
The Impact of Christianity on the Igbo and the Gikuyu Community in Africa as Revealed in *Arrow of God* and *The River Between*

○ Sheikh Zobaer

North South University

Abstract: Religious conversion was an extremely important and effective strategy for the European colonizers to establish their colonial dominance in Africa. The diffusion of Christianity across Africa helped the colonizers gain acceptance and support among the natives, which in turn gave the colonizers more control over Africa. During the inception of European Christian missionary activities in Africa, those who accepted Christianity were favored by the colonial administration; but those who opposed, faced persecution. As more and more native Africans espoused Christianity and eschewed their native religions, Christianity emerged as a distinct threat to the native African cultures, religions, and associated rituals. But such mass proselytization hardly had any altruistic cause; rather, the conversion game helped the colonizers hide how they exploited Africa under the cloak of philanthropy. The newly-converted Christians were indoctrinated by the missionaries to such an extent that they started to loathe indigenous culture. In some cases, they channeled their loathing for indigenous belief system into actively opposing and obstructing the practice of native African religions and rituals. This paper examines Achebe's *Arrow of God* and Thiong'o's *The River Between* to discover how Christianity helped the European colonizers expand colonial territory and tighten their stranglehold on native African cultures.

Keywords: Africa, Achebe, Thiong'o, Christianity, Colonialism

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Understanding the Gikuyu Religion in East Africa

In order to comprehend the impact of Christianity in Africa, it is important to understand the basic aspects of most of the native African religions. This knowledge will help us analyze how the unwelcome intervention of Christianity rendered a fatal blow to the very core of African culture by threatening the native Africans' religions, social customs, and rituals. As the focus of this paper is East Africa and West Africa—two regions mostly dominated by the Gikuyu and the Igbo respectively—understanding the fundamental features of Gikuyu and Igbo religions is absolutely imperative. Bewes points out that the Gikuyu tribe was the most populous of many Bantu tribes in East Africa during the 1950s, with the largest group living in Kenya. The tribe never had a king or any kind of

central government. Each Gikuyu village had a village elder who would rule the village, and the village elders would be appointed by the members of the tribe in a ceremony called *Ituika*. The entire Gikuyu population had never been ruled by one ruler; therefore, social customs were at the heart of the Gikuyu community and played the most significant role in holding the Gikuyu people together. Religion played a vital part in determining different social customs and rituals, and this is precisely why religion had a significant place in the lives of the Gikuyu community all across East Africa and beyond (Bewes 202).

The Gikuyu religion is fundamentally different from Christianity, which is arguably the most dominant Abrahamic religion up to the present. Christianity is a monotheistic religion, whereas the Gikuyu religion is not. Jomo Kenyatta, who is regarded as the founding father of modern Kenya, is one of the very few people who gave the world a comprehensive insight into the Gikuyu religion. In his famous book *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu*—a groundbreaking anthropological study of the Gikuyu community in East Africa—Jomo Kenyatta scrupulously discusses different aspects of the Gikuyu religion. Kenyatta mentions that “the Gikuyu people maintain a close and vital relationship with spiritual entities. Their daily lives, both as individuals and groups, are influenced at all points by belief in the supernatural” (231). From Kenyatta’s analysis, it is patently obvious that the Gikuyu religion is fundamentally different from Christianity. Moreover, as religion was at the heart of the very socio-cultural fabric of the Gikuyu community, the intervention of Christianity was also accompanied by a serious threat to the Gikuyu culture itself.

Wanjohi points out that the concept of God in Gikuyu religion, in fact, is ambivalent. The Gikuyu god can be both spiritual and material at the same time. It can be tangible – such as a human or an animal – or an intangible entity. The Gikuyu have at least three well-known names for god: *Ngai*, *Murungu*, and *Mwene-Nyaga*. Of these three names, the *Ngai* is considered to be the most common. However, even though some experts believe the Gikuyu religion to be akin to a monotheistic religion, none ever claims it to be similar to the kind of monotheism found in the Abrahamic religions. In addition to the worship of *Ngai*, the Gikuyu also worship different forms of spirits including that of their deceased ancestors. In order to propitiate evil spirits, the Gikuyu offer sacrifices hoping that the evil spirits would not return. The Gikuyu believe in afterlife and in the immortality of soul. There are two kinds of religious prayers practiced in the Gikuyu community: the public prayer and the individual prayer (Wanjohi 136-140). From Wanjohi’s analysis, it is evident that the Gikuyu religion is almost diametrically opposite of Christianity. The only trace of shared features can be found in the belief in afterlife, in the immortality of soul, and in the importance of prayer. However, such features can be found in many other religions, and therefore, does not conclusively follow that these shared features are the reasons why Christianity could appeal to the West African Gikuyu population.

When it comes to the concept of spirits and sacrifice, the Gikuyu religion is manifestly different from Christianity. Bernardi points out that the Gikuyu traditional cosmology combines two domains. One is the *Ngai* (the high god and other spiritual beings), and the other is the *Ngoma*, or the spirits of the ancestors. *Ngai* is thought to reside on Mount Kenya, and the ancestral spirits are thought to reside underground. However, spirits of the deceased ancestors are thought to be omnipresent. The Gikuyu believe that the spirits make their presence perceivable through unpleasant events, which is a sign that the living should offer sacrifice to appease the spirits (Bernardi 174). However, the

Gikuyu religion, according to Karangi, is not just a set of beliefs; it is more than that. Religion is incorporated and integrated into multifarious dimensions of life including people's social, political, and economic behavior. One of the Gikuyu words that could be translated as "religion" is *kirira* which refers to the "ethnic teachings of customs given by the elders of the community" (Karangi 613). Karangi asserts that religion in the Gikuyu community serves to explain, predict, and control everyday events. The Gikuyu's "religious thought is primarily based on the existing political and social model," and as a result, religion has "a lot of impact in people's daily lives" (613). Therefore, such concepts of religion "do not coincide" with the "Western understanding of religion as a system of beliefs" (613).

Understanding the Igbo Religion in West Africa

Like the Gikuyu in East Africa, the Igbo in West Africa also believe in different gods and their supernatural powers. Ubah claims that "the belief in the existence and powers of spirits is the cornerstone of the [Igbo] religious system" (91). Ubah mentions that there are three types of spirits: the supreme being or the *Chi*, the divinities, and the spirits of the deceased ancestors (92). According to Ayittey, the Igbo believe that their everyday actions are observed and controlled by various gods and spirits. To appease those deities, the Igbo people have to follow a strict code of conduct set by those deities. Obedience is rewarded with health, longevity, and individual prosperity. In contrast, lack of compliance ushers in the exact opposite outcomes. Violence of the moral code is punished with disease, death, poverty, drought, poor harvest, and various other individual and collective afflictions. These moral codes are handed down from generation to generation, and are maintained, enforced, and supervised by ancestral spirits. This is the reason why a great deal of reverence for ancestral spirits is integral part of the Igbo culture, much like the way it is in the Gikuyu society. As an agricultural community, the Igbo people worship different gods who control various environmental factors related to the production of crops. Much like the Gikuyu in East Africa, the Igbo in West Africa also observe sacrificial rituals either to propitiate their gods or to placate them (Ayittey 37).

Western colonial literature lacked proper understanding of the Igbo religion for a very long period of time, and consequently failed to comprehend the influence and significance of Igbo religion and its gods, especially *Chi*, in the lives of the Igbo people in West Africa. According to Metuh, many prominent western scholars had the misconception that "the influence of god in Igbo life is negligible" and that "it is purely theoretical and had no marked influence on life" (1). Metuh argues that such misconception about the influence of the Igbo religion in the lives of the Igbo people "has been repeated in different forms by many [western] writers on Igbo religion" (1). The truth is, *Chi*, or the personal god, is one of the highest controlling forces in the Igbo community, and "one has not to be very long in the Igbo community to know how much god [*Chi*] is in the Igbo conscious and how frequently he features in their daily speech" (2). Ayittey argues that the Igbo religion has a profound impact on the lives of the Igbo people as "every human activity on earth, including economic activity, [is] heavily influenced by religion" (37).

The concept of *Chi* is at the core of the Igbo religion, and "no other concept has provoked as much debate among scholars of Igbo traditional religious culture as *Chi*" (Ejizu 379). According to Ejizu, "the monosyllabic word *Chi* (pronounced as in the first part of the English word *Chi-ef*)

primarily denotes a prominent spirit” which is “closely associated with individual personality and fortune” (379). Chukwukere mentions that the term *Chi* has been differently translated as “god,” “personal god,” “guardian angel,” “guardian spirit,” and other relevant theistic concepts (520). According to Chukwukere, *Chi* represents the “central unifying theme that incorporates the different facts of Igbo social thought and usages, especially those aspects containing man’s relationship with the inscrutable realm of the supernatural” (523). Chukwukere also argues that the Igbo religion is not monotheistic, at least not the way Christianity or any other Abrahamic religion is. The term *Chi* is almost a generic word for god or a supreme being; however, a few other deities are also related to the concept of *Chi*. In Christianity, God is the one and only supreme being, but in Igbo religion, every individual Igbo person has his or her own *Chi*. This personal *Chi* can be either benevolent or malignant. A malignant *Chi* should be regularly prayed to if a person wants to stay safe from its wrath. Similarly, a benevolent *Chi* has to be regularly sacrificed to in order to ensure its continued favor.

The idea of reincarnation is also different in the Igbo religion from the way it is in Christianity. The belief in rebirth is one of the fundamental features of the Igbo religion. The Igbo believe that their deceased relatives are reincarnated among their living kin (525-526), whereas in Christianity, the Day of Judgment is the only time when every single person will be resurrected before either having an eternal life of bliss in heaven, or being doomed for eternity in hell. Apart from *Chi*, there are other important gods that the Igbo people worship including *Chukwu* (the great god), *Chineke* (the creator), *Kamanu* (the god of rain and thunder) and various other divinities (Oriji 115). When it comes to different forms of worship, there is an interesting similarity between the Gikuyu religion and the Igbo religion. Both religions distinguish between two different kinds of worships: private worship and public worship. Ilogu mentions that in the traditional Igbo religion, private worship “is divided into two parts: routine and occasional” (229); similarly, public worship “is also divided into two kinds: the family or extended family worship and the clan-tribe worship” (230).

It is patently obvious that both Gikuyu and Igbo religions are manifestly different from Christianity. In fact, there are more things in common between Igbo and Gikuyu religion than there are between Christianity and either of the aforementioned religions. Both Gikuyu and Igbo religions entail a firm belief in, and a rigorous worship of, different deities and spirits. Both religions simultaneously dictate as well as reflect the lives of people in Igbo and Gikuyu society. In contrast, Christianity was completely alien to Africa. As native religions are inextricably intertwined with almost every aspect of life in both Igbo and Gikuyu society, denying so, as the Western colonizers did, would be an utter misrepresentation of the African culture due to an extreme lack of understanding the cultural nuances. The obvious truth is, religion and life are almost inseparable in both Igbo and Gikuyu communities, and this fact starkly contradicts with, and emphatically eschews the early Western facile assumption about native African religions’ negligible status in Africa. The truth about the intervention of Christianity in Africa is, such intervention posed an insurmountable threat to the native African religions and cultural traditions. Hence, many postcolonial critics’ claim that the intervention of Christianity in Africa ensued a concatenation of unwelcoming outcomes is unequivocally warranted.

The Impact of Christianity on Indigenous Religious Traditions

European colonizers infiltrated into the hinterland of Africa through missionary activities. They projected the missionary activities as a philanthropic enterprise. However, the reality was exactly the opposite. The missionary activities were not carried out on a humanitarian ground; rather, such activities helped the colonizers solidify their occupation of Africa, and in the process, significantly damaged the native African religious traditions. Mulwafu claims that “as precursors to colonial rule, the missionaries made a significant contribution to understanding the environmental conditions of the people and the areas they came into contact with” (305). The Christian missionaries “called for their government at home to intervene and colonize the territory so that they could carry out their work smoothly and successfully,” and “as European imperialism in Africa reached its apogee in the late 19th century, ideas about conservation had been embodied in the larger scheme of colonization” (305).

Famous Martinique-born postcolonial critic and scholar Aimé Césaire reveals the hypocrisy behind the colonial envision of Africa in his famous book *Discourse on Colonialism* by pointing out what colonialism does not entail. Césaire argues that colonialism is “neither evangelization, nor a philanthropic enterprise, nor a desire to push back the frontiers of ignorance, disease, and tyranny, nor a project undertaken for the greater glory of God, nor an attempt to extend the rule of law” (32). According to Césaire, the “Chief culprit” is the “Christian pedantry, which laid down the dishonest equation [that] Christianity = civilization, paganism = savagery, from which there could not but ensue colonialist and racist consequences whose victims were the Indians, the Yellow peoples, and the Negros” (33).

Christianity did not bring civilization and spirituality in Africa. Apart from being a catalyst for colonization, Christianity also manifested itself as a means of cultural invasion as “conversion of the Africans to Christianity was almost synonymous with Europeanization” (Anigbo 133). During the colonial period, “slight regard, if any, was paid to African culture. Indigenous culture was regarded as pagan, and missionaries were encouraged to undermine it” (133). Anigbo points out that in West Africa, the missionaries actively encouraged, and often forced the Igbo people to renounce their traditional beliefs and accept Christianity. Traditional idol worship – a fundamental means of social control and cohesion—was viewed by the Christian missionaries as a pact with the devil. As a result, demolishing the idols and manhandling their priests became commonplace. The missionaries would deliberately desecrate the pagan idols by destroying them or trampling on them to prove that the pagan gods were powerless, and such actions reinforced the supremacy of Christianity and Western ideology over African traditional beliefs, causing many Africans to renounce traditional religions and to espouse Christianity and Western values (134-135).

The missionaries were heavily supported by the colonial governments. Gordon argues that the Christian missionaries would receive financial incentives to expand their missionary activities, and in turn, would help their respective colonial administration to strengthen its position in Africa. The Protestants focused on spreading Christian dogma and Western values by opening missionary schools. They trained a group of native converts as teachers who were always loyal to the missionaries. In contrast, the Catholics had a more ruthless approach. They were less tolerant of native African religious traditions and were bent on eradicating what they considered to be barbaric pagan rituals (Gordon 34-37). However, both the Catholics and the Protestants had one thing in common: they

operated through a group of native intermediaries who were loyal to the colonial administration. In order to extend the ambit of their dominance, the missionaries also trained a community of native converts who were “paid to evangelize, to spread the influence of the missions, and to gradually bring about a Christian modernity under their leadership” (45).

If necessary, the missionaries would not flinch at adopting shady and iniquitous methods, such as bribing the village Chiefs and the headmen, to carry out proselytization in Africa. Such reprehensible means of proselytization, coupled with the missionaries’ desire to get rid of paganism, saw the introduction of new Christian rituals in Africa which were utterly incompatible with native African traditions (34-35). Nunn argues that “merely exposing Africans to the word of God was not sufficient for conversion. Instead, additional benefits, which were provided through mission stations, were needed to entice Africans to convert to Christianity,” and “these benefits, rather than the word of God alone, were the most effective means of conversion” (151). Nunn also argues that Western education was one of the most notable benefits provided by the missionaries. They deliberately instilled Western values in the minds of the converts, and such external intervention had lasting impacts on people’s values and beliefs. The effects of the missionary activities “worked through the transmission of religious values from parents to Children” (148), and thus “the foreign missionaries altered the religious beliefs of the Africans” (147).

Impact of Christianity as Revealed in *The River Between* and *Arrow of God*

Both novels vividly capture some of the basic strategies that the Christian missionaries followed in order to spread their religious views across East Africa and West Africa, subsequently damaging native African religious and social traditions. First of all, the Christian missionaries gained native converts who were loyal to the colonial administration, and more so, to the church. After that, the colonizers instilled hatred for native African religious and social traditions in the psyche of these converts. These groups of newly converts were the native agents of colonization who worked for the missionaries, thinking that they were spreading the words of God; however, in reality, they were only helping the colonizers tighten their stranglehold on Africa. Such conversion of the native Africans had significant social, cultural, economic, and political implications as these emerging group of native converts were always favored and supported by the colonizers. As a result, people who held on to the native African traditions and rejected Christianity, or any kind of colonial intervention for that matter, were marginalized to the point where they could not even raise their voices against either the colonizers, or their native agents. This is how Christianity acted as a major catalyst for damaging the socio-cultural fabric of East African and West African society. Both *The River Between* and *Arrow of God* capture this reality in the context of the Gikuyu and the Igbo community respectively.

It is important to note that even though both novels are set in different contexts and tell the stories of two different African ethnic groups, the colonial mechanism at work in both the regions as revealed in these two novels have striking similarity. *The River Between* is set in Kenya and tells the story of the Gikuyu community, whereas *Arrow of God* is set in Nigeria and tells the story of the Igbo community. But in both regions, the British Christian missionaries operated in a similar fashion when it comes to enticing the natives into leaving their traditional religions and accepting Christianity. However, the missionaries were not alone, as they took the help of native converts

who worked as intermediaries between the church and the rest of their tribesmen. Joshua in *The River Between* and Goodcountry in *Arrow of God* are two such characters who function as native intermediaries of the British colonial administration. Both Goodcountry and Joshua are priests. In addition, Goodcountry also teaches at a missionary school. Their job is to preach Christianity among the natives on behalf of their British overseers. Both of them earn money and power because of their ties with the missionaries, and also with the colonial administration for that matter. Because of the fact that both of them are native Africans themselves, they are able to exert more influence on their fellow community members than the White missionaries would ever be able to. This is exactly the reason why operating through native intermediaries turned out to be an extremely prolific strategy for the missionaries to disseminate imperialistic propaganda under the cloak of religion, furthering the cause of the colonial enterprise.

In his highly acclaimed book *Divide and Rule: The Partition of Africa, 1880-1914*, famous Dutch historian Henk Wesseling discusses the role of native intermediaries in establishing colonial rule in Africa. In order to put stress on how vital a role the native intermediaries played in cementing colonial rule in Africa, Wesseling points out that “without their collaboration, colonial rule would not have been possible” (372). It is manifestly obvious that the Christian missionaries were at the forefront of putting the strategy of conversion into practice. Among the native converts, the most loyal ones were appointed as village Chiefs. It is important to note that the practice of appointing village Chiefs is a colonial intervention as none of the African tribes under colonial rule has ever had such practices before (Williams 25). Such disruptive practices turned out to be destructive, as the majority of the village Chiefs appointed by the colonial rulers started to abuse their powers through “bribery, extortion, and false criminal trials” (Ayittey 425). However, many critics argue that not only were such reprehensible practices introduced by the colonizers in Africa, but also magnified in scale. Morrock claims that bribing the native elites was one of the common methods the missionaries used in order to carry out missionary activities in Africa (129). It is not surprising that the native converts, who were unfairly put in positions of power by the colonizers, would adopt similar kinds of unfair means to hold on to their powers which they never deserved to have in the first place. James Ikedi is one such character portrayed in *Arrow of God* who is a former village Chief of Okperi village. His corruption and abuse of power become so unbearable that even the colonial administration in Okperi village is forced to remove him from his position of village Chief. Ikedi gives himself the title “His Highness Ikedi the First, Obi of Okperi” and sets up “an illegal court and a privet prison” to display his power (Achebe 430). Even Winterbottom—the colonial overseer—acknowledges that such abuse of power is not only common among the Chiefs they appointed, but also among “Court Clerks and even messengers. They all managed the turn themselves into little tyrants over their own people. It seems to be a trait in the character of the negro” (430). However, what Winterbottom, being an agent of colonization himself, either utterly fails to comprehend or consciously ignores is that, it is due to the colonial intervention in the first place that such problems came into existence. One might wonder what the Church’s role was in the unfolding of these events. The answer is, this Chiefs and Church messengers were all converts, and therefore operated under the protection of, and in tandem with the Church.

Much of the early Western colonial discourse on Africa had been heavily influenced by the accounts of Christian missionaries. As a result, it is not surprising that “African culture and religion—

in contrast to those of China and India—have often been despised, ridiculed, even dismissed by European scholars” (Morris 148). In the earliest colonial records, Africa, particularly West Africa, is regarded as “the black-spot of the world” where the “lowest races of mankind” and “lowly-organized human beings” were developed, who were destined “to become the slaves of the White man” (Boyce 394-395). Such an abysmal, repugnant, and racist attitude of the worst kind was present among most—if not all—of the Christian missionaries who carried out their missionary activities in Africa during the onset of colonization. Spreading Christianity and gaining converts were not the only objectives of the Christian missionaries. They actively inculcated hatred among the converts for African indigenous religious traditions and social rituals. It has already been discussed in this paper how the Christian missionaries used to loathe African indigenous religions. The missionaries transmitted the same hatred into the new converts. In doing so, not only did the missionaries turn the native converts against their very own century-old traditions, but also against their won people who rejected Christianity and chose to adhere to their indigenous tradition.

This bitter reality is captured by both novels in question. Thiong’o’s *The River Between* portrays Joshua as a person who has internalized the colonialist propaganda that there is nothing valuable in African tradition. He genuflects to the imperialists and looks down on his own Gikuyu culture. Joshua considers the Gikuyu god as the “prince of darkness” (29), much like the way Christian missionaries in the Siriana’s Mission consider the Gikuyu people to be the “Children of darkness” (67) due to their adherence to the traditional Gikuyu customs. As the novel progresses, Joshua starts to lean towards extremism. He maintains that “there could never be a compromise” as “all the tribe’s customs were bad” (84), and preaches: “My brothers and sisters, there is no compromise. Our lord did not compromise when he hung on the cross. He did not mix two ways but stood by the light” (86). Joshua also believes that as a Christian, it is his “duty to obey the government” (31) and believes that the Gikuyu people in his village “should leave their ways and follow the ways of the white man” (32). Frantz Fanon, in his famous work *Black Skin, White Masks*, examines why the colonized blindly adopt the values of the colonizer, rejecting and loathing his own. Fanon argues that the colonized “identifies himself with the explorer” because in his mind, the colonizer is the “bringer of civilization” who “carries truth to savages—an all-white truth” (114). Unfortunately, Joshua displays the exact same self-loathing, genuflecting mentality with his suicidally deranged conviction that the “White man” is going to eradicate the “ills of the land” and teach the natives how to “walk in the light” (Thiong’o 32).

Such colonial indoctrination reveals a crucial fact about the nature of evangelization in Africa. The missionary activities never operated separately from the active influence of colonial enterprise. Rather, they were a significant part of the colonial mechanism. As a result, not only did the missionaries instill hatred for indigenous traditions among the native converts, but also cultivated immense reverence both for Christianity, and most importantly, for the colonial administration. This is the reason why Joshua equates his newfound faith in Christianity with the reverence for colonial administration, and believes that every newly-converted Christian like him should have the same level of respect for the colonial government as they have for Christianity. This is how the Christian missionaries indoctrinated the Gikuyu people in East Africa by systemic proselytization, and the consequence of such proselytization was perverse that the newly-converted natives would hate their indigenous traditions, embrace Christianity along with European values, and most importantly,

consider the colonial administration to be their ally, turning a blind eye towards how Africa was being colonized in the process.

Mr. Goodcountry, portrayed in Achebe's *Arrow of God*, can be considered as a literary double of Joshua. He is an African himself, but after accepting Christianity, he becomes an extremist advocate for Christianity and even goes as far as to condoning violence in order to spread Christian values and to put an end to the practice of indigenous Igbo religious rituals and customs. He is a teacher at the local missionary school where he indoctrinates the converts exactly the way he has been indoctrinated by the Christian missionaries. He tells the story of how the Christians of the Niger Delta "fought the bad customs of their people, destroyed shrines, and killed the sacred iguana" (Achebe 366). He believes that Christians "must be ready to die for the faith" and urges his followers to "kill the sacred python" as it is the snake that deceived Eve (366). He says: "It is nothing but a snake, the snake that deceived our first mother, Eve. If you are afraid to kill it, do not count yourself a Christian" (366). This is how Mr. Goodcountry indoctrinates young Africans into loathing their indigenous religions, much the same way Mr. Goodcountry himself has been indoctrinated to the same effect. It is crucial to bear in mind that the Christian teachers at the missionary schools had the capacity to influence the thoughts of their students, which played a pivotal role in the grand scheme of proselytization and indoctrination. The teachers at the Christian missionary schools were the only channels between the native students and the teachings of the colonizers that the colonized holds in the highest regard. As a result, what the teachers used to teach at the missionary schools would inevitably go unquestioned and unchallenged, leading to the unrestrained infiltration of Western colonial values into the psyche of the young natives, which, as an inevitable consequence, caused the colonized to despise their own tradition.

The royal python is sacred to the Igbo community; therefore, killing it would not only be an utter sacrilege, but also an act of violence that would turn the rift between the converts and the traditionalists into a bitter animosity which would severely disrupt communal harmony. But blinded by the misguided religious zeal of his newfound faith, Mr. Goodcountry shows complete disregard to this crucial fact. Unfortunately, the bitter consequences of such derangement does not take long to unfold, as Oduche, the son of the Chief Priest of the indigenous god Ulu, converts himself into Christianity and starts to hate his own religion. At the local missionary school, Oduche finds Mr. Goodcountry as his mentor, and under the influence of his dogmatic and hateful preaching against the indigenous religion, Oduche makes it his mission to kill the royal python out of his misplaced respect for Christianity and suicidal disgust for his native religion that Mr. Goodcountry—his teacher—instilled in his psyche. This is how the Christian missionaries and the teachers at the missionary schools inculcated extremist ideologies among the native converts, who, as a result, declared a crusade against their indigenous traditional religions, completely disregarding the extremely crucial fact that such a suicidal holy war would bring the very socio-cultural fabric of Africa on the verge of a complete collapse. *Arrow of God* illustrates this phenomenon brilliantly, with all its subtleties and nuances.

Both novels in question portray how the division of the traditionalists and the converts proved to be extremely deleterious to communal harmony. Achebe's *Arrow of God* shows how the communal division eventually paves the way for the colonizers to take complete control over both Umuaro and Okperi with the help of the Christian missionaries. The colonial administration is in favor of Okperi, a village dominated by Christian converts. In contrast, the majority of the village

Umuaro's population follows traditional Igbo religion. Umuaro's Chief priest and community leader Ezeulu gets arrested because of his refusal to collaborate with the church. He is eventually released, but the people of Umuaro continue to receive ill treatment from the colonial administration. Despite all that, the villagers of Umuaro remain united with Ezeulu and continue to resist the missionaries as well as the colonial administrative officers. However, the table completely turns when Ezeulu fails to declare the annual yam harvest on time claiming that the god Ulu is still not giving him the permission, and if he disobeys Ulu, the entire village will face Ulu's wrath. Because of the postponement of the harvest, the entire village is faced with starvation. The missionaries quickly seize this opportunity and declare that the Christian God will protect the villagers from the wrath of Ulu if they harvest their yams in the name of the Christian god. This is exactly what the starving people do, and with that, most of them also renounce their traditional religion and embrace Christianity. Not only does this event bring Umuaro under colonial control, but also marks the end of people's faith in Ulu—an indigenous god. Without the help of the Christian missionaries and their native agents, taking control of Umuaro and destroying the indigenous tradition of worshiping Ulu would have been impossible.

The intervention of Christianity had similar effect of communal division in the Gikuyu community in East Africa, and Thiong'o's novel *The River Between* aptly captures this reality. The young protagonist of the novel, Waiyaki, lives in Kameno, which is a village controlled by the traditional Gikuyu people who resist the advance of Christianity. Soon, Waiyaki becomes the leader of his community and devotes himself to eradicating poverty and superstition from Kameno. Joshua, on the other hand, is a native Christian convert who live in neighboring Makuyu village dominated by the Christian converts. The river Honia flows between these two villages which are located on top of two ridges. The river separates these two villages physically, whereas religion separates them ideologically. Even though the inhabitants of these two villages belong to the same Gikuyu community, Kameno's adherence to indigenous Gikuyu religion and Makuyu's adherence to Christianity become a matter of division and animosity between these two villages. The protagonist Waiyaki wants reconciliation between Kameno and Makuyu because he fears that such "rivalry would cripple his efforts in education" (91). Every day he becomes more and more "convinced of the need for unity between Kameno and Makuyu," and also demands "reconciliation between Joshua's followers and the others" (91) as he believes in the mantra: "Education for unity. Unity for political freedom" (143). However, Joshua is unwilling to consider reconciliation and remains constant in his belief that "there could never be a compromise" because "all the tribe's customs were bad" (84). As a result, the process of reconciliation reaches an impasse because of Joshua's thoughtless stubbornness. Williams argues that Joshua is the portrayal of a "classic indigenous intermediary" (25) who becomes a puppet of the colonial mechanism due to his misguided religious zeal and fanaticism. Again, it is the dichotomous, as well as antagonistic nature of relationship between Christianity and indigenous religious traditions that works as a powerful agent of division among the native Africans.

Conclusion

Christianity worked as a major factor behind the decline of the practice of African indigenous

religious customs. The missionaries hardly had any respect for the native African religious institutions and the values they entail. They carried out their missionary activities hiding under the pretense of goodwill. But in reality, they served as the agents of colonization. The Igbo community is one of the major ethnic groups in West Africa, and so is the Gikuyu community in East Africa. Both the communities had their distinctively unique religious and cultural practices which were severely damaged as Africa was colonized. Indigenous religions in Africa had always been intertwined with the lives of the native Africans. As the intervention of Christianity functioned as a potent threat to the indigenous religious and social institutions, such intervention also contributed to the chronic decay of the socio-cultural structure of both the Igbo and the Gikuyu community. Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* aptly capture how the intervention of Christianity disrupted the socio-cultural structure of Africa, replaced the indigenous values, spread colonial propaganda, and created division among the native Africans. These two novels written by two of the greatest African authors of the postcolonial era valiantly expose the charade of evangelization masquerading as an altruistic project, and unmask the true imperialist motive behind such systemic mass proselytization of the Gikuyu and the Igbo people in Africa.

With that being said, there is no denying the fact that most of East and West Africa is dominated by Christian population now after centuries of mass evangelization, and those who are practicing Christianity today, are doing so not because of any visible colonial pressure, but on their own accord. However, it is imperative that they do not forget their past, or look down upon their indigenous traditions just because they have subscribed to a different faith now. Practicing Christianity and respecting their indigenous tradition must not be mutually exclusive, because if they do not appreciate and value their pre-colonial past as free Africans with their own rich indigenous institutions, they will never be able to break free from the psychological shackle of their colonial past. Christianity was tactically imposed on the Africans by the colonizers which made them loathe their native religions. Christianity had been projected as pure and the indigenous religions as evil, and the obvious motive behind such project was to trick the colonized population into believing that colonization equates to civilization and spiritual emancipation. This is precisely what the Africans living in a postcolonial world must unlearn, and without a doubt, this invaluable message is the most precious takeaway from *Arrow of God* and *The River Between*—two groundbreaking works of fiction by two of the greatest African authors ever to have graced the literary world.

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