Chapter 4

"...some traditions deserve to be swept aside":

Challenging Vices in Native Culture

Ancient glory, present misery: the subject of this entire story is "us." The mighty heroes of ancient India were "our" ancestors, and the feeble inhabitants of India today are "ourselves." 1

- Partha Chatterjee

It is intrinsic in every culture, every race, whose histories have been plundered by colonial intervention, to think back days of the past with an aura of idealism, to glorify native histories with stories of "mighty heroes," in order to reclaim indigenous identities. What exactly is this glorified past imagined; and why is it necessary to construct indigenous stories of valour to restore dignity to people dis-placed from their native cultures?

Colonization, in denying the existence of local histories, has conferred an inferior and degraded status to the cultures of the colonized. Fanon has emphasized that the African has "no culture, no civilization, no "long historical past" " (Black Skin 34). The colonial tendency to treat Africans as slaves, as a race devoid of civilization, adversely affects their psychic structure, and attempts to de-root them of their origins, their histories, their cultures. Therefore, in reclaiming indigenous histories, the colonized free themselves of the terrible
images of denigration associated with them: and “[i]t is through decolonisation that the
colonised country begins to construct a history” (Ahluwalia 41).

These local histories confer on the colonized an identity denied by colonizers, an
identity which determines their present and future interactions with the world. It is
significant to take a look at Hall’s argument here:

*Men and women make history but not under conditions of their own making.*

They are partly made by the histories that they make. We are always
constructed in part by the practices and discourses that make us, such that we
cannot find within ourselves as individual selves or subjects or identities the
point of origin from which discourse or history or practice originates. History
has to be understood as a continuous dialectic or dialogic relationship
between that which is already made and that which is making the future.
(“Ethnicity” 11)

Memory and nostalgia play important roles in constructing histories, in re-claiming
identities, for African cultures are pre-dominantly oral. Partha Chatterjee accentuates Reem
Saad’s account of the memories of peasants and their reforms in Naseer’s Egypt, and
uncovers the idea that: “...nostalgia for the past does not produce a social conservatism in
the subaltern. In many ways, it enables him or her to cope with modernity by making
‘failure respectable and defeat honourable’” (History and the Present 21).

However, nostalgia serves a significant role in the process of creating an idealized
past of the colonized country: a past constructed, devoid of any wrong-doings, and
associated with an aura of greatness with regard to cultural practices, customs, beliefs.
Calling into context the quote with which I have begun the chapter, Chatterjee talks about such “construction of a classical past” (The Nation 95) with respect to Tarinicharan Chattopadhyay’s book Bharatbarsher Itihās. Tarinicharan talks about the rich culture and civilization of ancient Indians, the great achievements not only in conquering other countries but also in the realm of learning, which have been subjected to degradation during and after the colonial rule. The reasons—according to him—for such decline, are the “false beliefs and practices [in the present, which] . . . did not exist in the past,” and therefore he expresses the necessity to “revive the true ideals of the past” (98). The writing of such histories idealizing the past, has conferred India with a belief, the belief of its culturally enriched roots, which one reclaims to restore lost dignity due to European colonialism. Chatterjee writes:

Ancient India became for the nationalist the classical age, while the period between the ancient and the contemporary was the dark age of medievalism. Needless to say, this pattern was happily approved by European historiography. If the nineteenth-century Englishman could claim ancient Greece as his classical heritage, why should not the English educated Bengali feel proud of the achievements of the so-called Vedic civilization? (The Nation 98)

The question remains: How true a portrayal of the past is made in all these history writings? The exigency of conjuring up an ideal past to reinstate lost power has actually led to an ignoring of the vices in native cultures, which have always been a part of every country, every race, every culture. It is of urgent necessity to no more befool oneself with the idea of a glorified past, but to turn a critical lens towards certain inherent traits within
one's culture and question the practices and customs which stand as detrimental to its own development—thereafter termed as "false" prejudices—which work to maintain a hierarchy, and suffocate dialogue with other cultures. The necessity to question the "false" prejudices of indigenous culture entails a healthy engagement with other cultures.

The tendency to treat other cultures as binary to one's own can only lead to the glorification of native culture and the objectification of other cultures. It stifles a healthy interaction between the diverse "Postcolonial Soliloquies." Why do cross-cultural encounters, often, stand witness to cultural antagonism? Such cultural antipathy frustrates a space for mutual learning, a space to acknowledge the presence of other "Soliloquies." I must hasten to clarify that I do not talk of the notion of "universalism" here. The distinctiveness of every culture has to be preserved for it to exist as a distinct identity. It is significant in this context to take note of Dallmayr's contention. Dallmayr takes recourse to the argument put forth by Charles Taylor in the essay "The Politics of Recognition," and writes that:

... whereas the politics of universalism seeks to safeguard a general human sameness (termed "equal dignity"), the politics of difference insists on the need to recognize the "unique identity of this individual or group," their differentiation from everyone else... Taylor notes, the politics of difference requires us to give general assent to what is not universal but particular... "through recognizing what is peculiar to each." Hence, a universal demand here "powers an acknowledgement of specificity." (Beyond Orientalism 213)
A sense of mutual respect and recognition of each other’s cultural thoughts, beliefs, practices—is required—with any attempt to take on a hierarchical point of view and nurture a judgmental attitude, at the moment of interaction.

Differences cannot and should not be done way with, which gives birth to the existence of one dominant universal culture. “Universalism is”—as Niezen writes—“redefining particularism, and vice versa” (177). It is also important to draw attention to the argument put forth by Amartya Sen in this regard. He writes about the need to preserve cultural individualities as well as the ability to indulge in dialogue with other cultures, acknowledging diverse cultural traits all over the world; and takes into consideration Satyajit Ray and his understanding of the distinctive values of each culture:

A deep respect for distinctiveness is combined in Ray’s vision with an appreciation of the importance of inter-cultural communication and also the recognition of much internal diversity within each culture. . . . his attitude contrasts sharply with the increasing tendency to see Indian culture (or cultures) in highly conservative terms—wanting it to be preserved from the ‘pollution’ of Western ideas and thought. Ray was always willing to enjoy and learn from ideas, art forms and lifestyles from anywhere—within India or abroad. (121)

Ray’s films highlight heterogeneity in Indian cultures, the distinctive differences in each individual, and therefore he does not create a homogenous glorified culture of Indians. The ability to open out a space for interaction of heterogeneous beliefs and cultures is something which needs to be imbibed in every individual. It is essential to come out of one’s cultural
traditionalism and conservatism, and carve out an arena where: “‘Our culture’ can draw on ‘their culture’ as well, as ‘their culture’ can draw on ‘ours’” (Sen 129).

Cultural specificities and individual cultural particularities, need to be valued, for engaging in a relation of mutual respect, without the tendency to establish one’s dominance over the other. Dallmayr’s and Köchler’s contentions in this regard—discussed elaborately in chapter one—highlight this idea of preserving cultural distinctiveness, also foregrounding the need to challenge the false prejudices and beliefs of one’s native culture, which suffocates co-existence. Echewa in his novel The Crippled Dancer questions the very idea to glorify one’s culture and to deny taking a critical look inside, opening out a space for mutual exchange of beliefs and opinions, through cross-generational interaction.

Set in the 1950s, in the years just before Nigeria has gained her independence in 1960, the novel focuses on the chaotic condition of a Nigerian village. Nostalgic reminiscence of an ideal past is repeatedly questioned, and follies in indigenous customs are highlighted, which need serious re-thinking in a country standing on the brink of gaining independence. What Echewa intends to do here is:

... to place some of our people’s famed ‘traditions,’ on the docket and cross-examine them. Some traditions did not fare well in that cross-examination. Ironically, it was Chief Orji, the chief antagonist in the novel, who provided the verdict, when he said: Everyone, on the long run, becomes an ancestor. Good people, evil people, witch-crafters, murderers, thieves, all become ancestors in the long run. So when we indiscriminately honor ancestors, we unwittingly include people who were evil and criminal. (Interview)
In the novel, the young protagonist Ajuzia challenges old indigenous practices, and deflates the pride taken by older generation on a romanticized past. Old men blame the Whites and the indigenous young generation for the degradation of their native culture. But the unfortunate truth uncovers itself in the discussion which ensues between the elders of the village themselves:

‘[. . .] it is the White Man that has spoiled everything for all of us, young and old alike,’ one man said.

‘It is the White Man and the youth together,’ another man said. ‘It is what the White Man has done to our youth.’ [. . .]

‘But is it not the elders who made him [White Man] welcome and gave him a place to stay?’ [. . .]

‘We did not welcome him. We fought him!’ [. . .]

‘And lost?’ [. . .]

‘We must have. Or else why is he here now against our wishes and why are we as we are?’

‘We are as we are now because we have always been that way [. . .]’

‘As we were then, before the White Man came! As we are now! How really were we now or then? Who really knows . . . ?’ (emphasis added) (The Crippled 23-24)

Echewa questions the ideal past constructed by village elders, and highlights the truth that the constructed past is merely a fiction created by them. The lens of being observed is fixed on older people and their constructed mythical past, and it is the grandson of Erondu, Ajuzia, who challenges this false image of an ideal past and unveils the wrong deeds
committed by his native people in the past for which he and the younger generation suffer in the present. His predicament is very well brought out, in the rhetorical question which addresses Ajuzia’s situation in the novel: “Was it any more proper for fathers and grandfathers to bequeath their lost or unfinished rights to their children and grandchildren, all of the unrepaid blows and unavenged wrongs?” (21).

Ajuzia is expected to be “the Avenger and Vindicator” (The Crippled 14) for all the wrongs done to his grandfather by Orji. He feels “like an osu agwu, a slave boy bought for the purpose of serving a juju . . . or like a girl, who as a child, had been promised in marriage by her parents, so that when she grew up her loyalty was already committed . . . .” (14). Echewa highlights a cross-generational encounter, whereby the corrupt practices and beliefs of Igbo society are subjected to critical questioning, like the practice of witchcraft.

The symbolism of the “crippled dancer”—as the title reads—significantly brings out the dilemma of the young generation (here, Ajuzia) in Igbo society who has access to Western education, and challenges certain traditions, instead of being a blind follower of every cultural norm:

The proverbial crippled dancer of the title returns from the colonial court unsure whether he has won or lost, whether his disability has been aggravated or cured, but he proceeds to dance his destiny, whatever it be. The solo performers who, like Ajuzia’s generation, break away from the group formation and refuse to be reabsorbed by it, create a new formation of their own. (Wright 260)
The central conflict in the novel is between Erondu and Orji, the village chief who misuses law to extract money from village men. But Ajuzia gets caught in the struggle between his grandfather and Orji, and in the process, comes to an understanding of the false virtues attributed to the past. He wonders if he is “privileged,” or is merely “a scapegoat” (The Crippled 138). His predicament is repeatedly revealed in his reminiscences of the past events. He questions the present happenings in his life, in an internal dialogue with his own self: “... Was he no more than the faceless dancer of his frequent dreams, imprisoned in a circle of village people, doing a solo whirl, out of step with the group, whose members were out of step with one another ...” (100). He finds himself burdened with the expectations of his grandparents, and, at a point, breaks out in an outburst at his grandfather: “[...] ‘You did so much in your youth. You did everything. There was nothing you did not do that needed doing. Then why are things as they are now? [...] Ever since I can remember, the family has been in some kind of arrears I was supposed to make up ...’ ” (129). He struggles to come in terms with the past, and with the forced responsibility of redeeming all that is lost.4

In questioning the past, and doubting certain cultural norms indigenous to his society, Ajuzia does not take on a judgmental demeanour towards his own culture and community. He attempts to rethink where and how things went wrong. The cross-generational encounter, in the novel, entails a critical reinterpretation of certain beliefs and traditions native to Igbo society, whereby the old generation is forced to reconsider certain customs which generates disharmony. Echewa uncovers the necessity of a space for dialogue between multiple points of view among two generations within Igbo society; challenging the vices and “false” practices which stifle co-existence. As Dallmayr writes:
... dialogue ... is not necessarily harmonious or consensual but includes challenge and critical contestation" ("Beyond Monologue" 254). Ajuzia, in contesting certain traditional beliefs of Igbo culture, generates a space for dialogue with each other sharing divergent ideas, opinions and beliefs.

The novel vehemently criticizes the practice of corruption and witchcraft in Igbo society. The character of Orji, in the novel—associated with all kinds of bribery and corruption—is typical of native court clerks who take advantage of being part of the British colonial law, and inflict troubles on native fellowmen. A year before Nigeria's independence, when the power has been gradually shifting from the hands of the colonial administrators to those of native men, one witnesses a mere "scramble for sharing political power with the colonial rulers . . ." (Chatterjee, The Nation 117).

In the case of India too, the bourgeoisie had failed to pay heed to the problems of the masses, and instead have been interested to make use of their newly acquired power in every possible corrupt way. The failure of the bourgeoisie to speak for the ordinary masses—Ranajit Guha writes—have led to an upsurge of the voices of common people. The different movements in India during the colonial period—Noncooperation, Civil Disobedience and Quit India movements—demonstrated how "on one historic occasion after another . . . the initiative of such campaigns passed from elite leaderships to the mass of subaltern participants . . ." (xviii). Spivak also highlights this issue, and writes that:

"In the case of the nationalist movement for independence it is clearly pointed out that the bourgeoisie's 'interested' refusal to recognize the importance of, and to ally themselves with, a politicized peasantry accounted for the failure of the discursive displacement that operated the peasants' politicization" (273).
In Nigeria, native court clerks like Orji indulge in corrupt practices of all kinds, and fail to speak for their fellowmen. In fact, Orji’s election as the Chief has transpired due to the “bigger bribes [he could afford] than his opponents, and the village had voted overwhelmingly for him . . .” (54).

This novel also upholds the presence of some native men of law who use colonial law—not to inflict troubles on ordinary masses but—to maintain justice and order in society, such as Stella’s father, who is an Assistant Superintendent of Police. The author repeatedly underlines the corruption in indigenous Igbo society, and the tendency to create a glorified past, conjuring up high notions of virtue and justice in society, which—according to the older generation—have been an asset in the past. The truth nevertheless remains that, it is “the hypocrisy of the elders, [the older generation itself] who in spite of their long-winded orations about justice were prone to deviousness and chicanery, and . . . meekly submitted to cowardice under the scowl of the strong eye,” (54) which have led to the appointment of Orji as the Chief.

The degrading condition of native courts acts as a major reason for the falling standards of Igbo society. Although it has been a few British colonials who have supported the rise of thieves and corrupt men as chiefs and lawyers in indigenous societies yet native people themselves are responsible to some extent to accept them as chiefs; such as in the case of Orji, who has been elected by the village merely because he has succeeded in giving more bribes than his opponents. As Wright highlights: “In the village of Uma Njikara power is shamelessly self-aggrandizing and nepotistic and justice is a travesty, sold by corrupt court officials to the highest bidder. Secret societies plot evil conspiracies at the instigation
of wealthy, powerful individuals who hire local ‘seers’ to point the finger of witchcraft at their enemies” (sic) (258).

Being wronged by Radio, when Ajuzia files a complaint against him in the native court, he too has to succumb to the act of bribing the court clerk Mr. Enoch to get Radio arrested:

‘One pound ten shillings is the fee.’ [Mr. Enoch]

‘One-ten?’ . . . [Ajuzia]

‘Right. And for another one pound, two court messengers to arrest him and put him in the lock-up overnight. . . .’ (117)

And later, it is Ajuzia and his grandfather who get arrested, for Radio pays more money to Mr. Enoch. The novel reaches a climax when Radio dies of a car accident, and Erondu is charged with witchcraft. Ajuzia, who has been away at Aba for his studies, receives the news; and in a moment of conversation with Stella, Echewa uncovers the truth behind the practice of certain customs which are in urgent need to be rectified: “‘Our people,’ she pouted. ‘That is so primitive. It doesn’t even make sense. How can the two things be connected, a car running over a person, and witchcraft?’” (178).

The need to hold on to native cultures and traditions—among the ethnic communities in Africa—in order to fight the colonizers, have led to a bypassing of internal vices, conflicts and prejudices which need to be challenged and done away with. It is important here, to note what Jean-Marie Makang writes: “Tradition survives by evolving, not by remaining the same. This perspective precludes an understanding of tradition as something fixed once and for all, or as self-sufficient and as essentially and absolutely different from other traditions.”
Therefore, customs which disrupt harmony, require subjection to critical questioning, for a culture to evolve: “A living tradition is, therefore, one which is at the service of people instead of people being subjected to tradition. For those linked by a community of destiny, the past has a meaning only when it is provided with conditions of its influence in the present” (Makang 330).

Ajuzia—having received higher education at Aba—develops an individual thinking of his own, and is therefore capable of taking a critical look into the traditions of Igbo society, pointing out the “false” practices in his native community which need to be discarded, for harmonious co-existence. The figure of the grandmother becomes very crucial here. Being the custodian of the past as well as the present stories of her community, she highlights the fact that, Igbo society has had its share of vices, which have always existed alongside the virtues:

‘There is a lot of evil native to this village. The White Man did not bring all of it. Never mind that often your grandfather and I lament the lost values of the old days. It is true that the old days had their virtues and their valour, but then they were also full of vice and folly, which have merely been washed clean by memory . . .’ (39)

Ajuzia, who gradually gains a deeper understanding of the traditions his community, vehemently questions the villagers: “[. . .] who is turning the village of Umu Njikara upside down? Outsiders? [. . .] No, it is the people of Umu Njikara themselves who are turning their own village upside down. It is you, the people of Umu Njikara, who must stop turning this village upside down . . .” (124). One is jolted by the question: “What really was this past that
had been lost and needed to be found again?... Did anyone, including the oldest man alive, have any true memories of it?" (106). He recognizes the follies of his own society, and turning a critical lens toward them, reveals the hard truth, which every cultural group must confront: "... some traditions deserve to be swept aside" (187).

Without nurturing—blindly—an acrimonious attitude towards white culture, Ajuzia ascribes importance to the positive changes in indigenous society resulting from the engagement with white culture, whereby some “false” practices have ceased to exist. At the same time, he also takes into consideration the price native people have paid for the intrusion of white colonizers, attempting to destroy native cultures and religions of the colonized; as one finds in his conversation with his grandfather:

... ‘If a man’s brothers are preparing to murder him, does he have to submit to their common wish?’

‘No.’

‘If a stranger is passing by, is the would-be victim justified in appealing to the stranger for help?’

‘Yes.’...

‘Then if the stranger overstays his welcome and destroys all that had been bequeathed to the brothers by their ancestors, who is to blame for him and his coming, and the loss of the common patrimony?’ (188)

Echewa attributes Ajuzia with an individual voice, and he realizes the predicament of his community, while at the same time deters himself from developing a blind trust in tradition (like older men, as his grandfather). He “finds it difficult to pin faith to the traditions of
ancestor fathers who, far from being infallible, had among them their fair share of rogues and crooks, bribemongers and thieves, and who, like Orji, sometimes fashioned laws to serve their own greed and vindictiveness” (Wright 259). He challenges traditional practices, and denies to participate in the custom of praying to the ancestors. He uses the colonial law to stop the practice of wrong customs such as witchcraft, as found at the end of the novel.

The author shuns a closed constricted idea of nurturing a glorified persona of one’s native culture, and urges one to question the “false” practices, as well as broaden one’s horizon by learning from other cultural groups. A healthy space of dialogue can develop only when people from diverse cultures adopt a non-judgmental and non-hierarchical frame of mind, and widen one’s thoughts to incorporate ideas from other Western and non-Western cultures, which encourage harmony and co-existence. It is not about the victory of one perspective over the other. In this context, it is important to consider what Dallmayr—in explicating Gadamer’s philosophy—argues, with respect to cross-cultural dialogue. “[D]ialogue,” he writes, “is a mode of . . . inquiry; its fruit is not the triumph of one opinion over another but rather a mutual learning process during which the partners gain a better understanding of both the subject matter and themselves (Integral Pluralism 108). Cross-cultural and cross-generational encounters tend to happen in a space of contestation, with an attempt to draw lines of hierarchy, and thereby judge each other in terms of superiority/inferiority. This tendency to engage in contestation needs to be questioned. Do divergent thoughts encounter in an arena of mutual learning and respect? The novel calls for a critical rethinking of such intriguing questions during delicate moments of encounter.
Coming back to the narrative, when Radio falls ill of dysentery, Orji persuades Radio's father to charge Erondu with witchcraft, and takes the case to Icheku Native Court. But, the District Officer Mr. Nettleton—to whom Ajuzia have written a letter regarding the case of witchcraft—questions the corrupt practices of court clerks to accept bribes and inflict troubles on common men—at Icheku Court—dismissing the very notion of witchcraft being the cause of Radio's illness. Later in the novel, when Erondu is once again accused of witchcraft, and the cause of Radio's car accident, Ajuzia realizes that some customs are in-built to a deeper extent in Igbo culture. Therefore, it is a matter of question if such practices can cease to be followed in native society:

... Ajuzia could think of no solution to this problem of witchcraft. Neither the police nor a lawyer nor a letter to the DO could adequately address this problem. Witchcraft was so deeply rooted in the culture of the village that no aspect of modern jurisprudence could find where it dwelled, expose all its ramifications and then address them” (The Crippled 184-185).

It is when traditions and customs created from within the culture lead to conservatism and stops it to evolve or engage with other cultures, rather than promoting development of people, that, dialogue within as well as outside the community ceases to exist. Cross-cultural and cross-generational encounters often lead to inflicting blame on each other, rather than mutual learning. Therefore, the propensity to sink within one's own "Soliloquies," without attempting to break out into dialogues, needs to be challenged. Ajuzia questions this very tendency to deny a space for interacting with other opinions and views. Traditions make significant contributions towards the enhancement of a culture, but Echewa
challenges the futility in one’s attempt to romanticize certain customs, at the same time emphasizing the importance to preserve the distinctive identity of one’s culture.

Dallmayr—in taking into concern Theodore de Bary’s reflections with regard to cross-cultural encounters—points out that:

... [Each culture must] undergo a mutual learning process while simultaneously preserving the distinctiveness or difference of their tradition. ... in our rapidly shrinking global village, what is needed most urgently is the cultivation of a sense of mutual responsibility and of a shared readiness to care for the well-being of this world and its people. (Beyond Orientalism 36)

Ajuzia, in the novel, not only questions the prejudices of his people but also opens out the need to incorporate values from white culture, by acknowledging that: “... some traditions deserve to be swept aside” (187). He later takes recourse to colonial law, so that proper justice be done; at the same time challenging the practice of traditions such as witchcraft, and the corrupt means adopted by native court clerks. When his grandfather gets accused of witchcraft by Chief Orji, it is the Assistant Superintendent of Police (Stella’s father) whom he calls for, in order to restore justice in his village. However, he experiences a dilemma within him. Echewa opens out questions which churn one to rethink issues: “Was it ignoble to ally oneself with powerful outsiders? What does a man do if he is about to be murdered by his brothers and he sees a passing stranger who can rescue him?” (226).9

“Transcending the horizon of one’s own cultural tradition is the precondition for a better understanding of that very tradition,” writes Köchler (“Philosophical Foundations”). Why do cross-generational and cross-cultural encounters restrict that space for individual
“Soliloquies” to transcend one’s cultural beliefs and interact with each other, with mutual respect and understanding, thereby making a positive change to one’s perception of the world? Does tradition suffocate dialogue? Makang contests this notion, and highlights the significance of “tradition as a process and not as a corpus of unalterable truths revealed once and for all” (335). He writes that:

... tradition has an important role to play in the conduct of our lives in present-day society, just as it did in the past. This importance of tradition is not peculiar to African people, but it is true of all human groups and communities, who rely on a common ethos as a common reference in the conduct of their common destiny. . . . [There is the need] for a critical use of tradition to make it congruent with basic and major requirements of today's society. (335)

Using the notion of tradition as an ideology, Makang upholds the idea of a society where “false” prejudices are critiqued and wisdom is gained from the past to create a better present: “By appealing to the praxis and wisdom of our African foreparents, we do not mean to repeat them, but we mean to make use of this praxis and wisdom as interpretative tools to enlighten present generations of Africans” (336).

Echewa—in a similar vein—brings out the importance of preserving yet questioning certain traditions. He challenges the absence of adequate space for healthy engagement with each other, within as well as outside one’s own culture; in the absence of which, there remains: “Glory days in the past. Glory days in the future. Both belied by the present” (The Crippled 131).
The next chapter closely examines the encounter between Igbo women and a Western anthropologist in Echewa's novel *I Saw the Sky Catch Fire*, exposing the bitter acrimony which results from misunderstanding each other, in the absence of mutual respect and recognition.
Notes

1 *The Crippled Dancer* 187. See Echewa.

2 *The Nation and its Fragments* 97. See Partha Chatterjee.

3 “A Rendezvous with T. Obinkaram Echewa.” Interview by Anwesha Das, 13 April, 2012, Washington D.C.

4 Being over-burdened with expectancy, Echewa highlights how:

In the malaise of confusion and corruption, the young Ajuzia grapples with problems of authenticity at both personal and group levels and with the question of the proper relation with the past. ... Ajuzia feels that he is unable to express his own authentic selfhood in this community because, to use his favourite metaphor, he arrives in it with “a bag packed by other people,” a bag whose contents he can add to but cannot replace which contents, moreover (as regards both his family history and the village culture), were damaged before he inherited them ... (Wright 258).

5 Partha Chatterjee critiques the nationalist ideology, and taking recourse to Ghulam Murshid’s views, states that: “Indian nationalism was nothing but a scramble for sharing political power with the colonial rulers ...” (*The Nation* 117).

6 Ranajit Guha quotes from *Subaltern Studies 1*, to show how the “historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism—colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism. ...” (xiv).

7 At another point in the novel too, Ajuzia’s grandmother highlights the vices native to Igbo culture: “... even if our people are always saying that justice is like a brittle twig which cannot be bent, they are bending it, even while the words are still on their lips. The White Man may have brought
evil of a new kind, but there was a lot of evil native to us before his coming. Perhaps the new evil has
impregnated the old kind..." (40-41).

8 The plight of Igbo society in the village of Umu Njikara is revealed through Ajuzia in
the novel:

They [villagers] were like a team sulking after a defeat, looking for someone
to blame for their loss, like soldier ants which had been scattered by a broom and were
now searching for their leaders and their former line of march. It was as if they had
forgotten how to be themselves, as though they had lost their formula for existence.
They quarreled, they often digressed from their purpose, their enmities,
rivalries and jealousies just barely suppressed out of decorum for the dead. (27)

9 Dieter Riemenschneider in his review article, comments on this novel:

Echewa's novel authentically portrays an African society at the eve of political
independence by successfully blending the psychological with the social dimension of
the conflict between past and present. At no point does the author subordinate or
sacrifice the fate of the individual to a depiction of his social surroundings nor does he
neglect the latter by merely narrating a psychological story. (337)

10 Makang borrows the notion of tradition as an ideology from the writings of Kwame
Nkrumah and Fabien Eboussi, and puts forth the idea that:

... An ideology of society, Nkrumah suggests, permeates all fields of
knowledge and all institutions of society, and must thereby yield concrete effects in
society. . . . The use of tradition as an ideology . . . as Eboussi shows, "aims at a mode of
historical intelligibility that leads to action." to collective creativity. A living tradition,
therefore, is neither a repetition of practices and customs of the past, nor a dream of "the
origin" or of a "lost paradise," but is meant to provide a utopian model of action, a
mobilizing ideal. Such an approach is ethical in perspective. . . . (335-336)
Makang writes:

... It [tradition] should lead to a critique of unproductivity and deficient management, of squandering of common patrimony and national resources, a critique of injustice, oppression, and exploitation, a critique of irrational choices which are detrimental to the well-being and emancipation of African people and which condemn them to perpetual subordination and dependency. Tradition must also allow and encourage critique of the bad distribution of power, including its personalization and confiscation within a few hands... (336)
Works Cited


