

## No Longer at Ease by Chinua Achebe



Review by: Lauren Evans

From the author of *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* comes Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, his second book in the African trilogy and one that was published in 1960, the year Nigeria received its independence from England. I had already read the first and third book in this trilogy and was excited to pick this one up. The book is set in the 1950s with Obi Okonkwo, the grandson of main character Okonkwo from *Things Fall Apart*, returning to Nigeria from England, where he had gone to receive his education. The story opens with Obi on trial for having accepted a bribe, then goes back to the pre-trial past to give us an idea of how he ended up there and ends with the story returning full circle.

Obi went to England on scholarship to pursue a degree in English. After returning to Nigeria and his hometown of Umuofia, he takes a position with the Scholarship Board as the Administrative Assistant to the Inspector of Schools. Soon after, he's offered a bribe by a man who is trying to get a scholarship for his little sister. The girl even visits Obi and offers to bribe him with sex, but Obi turns it down, even though he is tempted because of severe financial hardship. While all this is going on, Obi develops a romantic relationship with Clara Okeke, a Nigerian woman he met while in England who is an "osu," an outcast looked down upon by her descendants. Obi cannot marry her under the traditional ways of the Igbo people of Nigeria – his father and mother strongly oppose it, with his mother saying that she will kill herself if the marriage happens. When Clara hears the news, she tells Obi she is pregnant, and he arranges for her to have an illegal abortion that lead to health and financial complications. Then, Obi's mother passes away.

In dealing with the death of his mother and trying to juggle repaying his school loan, paying for his siblings' education and helping Clara with her abortion, Obi sinks into deep depression. Accepting bribes seems like the only way out, so Obi accepts many of them, until he gets to a point where he has paid off all his debts and can no longer live a life of corruption and guilt. He takes one last bribe, only to get caught in a sting operation. He is arrested, and the story comes full circle, taking us back to where we started.

I found it interesting that Obi's birth name is *Obiajulu* which means "the mind at last is at rest" – quite the irony, considering the title of the novel and the fact that Obi is caught between two worlds in a generation of change. Even though *No Longer at Ease* condemns the system of

corruption and bribery that exists within modern Nigeria, we also see that there are clear advantages to it.