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Tropologies of Tradition and (Post)modernity in Nwagwu's Forever Chimes

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James Tar Tsaaior,
"Tropologies of Tradition and (Post)modernity in Nwagwu's *Forever Chimes*" <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol13/iss2/4>

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Abstract: In his article "Tropologies of Tradition and (Post)modernity in Nwagwu's *Forever Chimes*" James Tar Tsaaior explores Mark Nwagwu's novel and postulates that the author succeeds in constructing a novelistic universe both concrete and fluid in its re-invention or re-fabrication of cultural traditions and identity formation processes. This universe is simultaneously traditional/indigenous and (post)modern. However, rather than to delineate these cultural formations through difference as oppositional categories, Nwagwu suggests grounds for multicultural interactions and transactions. In this cultural schema, none of the cultures claims exclusive preserve or pre-eminence over the other as what exists is a democratic space for the cultures to assert their energies as they thrive and co-exist in healthy communion.

James Tar TSAAIOR

Tropologies of Tradition and (Post)Modernity in Nwagwu's *Forever Chimes*

Richly textured and heavily nuanced. Infinitely multi-layered. Generously invested with cultural signifying codes and idioms. A vast cosmological canvas deeply etched with tropes and metaphors which unveils the cultural and civilizational continuum of African and Black peoples over the epochs. A powerful distillation of existential realities that negotiate and interrogate the human condition. A gripping narrative that exists at the intersection of tradition and (post)modernity, continuity and mutability. A novelistic universe that unveils and conflates History and contemporaneity in a harmony of temporal formations. A tale of philosophical depths and theological insights each jostling for ascendancy. A story that participates in the subtle tensions and resolutions that govern and define the human world. A quarry of ideas. And a mosaic of ideals.

The critical perspective in key words and concepts I suggest above perhaps captures the integral and fluid world of *Forever Chimes* and constitutes it as a narrative space that resonates with a plurality of negotiated and re-negotiated meanings. Written by Mark Nwagwu, a professor of zoology at the University of Ibadan, the novel, like its author, is a fusion of full-valued voices and putative perspectives, a multi-voicedness that is reminiscent of heteroglossic fictional narratives. In evaluating the fiction of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Mikhail Bakhtin identifies a multiplicity of speaking voices which are crucial in the determination of meaning. Each of these competing voices is ideologically positioned and politically motivated such that the textual entities become veritable battlegrounds for the contestation of warring forms of epistemologies representative of specific power structures. Bakhtin refracts Dostoyevsky's fiction as constructed around this idea of heteroglossia instituting a carnival of voices evoking the Tower of Babel experience except that in Dostoyevsky's fiction, the voices are coherent, clear, and are invested with significations that inhabit spaces which are contested and contestable.

Against this significant backdrop, the multi-disciplinary concerns of the novel accord with the biographical profile of the author: a university science teacher invading courageously the hemisphere of letters and the humanities. De-territorializing the discursive and disciplinary boundaries and domesticating them through the instrumentality of fiction, the novel's narrative kinesis orchestrates a dialogue between the past and the present and the present and the past on the one hand and the past and the present with the future on the other. This antiphonal or call and response structure and temporal formation is important. It registers in a significant way the fluidity of time as time past and time present are both found in time future (see Eliot in Ngugi). Like a pendulum, therefore, the characters, situations, and events in the novel oscillate between these temporal frames foregrounding the tropologies of tradition and (post)modernity. As such, the past is present in the present, and the present present in the future. Indeed, this is why in African epistemology and hermeneutics, the linear conception of time and history fashionable in the Western metaphysical and philosophical tradition is unacceptable. Time is cyclical, re-enacting its miscellany of significant moments and re-registering its essential lineaments.

Tradition is often refracted as fixed, static and unchanging. In this regard, it is thought of as belonging to pre-history, refusing to flow with the motions and currents of history. Its assumed immutability is seen to be synonymous with primitivity, philistinism, barbarism and, indeed, heathenism. It is defined in terms of ancientness, pastness and a pristine existence that is frozen in the archives of immemoriality. Tradition, therefore, assumes the uncomplimentary signification of being "nativist," "archaic," "antiquated" and contemporaneous with orality-itself a marker of primitivity in the Western perception — rather than a scribal or written culture. Within the dominant and totalitarian episteme central to European empire-building in Africa and other marginal spaces peripheral to the circumference of imperial knowledge, tradition "is applied to the sum-total forms of life, ideas and culture which ante-date European colonialism" (Nwala 25). Perhaps unknown to Nwala, the politics and ideology interiorized within Western meaning systems will not concede the idea of history and culture to Africa as the continent is a victim of Europe's cultural imperialism and predation. This historical reality is further accentuated by the fact that the continent was territorially subjugated, epistemologically tyrannized and culturally emasculated and constituted as a *tabula rasa* before the encounter with Europe.

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This is what constitutes the "discovery" trope in European historiography and travel writings by European travellers and explorers — Mungo Park, Hugh Clapperton, John and Richard Lander, David Livingstone and other men of enormous colonial capital – who "discovered," for instance, the sacred source of River Niger where primitive peoples still suckled the succulent nipples of pre-history and tradition. Jyotsna G. Singh crystallizes this "discovery" trope in the corpus of European colonial and imperial enterprise when he argues that: "this discovery motif has frequently emerged in the language of colonization, enabling European travelers/writers to represent the newly "discovered" lands as an empty space, a *tabula rasa* on which they could inscribe their linguistic, cultural and later, territorial claims. … Rhetorically, however, the trope of discovery took on shifting, multiple meanings within British colonial discourse, being constantly refurbished and mobilized in the service of other colonizing enterprises, such as *civilizing, rescuing,* and *idealizing* or *demonizing …* 'others'" (1-2). It is this prejudiced and spurious canon of Western knowledge which has been presented as universal truth-telling that has constituted Africa, in Valentine Mudimbe's felicitous phraseology as the "epistemological filiation of Europe." This genealogical constitution of Africa as a cultural vassal to Europe was executed through the violent history and historical violence of colonialism and imperialism which has now continued under the mask of globalization and multiculturalism. As it was in the past, so is it now, perhaps until a world without end because Western cultural imperialism in its late capitalist, consumerist stage is more deleterious and devastating than before. In this agonistic schema, tradition is, therefore, sieved in dominant modes of hermeneutic practices as subjectivist, idealist, and romanticist in its comprehension of the past. It is refracted as a narcissistic fixity, an obsessed foetal self-searching and navel-gazing which regress into the eaves and inner recesses of pre-history. Thus, in this jaundiced Western negation of African history, culture, and civilization, tradition possesses no redeeming potentials or positive attributions. It is defined in terms of lack. In African literature, the lineaments of tradition are believed to be resident in the Senghorean cultural philosophy and nationalism of Negritude, the nativist dialectics of the *bolekaja* troika of Chinweizu, Jemie, Madubuike, and the essentialist linguistic nationalism and cultural politics of Ngugi. These cultural nationalist projects, decidedly anti-colonialist, counter-hegemonic and revisionist in character and temperament, have at various times been deplored as either too essentialist and essentializing, ahistorical, puritanical, or blandly celebratory of a supposedly innocent and immaculate African past.

Modernity inaugurated a radical break from tradition, from the past. This radical disjuncture between tradition and modernity views the former with suspicion, disdain and even hostility as if the two are essential monads and mutually exclusive, without anything they can benefit from each other. Modernity is associated with European imperial conquest and civilization of Others in the backwaters of culture. It is conceived to be consistent with European education, administration, culture, values, attitudes and thought systems. But this idea of modernity which is Eurocentric is problematized and even compromised by the reality that there is no one single modernity but multiple modernities. Indeed, European and Western modernity cannot be the modernity of the formerly colonized world. As the Indian philosopher, Partha Chatterjee, has argued, "there might be modernities that are not ours, or, to put it another way, that there are certain peculiarities about our modernity […] what others think of as modern, we have found unacceptable, whereas what we have cherished as valuable elements of our modernity, others do not consider to be modern at all" (3). If modernity is not whole and monolithic but multivalent, hierarchized and even contradictory, it, therefore, presents a contested and contestable site for cultural negotiations and re-negotiations. It is, perhaps in this light that postmodernity has emerged to revision and interrogate the assumptions of modernity. In a cultural sense, postmodernity embeds a systematic erasure of essential difference constructed by the grand narratives of Enlightenment Europe based on notions of Kantian reason. It is a carnival of world cultures purporting to offer a space to all cultures of the world to survive and thrive. This is, however, not without its limitations as the voices of some cultures are more pronounced others and so consign others to subordination and subjugation. Postmodernity is consistent with globalization, an epoch of late capitalist pretensions and cultural commodification, fetishization and consumerism which has conquered all spatial entities leaving no oppositional enclaves or strongholds (i.e., as in Lyotard; Habermas; Hassan; Hutcheon; Jameson). Postmodernity is an epoch which seeks to "democratize" the world cultural space although it undermines itself from within by constructing cultural zones as a political strategy of excluding others by including them. It inscribes itself at the labyrinth and

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interstitial interface of tradition and conflictual modernities emerging and becomes a radical questioning linked to a liberation from previous constraints (see Barsky). In literary and cultural discourses, postmodernity along with postcolonialism and poststructuralism (with deconstruction) has given a virile voice to alternative meaning grids and networks and reified these hitherto marginal meanings as crucial to the interpretation of textuality, history and human essence and existence (see Leitch). Postmodernity, a periodization opposed to tradition and postmodernism, the concrete manifestation of the period in cultural terms, as such, represents "the cultural dominant of late capitalism" (Jameson) and "the age of electronic reproduction and circulation" (see Goldberg).

As a novel, *Forever Chimes* constitutes a veritable narrative possibility for a meaningful dialogic interaction between tradition and (post)modernity. In the epistemological construction and cultural space of the novel, tradition and (post)modernity enjoy a soulful contiguity such that they cease to be oppositional binaries, or mutually irreconcilable and antagonistic. Rather, in their embeddedness, they weave a composite and hybrid multicultural tapestry, yielding a trajectory of difference of sameness and sameness of difference. In this narrative schema which represents the harmony of rainbow colours, simultaneously concrete and yet indistinct, tradition inheres in and benefits from (post)modernity just like (post)modernity also shares in and feeds from tradition in a kinship that is mutually, rich and enriching. To appropriate a felicitous musical metaphor, tradition, and (post)modernity become synonymous with the concordant and discordant keys in an orchestra, harmonizing a rhythmic musical symphony of seemingly disparately cultural ontologies. In its narrative strategies, and in keeping with its fidelity to and preoccupation with the historical process and the reality of contemporary existence, tradition and (post)modernity, the novel distils the story of a family spanning four generations. At the extreme ends of the genealogical spectrum are Pa Akadike Njoku of Okeosisi, the patriarch, and Chioma, his great grand-daughter. Pa Akadike is the traditional prime minister of Okeosisi, capital of Okoko Division in the Igbo country of eastern Nigeria and is subordinate only to the Eze Ikemba, the king. In this exalted status, Pa Akadike personifies socio-political structures and is a foremost custodian of culture and guardian of sacred tradition. He later becomes a catholic Christian but maintains deep, abiding and healthy links with and respect for tradition foregrounding the possibilities for the continuity of tradition, and its hybridization with (post)modernity. Thus in Pa Akadike is the co-mingling flow of the sap of tradition and modernity.

Chioma is an *enfant terrible* and her precocity is noticed early in life through her probing, inquisitive disposition, provocative questions, exquisite drawings, and superlative performance in school. She graduates from being an intelligent girl to a young woman who is a student of philosophy at Georgetown University, an accomplished painter, and a devout catholic in love with the Opus Dei prelature. It is Chioma that inherits *Uzo*, an ebony walking-tick of familial totemic significance from Pa Akadike and becomes a veritable carrier of tradition and culture and ensures its continuity. In Chioma dwells the dualities and possibilities of trado-cultural hybridity and in her too consists the apparent tensions and conflicts between tradition and (post)modernity which get resolved though with latent ambiguities and ambivalences. Chioma herself announces the traditional and (post)modern agones, contradictions and complexities of this hybridity in an exchange with Onyebuchi, her mother: "Oh, you said you would not tell me the story of how my great-grandfather became a Christian… I want to know of my ancestry, everything. I want to know so I can better understand myself. Sure, we do not live in Okeosisi but for better for worse, Okeosisi is still in me, though now it will be manifest in the context of this new culture in the United States. Already I am beginning to discover myself. This is Okeosisi come to Washington … I am becoming transparent, more Okeosisi, more Washington, all of the above, each giving it hundred percent. That is my problem — how to be wholly and entirely one without sacrificing the other: how to be Pa Akadike's great-grand-daughter as he would like and at the same time go with the flow of life in Washington, D.C., in the United States (60). Between Pa Akadike and Chioma is a complex of familial relationships that form the generational nexus. There is Maduka, Pa Akadike's son and Chioma's grandfather who is married to Adiaha, a woman of Efik origin in Nigeria's South-South. Maduka is the father of Onyebuchi, Chioma's, and the wife of Okeadinife, completing the four generations. In this generational configuration resides the tropology of tradition and (post)modernity through the subtle cultural shifts and traditional transitions that define the generations. In the unfolding trajectory, the novel underscores the resilience of tradition and culture in its dynamic and conflictual interaction with the (post)modern and them infinite possibilities for what

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Paul Gilroy characterizes as "modernity and double consciousness." This generational hybridity, modernity and double consciousness is also present in the family of Bia, Chioma's childhood boy friend whose father is a Fanti Ghanaian, his mother Iranian, his father's mother Russian, and his mother's mother a white South African. If he were to Marry Chioma, their offspring will belong to a genealogy defined by racial miscegenation: Fanti-Igbo-Iranian-South African-Russian. What could be more traditional and yet postmodern than such a family of hybrid origins! Such hybrid roots can only parallel those of Kwameh Anthony Appiah in his book, *In My Father's House* in which Appiah celebrates the arrival of a world of multiracial possibilities.

Although spatially set in Okeosisi, the novel's spatial boundaries mutate in diverse directions to Calabar and Port Harcourt in the South-South of Nigeria, Ibadan and Ife in the South-West and Washington, D.C. in the United States of America. This setting is symbolic and harbors cultural significations and traditional typologies and how these embed with (post)modernity. Okeosisi itself is a huge, strong and hardy tree called iroko, renowned for its stability, strength and resilience. This is a metaphor for the resilience and longevity of traditional culture. This traditional culture is not static. It is capable of change when it comes into communion with other cultures. But as a physical space, Okeosisi as a peripheral rural town contrasts radically with the more urban cities of Calabar, Port Harcourt and Ibadan which are centers of (post)modern societal engineering. These urban spaces in turn are marginal to Washington, D.C. which is a metropolitan enclave and capital of (post)modern culture. Pa Akadike is the embodiment of tradition and continuity. This he achieves through the instrumentality of *Uzo*, the ebony walking-stick which serves as the veritable carrier of tradition through the generations. As the foremost guardian of sacred tradition, he dutifully and piously exercises ritual control and epistemological husbandry over *Uzo* as a family totem thereby ensuring its sanctity and integrity as a sacred property. It is in keeping with these requisite ritualistic protocols that the efficacy of the walking-stick is assured and maintained. Pa Akadike's unqualified fidelity, zeal and religious adherence to this responsibility and obligation foregrounds his profound attachment to and respect for tradition. It is against this significant backdrop that when he adventitiously discloses the secrets and powers that define *Uzo* and endow it with its immanent sacredness to his wife, this evokes sympathy from us. This is especially so with the negative repercussions attendant on this contravention which threaten his sanity and life.

In the cultural space *Uzo* inhabits, the number eighteen is symbolically crucial and critical. If the end of the stick is caressed eighteen times, the secret powers of the stick are unlocked. At this moment whatever the individual desires will be granted provided it is for the purpose of enhancing and not diminishing humanity, for noble and not base enterprises. For instance, Pa Akadike desires that Maduka his son should excel in his academic quests and it is when he is rubbing *Uzo* and uttering these words that his wife who is hiding under the bed hears him. It is significant that *Uzo* is not allowed by tradition to be used for destructive purposes. This underscores the intrinsic humanity, benevolence and altruistic character and temperament of this society and resonate its essential culturality and civilization. The totem represents the presence of the ancestral essences in their invisible participation in the life of the living so as to maintain cosmic harmony and ensure societal balance and coherence. According to the narrative, *Uzo* is an:

> ebony-walking stick carved with a grip in the shape of a lion's head. It is a walking stick from his ancestors, four generations back, at least. In fact, he would not remember which of his ancestors first used it. His father, Njoku, had given it to him before he died with the words: "My son, walk with this stick given to me by your great grandfather who got it from his grandfather. It is powerful and can do many things … never, I repeat, never point it at anyone unless you want the person to die. But if you do this, a terrible thing would happen to the family, to your children … the stick brings good fortune … if you need anything, simply rub the head seventeen times with your left hand repeating what you want seventeen times with each rub … You must not use it to do evil, to wish evil on anyone. It is only for you to do good and to help people … Just one thing: a little girl will come into this family and inherit the stick from you and from then on the life of the stick will be different … she will be the greatest of our dynasty. (12-13)

Uzo serves as "the way" for the people, a cosmological marker or idiom similar to Ayi Kwei Armah's "the way" in *Two Thousand Seasons.* As the way is the redemptive power of the Akan in Armah's novel, so is *Uzo* for the people in the Igbo society of the novel. Appropriating the trope or metaphor of

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Uzo, Nwagwu inscribes simultaneously into the fabrics of the text the tropologies of tradition and modernity, continuity and mutability and establishes a dynamic dialectic between the ostensibly oppositional binaries thereby underscoring their mutual and harmonic participation in the continuum of history. Pa Akadike's trusteeship of the walking-stick represents the motions of tradition and continuity and typifies the ancestral presence. Even when he transfers the guardianship of Uzo to Chioma, his great grand-daughter and the authentic heiress as demanded by the ancestors, tradition still continues in the totem. This is because even though Chioma is a product of (post)modernity, she is also heiress to the traditional past of Okeosisi and, indeed, the preferred one who is destined to be the custodian of *Uzo* and carry on with tradition. Chioma, therefore, emerges as the nexus for the co-habitation of two mutually exclusive identities and cultural traditions. In her also inheres the distinct voices of tradition and (post)modernity, continuity and change locked in a multicultural dialogue of negotiated and re-negotiated meaning grids. Thus, Chioma constitutes herself as a hybrid subject, a cultural mongrel in whom the conflictual interaction between tradition and modernity are harmoniously resolved. Sufficiently aware of her agency in this cultural miscegenation process, she states perspicaciously: "she had been given the walking stick soaked in mystery to help her in the quest to do good for others. But how would she cope with her own life and live it as best she could? … the different roles she now had to play — a priestess of the lesser gods in the service of the great Christian God; guardian of the secrets of her ancestors … a person that manifests a perfect blending of traditional African culture, American culture of freedom and capitalism, and the novel millennial global-village culture?" (229). It is fascinating in an (en)gendered perspective that it is a woman, Chioma, who provides the enabling, requisite space for the conflation of the two cultural categories in the novel. This reality or possibility resonates with crucial gender considerations particularly in a supposedly phallocentric society where the male principle takes significant precedence over the female in ritual, religious, political, juridical and socio-cultural engineering processes and registers phallic energy as the preferred category in inheritance rights. Chioma's agency and subjectivity are, therefore, mobilized in the service of privileging the matriarchal tradition and in providing a meaningful cultural space for womanhood. It is part of the authorial strategy that the ancestral essences designate the young Chioma as the repository of traditional mores and values through the instrumentality of her inheriting *Uzo*.

In a more fundamental sense, although Nwagwu problematizes the interaction between tradition and modernity in the subtle tensions, conflicts, and contradictions in the subjectivities of Pa Akadike and Chioma, the novelistic universe which he wills into existence radically contrasts in juxtaposition with that of Chinua Achebe, for example. In Achebe's fiction, especially in his historical novels of *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, there exists a mutually exclusive, antagonistic and irreconcilable relationship between the indigenous African and the predatory European cultural formations. Each of them constitutes an essential cultural monad, mummified in the sarcophagi of Selfness and Otherness, identity and difference, tradition and modernity. Abdul JanMohamed calls this "Manichean aesthetics," a construction of cultural binaries based on the essential differences of oral-written, traditional-postmodern, folk-elitist, anonymous-named, continuity-change, core-periphery, etc. It is this essentialism that orchestrates and mediates the adversarial cultural interactions in Achebe's novels. In contradistinction, Nwagwu constructs a cultural landscape whose geo-politics is governed by hybridity and the complementarity of the two cultural hemispheres each volunteering the aggregate sum-total of its grammar of mores and fund of values to be grafted on the other. In this cultural schema, what emerges is the interpenetration or interweaving of cultural networks, each asserting its energies and registering its self-presence but at the same time co-operating with the other in a sameness of difference and a difference of sameness. Two disparate threads constitute a single, harmonious loom. Thus, tradition outlives itself in modernity just like modernity feeds from tradition in what looks like a symbiotic relationship. This cultural complementarity and creative fusion of tradition and modernity presents itself, and is accentuated, in the characters of Pa Akadike and Chioma. While the former embraces catholic Christianity, he does not altogether abandon the protocols of tradition and culture which give meaning, direction and vitality to the cosmogony of the people's beingness and heritage. He finds in the new dispensation opportunities for cross-cultural transactions and negotiations which can enhance our common humanity. This is how the fusion between traditional ritual practices and Christian modernity is represented in him: "Although Akadike was now a baptized Christian, he still

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carried out a lot of rituals of his fathers. Early in the morning, like clockwork, he would go to his father's grave and pour libations to his ancestors, this time with rain-water and not the usual palm wine … as far as he was concerned, everything about his culture, his traditions and his religion were all in keeping with the tenets of the one God. As he saw it, instead of having twenty or so odd gods and deities, Christianity supplanted all of them with one Almighty God who had far more powers than the deities he had worshipped. And instead of making sacrifices of chickens and goats to the gods, he could attend mass and repeat the sacrifices of Calvary. This all seemed simpler to him and, therefore, readily acceptable" (174-75). Chioma on her own part does not conceptualize her modernity through education as an alienating agency but rather as an enlightened and informed process of inscribing herself into the texture and contours of traditional societal life for a more fulfilled existence as a cosmopolitan citizen, receptacle and heiress of world civilizations.

The novel, unlike Achebe's, does not participate in the raging cultural discourse as a clash or conflict of cultural traditions in asymmetrical relations of putative superiority and inferiority but as meaningful cultural exchanges dissolving the essentialist boundaries of cultural difference. This cultural vision negates what Mary Louise Pratt refracts as the "contact zone" which is a site where cultures meet and grapple with each other often in vertical relations of hegemony and counter-hegemony. Pratt elaborates on the meaning of the contact zone as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" (Pratt 4) like slavery, colonialism and their aftermaths as they structure our experiences and are lived out in the world today. In the novel, Pa Akadike constitutes the fulcrum and centre around which the society revolves. He is the veritable rallying point for unity even though the circumstances through which he emerges as the champion of unity in Okeosisi are precipitate and not entirely convincing. However, his mobilization of his elemental energies and requisite traditional knowledge and wisdom is instrumental to the construction of a unified identity formation, a communitarian ethos and an egalitarian society in which the part represents the whole and the whole represents the part. The efficacy of this united front fostered by Pa Akadike reveals itself when Okeosisi is made the capital of Okoko Division. This is partly contingent on, and a tribute to, his strength of character and collaboration with the colonial administration. It is instructive here too that unlike Okonkwo and Ezeulu who are resistant to the forces of modernity and mutability, Pa Akadike readily accepts the kinesis of historical change through his collaborationist engagement with the District Officer and yet without compromising or jeopardizing the interests of the community. Pa Akadike serves as a surrogate creative agent for the District Officer when the latter is involved in the project of writing a book, "Politics and the Colonial Experience 1870-1920." Pa Akadike furnishes him with some of the raw data about the indigenous culture which the colonial writing subject processes and interprets in the book. This colonial writing practice is reminiscent of the colonial officer's in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* entitled "The Pacification of the Tribes of the Lower Niger." This colonialist project of travel writing and "discovery" was consistent with the imperial process of empire-building in Africa and constituted itself as a potent cultural auto-narrative which interpellated the colonized Other as marginal to the circumference of European civilization and a static, monumentalized object in the motions of human history. It is in the essential character and textual politics of these imperial narratives to represent the colonized subject in negative and negating images so as to provide the justificatory claims for the colonialist and imperialist enterprise as a benign and salvific missionary project for the humanization of the colonized. It is to Pa Akadike's credit that the information he provides privileges the society and represents it as a society whose tapestries of culture and civilization can compare favorably with any other in the world. This becomes on his part a rite of vicariously speaking or writing back from the margins to the centre of dominant discourse as a counter-discursive practice and an ideologically positioned cultural possibility of revising the stereotypes and prejudices of Europe against Others.

The tropology of tradition and modernity also registers its trajectory in Chioma's exquisite paintings as a student: the paintings which capture *Ifa* — the divinatory god in the Yoruba pantheon — are executed in masterful metaphoric strokes. They as such recreate the cosmogony of a traditional universe through the instrumentality of a modern medium underscoring the transition and interaction between tradition and modernity. It is interesting that Chioma undergoes the throes of parturition for the paintings at a turbulent moment in her creative sensibility, at a time of profound internal doubts

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and psychological torments bordering on self-interrogation of the social and familial environment which circumscribes her. It will appear that it is only during such moments of heightened doubts and psychological trauma that the Muse always seizes her harassed, troubled votaries for the creative enterprise. Femi Osofisan raises the specter of this argument in corroboration when he states:

> the gods of Creativity arrive to possess their worshippers only at such moments when these votaries are in acute distress, when they are sunk in situations of deep emotional and psychological crisis, or lost in ecstatic delirium. But hardly ever when they are "stable" … In several instances that we know, it is pain indeed, and rarely pleasure, that provokes the artist into creative motion … Men are stricken, and if they are artists, they turn articulate, and expectedly through that vocation, they defeat the pain, and even convert it to triumph. The candour of genius, that is, is honed by the knife of catatonia. Pain rakes the imagination, and kindles it to eloquence … This is perhaps why throughout the history of man, the moments which have yielded the greatest works in art have been those in which society has been under the stress of turbulent transitions. The creative impulse seems to be stimulated best when it is ruffled by fear or scandal, or when it is violently stung to revolt against prevailing chaos, or suffering or injustice. (61-62)

The paintings by Chioma on *Ifa* during this time of torment and uncertainty in her artistic development inaugurate the tension between inspiration and perspiration as to which of the two plays a more crucial and defining role in the creative afflatus and sensibility of the artist. In Chioma's condition, the inspirational force assumes central significance as she is possessed by the Ifa principle to consummately etch these deeply encoded and signifying images on the canvass. This is underscored by the fact that Chioma herself looses her agency during this creative process and even doubts the accomplished quality of the paintings. It takes the studied insights of Jeff, the white American professor in love with Ifa during his stay in Nigeria to research for a cure for malaria, to attest to the representational and symbolic essence of the paintings. Jeff remarks, "wonder of wonders." The narrator informs us that, "when he saw one of Chioma's paintings from the dark moments of her life that drove her to seek answer in the works of masters such as Bruegel and Bosch." The narrator continues concerning the paintings: "This is Ifa, pure and simple. It is *Orunmila*, the god of divination in Yoruba culture. Chioma, please tell me, how did you capture the spirit of the ancestors on this canvas? … How could you have captured this complex idea in a painting? … Please tell me … have you any links with your ancestors? Do you talk to your great-grandfather's great grandfathers? … I think the gods created you for a purpose, perhaps to propagate their tribe. Are you an oracle?" (250-351).

In conclusion, Nwagwu succeeds in constructing a novelistic universe both concrete and fluid in its re-invention or re-fabrication of cultural traditions and identity formation processes. This universe is simultaneously traditional/indigenous and (post)modern. But rather that delineate these cultural formations through difference as oppositional categories, the novelist provides veritable grounds for multicultural interactions and transactions. In this cultural schema, none of the cultures claims exclusive preserve or pre-eminence over the other as what exists is a democratic space for the cultures to assert their energies as they thrive and co-exist in healthy communion. Pa Akadike and Chioma harmonize these cultural heritages through their individual agency and subjectivity. Even the forests of Okeosisi are refracted as housing wisdom and the cultural potentials to instruct and civilize. The margins of the provincial culture embed the center of metropolitan culture in a new world order where cultural essentialisms have been significantly reconstituted, reified and occluded. Nwagwu accomplishes a cultural renaissance project based on a revivalist program and re-appropriation project, harnessing the affirmative elements of African and Western cosmologies as part of his ideal cultural ensemble in our postmodern world. To him, tradition is not negative and negating, just like postmodernity is not necessarily and essentially an imperialist cultural ploy to further exercise epistemological, hermeneutic and econo-political control over Others by the satraps of the Western god of postmodernity. What the novel advocates is a new world order where all cultures and traditions are given ample space in the carnival of world cultures to enact their potentialities in the (re)humanization of our world brutalized by cultural, racial, class, religious, and political conflicts.

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