



Negotiating The Old And The New: *The Fishermen* Portrays The Clash Of Tradition And Modernity

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Abstract: Chigozie Obioma's *The Fishermen* literarily explores the negotiation between tradition and modernity in postcolonial Nigeria. The novel, which is set in the 1990s and is told through the experiences of four brothers, combines indigenous beliefs—most notably the prophecy of the madman Abulu—with the cultural and sociopolitical changes brought about by modernization, political upheaval, and Western education. Informed by modernization theory and postcolonial theory—specifically, ideas of hybridity and cultural negotiation—this study uses qualitative textual analysis to find and analyse thematic, symbolic, and narrative strategies that illustrate this cultural interaction. *The Fishermen* does not present tradition and modernity as mutually exclusive, according to the findings. The book portrays them as adaptive and interdependent forces that challenge binary thinking by influencing social structures and identities. The intersection of these forces is represented narratively by the Omi-Ala River, the prophecy's structure, and the family's breakdown. This study adds to ongoing postcolonial discussions by reorienting the critical focus from conflict to negotiation and providing a comprehensive overview of how modern African fiction both reflects and mediates cultural change. In line with the study's conclusion, other African literary works that examine the changing relationship between the old and the new might benefit from similar frameworks.

Index Terms - African Literature, *The Fishermen*, Tradition and Modernity, Obioma, Postcolonial Literature, Hybridity

I. INTRODUCTION

A major theme in African literature for a long time has been the conflict between tradition and modernity, which reflects the intricate socio-historical changes on the continent. African societies have struggled to balance native traditions with the introduction of Western political, educational, and religious systems since the beginning of colonial rule and into the post-independence period. This negotiation has been especially intense in Nigeria because of the country's rapid modernization, colonial past, and ethnic diversity. These tensions have been examined by Nigerian authors like Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who frequently frame them as clashes between ancestry and modern goals. Chigozie Obioma's 2015 novel, *The Fishermen*, explores this tradition in Nigeria during the 1990s from a fresh perspective. Obioma describes a family tragedy brought on by a local madman's prophecy through the eyes of Benjamin, the youngest of four brothers. The forces of modern change—represented by political upheaval, Western education, and the allure of urban life—are contrasted in the novel with deeply held beliefs in prophecy, fate, and communal order. As a result, *The Fishermen* becomes a narrative space where modernity and antiquity collide and converge. Although the role of tradition and modernity in African literature has been studied extensively, contemporary Nigerian novels' subtle depictions of this relationship as a process of negotiation rather than outright opposition have received less attention. While many studies highlight the damaging effects of cultural collision, fewer take into account the subtle compromises, hybrid identities, and flexible tactics that appear. *The Fishermen* provides a rich environment for examining how

literature can mirror and reimagine this negotiation because of its integration of biblical allegory, Igbo oral storytelling, and realist prose. This research aims to investigate how *The Fishermen* portrays the delicate balance between traditional values and contemporary influences in postcolonial Nigeria. It will concentrate on how contemporary forces like individualism, political modernization, and Western education interact with indigenous worldviews like prophecy and community solidarity. By moving the emphasis from conflict to negotiation, this study advances postcolonial literary scholarship and provides a more nuanced understanding of cultural interactions in African societies. It will also offer a new critical viewpoint on Obioma's writing, which has frequently been examined mainly in terms of its biblical references or position within the canon of African literature. More broadly, the study shows how literature can act as a mediator and mirror for societies that are having to quickly negotiate cultural differences.

Questions for Research

The study will address the following enquiries:

1. In what ways does *The Fishermen* illustrate how traditional beliefs endure in a Nigeria that is modernizing?
2. What thematic and narrative techniques does Obioma employ to show how the old and the new are negotiated?
3. What role does the novel's representation play in more general postcolonial discussions about identity and hybridity?

Literature Review

Influential critics like Said (Orientalism) introduced the idea of Western misrepresentation of colonised cultures, making literary reclamation possible. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (*The Empire Writes Back*), postcolonial literature actively challenges Eurocentric conventions. Although many authors employ English in inventive and subversive ways, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o promotes indigenous languages in literature as a means of cultural resistance in *Decolonizing the Mind*. On the other hand, Obi Wali maintains that authentic African literature needs to be written in African languages. African fiction's unique structural patterns, influenced by urbanization, cultural changes, and Western exposure, were recognized by early Western critics like Larson. Contemporary critics highlight how works fuse myth, folklore, and oral tradition in contemporary settings to create hybrid literary forms. The writings of several African authors, including Chinua Achebe, clearly incorporate Igbo terms into English. Achebe saw English as a weapon provided by colonizers to be used against them, in contrast to writers such as Wole Soyinka who opposed using it as a medium for their writing. Not only did he use it to alter the international perception of Africans, but he also moulded it to meet his own requirements. In addition to addressing colonial misrepresentation, African writers are generating new myths and artistic forms that honor cultural freedom, according to contemporary voices like Ben Okri. In-depth analyses of how Obioma's *The Fishermen* presents tradition and modernity as convergent, negotiating elements rather than as opposing forces are conspicuously lacking, despite a wealth of scholarship on the subject. Furthermore, linguistic hybridity and symbolic narrative strategies as means of cultural negotiation are frequently ignored in analyses.

Igbo Terms and Languages

Like his predecessor Achebe, Obioma too believed in imbibing the native terms into the colonizer's language. It not only gave them an opportunity to use their weapon against them, rather, it also helps to let the world know about their language. We observe that in the novel *The Fishermen*, the parents use Igbo words here and there. However, their children are not well-versed in their native language, which clearly depicts the influence of Western education and ideology on the natives. At various places in *The Fishermen*, we see native words imbedded in English:

““There, there, in the well!” the woman, whom Boja disliked and often called an *ashewo* because he said he once saw here going into the La Room motel, repeated.” (pg. 163)

““Food, food, *ajankro ba*, f-f-f-food! Eat this.”” (pg.224)

Whenever we encounter such words within the language, as a conscious reader, we try to determine their meanings. This act allows us to enter their language and learn about it. With respect to the Sapir-Whorf's Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis, it provides us an opportunity to conceptualize the world with reference to their perspective. Two people who speak different languages perceive the world differently. Benjamin could not even pray in his native language. When his father asked him to pray, he "began praying in English, the only language in which I knew how to pray." (185) Achebe's Okonkwo belonged to the first generation of natives who faced colonizers. They had their tradition and culture imbued in them. However, this was not the case with Obioma's characters. They were born with this cultural amnesia, which made it even more difficult for them to feel a sense of belonging to their own culture and tradition. Nigerian writers of the first and second generations examined the impact of colonialism on indigenous cultures while attempting to dismantle the colonial "master narrative." They were born in the "first five decades of the twentieth century when the colonial event was in full force" (Adesanmi and Dunton 14). Novelists such as Achebe or Soyinka set out to "help [their] society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement" (Achebe 44) with well-known works like *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Following the political events of independence, the third generation of Nigerian writers, including Helon Habila, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Sefi Atta, Chris Abani, and Segun Afolabi, were born. Additionally, they tackle postcolonial issues, extending worries about oppressive government and injustice, tradition and change, urbanization, family disputes, war, or violence (see Gordon 7–8; Balogun 9–25). Nonetheless, their texts are set in a "cultural, transnational, and hybridized space" rather than a national one (Eze 110). This may be because a large number of third-generation writers reside and work in the United States or Europe, and as a result, they have been categorized as part of the literature of the Nigerian diaspora (see Feldner). However, these shifting thematic interests are a part of a broader movement that is moving away from limited conceptions of national identity and toward new, relational forms of togetherness and belonging. Wherever colonisers went, the removal of native languages was a part of their policy. In Australia, children were kept away from their parents in missionary schools to become Christians. Not only that, they were brutally punished for using their native language or names. "The Last Lesson" by Alphonse Daudet speaks for all. In the current scenario, most Indian students find Hindi to be tougher than English. They are great at English but not even proficient at Hindi. Within the novel, we see that the narrator mispronounces "cataract" as "katacat." He is unable to pronounce English words efficiently, yet he persists in using them. The linguistic amnesia created around his native language forces him to speak in English irrespective of his efficiency in it. Derek Walcott in his "A Far Cry From Africa" witnesses how he is stuck between English and his African tongue:

"The drunken officer of British rule, how choose
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?
Betray them both, or give back what they give?"
(Lines 32-34)

Storytelling, Songs and Music

We see a native presence overshadowing the novel from the beginning. The novel begins with "We were fishermen." It establishes a relationship between our characters' roots. It depicts something they used to be and are not allowed to be anymore. We can already sense that a transformation is about to take place. Something is to be lost forever. Through sayings like "Always remember that a coconut that falls into a cistern will need a good washing before it can be eaten," fathers constantly caution children about the consequences of being careless. In other words, if you make a mistake, you will must be fixed" (Obioma 39). It reminds us of how Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* used to teach Nwoye through stories. Nwoye, however, preferred stories told by his mother. Teaching children through stories and examples has been a native way of inculcating education in them. Both traditional and modern education are passed down to the father. He teaches his kids proverbs, for example, as part of his traditional education. The father also contributes to their comprehension of social norms—more especially, the idea that "bad behaviour results in punishment"—through this proverb. To put it another way, the kids are being warned that they could face consequences for their misbehaviour. Some of the children, especially Ikenna, David, and Benjamin, have become wiser due to this warning; however, Ikenna's wisdom proved to be short-lived. Ikenna said, "I want to go and study," as a result of the warning. I am not a fisherman; I am a student (Obioma 19). The teaching of wisdom is greatly aided by proverbs. Eme, the mother, uses proverbs to teach the kids to respect their parents. "The vultures will devour the eye that mocks a father and an elderly mother, and the ravens of the valley will peck it out" (Obioma 24). However, beyond their didactic purpose, proverbs can also be used to provide a tentative explanation of the situation that characters are in as well as to express an ontological perspective on society

and life. Characters' psychological states and emotional tendencies are described through colloquialism, native languages like Yoruba or Igbo, and Pidgin English, particularly when they are battling life's uncertainties and social dilemmas. An illustration of colloquialism is "Three weeks after they took me away, long after I entered the new and terrifying world without my brothers, the next time I came home was" (Obioma 274). Benjamin, the narrator, uses this sentence to express how he felt when he was called before the court for the murder of Abdul the madman. Despite being appropriate, the sentence's structure does not indicate a high level of English proficiency. The novelist uses these examples of colloquialism to demonstrate why certain circumstances require a defamiliarization with social norms. To put it another way, he has Benjamin, a teenager, commit murder and is investigated for it in order to demonstrate how the social experiences of underprivileged kids can influence them to commit strange crimes. Iya Iyabo speaks to Adaku using code-switching and Pidgin. For example, after seeing a woman kill Paulina Adaku Agwu, Iya Iyabo went to tell her about a murder case. Stuttering between Yoruba and Pidgin, she told her husband the story:

'Aderonke killed her husband today.' 'E-who!' Mother screamed. 'Wo, bi o se, shele ni', the woman began. She often spoke Yoruba to mother, who perfectly understood the language, although she never believed herself proficient in it... 'Biyi drunk again last night and came home naked', Iya Igbo said, switching to Pidgin English... 'Please, Iya Iyabo, calm and tell me'. Her pikin, Onyiladun, dey sick. As her husband come inside, she tell am make im give medicine money, but im start to beat-beat am and im pikin. 'Chi-neke! Mother gasped, and covered her mouth with her hands.' (Obioma 107)

The novelist stays true to African originality by using native forms of expression, a linguistic decision that supports the author's narrative technique as a true creative writer. The novelist employs songs and music to convey the expectations and desires of the characters, to emphasize the emotional euphoria, and to highlight elements of the characters' ingrained cultural identity. Let's use some examples to demonstrate these:

"As the wind cannot blow
without touching the trees
As no one can block the light
Of the moon with a sheet
Oh father of the host
For whom I'm an oracle
I implore you to tear the
firmament and give rain
that the green things I have sown will live
Mutilate the seasons so my words can breathe,
That they yield fruit. (Obioma 85)

Abulu, who is reputed to be insane, sings this song. However, the novelist provides this song a profound philosophical perspective on the Akure culture in Western Nigeria. The song first and foremost functions as an invocation prayer, pleading with God Almighty to send rain. The vocalist depends on largely on the Igbo and Yoruba people's religious conviction that only God Almighty is the source of fertility, rain, and an abundant harvest. The prayer's topic or request is rain. Because it brings with it crop plantations and the hope of a bountiful harvest, rain is seen by the local communities as a symbol of life, breath, blessings, and happiness.

Overemphasis on Western Education

After articulating its knowledge, the West acknowledged that it was the only way to understand the world. Obioma appears to be highly critical of western education in *The Fishermen*. James Agwu appears to support only western education in the book. "I sweat and suffer to send you to school and receive a western education as civilized men," he says to the kids, "but you chose to be fishermen instead. "Fish-a-men!" (Obioma 46). When one examines James Agwu's statement, it becomes clear that, from his perspective, only western education has the capacity to elevate humanity. Mr. Agwu refers to his children, stating: "I sweat and suffer to send you to school to receive a Western education as civilized men, but you chose instead to be fishermen" (Obioma 33). That truth is explained further: "Listen, what you did was truly bad. Bad. Just how could kids receiving Western education engage in such a barbaric endeavor?" (Obioma 35)

Christian Faith versus Native Ways

Colonialism began in the 15th and 16th centuries, when Europeans began exploring the world. Colonialism happened around the world in different ways, but the outcome of the process was the same everywhere. The early characteristics of colonialism are also evident in some works from that era, such as the character Caliban in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The colonialization in itself was a violent act and its result, decolonization, was also equally violent. The original motive of the Europeans was to loot the physical resources of the native lands. Nonetheless, colonialism was not a unidimensional enterprise. Colonialization did not only involve physical subjugation but also mental slavery. Whites brought with them the superiority of their religion and lifestyle wherever they landed. The army of colonizers subjugated the natives and the missionaries did the rest. The effects of colonization are also relevant in the twenty-first century. Many colonies such as India, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Niger continue to experience mental subjugation. The educational institutions established by the invaders conditioned the natives to believe that whites were superior to them. Rudyard Kipling defined the ideology of colonialization as follows:

"Take up the White man's burden
Send forth the best ye breed --
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;" (lines 1-4)

They took it as their duty, which God imposed on them at birth, i.e., to "civilize" the coloured. The whites believed that Christianity was the only true faith, which is why they displayed arrogance towards other faiths and regarded them as superstitions. Catherine Nixey quotes St. Augustine:

"That all superstition of pagans and heathens should be annihilated is what God wants, God commands and God proclaims" (xxiii).

Iya Iyabo switched to Pidgin English while conversing with Adaku Agwu in chapter seven, "The Falconer." It is nothing but postcolonial effect. Earlier African society lived as a community. There was no orphan in the society. Everyone belonged to everyone. Nobody died starving. The arrival of colonizers changed the whole scenario. Native people learnt individualism. They learnt to consider themselves superior to everyone else, and they began prioritising their own needs over those of others. The colonisers did not attempt to understand the native culture. Instead, they labelled it "barbarous" and began "civilizing" them. In Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, Mr. and Mrs. Pilkins make no effort to understand the native culture or its events. All that they wanted was to stop the ritual suicide of Elesin Oba. Obioma's society is born with these effects. The transformation of Ikenna serves as a metaphor for the shift in ideologies among natives resulting from colonization. Somewhere colonizers have to mentally subjugate Africans because they know about their inferiority in front of them. They project it onto them, allowing them to live in the delusion of their inferiority to white men. The parents of Ikenna transferred both western as well as traditional values to their children. It seems that native traits have not completely vanished from the indigenous people. Western beliefs, however, eclipse these native traits. In Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, Isaac Okonkwo and others, despite being Christianized, rejected Clara because she was an *osu* (an outcast). The Agwu family was initially united. There was a sense of brotherhood. The shift in ideology from brotherhood to individualism symbolises a transition in national ideology from native traditions to Western influences. It resulted in devastation both literally and metaphorically. When Obembe and Ben avenged the deaths of their brothers, a sense of brotherhood and belonging was restored, resulting in some reconciliation by the end. There was a sense of satisfaction after that reconciliation. Ben introspected on the reason for Ikenna's death, attributing it to his weak *chi*.

"His *chi*, the personal god the Igbos believe everyone had, was weak. His was *elulefu* kind: the irresponsible sentinel that sometimes abandons its subject and went on far journeys or errands, leaving them unprotected." (Obioma 147).

He went back to Igbo cosmology, even when he was Christianized. Okonkwo also questioned his *chi* in *Things Fall Apart*. In the reign of colonizers, even your *chi* is not supporting you. Traditional values and beliefs become helpless and powerless in their reign. Ideologies are powerful until you believe in them. They become helpless once you shift your attitude towards them, just like Ariel was powerless once Bellinda had a lover in her heart. When people started believing in White men's religion as something more powerful, their tradition automatically became weaker. It can no longer hold them. This shift gave the courage to Enoch, a Christian convert, to remove the mask of an *egwugwu* in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and to Oduche to attempt to kill the sacred python in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*. In the novel, *The Fishermen*, we sense an overemphasis on Christian institutions rather than practical solutions. God has given us wisdom to lead us to solutions. He will not reincarnate to save us. When Boja "could not stop bed-wetting till he was twelve" (Obioma 155), his mother believed "he was under a bed-wetting spell" (Obioma 155). She could not see it as a practical issue. Everything has to have something to do with the Devil. As a solution, she took him to a prayer session of prayers and then

“...she began marking the edges of his bed with anointed oil- small-bottled olive oil on which prayers had been made- every night before he slept. Yet, Boja could not stop...”

(Obioma 155)

This was not the first time their god failed them. Each time they prayed, they met failure. God is necessary for the football to stay intact during play, so Kayode, a priest's son, prays for the ball:

“Because he couldn't contribute, he prayed for each ball asking God to help us keep this one for much longer by preventing it from crossing the clearing.” (Obioma 19)

When Kayode prayed to the ball, it got lost; when they prayed to Jesus for help against their father's beatings, they were beaten mercilessly. No amount of oil or prayers could stop Boja from wetting the bed, and no prayers could nullify Abulu's prayers. When the mother realised that she was unable to manage her children in the absence of their father, she did not seek any professional help. Instead, she retired after prayers and counselling sessions with Pastor Collins. The church played a significant role in undermining the closely knit tribal society. The missionaries established themselves quietly within the tribal society. Their focus was on those who were downtrodden in the native societies, usually untouchables, women, etc. They converted them and turned them against their own people. When rebellion came from natives, western military came up for the help and began holding control over the native societies. Ikenna was unable to dismiss the Abulu's prophecy. He could not believe that he can be the creator of his destiny. Ikenna was a boy who grew up influenced by postcolonial impacts. Had his traditional values been stronger in him, he would not have been given a second thought to the prophecy. Undoubtedly, the Agwu children inherited a sense of unity and brotherhood, but these were weak. The void created due to the incident gave space to Abulu's prophecy to bloom. A man without his roots of tradition is nothing. We could stop the tragedy if we provided Ikenna with proper psychiatric treatment. His mother had access to professional treatment and healed twice. She healed even in her worst condition.

The unity among the brothers was evident during the 1993 Nigerian election uprising, as they waited for each other and went out together. No one ran without others for the sake of individual life. Similarly, Ikenna stood up for Boja during school assembly. Both incidents demonstrate the traditional values they have absorbed. However, Ikenna's rude behaviour towards the principal illustrates how traditional values are overshadowed by western beliefs. He does not consider respect as a matter of age. Instead, he looks up at it as something to be earned. Boja's statement about his dependence on his brothers for everything highlights the love they share for each other:

“I gulped, my heart beating faster. My confidence often wilted when my older brothers urged me to make a decision rather than make one for me.” (Obioma 43)

The disunity among brothers serves as a metaphor for the fragmentation of traditional Igbo culture caused by colonisation.

Mr. Agwu also embodies the concept of individualism and westernisation. Ikenna's internal conflicts stem from his perception that their father's actions, which he views as reckless, cruel, and erratic, do not align with the role that a father should play. The purpose of the mother's instruction is to highlight the fact that the children's morals and psychology will be impacted by the father's absence from the house:

“What kind of job takes a man away from bringing up his growing son? Even if I were born with seven hands, how would I be able to care for these children alone?” (Obioma 4)

This is not how traditional African fathers behaved. Okonkwo never left his family by his side. Agwu created a distance between himself and his family, which provided his children with the opportunity to explore the unknown. Without their father, the boys believed that there would be no punishment and no law to keep them from making mistakes. Boys look up to their parents, particularly their fathers, as role models. Children sink when they don't fulfill that role in licentiousness and lawlessness.

The Omi-Ala River

Omi-Ala plays an important role in the novel. It is the site of major happenings. Omi-Ala is the place where Ikenna began his metamorphosis, which later changed the destiny of the Agwu family. Later in the novel, it also became the site of Abulu's death, after which the Agwu family's conditions changed for the worse again. The beginning lines of chapter 2, “The River,” clarify everything about the Omi-Ala River:

“Omi-Ala was a dreadful river: Long forsaken by the inhabitants of Akure town like a mother abandoned by her children. But it was once a pure river that supplied the earliest the earliest settlers with fish and clean drinking water.”

(Obioma 15)

Earlier, the Omi-Ala River was as sacred to the people of Akure as the Ganges was to Indians. Both rivers lost their traditional values and importance due to colonialism in their respective regions. It was a tradition in

Nigeria to worship their natural resources, they were pagans. Colonizers changed their perspective. In Genesis, verse 1:28, it says:

“God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’” It establishes men as masters of nature. It stands in contrast to the native view. Colonizers were not empathetic people. They were suffering from a high superiority complex. It blinded them from considering other peoples’ perspectives. Rather, those whose ideologies were different from theirs were labelled as “uncivilised.” They held themselves responsible for enlightening them by considering themselves a better race. Postcolonial Akure town also abandoned their once sacred river. The once pious river is now considered profane. People associated it with something evil. In every aspect of life, the British are clearly dominant. The imposed or superimposed foreign imported religion, namely Christianity, has supplanted the Ibos philosophy, as readers of *The Fishermen* realize. The river Omi-Ala’s altered status makes its significance clear:

“Like many such rivers in Africa, Omi-Ala was once believed to be a god; people worshipped it. They erected shrines in its name, and courted the intercession and guidance of Iyemoja Osha, mermaids, and other spirits and gods that dwelt in water bodies. This changed when colonialists came from Europe and introduced the Bible, which then prised Omi-Ala’s adherents from it, and the people, now largely Christians began to see it as an evil place. A cradle besmeared.” (Obioma 15)

If nature is treated like your kith and kin, a sustainable usage takes place. When you view nature as something to dominate, you end up destroying it. In precolonial times, it was an entity to be worshipped. However, in postcolonial times it is a place of evil. Mental subjugation of natives resulted in such ideologies. A physically subjugated man can hope for freedom like P.B. Shelley’s Prometheus in his play *Prometheus Unbound*. However, a mentally subjugated man is left with no escape route. Like fallen angels, he is trapped in his own hell. Omi-Ala River is symbolized so merciless that at which even what was assumed could not die, died there. It became an indirect reason for the tragedy of Agwu family.

The Justice System and Democracy

Obioma is satirical towards democracy. He openly rejects it. Chinua Achebe believes that each country must determine its political path on its own. In the end... you alone have to put it all together. (Achebe, “Remembering Chinua Achebe and the Importance of Struggle”). Obioma holds a similar point of view about it in his article “Africa has been failed by westernization. It must cast off its subservience”, he says:

“...The Middle Eastern nations are another example of cultures that have accepted material modernity but have not been westernised ideologically. They have retained their political systems which, given their theocratic cultural framework, seem best suited for these countries. Every time western nations have tried to disrupt those systems and install a western-style democracy, it has failed.” (lines 125-134)

Both of them talk about the devastation of Africa in the hands of Britishers. Both authors express their lament over the native education system, judicial systems, and culture in their respective works. Obioma, further in his article:

“...Today most of the nations in Africa should not even be called African nations, but western African nations. The language, political ideology, socio-economic structures, education, and everything that makes up a nation, even down to popular culture, do not originate from within these countries. African nations have a total dependency on foreign political philosophies and ideas, and their shifts and movements... This has resulted in Africa being slowly emptied of its essence, and becoming a relic, no different in substance from a statue or a museum.” (lines 35-44, 51-54)

There are various references to corruption in the novel *The Fishermen*. In chapter 10, “The Fungus”, we discover that a bribe demand at the police station agitated Mr. Agwu.

“The man’s subtle request for a bribe irked Father, who was an ardent hater of all forms of corruption plaguing the Nigerian nation; he would often rail against it.” (pg. 158)

Again, in the same chapter, we witness police’s inefficiency in search for Boja because no bribe is given:

““I mean our team has been conducting the search,” he continued after spitting into a handkerchief. “But, you know, even that will be futile if we don’t attach a ransom soon. I mean to involve the people of this town to assist us.” He opened a hardcover book before him and seemed to peruse it while he spoke. “With money on the ground, I am sure people will respond. If not, I mean, our efforts will be akin to sweeping the streets with a broom at night, I mean, by the dim squint of moonlight.”” (Obioma 160)

We observed Mr. Agwu constantly nagging at the corruption “that had eaten the entrails of the nation” (Obioma 213). He reminds us of Obi Okonkwo, the protagonist of Chinua Achebe’s *No Longer At Ease*. Unfortunately, Obi succumbed to corruption and lost everything.

Chinua Achebe effectively portrays the traditional justice system in his book *Things Fall Apart*. The system was efficient, swift, just, and unbiased. The Western judicial system does not function effectively for the native society. Mr Agwu made sure his sons would receive a western education, but after he moved to Yola, his influence on them started to wane, and they began to adopt an Igbo way of life. Fishing most likely represents the way of life that their ancestors led, and this notion is supported by the fact that before colonisation, Omi-Ala was revered as a god. Before colonisation, the river was abundant with fish and pure drinking water; however, in post-colonial times, it has transformed into a brackish drain. Ikenna's father also appears to have acquired his Igbo characteristics by the book's conclusion. He is appreciative to Benjamin for killing Abulu: "what you have done is great. Genti, eh. Do not regret it" (Obioma 329). Abulu's murder exemplifies the Igbo idea of justice, which holds that a person who has wronged society may be put to death. The Western justice system turns out to be unempathetic, which endeavours to equalise the theft of gold and bread. The novel suggests that the abandonment of colonial institutions was necessary after gaining independence from colonial rule. Africans made the historical error of holding onto colonial institutions due to cultural amnesia brought on by the white people's policies. Regrettably, Africa had made significant progress by that time. Africans could no longer work efficiently using traditional methods.

I. CONCLUSION

Chigozie Obioma uses *The Fishermen* as a rich literary canvas to illustrate the conflicts and points of intersection between Nigeria's traditional cultural frameworks and the demands of modernity. The novel demonstrates that these forces are not merely antagonistic, as shown through the prophecy motif, the symbolism of the Omi-Ala river, and the family's disintegration due to social and political change. Rather, they coexist in an ongoing process of negotiation that shapes communities, relationships, and identities. Obioma creates a hybrid narrative form that reflects Nigeria's own cultural hybridity in the postcolonial era by fusing realist prose, biblical allegory, and oral storytelling techniques. This analysis has demonstrated the novel's ability to traverse difficult cultural terrain, emphasizing instances in which indigenous beliefs reshape modernity and tradition to fit contemporary settings. By shifting the focus from conflict to negotiation, this study advances postcolonial literary scholarship by emphasizing hybridity as a process of creativity and adaptation rather than a place of unavoidable rupture. To better understand how literature records and mediates societal change, future research could expand on this analysis by contrasting *The Fishermen* with other recent African novels that also deal with cultural intersections.

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