Chapter 2

"... the lions produce their own historian ..."¹: Voices from Africa

"Until the lions produce their own historian, the story of the hunt will glorify only the hunter."²

- Chinua Achebe

In recalling this Igbo proverb, Achebe underlines the need for every individual, every culture, to express her/his own story. The existence of a single story threatens the presence of other narratives, resulting in the glorification of a single class or group, and conferring an inferior status on other cultural groups. Adichie takes into account the adverse situation which arises when wide varieties of communities in the world, are defined according to the cultural standards of one single culture: "... The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes are not that they are untrue but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story."³

Postcolonial writers have repeatedly emphasized on the need to reinstate indigenous histories and cultures. Europe lays claim to restore "history to people and cultures 'without history' " (Said 40). However, under this garb of civilizing the colonized, what has resulted is an obliteration of histories of colonized cultures, and "great care was taken to obliterate the textual ingredients with which such a subject [colonized and uprooted of history] could
Spivak uses the term "epistemic violence" to denote this silencing of colonized people, and writes: "The clearest available example of such epistemic violence is the . . . project to constitute the colonial subject as Other" (280-281). This tendency to stifle the culture of the colonized leads to a denial of the basic "human rights to human beings whom it [colonialism] has subdued by violence, and keeps them by force in a state of misery and ignorance that Marx would rightly call a subhuman condition" (Memmi xxiv).

In African countries—during the colonial era—the black man has not only been silenced but has also been conferred with an ethnic identity which emphasizes the similarities among black people, and denies the difference between diverse black cultures, ethnic groups and beliefs. The colonial rulers have attempted to mould the minds of the colonized by emphasizing the sameness between them, while denying the distinctive traits of varied cultures and traditions of people; and thereby constructing an ethnic identity for them. Stuart Hall has highlighted the fact that: "There was a concern not simply with the absence or marginality of the black experience but with its simplification and its stereotypical character" ("New Ethnicities" 223). Talking about the notion of ethnicity and its use in constructing the black identity, he argues that: "The term ethnicity acknowledges the place of history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity, as well as the fact that all discourse is placed, positioned, situated, and all knowledge is contextual" ("New Ethnicities" 226).

Hall questions the use of "ethnicity" by the West in constructing an identity same for all black people, based on the history of colonization faced by them. It aims to erase away the multifarious cultures and traditions. He highlights a "new conception of ethnicity" which
"engages rather than suppresses difference and which depends, in part, on the cultural construction of new ethnic identities" ("New Ethnicities" 226). This "new ethnicity" too, is "a constructed one. It is constructed in history, it is constructed politically in part. . . . We tell ourselves the stories of the parts of our roots in order to come into contact, creatively, with it" ("Ethnicity" 19). Thus, "this new kind of ethnicity—the emergent ethnicities" bear a relation with the past. But this relation with the past, with the histories of one’s cultural roots, "is a relationship that is partly through memory, partly through narrative, one that has to be recovered. It is an act of cultural recovery. . . . It is an ethnicity that cannot deny the role of difference in discovering itself" ("Ethnicity" 19). It acknowledges the variety in cultures, beliefs and experiences, and upholds a "new conception of our identities," which is "neither locked into the past nor able to forget the past. Neither all the same nor entirely different. Identity and difference. It is a new settlement between identity and difference" ("Ethnicity" 20). This need to create new ethnic identities by shattering the identity imposed by colonizers, to reclaim cultural identities, and restore histories, has led postcolonial writers to write about their indigenous cultures.

C. L. Innes has emphasized how "literary works by Achebe, Brathwaite, Rao, Rushdie and others can be read as alternative histories which both challenge colonial narratives and give voice to those whose stories have been ignored or overwhelmed by European historians" (40). They take a deeper look into the histories of colonized countries, pointing out not only the sameness of their colonial experiences but also the differences between their experiences, owing to their diverse cultural pasts.
These differences form an extremely significant part of the world - differences in opinions, in histories, in narratives. Jacques Derrida has criticized Western structures of thought for attempting to erase away differences and bring about a uniform culture in the world. Differences exist; and therefore, colonial rule in attempting to rule out differences, has actually given rise to a binary thought-structure, which defines each idea with an opposing idea considered as negative. Thus, "absence is the lack of presence, evil is the fall from good, error is a distortion of truth, etc." (Johnson viii). Each concept entails a hierarchy, privileging certain discourses over the others; in fact—in the process—also attempts to suppress differing ideas. These hierarchies are deliberately maintained to preserve a certain power structure (as I have argued earlier). One can very well perceive that: "... what these hierarchical oppositions do is to privilege unity, identity, immediacy, and temporal and spatial presentness over distance, difference, dissimulation, and deferment. In its search for the answer to the question of Being, Western philosophy has indeed always determined Being as presence" (Johnson viii).

Shunning this tyrannical tendency to establish sameness, Derrida brings in his concept of "difference," which implies both "to differ" and "to defer:" and thereby "attempts to demonstrate . . . that this difference inhabits the very core of what appears to be immediate and present. . . . The illusion of the self-presence of meaning or of consciousness is thus produced by the repression of the differential structures from which they spring" (Johnson ix). The hypothesis he propounds implicates that, meanings of words not only "differ" from each other but are also perpetually "deferred." Therefore, any concept—such as the Western colonial concept of Self—cannot be a determinant "presence:" and attempt to extirpate differences. As Michael Ryan and Danielle Sands have put it, that:
“Différence plays on the double meaning of differer as both to differ and to defer. Différence implies that both non-identity and delay are inherent in presence and make it possible” (553).  

In this chapter I intend to explore some of the major concerns in African novels, bringing out the differing perspectives of people across cultures, gender, and generations—as a brief literature survey—and question the gap in African literature to address certain issues related to the ideas of mutual dialogue, of respecting differences among cultures.

Taking into account the inhuman portrayal of Africans by Europeans, writers from Africa have taken up their pen, and have given voice to the long suppressed stories, the indigenous cultures, which have been stifled by colonizers. There is a propensity—among African writers—to reclaim native roots, and question the denial of individual identities by colonial administrators. However, have writers from Africa, also focused on the need to open up a space for dialogue across cultures, as well as across the divergent narratives among different ethnic groups within Africa? Apart from admitting the existence of other stories, has there been an attempt to interact with other stories, without taking on a supercilious demeanour towards each other? Why have the individual thought processes and dilemmas of white characters, been relatively not adequately explored in black African novels? Also, I am inclined to emphasize that, although certain authors have attempted to present a de-romanticized picture of indigenous societies, yet there have rarely been attempts to challenge and criticize certain indigenous practices and customs which defy harmonious co-existence. Why is there a lack of adequate attempt to interact with each other, to engage in dialogue with multiple “Postcolonial Soliloquies?”
This chapter takes up a few novels from different parts of Africa and delves into the existing studies made on these novels, to show how African writers revisit history and reclaim their pre-colonial cultures, the existence of which have been derogated by the West. The writers present a de-romanticized picture of the past, and highlight the history of colonization and its aftermath. When I speak of African novels here, I take into account black African writers and their works into consideration. I intend to focus on Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, and *Arrow of God*, Buchi Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood*, Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru*, from Nigeria (West Africa), Camara Laye’s *The Dark Child*, from Guinea (West Africa), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *Weep Not, Child*, from Kenya (East Africa), and Mongo Beti’s *Mission to Kala*, from Cameroon (Central Africa), in this chapter.

Extensive studies have been conducted on these novels, focusing on the portrayal of native resistance to colonizers, the reclamation of pre-colonial cultures of Africa, the corruption in native society, the portrayal of Western-educated young men, and the use of language in portraying these issues. In contribution to the works done, I would like to highlight certain new concerns, engaging in a critical re-reading of these novels. I first look into the novels which bring to the fore African pre-colonial cultures and their disruption in the hands of colonizers; then proceed to take up the issue of the rift between older and younger generations within native societies; and finally make a reading of some of the women novelists I have taken up here.

Achebe—in his novels—probes into the inner recesses of the Igbo community to retrieve voices which have been silenced by colonialism. He makes an effort to narrate the story of incursion of colonial rulers—from the inside—and reminds his Nigerian readers the
necessity to recognize the nature of imperial oppression. Recalling an Igbo proverb in this context, he says: “If you can’t tell where the rain began to beat you, you will not know where the sun dried your body” (“Spelling Our” 59). He highlights the fact that: “... it is not necessary for black people to invent a great fictitious past in order to justify their human existence and dignity today. What they must do is recover what belongs to them—their story—and tell it themselves” (“Spelling Our” 61). Achebe gives voice to the suppressed stories of Igbo, and thus seeks to present them as sentient human beings, in his novels *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*.

*Things Fall Apart* is set in “the period between 1850-1900... just prior to and after the arrival of white men in this part of West Africa,” (Killam, *The Writings* 13) in the two Igbo villages, Umuofia and Mbanta. The Igbo, standing face to face with colonizers, is re-evoked in his third novel *Arrow of God*, which is “set in the period between Things Fall Apart and No Longer at Ease; that is, the period when colonialism had become entrenched in Nigeria. The locale is Umuaro and the other villages which form a union of six villages” (Killam, *The Writings* 59). Achebe reclaims the past of Igbo and provides a picture of their native culture and traditions. One gets to know the Igbo society as a democratic and egalitarian one, well expressed in the proverb: *Igbo enwe eze* (Igbo do not have kings). Community is ascribed a significant role. But individual achievements share an equal place of importance in Igbo society as well - evident in *Things Fall Apart*.

The coming together of the society in the New Yam Festival and the rituals performed, gives the picture of a close-knit community; while the wrestling match on the second day of the festival is a means for the display of individual physical might. The novel
opens with an emphasis on individual achievements, and a link is immediately established with the honour which personal accomplishments can bring to the community:

Okonkwo was well known throughout nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements. As a young man of eighteen he had brought honor to his village by throwing Amalinze the Cat. Amalinze was the great wrestler who for seven years was unbeaten, from Umuofia to Mbaino. (3)

Igbo communal life also finds expression in *Arrow of God*, when the Festival of the First Pumpkin Leaves brings the six villages together, and communal unity shatters enmity between the villages: “A stranger to this year’s festival might go away thinking that Umuaro had never been more united in all its history. In the atmosphere of the present gathering the great hostility between Umunneora and Umuachala seemed, momentarily, to lack significance” (66).

Ezeulu—the Chief Priest of Ulu, the deity of six villages—is presented as an individual who considers himself to be the possessor of immense power: but at the same time he is constantly aware of the importance of community in an Igbo village: “…It was true he named the day for the feast of the Pumpkin Leaves and for the New Yam feast … If he should refuse to name the day there would be no festival—no planting and no reaping. But could he refuse? … He would not dare” (3). Achebe speaks about the importance attributed to community in Igbo society in his essay “The Writer and His Community”: 
... the Igbo postulate an unprecedented uniqueness for the individual by making him or her the sole creation and purpose of a unique god-agent, *chi*. No two persons, not even blood brothers, are created and accompanied by the same *chi*. . . . this unsurpassed individuality [is balanced] by setting limits . . . The first limit is the democratic one which subordinates the person to the group [or community] in practical, social matters. And the other is a moral taboo on excess which sets a limit to personal ambition . . . (39).

Okonkwo's and Ezeulu's attempts to act against the community and its customs ultimately lead to their downfall.

Orality constitutes another important part of Igbo societies, apart from the communal unity that they share. Proverbs and anecdotes in everyday speech form essential elements of Igbo culture, and oral story-telling practices within the family play significant role in imparting values to children. Oral literature serves as the storehouse of their customs and mores. In the pre-colonial period oral tales have been the only form of preserving native culture. Achebe uses oral story-telling techniques to bring out the pre-colonial culture of Igbo people; and lays emphasis on the significance of the concept of *chi* in Igbo cosmology. *Chi* is “translated as god, guardian angel, personal spirit, soul, spirit-double, etc.” (“*Chi* in” 93). It also means “day or daylight but is most commonly used for those transitional periods between day and night or night and day” (93). Also, Igbos believe on “the notion of duality,” which speaks about a balance between masculine and feminine principles: “Wherever something stands, something else will stand beside it” (“*Chi* in” 94). But one fails to find this balance—in practice—in Igbo society, where women rarely find importance, and where wife-beating exists as a practice.
The indigenous customs and practices are well highlighted by Achebe. However, in these two novels, one does not find indigenous women developed as characters. They are not endowed with individual voices, and with an individual existence of their own. The stories of women fail to find a space.

Thus re-creating the past traditional life of Igbo society, Achebe highlights: “... how a traditional Igbo lifestyle was disrupted by the advent of colonialism, together with the Igbos’ own internal processes of change and development” (Yousaf 35). In Things Fall Apart, Achebe presents the coming of white men in Umuofia in second person narration, through Obierika’s reports to Okonkwo in Mbanta. Okonkwo’s crime against the land of killing the son of his own clansman has resulted in his exile. He comes to know about the destruction caused by white men in Umuofia, from Obierika: “The three white men and a very large number of other men surrounded the market... And they began to shoot. Everybody was killed, except the old and the sick who were at home and a handful of men and women...” (144). Thereafter he comes to know about the building of the Church, and finally about his son Nwoye’s conversion to Christianity. Christianity has made its inroads, captivating young men like Nwoye, propagating the presence of one God and the gospel. Nwoye gets attracted towards the “poetry of the new religion” (151). The outcasts or osu have become the first converts, and “Igbo egalitarianism has been challenged and surpassed” (Carroll 53).

The very basis of European religious beliefs is questioned. Okonkwo, after listening to the white man’s words about Christianity and Jesus Christ, says: "You told us with your own mouth that there was only one god. Now you talk about his son. He must
have a wife, then.’ The crowd agreed” (151). In a conversation between Okonkwo and Obierika, one finds Obierika’s deeper understanding of the changes in his society:

“Does the white man understand our custom about our land?” [Okonkwo]

“How can he when he does not even speak our tongue? But he says that our customs are bad; and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also that our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? . . .” [Obierika] (183)

Okonkwo, unlike Obierika, fails to realize the deeper impact of white culture on Igbo society; and he voices his protest by killing the white man’s messenger; ultimately acting against the customs of his own land by hanging himself. He demeans himself in the eyes of his community, since suicide is considered a sin by Igbo people.

The society accepts certain changes in order to go on. The community adapts Christianity according to their indigenous needs, and holds the society from not falling apart: “. . . the novel’s title has a misleading finality because Umuofia, rejecting Okonkwo’s counsel of a war of resistance which would have meant total obliteration, does not fall apart: it changes in order to go on” (Wright, “Things Standing” 81). The changes in Igbo society is well highlighted by Achebe in the novels. However, white characters fail to find a space for individual growth and development.

In Arrow of God, the white colonial rule has already established itself in Nigeria for quite a few years. Achebe here attempts to depict the world of colonizers alongside the world of Igbo. He reveals the tactics of colonial rulers to colonize not only the land but also the minds of Igbo and their mythical beliefs. Colonialism seeks to introduce new myths and
beliefs pertaining to Christianity in the Igbo society, rejecting native beliefs as false:
“Christianity . . . sees its primary function as the degradation of Umuaro’s traditional symbols. . . . the Christians can only succeed in controlling the minds and hearts of the people of Umuaro by degrading national symbols and denying them their mythical significance” (Gikandi, Reading Chinua Achebe 154-155). Ezeulu, who sends his son Oduche to the mission so that he remains informed about the ways of the white man, ultimately finds his son trying to kill their sacred symbol, the python, in order to prove himself a good Christian. One is immediately reminded of his warning to Oduche earlier in the novel: “When a handshake goes beyond the elbow we know it has turned to another thing. . . .” (13). Tejumola Olaniyan points out in this context that:

. . . Christianity, unlike Igbo religions, is monotheistic and therefore selfish
. . . univocal. It is not a religion you can “share” with other religions; all it says is “Jesus Christ or hellfire and damnation.” *This is why the “share” the little boy Oduche brings home, rather than co-existing with others, attempts to stifle them out of existence.* (emphasis added) (24-25)

He brings out the destructive effects of colonization on Igbo society, and in the process the White culture is subjected to severe criticism.

However, white characters fail to find apt portrayal, and one remains uninformed about the dilemmas engulfing their thoughts. The black male characters are very well developed, their psychology well explored, but whites are stereotypically presented in these novels.
*Arrow of God* highlights the colonial power gradually establishing its dominance in Umuaro. Achebe voices the inferior status ascribed to Igbos who work under imperial rulers, such as Nwodika's son, who does some domestic work for white men. He expresses the predicament of black men working under white colonizers: "... Sometimes I feel shame when others ask me where I come from. We have no share in the market; we have no share in the white man's office; we have no share anywhere..." (170). Ezeulu's refusal to be a white man's chief ultimately shakes the power of the entire colonial administration, and finally the colonial rulers succumb to Ezeulu's decision. Achebe here reveals how Igbo community preserves its own traditions, customs, and ways of living, and does not completely succumb to white cultural norms, which colonizers strive to impose on them. The fall of the society happens not because white religion succeeds to shatter the indigenous culture of Igbos, but because of Ezeulu's destructive ambition to go against his community and consider himself to be the possessor of supreme power and authority. In making his people starve, he goes against the community, and against the customs of the land, similar to Okonkwo.

The dilemmas of indigenous characters in Igbo society find adequate expression in these novels. Whites are presented alongside the Igbos, and their tactics to colonize and rule, is revealed in *Arrow of God*. But one does not find a complete development of white characters. Their dilemmas do not come to full light in the novels. Indigenous women are relegated to negligible importance. Native characters resist foreign imposition; but there is a lack of a critical treatment of certain traditional practices within native society, such as the practice of abandoning *osulu* or outcasts, which needs to be subjected to questioning.
The intrusion of colonizers in Africa, disrupting the traditions and culture of the land, also finds a living presence in Ngũgĩ’s novel *Weep Not, Child*. The novel lays emphasis on indigenous men who are endowed with powers by colonial rulers, and act against native population: “The conflict now is between the aliens and their black lackeys on one side, and a deprived native population represented by the Mau Mau on the other. The issue centers round the question of who owns the land of Kenya, its indigenous people or the white settlers” (Ikiddeh 6). Ngũgĩ employs the strategy of highlighting the rift among the native people themselves, when some of the indigenous men who are given a place of authority by colonizers, act against their fellowmen; and along with their imperial masters breed trouble in their indigenous land.

The novel reveals the deprived state of Ngotho: his ancestral land is owned by the white man Howlands; and the land on which he lives is owned by the black man Jacobo. Through Bori and Kamau, the author emphasizes the fact that without resistance they will not be able to get back their land from the colonizers. Njoroge, on the other hand, being educated in a missionary school, is attracted toward the Church and the lessons taught pertaining to Christianity. He finds himself in dilemma. He gradually “conceives an analogous symbolic role for himself, seeing the equation between Jomo and Moses and his own potential relation to it” (Killam, *An Introduction* 48). Ngũgĩ draws a picture of native cultural norms and beliefs by making use of oral story-telling techniques. Njoroge listens to his father narrating the story of Creation according to Gikuyu culture:

... yes, children, God showed Gikuyu and Mumbi all the land
and told them.

“This land I hand over to you, O Man and woman
It's yours to rule and till in serenity sacrificing

Only to me, your God, under my sacred tree . . .” (Ngũgĩ, *Weep Not* 24)

Ngũgĩ challenges the eurocentric conception of the creation of the world according to the Christian myth, and gives voice to Gikuyu myths. At the same time he presents a de-romanticized portrait of the society, depicting the pathetic condition of common men, not only due to the destruction caused by colonial forces but also for the Mau Mau rebellion: which has its origin among common men, but brings trouble to their lives. Ngũgĩ reveals how Njeri gets arrested, Ngotho gets tortured for false reasons, and ultimately Njoroge, completely disillusioned, attempts suicide.

The novel highlights Ngũgĩ’s analysis of “the causes of the people’s suffering . . . [He] locates them not merely in the acts of intimidation committed by the whites, but in the Kenyans’ personal weaknesses” (Palmer, *An Introduction* 3). It is through Mwihiaki, that the author brings out the need for every individual to realize the needs of her/his society. Instead of deserting one’s fellow native people at the time of crisis—as Njoroge has wanted to do by taking an easy way to escape—she gains a deeper realization: “. . . But we have a duty. Our duty to other people is our biggest responsibility as grown men and women” (Ngũgĩ, *Weep Not* 134). Through these words, Ngũgĩ keeps the flame of hope burning. He draws one’s attention to the fact that indigenous Gikuyu culture has not lost its place among people native to Kenya, who continue with their struggle for resistance, and question the cultural imposition of colonizers.
Mwihaki is given an individual presence in the novel: and the novel sheds a ray of hope through her vision of the world. Indigenous characters and their dilemmas, and Njoroge's indecisiveness, are given vivid portrayal. But thoughts and dilemmas of white characters fail to find apt portrayal in this novel. Even the predicament of some African characters, who—despite being indigenous to Kenya—work for colonizers, and are the cause for the trouble and grief on their fellowmen, remains unaddressed. One still ponders over the question: What has been the cause of rift within native society? Why have a few indigenous men decided to choose the ways of the white man, and be the cause of trouble for their own kinsmen?

Indigenous traditions and culture also find prominence in Camara Laye's autobiographical novel *L'Enfant noir* translated as *The Dark Child*. He recounts his childhood days at Kouroussa in Guinea. White culture has failed to prove its dominance on this childhood world recreated by Laye. But, the "eruption of the colonial regime which decides his fate—school in Conakry and then at Argenteuil—is shown as the very factor which destroys the unity of the boy's life" (Brench 12). The traditional life in Kouroussa is drawn with intimate details of every ritual that forms an important part of the culture of the people. The episode of the smelting of gold is most beautifully portrayed by the author, the whole process being conducted by the boy's father as a ritual. The creative process that one comes to witness, along with the gathering of the entire community, makes the episode come alive before one's eyes. Commenting on this episode, Palmer writes:

The episode derives its power from four main factors: the incorporation of the gold-making process into the larger myth of creation, the detailed account of the various activities and reactions of the participants, the evocation of
sense of community, and the numerous human touches with which Camara Laye intersperses the description. (An Introduction 86)

The episodes of circumcision, of Konden Diara, and of rice-harvesting, all beautifully bring out the customs of Guinean society, where communal unity is most important.

The entire novel is written from the perspective of a child, and it is through these experiences that Laye “is trying to recapture his past, to relive his past . . .” (Brench 12). He does not consider the traditional ways of life as primitive, but rather gives utmost importance to the customs of his people, where Western intrusion find no place. White school education ultimately does result in the boy’s departure from his family, but he is not de-rooted from the culture of his society. He takes in the positive aspects that education has to offer, at the same time also staying close to his roots, to his traditions. The author lays emphasis on “his understanding and respect for African traditions” (Jahn 142).

It is the “very simplicity of the style [of Laye, which] reflects the viewpoint of the child that Laye seeks to capture in the work” (Irele 116). The portrayal of indigenous culture in his novel cannot be considered as “inauthentic” and “anthropological” — as claimed by certain critics—because the traditions are very much a part of the society. Laye’s novel very well brings out the fact that:

He did not consider his African childhood as something remote, primitive, something to be ashamed of. On the contrary: looking back on it . . . and having learned the technical skills European education had to offer, he discovered these skills had been animated, and had been more closely related to man, in his native civilization. (Jahn 142)
But one fails to find a de-romanticized portrayal of native community in the novel. The mere glorification of native culture needs to be subjected to questioning.

The predicament of young men educated under the auspices of Western academic institutions, form another significant aspect in African literature. Through the story of Okonkwo’s grandson Obi—in his second novel *No Longer at Ease*—Achebe showcases the conditions under which he has received Western education and has become a civil servant, and then falls into corruption, despite his initial resistance to accept bribes. This takes place because of the inability of his community to accept him and his ways of life after receiving Western education. Achebe highlights the corruption spread out all throughout Nigeria, in the years immediately before independence. I would like to focus on Obi’s dilemma with relation to his native society, and bring out the need to question certain indigenous customs, such as Obi’s questioning of the practice of treating *atives* as outcasts.

Having completed his B. A. degree in England, Obi Okonkwo returns to Nigeria, with his idealistic aim of creating a nation devoid of corrupted practices. However, professional and social pressures lead him to the very path of corruption. Achebe—in this novel—attempts “to give corruption a social context, and to show that the context is a complex interaction of the African past, the colonial encounter, and the emergent new hybrid culture” (Wren 48). Obi’s study in England has been financed by Umuofia Progressive Union in Lagos, and there is a great expectation all Umuofians have of him, since he is one of their clansman. He is expected to study law, so that later he can help his fellow people to settle certain legal disputes pertaining to land. But Obi opts to study English, contrary to communal expectations. The Union has been “angry but in the end they left him alone” (*No Longer* 6). An aura of greatness was conferred on him by his clan when
he received an opportunity to study in England. But, when he is asked to pay back the loan
given by the Union, he experiences a financial crisis.

A rift occurs between Obi and his community when he wants to marry Clara, an osu, an outcast according to Igbo cultural beliefs. His community rejects his decision to marry an osu. There is a vehement opposition from his community. He gets engrossed in dilemma, being torn between a set of beliefs he has imbibed from his Western education and the old values of his native society upheld by his clansmen. He questions the practice of abandoning osu in Igbo culture, but older men in the community deny to have a critical look into their own society. Obi is accused of following the white ways. He is considered as a traitor to his own community, having been failed to preserve the dignity of their customs. The conversation between Obi and his father is significant in this context:

‘I don’t think it matters. We are Christians.’ . . . [Obi]

‘We are Christians,’ he said. ‘But that is no reason to marry an osu.’

‘. . . Or fathers in their darkness and ignorance called an innocent man osu, a thing given to idols, and thereafter became an outcast, and his children, and his children’s children forever. But have we not seen the light of the Gospel?’

Obi used the very words his father might have used in talking to his heathen kinsmen. . . .

‘Osu is like leprosy in the minds of our people. I beg of you, my son, not to bring the mark of shame and leprosy into our family. . . .’ (120-121).
His mother forbids him from breaking the norms of society, and fails to understand his emotional dilemma: "... if you do the thing [marrying an osu] while I am alive, you will have my blood on your head, because I shall kill myself" (123). The demands of his family and his community put him in utter crisis.

Obi denies to bring an end his relationship with Clara, but on the other hand, he raises no objection to Clara’s abortion: “Obi wanted to rush out of his car and shout: ‘Stop. Let’s go and get married now,’ but he couldn’t and didn’t. The doctor’s car drove away” (135). A stream of discordant claims made on him, places his principles and idealism in a difficult situation. The Union wants Obi to repay the eight hundred pounds which they have paid for his education overseas; which creates a financial burden on him, along with his other expenses of income tax, electricity bills, repaying the loan for his car and flat. His demoralized state due to social and familial pressures leads to his disillusionment, and he “succumbs to the many temptations around him, accepts bribes, reduces his debts and, at the precise moment he decides, because of his troubled conscience, to reform his ways is arrested and sent to trial . . .” (Killam, The Writings 38).

At the end of the trial: “Everybody wondered why. The learned judge, as we have seen, could not comprehend how an educated young man and so on and so forth. The British Council man, even the men of Umuofia, did not know. . . .” (No Longer 154). Achebe, through this novel, answers the “why” that everybody seems to wonder about, and unveils the reasons for which young educated men get involved in corrupt practices.
Every society needs to question certain traditions which lead to disharmony. The inability to take a critical stance towards the practices of one's culture leads to a blind following of traditions and eulogizing them. The want of a space for understanding—in the novel—results in the terrible predicament which Obi finds himself in, and throws him into the folds of corruption. Also, the tendency to glorify people with European job and education, nurturing the spread of colonial culture, by privileging the English educated—repeatedly highlighted in the novel—is something which needs to be subjected to serious interrogation.

Mongo Beti's novel Mission Terminée, translated as Mission to Kala, also highlights the predicament of a young man in his native society, being educated under a French academic institution. Beti brings out the character of Jean-Marie Medza as someone who is thoroughly alien to the culture and customs of his native community. His journey to Kala—in the novel—acts as his re-initiation into the culture of his community. “The journey from self to community is a process of education,” (Gikandi, Reading the 41) for Medza. Although by birth he is a member of his native society, yet he is alienated from the customs and traditions of his people, being educated under the French educational policy. In his journey to Kala, one can witness Medza being reinstated as a member of his native society, learning the culture and traditions of his people.

He initially adopts the role of a detached observer among his own people, when he goes to Kala to bring back Niam’s wife. His “attitude towards other people is the best indication of how a colonial education has not only alienated him from the mainstream of his community, but also reinforced his slave mentality” (Gikandi, Reading the 47). His native people themselves emphasize his difference from those of his own community.
because he is said to possess a “special thunder,” as an old man tells him: “Shall I tell you what your special thunder is? Your certificates, your learning, your knowledge of white men’s secrets” (Beti 15). However, he gets educated on indigenous ways of life, from his cousin Zambo and the villagers. On his arrival at Kala, he is considered to be the representative of whites by native people, as is evident from the words of an old man:

“... For you the Whites are the real people, the people who matter, because you know their language. But we can’t speak French, and we never went to school. For us, you are the white man ...” (Beti 64-65). Medza is ignorant of the cultural concepts of his own society, and is constantly educated about the different beliefs and traditions indigenous to his people, as one finds in the conversation taking place between him and his uncle:

‘Do you know what kinship is?’ he [uncle] said at last. ... ‘Kinship means blood-relationship.’

‘Ah, yes, now I understand—’

‘It means that from the moment our kinship is established, the same blood flows in our veins. Or put it the other way round: the moment the same blood flows in our veins, we are bound by ties of kinship.’ (88)

Palmer highlights that: “Although in many ways the Kalans treat Jean-Marie as a superior they also exploited him as if he was an inferior. Even Zambo uses him to bolster his prestige” (An Introduction 151).

Native traditions which are intricately depicted in the novel. But Beti does not indulge in mere idealization. He assumes a satirical tone in his writing, especially towards half-educated indigenous men like Medza, and exposes their false arrogance and stupidity,
and their shameful ignorance of indigenous culture. Medza is even incapable of grasping French education properly. He fails in his exam, which his father considers to be a shame for the family. Beti highlights the aura of superiority associated by native Cameroonians with French colonial men and with indigenous people who receive French colonial education. Medza suffers from a dilemma; and fails to hold his position of superiority despite being educated under the auspices of white education. He is also unable to imbibe the cultural traits of his own community completely.

There is a tendency to impart a superior status to indigenous people with Western education—highlighted both in *Mission to Kala* and *No Longer at Ease*—and, at the same time, treat them with contempt for not being a blind follower of native traditions, as is highlighted in *No Longer at Ease*. The young generation, as a result, suffers from a dilemma, being unable to reconcile these two aspects. It actually enhances the binary of “us” and “them” more starkly, and works to preserve the hierarchy. The space for dialogue, for mutual co-existence—on equal footing—gets stifled.

Buchi Emecheta—in *The Joys of Motherhood*—turns the lens of criticism towards native society, and accords individual voices to women characters in her novel. She draws one’s attention to the changes which people have to adapt themselves to, in cities like Lagos, due to the imposing presence of white colonizers. Whereas village life continues with its own traditional ways of living, life in Lagos is very difficult to lead without serving white men. The Igbo patriarchal societal structure gets challenged in Lagos where women take up responsibility for the entire family in the absence or loss of job of their husbands, as is the case of Nnu Ego in the novel.
The traditional life of Igbos suffers a sharp criticism in the hands of Emecheta, who questions the wrong practices of her community, thereby bringing out an extremely de-romanticized portrait of Igbo society. She questions the imposed patriarchal conditions on Ona: “He [Obi] had maintained that she [Ona] must never marry; his daughter was never going to stoop to any man. She was free to have men, however, and if she bore a son, he would take her father’s name, thereby rectifying the omission nature had made” (Emecheta 12). The atrocious practice of murdering women who are kept as slaves, along with a family member who dies, is also highlighted by the authoress. Even though Agbadi protests the cruel treatment of the slave woman, to offer her as sacrifice, when one of his wives dies, he makes no effort to save her from being killed. The woman on the other hand, is content with the few words of sympathy uttered by him:

She kept begging for her life, much to the annoyance of many of the men standing around. . . . The poor slave was pushed into the shallow grave, but she struggled out, fighting and pleading, appealing to her owner Agbadi. Then Agbadi’s eldest son . . . gave the woman a sharp blow with the head of the cutlass he was carrying. “Go down like a good slave!” he shouted. “Stop that at once!” Agbadi roared . . . ”What do you call this, bravery? You make my stomach turn.”

The slave woman turned her eyes . . . “Thank you for this kindness . . . I shall come back to your household, but as a legitimate daughter. . . .” (23)

Emecheta also raises questions regarding the practice of polygamy in African societies, which usually goes unchallenged in novels written by male writers. She reveals how second or third wives to a man are always unwanted by the first wife or the previous
wives. Nnu Ego and Adaku—the second wife of her husband Nnaife—are jealous and suspicious of each other. While women in villages may accept this practice as part of their lives, Nnu Ego—having spent a considerable time of her life in Lagos—questions some customs, and finds it difficult to accept this traditional practice of polygamy. Palmer comments on this issue: "... Nnu Ego, who has become somewhat alienated during her sojourn in Lagos, is powerfully aware of its [polygamy] disadvantages, and through her we are made to see the misery that polygamy can bring, particularly in the urban situation" ("The Feminine" 41).

Emecheta also critiques the male chauvinist perspective of blaming the woman for not being able to bear children, more particularly sons, to their husbands. The words of Nnu Ego to her first husband Amatokwu, reverberate: "... Is it my fault that I did not have a child for you? Do you think I don't suffer too?" (32) to which one finds the sharp words of a patriarchal husband: "I am a busy man. I have no time to waste my precious male seed on a woman who is infertile..." (32). Though Nnu Ego yearns for freedom, she does not like the freedom that Western women have, of spending hours in leisure, and indulge in smoking. It highlights the cultural difference which she finds difficult to accustom herself to. However, Emecheta here generalizes white women. Whites are being looked at, from the perspective of blacks, and they fail to find individual voice in the novel.

Emecheta has also emphasized another significant aspect of African societies: the role of a mother. The words of Nnu Ego during the last days of her life stir one's thoughts even after the novel ends. Emecheta reveals and questions the plight of women in a patriarchal society:
... Men—all they were interested in were male babies to keep their names going. But did not a woman have to bear the woman-child who would later bear the sons? "God, when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody's appendage?" she prayed desperately... (186)

The novel very consciously brings out the true picture of Igbo community, with all its follies.

There is a critical approach towards one's native culture, for Emecheta vehemently criticizes the oppressive practices among Igbos. Women characters find a just treatment. But whites are relegated to absolute negligence, and are presented as stereotypes. Although indigenous women characters get a matured handling in Emecheta, yet white women characters fail to find voice.

The individual perspectives of indigenous women also find expression in Flora Nwapa's novel Efuru. Chimalum Nwankwo highlights the fact that: "Igbo women have a history, a tradition in terms of roles and expectations within their cultural milieu borne out by the characters of the protagonists of Efuru and Idu" (48). Palmer, however, accuses Nwapa, and argues that: "... its [Efuru's] author has not yet mastered her craft" ("Elechi Amadi and Flora Nwapa" 57). He fails to understand the intentional simplicity of her style, the deliberate narration of the novel from the point of view of Igbo women, with intended marginalization of male characters.
The characters of Efuru and Ajanupu—in the novel—acquire complex dimensions, and very well depict the fellow-feeling which Igbo women usually share with each other.

Efuru is educated not under the auspices of white colonial educational policy, but under that of her indigenous culture, customs, practices, and structures of thoughts. She marries Adizua despite his incapability to pay the bride price, which is unlikely in Igbo culture; and helps him with his work to pay the bride price later on, after marriage. Nwapa here not only questions—in a very subtle manner—some of the indigenous traditional practices which need to be done away with, but also underlines the corrupt practices of the Church, thereby questioning the civilizing mission claimed by colonizers. When Gilbert, a convert, says that his mother has made some sacrifices to the ancestors, Efuru asks: “How is that, you go to Church?” to which he replies: “What about that? I shall give the pastor some money . . .” (139). Efuru is astonished at the practice of bribery: “I see. I can never understand you Churchgoers . . .” (139).

The concept of motherhood holds an important position in African societies, and in this novel also, one finds the same. Nwapa abides by the traditional concept associated with motherhood, and highlights the trauma of Efuru when she fears that she might remain childless, and later when her child dies. The novel reveals the importance attached to gods and goddesses in Igbo society, which highlights their deep rootedness in native religion. Nwankwo’s comments on Nwapa’s depiction of a world where people follow their native cultural traditions, a world with its own norms of civilization—completely different from the Western civilization—is extremely significant to take into consideration in this context:
Beyond the roots of Igbo folklore, *Efuru* benefits from the projection and depiction of a specific reality complete with its own dynamics, especially the paradoxical nature of Igbo political and religious culture. . . . The flexible relationships between man and woman, between human beings and their *chi* or guardian spirits, between society in general and other metaphysical entities and realm indicate a world that is never enclosed in terms of meaning and possibilities. (46)

This novel provides a very subtle criticism of some of the indigenous customs as well as obliquely highlights the sham façade of the civilizing mission of Whites. Nwapa brings out an individual female voice, and reveals the predicament of Efuru when her husband, first Adizua, and then Eneberi—who she marries later—leave her. However, the novel fails to provide a space for white characters. It is only the character of Efuru, and to some extent that of Ajanupu, which find a mature development here.

Taking into consideration the Igbo proverb which Achebe recalls, and with which I have begun my chapter, I would like to highlight—with respect to the novels discussed here, as well as to most of the novels written by African authors—that “the lions” have produced their own “historian[s].” There is no more the existence of the single story, of the story of “the hunter.” The “lions” speak out through their “historian[s]:” but, at the same time, “the hunter” is ascribed a fixed stereotype, and his voice fails to find expression.

The question arises: Is there a space for dialogue between “the lions” and “the hunter,” between the Africans and the Europeans, with an attempt to transcend stereotypes? Adichie—in a lecture—has raised serious questions addressing the very idea of being
human. of sharing a humane feeling between people all throughout the world. I am inclined
to quote Adichie:

\[ \text{[There is a need] to embrace empathy, to constantly be reminded that we} \]
\[ \text{should share with everybody in every part of the world, the common and} \]
\[ \text{equal humanity. But I must hasten to clarify that I am not suggesting that we} \]
\[ \text{are all the same . . . Literature is indeed about how we are different. . .} \]
\[ \text{(emphasis added)} \]

The next chapter focuses on Echewa’s novel *The Land’s Lord*, and attempts to lay
emphasis on the need of a space for cross-cultural dialogue, beyond stereotypes.
Notes


2 See Note 1.


4 Spivak in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” highlights the continuous negation of the colonized by the colonizer:

It is impossible for contemporary French intellectuals to imagine the kind of Power and Desire that would inhabit the unnamed subject of the Other of Europe. It is not only that everything they read, critical or uncritical, is caught within the debate of the production of that Other, supporting or critiquing the constitution of the Subject as Europe. . . . great care was [also] taken to obliterate the textual ingredients with which such a subject could cathect . . . (280).

5 Benita Parry has underlined the fact that: “. . . while the reciprocity of the colonial relationship is stressed, all power remains with western discourse” (89). Colonialism “creates a culture in which the ruled are continuously tempted to fight their rulers within the psychological limits set by the latter” (Nandy 3). Mukherjee, in taking a closer look into postcolonial writings of Said, JanMohamed, Bhabha and other such writers, has highlighted that they “have had to be channelled through the centre; that is, they had to be validated by Columbia or Cambridge or Sussex in order to return to the periphery” (10). Therefore—as Parry points out—one has to “address the empowering effects of constructing a coherent identity or of cherishing and defending against calumniation altered and mutable indigenous forms, which is not the same as the hopeless attempt to locate and revive pristine pre-colonial cultures” (191).
Barbara Johnson highlights that: “Derrida’s project in his early writings is to elaborate a science of writing called *grammatology*: a science that would study the effects of this *differance* which Western metaphysics has systematically repressed in its search for self-present Truth” (ix-x). The study of “[d]ifferance is not a ‘concept’ or ‘idea’ that is ‘truer’ than presence. It can only be a process of textual *work*, a strategy of *writing*” (xvi).

See Ryan.

Laye draws a beautiful picture of the gold smelting episode, through the eyes of the child protagonist:

What words did my father utter? I do not know. At least I am not certain what they were. No one ever told me. But could they have been anything but incantations? On these occasions was he not evoking the genies of fire and gold, of fire and wind, of gold married to fire? Was it not their assistance, their friendship, their espousal that he besought? Yes. Almost certainly he was invoking these genies, all of whom are equally indispensable for smelting gold. (35)

Laye’s novel very well highlights the fact that:

He [the young boy] did not consider his African childhood as something remote, primitive, something to be ashamed of. On the contrary: looking back on it ... and having learned the technical skills European education had to offer, he discovered these skills had been animated, and had been more closely related to man, in his native civilization. (Jahn 142)

F. Abiola Irele writes how Adele King has commented on Laye “as not having been educated enough in French to have developed into the accomplished writer to which the novels attributed to him testify” (116). He considers his novels to suffer from “fundamental inauthenticity as regards cultural references and anthropological details” (116). However, Irele debunks King’s criticism, and argues that Laye’s style in *The Dark Child* does not show his educational and literary incompetence.
In this context, I would like direct one’s attention to the following words from Achebe’s novel *No Longer at Ease*:

A university degree was the philosopher’s stone. It transmuted a third-class clerk on one hundred and fifty a year into a senior Civil Servant on five hundred and seventy, with car and luxuriously furnished quarters at nominal rent. And the disparity in salary and amenities did not tell even half the story. To occupy a ‘European post’ was second only to actually being a European. It raised a man from the masses to the elite whose small talk at cocktail parties was: ‘How’s the car behaving?’ (*No Longer* 84)

Refer also to pages 42-43 (*No Longer*). See Achebe.


