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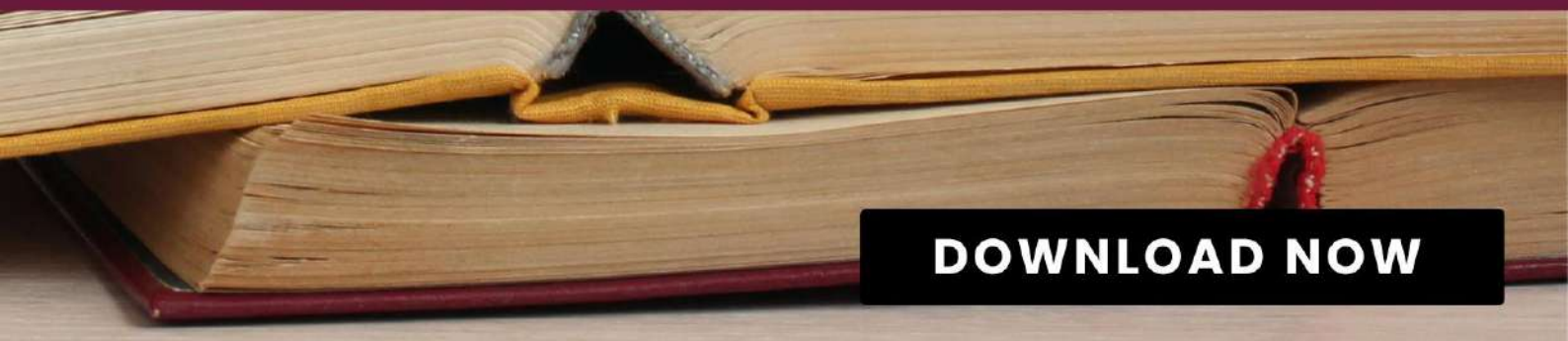

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Preface

We are delighted to present, with great pleasure, the **Volume-1, Issue-3, November 2025 of the Journal of Creative Research in English Literature & Culture (JCRELC)** — a peer-reviewed international journal devoted to the exploration and advancement of literary and cultural scholarship.

JCRELC is part of the **SPARC Institute of Technical Research** publication series and was envisioned to meet the growing global demand for an academic platform that unites critical thinking, creative inquiry, and interdisciplinary research in the field of **English Literature and Cultural Studies**. The journal aims to serve as a bridge between scholars, educators, and practitioners, providing an inclusive space for diverse voices and perspectives.

The mission of JCRELC is to foster intellectual exchange, innovation, and academic excellence by publishing original and thought-provoking research in areas such as:

English Literature:

Literary theory and criticism, comparative literature, postcolonial studies, modern and contemporary literature, diaspora studies, gender and identity, eco-criticism, digital humanities, narrative and stylistic studies, and creative writing.

Cultural Studies:

Media and popular culture, film and performance studies, cultural theory, identity politics, globalization and culture, heritage and memory studies, translation and intercultural communication, visual arts, and linguistic representation in literature and media.

Each article published in this inaugural issue exemplifies the journal's commitment to promoting meaningful scholarship and fostering dialogue that connects literature and culture with the evolving dynamics of society.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all **Editorial, Reviewer, and Advisory Board Members** who have contributed their expertise, as well as to the **authors** whose valuable research enriches this publication. Our appreciation also goes to the **editorial team of the SPARC Institute of Technical Research** for their consistent guidance and support in bringing JCRELC to life.

We hope that this inaugural issue of JCRELC will serve as a valuable resource for scholars and readers alike, inspiring continued exploration and critical engagement in the vibrant domains of **English Literature and Cultural Studies**.

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Beyond the Human and the Patriarchal: Ecofeminism and Animal Ethics in Olga Tokarczuk's *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*

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Abstract— *This paper examines the ways Olga Tokarczuk's novel, Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead, synthesizes feminist and environmental thought to mount a coordinated critique of species hierarchies and patriarchal structures. Narrated through the singular perspective of Janina Duszejko—an elderly woman who advocates for animals and imagines their demand for justice—the novel compels a re-evaluation of moral responsibility beyond the human. Drawing on Donna Haraway's concept of "companion species," Cary Wolfe's critique of speciesism, and ecofeminist insights from Vandana Shiva and Carolyn Merchant, this study argues that Tokarczuk constructs an ethical counter-narrative grounded in care, interdependence, and gender-aware epistemology. The novel's persistent attention to hunting, animal suffering, and environmental degradation exposes how anthropocentric and androcentric worldviews mutually reinforce systems of domination. Janina's position as an aging woman and social outsider becomes a site of epistemological resistance, where empathy and relationality contest detached, patriarchal rationality. Through an ecofeminist and multispecies critical lens, this article contends that Tokarczuk imagines a form of justice rooted in mutual respect rather than control. Ultimately, it situates Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead within the expanding fields of feminist ecocriticism and animal studies, demonstrating how narrative fiction can articulate the new ethical frameworks urgently needed in an age of ecological crisis.*

Keywords— Olga Tokarczuk, Ecofeminism, Posthumanism, Animal Ethics, Speciesism, Anthropocentrism, Patriarchy, Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead.

I. INTRODUCTION

Olga Tokarczuk's *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* (2009, English translation 2018) masterfully blends crime fiction with profound philosophical inquiry. The narrative follows Janina Duszejko, a retired engineer and teacher living in a remote Polish village, whose profound respect for animals and unconventional beliefs—including astrology and the poetry of William Blake—place her in direct conflict with her community's powerful men. When local hunters and authorities begin to die under mysterious circumstances, Janina posits that the animals are enacting retribution. Dismissed as a madwoman, her perspective challenges the reader to reconsider the foundations of justice, empathy, and community.

More than a conventional mystery, Tokarczuk's novel employs irony, symbolism, and a transgressive narrative voice to critique systems of domination over nature, animals, and marginalized humans. This paper argues that *Drive Your Plow* offers a potent ecofeminist and posthumanist critique, dismantling the dualistic hierarchies that elevate (male) humans above women, animals, and the environment. Janina Duszejko embodies a form of resistance that echoes Donna Haraway's call to "make kin" across species and Vandana Shiva's vision of making peace with the Earth.

Through an analysis framed by the work of theorists including Haraway, Cary Wolfe, Shiva, and Carolyn Merchant, this study will demonstrate how Tokarczuk's novel 1) exposes the interconnected logic of patriarchy and anthropocentrism; 2) champions embodied, situated knowledge over detached rationality; and 3) uses literary form to explore the radical, even violent,

implications of a truly multispecies ethics. The novel's resonance extends beyond the page, as evidenced by its adoption as a symbol in real-world environmental protests in Poland. At a time of climate collapse and mass extinction, Tokarczuk's work provokes a crucial ethical reckoning with our responsibilities to the more-than-human world.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW: SITUATING THE NOVEL IN CRITICAL DISCOURSE

Since its publication and particularly after Tokarczuk's 2018 Nobel Prize, *Drive Your Plow* has garnered significant scholarly attention intersecting literary, ecological, and feminist studies. Early reviews highlighted its genre-blending audacity and moral urgency. Hannah Weber labelled it a "thought-provoking" eco-fiction and "ecological thriller" whose rebellious protagonist has become an icon for activists, noting that Janina's name appeared on protest signs during the defense of Poland's Białowieża Forest.

Academic scholarship has deepened this analysis. Ellen Mortensen's (2021) ecofeminist reading, "The Fury's Revenge," frames Janina's vengeance through the mythic figure of the Furies, interpreting her actions as a form of "wild justice" against patriarchal and ecological violences. Danijela Petković and Dušica Ljubinković (2022) examine the clash between Janina's animal ethics and localist ideologies that defend hunting as tradition, arguing the novel critiques a parochialism that masks cruelty. Comparative work, such as Nima Fakhrshafaie's (2024) study pairing Janina with J.M. Coetzee's Elizabeth Costello, locates Tokarczuk within a global literary tradition that uses fictional protagonists to stage rigorous debates on animal rights, challenging the supremacy of reason over compassion.

In Polish literary studies, Małgorzata Poks (2023) identifies a consistent ethical thread in Tokarczuk's oeuvre, highlighting her focus on "nonhuman animals suffering without choice" and her creation of "heterotopian alternatives" to anthropocentric norms. Poks emphasizes Tokarczuk's posthumanist impulse to recognize the animal as a significant "Other."

This existing scholarship effectively establishes the novel's thematic concerns with gender, ecology, and ethics. However, a synthesized analysis that meticulously applies the core tenets of ecofeminist and posthumanist theory—specifically the integrated frameworks of Haraway, Wolfe, Shiva, and Merchant—to the novel's narrative mechanics and philosophical provocations remains a fertile avenue. This article aims to fill that gap, providing a consolidated theoretical reading that elucidates how Tokarczuk's formal choices (e.g., unreliable narration, irony, symbolism) serve to dismantle the "human" as a category built upon the subjugation of women and animals.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: WEAVING ECOFEMINISM, POSTHUMANISM, AND ANIMAL ETHICS

The analysis of Tokarczuk's novel is grounded in the interconnected theoretical frameworks of ecofeminism, posthumanism, and the critique of speciesism. Together, they provide a lens to examine the novel's deconstruction of what Val Plumwood termed the "backgrounding" of nature and the feminine within the dominant Western worldview.

Ecofeminism posits a historical and conceptual link between the domination of women and the exploitation of nature, both rooted in a patriarchal logic of dualistic hierarchy (mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, human/animal). Carolyn Merchant, in *The Death of Nature* (1980), historicizes this shift, arguing that the Scientific Revolution reconceptualized nature from a living, nurturing mother to a mechanistic resource, enabling unchecked exploitation—a shift paralleled by the persecution of women healers and midwives. Vandana Shiva extends this critique to colonialism and global capitalism, demonstrating how the "rape of the Earth" and the subjugation of women are mutually reinforcing processes. For Shiva, ecofeminism represents a liberatory project to move beyond this "maldevelopment" toward an "Earth Democracy."

Posthumanism, particularly as articulated by Cary Wolfe, critically interrogates the philosophical underpinnings of human exceptionalism. Wolfe argues that humanism, even in its progressive forms, often remains anthropocentric, co-opting the other into a human-defined schema. True posthumanism requires a fundamental rethinking of subjectivity, community, and ethics beyond the human species. This aligns with Donna Haraway's work on "companion species," which deconstructs the boundaries between human and animal, emphasizing entanglement and co-constitution. Haraway insists that the categories of species, race, and gender are inextricably linked, writing that the figure of the animal has been crucial to the oppressive logic of colonialism and racism.

Speciesism, a term popularized by Peter Singer, denotes the unjustified privileging of human interests over those of other sentient beings. Feminist philosopher Carol J. Adams, in *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990), explicitly connects speciesism and sexism, arguing that both depend on the reduction of living subjects to consumable objects (animals to meat, women to

bodies). Her concept of the "absent referent" describes the linguistic and cultural process that hides the lived reality of the animal, a process analogous to the objectification of women.

These frameworks converge on a key point: the autonomous, rational (male) human subject of the Enlightenment is constituted through the exclusion and domination of its others—women, animals, nature. Tokarczuk's novel dramatizes this convergence. Janina's marginalization as an "irrational" woman is directly tied to her empathy for animals; both her gender and her ethical stance place her outside the community of "rational men." The novel thus becomes a laboratory for testing a posthuman, ecofeminist ethic, asking what justice and community might look like when the circle of moral consideration is radically expanded.

IV. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS: UNRAVELING PATRIARCHY AND ANTHROPOCENTRISM

Tokarczuk's critique is enacted through intricate character construction, symbolic networks, and a deliberately unsettling narrative voice.

Janina Duszejko: The "Mad" Truth-Teller. Janina is the archetypal ecofeminist outsider. Her identities—aging woman, vegetarian, astrologer, animal advocate—place her in opposition to the village's patriarchal, Catholic, hunting-centric norms. Her worldview, dismissed as madness, constitutes a profound epistemological challenge. She operates from what Haraway calls "situated knowledge," grounded in embodied experience, care, and alternative systems like astrology, which the novel treats not as superstition but as a rival cosmology to the instrumental rationality of the hunters.

Janina's language itself is insurgent. She capitalizes key words ("Animals," "Creatures," "Ailments"), elevating them to proper-noun status, and assigns people reductive, animalistic nicknames ("Big Foot," "Black Coat"). This linguistic practice inverts the societal order: she personalizes the animal world and de-personalizes the human oppressors. Her deep, grieving anger—over her murdered dogs, the slaughtered deer—is framed not as hysteria but as a justified, clarifying force. As she states, "Anger makes the mind clear and sharp… Anger is definitely the root of all wisdom." This aligns with contemporary feminist reclamations of female anger as a legitimate political response to systemic injustice.

The Patriarchal-Anthropocentric Order. The village power structure is a microcosm of interlocking dominations. The men—Big Foot (the poacher), the Commandant (police), the Priest (Father Rustle)—represent institutional authority (state, church) and cultural tradition. Their bond is cemented through hunting, a ritualized performance of human dominance over nature, explicitly blessed by the Church in the grotesque St. Hubert's Day mass. Here, Tokarczuk makes a bold ethical link: Janina mentally compares the hunters' gathering to a concentration camp tower, invoking the Holocaust to shock the reader into seeing speciesism as a logic of ultimate exclusion and violence. The Priest's sermon, which glorifies man's God-given dominion, exemplifies what Merchant identified as the marriage of mechanistic science and patriarchal religion to sanction exploitation.

Narrative Irony and Multispecies Justice. The novel's brilliant central irony is that the "detective" (Janina, who seeks the cause of the deaths) is also the perpetrator (she kills the hunters). This structure forces a profound moral reckoning. Initially, the narrative cultivates the tantalizing possibility that nature itself is revolting—that the animals are executing cosmic justice. This fantasy represents a deep-seated ecofeminist desire for a rebalancing. The revelation that Janina is the agent does not deflate this desire but complicates it. Her violence is presented not as random madness, but as targeted, poetic retribution: Big Foot chokes on a deer bone; a fur farm operator is found in an animal trap. She becomes the human instrument of the justice she believes the animals deserve, blurring the line between human and animal agency and posing an unbearable ethical question: if the legal system is complicit in violence, is extra-legal vengeance ever justified?

Symbolic Networks. The novel is rich with ecofeminist symbolism.

- **Animals & Bones:** Deer, foxes, dogs, and insects are not mere plot devices but narrative presences whose suffering matters. Bones, referenced in the Blake-derived title, are the great equalizer, the material remainder that links all mortal creatures and humbles human pretensions to transcendence.
- **William Blake:** The chapter epigraphs from Blake, a visionary poet hostile to industrial reductionism, provide a spiritual and philosophical framework. Blake's protest against "mind-forg'd manacles" mirrors Janina's rebellion against the manacles of anthropocentric law and patriarchal reason.

- **Astrology and the Elements:** Janina's astrology represents an alternative, holistic epistemology that connects human fate to cosmic patterns, challenging the disconnected, hierarchical worldview of her opponents.

V. DISCUSSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR LITERATURE AND ETHICS

Drive Your Plow transcends its genre to become a significant work of philosophical fiction with broad implications.

Reimagining Genre and Justice. The novel subverts the detective genre, where a rational agent typically restores a disrupted social order. Here, the detective is the disruptor, and the "order" she attacks is revealed as fundamentally unjust. The novel thus becomes a tragedy of "civil disobedience," exploring the extreme costs of conscience in a corrupted system. It resonates with real-world tensions within animal and environmental activism, where legal channels often fail.

Modeling a Posthuman Ethic. Janina embodies the struggle to live a posthuman ethic. Her identity is relational, defined by her care for her dog-friends and her solidarity with wild creatures. Her final escape into the forest borderland symbolizes a refusal to remain within the confines of the human community as it is currently constituted. She attempts to practice what Haraway advocates: "making kin" across species boundaries, forging a precarious, affective community based on mutual vulnerability rather than domination.

Confronting the Anthropocene. The novel is a literary response to the Anthropocene. It localizes the planetary crises of extinction and climate change in the specific, brutal practices of hunting, poaching, and ecological disregard. Janina's "ecological grief" and rage are presented as the only sane responses to pervasive, normalized cruelty. The novel argues that a change in consciousness—a recognition of our entanglement with the more-than-human world—is the necessary precursor to any political change.

The Limits and Power of Narrative. Tokarczuk offers no easy solace. The systemic order absorbs the shocks of Janina's violence with a cover-up, and she must flee. The revolution is incomplete, personal, and costly. Yet, the novel's power lies in this very ambiguity. It does not preach but inhabits a radical perspective so fully that it destabilizes the reader's own assumptions. By making Janina compelling, ironic, and morally complex, Tokarczuk ensures that her ecofeminist, posthumanist challenge cannot be easily dismissed. The novel itself becomes a form of activism, a "bell that rings to call attention," expanding the reader's circle of empathy and moral concern.

VI. CONCLUSION

Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead is a formidable literary achievement that uses the tools of fiction to conduct a radical ethical thought experiment. Through Janina Duszejko, Tokarczuk dramatizes the inseparable links between the oppression of women and the exploitation of animals, both stemming from a patriarchal, anthropocentric worldview that privileges control, rationality, and hierarchy over care, interdependence, and kinship.

By applying an integrated ecofeminist and posthumanist lens, this analysis has shown how the novel's narrative strategies—its unreliable narrator, its ironic inversion of the crime genre, its rich symbolism—are essential to its philosophical project. Janina is not a flawless heroine but a compelling embodiment of the crises and contradictions that arise when one takes the claims of the marginalized—both human and non-human—seriously. Her story is a tragic, furious, and darkly comic demand for a justice that transcends the human sphere.

In an era defined by ecological collapse, Tokarczuk's novel is more than literature; it is a crucial intervention. It challenges us to "drive our plow" over the ossified bones of outdated paradigms, to break the ground for a new ethics. It asks us to imagine, with Janina, a community that includes all Creatures, and to recognize that our freedom is bound up with theirs. The novel's enduring power lies in its ability to make that demand not as an abstract theory, but as a visceral, unsettling, and unforgettable story.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Reclaiming the Narrative: A Dialogic Analysis of Achebe's Portrayal of Igbo Society

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Declarations

1. **Data Availability Statement:** No datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study. This research is a theoretical literary analysis based solely on the published text of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (Heinemann, 1958) and the theoretical works of Mikhail Bakhtin. All supporting evidence and materials are derived from these publicly available, published sources.
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Abstract— *Chinua Achebe's seminal 1958 novel, Things Fall Apart, stands as a foundational corrective to colonial-era European literature, which routinely depicted African societies as primitive. This essay employs a dialogic narrative analysis, informed by Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of* ***dialogism, polyphony, and heteroglossia****, to argue that Achebe's work deliberately counters colonial monologues by offering a nuanced, multi-voiced portrayal of pre-colonial Igbo society. Through a structured examination of the novel's* ***narrative architecture as a site of competing discourses****, character function as embodied ideologies, and linguistic hybridity, this study demonstrates how Achebe reframes the colonial encounter. The analysis contends that the novel presents the interaction between the Igbo and the Europeans not as a simple binary but as a* ***dialogic struggle between a polyphonic tradition and an authoritative colonial discourse****. Ultimately, this study elucidates how Things Fall Apart uses the novel form itself to complicate the historical record, revealing the dual legacy of colonial influence and establishing the text as a crucial site for understanding cultural conflict from a postcolonial standpoint.*

Keywords— Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart, African literature, postcolonialism, Bakhtin, dialogic analysis, narrative structure, heteroglossia.

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study:

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) stands as a foundational text in postcolonial literature, systematically challenging the reductive and pejorative representations of Africa prevalent in the Western literary canon. Set in the fictional Igbo village of Umuofia on the eve of and during the initial European colonial incursion, the novel constructs a detailed anthropological portrait of a complex society undergoing profound crisis. Achebe's project, however, transcends mere cultural documentation; it is a deliberate act of literary and historical reclamation.

Prior to Achebe, the dominant narrative of Africa in English literature was largely constructed by colonial writers such as Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and Joyce Cary in *Mister Johnson* (1952). Their works, though stylistically distinct, perpetuated a discursive tradition that framed the continent as a "dark," irrational space and its inhabitants as primitive or childlike, thereby providing an ideological justification for the colonial "civilizing mission." This established a significant gap: the absence of an autonomous, self-represented African perspective that could articulate the complexity, validity, and internal dynamics of indigenous societies.

In direct response to this discursive colonization, Achebe inaugurates a counter-narrative. *Things Fall Apart* serves as a literary corrective, deploying the very tools of the colonizer—the English language and the novel form—to subvert the colonial gaze. This essay argues that Achebe's novel performs two crucial, interconnected functions through its **dialogic form**: first, it meticulously models the structural cohesion and **inherent polyphony** of pre-colonial Igbo society through its intricate depiction of myths, proverbs, religious practices, and social institutions; second, it conducts a nuanced impact analysis of the colonial encounter, examining not a simple binary of destruction versus benefit, but a **dialogic process of destabilization**, cultural conflict, and forced adaptation. The primary aim is to analyze how the novel represents the effects of European colonization on Igbo culture, with particular attention to the erosion of social coherence and the emergence of a contested, hybrid reality.

This analysis is primarily informed by **Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of the novel**, which provide tools to examine the text not just thematically but as a field where multiple voices and ideologies interact. This Bakhtinian lens is complemented by postcolonial concepts such as Homi Bhabha's "hybridity" and the Subaltern studies critique of historical representation. These frameworks allow for an examination of the text that goes beyond cataloguing cultural practices, instead investigating the power dynamics of representation itself and the complex, often ambivalent, outcomes of cultural contact.

The discussion will first delineate the functional sophistication and **polyphonic nature** of Umuofia's social and spiritual systems, demonstrating how Achebe legitimizes them as a rational, self-governing order. It will then analyze the catalytic intrusion of the missionaries and colonial administration as an **imposition of authoritative discourse**, tracing the fractures that develop within the community. Finally, it will assess the novel's ultimate portrayal of the colonial legacy—a legacy marked by profound loss, but also by the irreversible alteration of Igbo life-ways. Through this examination, the essay contends that *Things Fall Apart* remains an indispensable scholarly resource, not for providing a simplistic indictment of colonialism, but for its sophisticated, **polyphonic exploration** of cultural collapse and resilience from the previously silenced perspective of the colonized.

1.2 Statement of the Problem:

The scholarly discourse surrounding Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is richly established, yet it reveals a critical area requiring further synthesis and theoretical focus. While extensive research has deconstructed the novel's thematic core—the collision between Igbo society and British colonialism—the precise mechanics of how Achebe narratively constructs this clash, and the specific interpretive gaps left by prior analyses, merit a more structured examination.

A significant strand of criticism focuses on diagnosing the causality of the protagonist Okonkwo's downfall and, by extension, the disintegration of Umuofia. Raisa Simola (1995), for instance, systematically catalogs four explanatory domains for this fate: the impact of British colonization, the applicability of the tragic hero archetype, the role of fate or destiny, and the concept of divine justice. This approach is foundational, establishing the primary nodes of conflict—individual versus society, internal versus external forces—that the novel presents.

Subsequent scholarship has expanded this focus from the individual to the collective. Varadharajan and Ramesh (2016) argue that the novel ultimately charts the "fall of Igbo culture," positing that the society's refusal to adapt was a contributing factor, even as they note the coercive nature of the colonial imposition. This perspective introduces the critical tension between internal agency and external force in societal collapse. Ian Glenn (1985) further complicates this by arguing that Okonkwo's tragic failure is inextricably linked to broader processes of social change, suggesting that Achebe's narrative resists "easy judgment" about individual versus historical culpability.

Despite these valuable contributions, a synthesizing gap persists. Patrick Nnoromele's (2000) study points toward this gap by situating Okonkwo's failure within the "Igbo conception of a hero," yet it leaves unanswered the deeper narrative and structural *how*: through what specific literary strategies does Achebe balance the portrayal of a pre-colonial social order with its inherent "strengths and imperfections" (as noted in earlier criticism) against the catastrophic external shock of colonialism? Prior studies often describe the conflict or its outcomes but less frequently perform a granular analysis of the narrative sequence—the strategic "moves"—by which Achebe builds cultural legitimacy before staging its dismantling.

Therefore, this study identifies its specific problem space: While existing literature has effectively thematized the novel's conflict, there is a need for a systematic **analysis of its narrative architecture through a Bakhtinian framework**. The core problem addressed here is the lack of a consolidated examination of how Achebe's procedural revelation of Igbo societal structures (a **polyphonic representation move**) is systematically undermined by the procedural intrusion of colonial forces (a **disruptive, authoritative counter-move**). This study argues that the novel's enduring power and analytical value lie not merely in its themes but in this deliberate, **dialogic sequencing** of narrative moves, which guides the reader to experience both the coherence of a world and the precise mechanisms of its fragmentation.

1.3 Research Questions:

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does Chinua Achebe employ **narrative structure and dialogic form** in *Things Fall Apart* to portray the complexities of pre-colonial Igbo society and its encounter with colonialism?
2. In what ways do the novel's principal characters function as **embodied ideological positions** within the dialogic clash of cultures?
3. How does Achebe's use of **language and hybridity** function as a specific narrative strategy to reclaim cultural authority?

1.4 Objectives of the Study:

1.4.1 General Objective:

The primary objective of this study is to conduct a **dialogic narrative analysis** of the representation of Igbo society in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. This analysis utilizes **Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism, polyphony, and heteroglossia** as its primary methodological lens to examine how the novel stages the conflict between indigenous and colonial worldviews. This theoretical framework is particularly suited to analyzing the **multi-voiced nature of the text** and its engagement with the **monologic tendencies of colonial discourse**.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives:

To achieve the general objective, this study aims to:

- Systematically identify and analyze the major thematic constructs in the novel **through a Bakhtinian dialogic lens**.
- Critically examine the roles and characterization of the novel's principal figures as **vehicles for competing discourses** (e.g., authoritative vs. internally persuasive).
- Interpret key literary quotations and linguistic strategies, analyzing their function as elements of the novel's **heteroglossic design** in conveying cultural values, moral complexities, and the novel's overarching philosophical stance.

1.5 Significance of the Study:

This research offers several potential contributions to the field of literary studies:

- It provides a structured, **theory-driven analysis** that may serve as a model for students and scholars engaging with literary texts, particularly from postcolonial contexts, through narrative theory.
- It offers pedagogical insights for instructors on scaffolding student analysis of **dialogic technique**, character function, and thematic depth in literary works.
- By presenting a focused case study applying Bakhtinian theory to African literature, it contributes to the broader scholarly discourse on Achebe's work and **interdisciplinary literary theory**.
- The findings may inform curriculum developers, researchers, and educators in the design of literary syllabi and the practice of literary criticism.

1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study:

The scope of this study is strictly delimited to a close textual analysis of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The analysis encompasses all 24 chapters of the novel, with a primary focus on **dialogic exploration**, character analysis as ideological positions, and close reading of significant passages through a Bakhtinian lens. The main methodological limitation is its reliance on a single data source, the literary text itself, without incorporating external empirical data or comparative analyses with other works. Furthermore, as a qualitative literary analysis, the interpretations are inherently subjective, though grounded in textual evidence and a defined theoretical framework. General constraints common to academic research, such as time and access to a broader range of secondary scholarly materials, are also acknowledged.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction: The Novel's Place in Literary and Postcolonial Canon:

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is widely recognized as a foundational text of modern African literature in English. Its significance lies not only in its narrative of pre-colonial Igbo society and the disruptive advent of European colonialism in the late 19th century but also in its deliberate counter-discourse to Eurocentric literary representations of Africa (Achebe, 1958; Gikandi, 1991). The novel's protagonist, Okonkwo—a man whose stature is built on hard work, traditional authority, and a fearsome will, yet ultimately undone by personal rigidity and historical forces—serves as the central axis upon which Achebe explores the complex interplay of individual agency, societal destiny, and colonial cataclysm.

A critical and persistent question in the scholarship concerns the precise interpretation of Okonkwo's downfall. Is it a function of personal hamartia, a tragic flaw rooted in his hypermasculinity and resistance to change (Innes, 1990)? Is it dictated by a deterministic fate or *chi* (personal god), concepts central to Igbo cosmology? Or, as much contemporary criticism contends, is his demise fundamentally a sociological consequence of an unstoppable colonial imposition that renders his worldview obsolete (Sickels, 2011)? This review will synthesize key scholarly conversations, arguing that Achebe's genius lies in portraying a confluence of these factors, thereby presenting a tragedy that is simultaneously personal and epochal.

2.2 Igbo Cosmology, Society, and Internal Tensions:

A substantial strand of criticism examines Achebe's intricate portrayal of Igbo society prior to colonization, challenging earlier notions of it as a monolithic or "savage" culture. Scholars note Achebe's anthropological detail in depicting a complex, functional society with its own logic, justice systems, religious practices, and oral traditions (Carroll, 1980). Central to this world is the concept of *chi*, representing personal destiny and spiritual fortitude, which creates a dynamic tension between individual free will and predetermined fate (Emenyonu, 1991). Okonkwo's constant struggle with his own *chi* embodies this philosophical conflict.

However, Achebe avoids romanticization. Critics highlight the internal fissures and "contradictions" within Umuofian society that the narrative exposes (Oha, 1998). These include harsh practices such as the abandonment of twins, the ostracization of the *osu* (outcaste class), and a rigid patriarchal structure that marginalizes women and effeminate men like Unoka, Okonkwo's father. The exile of Okonkwo for an accidental crime, questioned even by his friend Obierika, further illustrates a judicial system capable of severe, disruptive penalties. As Booker (1998) argues, these flaws create pockets of vulnerability and alienation, suggesting that the society was not an idyllic monolith but a living entity with its own stresses. Yet, the critical consensus, following Achebe's own narrative emphasis, posits that these internal tensions were historically manageable and insufficient to cause societal collapse without the external catalyst of colonialism (Gikandi, 1991).

2.3 Colonial Encounter and the Clash of Worlds:

The novel's second half shifts to a postcolonial critique, analyzing the destabilizing impact of British missionaries and colonial administration. Achebe's work is seminal in redirecting the narrative of colonialism from a European "civilizing mission" to an African experience of cultural disintegration and contested power (Said, 1993). The arrival of the white man introduces a new epistemological and political order—Christianity, a foreign legal system, and a capitalist economy—that systematically devalues and seeks to replace indigenous structures.

Scholars debate the nature of this encounter. Some early readings saw the novel as a straightforward elegy for a lost world. However, more nuanced analyses recognize Achebe's dialectical presentation (JanMohamed, 1984). The colonial forces bring not only violence and humiliation but also new avenues for the marginalized, such as Nwoye's conversion to Christianity as an escape from his father's tyranny and certain harsh traditional doctrines. The colonizers' success is shown to be partly facilitated by pre-existing social divisions within Igbo society, which they exploit. This complex portrayal resists a simplistic binary, instead presenting colonialism as a multifaceted, traumatic transformation that elicited complex responses from the colonized, ranging from violent resistance to strategic adoption.

2.4 Achebe's Literary Project and Narrative Reclamation:

Ultimately, *Things Fall Apart* must be read as a conscious act of literary and cultural reclamation. Achebe explicitly stated his aim to counter the denigrating portrayals of Africans in works like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (Achebe, 1977). His novel is thus both a work of art and a political project. He employs English while infusing it with Igbo proverbs, folktales, and linguistic rhythms, thereby "writing back" to the empire and appropriating its language to tell an African story (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1989).

The novel's structure is critical to this project. The detailed, sympathetic portrayal of Umuofia in Part One establishes a rich, valid culture whose destruction the reader mourns. Okonkwo's suicide at the end is not merely a personal failure but a potent symbol: the colonial District Commissioner's reduction of Okonkwo's life to a mere "paragraph" in his planned book, *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*, stands in stark contrast to Achebe's own detailed, humane narrative. This meta-fictional conclusion underscores that the battle is also over who controls the narrative (Wren, 1980). Achebe's novel itself is the defiant, comprehensive counter-narrative, ensuring that the story of the fall is told from the perspective of those who fell.

2.5 Synthesis and Critical Gap:

The extant literature comprehensively establishes *Things Fall Apart* as a postcolonial landmark that rehabilitates Igbo cultural identity, critiques colonial violence, and explores tragic heroism within a collapsing world. However, a focused analysis that systematically traces how Achebe uses specific **dialogic literary techniques**—such as the strategic deployment of proverbs to create **heteroglossia**, the structural symbolism of the three-part narrative as a movement from polyphony to monologue, and the characterization as a map of **competing discourses**—to dramatize the precise mechanics of this "falling apart" remains a productive avenue. This study will build upon the established historical and postcolonial scholarship to perform a **Bakhtinian close reading** of these literary mechanisms, arguing that they are the primary means through which Achebe transforms historical and sociological conflict into an enduring, **dialogic tragedy**.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Theoretical Framework:

This study employs a qualitative research design, utilizing a textual analysis methodology to investigate the construction and presentation of themes in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The primary analytical lens is derived from Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of the novel, particularly his dialogic imagination and his understanding of how meaning emerges within the historical and ideological fabric of narrative (Bakhtin, 1981). This framework is operationalized through a structured narrative analysis, focusing on Bakhtinian concepts such as **authoritative discourse** (imposed, monologic voices of power) versus **internally persuasive discourse** (assimilated, dialogic voices), **polyphony** (multi-voiced narrative), and **heteroglossia** (the coexistence of distinct socio-linguistic voices within a text). These tools allow for an examination of how Achebe stages ideological contestation between traditional Igbo worldviews and colonial modernity as a **clash of discourses**.

3.2 Methodological Approach: Qualitative Textual and Narrative Analysis:

The qualitative approach is suited to this inquiry as it prioritizes depth of understanding and the interpretation of meaning within its specific context, rather than numerical measurement (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Within this paradigm, textual analysis serves as the core method, defined as the systematic examination of a text's content, structure, and rhetorical strategies to understand its explicit and implicit meanings (Berg, 2001; Lockyer, 2008).

Specifically, this study engages in narrative analysis, a form of textual analysis concerned with "a family of analytic methods for interpreting texts that have in common a storied form" (Riessman, 2008, p. 539). Following Riessman, narrative is understood as a consequential sequencing of events, selected and organized by the author to convey specific meanings to the reader. By analyzing the novel's narrative architecture—how events are connected, which events are foregrounded, and how characters' actions are evaluated within the story's logic—this study traces the emergence and interaction of its central themes **as dialogic phenomena**.

3.3 Data Source and Selection:

The primary data source for this analysis is the English-language novel *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe. The specific edition used is the 1996 publication by Heinemann Educational Publishers. This text is selected as the sole data source because, as the original artistic work, it constitutes the complete and authoritative site of the narrative and thematic constructs under investigation. While acknowledging the novel's origins and its relationship to African linguistic contexts, the analysis proceeds from the English text as the published vehicle of Achebe's artistic and cultural vision for a global audience.

3.4 Data Collection and Analytical Procedure:

Data collection consisted of a comprehensive and repeated close reading of the primary text. The analytical procedure followed a systematic, two-phase process:

1. **Identification and Categorization:** The novel was coded for narrative units significant to thematic and **dialogic development**. This included pivotal plot events, character decisions and consequences, dialogic exchanges, proverbial sayings, and descriptive passages detailing societal norms. These units were categorized according to preliminary thematic and **discursive nodes** (e.g., "traditional discourse," "colonial authoritative discourse," "hybrid voice," "internal polemic").
2. **Dialogic and Narrative Analysis:** The categorized data was then analyzed through the Bakhtinian lens. This involved examining:
    - How narrative events function as turning points that reveal or challenge dominant **discourses** within the world of the novel.
    - The **dialogic interactions** between characters, and between characters and societal forces, as sites where themes are contested and developed.
    - The narrative sequencing and causation to understand how Achebe constructs a logic of historical and personal change **through discursive conflict**.
    - This process was iterative, moving between the specific textual data and the broader theoretical framework to refine thematic interpretations and ensure they are grounded in the **dialogic fabric** of the novel.

3.5 Trustworthiness and Validity:

To ensure the trustworthiness of this qualitative analysis, several strategies were employed. The coding process was iterative, with multiple close readings of the text to refine thematic and discursive categories. Peer debriefing was conducted with a co-author to cross-check interpretations and reduce researcher bias. Theoretical triangulation was applied by integrating Bakhtinian dialogics with postcolonial theory (e.g., Bhabha's hybridity) to enrich the analytical perspective. All interpretations are grounded in direct textual evidence, with representative quotations provided to substantiate claims, thereby enhancing the validity and reproducibility of the analysis.

3.6 Scope and Delimitation:

This study is delimited to the literary text of *Things Fall Apart*. It does not incorporate comparative analyses with other novels, empirical data on reader reception, or extensive biographical or historical archive work. The interpretation is focused on the

internal narrative mechanics and **dialogic patterns** as revealed through the applied theoretical framework. This focused scope allows for a deep, sustained examination of how the novel itself artistically generates its central meanings **through discursive struggle**.

IV. ANALYSIS: NARRATIVE STRUCTURE AND THEMATIC DIALOGICS IN *THINGS FALL APART*

This chapter presents a textual analysis of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, guided by a Bakhtinian framework that examines the novel as a site of dialogic contestation. The analysis focuses on how narrative structure, character function, and symbolic language interact to construct the central thematic tensions of the novel: the clash between tradition and change, the crisis of masculinity, and the epistemological violence of colonialism. Rather than presenting themes in isolation, this section interprets them as interconnected **discursive forces** that catalyze the societal disintegration referenced in the novel's title.

4.1 The Dialogic Structure: Polyphony Versus Authoritative Discourse:

Achebe structures the novel to enact, rather than merely describe, the destabilization of Umuofia. The meticulously detailed first part establishes a **heteroglossic** and functioning societal system—a world where meaning is created through the **polyphonic interplay** of proverbs, oracle messages, elder debates, and ancestral stories. This narrative immersion creates a baseline of **dialogic cultural integrity**, making the incursion of colonial forces in the latter parts not just a political event but an existential rupture of this discursive ecology.

The theme of colonialism is therefore not simply an "adverse impact" but a **dialogic counter-force** that exploits pre-existing fissures. As noted by critics like Gikandi (1991), Achebe avoids simplistic binaries. The colonial encounter, represented successively by the pragmatic Mr. Brown and the dogmatic Reverend Smith, introduces a new **"authoritative discourse" (Bakhtin, 1981)** that seeks to **monologize** the polyphonic Igbo world. It does not enter into dialogue; it demands submission. Okonkwo's famous lament—"He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart"—encapsulates this thematic core. The "things" are the **dialogic ligaments** of society—the shared language, rituals, and debates that constitute communal life. Their cutting leads to a narrative shift from polyphonic interaction to isolated, monologic responses (like Okonkwo's final act), rendering collective action impossible and symbolizing the **death of productive dialogue**.

4.2 Character as Embodied Discourse:

Characters in the novel function less as psychological archetypes and more as embodied positions within the **ideological struggle**, personifying different relationships to discourse.

1. **Okonkwo: The Monologic Will:** Okonkwo embodies a rigid, **internally persuasive discourse** that has hardened into an authoritarian monologue. His entire identity is a violent polemic against the devalued discourse of his father, Unoka, whose artistic and peaceful nature represents a suppressed but persistent alternative within the Igbo worldview. Okonkwo's internal monologue after killing Ikemefuna—"you have become a woman indeed"—reveals how his psyche is a site of **internal dialogic struggle** that he ruthlessly suppresses. His suicide is the final, tragic act of a **monologic consciousness** that cannot survive in a newly hybrid, dialogic field it can neither control nor engage with. He becomes a "word" that is rendered unintelligible in the new linguistic and ideological order.
2. **Nwoye and Obierika: Dialogic Consciousness:** In contrast, characters like Nwoye and Obierika represent the potential for a **"responsive"** or **"internally persuasive" discourse (Bakhtin, 1981)** that can adapt. Nwoye's conversion to Christianity is not portrayed merely as betrayal but as a seeker's response to the existential voids and brutalities within his own culture's dominant discourse, particularly after Ikemefuna's death. He finds a new, persuasive voice. Obierika, the critical traditionalist, consistently questions communal decisions (e.g., Ikemefuna's killing, Okonkwo's exile), representing a capacity for **internal dialogue and critique** that Okonkwo lacks. These characters demonstrate that the "center cannot hold" not only due to external pressure but also because of latent, responsive **dialogues within** the society itself.

4.3 Heteroglossia and Linguistic Reclamation:

Achebe's use of language is itself a primary thematic arena and the technical core of his **dialogic project**. The novel's strategic incorporation of Igbo proverbs, folktales, and transliterated concepts (*chi*, *ogbanje*) into English creates a **deliberate heteroglossia**. This **hybridized text** challenges the linguistic imperialism of the colonizers by forcing the English language to accommodate African voices, rhythms, and worldviews, enacting a formal reclamation at the level of the signifier.

Key quotations are not mere illustrations but active **sites of dialogic contest**. For instance, the proverbial wisdom "A man who pays respect to the great paves the way for his own greatness" establishes the traditional logic of reciprocity and social order—a voice within the Igbo **heteroglossia**. Its erosion is later symbolized by the District Commissioner's reductive, ethnographic notes, which stand in stark **dialogic opposition** to Achebe's own nuanced narrative. The DC's planned book title, *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*, represents the ultimate thematic threat: the replacement of a complex, **heteroglossic history** with a simplistic, **authoritative colonial narrative**. Achebe's novel is the material counter-statement to this monologic impulse.

4.4 Synthesis: The Tragedy of Monologic Consciousness in a Dialogic World:

The plot's trajectory from the integrated, **polyphonic world** of Umuofia to Okonkwo's isolated suicide and the DC's clinical conclusion enacts the novel's central **dialogic argument**. The tragedy is multidimensional: it is the fall of a **dialogic culture** unable to maintain its polyphony under a cataclysmic, **monologic new discourse**, and the fall of an individual whose **monologic consciousness** cannot accommodate change, ambiguity, or the voices of others (Nwoye, Obierika).

Okonkwo's fate is sealed not solely by colonial force but by his **inability to engage in genuine dialogue** with the new reality or with the softer, questioning voices within his own society. The "things" that fall apart are the connective tissues of shared meaning, ritual coherence, and **communal dialogue**. Achebe's narrative demonstrates that this disintegration is both imposed from without as **authoritative discourse** and facilitated from within by **dialogic inflexibility**. The novel concludes not with a resolution but with an enduring **dialogic tension**: between the rich, vanished polyphony of Umuofia and the reductive silence of the colonial archive, leaving the reader with the responsibility of hearing and preserving the complex story that the Commissioner's monologue seeks to erase.

V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Summary of Findings:

This study has demonstrated that Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* achieves its enduring impact through a carefully orchestrated **dialogic narrative structure**. By first immersing the reader in the **heteroglossic** and coherent world of Umuofia—with its complex social, spiritual, and judicial systems expressed through proverbs, debates, and multiple voices—Achebe establishes a baseline of **dialogic cultural legitimacy**. The subsequent intrusion of colonial forces is portrayed not as a mere historical event, but as an **epistemological and discursive collision**, the imposition of an **authoritative discourse** upon a **polyphonic society**. Characters like Okonkwo, Nwoye, and Obierika embody distinct ideological positions within this clash, representing **monologic rigidity, responsive adaptation, and critical traditionalism**, respectively. The novel's strategic use of Igbo linguistic and cultural forms within English enacts a **linguistic reclamation and hybridity**, making the text itself a site of resistance. Ultimately, the tragedy depicted is multifaceted: it is the collapse of a **dialogic society** under a **monologic colonial order**, and the failure of individuals like Okonkwo to engage with the internal and external voices of change.

5.2 Conclusion:

In conclusion, *Things Fall Apart* remains not only a pivotal postcolonial text but also a sophisticated **narrative experiment in dialogics**. Its power lies in its ability to make readers witness, from within, the precise **dialogic processes** through which a world coheres through polyphonic interaction and then falls apart under the pressure of an irresistible monologue. Achebe's work stands as a monumental achievement in **narrative reclamation**, using the novel form to restore voice, complexity, and humanity to a history that had been subjected to the silencing, authoritative discourse of colonialism.

5.3 Pedagogical Implications:

The dialogic approach advanced in this analysis offers valuable tools for teaching *Things Fall Apart* in literature and postcolonial studies classrooms. Instructors can guide students to trace:

- The **narrative sequencing** that builds cultural empathy through polyphony before introducing the monologic colonial conflict.
- The function of proverbs and folktales as key elements of the text's **heteroglossia** and sites of cultural argument.
- **Character contrasts** as embodied ideological debates (Okonkwo's monologue vs. Obierika's internal dialogue, Nwoye's search for a new discourse).

- The **meta-narrative critique** in the novel's ending, inviting discussion on who controls historical representation and the politics of narrative form.

Such an approach moves students beyond thematic summary toward an appreciation of how Achebe constructs meaning **through discursive struggle**, fostering critical skills in narrative, discourse, and ideological analysis.

VI. CONTRIBUTION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study contributes to Achebe scholarship by systematically analyzing the **narrative and dialogic mechanics** of cultural conflict, complementing existing thematic and historical critiques. It demonstrates the productive application of Bakhtinian theory to African literature, highlighting points of convergence between dialogics and the **inherent polyphony of indigenous oral traditions**.

Future research could:

- Extend this dialogic analysis to other Achebe novels (e.g., *Arrow of God*) or to other African novels in translation to build a comparative understanding of **postcolonial dialogics**.
- Incorporate reader-response studies to examine how diverse audiences engage with and interpret the novel's **polyphonic structure** and hybrid language.
- Explore intersections with digital humanities methods, such as computational analysis of proverbial frequency or narrative network mapping, to visually model the **discursive networks** and conflicts within the text.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Nigerian English Writing and Translation: The Fate of the Vernacular Literature and Culture

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Abstract— *This article examines a central paradox in postcolonial Nigerian literary and linguistic history, with a specific focus on Igbo. It argues that while early Christian missionaries used translation into vernacular languages as a tool for evangelism—thereby actively developing the language's lexical and conceptual capacity—the subsequent project of anti-colonial cultural assertion by Western-educated African writers and intellectuals has been conducted predominantly in English. This literary strategy, though successful in challenging imperial myths of cultural inferiority, has had the unintended consequence of further institutionalizing English as Nigeria's "power language." Meanwhile, vernaculars like Igbo have been relegated to a protected but stunted domain of "in-group" communication, denied the "rough and tumble of acculturation and translation" necessary for full modern development. Through analysis of language policy, translation history, and literary texts (by Achebe, Tutuola, Adichie, Soyinka, and others), the article demonstrates how the predominance of English in Nigerian writing has created a state of dependency for African languages, leaving them vulnerable to attrition and hybrid encroachment (e.g., "Engli-Igbo"), while secular translation work that could fuel their growth remains neglected.*

Keywords— Colonial metropolis, Christian missionaries, cultural software, Igbo, official language, translation, vernacular, Nigerian literature, power language.

I. INTRODUCTION: THE PARADOX OF VERNACULAR NEGLECT IN A POSTCOLONIAL CONTEXT

Cultural and language studies in Nigeria do not appear to accord great importance to translation of documents available in foreign languages. Sometimes scholars rail against the dominance of English in national public discourse. But it is normal to do this in English because of the assumed institutionality of English in national public discourse as the official language of Nigeria. Thus in terms of the needs to translate, English is not considered by the local intellectual community to be a foreign language.

For many decades following independence, however, there was open resentment of the notion of English as the official language of Nigeria, but that is not to say that there was a clear sense of what else may be called official, if not English. Although the citizens recognize themselves as belonging to one ethnic group or another, which was bound together by one local vernacular that could have served as the source of 'beliefs, attitudes, and values, [that would then be] part of their cultural software' (Balkin 43), the bonds to the vernacular may in reality be weakening. A main reason for this is the existence of English as the official language of Nigeria. As a result, the creative role that cultural leaders normally play unwittingly and their contributions to language development in the field of discourse are little felt, or registered. Cultural leaders in many African communities, and this is true also of Igbo in Nigeria, which is my main focus in this paper, often use language purely for communication, without leaving an impact on the language itself, whether the official one or their native ethnic vernacular: they make no impact on the received foreign one, because they have not gained trust among a worldwide language community whose culture centres are physically and attitudinally far off as authentic phrase makers and reliable language innovators; the local language, because there is no level at which attention is paid to the vernacular language itself so as to notice innovations

that may be learned, cited, and used again – for according to functionalism, 'language is shaped by the language community in the context of use' (Semantics and Discourse 82).

Intended or not, the national language policy of the Nigerian state is one of the ways in which the legacy of colonization is systematically reinforced and rendered permanent. The local book industry suffers from this policy, because the good quality books are ready-made abroad and consumed locally, and there is little incentive to invest in local publishing. This is compounded by the internet which is dominantly in English. But it is dismaying that documents that are available in English are taken to be sufficiently domiciled in the local space not to call for any effort of translation.

However, if these texts have originated in other languages than English, in their translation, the English language exercises itself, grows, and strengthens and extends its capabilities. But the local languages in Nigeria rarely have the chance to exercise themselves in this manner. The exercise is of course enabled by the translator; therefore, a very important language worker. He or she does not just 'operate[] in a mediatory middle-ground' (Douglas Robinson 62), as a 'faithful servant of the source text' (Bassnet and Trivedi 5), or merely a negotiator of the movement of information from one language to another; in the case of ethnic vernaculars with their typically limited vocabularies and concept-base, much creativity and innovativeness is needed. The low linguistic impact of the scholars of this community is one thing, and the absence of the impulse to translate and give an important foreign language text a place in the holdings of the vernacular culture another. But this is only a secondary cause of retardation for the local language, a primary one being the local use of English for all official purposes, and its encroachment and increasing spread into in-group activities within the given ethnic group.

II. THE MISSIONARY LEGACY: TRANSLATION AS VERNACULAR DEVELOPMENT

It must be noted, however, that although the Christian religion was often the subject of attack especially in the days of struggle for independence and denounced by African intellectuals as part of the software of imperialism, the use of translation to benefit and help grow the Igbo language and other African languages was by the Christian missionaries who translated Christian religious books and prayers and composed Christian hymns in the local vernacular. These were not by any means professional translators, but they were driven by need. Indeed their first major achievement in this regard was to develop the written form of these vernaculars based on the Latin alphabet. The work of translation involved creating coinages like *mụọma* (angel), *mụọ nsọ* (Holy Spirit), *mirichukwu* (baptism); direct borrowing as in *baịbụl, chaplet, sakramenti, vejin, yukaristia*; loan-translations like *Chukwu nwa* (God the Son), *oriri nsọ* (holy communion), *nmesoọma* (loving-kindness), *ngarube nke obe* (stations of the cross), *ndụ ebebe* (eternal life); phraseological units like *ịtọ nime ofu dị ngozị* or *atọ nime otu dị ngọzị* (the Blessed Trinity), *itụ ime n'ejighị njọ* (immaculate conception), *ndi otu Kristi* (Christians), *njọ ekelu-ụwa* (original sin), *ọ dị be ndị* (tradition), and so forth entered the Igbo language. The coinages and loan translations show that the target language was not a passive recipient of concepts, but that it caused the translators to reach into the inner recesses of the language, enabling the language to bring up answers not previously known to exist. At the same time it brings out the individual translator's 'dynamic and varying internalizations of the norms and structures of the source and target fields, and of their mutual contacts and intersections' ('Translators and (their) Norms' 95). It is even possible by analysis of favourite Igbo translations to make out the specific Christian culture in question. *Jesu Kristi* appears to have been commonly used by Christians of all denominations until recently when *Jisọs Kraist* was introduced under the influence of Pentecostalism translating from English instead of through the intermediary of Latin as in Catholic usage.

Thus, a Christian religious service of any complexity may be conducted fully in Igbo, but no one would be able to write a theological paper in Igbo or literary criticism. The reason is that much of the theological and literary critical registers has remained un-naturalized in Igbo. Translation is the agency for introducing and naturalizing foreign concepts in the vernacular and agitating the language to bring out some of its hidden capabilities. Leaving the vernaculars unchallenged in this way is also the reason that medical and other scientific research cannot be attempted in Igbo and many African languages. The situation has remained basically the same since the introduction of the vernacular in the colonial junior primary educational curriculum.

III. THE LITERARY TURN: ASSERTION IN THE LANGUAGE OF POWER

English began to be used in literary activity in Nigeria from the very beginnings of what is called 'modern' literature in Nigeria of which the earliest flowering is Onitsha Market Literature during the 1930s and 1940s. There was of course one important work in Igbo, *Omenuko* by Pita Nwana (1935). Obiajunwa Wali was to drop a bombshell, as it were, in 1961 with a conference paper presented in Makerere before African literary practitioners entitled 'The Dead End of African Literature'. He had argued that 'An African writer who thinks and feels in his own language must write in that language' and that African writing in a

non-African language, whether creative or critical is entirely 'misdirected' and 'has no chance of advancing African literature and culture' (qtd in Emmanuel Ngara 5). This put many of the Nigerian writers on the defensive, and the discussion has been long lasting. There were some like Ngugi wa Thiong'o who took the criticism to heart and started writing in the vernacular, and others like Wole Soyinka who took the view that poetic art should not be constrained to local vernaculars with their limited readerships. According to Phanuel Egejuru, however, most of the writers were aiming their productions at a white audience, and so it made sense to write in the language that audience could understand. This is presumably in the service of so-called 'writing back to the empire'. But it has also put in place 'a one-way process', utterly failing to activate 'a reciprocal process of exchange' (Bassnet and Trivedi 5). The failure of the cultural leaders and intellectuals to open a dialogue between the vernacular languages and the world power languages redounded negatively at the epistemological level on the local people themselves: they came to know the modern world only in the language of the former colonist, and describing modern life was a lot more convenient in that language, or in hybrid Engli-Igbo. The role of language in knowledge transmission, knowledge creation, and the accumulation and preserving of available knowledge has not always been emphasized.

On the question of the language of African literature, however, there was a middle ground, which was sought especially by the literary critics, namely that the writing was to be considered as African – no matter the language in which it took form – if it captured something authentically African, an 'African psychological reality', African 'social reality', an 'African vision', 'an African experience', and so forth.

Strictly, Obiajunwa Wali and the intellectuals referenced were talking about different things. Wali was concerned with the development of African literature in African languages, while the other scholars were concerned with something to be found in a work whereby it might be given recognition as African literature. For Wali, it was a question of what can be done in African languages in the way of literature. So the language is of decisive importance and African literature was a contradiction in terms if it was in a non-native African language.

But the contradiction was not apparent to Obiajunwa Wali's immediate and younger contemporaries who understood literature as having an object of representation, which was the thing of importance, which would be the same whatever the language; and their sense was that that object had better be African. This is a version of what Merleau-Ponty in his *Phenomenology of Perception* calls 'the dualism of consciousness and body' (138). This thinking of literature as having a body (language), and a soul (content) persists to the present in African criticism and literary studies. The African literary scholars also tended to recognize the artistic in terms of Plato's 'ethics of representation'; thus in addition to elucidating 'what is [represented]', attention went to 'how correctly (orthōs) it has been represented, and thirdly how well (eu)] each image has been rendered' (Halliwell 85). This approach has no rule system for assigning worth in literature, nor does it really envisage that one literary work may be of higher literary worth than another, nor yet how to differentiate literature from a historical or a philosophical text.

Revisiting Wali's charge in a 2021 article, AfricaSon writes that:

> As a writer who believes in the utilisation of African ideas, African philosophy and African folk-lore and imagery to the fullest extent possible, I am of the opinion the only way to use them effectively is to translate them almost literally from the African language native to the writer into whatever European language he is using as his medium of expression (Web).

This echoes Solomon Iyasere's idea that in their literary works, African writers 'use language to translate and transform their vision of social reality into perceivable form' (20). But more than this, AfricaSon is suggesting in his postulations that each individual form in a literary work with a determinable content may have its own individual aim and messaging destination.

As has been noted, it seems odd that instead of employing translation to render a foreign language content accessible ('into perceivable form') in the vernacular, it is the other way around: local vernacular content is being rendered accessible in a non-African language. There is complicity here between the writer and the colonist whereby the power language is granted locus standi and normalized as the language not only for expression, but also for processing information, even if the information was originally in a native African language. Thus Lewis Nkosi complained of the 'bitterest irony of all,

that even when an assault had to be made on those opposing values which the masters used to control their colonial subjects, values which constituted the very underpinning of the colonial system, that war had to be waged by Africans in the same languages that were used to enslave them … if not in mental attitude, at least in the tool of its production, the best of African literature reflects a former colonial dependency (6).

Our concern here is not with the writer, what he should be busy with or how to approach his or her task. This is the direction that the Wali language debate has taken. Our concern is with the African languages which have remained underdeveloped, while the scholars seem to have left them to their own devices. But language evolution 'by natural selection', so to say, will leave it trailing by a long shot behind galloping modernization. This would leave us effectively with a dead language, for to be a living language is to be abreast with technological change and with whatever is driving modernization and human progress.

IV. VERNACULAR CITATION IN NIGERIAN LITERATURE: TECHNIQUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Nevertheless, modern literature in Nigeria both by Igbo writers and others have been exercised by issues related to the existence of the vernacular in the space of particularly novelistic action. They often recognize the space of novelistic action as a theatre where languages clash and where the clash leaves traces which then force themselves on reading attention. Hence contrary to what normally happens in translation, where the foreign and unfamiliar is carried over into the local and familiar to render it readable and appropriable, it is the local that is taken into the folds of what should be the foreign language. But this is for a variety of purposes: to enable it participate in the discourse as an equal partner; to bring into view a habit of thought in opposition not to another individual discourse, but to that of narration itself; or even for what Jonathan Culler calls 'the conventions of literary vraisemblance' (*Structuralist Poetics* 173).

In Nigerian literature, the power language, English, dominates the textual surface, and if other languages are cited, they are, so far as the world of the text is concerned, minority languages. In Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, the protagonist muses lyrically about his own mother tongue in tones of a lament for exclusion or at least having a limited role in the public space:

> [In England,] when he had to speak in English with a Nigerian student from another tribe he lowered his voice. It was humiliating to have to speak to one's countryman in a foreign language, especially in the presence of the proud owners of that language. They would naturally assume that one had no language of one's own. He wished they were here to-day to see. Let them come to Umuofia now and listen to the talk of men who made a great art of conversation. Let them come and see men and women and children who knew how to live, whose joy of life had not yet been killed by those who claimed to teach other nations how to live (pp. 49-50).

Obi Okonkwo is showing his resentment over the subjugation of his native language and other Nigerian languages under colonialism. In England where this memory ranges, the languages are totally in the margins, and no one expects (perhaps even wishes) to hear them spoken. But the Nigeria to which he has returned as a foreign-trained senior service official has its own metropolis – that is, a local copy of the colonial metropolis where the language spoken by the minority of residents, the colonial expatriates, is the official language and commands the public space; and that spoken in the vast hinterland has but minority status. It is noted in Bassnet and Trivedi that the metropolitan copy is in fact a 'translation' (4). This is part of what Obi resents in the above. Nevertheless, his story, which is the matter of *No Longer at Ease* is being told in English, including the ruminations in his own interior life. And the vernacular culture, even when he has physically re-entered the world of that culture, is given perceptible form in English. Thereby the novel, the African novel, gives English the capacity to render the vernacular culture perceptible – in addition to its own natural capacity to render itself patent. It puts the vernacular language in a state of dependency. Whereas Obi Wali had been complaining about the failure of the African writers to assist the development of African literature, the deeper problem, which the scholars of African 'content' are apparently willing to live with, is the novel dependency status of the African languages which the African literature of their conception puts in place and guards.

The minority vernacular language undoubtedly lives even in London, through the agency of Obi Okonkwo who has carried it there, ready to render it expressive if, for instance, he finds a Nigerian from the same 'tribe'. In the same way, the vernacular lives within the folds of the official English of the Nigerian novel, and occasionally breaks out through citations, which according to Kristeva, 'establish a similitude, a resemblance, an equalization of two different discourses. The ideologeme of the sign once again crops up here, at the level of the novelistic enunciation's inferential mode: it admits the existence of an other (discourse) only to the extent that it makes it its own' (*Desire in Language* 45).

In Obi Okonkwo's rumination above, there is a sense of being rooted in Nigeria and in Umuofia. Nigerian is not a language, but an appendage derived from the name of a specific geographical area called Nigeria, and includes Obi Okonkwo's Umuofia, as well as others whose founding memories are rooted elsewhere than Umuofia and do not share its language and art of conversation: for Obi and all these, there is a dual identity. Obi has a clear sense of a linguistic identity where his founding memories are earthed, different from a national or a political identity, which from London he can reference as his native land.

This is a native land where the people are divided by primordial linguistic affiliative networks. One other of these vernacular languages is cited at the scene where Obi Okonkwo narrowly escapes an auto crash:

> 'Make you take am jeje. Too much devil de for dis road. If you see one accident way we see for Abeokuta side – Olorun!' (*No Longer at Ease* 141)

Since Obi is presumed by these witnesses not to share their linguistic identity, they speak to him in the hybrid language in which the words are mostly English, but elements of structure come from elsewhere. It is called in *No Longer at Ease* 'Broken English', but it came to be called Pidgin and has been defended as autonomous. For now, it does not supply Nigeria with a linguistic identity. The Nigerian identity is geographical, historical, and political, and the State expresses its political and national identity in English. It must be good politics that its literature is in English, even if this hampers the vernacular languages and retards the development of African literature. As Saïd Akl puts it, this language has become 'the nimbus of the nation's cultural narrative and the vector of continuity between its past, its present, and its future' (cited in Salameh 47). We have mentioned that some of the Nigerian scholars rail against English, but others affect the attitude that English is something we have to live with temporarily, and then it would go away. A power language will not go away as long as the institutions of which it supplies the software are in place, institutions like education, institutions of governance and control, institutions of trade and commerce, institutions of social communications, and so forth.

The double citation of Pidgin and Yoruba preserves a habit of thought, for 'Make you take am jeje', reflects unlimited goodwill and even sympathy towards Obi, whereas use of the English 'equivalent' ('[please] drive with care') would appear to lay some of the blame for the near miss on Obi. In the full account, the caution is clearly more appropriate to the other driver who was at fault with his dangerous overtaking, and the avoidance of a crash was only thanks to Obi's timely action in swerving from the other's path.

In some of Achebe's work, there is carrying over not only from the space of speech to the space of writing, but also 'a transcription of oral speech' in the vernacular (*Desire in Language* 54) into a writing that seeks to keep intact the habits of thought of the original:

> 'Is it true that Okonkwo nearly killed you with his gun?'
>
> 'It is true indeed, my dear friend. I cannot yet find a mouth with which to tell the story.'
>
> 'Your chi is very much awake, my friend. And how is my daughter, Ezinma?'
>
> 'She has been very well for some time now. Perhaps she has come to stay.'
>
> 'I think she has. How old is she now?'
>
> 'She is about ten years old.'
>
> 'I think she will stay. They usually stay if they do not die before the age of six.'
>
> 'I pray she stays,' said Ekwefi with a heavy sigh (*Things Fall Apart* 15).

The dialogue here is a moment of realism, in which the characters' Igbo speech is represented in English words. The 'transcription of oral speech' is obvious enough in 'I cannot yet find a mouth…' and 'Your chi is very much awake', but it is beliefs about *ogbanje* (children dying and coming back to be born again) that supplies the substantive of 'They usually stay', which should otherwise be unanchored since the identified third person of the discourse is singular, 'my daughter Ezinma'.

Vernacular habits of thought run directly in the voice of narration in Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*; and this is rendered achievable from the technical point of view by the fact that it is first-person narration.

> But in those days, there were many wild animals and every place was covered by thick bushes and forests; again, towns and villages were not near each other as nowadays, and as I was travelling from bushes to bushes and from forests to forests and sleeping inside it for many days and months, I was sleeping on the branches of trees, because spirits etc. were just like partners, and to save my life from them; and again I could spend two or three months before reaching a town or a village. Whenever I reached a town or a village, I would spend almost four months there, to find out my palm-wine tapster from the inhabitants of that town or village and if he did not reach there, then I would leave there and continue my journey to another town or village. After the seventh month that I had left my home town, I

> reached a town and went to an old man, this old man was not a really man, he was a god and he was eating with his wife when I reached there. When I entered the house I saluted both of them, they answered me well, although nobody should enter his house like that as he was a god, but I myself was a god and juju-man. Then I told the old man (god) that I am looking for my palm-wine tapster who had died in my town some time ago, he did not answer to my question but asked me first what was my name? I replied that my name was 'Father of gods' who could do everything in this world…

The narration here does not always respect the rules of English sentence structure, with some of the 'sentences' going without the required predicates, as in 'I was sleeping on the branches of trees, because spirits etc. were just like partners, and to save my life from them; and again I could spend two or three months before reaching a town or a village'. There may be a case of the Wordsworthian 'overflow of powerful feeling recollected in tranquility' where the narrator totally loses control but it may be equally a case of traditional storytelling where the ruling logic is total representation focusing 'the conceptual content of the sentences' (Ngoni Chipere 2), and not on grammatically delineated sentences.

Some writers seem to use citation to achieve specific effects so that in these cases it may be called a technique, and following them one can 'discover' (Mark Schorer) the writer's overall intention. This is seen very often in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie where it may give a sense of verisimilitude. We read for instance in *Americanah*:

> Okwudiba followed him out. 'I'm going home,' Obinze said. 'Let me find Kosi and Buchi.'
>
> 'The Zed, o gini? What is it? Is it just tiredness?' ….
>
> 'The Zed! You are really quiet today,' Okwudiba said, now on his fifth glass of champagne.
>
> 'Aru adikwa?'
>
> Obinze shrugged. 'I'm fine. Just tired' (Chapter 54)
>
> 'What is it?' directly repeats 'o gini?' And both are citations. It is a form found elsewhere in Adichie, as in *Half of a Yellow Sun*:
>
> Ugwu was about to pour the cold Coke into her glass when she touched his hand and said, 'Rapuba, don't worry about that' (chapter 1).

So one must take it that this manner of repetition is a realistic portrayal of the speech habits of the characters in question. Nevertheless, the vernacular utterances *o gini* and *rapuba* have been rendered intelligible to a potential non-Igbo reader.

Verisimilitude is still preserved in citations of set phrases where there is no real equivalent in English available, with approximate meanings recoverable in the surrounding text:

> 'The Yoruba man is there helping his brother, but you Igbo people? I ga-asikwa. Look at you now quoting me this price' (*Americanah*, chapter 54).

Perhaps *I ga-asikwa* in the specific context can be translated *Impossible* or *Unthinkable!* – which may be made out in the discourse itself about the Yoruba man helping his brother, 'but you Igbo people?' In like manner, *Aru adikwa?* In Okwudiba's speech to The Zed is probably explained in the latter's response, 'I'm fine. Just tired.'

These 'discourses' (Benveniste) including citation of Igbo phrases mark the shared world of the vernacular culture with its specific 'care structure' (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 241). The Zed's quietness amidst his friends on the particular occasion has set off a call for care which first draws from Okwudiba 'Aru adikwa?', then 'o gini?' Because of this shared care structure, Obinze takes no offence at Okwudiba asking persistently about his inner state of affairs. But it does turn out that there is in fact a worry, unleashing the following dialogue – and it is not tiredness in the literal sense:

> 'You know Ifemelu is back,' Obinze said, and just saying her name warmed him.
>
> 'I know.' Okwudiba meant that he knew more.
>
> 'It's serious. I want to marry her.'

In some of Soyinka, the interplay of English and Yoruba can become challenging, especially for non-native speakers, although in most cases the translation is recoverable nearby:

The usual cries went up ' A -ah ọmọ Soyinka, wa nube wa gbowo' and they stretched out their hands.

Kabiyesi put me down, I went and shook hands round the assembly. The tall, self-consciously regal man was standing by a cupboard, lazily waving a fan across his face. When I came to him, he looked down on me from his great height and boomed out in so loud a voice that I was rocked backwards on my feet.

'What is this? Ọmọ tani?'

A chorus of voices replied, 'Ọmọ Soyinka' pointing to my father who was already in close conversation with Ọdẹmọ. The stranger's lip turned up in a sneer; in the same disorientating boom as before he ordered,

'Dọbalẹ!'

The response from the parlour was good-humoured, bantering … of course you don't know, they are these 'ara Egba', the children of Teacher, they don't even know how to prostrate (*Aké* 137).

We probably know the meaning of *wa nube wa gbowo* from the accompanying actions. But it is not clear whether *Dọbalẹ* simply means 'Prostrate yourself' as stated in the footnote. It may be a gesture more complicated than prostration. In addition to verisimilitude, a dramatic effect is also brought out in 'Dọbalẹ!', with a build up to it. But this citation 'Dọbalẹ!' also brings into play not just the vernacular, but also the culture it is associated with. Indeed the whole effect, with 'these "ara Egba", the children of Teacher, they don't even know how to prostrate' emphasizes the village as a place steeped in the traditional culture, and in sharp opposition to the one from which the 'ara Egba' have come. 'These "ara Egba"' may also involve a condescending attitude. Many of the local people, however, are willing to let the town dwellers be, but not the 'tall, self-consciously regal man'. The Teacher will take on the task of teaching prostration and *dọbalẹ* as soon as the visiting family are by themselves.

The piece is also interesting for other reasons than the interplay of English narration and Yoruba discourse. There is also the interplay of consciousnesses. What is narrated is the remembrances of the child who is effortlessly hoisted on the knee of the Ọdẹmọ. He is the persona and the substantive figure designated by the first-person 'the autobiographical form par excellence' (Benveniste 210), that should properly belong to discourse. But that person is in a state of capture by the narrator within whose linguistic operations he is reduced to a character, and 'the third person of the Novel' (Banfield). Henceforth, what we see of his consciousness is 'represented thought' (14). But this is where narration comes unstuck. The represented thought belongs to an adult consciousness:

When I came to him, he looked down on me from his great height and boomed out in so loud a voice that I was rocked backwards on my feet.

'He looked down on me from his great height' may be what the child sees, but it is not likely that this is how the child would state what he has seen or represents it to himself. So there is a split between what is seen and what is told – because the consciousness that perceives is that of a child, the one that narrates the perception that of an adult. Such a split is also observed in he 'boomed out in so loud a voice that I was rocked backwards on my feet'.

V. CONTEMPORARY SHIFTS: HYBRIDITY, FORGETFULNESS, AND THE SOCIAL NOVEL

A great example is Igbo where many members, even those with very low educational attainments have added large numbers of English words to their active repertoire. What is added may be words with no Igbo equivalent like camera, photo, video, weights and measures, heights and distances, values in money, clock time, modern information communication gadgets, household items and fittings like beer, bottle, bulb, coffee, (electric) fan, flask, fork, fridge, mattress, pan, pail, pillow, (light) switch, table, tea, teaspoon, tent; official documents like card, form, licence, passport; school materials like ink, pen, pencil, ruler, uniform; time pieces like clock, watch; shopkeeping paraphernalia like carton, dozen, packet, counter; workshop equipment like bolt, hammer, jack, nut, spanner. Other English words first enter the language as available alternatives to native Igbo words. These Igbo speakers mix the native Igbo and English codes in a form that has been jocously called Engli-Igbo, and it appears that most of the people who speak exclusively in Igbo in a conversation or even formal or semi-formal speaking events like sermons and homilies do so by conscious effort. Significant linguistic innovations such as give a sense of a living language responsive to the realities of time and place and circumstance may indeed occur in these formal and semi-formal speaking events. A living language like English seeks to capture important linguistic innovations appearing especially in print, and new editions of the authoritative dictionaries of the language register them. Whether from the dictionary or from the

original site of the innovation, other language users learn these new forms; and so they enter into circulation. A language like Igbo, heavily overshadowed by the power language, English, can only do this in a very limited degree. On the other hand, the habitual use of English replacives for available Igbo words like greetings, titles, and numerals can lead to those words gradually dropping out of everyday Igbo usage, giving the replacives a permanent place in a hybrid Engli-Igbo vocabulary.

Some of the contemporary writers are writing with no acknowledgment of the existence of a vernacular language or culture. Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* only makes an occasional acknowledgment of Pidgin, regarded by some to belong to the lower middle class, but shared by others, even the upper middle class, and used informally. Hence:

> Hello, Rufus. Na your sister be dis?
> How now, Grace. Na my sister.

Boma lowered her face instinctively (*Oil on Water*, chapter 9).

> Use of the Pidgin in the following from Chris Abani's *GraceLand* reflects a divide between the upper and lower middle classes:
>
> Okon grabbed Elvis by the hand.
>
> 'I dey serious my friend, nobody knows tomorrow. Remember— Okon.'
>
> Elvis looked from the intense eyes to the grip on his arm.
>
> 'Sure, Okon.'
>
> 'Dat's me' (Chapter 5).

The fate of the vernacular is obviously not an issue of equal importance to all the writers. With some all attention is given to the 'representing' of the issue that has given the impulse to writing, issues of global importance like climate change and mindless exploitation of earth's resources and pursuit of profit by multinationals with dire impact on human life and the ecosystem; some others are solely exercised by some particular socio-political problem apparently needing to be addressed, or any of the many problems of democracy and development that are the stuff of social discourse. A common assumption in these novels is that the received educational system, socio-political system, the rule of law, sanctity of elections, etc. are normative and not to be contested.

What we may call the social novels are therefore defenders of the values of democracy, the rule of law, individual rights, equity, social equality, responsible exercise of power, etc. in all their ramifications, and use language in such a way as to drive their point home – which language is not particularly important. But the default language for all this is the language bequeathed by the colonist. The social issues – just like the issues recommended by AfricaSon and the advocates of content – are in all these novels the objects of representation. But it is clear that they are not themselves literature or art. Literature or art can only be the work itself, and the social, political, cultural, religious issues the materials out of which literature has been constructed. This is speaking from the point of view of the Aristotelian tradition which continues in poststructuralism, where 'conventions of unity' are assumed (Culler 218), and guide reading 'in making various codes [functioning in the text] come together and cohere' (262). This contrasts with the Platonic system mentioned above. In Aristotle, the critical question is whether the incidents have been arranged in such a way that the incidents follow one another according to the order of probability or necessity (*Poetics*, chapter 9), and create 'a single, whole, and complete action, with beginning, middle, and end' (chapter 13). It is this single action that is the poem, whereas in the Platonic tradition, the represented 'message', the material object, the author's intention, or whatever is said to be 'the meaning' – which can depend on the interest behind the reading – can be given exclusive attention as what the particular work is all about.

In the conscious making of poetic art, such as in Ijeoma Umebinyuo, a contemporary poet and Christopher Okigbo in the 1960s, the concern may be not with the genesis of the language being turned into art in the same movement that the material of the construction is being turned into art. The problem that these kinds of literary works face may be simply how to order the language in hand to attain a construction with 'organic life' (Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* 343) or the character of 'self-contained independence' (Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 31). But while the vernacular culture is embodied and a source of strength in Okigbo's English poetry, it is not at all noticeable in Umebinyuo. It would appear that at least some of Nigerian literature in the twenty-first century has decoupled from the vernacular culture and is taking form purely as English.

VI. COUNTER-CURRENTS: APPROPRIATION, VITALITY, AND THE LIMITS OF THE ARGUMENT

The ethnic languages are of course in use in their respective core areas where they serve as L1, with English as the Second Language, but English is Nigeria's official language and some like the Igbo have been complaining of increasing loss of ground to English, while still smaller language communities also complain of pressure from some of the more influential vernaculars. The language serving mainly in literary production is the official language of the country, that is the language of the former colonist, and it appears to be taken as read that serious literature is in English. But the persistence of the vernacular in the social space is frequently acknowledged through what Kristeva calls citation.

The debate over language probably fed from what was called Black aesthetics in America, itself an output of the civil rights movement. There was hardly any demand for substitution of any other components of the received social system. Capitalism was the other item of the colonial heritage, in addition to the Christian religion, that some of the intellectuals attacked, suggesting substitution by socialism, despite that socialism was equally of foreign origin. But these attacks seem not to have made any real difference. Capitalism was even more deeply entrenched than the power language, as its specific software had quickly embedded in the native language itself. Ultimately, the language movement was to collapse too. Today, writers work dominantly in the received colonial language, which in the case of Nigeria is English.

It is important to acknowledge counter-perspectives that see vitality in this landscape. The creative appropriation of English, theorized under models like Braj Kachru's "World Englishes," posits that Nigerian English is a legitimate, agential variety, not merely a tool of dependency. Furthermore, hybrid codes like Pidgin and "Engli-Igbo" are not solely signs of attrition; they can also be dynamic, creative spaces of linguistic innovation and identity formation. However, while these forms exhibit resilience and creativity, they do not fundamentally alter the structural power dynamic outlined in this article. They operate within a hierarchy still crowned by a standardized, institutional English. The primary argument here is not about the absence of creativity, but about the systematic absence of the institutional, secular translation work that would challenge vernaculars to develop *as standalone, fully-equipped languages* for modern discourse, in the way the missionaries initiated within the religious domain.

VII. CONCLUSION: THE PATH NOT TAKEN AND A FUTURE FOR AFRICAN LANGUAGES

Obiajunwa Wali's conception of African literature is tied to 'ideas of cultural authenticity' (Newell 8). For him this literature is inauthentic unless it simultaneously inscribes its cultural software in its surface as well as in its depth. An African cultural content in a non-African language is repugnant to him; and that is the anomaly that has provoked his paper. The scenario he envisages for African literature would have inevitably benefited the African languages in the same way as European languages, for instance, rose to higher levels of development in line with the evolving of the literary history. This is by reason of the constitutive role of language in the being of literature, according to Aristotle, the medium that enables the emergence of the poem itself (*Poetics*, chapter 1), that is, the only way in which this singular poem may 'accomplish existence' (Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 135).

Another mechanism to assist the development of African languages is translation. Its power is seen in Christian religious activity in Africa. Besides religion, and outside the Swahili areas of Eastern Africa, the servicing of all the major out-group functions of the ethnic communities in contemporary Africa is by the official language; and this covers everything from education from senior primary onwards to commerce and exchange, from participation in socio-political discourse to the print media and information networks in a modern plural society, and as we have seen increasingly literature as well. The network powered by the official language has become so encompassing by the early twenty-first century that the preoccupations of the language scholars have all but shifted away from the debate why use the language of the colonists as the official language of an independent African nation. And concern for the subjugated African languages is a distant and dying memory. Instead language research in Nigeria is nowadays heavily focused on the question of the existence and features of Nigerian English. But as the study of native African languages is still provided for at all the educational levels, translation has a big role to play in opening of access to the world's literary archive in the vernacular languages. There is probably need also for government intervention to advance the study of the native languages with the help of well-funded translation studies to have a role in teaching things like science and technology.

The tragic irony this analysis exposes is that the fight for cultural self-representation, waged brilliantly through the colonizer's language, may have come at the cost of long-term linguistic sovereignty. The vernaculars survive, but in a state of dependency, their potential for autonomous growth curtailed not by explicit policy but by the very success of their literary defenders. The

path not taken—the path of sustained, secular translation into the vernacular, modelled by the missionaries for a different purpose—remains the clearest, if daunting, route to redeeming that sovereignty and ensuring African languages are not merely preserved as cultural artifacts, but developed as living tools for confronting a modern, globalized world.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Studying the Concept of Titles in the Relationship between Armenians and the Qajar Government in Documents (Case Study of 96 Documents of the Persian Decrees of the Matenadaran of the Qajar Period)

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Abstract— *This study investigates the function and significance of titles within the official documents of the Qajar era, focusing on Persian decrees (farmāns) addressed to the Armenian community. Through an analysis of 96 documents from the Matenadaran collection, this research demonstrates that titles transcended ceremonial honorifics to become instrumental in establishing power relations and political legitimacy. In the dynamic between the Qajar state and its Armenian subjects, titles served as markers of socio-political inclusion, precisely defining the status of Armenian religious and social leaders within the imperial hierarchy. A close examination of the lexicon and combination of these titles reveals a symbolic language through which the state simultaneously reinforced minority loyalty and delineated the boundaries of its authority. Conversely, the Armenian elite's acceptance and deployment of these titles represented a strategic form of cultural adaptation and negotiation with central power. This study concludes that titles in Qajar documents were carriers of complex political and social messages, functioning as a vital communicative mechanism for managing state-minority relations. The diversity and evolution of titulature in these decrees reflect the broader political, social, and cultural developments of the Qajar period.*

Keywords— Administrative Titles, Royal Decrees (Farmāns), Qajar Bureaucracy, Armenian-Iranian Relations, Matenadaran Archive, Political Language, Imperial Legitimacy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Among historical sources, archival documents possess a superior degree of authenticity and reliability. Official decrees, orders, and letters are tethered to specific, real moments and events, maintaining a direct and organic link between the document and its author. Unlike narrative texts, they are generally free from subsequent alteration, revision, or reinterpretation, granting them inherent credibility and authority [1]. For the political, social, and economic history of Armenia in the medieval and early modern periods, the Persian documents of the Matenadaran manuscript archive in Yerevan constitute an invaluable resource, covering events from the 15th to the 19th centuries.

These Persian documents originated in the churches and religious centers of Eastern Armenia, where they were preserved before being consolidated first in the manuscript repository of the Etchmiadzin Cathedral and later transferred to the Mesrop Mashtots Matenadaran [2]. The collection is categorised into three principal groups: 1) royal decrees and orders from kings, khans, local emirs, and Muslim religious leaders; 2) court minutes from Iranian officials concerning property sales, endowments (*waqf*), and leases; and 3) documents related to inheritance disputes, inter-village conflicts, and customary rights.

The latter two groups are particularly crucial for studying land tenure and economic history, with some documents detailing irrigation rights and social structures [3].

The royal decrees, the focus of this study, are of paramount importance for examining feudal relations and social stratification. Most survive as originals or authenticated copies. The oldest document dates to 1449 CE, issued by Sultan Jahanshah Qara Qoyunlu, while the most recent is from 1848 CE. Seventeenth-century decrees are especially numerous, many pertaining to the reconfirmation of religious institutions' rights by new sovereigns. These texts vividly record oppressive taxation, violence, and the tax system in Eastern Armenia prior to the Russian annexation of the Caucasus, providing critical terminology for understanding contemporary socio-administrative issues [3].

This research employs a historical-analytical method to examine 96 Persian decrees from the Qajar period within the Matenadaran. It seeks to answer: What role did titles (*alqāb*) play in establishing the social and political status of individuals within Qajar decrees? What patterns of similarity and difference exist in titulature across various decrees? By analysing titles as a primary lens, this study moves beyond a purely linguistic or ceremonial reading to argue that they were a fundamental technology of Qajar statecraft—a mechanism for integrating the Armenian elite, articulating hierarchy, and projecting imperial legitimacy.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND SCHOLARLY CONTEXT

To date, no independent, comprehensive study has analysed the concept of titles within the Matenadaran's Qajar decrees from a combined analytical and linguistic perspective. The foundational work remains Gostikian's *Farmin Matenadaran*, which primarily provides transcriptions and retellings of the edicts.

The significance of the Matenadaran's Persian documents for Armenian history was recognised early by Catholicos Simeon Iravantsi (1763-1780), who incorporated analyses into his work *Jamber*. The most significant scholarly contribution is Hakob Papazian's 1968 publication of a major corpus of these documents, translated into Armenian and Russian with extensive commentary. Numerous studies have since utilised these decrees. For instance, Fatemeh Orji investigated "Abbas Mirza's Relations with the Church of Etchmiadzin Based on Archival Documents," highlighting Iran's diplomatic efforts in the Caucasus [4]. Alam, Avagyan, and Eghbal examined "The Role of Etchmiadzin in Relations between Armenians and Qajar Monarchs," focusing on the institution as a mediating body [5]. Research by Sam on "Edict Writers in the Qajar Era" detailed the bureaucratic apparatus behind decree production, noting the roles of officials like the *Mustafi al-Mamalik* and *Munshi al-Mamalik* [6].

While these studies engage with the content and context of the decrees, a systematic examination of titulature—the system of titles itself—as a primary object of analysis remains absent. This gap is critical because titles are not mere ornamentation but are constitutive of the social and political order they represent. Analysing them is key to reconstructing administrative hierarchies, understanding the performance of power, and deciphering the nuances of state-minority relations. A focused case study of the Matenadaran documents is therefore essential to map the diversity and evolution of Qajar titulature and to reinterpret this facet of Iran's socio-administrative history.

III. METHODOLOGY AND SOURCE CHALLENGES

This study is based on the historical-analytical examination of 96 Persian-language decrees from the Qajar period housed in the Matenadaran. The analysis proceeds through: 1) identifying and categorising all titles attributed to the decree issuer (Shah, Crown Prince), addressee (Armenian Caliph, community leaders), and other named officials; 2) correlating these titles with the subject matter of the decree (e.g., tax exemption, dispute resolution, appointment); 3) tracing patterns and variations in titulature over time and across different royal reigns.

Working with these documents presents specific challenges, including: vague dating or undated documents; discrepancies between title and content; determining the dominant language in multilingual texts; and limited prior research on individual scribes or precise provenance. Despite these challenges, such documents are invaluable, containing data on: administrative correspondence; socio-economic reforms; property and legal systems; official conduct; geographical and ethnographic details; and the evolution of Persian paleography and diplomatic forms, including seals (*tamgha*) and signatures [7].

IV. THE ANATOMY OF A QAJAR DECREE: STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS

The composition of a Qajar decree (*farmān*) followed a formal structure, each part serving a distinct purpose. The introduction (*dībācha*) showcased the secretary's literary artistry and was tailored to the addressee's rank, employing elaborate compound phrases and epithets. For Armenian caliphs, these included "His High Position," "The Caliph of the Christian Caliphs," and "The Chief of the Christian Bishops" [8, p. 361].

Structurally, a decree comprised three core pillars:

1. **The Introduction:** Containing the titles and address to the recipient.
2. **The Text (*matn*):** The main body, stating the command or decision (also called *ḥāl* or *sharḥ-i īn*).
3. **The Conclusion (*khatima*):** Containing instructions to officials, benedictions, and the execution clause (*mas'ūl-i farmān*).

Additional formal elements included the *ṭughrā* (royal cipher), marginal notes (*ḥāshiya*), and the date. The text's style often employed intricate metaphors and allusions, making precise interpretation demanding [8, p. 481].

V. ANALYSIS OF TITULATURE IN THE MATENADARAN CORPUS

5.1 The Issuer and Addressee:

A fundamental element is the identification of the decree's issuer (the Shah or Crown Prince) and its addressee (e.g., the Caliph of Etchmiadzin, a bishop, or a Qajar governor). The addressee's name follows the *ṭughrā*, preceded by a cascade of honorifics. A typical example begins: "Decree that His Eminence, the high seat of sobriety and understanding... the chief of the Christian caliphs, Narcissus Mehrasia, should know..." [8, pp. 520-521]. This structure immediately establishes a hierarchical dialogue between the sovereign and a specifically titled subordinate.

5.2 The Shah's Titles and the Nature of Authority:

In the Qajar political structure, the Shah was the fount of all authority. His titles reflected this absolute status: *Shāhanshāh* (King of Kings), *Zill Allāh fi'l-Arḍ* (Shadow of God on Earth), *Qibla-yi Ālam* (Focus of the World). Fath-Ali Shah Qajar employed an especially lavish array, including *Khāqān-i Aʿẓam* and *Shams al-Mulūk* (Sun of Kings) [9]. This autocratic system, largely unbound by legal constraints, meant the granting of titles was often a matter of royal favour rather than regulated merit, as seen when Naser al-Din Shah bestowed the title *Farugh al-Saltana* on a favourite courtier [10].

5.3 Titles for the Armenian Caliph:

The titles granted to the Armenian Caliph of Etchmiadzin were carefully chosen to denote a respected but subordinate position within the imperial order. Common honorifics included:

- *'Ālījāh* (High Position)
- *Maqām-i 'Ālī-i Jamāl* (The High Position of Majesty)
- *Ra'īs-i Ikhwān-i Masīḥī* (Chief of the Christian Brethren)
- *Khalīfat al-Khalā'if al-Masīḥī* (Caliph of the Christian Caliphs)

A decree typically opens: "Decree that His Highness, the High Position of Glory... the Chief of the Great Christian... the Caliph David, should consider..." [8, pp. 361-362]. These titles simultaneously honoured the Caliph's religious authority and framed it as embedded within the Shah's sovereignty.

5.4 Titles for Qajar Military-Administrative Officials:

Generals and governors (*beglarbegs*) also received specific titulature, blending military and administrative prestige:

- *'Ālījāh, Maqām-i 'Ālī-i Dawlat* (High Position of the State)
- *'Izzat-i Jalāl-i Nizām* (The Honoured Majesty of the [Military] Order)
- *Amīr al-Umarā* (Commander of Commanders)

A decree to Hussein Khan, the *Beglarbeg* of Yerevan, begins: "Decree that *'Ālījāh*, the high position of honour and courage... the conscious Amir of the great princes... Hussein Khan... should know..." [8, p. 481]. This formal language reinforced the chain of command from the Shah, through his provincial agents, to the Armenian leadership.

VI. THE FUNCTION OF TITLES: CORRELATION WITH DECREE SUBJECTS

The conferred titles were directly relevant to the decree's purpose. Analysing the 96 documents reveals key subjects and their titular context:

1. **Tax Exemption & Economic Privilege:** Decrees confirming property rights or tax exemptions for the Church or individuals used titles affirming the recipient's loyalty and high standing, making the privilege a reward for fidelity.
2. **Dispute Resolution:** Orders settling intra-Armenian or Armenian-Muslim conflicts invoked the Caliph's titled authority as the sanctioned mediator, recognising his jurisdiction as derived from the Shah. E.g., a decree concerning a water dispute references the "Chief of the Peers of the Christian Caliphs" as the arbiter [8, pp. 389-390].
3. **Appointments and Ecclesiastical Authority:** Decrees affirming the Caliph's right to appoint nobles (*azādān*) within the Armenian community explicitly tied his internal authority to royal sanction: "the determination of the great and the small... is subject to the determination and appointment of His Highness" [8, p. 417].
4. **Symbolic Exchange and Legitimisation:** Decrees concerning the exchange of gifts or the formal allegiance of the Caliph employed the most elaborate reciprocal titles, performing a ritual of mutual recognition that bolstered the legitimacy of both parties.

VII. CONCLUSION

This analysis of 96 Qajar decrees from the Matenadaran demonstrates that titles (*alqāb*) were far more than ceremonial tools; they were sophisticated political and social mechanisms for regulating power. In the context of state-minority relations, they performed a dual function: integration and control. The bestowal of Persianate titles upon Armenian elites formally integrated them into the Qajar hierarchy, granting recognised status and often concrete privileges. This created a vested interest in maintaining loyalty to the state.

Conversely, these titles were conditional markers, perpetually reminding the recipients that their authority and position were contingent upon and subordinate to the Qajar sovereign. The titles acted as a symbolic language of domination, delineating the boundaries of tolerated autonomy. The protective function of a decree was often activated precisely through the invocation of the recipient's official title, turning it into a shield against lower-level encroachment by other state agents or local powers.

The evolution and variation in titulature reflect the shifting political and economic strategies of the Qajar state towards its Armenian subjects across the long nineteenth century. Therefore, the study of titles provides a crucial index for understanding the dynamics of imperial legitimacy, minority management, and the intricate interplay between language and power in Qajar Iran. The Matenadaran decrees reveal that titulature served as a essential bridge—a bridge that facilitated Armenian participation within the imperial system while simultaneously reinforcing the structure of Qajar authority that framed it.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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