable of finding a way in-between. On the one hand, he does not want to look like an ape when his mother tells him “I [Efua] wish you [Baako] had brought a tux, or at least a suit, though. It would have been so fine.”<sup>19</sup> He does not want to wear a suit. He no more shares the same beliefs as his countrymen. He considers such kind of ceremonies as being ridiculous and meaningless “I suppose your sacred ancestors laid down the word that we should sweat in stupid suits and tuxes for such ceremonies. Too bad”<sup>20</sup> for him, wearing a suit in this warm country would make him feel uncomfortable. But on the other hand, Baako is not really convinced of the superiority of the white man. This may explain his feeling of malaise when he returns home. He does not expect his family to become too materialistic. He does not want them to lose their ancestral heritage. He wants his family and countrymen to understand that their Ghanaian culture is a sacred one. It must be preserved and protected from disappearance. He views that his family’s expectations on his journey abroad are to a certain degree senseless since he is aiming at developing his moral capacities instead of running after the materialistic wealth. So, one may understand that Baako is a Ghanaian young intellect who is not able to find a way in-between the totally opposing cultures that are considered as being two fundamental elements which contributes to his formation and making up.

Brempong is another “been-to” character that plays an important role in the novel. Throughout the events of the novel, Brempong is considered as being the perfect “been-to” who views that “it is no use [...] going back with nothing.”<sup>21</sup> For him, a “been-to” returner must satisfy the materialistic expectations of his family members. Confronted with the foreign culture, Brempong changes a lot. He becomes materialistic. He easily falls prey in the hands of the dirty men. He strongly believes in the utopian vision of the non-African world; for he adopts a Western way of life. As such, one may consider that Brempong rejects his traditional



way of life with the coming of the white man as it is the case of many African people who have been in contact with the Western culture.

In *Season of Migration to the North*, the cultural differences between the Sudanese and European way of life are directly referred to from the start of the novel.

They were surprised when I told them that Europeans were, with minor differences, exactly like them, marrying and bringing up their children in accordance with principles and traditions, that they had good morals and were in general good people.<sup>22</sup>

The villagers ask the narrator about Europeans. His response reveals that individuals in the West and East are more alike than they are different. That is to say, even if there are different cultures, the nature of human beings is without doubt the same. Everyone in this world masters his own culture and sees it as the most reasonable one. Indeed, when an individual is in touch with two or more different cultures, he is dropped in a state of ambivalence; in a sense that, he becomes lost. He stands in a position where he belongs no more to his native culture not to the new one which is not yet assimilated.

The colonizer wants through mimicry to form individuals that are “interpreters” of the western culture. Persons used to help them to extend widely their thoughts. Bhabha quotes Macaulay to show the aim of the Westerners: “a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect”<sup>23</sup> by taking the example of the Indians, Macaulay explains the strategy used by the colonizer. Through Western education, African intellectuals act as ‘interpreters’ of Western culture. In the case of Mustafa Sa’eed, this “been-to” get in touch with the colonialist culture for the first time through Mrs Robinson “From her [Mrs Robinson] I learnt to love Bach’s music, Keats’s poetry, and from her I heard for the first time of Mark Twain.”<sup>24</sup> She introduces Mustafa for the first time to the Western culture and cultivates in him its love. At school, he is a brilliant student, his headmaster advises him “This country [Sudan] hasn’t got the scope for that brain of yours, so take

yourself off”<sup>25</sup> Mustafa acts as he is advised. He goes to Cairo, then to England searching for a higher educational degree. He obtains what he seeks, but he learns many Western values. As it is referred to by Professor Maxwell Foster-Keen : “Mustafa Sa’eed [...] is a noble person whose mind was able to absorb Western civilization, but it broke his heart”<sup>26</sup>. It is clear that he is genius and brilliant person, he succeeds to mimic the white man but at the end it leads him to commit a crime and break his career. The retired Mamur says to the unnamed narrator: “Mustafa Sa’eed was the first Sudanese to marry an Englishwoman [...] and took British nationality [...] He was one of their [English] most faithful supporters.”<sup>27</sup> Mustafa is able to understand the colonial policy. His transformation is mainly complete. His western education changes him radically. In fact, after his transformation, he becomes a menace to his native people. It is the reason why the retired Mamur accuses him of being a supporter of the West.

In the novel, during the colonial period, Sudanese people worry about their children. They prevent them from going to school; for it was an extension of the British hegemony. “People would hide their sons –they thought of school as being a great evil that had come to them with the armies of occupation.”<sup>28</sup>. While attending school, Mustafa longs for more knowledge, he becomes obsessed by the English language as he says: “I discovered other mysteries, amongst which was the English language”<sup>29</sup> he adds: “At any rate, I devoted myself with the whole of my being to that new life.”<sup>30</sup> It means he is ready to absorb Western culture and forget about his native one. As a matter of fact, Mustafa marks a big shift. Abdul Jabbar argues “he [Mustafa] has Anglicized himself to the point of no return”<sup>31</sup>. Even after his return to his homeland, it is clear that he is still attached to that culture. He builds a room where he keeps all what is related to his journey in England. His wife says: “he used to spend a lot of time at night in that room”<sup>32</sup> which affirms his attachment to his past.

The narrator in *Season* is also a “been-to” who is influenced by the Western way of thinking. Patricia Geesey points out:

The narrator too has been similarly affected by the cultural “contact” between England and the Sudan, but he is at first unwilling to acknowledge this reality<sup>33</sup>

In fact, the narrator does not admit that he, too, is a mimic man, that he is influenced by the European culture. For him, his attachment to his village is the reason for keeping himself from absorbing the English culture. He says:

I had lived with them superficially, neither loving nor hating them. I used to treasure within me the image of this little village, seeing it wherever I went with the eye of my imagination.<sup>34</sup>

Before the killing of Wad Rayyes, the reader cannot notice the narrator’s change in his way of thinking. The reader cannot deduce the influence of that culture upon him. But after the murder of Wad Rayyes, the narrator began to criticize the traditions and customs of his society. He comments on the fact that women do not decide about their marriage but their brothers and fathers. This is embedded in his conversation with Mahjoub: “ ‘But the world’s changed,’ I [the nameless narrator] said to him. ‘These are things that no longer fit in with our life in this age.’ ”<sup>35</sup> His life abroad leads to the change of his way of perceiving things. However, Mahjoub, who is not a product of colonial education, is aware that Sudan remains as it was. Nothing has changed and change is impossible in his eyes.

‘The world hasn’t changed as much as you think,’ said Mahjoub. ‘Some things have changed –pumps instead of water-wheels, iron ploughs instead of wooden ones, sending our daughters to school, radios, cars, learning to drink whiskey and beer instead of arak and millet wine – yet even so everything’s as it was.’ Mahjoub laughed as he said, ‘The world will really have changed when the likes of me become ministers in the government. And naturally that,’ he added still laughing, ‘is an out-and-out impossibility.’<sup>36</sup>

The unnamed narrator criticizes his fellow Sudanese “When they laugh they say ‘I ask forgiveness of God’ and when they weep they say ‘I ask forgiveness of God.’ Just that.”<sup>37</sup> The murder of Wad Rayyes wakes on him his Western way of thinking and pushes him to see his culture as unjust, odd and unreasonable.

Toward the end of the novel, the unnamed narrator seems to be aware of the impact of the two cultures on his life; for the North and South are two different cultural worlds. While he swims in the river, he finds himself lost. He claims: "Turning to left and right, I found I was half-way between north and south. I was unable to continue, unable to return."<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, the nameless narrator is unable to belong to any of these worlds, he is in-between. He is caught between these two divergent cultures. He cannot stick to his rooted communal values because he considers them as being inappropriate. He seems to be a victim of the clash of cultures due to his exposure to two opposing cultures.

To finish with, Obi, Baako, Mustafa Sa'eed and the unnamed narrator are the "been-to" figures in the three chosen novels whose new acquired knowledge and culture causes their inability to reintegrate both culturally and socially within their societies. They are torn between two opposing cultures. They are neither able to maintain their native culture nor able to adopt that of the West.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease* (Johannesburg: Heinemann, 1960), 45.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>3</sup> Bhabha, *the Location of Culture*, 128.

<sup>4</sup> Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, 38.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>6</sup> Bhabha, *the Location of Culture*, 128.

<sup>7</sup> Moanungsang, *Death of the Native Cultures in Chinua Achebe's No Longer at Ease*, 216.

<sup>8</sup> Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, 31.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., 136-137.
- <sup>12</sup> Abdulrazak Gurnah, *Essays on African Writing: Contemporary Literature* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1995), 4.
- <sup>13</sup> Armah, *Fragments*, 84.
- <sup>14</sup> Petersen, *Loss and Frustration*, 60.
- <sup>15</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 123.
- <sup>16</sup> Armah, *Fragments*, 80.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid., 102.
- <sup>18</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 123.
- <sup>19</sup> Armah, *Fragments*, 98.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid., 99.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid., 53.
- <sup>22</sup> Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, trans. Denys Johnson-Davies (Oxford: Heinemann, 1969), 3.
- <sup>23</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 124.
- <sup>24</sup> Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, 28.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid., 23.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., 33.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., 55-56.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., 20.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid., 22.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup> Abdul Jabbar, *The Mimetic Discourse in Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to the North*, 132.
- <sup>32</sup> Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, 91.

<sup>33</sup>Patricia Geesey, *Cultural Hybridity and Contamination in Tayeb Salih's Mawsim al-hijra ila al-Shamal (Season of Migration to the North)* (1997), 129. Viewed 15 March 2015. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3820998>>.

<sup>34</sup>Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, 49.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 99.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 100.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 130.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 167.

## 2. Alienation and Isolation

Concerning *No Longer at Ease*, Obi, the “been to”, returns to his homeland after five years abroad. Once in Nigeria, he suffers from many problems with his family and his people, for they no longer share the same beliefs. As a result, Obi feels himself alone and isolated, a state that is better described at the very beginning of chapter two:

Obi was away in England for a little under four years. He sometimes found it difficult to believe that it was as short as that. It seemed more like a decade than four years, what with the miseries of winter then his longing to return home took on the sharpness of physical pain. It was in England that Nigeria first became more than just a name to him. That was the first great thing that England did for him. But the Nigeria he returned to was in many ways different from the picture he had carried in his mind during those four years.<sup>1</sup>

In England, Obi misses his family, society and culture, in a way or another he recognizes that Nigeria along with its people are dear to him. In short, he is nostalgic about his country. He seems to be lost. Thus the feeling of loneliness reigns over his daily life there. As a matter of fact,

He [Obi] spoke Ibo whenever he had the least opportunity of doing so. Nothing gave him greater pleasure than to find another Ibo-speaking student in a London bus.<sup>2</sup>

Obi communicates with his fellow Nigerians in Ibo language each time he has the opportunity to do so. Quoting Freud, Bhabha says:

Their mixed and split origin is what decides their fate. We may compare them with individuals of mixed race who taken all round resemble white men but who betray their coloured descent by some striking features or other and on that account are excluded from society and enjoy none of the privileges.<sup>3</sup>

The “been-to” in their encounter with the white men are thrown into in-betweenness that results in their exclusion from society. Their alienation is due to their Western education and the contact with the former colonizer’s culture. This contact makes of the “been-to” a person who is ambivalent. He no longer sticks to his traditions and he is not totally integrated in the

West. So, he belongs neither to the Europeans nor to the Africans. He cannot reintegrate within his native society once home. He feels himself a stranger among his people.

Obi falls in love with Clara –an *Osu* girl. He decides to marry her even though he knows that his parents and the Umuofia Progressive Union will oppose him. He is determined to do it as he says to Joseph “[...] Not even my mother will stop me [...]”<sup>4</sup>. But his dream is broken. His father opposes this marriage. Obi tries to convince him by saying that they are all Christians but it was of no use. His father sticks to his response. He tells him:

*Osu* is like leprosy in the minds of our people. I beg of you, my son, not to bring the mark 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. It is not for myself I speak; my days are few. You will bring sorrow on your head and on the heads of your children.<sup>5</sup>

His mother also tells him:

I have nothing to tell you in this matter except one thing. If you want to marry this girl, you must wait until I am no more. If God hears my prayers, you will not await long [...] but if you do the thing while I am alive, you will have my blood on your head, because I shall kill myself.<sup>6</sup>

These words have a great influence on Obi. “Obi kept to his room throughout that day [...] he refused to see anybody.”<sup>7</sup> Hannah’s refusal of Clara leads Obi to further isolate and alienate himself. He does not accept to see anyone of his neighbours who come to him. Obi thinks that he is able to marry whom he wants. He neglects the fact that he is living in a society that is governed by some customs and traditions. The mimic man behaves like Westerners and unwillingly he is rejected from society.

In the meeting of the first December 1956, the president of the UPU explains his desire and advises Obi to give up his relation with Clara because she is an *osu* girl. The reaction of Obi is unexpected. He considers his problems as privacy and that he is free to do whatever he wants. It is his own life and no one has the right to interfere. “don’t you dare interfere in my affairs again.”<sup>8</sup> Consequently, Obi becomes further alienated as he shows



disrespect over his elders. The Umuofian elders disapprove the behaviour of Obi and they are very angry about his lack of respect. Obi, by behaving like that, betrays one of his traditional values which is respect for the elders who want to disalienate him. Unfortunately, this incident further alienates him from his community. As Simon Gikandi observes: “Obi has failed to live up to the image and function Umuofia created for him; for this reason he will become further isolated from his community.”<sup>9</sup> The Umuofian elders expects Obi to be educated and at the same time to stick to his traditions. They forget about the influence practised on him by the Westerners. The African people attempt to resemble the white man. By behaving like Westerners, they begin to lose their traditions and way of life. They begin to be alien among their communities. They anglicise themselves to the point that they do not consider themselves as being members of their communities.

Joseph describes Obi’s alienation “Obi’s mission-house upbringing and European education had made him a stranger in his country.”<sup>10</sup> Obi feels uncomfortable in his home. What is remarkable is the change in his way of behaving. His education abroad much influences him. Alone in England, he learns Western values that will eventually bring him to be far from his native people. It is the reason for his homesickness. The impact of the foreign education on him is different from that expected by the Umuofian. Gikandi puts “Obi is an invention of his kinsmen: they have educated him to serve their communal interests and thereby projected their own fantasies onto him.”<sup>11</sup> The Umuofian send him to England in order to pursue his education there, they want him to be a lawyer “They wanted him to read law so that when he returned he would handle all their land cases against their neighbours.”<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, instead of studying law, Obi studies English which is considered as a disappointment among his people. “But when he got to England he read English; his self-will was not new. The Union was angry but in the end they left him alone.”<sup>13</sup>

It is Obi's people that send him to England in order to study, this is the reason why they expect a lot from his journey abroad. They think that they have the right to take part in his decisions about his future. Obi does not agree with the idea. Dr. Sakshi asserts: "But later in [the] novel Obi quickly feels that the demands being made upon him are unacceptable, and he is an alien with a different set of values."<sup>14</sup> From this quotation, we may understand that the alienation of Obi is due to the values learned from the West and that ones changed in Nigeria. In England, he has an image of Nigeria that is idealized. At his return, he notices that many things have changed in his mother land what surprised him a lot. Corruption is everywhere. Speaking of the state of Nigeria, he says:

'What an Augean stable!' he muttered to himself. 'Where does one begin? With the masses? Educate the masses?' he shook his head. 'Not a change there. It would take centuries'. A handful of men at the top. Or even one man with vision –enlightened dictator. People are scared of the word nowadays. But what kind of democracy can exist side by side with much corruption and ignorance?'<sup>15</sup>

Obi realizes that his idea about Nigeria is false and that he is far from reality. He thinks that "the public service of Nigeria would remain corrupt until the old Africans at the top were replaced by young men from the universities."<sup>16</sup> thus, he does not feel at ease in his homeland.

Obi no longer feels at ease in Nigeria. He is alienated from his society. This alienation is mainly due to the fact of mimicking the former colonizer. The Western influence on the "been-to" has distanced him from his native culture and made him an alien within his community.

Not only in *No Longer at Ease* but also in *Fragments* the life of the protagonist typifies the state of alienation and isolation from which many African "been-to" suffer. They find themselves lost after their return home. They are unable to rediscover their place in neo-colonial Africa as it is the case of Baako after his return back home

all his talk was of a loneliness from which he was finding it impossible to break, of the society he had come back to and the many ways in which it made him feel his aloneness.”<sup>17</sup>

From this quotation one can understand that the society into which Baako returns is terribly affected by the Western modern way of life. Therefore, Baako is lost in a society he once was in a hurry to be back to.

When he returns home, Baako is strongly astonished by the reaction of his family and their materialist expectations they hold on his journey abroad. This is a lucid proof of their increased wishes for materialist wealth instead of encouraging him to enrich himself morally. Thus, this shift in the society’s way of life reinforces Baako’s alienation for, it is his family and society which first want him to go and study abroad to develop his moral capacities. But, now they are themselves opposing the values to which they have introduced him “his family became only a closer, intenser, more intimate reflection of the society.”<sup>18</sup> Adding that, “the family is always there, with a solid presence and real demands.”<sup>19</sup> Baako finds it difficult if not impossible to establish any solid relationship with any Ghanaian man who becomes materialistic since the Ghanaians’ sole interest is to fill their pockets as they consider Baako as the provider of luxuries, fame and richness.

Moreover, Baako is seen as being unable to reconnect with things as they were before his departure to the Western modern world for “the world has changed.”<sup>20</sup> Everything astonishes him. This proves that Baako’s mode of thoughts has changed. He no more believes in the traditional life. He also no longer shares the same values as his fellow Ghanaian man. Consequently, we notice in the novel that Baako is becoming a “been-to stranger”<sup>21</sup> in his country mainly because his belief and morality have been shaped by the western educational system that is used as a way to manipulate people’s mind and to have control on them in an indirect way. This is better explained by Sayed Mohammed Mrarandi and Reyhane Sadat

Shadpour in their article entitled: *Education as an Ideological Instrument: A Postcolonial Reading of Chinua Achebe's No Longer at Ease*:

Imperial power uses different ideological instruments as indirect means to gain control over colonized nations [...] education system in colonial countries represents a set of information which is disguised as neutral, but in fact it is designed to make the colonized alienated from his original values and absorbed to those of the colonizer.<sup>22</sup>

It is under the pretext of bringing enlightenment and civilization that the colonizer introduces the Western educational system to Africa. Education is rather used by the colonizer to control the knowledge that enters into the mind of the oppressed. The colonizer makes the colonized man believe in his so called noble mission to have control on him and to submit him to his will. Thus, unwillingly the colonized man will think; behave and speak exactly as the white man does. Also, unconsciously the colonized man will be intensively imitating the ex-colonizer and he will therefore, gradually lose his genuine values and beliefs and start receiving those of the oppressor. This leads most of the time to the colonized man's alienation and isolation from the rest of his family members and society as well. In this context, Bhabha declares that "mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which appropriates' the other as it visualizes power."<sup>23</sup>

In *Fragments*, Baako, like Obi in *No Longer at Ease*, does not understand neither his family's and society's behaviour nor is he able to understand their way of conceiving things. Everything is mixed up in his mind. He is not able to make up his mind or to fix up his ideas. Thus, his mind is never at rest. For him "it is beginning to look like a cataract."<sup>24</sup> He even does not understand the rituals and ceremonies his family planned like the outdoor ceremony organized by his mother Efua and his sister in-law Araba. Baako says "I [Baako] do not fully understand the ceremony itself."<sup>25</sup> This means that Baako's ideas are changed and are now distinct from the ideas of his countrymen and family members. As a result, he decides to set himself apart from his people and to isolate himself. He also does not want to

interfere and to take part in making decisions “Baako closed his mouth and sat staring at the baby, listening to the two women [Araba and Efua] talking, remaining outside their plans.”<sup>26</sup> As such, one may infer that Baako is isolating himself from the rest of the society and does not care for their practices, decisions and ceremonies that he considers as being “stupid”<sup>27</sup>

Baako’s inability to understand himself and to understand those who continue to exist around him lead to his loss of moral control. As a matter of fact, he sinks into depression as a kind of mental resistance to the widespread social Ghanaian vices such as corruption. To conclude with, Baako, the isolated elite is not able to bridge the masses and mentality of the two poles and cannot therefore be integrated with none of them.

In *Season of Migration to the North*, the “been-tos” are also in confrontation with their communities. They are not able to situate themselves in post-colonial Sudan. The protagonist, Mustafa Sa’eed, is not the only character who is a “been-to” in the novel. In fact, the unnamed narrator is also an African student who gets a Doctorate in English poetry from England. The two characters, after their encounter with the ex-colonizer, are in ambivalent positions because they are not able to find a place within their society. On the one hand, Mustafa wants to assimilate to the Western culture. He tries harder to be like the English. Abdul Jabbar notes:

His [Mustafa’s] objective is not, as often assumed, to violate the West in some form of retaliation but rather it is an assertive accentuation, a desire to become one of them<sup>28</sup>

It is clear, thus, that Mustafa by his experience abroad is much influenced by the Westerners. As a matter of fact, once in Sudan, he is unable to locate himself within the villagers. On the other hand, the unnamed narrator does not acknowledge that he is influenced by the Westerners “I had lived with them superficially, neither loving nor hating them.”<sup>29</sup> But latter in the novel it is clear that he, too, is influenced by ex-colonizer’s culture. The influence

of Western culture and education upon the “been-tos” seem to be the reason for their alienation from their societies.

In many occasions, Mustafa Sa’eed is referred to as “a stranger”. He returns from England and chooses to live in a small village at the bend of the Nile. He buys a land and marries one of the girls of the village, Hosna Bint Mahmoud. From this, it is obvious that Mustafa tries to integrate in the village. He tries to forget about his experience in England and start a new life in Sudan. He is described by the father of the unnamed narrator as being “a stranger who had come here five years ago [...] a man who kept himself to himself and about whom not much was known”<sup>30</sup> As such, Mustafa is a person that is viewed by the villagers as a foreigner who does not belong to them. Despite Mustafa’s attempts to be recognized as a member of this village, he remains an outsider. It is because he imitates the Westerners during his journey abroad and becomes like them that he fails reintegrate within the villagers. In this sense Abdul Jabbar comments:

The Sudanese narrator cannot see Mustafa as one of them, despite Mustafa’s sincere attempts to assimilate, which indicates an initial failure on the mimetic level. Mustafa fails precisely because he has Anglicised himself to the point of no return.<sup>31</sup>

Mustafa seems to like his life in the village, he says to the unnamed narrator: “Life in this village is simple and gracious. The people are good and easy to get along with.”<sup>32</sup> He is shown as an introvert person who behaves differently from the other people of the village, as the unnamed narrator points about him “His excessive politeness was not lost on me, for the people of our village do not trouble themselves with expressions of courtesy”<sup>33</sup>. Thus, the protagonist is viewed throughout his polite intellect, respective conduct and behaviour toward his members of society that differentiate him from the villagers. Mustafa faces the trauma of the colonial ambivalence resulting from ‘mimicry’ marked by “a difference that is almost nothing but not quite –to menace- a difference that is almost total but not quite”<sup>34</sup>. The West

and East dichotomy results on perpetual uncertainty among the colonized. Mustafa is so obsessed with the idea of mimicking the other what generates his sense of alienation from his own society. Despite Mustafa's alienation during his life in the village, he is "always ready to give of his labour and his means in glad times and sad"<sup>35</sup> It is another example that shows that Mustafa really tries to be a member of his native society but his previous contact within the Westerners renders it impossible to reintegrate in the village.

In Salih's novel, as it is already said, Mustafa Sa'eed is not the only "been-to" who is alienated and isolated; but the unnamed narrator seems to be alienated too due to his Western education. M.Kolk asserts: "two intellectuals much influenced by 'foreign ideas' are lost near the river Nile –flowing from the South to the North."<sup>36</sup> Mustafa and the unnamed narrator are the product of colonial education. At the start of the novel, the unnamed narrator who just returns from Europe after seven years of studies there, is very excited and happy because he finally finds his people and home. He says:

I returned with a great yearning for my people in that small village at the bend of the Nile. For seven years I had longed for them, had dreamed of them, and it was an extraordinary moment when I at last found myself standing amongst them.<sup>37</sup>

In his return, he thinks that he is not alone but he stands among people that are dear to him and with whom he shares everything. After the events drag on, the unnamed narrator believes that he has lost his place within his homeland and that he is alone in a world he thinks he belongs to. "there is no room for me here. Why don't I pack up and go"<sup>38</sup> From this statement, one can understand that his mind is never at rest. He is alone because no one can understand him and he is no more like his fellow Sudanese people. Thus, he belongs to neither place, not that of East nor that of West. Nothing can convey his sense of stability. He believes that he is alienated due to the differences that occur between the world he left behind him and that one he is trying to regain. In other words, the unnamed narrator finds himself in two contradicting

positions, one asking for modernity and change and the other asking for tradition and ethnicity.

After Mustafa's suicide, the unnamed narrator considers himself as a person who is alone and lost. Speaking of the changes that occur to his life he says: "Outside, my world was a wide one; now it had contracted, had withdrawn upon itself, until I myself had become the world, no world existing outside of me"<sup>39</sup> meaning that, before, he lives in a society that he belongs to and now he feels as if he is without any relation that gives a sense to his life. It is difficult for him to find a person with whom to communicate and share his views. Even his friend, Mahjoub, doesn't understand him. When the unnamed narrator defends Hosna Bint Mahmoud after her crime, Mahjoub says to him:

Take a pull at yourself, man! Wake up! Fancy you falling in love at your age! You've become as mad as Wad Rayyes. Schooling and education have made you soft. You're crying like a woman.<sup>40</sup>

In this passage, Mahjoub declares that his friend is much influenced by his Western education; as a result, his way of thinking has changed. He no more shares the same beliefs as his people. His education has distanced him from his community. Accordingly, he became an alien within his people.

To sum up, the "been-tos" in *No Longer at Ease*, *Fragments* and *Season of Migration to the North* are unable to adapt in their native societies. They could not reintegrate in the society which they consider odd and too traditional. In fact, they are unable to bridge the two cultures. Their imitation of the Westerners leads them to be alien and lost in their motherland. They behave like Westerners and unwillingly they are thrown away from society. In fact, being a product of colonial education, the "been-tos" no longer feel at ease in their native countries. They are strangers among their people.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, 11.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>3</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 127.

<sup>4</sup> Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, 65.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>9</sup> Simon Gikandi, *Reading Chinua Achebe* (London: Heinemann, 1991), 96.

<sup>10</sup> Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, 64-65.

<sup>11</sup> Gikandi, *Reading Chinua Achebe*, 95.

<sup>12</sup> Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, 6.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Sakshi, *Colonial Conflicts leads to Alienation and Rootlessness in Achebe's No Longer at Ease*, 28.

<sup>15</sup> Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, 40.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>17</sup> Armah, *Fragments*, 102.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Armah, *Fragments*, 98.

<sup>21</sup> Armah, *Fragments*, 67.

<sup>22</sup> Mrarandi and Shadpour, *Education as an Ideological Instrument: A Postcolonial Reading of Chinua Achebe's No Longer at Ease*, 938-939.

<sup>23</sup> Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 122.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 104.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 97.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 88.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 86.

<sup>28</sup>Abdul Jabbar, *The Mimetic Discourse in Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to the North*, 131.

<sup>29</sup>Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, 49.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 2.

<sup>31</sup>Abdul Jabbar, *The Mimetic Discourse in Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to the North*, 132.

<sup>32</sup>Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, 9.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>34</sup>Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 131.

<sup>35</sup>Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, 7.

<sup>36</sup>M. Kolk, *East/West cultural differences as war between the sexes: 2. Tayeb Salih's 'Season of migration...' traveling to theatre in the North*. (2006), 135. Viewed 15 March 2015. <<http://hdl.handle.net/11245/2.77050>>.

<sup>37</sup>Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, 1.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 130.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 134.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 133.

### 3. Identity

Chinua Achebe is one of the writers who attempt to revive “African culture” and whose attention is to help his society to have belief in itself and forget the years of denigration. In fact, his writings remind us of the beauty of the African past history: religion, culture and identity. In this respect Taiwo claims:

One outstanding characteristic of West African writing is a return to the past- a past which was almost wiped out by two important historical events, the slave trade and colonialism. The writers attempt to recreate the simplicity and romantic attraction of traditional way of life of the African disrupted by his contact with the Western world; they show the devastating effect of this contact on his culture, which has led to his present dilemma.<sup>1</sup>

After the coming of the colonizer, the ancestral organization of African society is no longer given any importance. It is rather replaced by the Western mode of life. Everything is turned upside down. The conventional customs are questioned, identities and cultures are broken. The traditional system inscribed in people’s mind, which unifies and keeps them in agreement, is now threatened by an external menace which is that new system that the foreigner has already established. This is said in the words of one of the elders:

Iguedo breeds great men’ said Odogwu changing the subject. ‘When I was young I knew of them-Okonkwo, Ezeudu, Obierika[...]. These men were great in their day. Today greatness has changed its tune. Titles are no longer great, neither are barns or large numbers of wives and children. Greatness is now in the things of the white man. And so we too have changed our tune. We are the first in all the nine villages to send our son to the white man’s land. Greatness has belonged to Iguedo from ancient times.’<sup>2</sup>

Obi Okonkwo, the central character in *No Longer at Ease* is a typical educated Nigerian young man from Umuofia which is:

An Ibo village in Eastern Nigeria and the home town of Obi Okonkwo. It is not particularly big village but its inhabitants call it a town. They are very proud of its past when it was the terror of their neighbours, before the white man came and levelled everybody down.<sup>3</sup>

He grows up in a Christian family that creates on him a state of instability throughout his life.

This is lucidly expressed in Moanungsang's words:

Obi has been shaped by the traditional Igbo culture of Umuofia, the Christianity of his father, the idealism of English literature, and the corrupt sophistication of Lagos, but he is at ease nowhere.<sup>4</sup>

In *No Longer at Ease* Obi is portrayed as being unable to settle the conflict between his Nigerian origin and European acquired culture. He feels sick in both cultures. Thus, the title *No Longer at Ease* better reflects the dramatic situation into which the "been-to" Okonkwo falls in. Also, Obi's name in the novel is a combination of European and an African name. His name is Michael Obiajulu Okonkwo. This means that Okonkwo finds himself at the "cross-roads of culture"<sup>5</sup>; for he is not able to take any choice and to participate in decision-making in any meaningful way. That is to say he is in a state of ambivalence because on the one hand, he belongs to Ibo origins and on the other hand he receives Western values. Thus, "he cannot completely dissociate himself from the colonial culture which he has inherited from his father, nor can he totally identify with the Igbo culture of his ancestors."<sup>6</sup>

At the start of the novel, Obi in England keeps his allegiance intact "he could say any English word, no matter how dirty, but some Ibo words simply would not proceed from his mouth."<sup>7</sup> Just like Baako, Obi in England is proud of his Ibo culture to the extent that he felt ashamed of studying English. He proudly tells his classmates the story from the Ibo culture that his mother narrated to him. He even adds to the story his own imagination. Once Obi comes back home with his new degree he can no longer be at ease under such living conditions. He becomes "fascinated by what he was learning of this strange and sinful new world."<sup>8</sup> Everything has changed in Nigeria. It is not Nigeria he left behind him when he went to England. A situation better referred to by Moanungsang :

The world that Obi comes back to is not the world of his dreams, a country given to purity and sacrifice, but a world of corruption where it becomes very difficult to escape the vice-like grip of the evils rampant in all levels of life.<sup>9</sup>

The change in Africans' way of life pushes him to alienate and isolate himself from the members of his society. He is presented as being a character torn between the two sides that both of them contribute into his formation.

When he was in England, Obi was in a hurry to come back to his village, but after once home, he becomes disheartened by the situation in which he finds Nigeria. As a matter of fact, Obi loses all contact with his national cultural heritage. He forgets his wish for change and his will of cleansing Nigeria from its evils. He rather becomes a spendthrift man and a man who like going out with girls having fun with them. However, his family, the Umuofia Progressive Union and the government also contributes to Obi's tragic downfall and failure as well. Because they do not help him; they rather put on him pressure and they do not give him "time to look round first and know what is what."<sup>10</sup>

It is from Obi's childhood that he is deprived of knowing his real identity. His father Isaac was baptized early in his life. This isolates him from his kinsmen and sets him apart. They view him as an empty man who loses his self-respect and senses after a drop of palm wine. During all his life, Isaac is regarded as a man who forgets his origin and a man who loses his personal identity. He gives all his children two names: one Ibo and another Christian. He did not want his wife to tell her children African stories that should not be told in a Christian house. Also, his wife Hannah prevents her children from eating their neighbors' food and stops teaching her children the African heritage and identity.

Joseph is Obi's intimate friend; he is the first to try to stop him from going forward in his decision to marry Clara. Though Joseph's nonconformist behavior with the African culture in the sense that he permits himself to go around with girls spending good times, he

says to Obi: “what you are going to do concerns not only yourself but your whole family and future generations. If one finger brings oil it soils the others.”<sup>11</sup> Joseph is aware of the Western menace; he is aware that with the introduction of the Western mode of thoughts to Africa, it is the African identity that is threatened. So, Joseph tries in vain to make him think of the consequences of such an act. He also tries to draw Obi’s intention to the fact that his fellow Nigerian men will not accept to participate or even attend a wedding which goes against their sacred tradition and identity. “Are you going to marry the English way or are you going to ask your people to approach her people according to custom.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, one may deduce that Obi is badly influenced by the modern Western mode of life adding that he is distant from his own culture. Contrary to Obi, Joseph tries to help to rediscover his tradition and his culture. Moreover, Joseph is regarded as being a character who submits to the pleasures of the modern society, but he does not dare do anything which will affect or harm the rooted African identity.

As far as Chinua Achebe’s concerned, Ayi kwei Armah sheds light on the prevailing injustices not only during the colonial era but also during the post-colonial Ghana. “Armah may be read as leading us to conclude that the effects [of the colonizer’s presence and absence] are similar.”<sup>13</sup> In this respect, one may say that his novels give an image of the breaking down and fragmented way of life the Ghanaian tribes suffer from. With the coming of the colonizer to Africa, the ancestral organization and the tribal system of life are no longer respected. They are either neglected or completely rejected; all the old values are replaced by worthless ones. The Africans adopt the Western mode of life putting aside their glorious ancient values and ideals. They tend to speak, behave and get dressed exactly the way the western man does. Again, the Africans are most of the time reinterpreting the attitudes and values of the West instead of glorifying their rooted traditional communal values. In this context Bhabha says “Mimicry repeats rather than represents”<sup>14</sup>. Meaning that all those

Africans who imitate the ex-colonizers in their mode of thinking and behaving are not advancing, they are only repeating what has been already created by the white men.

In *Fragments*, Baako as a Western educated young man has been a victim of his acquired culture since it creates in him a feeling of disillusionment and despair as well. Baako is in a constant search for his identity. His Twi name corresponds to “a man”; he may be anyone but no one. In this context, professor Riche Bouteldja in his article: *Women, Men, Tradition, and Modernity in Efua Sutherland’s New Life at Kyerefaso and Ayi Kwei Armah’s Fragments* claims “both Baako and Araba’s child remain nameless in the novel because they have not yet been integrated in the community of the living.”<sup>15</sup> The fact of being a nameless character is very significant. The character, in fact, stands for the many “been-to” returners who are not able to identify themselves with their society after having received the Western education. This means that he is unable to locate himself either to belong to Europeans or to belong to his native Ghanaian society. Thus, Baako’s mind is never at rest. His state is rather better expressed by the very title of the novel *Fragments*. Baako is torn between the two cultures. He feels ill at ease in both cultures. Thus, one may say that he remains in between occupying an ambivalent place being unable to react or to side any of the two opposing sides.

Throughout the novel, Baako’s family members are divided on the basis of expectations they have on his journey abroad. Thus, his life is affected by these expectations that his family hold on his trip outside motherland. His mother Efua and his sister in law Araba are expecting him to be transformed into a rich and powerful man. While his grandmother Naana wants him to gain spiritual returns from the journey and to gain also a spiritual wisdom to invest it for the benefit of the whole Ghanaian community. This kind of expectations on the part of his family members and society are causing Baako’s moral instability. For, he himself wants to become a wise man. So, one may say that he is unable to settle himself in a society obsessed by materialistic wealth. He cannot identify himself with

the members of his society only because he is hesitating either to come to the materialistic desires that his mother and sister hold on his journey or to become that wise and strong man his grandmother wishes to see before dying. Furthermore, he is not able to make up his mind since his identity has been destroyed by such appetite for materialistic things rather than moral values.

At the dawn of the novel, we see Baako as someone who owes respect and allegiance to the history of his country and to Ghanaian culture “we have inherited a glorious culture”<sup>16</sup>. Here, Baako is valorizing his culture to the extent that he expresses himself openly in front of Asante-Smith and in front of all the staff working in the Ghanavision. He also adds that “Slavery is a central part of that culture, isn’t it?”<sup>17</sup> Baako wants his colleagues to understand that he is a person who cares a lot for the history of his culture. He is proud of his Ghanaian culture and of its past history. But, he is astonished by the reaction of his colleagues and of the dismissing silence that reigned over the room where they gathered. He is also more shocked when Asante-Smith says to him that “what you’ve just said has nothing to do with our people’s culture -all this slavery, survival, the brand”<sup>18</sup> Baako does not expect such a kind of answer. Baako is furiously surprised by his colleagues’ carelessness and inability to understand or even to believe what Baako has just declared in front of all the Ghanavision staff working. He becomes fascinated by all the great changes that have taken place both in Ghana and within the mind of its population.

Consequently, all this contributed in his self-destruction and alienation from society. He is not able to fight for any of the two poles that constitute his whole. He is rather caught up in between these two sides that he can never join together. For this, one may deduce that Baako suffers from an identity crisis since he is unable to locate himself. One can add that, he cannot identify himself neither with his Ghanaian origin nor with his western education. Baako is nowhere for, he is lost between the two totally contradicting identities.



In addition to the glorification of his culture, Baako admiringly speaks of the Ghanaian myth with his expatriate girlfriend Juana on the shore. He is firmly convinced that “the myths here [in Ghana] are good”<sup>19</sup>. This means that such kinds of stories are of great importance to him. And these stories have to be taught from generation to another. For him, the Ghanaian myths must be preserved and must be prevented from loss. However, he desperately adds that these stories are outstanding if they are used in a good way. In this context, he says in a low voice “Only their use ...”<sup>20</sup> meaning that he is terribly sorry for, his society members and fellow Ghanaian men have misused these stories. In fact, such kind of carelessness on the part of his fellow men engenders Baako’s uncertainty. He is not able to place himself within the members of his society. This causes his identity fragmentation and moral unrest. He always puts his identity into question whether he belongs to the Western world or to the Ghanaian land where he spent his early young age. His identity is broken because of the great changes that have taken place in Ghana. It is worth noting that Baako escapes into madness as a gesture of final rejection of his society annihilated mode of thoughts.

As it is the case of the two previous authors Achebe and Armah, Tayeb Salih in *Season of Migration to the North* illustrates how the colonial encounter generates the sense of cultural identity through the two central characters, Mustafa Sa’eed and the unnamed narrator. He problematizes the conflict that results from the encounter of the European and African worlds, shedding light on the “been-tos” ambivalent life engendered by the meeting of the two. Both of them suffer from identity loss due to the feeling of confusion that results from the confrontation of the two cultures. They leave Sudan to study in England and return as estranged intellectuals. In this sense, Kolk asserts:

Marked as a turning point in the 20<sup>th</sup> century travel-narratives that focus on East-West encounters, *Season of Migration to the North* was the first example of the non-Western novel dealing with the experience of exile and colonial humiliation, but above all with the loss of identity of a ‘native outsider’, both in the European diaspora and the homeland.<sup>21</sup>

Mustafa Sa'eed is much marked by his experience in the West. He wants to become English as Abdul Jabbar claims "In Mustafa's case, the desired transformation is almost complete. He becomes a menace to his native people as he no longer is like them."<sup>22</sup> As such, Mustafa's will of becoming a western man has approximately been achieved. He is no longer in need for the colonizer's paternalism and guidance. He is now speaking the English language more fluently. He left Sudan for England, more importantly; his marriage with an English white woman permitted him to get the English nationality. However, this transformation into English is considered as being a menace to his fellow Sudanese. They fear him because he is different from them since he is affected by the western communal values. His behaviour and way of perceiving things is distinct from that of his fellowmen. Even the unnamed narrator who just returns from England notices that he is not like the villagers "It's clear you're someone other than the person you claim to be"<sup>23</sup> Mustafa's mimicking of the white man results in his loss of identity. His behaviour is no longer like that of his fellow Sudanese. The narrator affirms:

His excessive politeness was not lost on me, for the people of our village do not trouble themselves with expressions of courtesy –they enter upon a subject at one fell swoop, visit you at noon or evening, and don't trouble to apologize.<sup>24</sup>

It is clear that the identity of Mustafa is not like that of the villagers. His excessive politeness may be inherited from the West because as the unnamed narrator refers to, the villagers do not care too much for being too polite with the others.

The identity shift that marks Mustafa prevents his reintegration among the villagers. He wants to regain his society but his previous assimilation in England lead him to be a foreigner in his country. So, Mustafa's identity is not recognizable; for he belongs neither to the English nor to the Sudanese. Even in Sudan, Mustafa maintains his ties with England through a private hallowed place to preserve European culture and philosophies which shows

his great influence of the British culture. That is to say, even if Mustafa resettles in his homeland, he is always haunted by his past.

According to Bhabha “[...] ‘partial’ representation rearticulates the whole notion of identity”<sup>25</sup> In the case of Mustafa Sa’eed, the desire to be more like the English is a partial identity. Receiving Western education and having relations with English women means to be accessible, giving partial access to European identity and therefore losing his African identity. The unnamed narrator seems to be uncertain of his identity. He seems to be aware of his lost identity right from the beginning of the novel. He is happy to be back home. He feels at ease in his village within his people. It is a sensation that he has lost during his life abroad. For him, the cold climate of England has had effect on his soul

I [the nameless narrator] were [sic] some frozen substance on which the sun had shone –that life warmth of the tribe which I had lost for a time in a land ‘whose fishes die of cold.’<sup>26</sup>

Abroad, the unnamed narrator was impatient to regain his place within his society. He is not able to adapt himself to the social environment of England. He misses the mutual affection between him and his society members. Again, he highly esteems social, communal and tribal atmosphere in his homeland. Thus, his return home is of a great psychological release for him as if he was kept in jail in England.

The nameless narrator is identifying himself within the people of his village and he acknowledges his sense of belonging. As he indicates: “I felt not like a storm swept feather but like that palm tree, a being with a background, with roots, with a purpose.”<sup>27</sup> In this sense, Patricia Geesey comments: “[...] the sight of the tree with its solidly sunken roots aids him in feeling reaffirmed in his own identity.”<sup>28</sup> The narrator tries to convince himself of his belonging. This shows his uncertain attitude toward his own cultural identity, as he constantly finds the need to assert his identity in the village. Later in the novel he adds:

I know this village street by street, house by house; I know too the ten domed shrines that stand in the middle of the cemetery on the edge of the desert high at the top of the village; the graves too I know one by one, having visited them with my father and mother and with my grandfather. I know those who inhabit these graves, both those who died before my father was born and those who have died since my birth. I have walked in more than a hundred funeral processions, have helped with the digging of the grave and have stood alongside it in the crush of people as the dead man was cushioned around with stones and the earth heaped in over him. Heaped in over him.<sup>29</sup>

The surrounding of the narrator reminds him of his roots, his ancestors and the history of his country. He compares it with Europe:

By the standard of the European industrial world we are poor peasants, but when I embrace my grandfather I experience a sense of richness as though I am a note in the heart-beats of the very universe.<sup>30</sup>

The narrator uses contrasting terms to compare the standard of living of European countries and Sudan. He realizes that his identity is not determined by social class or wealth but rather by the achievement of his ancestors. The narrator shows a sign of appreciation toward his hometown and realizes that luxury and status do not define him, but rather the pride of his heritage. He seems to be able to detach himself from his European life by understanding the true identity. This assurance is superficial, the narrator finds it difficult to adapt in his native land, and he finally admits “There is no room for me here. Why don’t I pack up and go?”<sup>31</sup>

As a conclusion, the “been-tos” characters in the three novels suffer from a crisis of identity due to the feeling of confusion which results from the confrontation of the two cultures. That is to say, their access to western identity leads them to lose their African identity and forget about their origins. In short, this category of African intellectuals is no more able to share the same values and ideals with their African society members.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Taiwo, *An Introduction to West African Literature*, 29.

<sup>2</sup> Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, 49.

- <sup>3</sup> Ibid., 4.
- <sup>4</sup> Moanungsang, *Death of Native Cultures in Chinua Achebe's No Longer at Ease*, 215.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid., 215.
- <sup>6</sup> Gikandi, *Reading Chinua Achebe*, 98.
- <sup>7</sup> Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, 41.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid., 13.
- <sup>9</sup> Moanungsang, *Death of Native Cultures in Chinua Achebe's No Longer at Ease*, 218.
- <sup>10</sup> Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, 73.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., 67-68.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid., 48.
- <sup>13</sup> Gurnah, *Essays on African Writing*, 6.
- <sup>14</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 125.
- <sup>15</sup> Bouteldja Riche, 'Women, Men, Tradition, and Modernity in Efuwa Sutherland's *New Life at Kyerefaso* and Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments*', *Revue Campus* 07 (2007): 70-71.
- <sup>16</sup> Armah, *Fragments*, 147.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid., 120
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> Kolk, *East/West cultural differences as war between the sexes*, 131.
- <sup>22</sup> Abdul Jabbar, *The Mimetic Discourse in Tayeb Salih's Season of migration to the North*, 134.
- <sup>23</sup> Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, 15.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., 7.
- <sup>25</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 127.
- <sup>26</sup> Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, 1.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>28</sup> Geesey, *Cultural Hybridity and Contamination in Tayeb Salih's Mawsim al-hijra ila al-shamal (Season of Migration to the North)*, 131.

<sup>29</sup> Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, 47.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 130.

## V. Conclusion

Throughout this humble study, we have tried to provide a possibility to bring together three authors from three distinct countries, socially and culturally different backgrounds but who deal with the same themes. By a close reading of the three works namely *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Fragments* (1969) and *Season of Migration to the North* (1969), we can conclude that the “been-tos”, who are the source of hope to bring light to their own countries, are ambivalent as regard to their identity.

The work starts by a general introduction wherein the review of literature about the topic is included. Then, we have tried to give a short account for the theory borrowed and short definitions for “been-to”, cultural clash, alienation and identity, four recurrent words throughout all the discussion section. Finally, by making reference to the chosen theory namely Bhabha’s, we have tried to analyse the themes of clash of culture, alienation and isolation, in addition to identity in the three works.

Throughout a close reading of the three novels, we conclude that any “been-to” who leaves his country for Europe or America becomes an alienated individual among his society members. He no longer shares the same traditional beliefs as his fellow Africans only because his received education has strongly affected his way of conceiving and doing things. Thus, he comes to reject his traditions and customs that he considers as being odd and senseless. The chosen writers have succeeded to give a very representative image of the state of disorder which many African “been-tos” face after their coming back from the West. In fact, the “been-tos” do not show any concern to improve their living conditions at home due to the cultural and social changes that have occurred in their homelands during their journey abroad.

Many critics have considered that Achebe’s, Armah’s and Salih’s novels portray the living conditions of the African societies after independence. Those societies are strongly

affected by the ex-colonizer. That is to say, the postcolonial Africans have inherited from the former colonizer many habits that have contributed to their change. This leads to people's loss of their rooted traditions and customs. Moreover, this work can be extended to further works by dealing for instance, with the theme of change that joins the three novels together. Said differently, African people, after independence, have adopted illegal means like bribery and corruption to realize their personal interests.



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