Chapter 1

"The danger of a single story": Postcolonial Soliloquies

... The consequence of a single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar.

- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Postcolonial writings have given prominence to multiple voices, to pluralities of stories from varied cultures. Then why does one need to talk of "a single story" today, in the twenty first century? This chapter explores some of the postcolonial theoretical concerns, and makes an attempt to uphold how there has always been a gap in addressing certain questions: What are the structures of thoughts which come to play at the moments of cross-cultural encounters? When divergent stories interact, do they engage in a dialogue, or is there a propensity to adopt a eurocentric perspective, and consider it as the only single story in reading diverse cultures?

In recalling quite a considerable number of postcolonial theoretical writings here, I do not merely indulge into a historical rumination of the manner in which postcolonial theory has given voice to the marginalized, to the colonized. Every idea which the theorists have highlighted in the past, bears a deep connection with the present, in rethinking the delicate moments of encounter when diverse cultures encounter each other. Partha
Chatterjee has insisted on this link between history and the present, and has highlighted the fact that the sidelined or marginalized are always living realities in the present, which history cannot ignore.3

Various writings by different postcolonial writers have repeatedly shown - how Western discourse has produced a specific kind of knowledge about Africans and other colonized people of the world, how the colonized is considered as barbaric and devoid of civilization, and is therefore silenced, while the colonizer has embodied a superiority in culture and civilization. Frantz Fanon draws one’s attention to the objectification of a black man in a colonized state, at the mercy of a group that considers him as the Other.5 The dominant group, the Self, presents a distorted image of the native to the West, which helps him to justify the denigration of the colonized. Edward W. Said has shown how the East has been constructed by the West, as a “tradition of thought, imagery and vocabulary” (5).5

“The objective of colonial discourse”—as Homi Bhabha writes—“is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction” (101). He uncovers the fact, that it is “that ahistorical nineteenth-century polarity of Orient and Occident which in the name of progress, unleashed the exclusionary imperialist ideologies of self and other” (Bhabha 29). Ashish Nandy has also highlighted the imposition of a worldview by the West, which “believes in the absolute superiority of the human over the nonhuman and the subhuman, the masculine over the feminine, the adult over the child, the historical over the ahistorical, and the modern or progressive over the traditional or the savage” (x). It aims at colonizing minds, de-rooting the cultural base of the colonized. But in doing so, the
colonizer himself is "decivilize[d]," for colonization "dehumanizes even the most civilized man" (Césaire 2-5).

The West seems to suffer from a "narcissistic self-recognition since the native . . . is cast as no more than a recipient of the negative elements of the self that the European projects onto him." (JanMohamed 20) which gives rise to the "Manichean allegory." In most of the countries of Africa, though colonial rule has been of a shorter duration in comparison to that in India, the shattering of pre-colonial culture has been much more severe. Therefore, Africa "is not only perpetually caught and imagined within a web of difference and absolute otherness. . . . [It] ends up epitomizing the intractable, the mute, the abject, or the other-worldly" (Mbembe, and Nuttall 348). Highlighting the concept of postcolonialism in the African context, Pal Ahluwalia draws one’s attention to the fact that, for Africa, “the term post-colonial does not mean ‘after independence.’ Rather, it is a concept which takes into account the historical realities of European imperial incursions into the continent from the fifteenth century onwards” (14). He writes how the African “re-imagines” himself, and shares “a history of colonial contact” with other cultures of the world.

There is always an impulse in the postcolonial world—among every culture—to "re-write histories." to speak for the colonized, for the marginalized. But one finds usually a re-presentation, by the intellectual. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has questioned this claim by postcolonial writers to give voice to the deprived: “What can the intellectual do toward the texts of the oppressed? Represent them and analyze them, disclosing one’s own positionality for other communities in power. Foucault has done this.” (“The Problem” 56).
She writes: “We must now confront the following question: ... can the subaltern speak?” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 283). However, her view that the subaltern cannot speak, has been contested by certain theorists. Benita Parry points out that Spivak “restricts (eliminates?)” the space for the colonized.\(^\text{10}\) Leela Gandhi too, shows how Spivak has failed to take into concern the pluralities of voices in postcolonial studies.\(^\text{11}\) A completely new viewpoint is highlighted by Tabish Khair:

The question “Can the subaltern, speak?” assumes central importance only within an intellectual tradition that has divorced speech from act. ... the subaltern may not ‘speak,’ but the subaltern can and does act. Acting, however, is also a kind of speech: it is the kind of “underprivileged” speech that is resorted to when the “privileged” speech of words is denied to a subject. (10)

The issue of languages demands attention in this context. Unless there is a thorough knowledge of each vernacular language, it is difficult to comprehend each other’s speech. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o has highlighted how language serves a double function, as “a means of communication” as well as “a carrier of culture.” (Decolonising the Mind 13) and therefore plays a crucial role in understanding each other’s cultural differences. He writes: “Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world” (Decolonising the Mind 16). He vehemently protests against the use of English in writing African literature. However, it is significant here to uphold the idea propounded by Achebe regarding the issue of language. Talking about the use of English in African literature, he points out that English is no more merely the speech of the privileged, in Nigeria and other
countries of Africa. Though English language carries “the positive atrocity of racial arrogance and prejudice which may yet set the world on fire,” but one must not, “in rejecting the evil throw out the good with it” (“The African Writer” 58). He points out how English is intertwined with the cultures and societies in the African continent, and is crucial to the affairs in Africa. He writes:

... I do not write in English because it is a world language... Nigeria is a reality which I could not ignore. One characteristic of this reality, Nigeria, is that it transacts a considerable portion of its daily business in the English language... English is therefore not marginal to Nigerian affairs. It is quite central. (“Politics and Politicians” 100)

Though—as Ngũgĩ has emphasized—English language is imposed forcibly by colonizers and is therefore alien to Africa, Achebe sheds light on the fact that the language is adopted in Africa because of “the linguistic pluralism of modern African states” (“Politics and Politicians” 106).

Multiple narratives, in English as well as in other vernacular languages from all over the world, have given prominence to divergent stories, cultures, thoughts as well as actions of people with a shared history of colonial rule. But these histories of Nigeria, India, and other colonized countries, have resulted in conferring on them a traumatized past. “Remembering” has never been “a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present” (Bhabha 90). Histories live as reservoirs of memories and dominate the present.
Dipesh Chakrabarty has repeatedly highlighted how “[h]istoricism [has] enabled European domination of the world in the nineteenth century” (7). The importance of history in the writing of literature, has also been dealt with, by Derek Walcott. He writes: “In the New World servitude to the muse of history has produced a literature of recrimination and despair. a literature of revenge written by the descendants of slaves or a literature of remorse written by the descendants of masters” (371).

Looking back at the past of a postcolonial country like Nigeria, one finds numerous writings about her history which has been shaped first by her indigenous culture, then re-shaped by the traumatic experience of colonization, and further shaped by the history of decolonization. History also stands witness to the fact that how, the struggle to gain freedom from colonizers has led to a re-colonization at the hands of men indigenous to the place, submerging societies and communities in a mire of corruption and misrule. Common people, therefore, take recourse to their pre-colonial history to re-constitute their culture, shattered in the hands of colonizers. Where the colonial forms of history are mainly in prose, these vernacular histories—reclaiming indigenous culture—make use of genres, like the novel, drama, poetry.

The “culture of the ‘people.’” constitutes “an important seed-bed of tradition and heritage – a seed-bed from which ordinary people derived their perceptions regarding their traditions” (Kumkum Chatterjee 119). This indigenous Bengali concept of history—which is very well applicable in the Nigerian context too—rejects Western as well as Persian histories. It puts emphasis on “the samaj/community as its subject, rather than the state” (132). When culture and traditions constitute the “seed-bed,” memory and oral stories come to play a significant role in history writing. The manner in which such stories are subjected
to analysis, becomes very crucial. Nandini Sundar in her study of histories of people in the villages of India, finds out, how, even the “silences and inconsistencies” (155) of people with whom she has spoken to, carry deep meanings. The realization dawns on her that:

“...there was no one truth or historical account of the past. Instead, the past ... is one that was being negotiated as a part of current politics, both within the immediate village community and in the region as a whole” (156). Therefore, narration of past events, and further writing them as histories, depend on the manner of representation of past stories. This is extremely relevant in the case of Nigeria too, for Nigerian culture comprises of mainly oral traditions, very vividly prominent in Echewa’s novel *I Saw the Sky Catch Fire*.

Writing the past becomes more problematic when events of violence find place in histories, such as the Aba Women’s War in Nigeria, for which village women constitute the custodians of histories, being participants themselves in the war. Memory and forgetfulness become very important in the narration of such events. Deepak Mehta, in his study of riots in India, has explored the complexities involved in narrating incidents of violence. Due to the multiplicity of meanings involved in reading violence, the narration of violence invests it with ambivalence. He writes that:

...the event of violence, as experienced by participants, not only colours their verbal representations, but also infuses the space over which violence occurs with specific value. But this double significance is available to us only after the event has passed into remembrance and forgetfulness—the event is replaced by an image. (221-222)
Therefore, histories are narratives where meanings are heavily dependent upon memory and the manner of representation.

Partha Chatterjee highlights Roland Barthes’s notions about history writing, and emphasizes that: “. . . meanings can only be constituted, not found. . . . ‘historical discourse is in its essence a form of ideological elaboration, or to put it more precisely, an imaginary elaboration’” (History and the Present 10). Histories are heavily dependent on the historian’s interpretation of facts. In fact—as Hayden White points out—some critics go on to “argue that historical accounts are nothing but interpretations” (55). He highlights Claude Lévi-Strauss’s notion, according to which: “. . . historical facts are in no sense ‘given’ to the historian, but are, rather, ‘constituted’ by the historian himself . . . ” (55). There is always a certain ideology at work. What is important is that: “How are the facts to be described in order to sanction one mode of explaining them rather than another?” (White 134). The novelist too, in writing his work of fiction, deals with historical events, and what becomes significant there is, not how exact the facts are, but how the writer makes sense of them.15 Chapters five and six of this thesis very well bring out how Echewa rethinks historical events, to highlight concerns which are extremely relevant in addressing certain contemporary issues.

Throughout postcolonial writings, there have been attempts to accord individual voices to the colonized, to question the dichotomy of “centre” and “periphery,” to retrieve indigenous cultures, to re-create histories. Yet, recent discussions on this subject, still continue to speak of “the danger of a single story.”16 Despite the plethora of stories which postcolonialism highlights—to some extent, explored in this chapter—why is it that people continue to talk about the loss of dignity when civilizations encounter each other?
In relation to this, one needs to be aware of the tendency among European colonizers to consider certain cultural traits as superior, and thereby judge people from other parts of the world according to the notions put up by the West; as is widely upheld in postcolonial writings. In doing so, during the colonial era, the West has ignored the varied cultures of people all over the world, and has instead attempted to use their own biased notions to judge other cultures. Clifford Geertz talks about this attempt of the West to impose their notion of humanity on people from different parts of the world:

... the approaches to the definition of human nature adopted by the Enlightenment and by classical anthropology have one thing in common: they are both basically typological. They endeavor to construct an image of man as a model, an archetype, a Platonic idea or an Aristotelian form, with respect to which actual men—you, me, Churchill, Hitler, and the Bornean headhunter—are but reflections, distortions, approximations. ... the differences among individuals and among groups of individuals are secondary. Individuality comes to be seen as eccentricity, distinctiveness as accidental deviation from the only legitimate object of study. (51)

Therefore, there is a quest for “Man with a capital ‘M.’” in the interests of which we sacrifice the empirical entity we in fact encounter, man with a small ‘m’ ” (51). As a result, “other cultures or civilizations . . . are denied equal status in terms of their dignity as expressions of the spirit of humanity” (Köchler, “Culture and Empire”).
The West attempts to thereby reach a “global cultural uniformity and, resulting from it, a loss of *cultural and civilizational memory, at an enormous scale...*” (Köchler, “Culture and Empire”). This trend towards homogenization, tends to restrict the space for a dialogue to exist between different cultures of the world. Why is there a propensity to impose, to judge in terms of the binary of superior/inferior? The propensity to nurture a superior idea about one’s native culture is not only found among Europeans but is also inherent in other cultures of the world. Indigenous peoples from the once-colonized areas of the world are found to experience a shared identity, and consider the West as the Other.

Postcolonial world is still replete with binaries, with structures of thoughts which maintain hierarchies. Its difference from colonialism lies in the fact that, whereas colonialism entailed an imposition by European cultures, the postcolonial era—in questioning the binary advocated by colonialism—entails a supercilious disposition inherent in every culture, considering other cultures to be inferior. Ronald Niezen has pointed out how postcolonialism, in giving voice to the colonized, to the repressed, “have failed to move from theoretical critique to social reform, and occasionally themselves lapse into musings about a new, emergent humanity” (10).

The eminent African critic Ihechukwu Madubuike talks about co-existence in the postcolonial world, and poses a question: “We are co-existing. Are we not? But are we co-existing as equal partners? Is one always taking ‘down’ on others?” (E-mail message). According to him, the idea of considering one’s culture as superior is ingrained in every community, and “it frustrates co-existence” (E-mail message).
Sabine Jell-Bahlsen\(^\text{18}\) has been witness to a situation which raises serious questions regarding the moments of encounter between people sharing the same cultural origin. When people belonging to the same country, same culture, but differing beliefs and practices interact, how do they come to read the discordant perspectives of each other? What are the circumstances which mark moments of discordant encounters among people within a culture itself? Jell-Bahlsen speaks of a conference she has attended on “The Interface of Igbo Theology and Christianity,” at the Whelan Research Academy for Religion, Culture and Society at Owerri, Nigeria, and writes about her own experience there:

One Afro-American man and myself were the only foreigners there. What struck me was that there is a perceived need for co-existence and dialogue between those who value their own pre-colonial culture, history, pre-Christian religion, language, tradition etc on the one hand, and on the other hand those Igbos who are “more Catholic than the Pope,” “more British than their former colonial masters,” or “who weep louder than the bereaved” to paraphrase Chinua Achebe. The new issue then is the native proponents of the colonial mind vs. those who value their own heritage and identity. The consensus at the conference was that dialogue is needed and that the “superiority complex” (of the Catholic Church in this particular case) must end. . . . What was once “natives vs. empire” has definitely turned into an internal affair and serious soul searching in Nigeria. (E-mail message).

In this context, it is extremely necessary to understand how the power structure works in societies to maintain the supremacy of certain cultural groups. Michel Foucault uses the term “power/knowledge” to argue how knowledge structures the workings of
power in societies. He highlights the hierarchy which is deliberately maintained in the knowledge-sphere, privileging the circulation of specific knowledge(s) and disguising others. He terms such disguised knowledge(s) as "subjugated knowledges," which are "naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy," (82) and calls for an "insurrection of subjugated knowledges" (81). Emphasizing the dominance of a scientific discourse, which works towards preserving the hierarchy, thereby maintaining the functioning of power in societies, Foucault upholds how other discourses are placed down on the hierarchy. It is this body of discourses which are abandoned by the structures of power working in the world, which Foucault terms "genealogy," and which constitute the sphere of the "anti-sciences" (83). A "genealogy" entails "the claims to attention of local, discontinuous, illegitimate knowledges against the claims of a unitary body of theory which would filter, hierarchise and order them in the name of some true knowledge and some arbitrary idea of what constitutes a science and its objects" (83). He draws one's attention to the ways in which an entire body of scientific discourses, framed by institutions, works towards nurturing the mechanism of power dominating every culture and civilization.

Foucault does not define power as repression, as domination by social institutions; he sees power as an all-pervasive presence, working in the society not merely as an oppressive force but as "a war continued by other means" (90). Political power works to maintain this perpetual process of "unspoken warfare: to re-inscribe it in social institutions, in economic inequalities, in language, in the bodies themselves of each and every one of us;" (90) and thereby, power works effectively to manufacture truths: producing truths under the veneer of scientific discourses, and determining the body of knowledge which people must accept as truth and function accordingly in society. Power "functions in the form of a chain," and is
"exercised through a net-like organisation:” (98) it is not merely employed by one dominating institution. It works in every sphere of society, in day-to-day processes; it is extremely significant in the global functioning, nurturing narratives, discourses, truths, which govern societies, cultures, people, their thoughts and beliefs.

Foucault expounds the concept of a “genealogy,” which “must wage its struggle,” “against the effects of the power of a discourse that is considered to be scientific.” (84) and is “a kind of attempt to emancipate historical knowledges from that subjection, to render them, that is, capable of opposition and of struggle against the coercion of a theoretical, unitary, a formal and scientific discourse” (85).

However, I would like to direct one’s attention to the fact that power operates even in the production of knowledges from the local, disguised narratives which “genealogy” attempts to resurrect. Thus, narratives from the postcolonial pockets of the world, from the marginalized sections of the world, are also replete with structures of power manufacturing certain kinds of discourses taken as truths. Power still functions in every narrative emanating from cross-cultural encounters—in the postcolonial era—to privilege the production of certain discourses and abandon other narratives down in the hierarchy. The hierarchy continues to prevail, which makes it difficult for a space for mutual dialogue to emerge in a broader scale, frustrating the scope of opening up an arena for co-existence, on equal terms. It is no longer only the concept of the binary of “us” and “them”—given birth during the colonial period—which works in the world; it is a hierarchy in the production of knowledge, of narratives, of truths, in every society and every civilization, which baffles the idea of co-existence.
I have been profoundly inspired by the writings of Fred Dallmayr, Ronald Niezen, and Hans Köchler, in taking up the ideas of dialogue and co-existence. In this doctoral project, I intend to explore the questions marking the moments of encounters across cultures, generations and gender, focusing generally on fiction, and particularly on Echewa, whose works have not been given the recognition they deserve.

I do not talk about cultural universalism or the notion of homogeneity, when I focus on the idea of co-existence, and look into divergent stories interacting with each other, questioning the lack of an adequate space for dialogue between them. Every group has its unique identity which must be preserved. To promote the idea of a universal culture leads to the domination of a single cultural group. It results in the existence of one homogenous culture in the world, suppressing pluralities and distinctive identities.

Achebe, in his writings, denounces the notion of universality. According to him, it is nothing but “a synonym for the narrow, self-serving parochialism of Europe” (“Colonialist Criticism” 9). He writes how “the work of a Western writer is automatically informed by universality. It is only others who must strain to achieve it” (9). Taking into account America’s dominance on the world now, he points out that one need not conform to the cultural standards put up by America, because “... the plain fact is that we are not Americans. Americans have their vision; we have ours. We do not claim that ours is superior: we only ask to keep it” (17). He refers to an Igbo saying to explicate his point: “... the firewood which a people have is adequate for the kind of cooking they do;” (17) and raises some extremely pertinent questions: “... would it truly be invalid for a Nigerian writer seeing a dissatisfaction in his society to write about? Am I being told ... that before I write about any problem I must first verify whether they have it too in New York and
London and Paris?" (“Thoughts on” 52). He urges one to look into one’s own culture and preserve its originality.

Every culture has a unique existence of its own. Mahasweta Sengupta, in expressing her experiences of being a student of Achebe, writes that: “Chinua Achebe made me realize that one can never naturalize oneself to another culture; you have an identity that is a product of your own context” (78). At the same time, he also calls for a celebration of world literatures, with due respect to all the multiplicities and differences present in the world: “Let every people bring their gifts to the one great festival of the world’s cultural harvest and mankind will be all the richer for the variety and distinctiveness of the offerings” (“Colonialist Criticism” 17).

Niezen has talked about the notions of “cultural universalism” and “cultural particularism,” (1) highlighting the ideologies set forth by French Revolution and industrialization, which involved “power accumulation and social uniformity,” (7) and had aimed to put an end to the divergent cultural particularities across the world. Dallmayr brings out the relevance of Charles Taylor’s notions of “liberal universalism” and “cultural distinctiveness,” in this context (Beyond Orientalism 212). He questions the very notion of universality:

Who is universal, or whose conception of universalism is really universal? . . .

Shunning monopolistic or monological gestures, all we can plausibly and honestly do is seek universality in our different ways. To do this, however, we surely need to take others and their aspirations seriously, which requires dialogue and empathetic attentiveness. (“Beyond Monologue” 253)
It is not to argue for the existence of one universal culture, and for the erasure of pluralities; but to rethink the growing schism between diverse cultures, divergent stories, marking the delicate moments of cross-cultural, cross-generational, and cross-gender encounters, which demands attention, and is questioned critically in this dissertation.

A critical approach regarding certain traditions and customs of one's own culture also needs to be carried out, in order to question the fissures in the postcolonial era, which mark out moments of encounters with bitterness and acrimony. Dallmayr talks about the practices of untouchability, of female circumcision as well as infanticide in some societies in Africa, which are unacceptable to people from the West. However, he points out that “horror is not a monopoly of the East, but is also abundant in Western . . . civilization,” such as “the Crusades,” “the two world wars,” “the Holocaust” (“Beyond Monologue” 254). But they do not lead to a complete denial of the existence of a civilization. Dialogue between cultures, also, does not call for a “silence” when “faced with appalling features of a culture . . . The central issue is whether critique proceeds from a presumed self-righteousness or hegemonic arrogance, or else from a shared engagement and a willingness to engage in a mutually transforming learning process” (emphasis added) (“Beyond Monologue” 254). Why is there a reluctance to challenge the practices of one’s own culture which need to be shunned? How can a space be created for acknowledging those traits in other cultures across the world, which may lead to a harmonious relation among people within one’s own civilization, as well as with other civilizations? Echewa highlights these perplexing issues in his novel The Crippled Dancer, which is explored in details in the fourth chapter of my thesis.
Civilizational encounters often restrict themselves to open up an adequate space for healthy engagement with each other. How can this be countered, and the prevailing power structures in the postcolonial world challenged? The West—during the colonial era—has attempted to “export its worldview,” and “reshape the identity” of civilizations across the world (Köchler, “The Philosophy” 5). It is a colonial mentality to claim the superiority of one’s own culture, and thereby judge other cultures. Western anthropologists and ethnographers during the colonial era, have taken a similar approach towards the other cultures they study. The fifth chapter of my thesis deals with this aspect of cross-cultural encounters, and looks into the encounter between a Western anthropologist and Igbo village women in Echewa’s novel *I Saw the Sky Catch Fire.*

Köchler points out the fact that cross-cultural encounters—during colonialism—have always had a “missionary ideology,” which aims to “propagate Western rationality” (“Philosophical Foundations”). He draws one’s attention to a similar dominating tendency working at present in the world:

This dominationist approach in cross-cultural encounters has not disappeared with historical colonialism. In a more or less secularized form, it lives on in the cultural self-perception of the United States—which claim to represent the “West” as the herald of “human rights” and “democracy” in a self-declared “New World Order.” (“Philosophical Foundations”)

The dominating culture—the culture which tries to impose its own civilization on other cultures—the “emperor,” “engages in a kind of civilizational soliloquium, relating to other civilizations or national cultures by way of a self-encounter and tending to shape their
identity according to his own self-perception, excluding any possibility to see himself through the eyes of the other” (Köchler, “Culture and Empire”). The power hierarchy is deliberately maintained in societies, as Foucault has argued, and we have discussed. The question I am inclined to raise is that: How can one attempt to overthrow the power structures which operate in maintaining certain discourses?

Köchler directs one’s attention to—and emphasizes—the idea that a civilization “can only define and fully develop itself if it is able to relate to other civilizations” (Köchler, “Philosophical Foundations”). It is important in this context, to take into concern the notion of “globalectics” upheld by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o. Globalectics proposes the need for “wholeness, interconnectedness” (Globalectics 8) of different parts of the globe, making way for dialogue between cultures, between people:

... Globalectics combines the global and the dialectical to describe a mutually affecting dialogue, or multi-logue, in the phenomena of nature and nurture in a global space that’s rapidly transcending that of the artificially bounded, as nation and region. The global is that which humans in spaceships or on the international space station see: the dialectical is the internal dynamics that they do not see. Globalectics embraces wholeness, interconnectedness, equality of potentiality of parts, tension, and motion. It is a way of thinking and relating to the world, particularly in the era of globalism and globalization. (Globalectics 8)

Ngũgĩ directs one’s attention to the need to read a text globalectically, shunning away “[n]ational one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness” (Globalectics 48). However, this
does not imply doing away with the particularities of each culture, its unique traits and practices. It highlights the need to bar oneself from reading texts with conservatism and narrow thinking, which results in developing a supercilious disposition. This leads to a tendency to treat other cultures and the texts with condescending attitude.\(^{25}\)

The varieties of local literatures add up to the distinct voices highlighted in a world literature, where the distinctiveness of each culture is valued, instead of being inferiorized: “Reading globalectically is a way of approaching any text from whatever times and places to allow its contents and themes form a free conversation with other texts of one’s time and place . . . It is to allow it to speak to our own cultural present even as we speak to it from our own cultural present. . . .” (Globalectics 60). But, the question I would like to raise here is that, how can a “globalectic” approach be achieved?

The propensity to label cultures and languages with a hierarchy acts as an impediment to develop such a globalectic reading of texts, and to nurture such a globalectic approach towards diverse cultures. Ngũgĩ calls this “linguistic feudalism,” and accentuates how it “leads to aesthetic feudalism within and between nations” (Globalectics 60-61). He therefore argues in support of breaking down the hierarchy; and bringing about a relationship of equality between cultures and languages, as in a network: “In a network there is no one center, all are points balanced and related to one another by the principle of giving and receiving. The pedagogical organization of literature should reflect that sense of a common heritage of simultaneously taking and giving assumed by a network” (Globalectics 61). A globalectic stance, therefore, signifies a mutually engaging relationship between diverse cultures, where cultural specificity is acknowledged, and a bridge of dialogue is
built. What are the ways in which a "globalecic" approach can be taken, thereby nurturing mutual dialogue?

Any discussion about the hierarchy prevailing in the world, leading to the lack of an adequate space for dialogue, calls for an understanding of the idea of "dialogism" propounded by Mikhail Bakhtin. The Russian philosopher, in producing a "highly distinctive concept of language," has upheld how language entails "an almost Manichean sense of opposition and struggle at the heart of existence . . ." (Holquist, Introduction xviii). His use of the tropes of "heteroglossia," "polyphony," and "carnivalization," to bring out the "immense plurality of experience" (Holquist, Introduction xix) in language, is a challenge to the authoritative role taken up by certain languages, and opens up a space for a plurality of meanings and narratives. He has shunned the study of languages as divorced from the social and cultural spheres of life; and, in highlighting his idea of "dialogism," brings out the inherent quality of languages to remain intermingled with the social and cultural milieu. I specifically look into the chapter "Discourse in the Novel," from his book *The Dialogic Imagination*, to uphold his ideas of "dialogism" and "heteroglossia" in language. Since I do not attempt to make a linguistic study of novels, I have not dealt with the other concepts propounded by Bakhtin, in my thesis.

In upholding the concept of the "internal dialogism" (Bakhtin 280) of a word, Bakhtin has argued that: "The word is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it: the word is shaped in dialogic interaction with an alien word that is already in the object. A word forms a concept of its own object in a dialogue way; . . . every word is directed toward an answer and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word it anticipates" (279-280). Therefore, the identity of a word is incumbent on the other word: the identity of
the "self" is always incumbent on the presence of the "other." There is an intertwining relationship between words, and their identities are dependent on each other. Hence, a word can never exist in isolation; it exists always in dialogue with the other word. Language has a "double-voiced" characteristic, which incorporates "both the language of the speaker and that of any immediate or anticipated addressee, toward whom the speaker may assume various postures through his or her language . . ." (Ryan 63). According to Bakhtin, language is inherently "heteroglot," multiple-voiced, and "it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions . . . intersect[ing] each other in a variety of ways . . ." (Bakhtin 291). Languages "do not exclude each other," (291) but co-exist together, entering perpetually in dialogue with each other, giving birth to a plurality of meanings; and this constitutes the "heteroglossic" characteristic of languages.

Taking into account the inherent "dialogic" and co-habiting nature of languages, I would like to argue, and raise the question, that: do these "dialogic" spaces open up an arena for co-existence on equal footing, or, is there a hierarchy maintained when languages enter into dialogue? Are languages actually co-existing, with a space for mutual respect and recognition? Bakhtin’s notion of "dialogism" acknowledges the presence of multiplicities and pluralities, but, is there a space for mutual dialogue—between these multiple existences—on an equalized sphere?

In rethinking the moments of discordant encounters and the nuances of thoughts which come to play in defining and re-defining each other when divergent stories encounter, I would like to uphold in my thesis—what I call—the idea of “Postcolonial Soliloquies.” The word "soliloquy" reads as, "a speech in a play in which the character speaks to him- or herself or to the people watching rather than to the other characters" (Cambridge 1376).
The usage of the word "Postcolonial" here, takes within its ambit, multiple disparate voices giving expression to individual stories, narratives, across cultures. The idea of "Postcolonial Soliloquies" uphold the present situation in the world, where individual voices and stories exist more like soliloquies, engrossed within one's own culture and customs. There is a dominating hierarchy maintained in the knowledge-sphere, as Foucault has argued. Therefore, although diverse perspectives, thoughts, beliefs, share a distinct space for expression, yet, discordance giving rise to cultural and social inequality marks moments of cross-cultural, cross-generational, cross-gender encounters. This leads to a hierarchization of world by privileging certain types of narratives.

Attempts to exchange divergent ideas and culture-induced truths—with each other, on an equal footing—get trapped within the ever-pervasive web of a hierarchy weaved by "power." Individuals with their "heteroglossic" narratives tend to indulge more into "Soliloquies" in the postcolonial era. But, the question which I would like to highlight—in my thesis—and which intrigues me, is that: Can these "Soliloquies" break out into dialogues? How can these "Soliloquies" enter into an exchange of views, beliefs, thoughts, without the tendency to impose one's standpoint on the other? The idea of "Postcolonial Soliloquies" upholds these questions, involving one to rethink and question the deliberately maintained hierarchy, and the bitterness which results from discordant encounters.

Dallmayr, Köchler, and Niezen have repeatedly questioned the scarcity of a space for dialogue and mutual tolerance, in cross-cultural encounters. In addition to their contribution, my thesis attempts to explore certain perplexing questions: Why is there the propensity to define one's position in terms of hierarchies? Why has there been a want of an adequate space for mutual understanding, without taking on a judgmental demeanor by privileging
one’s own cultural norms and abandoning other cultures and practices down on the hierarchy? Why is there a reluctant approach to critically rethink certain practices of one’s own culture?

Echewa in his novels *The Crippled Dancer* and *I Saw the Sky Catch Fire*, has challenged certain practices in Igbo culture, such as the practice of witchcraft, circumcision among women, for they lead to disharmony within Igbo society itself. Köchler highlights that: “Transcending the horizon of one’s own cultural tradition is the precondition for a better understanding of that very tradition” (“Philosophical Foundations”). It is significant to draw one’s attention to Dallmayr’s observations—taking recourse to Todorov—in this context:

As invoked by Todorov, dialogical exchange means an effort at bridge building across a vast abyss, an effort which does not erase the abyss nor domesticate the “other shore.” In terms of self-other relations, dialogue means exposure to an otherness which lies far beyond the self... it signals an alternative both to imperialist absorption or domination and to pliant self-annihilation (a surrender to an “essentialized” other). (*Beyond Orientalism* xviii)

Thus framing a theoretical viewpoint, I intend to explore the questions which make me think again and again regarding the issues marking the moments of discordant encounters, bringing into context the idea of “Postcolonial Soliloquies,” in reading the novels of Echewa.
The pertinent question of a “single story” (Adichie) in a postcolonial world of multiplicities appears oxymoronic. But one still finds the dominance of single story(s) which actively participate in manufacturing truths and discourses, shunning other kinds of discourses and narratives; thereby indulging in “Soliloquies,” and suffocating co-existence. It is significant to take into account Achebe’s words in this context: “Whether the rendezvous of separate histories will take place in a grand, harmonious concourse or be fraught with bitterness and acrimony will all depend on whether we have learned to recognize one another’s presence and are ready to accord human respect to every people” ("African Literature" 123).

This dissertation explores the existence of multiple voices, of plural stories—in the novels of Echewa—and questions the tendency to indulge in “Soliloquies,” when divergent narratives encounter.
Notes


2 See note 1.

3 See Chatterjee, History and the Present.

4 See Fanon.

5 It is significant to consider the words of Stuart Hall. He writes how the West has relied on "classical, Biblical, legendary, and mythological" knowledge to construct an idea of other parts of the world: "Asia remained largely a world of elephants and other wonders almost as remote as sub-Saharan Africa" ("The West" 289).

6 Césaire emphasizes that: "... between colonization and civilization there is an infinite distance ... colonization works to decivilize the colonizer, to brutalize him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism ..." (2). In this context, it is also important to note what Jean-Paul Sartre writes, that colonialism "designates colonizer and colonized alike" (The Colonizer xxvi). The colonizer "can only exonerate himself in the systematic pursuit of the 'dehumanization' of the colonized by identifying himself a little more each day with the colonialist apparatus" (xxvi). But first he "must dehumanize himself ... A relentless reciprocity binds the colonizer to the colonized ..." (xxviii). See Sartre.

7 "The 'othering' of vast numbers of people by European colonialist thought, and their construction as backward and inferior, depended upon what Abdul JanMohamed calls the "Manichean allegory," in which a binary and implacable discursive opposition between races is produced ... Such oppositions are crucial, not only for creating images of non-Europeans, but also for constructing a European self" (Loomba 91).
See Mukherjee, “The Centre Cannot Hold: Two Views of the Periphery.”

Tejaswini Niranjana highlights the important role which translation plays, in re-writing the histories of once-colonized cultures. The “post-colonial desire to re-translate is linked to the desire to re-write histories” (172). Translation, “[b]y employing certain modes of representing the other . . . reinforces hegemonic versions of the colonized, helping them acquire the status of what Edward Said calls representations, or objects without history” (3). See Niranjana.

See Parry.

See Gandhi.

Achebe sees the emergence of a “new voice” in Africa, which can be achieved by adapting English language to express African ways of life:

He [the African writer] should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience. . . . I [Achebe] feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings. (“The African Writer” 62)

“Historicism is what made modernity or capitalism look not simply global but rather as something that became global over time, by originating in one place (Europe) and then spreading outside it. . . .” (Chakrabarty 7).

Partha Chatterjee, in talking about the vernacular history writing traditions in Bengal, has drawn one’s attention to the use of “other literary genres such as the novel, drama, autobiography, and even poetry.” (History in the Vernacular 19) in writing indigenous histories, which are entirely different from the colonial forms of history.

See White, 98.

See Note 1.
The notion of rationality is something constructed by the West. Cultural beliefs are judged according to the ideas of rationality pertaining to the Western society. The societies which do not follow the same cultural norms considered *rational* by the West, are thereby grouped as binaries of the *rational* Western society, and are labeled *irrational*. Based on the Western notions of rationality and irrationality, distinction is made between countries as "developed and underdeveloped (or developing) countries; in large measure this distinction coincided with that between Occident and Orient, with the former assigning to the latter its status and significance in the global context..." (Dallmayr. *Dialogue Among Civilizations* 33).

"Sabine Jell-Bahlsen is an anthropologist and an ethnographic film maker. She holds an MA from the Free University in Berlin, Germany, and a Ph. D. in anthropology from the Graduate Faculty of the New School for Social Research in New York (1980). Sabine has carried out extensive, in-depth field research in South Eastern Nigeria over 30 years..."

<http://sabinejb.com>  

Questioning the hierarchy of knowledge(s), Foucault uses the term "genealogy" to signify "the union of erudite knowledge and local memories which allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today" (83).

According to Foucault:

... truth isn’t outside power, or lacking in power... ‘Truth’ is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements. ‘Truth’ is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A ‘regime’ of truth. This regime is not merely ideological or superstructural: it was a condition of the formation and development of capitalism. (131-133).
Niezen emphasizes on the need to preserve the particularities of cultures, the unique identity of every culture, and writes: "... another way to try to create a world in which human differences are inconsequential is through the assertions of communities, local cultures, or micro-nations, through the creation of microcosms shored up against the intrusions of global integration" (3). It is significant—in this respect—to look at his views regarding the idea of a uniform culture, and what it ultimately leads to:

... earlier theorists of social integration, many inspired directly or indirectly by the universal ambitions of the French Revolution and the unprecedented powers of industrialization... were centrally concerned with the growth of the state, the expansion of empires, the progress of civilization... These were phenomena that entailed profoundly important processes of power accumulation and social uniformity, sometimes with a view to a terminus of history, the centralization of governments, and an end to all significant human differences... (7-8)

Dallmayr, in talking about the need for every culture to secure its distinctiveness, draws one's attention to Charles Taylor's 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. That is, it insists on paying homage to what is universally present—that everyone has an identity—"through recognizing what is peculiar to each." Hence, a universal demand here "powers an acknowledgement of specificity." (Beyond Orientalism 213)

See Pratt.

Köchler emphasizes on the importance of dependence on each other, between civilizations across the world. He writes:
For those who are concerned about the human race, a *universal* dialogue of civilizations is of crucial importance for the future of mankind because such a dialogue is a basic condition of peace and stability on both the national and the transnational level. As stated by UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim in his message to the participants of the international conference on "The Cultural Self-comprehension of Nations" (1974): "No nation, however large or powerful, can escape from the fundamental reality of our interdependence." ("Philosophical Foundations")

Ngũgĩ highlights that world literature "has not meant the end of national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness. On the contrary it has often been viewed with such one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness" (*Globalectics* 48).

I would like to point out Michael Holquist's argument here, that the term "dialogism" was "never used by Bakhtin himself" (*Dialogism* 14). He writes that: "There can be no theoretical excuse for spawning yet another ‘ism,’ but the history of Bakhtin’s reception seems to suggest that if we are to continue to think about his work in a way that is useful, some synthetic means must be found for categorizing the different ways he mediated on dialogue..." (*Dialogism* 14).

Michael Holquist’s “Introduction” to Bakhtin’s *The Dialogic Imagination*. See Holquist.

Since Bakhtin’s contentions focus more on the linguistic aspect, and because I do not attempt to make a linguistic study in my thesis, therefore I do not indulge into a detailed discussion of his concepts. As my theoretical argument engages with the idea of dialogue, I take into account the concept of “dialogism” from the chapter “Discourse in the Novel” in Bakhtin’s *The Dialogic Imagination*.

Bakhtin’s concept of “dialogism” entails the idea that: “...the ‘self’ is radically dependent upon others; it is described as an act of grace, the gift of the other. Thus selfhood is fundamentally social, and consciousness can be formed only in perpetual dialogue with the ‘languages’ of others” (Ryan 63).
Dallmayr directs one's attention to the fact that: "... in dialogue all concerned parties must be enabled equally to participate in the contest. But there are enormous inequalities in the world obstructing dialogue: inequalities between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless, the oppressors and the oppressed" ("Dialogue Community"). He suggests the need of "agonistic struggle," and writes that:

... the struggle is ultimately for justice and truth, and in that struggle no one has a monopoly of the definition of these terms; hence, struggle must mean an open, fair-minded and tolerant search for a just society and just world order. This does not amount to an endorsement of relativism or the view that "anything goes." Here, the basic meaning of "dialogue" comes to the fore: that the "logos" or truth is "between" participants. ("Dialogue Community")

Köchler further writes that this approach towards one's native culture, is "based on the dialectics of cultural self-comprehension, [and] is the only alternative to the logic of domination and conflict as it has been incorporated in the post-Cold War vision of a new international order with its concomitant paradigm of supposed threats to international security along civilizational lines" ("Philosophical Foundations").
Work Cited


Jell-Bahlsen, Sabine. Message to Anwesha Das. 4 Aug. 2012. E-mail.


