

## Culture and The Contemporary Nigerian Novel: An Examination of Akachi-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*

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### Abstract

There has been a renewed cultural onslaught in the country through the influx of foreign norms and ideals via the internet. There is therefore equally a renewed imperative for Nigerian writers to come to the rescue of their cultures by projecting them in their works to create consciousness about them. There are however conflicting critical submissions over the depiction of indigenous Nigerian cultures in the contemporary Nigerian novel. This paper therefore critically examines the depiction of culture in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* using the postcolonial literary theory. The purpose is to gain insight into how contemporary Nigerian novelists have been promoting and preserving their cultures by depicting them in their works. The author shows an in-depth knowledge of the cultures and oral traditions of the country in the selected work by showcasing the close relationship between literature and culture. She reveals several cultural practices of Nigerians relating to marriage, inheritance, naming, death, burial and reincarnation, etc. The study reveals that recent Nigerian novelists, like their predecessors, are equally concerned with the preservation of their cultures, especially in the face of the current onslaught on the cultures of third world countries by the west, especially, through the internet and have therefore been depicting them in their works.

**Keywords:** Literature, Culture, Cultural Promotion, Cultural Awareness, Cultural Syncretism.

### Introduction

This study investigates the depiction of indigenous Nigerian culture in the contemporary Nigerian novel using *Trafficked* (2008) by Theodora Akachi-Ezeigbo as a case study and the post-colonial literary theory as the theoretical framework. The study examines the presentation of indigenous Nigerian traditional cultural practices by the author. The approach the

study adopts is that of close analysis of the selected text. The study was inspired by the need to investigate the recent conflicting critical submissions over the depiction of Nigerian cultural experiences and other developmental issues by contemporary Nigerian novelists in their works especially in the face of the current onslaught on the cultures of third world countries by globalization. The main concern of the study was to therefore find out how the selected text has been used to depict indigenous Nigerian cultures.

There is no gainsaying that Nigerian writers have been using Nigerian literature, especially the Nigerian novel, to expose, preserve and promote the Nigerian culture by manifesting aspects of their cultures in their works. This task began with the publication of *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe in 1958. And ever since then, Nigerian writers have been helping in the promotion and preservation of the rich cultural values of the country by manifesting them in their works. There has, however, been an ongoing debate in respect of the depiction of the rich cultural values and other developmental issues by recent Nigerian novelists in their works. In their recent separate evaluations of recent Nigerian fiction, some literary critics like Olaniyi (2013) and Nnolim (2010) argue that recent Nigerian writers have not been manifesting the Nigerian culture, among other issues, in their works. For instance, based on his evaluation, Olaniyi (2013) argues:

Recent Nigerian novelists have largely betrayed Western sentiments which do not do the nation any good. From Okediran's *Dreams Die at Twilight* to Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, no one is left in doubt that contemporary Nigerian writers have jettisoned the tradition held in high esteem by their earlier counterparts. Instead of serious socio-cultural themes, they prefer 'traditionally forbidden' themes of pre-marital sex, promiscuity, marital infidelity and moral bankruptcy. (74).

Olaniyi equally argues:

The post military era in Nigeria has given rise to a new crop of writers whose thematic engagements have shifted from

serious socio-cultural themes. With the advent of civil rule, new Nigerian writers are quick to dispense with literature imbued with serious socio-political messages. The high hope associated with civilian dispensation unequivocally influences their thematic thrusts which now centre on individuality, promiscuity, sex, women are wine. Since their works are meant for audiences who care no hoot about cultural revitalisation, they flood the literary arena with themes which negate the core African values cherished by their predecessors. (73).

While also evaluating recent Nigerian fiction, Nnolim (2010) argues that where the first generation of African writers had a general thematic focus, Africa's cultural encounter with Europe and the fight against apartheid and colonialism, the second-generation writers fought ideological battles for social equality, for feminism, contemporary African writers lack a clearly defined thematic focus. (207) He stresses that instead, what we have in recent Nigerian fiction, are disinherited people who have abandoned "home" and converged in Lagos (no man's land) searching for quintessential pleasure, through sluice-gates of debauchery, drinking, motoring as doubtful palliatives and suspect compensations in bars and brothels. This is why he concludes: "...in recent Nigerian fiction, ... there is a corruption of the Nigerian dream, there is an absence of a national ethos, there is a sense of estrangement, of cultural disinheritance...." and observes that "...recent Nigerian writing is no more cheering." (217)

On the contrary, submissions by some other scholars and critics point to the obvious fact that recent Nigerian writers, novelists, in particular, have been depicting the rich cultural values and other important issues of their society in their works. According to Ojaide (2014):

The third generation of African writers...learned from their literary elders the power of culture in a people's literary tradition. That is why they took that aspect their writing but shed the use of what has come to be described a la Chinweizu as "euro-modernist Hopskins disease." I think the third generation took over from where the second generation stopped...In fact, what makes the third generation to flourish is

its ability to be steeped in poetic content and form derived from the oral traditions of the poets. In fiction...Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, among others, show a rootedness in their culture and that gives so much depth to their thematic articulation. (20)

The position of Sylvester (2014) lends credence to the above assertion by Ojaide on the depiction of cultural values in the contemporary Nigerian novel. Writing in respect of the observation by some critics that the state of contemporary African literature gives one cause for anxiety where some writers have tended to present graphic sex, an obsession with child soldiers, emphasize content above form, Sylvester states that: "...we appreciate even the new writers like Chimamanda Adichie and Helon Habila who tap from their roots to affirm faith in our indigenous virtues and values...." (47)

Furthermore, in a recent study titled, "Language and culture in African literature: a stylistic assessment of the works of the contemporary Nigerian novelists", Awa (2016) writes:

African literature is a fusion of various cultural projections. This is because Africa is made up of numerous cultures, ethnic groups, languages and world views. This has given impetus to most African new generation writers to lace up their narrative with African local words, phrases and expressions, oral songs, proverbs, oral narrative style and so on. (129)

Awa's study reveals the reflection of aspects of Igbo culture like proverbs and folksongs in two selected novels, *The Last of The Strong Ones* and *Purple Hibiscus* by two contemporary Nigerian authors, Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, respectively.

In the conclusion to the study, Awa submits:

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo in their *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Last of the Strong Ones*..., combine the Igbo oral narrative style with the western novelistic conventions. They have meticulously crafted language in their literary artifacts to display their culture to the world by allowing their characters to tell traditional didactic

folktales and use Ibo moralistic proverbs among others, to boost the aesthetic zest of their narratives and show the world that Africans and the Igbo particularly, have a great pride in their culture, people and country. Therefore, the writers have gallantly converted their bilingual challenge to literary gifts, which they have exploited to reveal to the world at large the culture, traditions and heritage of the African people. (136)

The above submissions are good proof that recent Nigerian writers are concerned with the cultural experiences of their society and thematise them in their works.

This study, therefore, argues that the positions of Nnolim and Olaniyi concerning the concerns of recent Nigerian writers with culture in their works are overgeneralized ones. The aim of this study is, therefore, to repudiate these claims by demonstrating that recent Nigerian writers have been equally concerned with the cultural and other experiences of their society and have been reflecting the same in their works just like their predecessors did. Despite the recent influences on recent Nigerian fiction, there are still many recent Nigerian writers who are conscious of and are concerned with the preservation and promotion of their cultural experiences and therefore project them through their works copiously. These writers have demonstrated that they are aware, as Nnolim (2010) stresses that the survival of our cultures and folkways depends on artists. They, like their predecessors, have therefore continued to respect, copy from, make use of, and owe allegiance to our folk literature, folk tale, local myths, et cetera, in giving expression to our national culture in line with the definition of the Nigerian tradition in the novel given by Nnolim (2010).

Just as Pius (1986) points out in the case of the early African novel in general, folklore motifs equally abound in the contemporary Nigerian novel. This is evident in the profuse use of Nigerian imagery, proverbs, local customs and practices; beliefs, mystery, magic, witchcraft, axioms, adages, social habits, modes of thoughts and actions, and traditional heroic songs. One is, for instance, startled at the way Ezeigbo, the author selected for this study, extensively deploys the cultural experiences of her Ibo people in her works like *Trafficked* (2008), the text chosen for this paper and the *Last of the Strong Ones* (1996). The intention of this study, therefore, is to put in a right perspective, the charge of whether or not

recent Nigerian fiction has abandoned the use of indigenous cultural experiences.

This study proposes that contemporary Nigerian novelists are also conscious of the rich cultural values of their country like their predecessors and have been helping in their projection, preservation and promotion by manifesting them in their works. Through the selected text, the author skilfully educates the world about Nigerian cultural practices and beliefs by embellishing her works with them, thereby spreading and promoting knowledge about Nigerian traditions, cultures, and languages. The selected author appears to be interested in recreating in her readers the traditional ways of life of her people in totality, pointing out, where necessary, their triumphs and failures. She, therefore, makes several allusions to the traditional customs, beliefs, ceremonies, festivals and rituals of her society to show their significance in the life of her people. The impression created in the readers by the chosen novelist is that of a people who, though, live in a contemporary world highly driven by science and technology, have not forgotten their traditional cultural heritages. The novel, therefore, shows the writer's commitments in two ways: one, commitment to the socio-political events of her society, and two, commitment to the cultures of her people. This explains why while focusing on the contemporary socio-political and economic issues of her society, she equally demonstrates that she has not forgotten the cultures and traditions of her society by stylistically embellishing her narratives with them, thereby demonstrating the close tie between literature and society. This study, therefore, argues that recent Nigerian novels are being used to project Nigerian cultural experiences, alongside other equally relevant issues, and are therefore a good repository of the cultural experiences of the Nigerian society. In the selected novel, the writer comprehensively presents her South-Eastern Nigerian (Igbo) cultures. The novelist reflects in her writing the culture of her environment. In *Trafficked*, the reader is introduced to many aspects of the culture of the novelist's environment or setting of the novel. The reader sees the traditional life of the environment in which the novel is set. The reader is introduced to the Igbo culture in *Trafficked*.

The study, therefore, further argues that recent Nigerian writers have continued with the spirit of cultural nationalism begun by the first generation of writers in the country. They have been projecting the

Nigerian cultural experiences as they are obtainable in different parts of the country. It is, therefore, safe to say that recent Nigerian novelists, like their counterparts in the other literary genres, have not lost sight of the rich cultural values of their society. However, it is worth pointing out that the selected novelist by no means blindly approves or disapproves of the traditional cultural practices depicted in the selected text. In other words, the selected author's attitudes to the cultures of her society are not those of uncritical total acceptance or rejection. She promotes some aspects of the cultures she thinks are worthy and condemn those that appear condemnable. This study is, therefore, an effort to demonstrate that contemporary Nigerian fiction is not devoid of the cultural experiences of the Nigerian society despite the recent influences of Western ideals and despite other equally important socio-political and economic issues the writers have to deal with in their works in a post-military dispensation.

### **Statement of the Problem and Objectives of the Study**

The modern Nigerian literature emerged as a counter-discourse to the portrayal of Nigeria in Eurocentric authored texts as a society lacking culture. The first generation of Nigerian writers like Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe among others deployed their early works to prove the Eurocentric writers wrong. Through their works, they showed that Nigeria, like any other country in Africa, was rich in cultures. Today, there is a fresh onslaught on the culture of Nigeria via the unhindered influx of foreign cultures through the internet. There is therefore the need for an equal response from contemporary Nigerian writers to this development. They are expected to use their works to project Nigerian cultures to the world as their predecessors did. However, there have been conflicting critical submissions over the presentation of cultures in contemporary Nigerian literature. While some critics claim that contemporary Nigerian writers have abandoned the use of cultures in their works, the submissions by some other critics indicate the contrary. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the presentation of culture by contemporary Nigerian novelists in their works in the face of the current cultural onslaught and multiculturalism, in order to put in the right perspective, the claims and counterclaims over the depiction of cultures in contemporary Nigerian literary works.

The aim of this study was to examine the depiction of culture in the

contemporary Nigerian novel using Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* as a case study while the objective was to demonstrate that contemporary Nigerian novelists have not jettisoned the exposition of the cultures of their society in their works as alleged by some critics.

### **Methodology and Theoretical framework**

This study is textual and research-oriented, adopting a library-based approach. As such, a careful analysis of the selected novel was carried out with special consideration on the focus of the study. The study is equally an extrinsically motivated one. It, therefore, examined the selected text using extra-textual parameters. The research used the post-colonial literary theory as the theoretical framework.

This study adopts the postcolonial literary theory as the theoretical framework for the assessment of the selected text. Postcolonial theory is a counter-discourse aimed at correcting the negative image of erstwhile colonies painted in works of literature produced by the colonial powers. It is therefore a theory that enables the colonized to speak for and by themselves. This is why Abubakar (2017) posits that the theory emerged as a result of the imperative to “speak or write back” to a centre that had arrogated to itself all knowledge and all normativity. He describes the theory as part literary and part theory, part critique and part political-moral discourse that defined the contours and problems of literary-cultural studies. According to him, post-colonial critique refers to theoretical and political expositions that oppose the oppressive conditions of the legacies of colonialism and imperialism and the new global context of economic and political domination. Thus “post-colonial theory” is a form of *critique* concerned with the social-cultural criticism of those processes of *representation* by which the West has framed the identity, experience, and history of once-colonized non-Western societies and peoples.

The postcolonial theory is a way of reasserting oneself either as an individual, a group, a race, or a nation in the course of history, and has to do with politics, language, culture and so on, Kofa (2003). In the light of this, the depiction of culture by contemporary Nigerian novelists is seen as a fresh effort at reasserting the different cultural practices in the country, especially in the face of the renewed onslaught on the cultures of third world countries vide the internet.

The concept, postcoloniality connotes that which has to do with a

temporal period, the period which, chronologically, begins after the decolonization of a previously colonized nation. It also connotes that which has to do with only the nations that were once under the yoke of colonization. In the particular case of Nigeria, for instance, the concept could literally be seen as referring to the period beginning from the year 1960 when the country became independent from British colonial rule. However, the term postcoloniality, as a literary theory, is used figuratively, and like any other figurative expression, say, for instance, kick the bucket; to be put in the family way, the pen is mightier than the sword, et cetera, it is used in a special sense. It, therefore, has a special and deeper meaning different from the literal meaning. The concept encompasses a wide range of phenomena covering not only the period after decolonization but also before and during the colonial periods both in the colonies and the colonising countries. In essence, the term postcoloniality is an all-encompassing concept used in literary criticism to refer to all periods in the life of not only the formally colonized nations but also that of their colonizers (Onyemelukwe, 2004; Jatau, 2014; Abrams et al, 2009; Dobie, 2009).

According to Jatau (2014), postcolonial discourse is an encompassing hermeneutic mechanism or discourse. It is an all-encompassing phenomenon whose versatility and diversity can encapsulate the extensiveness and complexity of the Nigerian postcolonial reality. Postcolonial discourse identifies the wide range, variety and nature of postcolonial writing. It can be used as an epistemology applied to the Nigerian novel to examine how Nigerian novelists 'talk for themselves' within the context of Nigerian postcolonial reality by offering a re-reading of Nigerian novels, especially with regards to their demonstration of difference and their celebration of hybridity and cultural polyvalence. In so doing, the manner in which the colonial contact distorted the hitherto socio-political, economic and cultural patterns of existence in Nigeria, leaving the Nigerian, after independence, to grapple with a 'new order' created by the resultant cross-fertilisation of cultures, is highlighted. She argues that postcolonial discourse is a field of study, which is more laden, more polysemic, and more positional than its inventors and users are readily aware of. It is a vast, variegated, and even complex phenomenon that is heterogeneous and whose dispute is active and unresolved. It is far from being a unified field. Jatau further posits that

postcolonialism is both a field and a methodology used in several disciplines.

Postcolonial discourse has a mundane, historical sense as well as a more ideologically charged discursive one. This study, therefore, uses postcolonial theory to investigate how contemporary Nigerian novelists depict indigenous Nigerian culture in their works. Dobie (2009) argues that the formal termination of the colonial rule does not wipe out its legacy, and the culture that is left is a mixture of the colonized one and that of the colonizer, often marked by contrasts and antagonisms, resentment and blended practice. The two are no longer recognizable as separate cultures but exist as mixed ones. Consequently, issues abound regarding the development of national identity, identification of cultural histories and knowledge, the precolonial nature of the colonized, and their resistance to the power base that has subjugated them. From the foregoing, it is therefore expected, that in line with the function of literature as a mirror of the society, contemporary Nigerian writers should depict the indigenous Nigerian culture not only as it was before the advent of colonization, but also as it is now after the distortion occasioned by colonization. In other words, contemporary Nigerian writers should highlight the hybrid or syncretized nature of the culture of contemporary Nigerian society. This study therefore especially examines how contemporary Nigerian writers depict the cultural heritage of their society after being distorted by colonization giving birth to cultural syncretism.

### **Depiction of Cultural Syncretism in Ezeigbo's *Trafficked***

Ezeigbo is one of Nigeria's eminent contemporary novelists and scholars and *Trafficked*, published in 2008, is one of her many distinguished works that cover a variety of socio-economic and political themes. The subject matter of *Trafficked* is trafficking, a trending social issue with international implications. The novel is Ezeigbo's attempt to react and respond to the contemporary state of the Nigerian nation. In it, Ezeigbo aims to show what contemporary Nigerian society looks like by recreating and painting a very realistic portrait of the country. The text is an exposition of the contemporary post-colonial Nigerian society. *Trafficked* is a vision of what life is in the contemporary Nigerian nation. In the novel, Ezeigbo highlights the thorny political, economic, educational, religious and tribal conflicts that are plaguing contemporary Nigeria since the return to

democratic rule in 1999. The novel is contemporary realism. It is an imaginative interpretation of actual experiences re-created in the total historical context of what is actually happening. The novelist describes in detail what is actually happening in the life of the contemporary Nigerian nation. The novel is best described as a fiction because the author uses social and economic backgrounds for the creation of her narrative.

The novel, *Trafficked*, contains two separate but interwoven narrations. The first narration is about trafficking in humans, and it is the story from which the text derives its title. The narrative is about how young girls are cajoled into trafficking abroad from Nigeria in the name of getting them better jobs, and the ordeals they go through like being forced into prostitution, being sold off as slaves and the rest. The novel specifically tells the story of how Nneoma, the protagonist, was trafficked abroad by human traffickers with a promise that they were going to secure a teaching job for her and other girls, but only to force them into prostitution, how she was repatriated home, rehabilitated and how she re-joins her family at last. The second narrative is also about Nneoma. It is the story of her love life. It narrates how the relationship between Nneoma and Ofomata had been going on smoothly until it was truncated when Nneoma was trafficked abroad, the faithfulness of Ofomata to the relationship and how they are reunited after Nneoma was deported home.

One is highly astonished at how Ezeigbo successfully and cleverly garnishes the narrative with almost all the aspects of the culture of the Ibo people of eastern Nigerian like proverbs, superstitions, myths, traditional ways of life, marriage system, judicial system, religion, etc. With the pervasiveness of the use of culture in the text, one will be right to say that it is a book on Nigerian culture. Reading *Trafficked* is like a re-reading of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. It, however, needs stressing that the author does not just make use of the cultural experiences of the society in her narrative for the mere sake of just using them. She uses the novel to make some concrete statements; that her pre-colonial Ibo society of Eastern Nigeria, like any other parts of Nigeria, was culturally buoyant, that the Nigerian society is still bubbling with her rich cultural values despite the cultural onslaught suffered as a result of colonialism in the last century and in spite of the renewed onslaught through the current phase of globalization. She also uses the text to show that some Nigerian traditional cultural practices can be revised and refined or modernised to meet modern

taste but not to be totally pushed aside in the name of modernisation.

Through her text, Ezeigbo skillfully educates the world about Nigerian cultural practices and beliefs, thereby spreading and promoting the knowledge of Nigerian traditions, cultures, and languages. The novel, therefore, shows Ezeigbo's commitments as a writer in two ways: commitment to the culture of her people and commitment to the socio-political events around her. This explains why while she focuses on the contemporary socio-political and economic issues of her society, she equally demonstrates that she has not forgotten the culture and tradition of the society by stylistically embellishing her narrative with the rich cultural experiences of the society.

The extensive depiction of the cultures and traditions of her environment shows that the author is well-grounded not only in the culture of her Ibo people but also the cultures of the other ethnic settings of Nigeria like Yoruba and Hausa. In *Trafficked*, Ezeigbo manifests several traditional cultural practices in her Igbo society including funeral ceremonies, traditional festivals, traditional rituals, social relations, marriage, cultural beliefs, proverbs, myths, folklore, inheritance, judicial system, traditional religion, traditional songs and local slangs and words.

Ezeigbo, as a postcolonial writer, has immensely demonstrated in *Trafficked* that her pre-colonial Ibo society, and by extension, the pre-colonial Nigerian society was culturally buoyant before the advent of colonization. She shows that the precolonial Ibo society was not a cultural desert as Eurocentric writers had earlier portrayed in their works to justify colonization. The novel reveals that the precolonial Ibo society had a rich culture which reflected in everything they do. They had their traditional form of religion, justice system, names and naming, burial, marriage, commercial activities, recreational activities, traditional beliefs, indigenous folktales, myths, system of inheritance, festivals, social interaction among others. Ezeigbo highlights all these in the novel. The depiction of the various aspects of the indigenous traditional Ibo culture in the novel is characteristic of the concern of postcolonial literature with rewriting the colonial history of the erstwhile colonies. The different aspects of the indigenous culture she depicts in the novel, burial ceremony, marriage, religion, beliefs, judicial system, inheritance and festivals, among others, have been in existence before the coming of the colonialists.

Ezeigbo also highlights the effects of the cross-fertilization of

cultures that took place between the indigenous Ibo culture and foreign culture as a result of colonialism. This is in accordance with the basic concern of postcolonial literature of examining the processes and effects of, and reactions to, European colonialism from the 16<sup>th</sup> century up to and including present-day neo-colonialism, as pointed out by Onyemelukwe (2014). The author shows that colonialism could not, and did not succeed in wiping away the pre-colonial traditional Ibo culture in its totality despite the cultural colonization embarked upon by the colonialists. She shows that much of the indigenous culture is still intact, even after the decolonization process and is being practised side by side with aspects of the foreign culture.

Colonizers did not stop at only physically conquering the colonists. They, through cultural colonization, also attempted replacing the practices and beliefs of the native culture, Dobie (2009:209). However, as much as they tried, they did not succeed in totally eradicating the native culture of the colonies. Therefore, the culture that is left in the erstwhile colonies, as Dobie (2009) points out, is a mixture of the culture of the colonized and that of the colonizer, often marked by contrasts and antagonisms, resentment, and blended practice. Therefore, the two hitherto separate cultures are no longer recognizable as separate but exist as mixed or syncretized one. This is why Onyemelukwe stresses that syncretism and hybridity are the hallmarks of postcolonial writing. This is evident in Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*.

The society we come across in *Trafficked*, unlike what we have in *Things Fall Apart*, is a modern or contemporary one. Unlike the Ibo society of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* where the contact between indigenous culture and the foreign one was just being established or created, in *Trafficked*, we have an Ibo society that is already fully in contact with foreign culture, has been influenced and is still being influenced by that foreign culture. What we, therefore, have is a new society going through or living with cultural syncretism. This is an aftermath of the process of colonization, which succeeded in changing the status quo of many aspects of the indigenous pre-colonial socio-political, economic and cultural patterns of existence in Nigeria.

The novel, *Trafficked*, reveals the postcolonial status of a once colonized society, the Ibo society in particular. It reveals the contemporary Ibo society as a society that is a product of syncretised cultures; the culture

of the former colonial masters and the indigenous pre-colonial Ibo culture. One major instance of cultural syncretism depicted in the novel is in the area of religion. There is the co-existence of the Christian religion, a foreign religion, and the pre-colonial traditional religion. In Ihite-Agu, both Christians and the worshippers of the traditional religion, *Amaala*, co-exist. This is a clear indication of the type of culture that is left after the formal termination of colonial rule, which, according to Dobie, is a mixture of the colonized one and that of the colonizer. Their co-existence is however not without the contrasts and antagonisms as we see in the conflict between the two adherents of the two religions in the novel.

Ogukwe, Nneoma and Hannah's father is a staunch Anglican, a good Christian. With this, one would expect him and his family to overlook or forget the idea of the traditional bride price. Instead of forgetting it, they, however, insist that Prophet Elias must pay it. This is why they did not consent to Hannah marrying Prophet Elias. As is evident in the text, they are not against the marriage, but Elias must pay the bride price, which is a traditional requirement before marriage can take place. This is despite being staunch Christians. Similarly, Nneoma is from a devoted Christian family, but the author would not allow her to fully become Ofomata's wife until they have done the *igba-nkwu*, traditional wedding. This is in spite of the fact that her bride price has been paid. In about two instances, the author makes Ogukwe, though a devote Christian, express his favourable disposition to the cultural belief in reincarnation.

Being the eldest son, the probability of Ofomata, a practising Christian, inheriting his father as the next Ozo-nkwu, the highest traditional religion position, is high. The author does not seem to see anything wrong in Ofomata assuming the position of Ozo-nkwu. This is evident in the following conversations:

“Do you think Ofomata will ever become born again?”... “I don't think so. If he'll take his father's place – as it has been rumoured – as the next ozo nkwu in Ihite-Agu, how then can he become born again? Will he remain a Christian if he assumes the position? After all, his father is not a Christian. “Mma, it is enough,”.... “Why are you indulging in these speculations? What stops Ofomata from remaining a Christian if he becomes the next ozo-nkwu? (21)

What the author is trying to say in the above instances is that being Christians should not make the natives abandon all their cultural practices. They can practice their foreign religion alongside the aspects of their culture that are good. In essence, the good aspects of the two cultures, the foreign and the traditional, can coexist.

Another instance of cultural syncretism depicted in the novel has to do with education. The formal form of education is a legacy of the colonial process and characteristic of the hybrid nature of postcolonial societies, which is also manifested in the novel. Ezeigbo uses the novel to show one undeniable fact about the postcolonial Ibo society; that as a legacy of colonization, formal education, a foreign form of education, has become the norm. In the precolonial Ibo society, like any other society in Africa, the informal, traditional form of education that covers every aspect of the life of the people was the vogue. Today, however, this traditional form of education is being practised alongside the formal education system introduced through colonialism. Unlike the society we come across in Achebe's *Arrow of God*, where formal education was just being introduced, and Ezeulu's son, Oduche, was just being sent to school, in *Trafficked*, we come across a postcolonial society where formal education has been well entrenched. For instance, universities and colleges have been established. Ofomata, who already has a Higher National Diploma certificate, is studying for his degree in Estate Management at the Lagos University of Science and Technology, and Nneoma, who is a trained teacher with the National Certificate of Education, puts in for the university matriculation examination, passes it and is admitted to the university. Hannah is a trained stenographer. Kelvin studied fashion design at the Yaba College of Technology. The society we now have is a postcolonial one in which the two forms of education have been syncretized. Today, both the traditional form of education and the imported formal education system go on in Nigeria.

The modern monetary system is another legacy of the colonization process, which has become part of the syncretized culture of the postcolonial society depicted in *Trafficked*. In the precolonial period, cowries and manilas were commonly used for the exchange of goods and services. These items were, however, replaced with the modern monetary system. As evident in *Trafficked*, the syncretized contemporary

postcolonial Ibo society is characterized by this modern monetary system.

Employment is another area of cultural syncretism depicted in the novel, *Trafficked*. The contemporary postcolonial African society is equally a syncretized one with respect to employment and means of livelihood. The precolonial Ibo society was characterized by traditional means of livelihood like farming, fishing, and petty trading, among others. With colonization, however, came the modern forms of employment. This is depicted in *Trafficked* by Ezeigbo. In the text, Ogukwe, Nneoma's father, is a retired clerk. He had worked with the Internal Revenue Department in the Ministry of Finance, Enugu. Professor Jimoh, Dr. Alade, Dr. Okehi, Professor Obi Okalla and Dr. Komolafe all work at the university. Worth stressing is the fact that the traditional forms of employment and the modern paid jobs are being practised side by side in the contemporary postcolonial Nigerian society as depicted in the novel, thereby illustrating the culturally hybrid nature of postcolonial societies.

In the aspect of language, the author also reveals the cultural hybridity in contemporary postcolonial Nigerian society. Just like formal education, the language of the colonizers, the English language entered Nigeria through the colonization process. The language is part of the legacy of colonization in the country. Today, it is the official language of the country and is being used widely across the country alongside the various indigenous languages. Ezeigbo equally depicts this fact in the novel. In the novel, several languages are used while the narration lasts. They are English, Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba. The use of these languages reveals the syncretic nature of the postcolonial Nigerian nation linguistically. Today, the average Nigerian man speaks at least two languages simultaneously, his own indigenous language and the English language, in his daily interactions.

Cultural hybridity is also evident in the burial ceremony depicted in the novel. The author's attitude to its elaborate nature notwithstanding, the depiction of the burial ceremony of Mbonu Ezenwa in the novel shows that the Ibo society has their traditional method of celebrating their dead ones, especially important personalities among them before colonization. This traditional burial ceremony is one of the several pre-colonial traditional cultural practices which survived the colonization process. One pertinent point worth pointing out however is the fact that, in the contemporary postcolonial Ibo society, both the traditional burial system



and the foreign Christian method are being practised. This is a result of the cultural syncretism occasioned by colonization. Even in the burial ceremony of Ezenwa cited above, which is supposed to be the traditional one, elements of cultural syncretism are observable. For instance, the guests were served with foreign drinks and gifts were recorded in a register following a foreign practice.

The resolve by Nneoma that she does not want her fiancée to become an *Ozo nkwu*, because she does not want to be trapped in Iwhite-Agu, and the threat by Ofomata that he would equally stop coming to his hometown for the same reason are also characteristic of the postcolonial society characterized by cultural hybridity and depicted in the novel. With the opportunities that abound in the cities created by the contact with the outside world nowadays, no one wants to waste his or her time away in the close-knit villages characterized by lack of development.

The hope by Nneoma that her fiancée would at least be more modern and wear shorts instead of a loincloth to climb the palm tree if he eventually becomes an *ozo nkwu* is also indicative of the cultural hybridity of a contemporary postcolonial society portrayed by Ezeigbo in *Trafficked*. The author is saying that to make the traditional culture of tree trampling look modern, attractive, there should be cultural syncretism where the *ozo nkwu* will use the material from another culture, shorts, during the spectacular traditional ceremony. The use of penknife by the *Ozo-nkwu* is also an indication of cultural hybridity. The festival is a traditional one, but a foreign tool, the penknife, is used to carry out the most vital aspect of the festival, the cutting of the *omu*, the tender yellow shoot at the tip of the palm tree.

The depiction of the various traditional beliefs in reincarnation, gods, rainmaking and others in the novel is also characteristic of the syncretic nature of the contemporary postcolonial Ibo society. The author shows that colonialism could not and did not wipe out the pre-colonial traditional Ibo culture in its totality. Many are still intact and being practised side by side with aspects of foreign culture.

From the foregoing, there is no gainsaying that Ezeigbo has successfully projected many aspects of the Igbo traditional cultural practices in *Trafficked*. However, like many other writers, Ezeigbo does not just present those practices in her narrative to her readers. She also uses the opportunity to use her work to criticise some of the practices, making her

opinions known about them through her characters.

### Conclusion

Against the fresh onslaught on the cultures of third world countries vide the internet, and the conflicting critical responses over the presentation of cultures by contemporary Nigerian novelists in their works, this study set out to investigate the use of culture in the contemporary Nigerian novel. The study revealed that, as watchdogs of their society, contemporary Nigerian novelists have realized the fresh onslaught on their cultures because of the present phase of globalization and the free flow of foreign norms and ideals vide the internet. The writers have therefore equally realized the urgent imperative to begin a reappraisal of the cultures of their society and promote them vide their works. These writers, like their predecessors, view the function of literature beyond just giving pleasure and entertaining. Instead, they see literature as a vehicle for educating their readers, both near and far, not only about the social, economic and political issues of their society, but also the cultural experiences of their society. This is in conformity with the value attached to literature in Africa generally as a functional art as against the school of art for art's sake.

This study has therefore revealed that while the thematic preoccupations of contemporary Nigerian novelists in English expectedly centre on trending social, political and economic issues of the contemporary Nigerian society, the writers also stylistically embellish their works with the rich cultural experiences of their society. This study, therefore, invalidates the charge of abandonment of cultures made by some critics against recent Nigerian novelists, thereby contributing to the criticism of the contemporary Nigerian novel.

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