



# **An Evaluation of Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God in Light of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's Essay "The Quest for Relevance"**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Kenyan novelist and postcolonial theorist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's famous work *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature* is a collection of four essays. "The Quest for Relevance" is the fourth essay in this book that deals with where African languages and cultures have their places in academic education, and the necessity of using African language to uphold the African experience. Thiong'o urges that African experience should be at the centre of the study of literature in the educational institutions, and to do so, using languages originated in Africa in the academic study of literature is absolutely necessary. Now, the approach made by Thiong'o to portray and uphold African experience in literature is clearly different from the approach made by one of the most influential African authors of all time, Chinua Achebe. In his first three novels, Achebe depicts and upholds African experience, but his approach is clearly different from the approach made by Thiong'o. Achebe successfully uses the colonizers' language English to reveal the colonial atrocities and to glorify the image of Africa. In this paper, I will evaluate Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* and *Things Fall Apart* in light of Ngugi's essay "The Quest for Relevance" to demonstrate how Achebe uses English to uphold the true image of Africa in his novels.

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## **Introduction**

### **Africa and the Quest for Relevance**

In his essay "The Quest for Relevance," Thiong'o focuses on the interconnectedness of life and language, and suggests that it is the African experience that should be at the centre of

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the study of literature in the educational institutions in the African countries. Thiong'o focuses on the dominance of western colonial discourse in the study of literature in Africa. He points out that since Western literary tradition has very little relevance to African experience, over-privileging the Western literary tradition by relegating the native language and culture to an insignificant position is alienating the African students from their roots. In fact, Thiong'o is not the first scholar to identify and analyze this phenomenon. Frantz Fanon in his seminal work *Black Skin White Mask* asserts that because of the linguistic and cultural dominance of the colonizers' country, which Fanon labels as "mother country," the colonized thinks that he is "elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards" (Fanon 9). Thiong'o is perfectly in dialogue with Fanon in "The Quest for Relevance," and to establish his point, Thiong'o elaborately discusses the Nairobi literature debate and mentions how the group of African academics faced hostile criticism after they proposed reformation of the literature curriculum putting African literature at the centre of priority. He points out that the colonial educational system was a big obstacle for the students to perceive the essence of their culture. He mentions that "African children who encountered literature in colonial schools and universities were thus experiencing the world as defined and reflected in the European experience of history. Their entire way of looking at the world, even the world of the immediate environment, was Eurocentric" (Thiong'o 93). He voices deep concern over the neglected state of the native literary tradition in the studies of literature in Africa and predicts that if the Western literary tradition continues to dominate in the same way it has been dominating since the colonial period, a time will come very soon when the native Africans will not be able to relate themselves to their own culture, and therefore will find themselves in a severe crisis of identity.

From the perspective of an African man, Thiong'o views the "quest for relevance" as a "search for a liberating perspective within which to see ourselves clearly in relationship to ourselves and to other selves the universe" (87). In this search for a liberating perspective, he finds it extremely significant to give African experience the highest priority in the study of literature in Africa. According to him, the "quest for relevance" is actually a mission to explore the relevance and interconnectedness among language, culture, and life; and therefore, to liberate the study of literature in Africa from the overbearing dominance of Western literary tradition where the real African experience has a distorted projection. According to Thiong'o, putting Africa at the centre of experience is the only way to resist the dominance of the Western literary tradition and philosophy, Western projection of Africa, and the Westernization of Africa in general. Thiong'o believes that this objective can be fulfilled

by rejecting the “primacy of English literature and culture,” and by “placing Kenya, East Africa and then Africa in the centre” (94). This is extremely important in order to stop the misrepresentation of Africa, to re-establish the African identity, and to create powerful counter narratives of Western colonial discourse by upholding the true image of Africa. This, however, does not mean the total rejection of Western literary tradition and philosophy. What Thiong’o means is, African experience has to be at the centre of the study of literature in Africa, and all other literary traditions have to be interpreted from an African perspective. According to him, the aim is to “establish the centrality of Africa” in the study of literature (Thiong’o 94). For the African students, it is the African experience that will be at the core of the interpretative perspective from which they will be able to “radiate outwards and discover peoples and worlds around” with Africa “at the centre of things, not existing as an appendix or a satellite of other countries and literatures, things must be seen from the African perspective” (Thiong’o 94).

Molefi Kete Asante, the proponent of the movement called Afrocentricity, is also in dialogue with Thiong’o as his view of Afrocentricity almost exactly echoes Thiong’o’s words. “Afrocentricity is the frame of reference wherein phenomena are viewed from the perspective of the African person. The Afrocentric approach seeks in every situation the appropriate centrality of the African person” (Asante 171). According to Asante, Afrocentric education means that the teachers provide students the “opportunity to study the world and its people, concepts, and history from an African world view” (171). Afrocentricity also contends that the main problem of African people is their “unconscious adoption of the Western worldview and their attendant conceptual framework” (Mazama 387). Here, both Asante and Mazama are in perfect agreement with Thiong’o when it comes to prioritizing African experience in the education of the African students, and addressing the negative impact on the students left by the Westernized education which shaped the students’ world view from the Western perspective.

However, in Thiong’o’s view, producing literature in the native African languages is the only way to depict and uphold the true African experience. His famous essay ‘The Language of African Literature,’ is considered to be the “principle source” for his “arguments regarding the use of indigenous African languages, for which he has almost become more famous than for his novels” (Williams 141). In this essay, Thiong’o argues that since language is “both a means of communication and a carrier of culture,” the domination of the language of the colonized people by the language of the colonizer was “crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonized” (13-16). Thiong’o also urges that works

of writers and scholars like Balzac, Tolstoy, Neruda, Brecht, Marx, Einstein, Aristotle, Plato and so on should be translated into African languages so that for the African students, a complete African exposure can be ensured (8). He has taken his view of privileging African languages to such an extent that he has given up writing in English and prefers his native language instead. He describes his book *Decolonizing the Mind* as “my farewell to English as a vehicle for any of my writings” (Thiong’o1). Thiong’o mentions that he “started writing in Gikuyu language in 1977 after seventeen years of involvement in Afro-European literature,” and believes that his writing in Gikuyu is a “part and parcel of the anti-imperialist struggles of Kenyan and African people” (27-28).

Even though both Thiong’o and Achebe want to prioritize the African experience, their approaches of doing so are different. While Thiong’o moves away from using English as a means of portraying African experience, Achebe does exactly the opposite. Not only does he use English to uphold African experience, but he also uses English as a form of challenge by producing literary and scholarly works in English aimed at dismantling the Western colonial discourse. Achebe uses language as an instrument to instigate a new wave of change. In his novels, Achebe’s description of Africa is realistic because Achebe was an African who had good understanding of the African way life. Previously, the world saw Africa through the eyes of the western people. Now, perhaps for the first time, the world got the chance to see Africa through the eyes of an African, and heard the voice of Africa. Achebe’s Western education was another factor which contributed to his amazing success enabling him to see through the problems of Africa from the viewpoint of an outsider. At the same time, because of his African connection, he was also able to see the richness of Africa and therefore be the voice of Africa.

### **The Image of Africa Depicted in *Things Fall Apart***

The novel *Things Fall Apart* is perhaps the best example of how Achebe uses the language of the colonizers to unmask their true face, and this is what sets Achebe apart from Thiong’o in terms of their approach to uphold African experience and to challenge the Western perception of Africa. *Things Fall Apart* established itself as one of the most remarkable counter-narratives to Western colonial discourse. Africa had always been the Dark Continent to the early colonizers. The earliest records reveal that West Africa “has generally been regarded as the “black spot of the world”- the spot where the lowest races of mankind had their home” (Boyce 394). According to Innes, African culture and heritage were nothing but “subordinate elements in the total complex of the European psyche” (22). Africa was

considered to be the place where “lowly organized human beings were developed, to slaves of the white man in every part of the world” (Boyce 395). Such outrageously racist attitude towards Africa and the continent’s inhabitants was common in the dominant Western colonial discourse. With *Things Fall Apart*, not only does Achebe achieve a “power-packed, multi-faceted work of literary revision” of Western colonial discourse, but also “seeks to correct misconceptions, challenge the misrepresentations of the political history and culture of African peoples, and rearrange other established notions on who the African is” (Mezu 16). Through this novel, Achebe introduces the world to an entirely new perspective of Africa. The novel is also considered as a strong response to Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* where the projection of Africa, according to Achebe, is misleading and racially prejudiced. In his article *An Image of Africa*, Achebe even goes so far as to call Joseph Conrad a “bloody racist” (788). Apart from being one of the most influential postcolonial texts of all time, this novel has also been a great source of information about Africa itself, which even today, helps scholars and academics across the globe in their quest for further unearthing the history of Africa in order to know more about the social, cultural, political, and economic state of pre-colonial Africa which was once thought to be the most primeval place on earth. Through this novel, Achebe reconstructs, deconstructs, and recreates the image of Africa – the African language, culture, life, and history; and does it all by using the language of the colonizers itself, namely English, as a means of challenge.

*Things Fall Apart* captures the richness of Africa – a continent which was previously misrepresented as a dark continent throughout the entire tradition of the Western colonial discourse. Many European scholars, critics, and authors projected Africa as a savage wasteland. Thiong’o in his essay “The Quest for Relevance,” accuses writers like “Rider Haggard, Elspeth Huxley, Robert Ruark, and Nicholas Monsarrat” of producing “downright racist literature” (92). *Things Fall Apart* is a perfect response to such racist literature as Achebe clearly proves that the Africans were not savages at all; rather, they had a wealth of language and culture, very unique, of their own. In this novel, Achebe portrays the Igbo society in Nigeria which can be considered as a microcosm of Africa. He clearly shows that they had strong social bond and stable economic system. They had unique system of governance and lived with remarkable unity. Even though they lacked centralized political structure, it is an important point to notice that the Igbos developed a “democratic system of government” (Rhoads 63). They had an organized structure of society and valued qualities like courage, valour, honesty, responsibility, and leadership. Not only did they have a language, but also they had a very rich tradition of oral literature and folk narratives. They had

extremely rich tradition of music, sports, and dance as parts of their culture. They had unique rituals and festivals as parts of their unique and colourful culture.

In this novel, Achebe clearly points it out that the African people had a rich and glorious past, and they were civilized in their own way which was of course unique and different from the European civilization. Therefore, it would be absolutely wrong to measure the richness of Africa against Western standards. In his essay “An Image of Africa,” Achebe mentions that Western people have a desire to “set Africa up as a foil in Europe, a place of negation at once remote and vaguely familiar in comparison with which Europe’s own state of spiritual grace will be manifest” (783). Interestingly in “The Quest for Relevance,” Thiong’o also stresses the same issue by addressing that Europeans writers “often had Africa as the subject of their imaginative exploration,” and argues that it is necessary for the African writers to be the voice of Africa (91). In *Things Fall Apart*, this is exactly what Achebe does; he becomes the voice of Africa, and he achieves this feat by using English – the colonizers’ language. When the Western colonial discourse does not recognize that Africa has a rich cultural background, in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe takes more than half of the book to describe Africa’s cultural richness. The text describes the value of community honour and justice in Igbo society in chapter two, the colourful yam festival full of dance and music in chapter five, traditional sports in chapter six, marriage rituals in chapter twelve and fourteen, funeral rituals in chapter thirteen, and especially the richness of African oral literature throughout the first part of the novel, particularly in chapter four and seven. In “The Quest for Relevance,” Thiong’o points out that African orature is mainly the compositions, songs, stories, and art of African peasantry; and since it “has its roots in the lives of the peasantry” and also “forms the basis of the national and resistance culture during the colonial and neo-colonial times,” it should be placed “at the centre of the [literature] syllabus” so that the African students can learn more about their own culture and history (94- 95). With *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe achieves more than that. This novel, which widely considered to be one of the most influential postcolonial fictions of all time, is taught in educational institutions all over the world. Since this novel gives vivid description of the cultural richness of Africa, the worldwide importance and popularity of this novel ensure that not only the Africans but also people all over the world can learn more about African culture and appreciate its richness and diversity. Writing this novel in English definitely helped Achebe achieve such an enormous feat.

In the second half of the novel, Achebe shows how the colonizers gradually establish their authority destroying the socio-cultural fabric of the Igbo society. Therefore, apart from

being a novel that upholds African culture, *Things Fall Apart* also becomes a novel that reveals the “systematic emasculation” of Africa and studies how a “belligerent culture or civilization” invades and plunders another civilization out of “sheer arrogance and ethnocentrism” (Emenyonu and Nnolim 62). Achebe portrays how the Christian missionaries used religion as a tool to infiltrate into the Igbo society which was the first step of colonization. Gradually the colonizers establish trading posts, schools to teach the Igbos who have newly converted into Christianity, and finally native courts which is the last step to complete colonization of the Igboland. This is how Achebe reveals the true face of the colonial enterprise, and deconstructs the western projection of Africa depicting a fresh new image of Africa in front of the world. To make this remarkable achievement possible, Achebe uses English as a tool. On the whole, this novel came as a brave challenge to the European preconception of Africa as a dark continent. The novel also gives the message to the new generation of Africans that they should look back at their past in order to move forward in true sense. However, looking back at the past does not mean regression. It means that the past can guide the way to overcome obstacles and help to see the present from a fresh new perspective. The novel inspires the Africans to search for their roots, and to look back at their glorious past where they can find many things useful with relation to their movement forward.

### **Colonization of Africa Captured in Arrow of God**

Revealing the true face of colonization is one of Achebe’s most important objectives, and despite the success of *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God* is arguably his most important work in this regard. In *Arrow of God*, Achebe shows how the colonizers gradually infiltrate into the very socio-cultural fabric of the Igbo community to cement their position in Igboland. Throughout the history of Western colonial discourse, the colonial enterprise has been described as a mission to enlighten the underdeveloped people in the world. Aimé Césaire, in his essay ‘Discourse on Colonialism,’ points out the devastating effects of colonization and mentions that colonization has never been a benevolent project aimed at improving the lives of the colonized people. Césaire describes colonialism as “a collective hypocrisy” which is “neither evangelization, nor a philanthropic enterprise, nor a desire to push back the frontiers of ignorance, disease, and tyranny, nor a project undertaken for the greater glory of God, nor an attempt to extend the rule of law” (32). Thiong’o also echoes the same opinion in “The Quest for Relevance” and points out that it is necessary to debunk the melioristic propaganda of colonialism because for Africa, the “quest for relevance and for a correct perspective can only be understood and be meaningfully resolved within the context of the general struggle

against imperialism” (88). Achebe makes an enormous contribution to completing this quest for relevance and correct perspective by projecting the true image of colonial atrocities, by countering the fabricated story of social enlightenment, and by dismantling the myth that Western colonial enterprise was a philanthropic project.

In *Arrow of God*, Achebe shows how the technologically superior, sophisticated Western colonizers exploited the weakness of native African people and eventually managed to colonize them. The atrocities of colonization and the destruction of the very fabric of the societies of native African people are revealed in this novel. In this novel, Achebe carefully exposes the strategies that the colonizers followed in order to ensure the total subjugation of Africa. It all starts with the coming of the Christian missionaries – a common phenomenon in almost every region that went under Western colonial rule. The first attack comes on the Igbo religion as church is established in villages named Umuaro and Okperi, and the natives gradually start to embrace Christianity. Nunn points out that “merely exposing Africans to the word of God was not sufficient for conversion. Instead, additional benefits, which were provided through mission stations, were needed to entice Africans to convert to Christianity” (151). Mulwafu maintains that the introduction of Christianity in Africa was a precursor to colonial rule as it helped the colonizers’ to “intervene and colonize” (305). As eventually Christianity gains solid ground, it becomes the ultimate threat towards native Igbo religion and culture. Apparently, there is no harm in leaving one religion and taking another. But if the entire endeavour of luring people away from their religion is nothing but a trick for establishing a deadly project like colonization

on solid ground, then the whole conversion game becomes a hideous conspiracy. Since Igbo religion is an integral part of the Igbo culture, attacking the Igbo religion means rendering a severe blow to the Igbo culture itself. In this novel, Achebe shows how the intervention of Christianity destroyed Igbo religion and created a gulf between the converts and the followers of traditional religion. Mr Goodcountry, a teacher at the village church, is a radical Christian who is in favour of the total annihilation of the Igbo religion. He reminds his young students – who are newly-converted natives – of “how the Christians of the Niger Delta fought the bad customs of their people, destroyed shrines and killed the sacred iguana” (*Trilogy* 366). He believes that true Christians “must be ready to die for the faith” and urges his students to kill the sacred python – an extremely important religious symbol to the natives – because according to the Bible, the snake deceived Eve (*Trilogy* 366). This incitement prompted Ezeulu’s son Oduche to make an attempt to kill the royal python. Such act of betrayal unfolds a series of events that severely disrupt the communal harmony in the Igbo

society. Ultimately, religion becomes one of the most important means of exerting power and dominance over the colonized as the natives start to believe that “there is no escape from the white man” and that “the white man has power which comes from the true god and it burns like fire” (*Trilogy* 405). Since religion is an extremely important component of Igbo culture, religious control also means cultural control. In “The Quest for Relevance,” Thiong’o claims that “economic and political control of people can never be complete without cultural control” (93). This is precisely the point Achebe makes in *Arrow of God* by portraying how the colonizers used religion to destroy the very cultural ethos of the Igbo society which helped them establish their authority. Achebe also creates awareness among the readers through the characters in this novel who understand the colonizers’ motive behind this conversion game and compare joining the “new religion” with “chewing the seed of foolishness” (*Trilogy* 405).

In *Arrow of God*, Achebe also reveals how the colonizers manipulated the power structure of the Igbo society to establish their dominance. They appointed native chiefs to carry out administrative works in Igbo villages despite the fact that the Igbo people “never developed any kind of central authority” (*Trilogy* 356). Such native agents of colonial authority brought about an unwelcoming change to the Igbo society. Not only were they susceptible to corruption, but also destabilized the power structure of the society. Even within the British administration itself, such controversial policy was not welcomed as the District Officer Captain Winterbottom criticizes this policy pointing out that the British administration are “making a dozen of mushroom kings grow where there was none before” (*Trilogy* 378). The colonizers cleverly used these native chiefs to develop an “effective system of ‘indirect rule’ based on native institutions” which further reinforced their authority and cemented their position in Africa (*Trilogy* 375). Renowned Postcolonial scholar Albert Memmi sheds light on how the colonizers legitimized their behavior of using native agents to cement their domination. In his book *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Memmi explains, “a colonialist is, after all, only a colonizer who agrees to be a colonizer. By making his position explicit, he seeks to legitimize colonization” (89). Williams claims that ruling through native intermediaries was the “the colonialists’ preferred model of leadership” (26). Thiong’o is also in dialogue with Williams in this regard as in his essay “The Quest for Relevance,” Thiong’o mentions that such “native elite” always helped to “prop up the Empire” (93). This is exactly what Achebe shows in *Arrow of God* through the portrayal of James Ikedi – the corrupted power-hungry Warrant Chief of Okperi – who is ready to betray his own community to advance his selfish cause.

### **Racism, Oppression, and Loss of Identity**

In both novels, Achebe draws attention to the racist attitude the colonial rulers had towards the Africans. In *Arrow of God*, the District Officer Captain T.K. Winterbottom considers the natives as barbarians and believes that the Europeans who are living in Nigeria “should not lower themselves in the eyes of the natives” (*Trilogy* 351). He claims that Umuaro are more “backward” than Okperi because Umuaro did not welcome “the missionaries and government” (*Trilogy* 356). He also implies that like the French, the British should also “teach their culture to backward races under their charge” (*Trilogy* 355). He blatantly claims that the Igbo people are “great liars” like children, who “don’t lie simply to get out of trouble;” sometimes they will “spoil a good case by a pointless lie” (*Trilogy* 357). Even though he appoints native chiefs to carry out the British administration’s order, he hates the chiefs who are “more like filthy animal skin” to him (*Trilogy* 355). In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe shows how the colonial rulers looked down upon Africa – its people and their culture. Okonkwo’s best friend and one of Umuofia’s wisest men Obierika laments, “...he [any typical British colonizer] says that our customs are bad; and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad” (*Trilogy* 145). *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger* – the very title of the book about British conquest of West Africa that the District Commissioner intends to write – powerfully captures the very essence of colonialism: how the colonizers detested the native Africans, how they loathed African culture, and how they glorified the inhumane subjugation of African tribes. In both *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, Chinua Achebe tells a remarkable tell of this dark episode of history, and that too, by using the very language of the people who colonized Africa.

Africa has been brutalized by the colonizers for centuries. Strategic forceful subjugation of the natives was common in Africa. The colonizers rampantly used “aggressive military campaigns” to bring new territories under control (Farooqui 56). Sometimes, “the natives were to be forced to work without pay to keep costs down” (Ayttey 422). Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* mentions that “iniquities such as forced labor, corporal punishment, unequal wages, and the restriction of political rights” were prevalent (97). In both *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, Achebe shows the inhuman treatment of the Africans at the hand of the colonizers. In *Things Fall Apart*, the protagonist Okonkwo is also arrested for refusing to obey the colonial administration. Similarly in *Arrow of God*, Captain Winterbottom imprisons the protagonist Ezeulu for his refusal to work for the colonial administration as a village chief. Both the instances show that the natives – even the most respected ones among them – have no choice but to accept every decision the colonial

administration takes. Mr. Wright is another colonialist who, with the approval of Captain Winterbottom, uses unpaid labour to construct a road that connects Umuaro and Okperi (*Trilogy* 397). Forcing the natives to work for free is nothing but slavery which both Captain Winterbottom and Mr. Wright approve of. When Obika confronts Mr. Wright about it, he whips Obika and orders the rest of the workers: “Shut up you black monkeys and get down to work” (*Trilogy* 403). The poor villagers know that if they protest, “the white man would repay by taking all their leaders to prison at Okperi” (*Trilogy* 405). In both novels, Achebe uses the narrative of Abame’s subjugation at the hands of British colonizers. In *Things Fall Apart*, Obierika mentions that “the white man wiped out Abame” while in *Arrow of God*, “the story of what these [British] soldiers did to Abame was still told with fear” (*Trilogy* 144, 347). The narrative of Abame “underlines the crucial linkage between slavery and sovereignty in Achebe's fictions” (Osinubi 32). In both novels, Achebe portrays the native Africans’ suffering and agony, and through the tragic death of a heroic character like Okonkwo, Achebe depicts the struggle of Africa against colonial oppression. Thiong’o believes that the quest for relevance entails a “call for the rediscovery of the real language of the humankind: the language of struggle” (109). In both the novels, Achebe rediscovers this language of struggle in the context of colonial Africa – a feat he achieves both by revealing the truth about colonial atrocities, and by establishing a strong counter-narrative to Western colonial discourse where colonialism is hailed as a benevolent enterprise.

The loss of native identity is one of the most pressing issues related to colonialism. Almost all renowned Postcolonial scholars have voiced their concerns over the fact that prolonged colonial domination manipulates the psyche of colonized people in such a way that they elevate the colonizers’ culture, and in the process, look down upon their own culture, heritage, and history – the very things that form the core of their socio-cultural fabric. Frantz Fanon in his famous book *Black Skin, White Mask* explains this phenomenon as Fanon claims that a colonized man “identifies himself with the explorer” or in other word, the colonizer, and considers the colonizer to be the “bringer of civilization” who “carries truth to savages – an all-white truth” (114). In his other famous work *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon claims that without such psychological dominance over the colonized, colonialism would be inherently powerless (146). Albert Memmi is in dialogue with Fanon as Memmi claims that by making the colonized feel inadequate, the colonizers turn the colonized into “an oppressed creature, whose development is broken and who compromises by his defeat” (133). Césaire points out that as the colonized people undermine their own culture and accept the elevated status of the colonizers’ culture, the colonizers start to see the colonized “as an animal,” treat

the colonized “like an animal,” and tend “objectively to transform” the colonized into an animal (41). *Arrow of God* examines this phenomenon and reveals the true horror of the psychological subjugation of the colonized quite vividly. The missionary school teacher Mr. Goodcountry tells the story of how the Christians of Niger Delta “fought the bad customs of their people, destroyed their shrines, and killed the sacred iguana;” and urges his students to kill the royal python (*Trilogy* 366). Influenced by Goodcountry’s hate speech and indoctrinated by his militant religious views, Ezeulu’s son Oduche attempts to kill the royal python. Killing the royal python is a sacrilege, and as serious a crime as killing a kinsman. By attempting to do so, Oduche manifests the depth of his hatred for indigenous culture that the Christian missionary Mr. Goodcountry has instilled in him. Ironically, Goodcountry is also an African indoctrinated by British Christian missionaries. Almost a similar episode unravels in *Things Fall Apart* as the protagonist Okonkwo’s son Nwoye accepts Christianity and takes the Christian name Isaac. Enoch, son of a snake priest in Umuofia, is also “believed to have killed and eaten the sacred python,” and his “devotion to the new faith had seemed so much greater than Mr. Brown’s” who is a colonial overseer (*Trilogy* 151). Oduche and Goodcountry in *Arrow of God*, and Nwoye and Enoch in *Things Fall Apart* are the manifest examples of what colonial indoctrination does to the colonized.

### **Learning from Mistakes**

In both novels, Achebe gives a strong message to the African people to learn from their mistakes and to put more efforts on rebuilding their African identity. Achebe dispassionately exposes the flaws that were there within the Africans themselves which made them vulnerable and helped the colonizers to ensure the subjugation of Africa. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe describes some of the horrible malpractices that found their way into Igbo religion and culture. Excommunication of the disabled, inhuman subjugation of women, killing of new-born twins, sacrificing young boys (for instance, the killing of Ikemefuna in chapter seven), and gruesome exorcism rituals (for instance, the dismemberment of Ekwefi’s stillborn third child in chapter nine) are just some examples of the most horrible malpractices that prevail in the Igbo community. The Igbo community described in *Things Fall Apart* has another big problem, which is the inhuman subjugation of women. Neither the kind of treatment the women get from the men, nor the status they have in the Igbo society can be justified when it comes to the issue of women’s rights. Even though the ideas like women’s rights and gender equality are modern concepts for the pre-colonial Igbo society and therefore are not expected to be applicable there, it cannot be denied that the constant oppression of

women in Igbo society reflects the historically degraded status of women in those societies. Chinua Achebe successfully addresses these problems to create awareness among the Africans. As the novel clearly shows that it is the group of deprived and discontented people who are the first ones to join the missionaries, it is sure to work as an awakening force among the Africans to learn from their mistakes in their effort to build a better future. *Arrow of God* also reveals the problems within the Igbo community which helped the colonizers to infiltrate and conquer. The Igbo people were divided. The rivalry among villages about land possession and worship of different gods created a severe lack of unity among them. This novel shows how the enmity between the two villages Umuaro and Okperi, and also between two important figures like Ezeulu and Ezidemili destabilise the entire Igbo community. Such division within the Igbo community made it easier for the colonizers to take advantage of the situation as Ezeulu mentions that “when two brothers fight a stranger reaps the harvest” (*Trilogy* 455). The native agents working for the Empire as chiefs and court messengers further widen the division among people as Tony Clarke mentions that “they all managed to turn themselves into little tyrants over their own people. It seems to be a trait in the character of the Negro” (*Trilogy* 430). The colonizers were very clever at getting the natives work for them. The court messenger Nwodika explains the reason why he works for the British is “people from other places are gathering much wealth” because they have a “share in the market” and also “in the white man’s office” (*Trilogy* 494). Apart from communal division, superstitions also prevailed among the Igbo people; one of many examples is their belief that the village medicine-man and diviner named Aniegboka can “turn a person into a dog by slapping him on the buttocks” (*Trilogy* 440). When Captain Winterbottom gets ill, the villagers believe that the Ezeulu “had hit him with a potent charm” (*Trilogy* 478). Such superstitions eventually lead to downfall of the Igbo religion and the triumph of the missionaries as Ezeulu’s refusal to announce the New Yam Feast on time for no good reason makes him a “a public enemy in the eyes of all” (*Trilogy* 536). The catechist of St Mark’s CMS Church John Goodcountry grabs this opportunity and offers the villagers distraught by the thoughts of the eminent loss of crops and starvation to “bring their one yam to church instead of giving it to Ulu” (*Trilogy* 541). This dramatic turn of event suddenly changes everything decisively in favour of the colonizers as Christianity begin to gain solid ground in Umuaro paving the way for a complete colonial domination. In *Arrow of God*, Achebe clearly shows the mistakes the Africans made which contributed significantly to their own downfall. This is why, this novel is also a lesson for the Africans to learn from their mistakes.

### English Language and the Quest for Relevance

In “The Quest for Relevance,” Thiong’o points out that the way the Africans view themselves is “very much dependent” on where they stand “in relationship to imperialism in its colonial and neo-colonial stages” (88). According to Fanon, unfortunately many Africans are not adequately prepared to break free from the colonial system and embrace the “values and ideologies of the colonial system” and remain “incarcerated in the habit pattern established by the mother country” (Fairchild 196). To break free from the psychological domination of the colonial system, novels like *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* can play a great role by revealing the true face of the colonial enterprise and by portraying the glorious past of Africa. For Thiong’o, the quest for relevance is also a “call for a regenerative reconnection with the millions of revolutionary tongues in Africa and the world over demanding liberation” (108). As Achebe has written this novel in English, readers from all over the world have the chance to see how he has revealed the colonial atrocities, and nations who once lived under colonial rule can also relate to the African experience of colonization. This remarkable achievement became possible because Achebe wrote the novel in English, which is a global language. Thiong’o argues that if writers write in English, the “strength and depth” of their works will depend on their “ability to invoke the idiom of African Culture in a language that is closer to it” (99). Achebe also excels here with the way he conveys African idioms in English. Idioms like “a man who brings antridden faggots into his hut should expect the visit of lizards” (*Trilogy* 467), “if the rat could not run fast enough, it must make way for the tortoise” (*Trilogy* 493), “every lizard lies on its belly, so we cannot tell which has a bellyache” (*Trilogy* 494), and “a man must dance the dance prevalent in his time” (*Trilogy* 514) are some examples of how successful Achebe is in his rendition of African idioms into English.

Not only is language a means of communication, but also a medium of acquiring knowledge. In order to learn the colonizers’ knowledge, the knowledge that gave them the upper hand over the colonized in the first place, it is important to learn the colonizers’ language too. Thiong’o himself addresses this issue in his both novels *The River Between* and *Weep Not Child* where the protagonists learn English to educate themselves and to learn the colonizers’ craft. If learning English is fine, writing in English should also be acceptable. Therefore, saying farewell to English as a means of writing is not a pragmatic solution. There is no denying the fact that language and culture are intertwined, therefore writing in one’s native language is always the first priority; but in order to address audiences all over the world, a global language is necessary. Just like Thiong’o discusses Africa’s quest for

relevance in this essay, Gabriel García Márquez too talked about Latin America's "quest for independence and originality" in his Nobel lecture as he pointed that even though "Latin America neither wants, nor has any reason, to be a pawn without a will of its own," it is also important that Latin America's "quest for independence and originality" is recognized globally, and its struggle to "respond with life" in spite of all the "oppression, plundering, and abandonment" is appreciated worldwide ("Gabriel García Márquez"). Thiong'o himself calls the language of struggle the "real language of humankind" and addresses the importance of global acknowledgement by claiming that the quest for relevance is also a call for "a regenerative reconnection with the millions of revolutionary tongues in Africa and the world" (108). By writing in English, Achebe successfully completes this quest.

Achebe accomplishes his mission of dismantling the Western projection of Africa by creating a successful counter-narrative to Western colonial discourse. He successfully deconstructs the Western colonial discourse, reconstructs the history of Africa by depicting the true African experience, and eventually projects the new image of Africa in front of the world. Achebe's greatest success is, he accomplishes all these by using the same language as a tool which was once used by the colonizers as a means of control. In his seminal work *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Albert Memmi asserts that "the most serious blow suffered by the colonized is being removed from history and from the community" (Memmi 135). In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon passionately argues that the colonial enterprise deliberately "turns its attention to the past of the colonized people and distorts it, disfigures it, and destroys it" (149). Achebe's greatest success is that in using English – the language of the colonizers – Achebe not only restores Africa in history, but also restores the image of Africa in front of the entire world creating a global appeal reaching far beyond the periphery of Africa. This is what sets Achebe apart from Thiong'o and makes him more successful.

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