Abstract

Postcolonial writings, in bringing out the distinct stories of people from disparate places, cultures, ethnic groups, have constantly questioned the binary of "us" and "them," practiced during colonialism. But hierarchies continue to prevail in the postcolonial era. When discordant narratives from divergent parts of postcolonial world encounter each other, do they attempt to create a space for dialogue, a space where each other understand and respect the distinctive cultural particularities, or, is there a propensity to be judgmental? This dissertation makes an attempt to rethink the still dominating hierarchies, not only across cultures but also between people sharing the same cultural roots; and propound the idea of "Postcolonial Soliloquies." It takes into concern cross-cultural, cross-generational and cross-gender encounters, in relation to the fiction of the West African novelist Thomas Obinkaram Eccheva, whose works have been subjected to neglect till date.

It is no longer just the concept of the binary of "us" and "them"—given birth during the colonial period—which works in the world: but it is a hierarchy in the production of knowledge, of narratives, of truths, in every society and every civilization, which baffles the idea of mutual dialogue, and nurtures the existence of "Postcolonial Soliloquies." In exploring the idea of dialogue and co-existence—reading the novels of Eccheva—I argue not for the existence of one universal culture and for the erasure of pluralities, but make an attempt to look into the growing schism between diverse cultures, divergent stories, marking the delicate moments of encounters across cultures, generations and gender, which demands
attention; and is therefore questioned critically in this thesis. I have taken recourse to the theoretical ideas propounded by certain recent writings by political theorists, philosophers and anthropologists, like Fred Dallmayr, Hans Köchler, and Ronald Niezen, in questioning the lack of an adequate space for dialogue when disparate viewpoints, beliefs, and cultural worldviews interact.

The main contention of this research is to interrogate the moments of discordant encounters, the still existing hierarchies, in exploring the issues Echewa unfolds in his novels; calling for one’s attention to the Igbo worldview: “Egbe bere! Ugo bere . . .” which reads as, “Let the kite perch!/ Let the eagle also have a perch . . .” (Echewa, The Land’s Lord 45-46). I have focused on the works of this novelist—whom Derek Wright calls “a neglected novelist” in his essay “T. O. Echewa: A Neglected Novelist”—in this dissertation. Echewa, a “late bloomer”¹ in his literary career, does not merely re-write the story of the colonized and the colonizer. He does not just recast the story of the older generation in Africa preserving indigenous traditions, and the younger generation challenging certain customs. He deters from a mere re-enumeration of the roles of African Igbo women as mothers and wives. Instead, he rethinks these concerns in unveiling significant questions which open up new avenues to explore.

¹ This phrase has been used by Professor A. V. Ashok in the context of Hans-Georg Gadamer, in his class lecture at “The English and Foreign Languages University,” Hyderabad, on 01.03.2011.
This dissertation highlights certain research questions: What happens when discordant perspectives encounter? Why is there a hierarchy still prevailing across civilizations? What are the issues which demand critical attention in the study of West African literature, with focus on Echewa? How can there be an adequate space for mutual dialogue without taking on a judgmental attitude? It aims to unravel concerns which have been relatively untraversed in the study of African literature.