



## **Focalizing Chinua Achebe's No Longer at Ease: Mitigating and Aggravating Factors in Obi Okonkwo's Corruption Scandal**



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### **Article history:**

Submitted: 09 July 2021

Revised: 27 August 2021

Accepted: 18 Sept 2021

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### **Keywords:**

*Chinua Achebe;*  
*corruption scandal;*  
*criminological concepts;*  
*focalizing;*  
*mitigating and aggravating factors;*

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### **Abstract**

This essay employs criminological concepts to examine a corruption scandal in *No Longer at Ease*, a fictional work by the illustrious African writer, Chinua Achebe. The essay concludes from an examination of myriad contextual factors that Obi Okonkwo's bribe-taking act was precipitated by a conglomeration of unfortunate events that dogged the auspicious life of a young college graduate. Rather than categorically chastise Obi Okonkwo for economic malfeasance, one must consider the context—the multiple competing financial demands that he was saddled with, coupled with the difficult social and cultural situation he was embroiled in. Unlike some notorious bribe-takers elsewhere who demand or accept money with impunity to indulge in extravagant displays of opulence, Obi Okonkwo took bribe money primarily to defray pressing financial obligations towards family and to maintain a lifestyle that was forced upon him by the arrant expectations of his society. He succumbed to the crime only after refusing numerous bribe offers and only after engaging in torturous calisthenics with his conscience, a process known in criminology as techniques of neutralization.

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## 1 Introduction

Chinua Achebe is considered one of the greatest African novelists of all times. His literary works have been the subject of numerous popular and academic commentaries (Adinkrah, 2013; Cămpu, 2013; Emenyonu & Uko, 2004; Innes, 1992). In this essay, the authors examine in-depth Obi Okonkwo's bribe-taking offense in Chinua Achebe's second novel, *No Longer at Ease* (1961). Applying criminological concepts to the analysis, we argue that mitigating circumstances far outweighed aggravating circumstances in the bribery scandal and that Okonkwo deserved a lenient sentence at the sentencing phase of the criminal trial. Evidence is marshalled to demonstrate that there were several extenuating circumstances which called for the imposition of a lenient sentence on Obi Okonkwo. In criminological jargon, mitigating or extenuating circumstances are circumstances that make one's deviant action less serious, even forgivable. In Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, Obi Okonkwo, a 26-year-old senior civil servant, was apprehended by police and adjudicated by the courts for accepting a £20 bribe. He was found guilty and was about to be sentenced for this economic malfeasance. The imposed sentence was not revealed in the book. The position of this paper is that while Obi Okonkwo was patently legally culpable for accepting the bribe, there were several extenuating circumstances that demand thorough review and consideration before penalization. These extenuating factors, it is argued, justify the imposition of a lenient sentence (Achebe, 2017).

### *No longer at ease: a synopsis of the book*

Obi Okonkwo, the protagonist in *No Longer at Ease*, was a young, academically brilliant student. Upon graduating from high school, he accepted a scholarship from the Umuofia Progressive Union—a voluntary association of Umuofian migrants working in Lagos—to go to England to pursue a university education. The scholarship was worth £800. Under the terms of the scholarship, Obi Okonkwo agreed to reimburse the Union the total sum of £800 in forty monthly instalments of £20 each. It was also implied that Okonkwo would return to Nigeria to occupy a position in the Nigerian Civil Service and from his vantage position in the Civil Service, Obi would be able to provide assistance to fellow townfolk in need of social assistance and connections to succeed in the harsh economic conditions of Lagos. As expected, Obi Okonkwo returned from England and acquired a reputable job in the Federal Civil Service as Secretary to the Scholarship Commission. In this position, he vetted and provided the Commission with abridged lists of qualified candidates who had applied for Nigerian government scholarship for university study overseas. The Commission would then make a final selection based on the applicant's performance at an interview conducted by the Scholarship Commission (Jalali & Ansari-pour, 2014; Costas-Pérez et al., 2012).

Obi Okonkwo faced numerous financial challenges when he returned to Nigeria. Within weeks of commencing employment, he was to begin to recompense the Umuofia Progressive Union for the cost of his university education overseas. In addition, he began providing monthly financial assistance to his impoverished and aging parents. He also took upon himself the social and moral responsibility of paying the medical bills of his ailing and dying mother and the tuition and other school fees of his two younger brothers. Amidst all these financial obligations, he was confronted with the burdensome social expectation of leading a lifestyle deemed worthy of a foreign-educated, university graduate employed in the senior civil service. He was besieged by scholarship applicants and their relatives with bribery money, in exchange for professional favors and influence. In the end, he collected a £20 bribe offered by an undercover law enforcement officer. Okonkwo was convicted of the crime. The book concludes with Okonkwo standing in a packed courtroom about to be sentenced for the offense (Solé-Ollé & Sorribas-Navarro, 2018; Fan et al., 2008).

### *Mitigating factors or extenuating circumstances*

#### *Obi Okonkwo was young and immature*

Although an adult by chronological age, Obi Okonkwo was only 26 years old when he committed the criminal act. It can be submitted in mitigation that he was still young and immature in his thinking. An older, more mature person might have been able to exercise proper judgement or circumspection, able to fully resist the temptations of bribe-taking. He might also have exercised greater caution to ensure that he did not get caught. Alternatively, he might also have taken other socially palatable steps and non-criminal actions to deal with his financial challenges. For example, he might have been humble enough to swallow his pride and ask for deferment of payments to the Umuofia Progressive Union. Indeed, Okonkwo had initially appealed to the Umuofia Progressive Union for deferment of loan payments for four months and had been granted such deferment (Hebenton & Jou, 2008; Schilling et al., 2011).

However, when the President of the Union alluded to Okonkwo's relationship with Clara, Okonkwo was enraged by what he regarded as unfitting interference in his private life and rejected the offer.

*Obi Okonkwo has been shamed enough*

Every form of criminal sanction, or punishment, embodies some element of shame. From the payment of a monetary fine to penal incarceration to the implementation of the death penalty, the defendant suffers some degree of shame or disgrace. For Obi Okonkwo, the shame and disgrace came even before the pronouncement of his official sentence. A review of the book shows that Obi Okonkwo suffered extensive pre-sentence humiliation, shame, or disgrace. His trial had been "the talk of Lagos for a number of weeks". The trial had been very well-attended by both sympathizers and detractors alike. The reader learns that "every available space in the court-room was taken up. There were almost as many people standing as sitting". Typically, in such packed courtrooms, along with the sympathizers and detractors, are gossip purveyors and others more interested in gawking at the defendant than observing the proceedings. The shame and disgrace suffered by Obi is unlikely to dissipate and Okonkwo will carry the badge of dishonor for some time. Even after his release from prison, if he was to receive a custodial sentence, or satisfaction of any imposed penalties, he may be unable to secure a good job in the future even with his university education. He may be stigmatized for life. Many who attended the trial will be able to recognize him in public, outside the courtroom. It is fair to argue that such public humiliation and disgrace will follow Okonkwo after his release back into society, if he were to receive a custodial sentence. For these reasons, it is needless to sentence him to a long prison term. He has been sufficiently shamed, even prior to the imposition of an official sentence (Bredart & Modolo, 1988; Laurent et al., 2005).

*Bribe-taking was not an unprecedented crime*

Although Obi Okonkwo accepted a bribe, his behavior was not unprecedented in Nigerian society and employment circles. Corruption and bribe-taking was rampant in Nigerian society during the era of Obi's bribe-taking scandal. Indeed, both African and Nigerian senior civil servants were said to be in the habit of accepting bribes in exchange for employment, scholarships and promotions. Although bribe-taking was a criminal offense, not many people seemed to be deterred by the law that criminalized it. Bribe-takers merely took steps to ensure that they did not get caught. Only occasionally was a bribe-taker caught and prosecuted. A few examples of bribe-taking or corruption in the novel will illustrate the extent of bribery and corruption in Nigerian society at the time (Kaplan et al., 2014; Degirmenci et al., 2021). First, just prior to Okonkwo's disembarkation from the boat which brought him from London to Lagos, the customs officer who was sent to assess customs duty on his belongings deliberately came up with a hefty duty. When Okonkwo protested, the officer offered to reduce the amount if Obi decided not to take a receipt for the amount he paid to him. Also, at the reception organized for him by the Umuofia Progressive Union, Obi Okonkwo described an impending job interview with the Scholarship Board. In response, the Vice President of the Union suggested "seeing" [i.e. bribing] the people on the interview board ahead of Obi appearing before the board. It was then suggested by the President that "It would not be necessary since they would be mostly white men". To this statement, the Vice President retorted "You think white men don't eat bribe? Come to our department. They eat more than black men nowadays". Further evidence of the endemic nature of bribe-taking was evident during Obi Okonkwo's interview for a civil service position. One of the members of the interview board asked Okonkwo: "Why do you want a job in the Civil service? So that you can take bribes?". Though in his response Obi described the question as foolish and unnecessary, the fact that the question was asked at all was suggestive of the pervasive nature of bribe-taking in the civil service. Consider also the circumstances surrounding one Joshua Udo's job termination from the Post Office:

Joshua Udo, a messenger in the Post Office, had been sacked for sleeping while on duty. According to him, he had not been sleeping but thinking. But the Chief Clerk had been looking for a way to deal with him since he had not completed the payment of ten pounds' bribe which he had promised when he was employed. Joshua was now asking his countrymen [the Umuofia Progressive Union] to 'borrow' him ten pounds [to be used as a bribe] to look for another job.

Another point worth noting! Even with the huge publicity surrounding Obi Okonkwo's bribe-taking scandal, his conviction and pending sentencing, people did not recoil from the taking of bribes. Some civil servants were still

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offering, and some doctors were still receiving money to obtain or dole out, respectively, fake slips purporting illness in order that they would be able to attend Obi Okonkwo's trial:

Every available space in the courtroom was taken up. There were almost as many people standing as sitting. The case had been the talk of Lagos for a number of weeks and on this last day anyone who could possibly leave his job was there to hear the judgement. Some Civil Servants paid as much as ten shillings and sixpence to obtain a doctor's certificate of illness for the day (emphasis mine).

#### *Okonkwo's crime is not a violent crime*

Obi Okonkwo's bribe-taking offense falls under the ambit of a non-violent white-collar crime. American sociologist, Edwin Sutherland, who coined the term white collar crime in 1939, used the term to designate "a crime committed by a person of respectability and high social status in the course of his occupation" (Sutherland, 1940). Examples of white-collar crime include insider trading, embezzlement, bribery, fraud, identity theft, and copyright infringement. Obi Okonkwo's bribe-taking is an example of a white-collar crime. Okonkwo was a senior civil servant who accepted a monetary bribe designed to influence his decision regarding a scholarship. This is not a violent crime or a serious crime of violence against a person, like murder, rape, aggravated assault or robbery where the victim suffers death or severe physical injuries. Okonkwo did not pose a danger to society in terms of ability to inflict physical injuries on his victims. On that basis, it can be argued in mitigation that Okonkwo should be given a non-custodial sentence (Kaur, 2017; Arsawati, 2016).

#### *Obi Okonkwo was remorseful*

Obi Okonkwo was extremely remorseful for his crime. For this, one could argue in mitigation that he deserved a lenient sentence. From *No Longer at Ease*, one learns that it was not in Obi Okonkwo's nature to show softness. But at his trial, there were unequivocal signs of expression of remorse for his crime. Indeed, throughout the book, Obi Okonkwo was a very proud and uncompromising person. Yet, when it came time for his sentencing, he shed tears: "Traucherous tears came into Obi's eyes. He brought out a white handkerchief and rubbed his face. He even tried to smile and belie the tears". For a remorseful convict, a mitigating sentence is justified. One may also argue in mitigation for Obi Okonkwo that he did not relish the taking of bribes. Indeed, he resented taking bribes. Consider the following excerpt from the book:

Then one day someone brought twenty pounds. As the man left, Obi realized that he could stand it no more. People say that one gets used to these things, but he had not found it like that at all. Every incident had been a hundred times worse than the one before it. The money lay on the table. He would have preferred not to look in its direction, but he seemed to have no choice. He just sat looking at it, paralyzed by his thoughts [Emphasis added].

#### *Okonkwo was a spendthrift, not extravagant*

Some readers of *No Longer at Ease* might suggest that Obi Okonkwo was an extravagant spender who accepted monetary bribes to subsidize his extravagant lifestyle. However, following a careful review of the book, one finds little substance in this claim. Indeed, nothing in the book demonstrates that Obi Okonkwo was an extravagant spender whose unwise spending habits contributed to his bribe-taking offense. The bribes that Obi Okonkwo took did not go to satisfy profligate or extravagant tastes and habits. The bribes went to repay urgently needed loans he had taken and to offset some of his modest but pressing expenditures. In the excerpt below, the reader learns about the reasons for Obi Okonkwo's pressing need for additional money:

Obi was finding it more and more impossible to live on what was left of his forty-seven pounds ten after he had paid twenty to the Umuofia Progressive Union and sent ten to his parents. Even now he had no idea where John's school fees for next term would come from. No, one could not say he had no need of money .  
No one can say I have been extravagant. If I had not sent thirty-five pounds at the end of last month to pay for mother's treatment in a private hospital, I would have been all right—or if not exactly all right, at least above water .

Indeed, to help alleviate his financial quagmire, Okonkwo took stringent steps to live within his means. Early on when Obi Okonkwo realized that his salary would not adequately maintain his lifestyle, or the lifestyle he was expected to live, he took austere measures to stay within budget. This was despite the palpable discomfiture that those austere measures would bring him. Recall that he rebuked his houseboy and cook for using too much meat to

prepare his soup, saying he (Obi Okonkwo) was not a “millionaire”. Okonkwo also told the cook that he would give him money to shop at the market only once a week instead of the hitherto daily schedule he was used to. Other austerity measures included pruning the number of electric bulbs per electric switch in his apartment from two to one. Furthermore, he ordered his houseboy to turn off the refrigerator every evening at 7 p.m. and to keep it off until 12 noon. Moreover, Okonkwo switched off the water heater in his apartment, stating that henceforth he would bathe in chilly water. This meant that Obi Okonkwo was willing to experience discomfort to deal with his financial difficulties. On page 125, in preparing to go on a trip to visit his parents during his annual leave, Okonkwo subjected himself to taking a cold bath despite his loathing of cold baths, all in the name of saving money or staying within budget. The author writes: “He hated cold baths, but he could not afford to switch on the electric heater”. In addition, although Obi Okonkwo had a two-week leave to spend at the village with his family and friends, he elected to spend only a week there, cutting short the vacation for financial reasons. The author writes:

Although he had two weeks, he proposed to spend only one at home for reasons of money. To home people, leave meant the return of the village boy who had made good in the town, and everyone expected to share in his good fortune (emphasis added).

### *Non-shareable financial problems*

Sociologist, criminologist, and penologist, Donald R. Cressey, coined the phrase nonshareable financial problems to describe a series of financial problems that propel the financial elite to commit economic crimes, including embezzlement. Oftentimes, the nonshareable financial problems facing these men were “booze, bookies and bimbos.” Booze refers to problems with alcohol and costly illicit drugs. Men facing illicit drug problems have an extreme desire to fulfill this addiction and tend to embezzle funds entrusted in their care to pay for this addiction. Bookies refers to a gambling habit. People who have a gambling addiction will go to every length to obtain money to sustain their gambling habit. In the absence of funds, they will engage in criminal acts such as embezzlement of funds entrusted to their care, using the money to sustain the gambling addiction. Bimbos refers to womanizing. Excessive womanizing is said to be a very financially costly habit. When confronted with the shortage of money, some will engage in economic malfeasance crimes to pay for this habit. [Cressey \(1953\)](#), wrote:

Trusted persons become trust violators when they conceive of themselves as having a financial problem which is non-shareable, are aware that this problem can be secretly resolved by violation of the position of financial trust, and are able to apply to their own conduct in that situation verbalizations which enable them to adjust their conceptions of themselves as trusted persons with their conceptions of themselves as users of the entrusted funds or property.

In applying the concept to Obi Okonkwo’s situation, one finds that Okonkwo, at the time of his criminal offense had a strong need for money—to maintain his lifestyle as a “been-to” and a senior civil servant. He needed, for example, to drive a posh vehicle, live in a luxurious flat, and to hire a chauffeur and a personal cook. He also needed to take care of his ailing mother, feed his hungry parents and pay the fees of his younger brothers. He was also dating a woman with expensive tastes and was eager to marry her. Yet, his salary as a new senior civil servant was not adequate. So, he succumbed to the temptations of taking a bribe to maintain the status quo and to maintain his standard of living. In the end, he was caught taking the bribe. At this juncture, it is pertinent to scrupulously examine Obi Okonkwo’s financial situation. He was paid approximately £47 and 10 shillings. Out of this, he paid £20 monthly to the Umuofia Progressive Union. He then remitted £10 to his parents. This left him with less than £20. His electricity bill was £5 monthly, leaving him with less than £15. Out of this money he must pay his monthly car note, monthly car insurance premium, his property tax, the wages of his chauffeur, the wages of his houseboy, the school fees of his younger brothers and his food bill. At the time that he collected the bribe, Obi Okonkwo had to pay £30 to replace four worn-out tires under his car and £4 a quarter to renew his automobile license. He must also pay a hefty £42 annually to renew his auto insurance policy. Let us consider Obi Okonkwo’s financial situation as he set off to visit his family on February 10:

Obi had exactly thirty-four pounds, nine and three pence when he set out. Twenty-five pounds was his local leave allowance, which was paid to all senior Civil Servants for no other reason than that they went on local leave. The rest was the remains of his January salary. With thirty-four pounds one might possibly last two weeks at home, although a man like Obi, with a car and a ‘European post’, would normally be expected to do better. But sixteen pounds ten shillings was to go into brother John’s school fees for the second term which began in April. Obi knew that unless he paid the fees now that he had a lump sum in his pocket he might not be able to do so when the time came.

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*Obi Okonkwo was an unlucky guy: when it rains, it pours*

Obi Okonkwo was an unlucky man. There were many instances in his young life when multiple, challenging adversities occurred simultaneously, making it extremely difficult for him to extricate himself. In the end, he could not overcome these concurrent challenges. At one point when he faced multiple financial commitments that needed to be fulfilled and was in desperate need for cash, he discovered that Clara was pregnant with his baby. Clara did not want to keep the baby and proposed having an abortion. Obi immediately had to raise £30 from outside sources to pay for the abortion. One must also remember that the sum of £50 which Clara loaned him was stolen from the glove compartment of Obi's car while the pair went to a nightclub. All these mishaps, it can be argued, occurred during tough times. As a counterargument, one could say that Okonkwo was simply foolish and imprudent. Given the massive looming opposition to his marriage to Clara, the couple should have taken preventative action to ensure that Clara did not get pregnant. They could have waited until his relationship had received his family's approval to begin to have unprotected sex.

*Lack of proper mentorship*

It can be argued in mitigation that Obi Okonkwo lacked adequate mentorship on the job which led to or compounded his economic problems—a situation that ultimately resulted in his acceptance of a bribe. In typical or effective mentorship relationships, a more experienced person on the job provides guidance and counseling to an incoming employee to help them navigate the environment to succeed in the new position. As a new university graduate and employee in the civil service, Obi Okonkwo should have been appointed a mentor who would guide and counsel him about the nature of the job, emoluments, entitlements, and taxes. One finds that many financial bills sprung up on Obi Okonkwo. He was unaware of the nature of the bills and the deadlines for making those payments. Since he was unaware of them, he could not effectively plan to deal with them. Even in bribe-taking, it was Obi Okonkwo's lack of experience that contributed to his getting caught. A mentor could have advised Obi Okonkwo on how to manage his salary wisely to avoid the possibility of overspending and mismanagement. A mentor could also have counseled him about the negative consequences of accepting a bribe, or even counseled him about the proper ways of taking bribes to ensure he did not get caught. Consider these comments made at a meeting of the Umuofia Progressive Union following Okonkwo's conviction for bribe-taking:

The President said it was a thing of shame for a man in the senior service to go to prison for twenty pounds. He repeated twenty pounds, spitting it out. 'I am against people reaping where they have not sown. But we have a saying that if you want to eat a toad you must look for a fat and juicy one.' 'It is all lack of experience,' said another man. 'he should not have accepted the money himself. What others do is tell you to go and hand it to their houseboy. Obi tried to do what everyone does without finding out how it was done'. (Emphasis added).

Further evidence of Okonkwo's lack of good mentorship on the job abounds throughout the book. Often, he was found lacking information. Things appeared to spring up on him because his superiors failed to forewarn him or provide necessary information before an event happened. Let us consider a few of these:

Earlier on the same day Mr. Omo had sent for him to sign certain documents. 'Where is your stamp?' he asked as soon as Obi arrived. 'What stamp?' asked Obi. 'You get B.A. but you no know say you have to affix stamp to agreement?' What agreement? Asked Obi perplexed.....'You think Government give you sixty pounds without signing agreement?' It was then that Obi understood what it was all about. He was to receive sixty pounds outfit allowance. Obi's plan to pay fifty pounds into her [Clara's] account had come to nothing for various reasons. One day he had received a registered parcel slip. He wondered who could be sending him a registered parcel. It turned out to have been the Commissioner of Income Tax. Marie advised him to arrange in future to pay by monthly instalments through his bank. 'That way you don't notice it,' she said. That was, of course, useful advice for the next year. As for the present, he had to find thirty-two pounds pretty soon.

*Entrapment*

The circumstances surrounding Obi Okonkwo's bribery scandal appears to have some elements of entrapment. Obi Okonkwo and his attorneys could have used this as a defense against the bribery charges. While the reader is not privy to all the information surrounding the offering of the bribe by the police officer and acceptance of the bribe by Okonkwo, the defendant appears to have been entrapped. The briber offered him the money, then left his hat on the table. The money sat on the table for a long time while Okonkwo mused over the morality of taking the money.

Here, there is clear evidence that Obi Okonkwo was a reluctant participant in the exchange. He was not gleeful about the money, grabbing it from the table in haste only when there was a knock on the door and shoving it into his pocket. Then came the bribe-giver and a plainclothes, criminal investigation officer. If Okonkwo had never grabbed the money that lay on the table nor opened the door, he would not have been apprehended for a crime. The reader is also not aware of all the events that transpired prior to the offer of money. How much coercion, cajoling or entreaties were involved? This would need to be investigated by Okonkwo's attorneys and used in conjunction with other mitigating factors outlined in the article to argue for Okonkwo's acquittal or lenient sentence.

#### *Multiple family commitments*

Obi Okonkwo was overwhelmed by multiple financial obligations. His situation was akin to the saying, "when it rains, it pours." There were too many competing family demands from his father, mother, and brothers. Too many burdens were placed on his shoulder at once. But he had only limited funds to satisfy these commitments. He had just returned to Nigeria when he began to realize the deep financial gulf his family was in. First, he returned from the United Kingdom to find that his father had retired from his employment as a pastor and was living on a limited pension—a paltry allowance of £2 a year. Upon discovering that his parents were emaciated because of insufficient and lack of quality food, he began to allocate his parents an allowance of £10 a month. The father still had younger children to take care of and as the eldest son, Obi Okonkwo felt compelled to assist his father in addressing all his financial obligations. This included assisting in the payment of his younger brother's school fees to ensure that they could continue their schooling. Okonkwo also paid £35 to get his mother medical treatment at a private hospital. When his mother died, he covered the expenses for her burial and funeral.

#### *Repayment of loan to the umuofia union: terms for repayment were onerous*

It is fair to argue that the terms of the contract under which Obi Okonkwo was to repay the loan of £800 pounds to the Umuofia Progressive Union were onerous. This placed undue burden on a young Okonkwo just starting up in life. For a salaried worker who made only £47 and 10 shillings a month to come up with £20, or about 40 percent of one's monthly salary, to offset the loan was too burdensome. To satisfy a loan of £800 at a rate of £20 pounds a month, it would take Okonkwo 40 months (3 years and 4 months) to satisfy the entire loan. It is doubtless that this contributed heavily to Obi's hopeless desire to find supplemental money. On page 155, Obi Okonkwo acknowledges the role that this £20 monthly payment played in causing his financial strain:

Take this matter of twenty pounds every month to his town union which in the final analysis was the root cause of all his troubles. Having seen the situation in its true light, Obi decided to stop payment forthwith until such a time as he could do it conveniently.

It may be asked: Did the Umuofia Progressive Union know in advance how much Okonkwo's salary would be before they came up with the arbitrary figure of £20 a month? If Okonkwo had been paid less than £47 and 10 shillings, would he still have had to come up with £20 pounds monthly? Okonkwo could not anticipate that his mother would be near death at the start of his employment and that she would need medical treatment in a private hospital. It is reasonable to suggest that the repayment contract with the Umuofia Progressive Union should have contained a hardship clause which Okonkwo could have invoked once he realized that he had been beset with unforeseen and seemingly insurmountable financial difficulties.

#### *Societal expectations and pressures*

There was excessive pressure placed on Obi Okonkwo to live a certain lifestyle. As a "been-to," (i.e. one who had been overseas), he was expected to wear fancy suits and ties. At the meeting of the Umuofia Progressive Union, he was criticized for showing up in clothes that were too casual and unbecoming the status of a senior civil servant. There were also expectations associated with his position in the Senior Civil Service. As a senior civil servant, there was pressure on him to own a private car. It would have been a huge disappointment for Okonkwo to show up in a pre-owned vehicle and to drive his own car. So, to meet the expectations of the Umuofia Progressive Union and the rest of society, he bought a brand-new vehicle and engaged the services of a chauffeur for a hefty £5 per month.

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### *Aggravating factors*

The preceding sections of the article have focused on the mitigating or extenuating circumstances in Okonkwo's bribe-taking offense. The current section explores aggravating circumstances in the crime, or factors which, when considered, call for the imposition of a harsh sentence on Okonkwo.

### *Prior discussions about bribery and general deterrence*

Obi Okonkwo was neither ignorant of the occurrence of bribery and corruption in his society nor the legal implications of accepting a bribe. In fact, Obi Okonkwo and his friend Christopher had debated the merits and demerits of bribe-taking in Nigeria and discussed the specific case of a civil servant in the Lands Department who was jailed for taking a bribe. Criminologists talk about the concept of general deterrence. Publicizing the punishment of an errant individual is often designed to serve as a deterrent to potential offenders. Having learned about this civil servant who was incarcerated for accepting a bribe, Obi Okonkwo should have learned that he risked going to jail or prison if he took a bribe. Consider this discussion between Okonkwo and Christopher:

Obi and Christopher theorized about bribery in Nigeria's public life. 'The Civil Service is corrupt because of these so-called experienced men at the top,' said Obi. 'What about the Lands Officer jailed last year? He is straight from the university'.

Obi Okonkwo's situation was coincidentally identical to the situation of the jailed civil servant referred to in the excerpt above. Within a year of taking a position in the civil service as a new university graduate, he was convicted of accepting a bribe. Despite Okonkwo's awareness of the punitive legal consequences of bribe-taking, he was not deterred; he accepted a bribe, was caught, tried, convicted and is about to be penalized.

### *Not a first-time offender/repeat offender/chronic offender*

Another aggravating factor in Obi Okonkwo's bribery scandal is that Okonkwo was not a first-time offender at the time he was caught. Indeed, Obi Okonkwo was a repeat offender; he was a chronic offender, or a recidivist. He had taken monetary bribes on numerous occasions and had, at least on one occasion, accepted sex in exchange for his professional influence. It is sad that he took advantage of desperate young women by accepting sexual favors in exchange for scholarship recommendations. This form of sexual abuse was inexcusable. To this end, Obi Okonkwo deserved a severe punishment. One learns that Obi Okonkwo continued to engage in bribe-taking even after he had used earlier bribe money to assist him in paying for most of the expenditures he faced. He should have ceased receiving bribes at that time, but instead, recklessly continued to take the money for needless expenses. The following two paragraphs depict Obi's bribe-taking behaviors which preceded the one for which he was standing trial:

'You dance very well,' he whispered as she pressed herself against him breathing very fast and hard. He put her arms around his neck and brought her lips within a centimeter of his. They no longer paid any attention to the beat of the high-life. Obi steered her towards his bedroom. She made a half-hearted show of resisting, then followed. Obviously, she was not an innocent school-girl. She knew her job. She was on the short list already, anyway. All the same, it was a great let-down. No point in pretending that it wasn't. One should at least be honest. He took her back to Yaba in his car. On his return journey, he called on Christopher to tell him about it so that perhaps they might laugh it off. But he left again without having told the story. Some other day, perhaps [Emphasis added].

Others came. People would say that Mr. So-and-so was a gentleman. He would take money, but he would do his stuff, which was a big advertisement, and others would follow. But Obi stoutly refused to countenance anyone who did not possess the minimum educational and other requirements. On that he was unshakeable (Emphasis added).

### *A bit of extravagance*

The financial difficulties that subsequently led to Okonkwo's acceptance of a bribe can be blamed, in part, on his reckless use of money and a little bit of extravagance. Obi Okonkwo "bought a Morris Oxford [car] a week after he received his letter of appointment. Mr. Green gave him a letter to the dealers saying that he was a senior civil servant entitled to a car advance. Nothing more was required. He walked into the shop and got a brand-new car". It could be asked: was the purchase of a brand-new vehicle a wise decision given his precarious economic situation? Okonkwo



should have anticipated his monthly car payments, his monthly reimbursement amounts to the Umuofia Progressive Union, his monthly allowances to his parents, his brothers' school fees and the other expenditures that subsequently overwhelmed him. Couldn't he have purchased a less-expensive second-hand vehicle? Furthermore, knowing his financial predicament, Obi Okonkwo should have purchased a less-expensive engagement ring for Clara. Instead, he spent £20 on the ring, which was excessive and foolish. Clara appeared to be an understandable person who would have accepted a less expensive ring. One more expenditure Obi Okonkwo could have forgone was engaging the services of a chauffeur. The Umuofia Progressive Union was impressed by the purchase of the car but would probably have cared less if he chose to drive his own car.

## 2 Conclusion

That No Longer at Ease is a masterful artistry in fiction is without question. By examining both the aggravating and mitigating circumstances surrounding Obi's offense, the article has established that mitigating factors far outweighed the aggravating factors. This therefore should have called for the imposition of a lenient sentence for his crime of taking a bribe.

### *Conflict of interest statement*

The authors declared that they have no competing interest.

### *Statement of authorship*

The authors have a responsibility for the conception and design of the study. The authors have approved the final article.

### *Acknowledgments*

We are grateful to two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments on the earlier version of this paper.

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