Conclusion

. . . when “Soliloquies” break into dialogues

A cultural community—or civilization—can only define and fully develop itself if it is able to relate to other civilizations. Self-comprehension on the individual and collective level is only possible on the basis of a distinction from another self. . . . In this way, the “other” serves as the “corrective” of one’s own understanding of the world . . . and one’s system of values. In the context of this kind of dialectics of cultural awareness, the “other” civilization is the condictio sine qua non of the awareness and full perception of one’s own civilization.1

- Hans Köchler

Cross-cultural encounters can take place within a space of harmonious interaction only when civilizations enter into a mutual recognition of each other’s opinions, beliefs, and narratives. It is by defining oneself as distinct from the other individual, not with the tendency of nurturing a binary or a hierarchy, but with the propensity to acknowledge each other’s distinctive traits, that a space for dialogue—on an equalized terrain—can come to exist. Köchler has repeatedly argued in his essays, that: “The hermeneutics of civilizational dialogue is based on a perception of the self (whether individual or collective, a person or a community) that is shaped by its encounter with that which is distinct from the self” (“Philosophical Foundations”). One’s interaction with other cultures must entail a process
of mutual learning, broadening one's cultural horizon to understand each other, and shun the predisposition to take on a judgmental demeanour, in order to bring about a co-existence of divergent cultural groups, sharing interdependent relations, without nurturing acrimony.

In dealing with the research questions which have led me into this project—as highlighted in the Introduction—I have made an attempt to rethink the moments of discordant encounters across cultures, generations, gender; and have discerned that these interactions fail—to a certain extent—to nurture mutual dialogue, understanding, and “globalectic” approach. Rather, they tend to indulge more into “Soliloquies.” The issues marking such moments of encounters in the novels of Echewa, have repeatedly pointed out the need to engage into interaction with each other, to understand each other’s perspectives and beliefs, without demeaning one another’s cultural traits and practices.

Postcolonial writings, in voicing the perplexities and individual dilemmas of people from the marginalized parts of the world, have constantly questioned the binary of “us” and “them” propagated by colonialists. But hierarchies still continue to exist in societies, as Foucault had argued (discussed in the Introduction). The question which I am inclined to highlight is that: How can one bring about a harmonious co-existence of divergent narratives, shattering down the hierarchy deliberately cultivated in order to maintain a certain power structure?

In the Conclusion of my thesis, I would like to argue that a space for harmonious co-existence, an arena for mutual dialogue on an equalized terrain, a “globalectic” stance, can be achieved by nurturing “reciprocal respect” (Connolly) towards each other, and by acknowledging the distinctness of every culture, every individual, without any attempt to
adopt a judgmental disposition. It is when people learn to relate oneself to the other, to enter into a space for mutual learning, to respect each other’s discrete cultures and narratives, that “Soliloquies” can break into dialogues. Recent writings need to uphold the ways in which a space for mutual understanding be carved out, by not only challenging the existing hierarchies but also attempting to look beyond the hierarchical order maintained among cultures and civilizations, by cultivating “reciprocal learning” (Connolly) (discussed later). In this context, I would like to highlight the idea of “agonistic respect,” upheld by William E. Connolly.

The notion of “agonistic respect” upholds the idea of fostering “reciprocal respect” (xxvi). Connolly has very clearly explicated this concept, which is extremely significant to cultivate, in order to open up a space for mutual dialogue, respect and understanding. He writes that: “Agonism is the dimension through which each party maintains a pathos of distance from others with whom it is engaged. Respect is the dimension through which self-limits are acknowledged and connections are established across lines of difference” (xxvi). It calls for an acknowledgement of the distinct existence and identity of the other group, without any attempt to incorporate it within the ambit of the universal. The presence of one universal culture—such as the European culture during the colonial era—actually denies the existence of other cultural groups and their specific identities, thereby stifling dialogue and co-existence. Dallmayr and Köchler have repeatedly argued in their writings that, even in the postcolonial era, the United States attempts to maintain a certain power structure, thereby privileging their culture as a universal culture, and as a standard for other cultural groups to follow. One needs to shun this propensity to intentionally nurture a hierarchy—
leading to an absence of an equalized sphere for people to interact—which can be achieved by cultivating “agonistic respect.”

The uniqueness in every culture has to be recognized, and one’s mental horizon has to be broadened in order to engage in a process of “reciprocal learning.” Connolly argues that “respect is not deep respect until those who bestow it acknowledge the dignity of those who embrace different sources of faith” (xxvi). There is a need for “reciprocity of understanding,” as highlighted by Dallmayr. This idea of mutual understanding points to the notion that: “... it is not only up to others (‘them’) to understand ‘our’ perspective, but is equally up to ‘us’ to grasp things from ‘their’ perspective” (Dialogue Among Civilizations 40).

Reciprocal understanding and respect towards each other does not entail a blind appreciation of each other’s cultural traits, beliefs and practices. In fact, as Connolly emphasizes:

Agonistic respect carries the expectation that you may contest one another on the source of respect, particularly when one party insists that eligibility for respect itself requires you to accept the universal it affirms. It also includes the possibility that something said or done by others may nudge you to reinterpret your existential faith, or draw you toward conversion to another. (emphasis added) (xxvii)

There is a necessity to turn a critical lens towards one’s native cultural traits as well as to those of others, resisting a blind appraisal of customs and traditional practices. A harmonious co-existence can be achieved not only by acknowledging the distinctiveness of
each culture but also by critically rethinking one’s own and others’ cultural practices; as Dallmayr argues that: “... dialogue ... includes challenge and critical contestation” (“Beyond Monologue” 254). This does not implicate a destructive criticism, leading to the denial of multiplicities. Rather, it calls for one to look into one’s own culture and critically engage in rethinking certain traditions.

History stands witness to the fact that there have been tendencies to establish the superiority of one dominant culture, the Western culture, and admit other cultures within its regime, denying their individual particularities and existences, and making them a part of the power structure regulated by the West. Such “civilizational antagonism” has led to the “total rejection of the other,” (Köchler, “Dialogue of Civilizations” 2) to a dismissal of the specificities and distinctive identities of other civilizations. This propensity to maintain a power structure, a hierarchy among cultural groups, civilizations, languages, is also predominantly nurtured even in the postcolonial era. It is not only the West manufacturing discourses to maintain a hierarchy but similar tendencies can also be witnessed among other civilizations, as has been argued by Dallmayr and Köchler.

In this doctoral project, I have attempted to highlight that: In order to cease considering other cultures as threats, there is not only a need to question the hierarchies intentionally nurtured, but also interrogate our own contentions which work towards nurturing the existence of hierarchies, by privileging our own cultural norms. This tendency to engross oneself in “Postcolonial Soliloquies” (discussed in chapter one) has to be challenged and critiqued, to reach out beyond “Soliloquies.” However, challenging certain cultural norms must happen in a space of mutual respect and understanding, without any intention to debunk each other. It is only by nurturing “agonistic respect” and “reciprocal
learning” that discordant narratives can interact on an equalized terrain, because it serves as the “reciprocal virtue” (Connolly xxvi) which “balances critique with an invitational style of engagement” (xxx).

It is significant here to consider Spivak’s concept of “planetarity,” which highlights the idea that: “To be human is to be intended toward the other” (73). Ferial J. Ghazoul—very distinctly—upholds the idea behind Spivak’s notion of “planetarity”:

The key word for Spivak is inclusiveness; she wants to embrace the world, and thus she looks for a comprehensive collectivity. It would be a mistake to assume she is arguing for universality where people are variations on a common denominator. . . . Hers is not a blueprint but an effort to conceive, to imagine a better world where we all come together as a collectivity without reducing one to the other. This non-reductive collectivity is to be contrasted to the streamlined, hegemonic collectivity of globalization, which she defines as “the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere . . . .”

Every other culture must not be “perceived as threat, as potential enemy, but rather as partner in the project of reaching a higher level of humanity through civilizational encounter” (Köchler, “Philosophical Foundations”).

This dissertation highlights the idea that multiple “Soliloquies” can break into dialogues, and bridge the discordant plural narratives, by cultivating “agonistic respect,” “reciprocal learning,” (Connolly) and by nurturing a critical rethinking of indigenous as well as other cultural traits. Postcolonial writings, therefore, need to focus and lay emphasis on these concerns, apart from challenging the still existing hierarchies in the world. The
theoretical framework of this dissertation draws certain ideas from postcolonial theories, and
thereafter proceeds to highlight the concepts of mutual dialogue and co-existence—being
inspired by Dallmayr, Köchler and Niezen—with an intention to bring out issues which have
been relatively untraversed, especially in African literature. The detailed study of the novels
of Echewa, draws one’s attention towards the need for mutual respect, and a critical
reassessment of one’s native beliefs and norms, in order to broaden one’s horizon and
indulge in a process of “reciprocal learning” (Connolly). This project has also attempted to
bring out the relevance of reading the West African novelist Echewa—among other West
African writers—for his novels demand a critical attention which have been due till
date. These have broadly been the thrusts, which I have explored in details in this
dissertation, and defy a quick summary here.

There is a need for an inter-responsibility towards each other, which entails
“reciprocal respect”—on an equal plane—beyond hierarchies, beyond the still prevailing
“Postcolonial Soliloquies,” which is also highlighted in the West African (Igbo) worldview,
emphasized in the title of my thesis:

_Egbe bere!_

_Ugo bere . . ._

Let the kite perch!

Let the eagle also have a perch . . . (Echewa 45-46)

This dissertation, in dealing with certain significant issues pertinent to the study of
postcolonial writings and African literature, encourages further research - in exploring the
concepts of “agonistic respect,” and “reciprocal learning” (Connolly). The variety of issues
Dealt with here, can contribute to a deeper understanding of the postcolonial concerns which demand critical attention, and need to be explored by future research participants.
Notes

1 See Köchler, "Philosophical Foundations of Civilizational Dialogue."

2 According to Connolly, "agonistic respect" is "a civic virtue that allows people . . . to cultivate reciprocal respect across difference, and to negotiate larger assemblages to set general policies. Agonistic respect is a reciprocal virtue appropriate to a world in which partisans find themselves in intensive relations of political interdependence" (xxvi).

3 Spivak differentiates between the ideas of globalization and "planetarity." According to her: "The globe is on our computers. No one lives there. It allows us to think that we can aim to control it. The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan" (Death of 72). She writes that: "To be human is to be intended toward the other . . . If we imagine ourselves as planetary subjects rather than global agents, planetary creatures rather than global entities, alterity remains underived from us; it is not our dialectical negation, it contains as much as it flings us away" (73).

Works Cited


