

**RECODIFICATION AS RESISTANCE IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *THINGS
FALL APART* AND CHIGOZIE OBIOMA'S *AN ORCHESTRA OF
MINORITIES***

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BENIN CITY**

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was carried out by **Queensley Esohe EDIABONYA (Miss)** with matriculation number **ART2100198**, in the Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City.

DR. SAMSON O. EGUAVOEN
(Project Supervisor)

DATE

DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this project to God almighty who has blessed me with strength, good health and courage till date. I also want to dedicate this to my beloved mother Mrs. Mercy Iyore, my Guardian and mentor Mr. Roland Omigie and also to all who has been my biggest support and inspiration. Thank you all for being there for me.

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ABSTRACT

This study interrogates the notion of recodification as an act of resistance in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Chigozie Obioma's *An Orchestra of Minorities*. Though separated by decades, both novels converge thematically in their defiance of cultural erasure and their reclamation of Igbo indigenous identity through narrative innovation. The research analyses how Achebe and Obioma adapt, bend, and blend language employing proverbs, idioms, myth, cosmology, and oral tradition not merely as stylistic choices but as deliberate strategies of epistemic and cultural resistance against colonial and neo-colonial forces. Using a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in close reading and informed by postcolonial theory and cultural studies, the study examines narrative structure, symbolic representation, and linguistic hybridity to uncover how both authors recode English to carry Igbo rhythms, ontologies, and worldviews. Building on the works of Said, Bhabha, Spivak, Ngũgĩ, and Hall, the analysis demonstrates that recodification functions as a decolonial praxis a recentering of African epistemologies within global literary discourse. The thesis argues that both Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Obioma's *An Orchestra of Minorities* use recodification through the adaptation, bending, and blending of language, myth, and oral tradition as tools for resisting colonial and modern dislocation, rewriting identity, and reclaiming cultural power.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Purpose of the Study

This study will interrogate the notion of recodification as an act of resistance in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Chigozie Obioma's *An Orchestra of Minorities*. These two seminal novels, though separated by decades, converge thematically on the defiance of cultural erasure and the reclamation of indigenous identity. Through their protagonists Okonkwo and Chinonso the authors narrate parallel battles against colonial and neo-colonial incursions that threaten the spiritual and cultural lifeblood of the Igbo people. The primary goal is to analyse how these texts, adapt, bend and blend language through symbolism, and cultural motifs, enact a process of cultural rewriting a resistance encoded in the very texture of the narrative.

1.2 Research Questions

This study will be guided by the following critical enquiries:

1. How do Achebe and Obioma articulate the concept of recodification in their respective narratives?
2. In what ways do the protagonists utilise recodification as a form of resistance against colonialism, modernity, and systemic dispossession?
3. What cultural symbols, practices, or worldviews are recoded, and how

do they contribute to the characters' reassertion of identity?

4. How are language, orality, and narrative structure employed as tools for ideological resistance and cultural survival?

1.3 Scope of the Study

The analysis is limited to *Things Fall Apart* and *An Orchestra of Minorities* as primary texts, with particular focus on their thematic engagement with adaptation,

bending, and blending of language as a form of resistance. The scope includes character analysis, narrative structure, and symbolic representation of indigenous belief systems and cosmologies. Historical and sociocultural contexts, decolonial, and postcolonial will also be integrated into the discourse to situate the act of recodification within broader patterns of resistance.

1.4 Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative and interpretive approach grounded in literary analysis. It relies on close reading as its principal analytical technique. Through a detailed examination of textual elements such as narrative voice, characterisation, language choices, cultural references, and symbolic structures, the study will identify and interpret the modes of recodification present in *Things Fall Apart* and *An Orchestra of Minorities*. The goal is not simply to

uncover what the texts say, but how they say it, and what cultural work is accomplished through this saying. The study approaches both novels as literary artefacts that reflect and respond to specific sociocultural and historical conditions. In engaging with these texts, attention is paid to the nuanced ways the authors deploy language to reclaim identity

and assert resistance. Special focus is placed on how Achebe and Obioma incorporate indigenous knowledge systems, proverbs, cosmological beliefs, and oral traditions into the fabric of their narratives. These elements are not treated as aesthetic ornaments but as active, resistant strategies embedded in the structure of the story itself.

In interpreting these features, the analysis is both textual and contextual. The novels are situated within the broader historical realities they reflect Achebe's within the context of direct colonial confrontation, and Obioma's within the milieu of postcolonial disillusionment and global displacement. Rather than treating the texts in isolation, the study considers how each novel dialogues with political, historical, and cultural forces that shape the characters' realities and identities.

To enrich the primary analysis, the study also draws upon a wide range of secondary materials. These include peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly

monographs, book chapters, interviews, and literary criticisms that examine decolonial writing, Igbo culture, resistance literature, and the narrative strategies employed by African authors. These sources offer critical perspectives that help situate the arguments within established academic conversations, while also allowing space for original insights and reinterpretations. Furthermore, the study follows a comparative framework that does not merely juxtapose the two texts but seeks to illuminate points of resonance and divergence in their treatment of recodification. Achebe and Obioma write from different generations, but both are concerned with cultural continuity and rupture. The comparative reading allows the study to trace how the theme of resistance evolves across time and context, from colonial encounter to postcolonial migration, from the physical village to the metaphysical world of the *chi*. This methodology permits a deep and flexible engagement with the material, guided by an awareness that literature, particularly African literature, often operates as a site of memory, struggle, and survival. The emphasis is on interpretation rather than measurement, meaning rather than data, depth rather than breadth. The study's commitment is not to a mechanical search for themes, but to an organic uncovering of meaning as it emerges through the rich interplay of form, culture, and narrative voice.

1.5 Theoretical Background

This study is fundamentally grounded in decolonial theory as articulated by African writers and intellectuals, with particular emphasis on the works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, whose interventions on language, culture, and literary resistance provide the most incisive framework for understanding recodification in African literature. While postcolonial theory often rooted in Western academic discourse has been instrumental in critiquing imperialism, it frequently reproduces the very epistemic hierarchies it claims to dismantle. In contrast, African decolonial thought, emerging from the lived realities of colonial violence and cultural erasure, offers a more radical and self-determined vision of liberation one that begins with the reclamation of language, memory, and worldview.

At the heart of this decolonial project is Ngugi wa Thiong'o's seminal argument in *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986). Ngugi contends that colonialism's most enduring weapon was not the bullet but the language a tool used to colonize the mind, sever the connection between African peoples and their cultural roots, and install a sense of inferiority toward indigenous knowledge systems (Ngugi 4–5). He identifies the imposition of European languages in African education and literature as a

form of “spiritual subjugation” that alienates the child from their mother tongue, community, and cosmology (Ngugi 11).

For Ngugi, true decolonization cannot occur without linguistic reclamation: writing in African languages is not merely a stylistic choice but an act of resistance, a refusal to let the colonizer’s tongue define African reality. Ngugi’s position stands in deliberate tension with that of Chinua Achebe, who, in essays such as *The African Writer and the English Language*, argued that English could be “Africanized” bent, adapted, and infused with indigenous rhythms, proverbs, and thought patterns to serve African expression (Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day* 62). While Achebe saw English as a pragmatic “common language” for a linguistically diverse Nigeria, Ngugi viewed this compromise as a continuation of colonial dependency. This debate between adaptation and rejection forms a critical axis in African literary decolonization and directly informs this study’s analysis of recodification. Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart** exemplifies the strategy of linguistic recodification within a colonial medium, whereas Ngugi’s call for writing in Gikuyu represents a more radical break a total epistemic reorientation.

Beyond language, African decolonial thought emphasizes the recentering of indigenous cosmologies, oral traditions, and communal ethics as sites of

resistance. Scholars such as Chinweizu , Onwuchekwa Jemie, and Ihechukwu Madubuike in their collaborative work *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* (1983) critique the uncritical adoption of Western literary forms and aesthetics, arguing that African literature must be judged by its own cultural standards, not by Eurocentric canons (Chinweizu et al. 23). They insist that proverbs, myths, songs, and ritual speech are not decorative elements but the very architecture of African narrative and philosophy. This perspective validates the deep integration of Igbo orature in both Achebe's and Obioma's works not as "local color" but as epistemic resistance. More recently, thinkers like Achille Mbembe and Lewis R. Gordon have expanded decolonial discourse to include questions of being, ontology, and futurity. Mbembe, in *On the Postcolony* (2001), critiques the necropolitical logic of colonialism that reduces African lives to bare existence, and calls for a reimagining of African subjectivity beyond victimhood (Mbembe 11). Similarly, Gordon's concept of "epistemic disobedience" the refusal to accept knowledge systems that deny one's humanity resonates with Obioma's use of the chi as narrator in *An Orchestra of Minorities*. By centering an Igbo metaphysical entity as the voice of reason, memory, and moral judgment, Obioma enacts a form of ontological

recodification, asserting that African ways of knowing are not only valid but essential to understanding human experience.

This study, therefore, situates recodification within this African-centered decolonial tradition. It views Achebe's weaving of Igbo idioms into English and Obioma's deployment of the chi as narrator not merely as literary techniques but as strategic interventions in a centuries-long struggle for cognitive and cultural freedom. Recodification, in this light, is the process through which African writers dismantle colonial epistemologies and reinscribe indigenous worldviews into the global literary imagination using whatever tools are at hand, whether a "bent" English or a reimagined narrative cosmos.

Thus, the theoretical lens of this research is not borrowed from the metropole but forged in the crucible of African intellectual resistance. It affirms that decolonization begins not with the rewriting of history alone, but with the rewriting of language, story, and spirit a project both Achebe and Obioma advance, each in their own generational and aesthetic register.

1.6 Thesis Statement

Both Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Obioma's *An Orchestra of Minorities* use recodification as a form of adaptation, bending and blending through language,

myth, and oral tradition, therefore of resisting, rewriting identity and reclaiming cultural power in the face of colonial and modern dislocation.

CHAPTER TWO

ADAPTATION; RECLAIMING IGBO MYTH, IDIOMS, PROVERBS, AND COSMOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

In the postcolonial literary imagination, language is not merely a medium of expression but a site of ideological contestation. For Igbo writers like Chinua Achebe and Chigozie Obioma, the English language imposed through colonial education and administration becomes both a constraint and a canvas. Their response is not rejection, but recodification; the strategic reworking of English to carry the rhythms, philosophies, and epistemologies of Igbo culture. This act of adaptation is profoundly resistant a reclamation of cultural sovereignty through narrative form. In particular, both authors embed Igbo proverbs, idioms, myth, and cosmology not as decorative folklore, but as foundational structures of meaning, thereby challenging the colonial erasure of Indigenous knowledge systems.

2.1.1 Igbo Proverbs and Idioms: The Grammar of Wisdom

In Igbo society, proverbs are more than rhetorical flourishes they are instruments of reasoning, social regulation, and philosophical inquiry. As Achebe famously writes in *Things Fall Apart*: "Proverbs are the palm-oil with

which words are eaten." (chapter 1). This metaphor is not incidental. Palm oil was essential in Igbo cuisine and ritual; to eat without it was to consume without nourishment or respect. Similarly, speech without proverbs lacks depth, decorum, and communal resonance. Achebe's use of this proverb in English does not dilute its cultural weight it translates it, preserving its figurative logic, rhythm, and function within discourse. By embedding such proverbs into the narrative fabric, Achebe resists the colonial narrative that framed African speech as primitive or inarticulate. Instead, he reveals a complex oral epistemology, where wisdom is indirect, metaphorical, and collectively validated. Achebe's characters especially elders like Ogbuefi Umezulu and Okonkwo himself speak in proverbs not to obscure meaning, but to deepen it. Consider the proverb: "When a man says yes, his chi says yes also." (chapter 4). This is not just about fate or personal ambition; it reflects the Igbo concept of chi a personal god or spiritual double and the interplay between individual will and spiritual destiny. Achebe uses the proverb to introduce cosmological ideas organically, without exposition, forcing the English-language reader to engage with Igbo metaphysics on its own terms.

Chigozie Obioma, writing decades later in *An Orchestra of Minorities*, extends this tradition but with greater mythopoeic ambition. His narrator is not a man,

but the chi of the protagonist, Chinonso, speaking in a register that blends Igbo cosmology with Homeric grandeur. Proverbs in Obioma's novel are not just spoken by characters they are woven into the narrative voice itself, becoming part of the metaphysical architecture of the story.

For instance, Obioma writes: "A snake must give birth to something as long as itself" (p. 198): This proverb suggests that children, or the results of someone's actions, are often akin to their parents or origins, emphasizing a sense of inherited identity or consequence" (page 198).

On the surface, this speaks to the symbolic nature of sarcasm and warning, not mere sustenance. But in context, the proverb foreshadows betrayal and the collapse of loyalty. It is layered with irony and spiritual warning, functioning as both moral instruction and narrative prophecy. Unlike Achebe, who integrates proverbs into dialogue, Obioma elevates them to cosmic commentary, spoken by a chi that sees across time and fate. Moreover, Obioma's prose is saturated with idiomatic density phrases.

2.1.2 Recodification as Resistance: Beyond Translation

Both authors engage in what can be called linguistic re-indigenization the process of making English speak with an Igbo soul. This is not mere translation, but transformation.

They do not exoticize proverbs for Western readers; instead, they normalize them within the narrative logic, expecting the reader to adapt to Igbo ways of knowing, rather than the other way around. This is an act of resistance in three dimensions; Epistemic Resistance (Challenging the colonial hierarchy of knowledge by asserting the philosophical sophistication of Igbo oral tradition), Linguistic Resistance (Subverting English by infusing it with Igbo syntax, rhythm, and metaphor, thereby decolonizing the language from within), Narrative Resistance (Replacing the Western individualistic hero with a communal, spiritually-embedded subject whose fate is tied to ancestral and cosmic forces) . By centering proverbs and idioms as structural, not ornamental, Achebe and Obioma refuse the marginalization of Igbo thought. They do not explain the culture they enact it. The reader does not observe Igbo worldview from a distance; they are immersed in it.

The use of proverbs and idioms in *Things Fall Apart* and *An Orchestra of Minorities* exemplifies a broader project of cultural recodification a re-centering of Igbo cosmology in the face of colonial epistemic violence. Achebe lays the foundation by demonstrating the intellectual rigor of Igbo speech, while Obioma expands the scope, embedding proverbs into a spiritual narrative consciousness. Together, they show that adaptation is not assimilation, but

reclamation a way of saying: Our ways of speaking are not relics. They are living, thinking and resisting.

Through the act of literary resistance, Achebe and Obioma use their narratives and characters not only to reclaim but also to reaffirm the integrity of Igbo culture in the face of colonial erasure and misrepresentation. By centering Igbo worldviews, speech, and spiritual beliefs in their fiction, they position themselves and their characters not as subjects observed through a colonial lens, but as self-defined agents of their own cultural narrative. This is a powerful reclamation: they portray the Igbo not as static ethnographic types, but as complex, philosophical, and spiritually grounded people whose identity is articulated through their own linguistic and cosmological frameworks. Crucially, this reassertion does not require the abandonment of English; instead, both authors reshape the colonial language, infusing it with Igbo proverbs, idioms, rhythms, and metaphysical concepts, thereby decolonizing the form from within. In doing so, they demonstrate that cultural authenticity is not contingent on linguistic purity, but on the fidelity to worldview. The result is a literature that speaks in English, yet thinks in Igbo -a testament to the resilience of cultural identity even in the terrain of a foreign tongue.

2.1.3 Recodification as Resistance: Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the Reclamation of

Language

The literary project of Chinua Achebe and Chigozie Obioma resonates deeply with the decolonial framework articulated by Kenyan theorist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o , especially in his influential text *Decolonising the Mind* (1986). Ngũgĩ argues that language is not merely a neutral medium of communication, but a carrier of culture, history, and collective consciousness. For him, the imposition of European languages during colonialism was not just linguistic domination, but epistemic violence a deliberate erasure of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and imagining the world. He famously calls language “the collective memory bank of a people’s experience,” and warns that to lose one’s language is to risk losing one’s cultural soul.

While Ngũgĩ ultimately advocates for writing in African languages as the most radical act of resistance, he also acknowledges the complex reality of postcolonial writers who work in colonial tongues. Achebe and Obioma, writing in English, do not reject Ngũgĩ’s critique they respond to it through transformation. Rather than abandon English, they recode it, bending its grammar, rhythm, and semantics to carry the weight of Igbo cosmology, oral tradition, and social philosophy. In this way, they perform what might be called

strategic hybridity a form of resistance that operates within the colonial language while centering Indigenous epistemologies.

As Ngugi writes: "Imperialism imposes its language not only through the educational system but also through the 'cultural bomb' the process by which a people's confidence in their own identity, history, and creativity is eroded."

Achebe and Obioma counter this "cultural bomb" by using English not as a tool of assimilation, but as a vessel for cultural restoration. In *Things Fall Apart*, when elders speak in proverbs, when rituals are described with solemn precision, and when the concept of chi shapes a man's destiny, Achebe is not translating Igbo culture for Western consumption he is reinstating its internal logic. The narrative assumes the validity of Igbo thought systems without apology or over-explanation. As Ngugi might say, Achebe "decolonizes the mind" of the reader by forcing engagement with a worldview that refuses to be exoticized or simplified.

Similarly, in *An Orchestra of Minorities*, Obioma takes this further by structuring the entire novel around the Igbo cosmological principle of the chi. The narrator is not a human, but the protagonist's chi a spiritual witness that speaks in a register saturated with Igbo metaphysics, proverbial wisdom, and ancestral memory. This narrative choice is not merely stylistic; it is

epistemological. Obioma refuses the Cartesian, individualistic subject of the Western novel in favour of a communal and spiritually embedded self, where fate, free will, and divine will are in constant dialogue. In Ngugi's terms, Obioma is re-Africanizing consciousness through form. He does not write about Igbo belief he enacts it. The English language becomes a site of cultural re-memory, where proverbs like "A man who calls his kinsmen to a feast does not do so to save them from hunger" (.) are not footnoted curiosities, but operative truths that shape character, plot, and moral judgment.

Thus, while Ngugi calls for a return to African languages as the ultimate act of liberation, Achebe and Obioma demonstrate an alternative path: resistance through recodification. They show that even within the confines of English, it is possible to reclaim narrative sovereignty, to speak as Igbo, and to redefine the terms of cultural representation. Their work embodies what postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha might call the "Third Space" of enunciation a hybrid discourse where the colonized speak back, not in the colonizer's voice, but in a new voice forged from the fragments of tradition and translation (.).

Achebe and Obioma, through their adaptation of Igbo proverbs, idioms, and cosmology, engage in what Ngugi would recognize as a battle for cultural memory. They resist not with polemics, but with aesthetic and linguistic

reclamation proving that identity can be preserved, even celebrated, without linguistic separatism. By embedding Igbo ways of thinking into the syntax and soul of the English novel, they transform the language from a tool of domination into a medium of return a bridge back to self-definition, ancestral wisdom, and cultural continuity.

This act of recodification as resistance is not compromise. It is reconquest quiet, deliberate, and profoundly revolutionary. 2.2. Igbo Myth and Oral Tradition: From Folklore to Cosmological Resistance While proverbs and idioms structure the language of Igbo thought, myth and oral tradition shape its spiritual and moral universe. In *Things Fall Apart* and *An Orchestra of Minorities*, Chinua Achebe and Chigozie Obioma do not treat Igbo myths as quaint folktales or anthropological artefacts; instead, they revive and reanimate them as living frameworks of meaning. Through this reclamation, myth becomes a site of resistance, a way to challenge colonial narratives that dismissed African belief systems as primitive superstition and to reassert the philosophical and cosmological sophistication of Igbo worldviews.

2.2.1 Achebe: Folktales as Moral Architecture

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe strategically embeds Igbo folktales into domestic and communal spaces mothers telling stories by the fire, children gathered in

the compound thereby positioning oral tradition as a pedagogical and ethical force. One of the most iconic examples is the tale of the tortoise, a recurring figure in Igbo folklore known for his cunning and hubris. The story recounts how the tortoise, through trickery, convinces the birds to allow him to join their feast in the sky. He changes his name to "All of you " so that when the hosts says the food is for all of you, the birds will believe it's for the tortoise, and the tortoise claims it all. But when the birds realize the deception, they took back their feathers from the tortoise

In desperation, the tortoise beg one of the birds to tell his wife to cushion his fall from the sky with soft things, but the bird went and told the opposite, He falls, his shell cracks, and that is why, the narrator concludes, "the tortoise's shell is not smooth."

On the surface, this is a *pourquoi* tale a story explaining a natural phenomenon. But Achebe elevates it into a moral and social allegory. The tortoise embodies both cleverness (*njakiri*) and arrogance (*ogwu onwe*) a duality central to Igbo ethics. Intelligence is valued, but not at the expense of communal harmony. The tale warns against individualism, deceit, and the violation of trust values that resonate with Okonkwo's own tragic arc. Like the tortoise, Okonkwo rises through personal ambition, but his refusal to adapt, to listen, to honor the

collective, leads to his downfall. By including such stories without framing them as "primitive" or "superstitious," Achebe resists the colonial gaze that reduced African oral traditions to childish fables. Instead, he presents them as complex narrative systems that encode law, ethics, ecology, and psychology. As Ngugi wa Thiong'o argues, oral literature is not a "preliminary stage" to written literature, but a complete aesthetic and philosophical system in its own right. Achebe's use of the tortoise myth affirms this: it is not folklore for children, but wisdom for society.

2.2.2 Obioma: The Ogbanje Myth as Cosmic Reality

Where Achebe uses myth to illuminate cultural values, Chigozie Obioma in *An Orchestra of Minorities* transforms myth into narrative ontology. His central adaptation of the ogbanje myth referring to a child spirit who cycles between life and death, causing grief to its parents is not a tale told in passing, but the foundation of the novel's entire cosmology.

In traditional Igbo belief, an ogbanje is a malevolent or restless spirit that deliberately reincarnates into the same family, only to die young and return again, trapping parents in cycles of sorrow. To break the cycle, families might consult a dibia (spiritual healer), who could locate and destroy the *iyi-uwa* a buried object linking the spirit to the human world.

Obioma does not treat this as superstition. Instead, he reconfigures it as literal truth within the novel's world. The protagonist, Chinonso, is revealed to be an ogbanje a soul burdened by past wrongs, condemned to suffer and repeat cycles of loss and betrayal until redemption is achieved. But more radically, the novel is narrated by Chinonso's chi, his personal god, who speaks from the spiritual realm, pleading with the chi of the earth to allow his journey toward atonement. This narrative structure is revolutionary. Obioma does not explain the ogbanje myth to a skeptical reader; he presumes its validity. The spiritual realm is not metaphorical it is real, active, and causally significant.

Fate, guilt, and justice are not psychological states but cosmic conditions governed by ancestral and divine laws. In doing so, Obioma performs a profound act of epistemic recentering. He refuses the Western literary tradition that marginalizes spiritual belief as delusion or symbolism. Instead, he insists on the Igbo worldview as a legitimate epistemology one where the unseen shapes the seen, where destiny is negotiated, and where morality has metaphysical consequences. This aligns with Homi Bhabha's concept of "colonial mimicry" and its subversion. Colonial discourse often demanded that colonized subjects mimic European rationality, relegating Indigenous beliefs to the realm of the irrational. Obioma reverses this: he mimics the novel form, but

fills it with Igbo metaphysics, creating a hybrid text that resists assimilation. The reader must not only accept the ogbanje as real within the story they must confront the possibility that other ways of knowing are equally valid.

2.2.3 Myth as Resistance: Reclaiming the Sacred Narrative

Both authors use myth not for nostalgia, but for cultural rearmament. Achebe shows that Igbo society has its own moral grammar, taught through stories that rival Aesop or the Bible in didactic power. Obioma goes further, asserting that Igbo cosmology offers a coherent, spiritual explanation of human suffering and redemption one that does not require validation from Western secularism. Their work challenges the colonial binary that opposed "rational" (European) and "magical" (African) thinking. Instead, they present a world where spirit and society, fate and freedom, myth and history are intertwined. In reclaiming the ogbanje, the tortoise, the chi, and the proverb, they do not preserve culture as a museum piece they resurrect it as a living, resisting force. In *Things Fall Apart* and *An Orchestra of Minorities*, Igbo myth and oral tradition are not relics of a premodern past, but dynamic instruments of cultural survival and resistance. Achebe uses folktales to expose the ethical depth of Igbo society, while Obioma elevates myth into a metaphysical narrative framework that defies

colonial rationalism. Together, they demonstrate that storytelling is not escapism it is world-making, and in the postcolonial context, world-reclaiming. This sets the stage for the next section, where we explore how both authors reconfigure time, destiny, and identity through the lens of Igbo cosmology, particularly the interplay between free will and fate, and how these concepts challenge Western individualism.

2.3 Igbo Cosmology: Chi as Recodified Resistance

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*: Chi as Philosophical Agency "When a man says yes, his chi says yes also."(chapter 4)

Achebe does not merely describe chi as a traditional Igbo belief he recodifies it into a philosophical framework that asserts harmonized agency between the human and the spiritual. In doing so, he resists two dominant Western paradigms.

Western individualism: The Enlightenment ideal of the autonomous, self-determining individual is subtly countered by Achebe's notion that personal will ("a man says yes") is not isolated but spiritually ratified ("his chi says yes also"). This implies that agency is relational embedded in a cosmic order rather than atomized.

Colonial determinism: Colonial narratives often portrayed Africans as passive victims of fate or superstition. Achebe's chi resists this by showing Okonkwo's choices as meaningful and spiritually validated, even when they lead to tragedy. His downfall is not due to "primitive fatalism," but to the complex interplay of personal will, social expectation, and spiritual alignment. Thus, Achebe recodifies chi from a "primitive belief" into a sophisticated metaphysical system that affirms moral responsibility, spiritual accountability, and cultural coherence all while resisting colonial misreadings.

2.3.1 Chigozie Obioma *An Orchestra of Minorities*: Chi as

Sovereignty Obioma takes the recodification further by personifying the chi as the novel's narrator a bold formal innovation that transforms cosmology into literary architecture. The chi-narrator speaks in elevated, incantatory prose, echoing the cadences of Igbo oral tradition and classical epic (e.g., Homeric invocations, but filtered through an Igbo worldview). This stylistic choice asserts narrative sovereignty the story is not told through a Western omniscient narrator or psychological realism, but through an indigenous spiritual entity. By making the chi the narrator, Obioma centers Igbo

epistemology as the lens of truth-telling. The chi does not merely observe it interprets, laments, defends, and judges. It is both witness and advocate, embodying the moral and metaphysical dimensions of the protagonist's life.

This structure resists Western literary conventions that privilege human subjectivity alone. Instead, Obioma insists that truth, fate, and morality are co-authored by the human and the divine a direct challenge to secular humanism and Eurocentric narrative forms.

Obioma's chi is not folklore, it is a radical act of narrative decolonization. The chi's voice becomes a vessel for cultural memory, spiritual wisdom, and ethical commentary all framed within an Igbo cosmological system that refuses marginalization.

2.3.2 Recodification as Epistemic Resistance

Both authors use the Igbo concept of chi is not as exotic decoration, but as a tool of epistemic resistance. Achebe recodes it to assert the philosophical depth of Igbo thought against colonial caricature; Obioma recodes it to claim narrative authority and formal innovation for African cosmologies. In both cases, the chi becomes more than a deity it becomes a site of cultural

reclamation, a voice of indigenous wisdom, and a challenge to Western hegemony in literature and thought. This is recodification not as assimilation, but as reclamation with transformative power turning what colonialism dismissed as “superstition” into the very architecture of meaning, morality, and storytelling.

CHAPTER THREE

BENDING

3.1 Bending: Distorting English to Fit Igbo Worldviews

“Bending” transcends conventional translation. It entails the deliberate distortion, stretching, and reshaping of English not merely to convey meaning, but to embed Igbo syntax, rhythm, ontology, and epistemology within the very fabric of the English language. This act of linguistic recodification becomes radical when it challenges the hegemony of standard English and asserts the incommensurability of certain Igbo concepts within Western frameworks. Through this bending, authors like Chinua Achebe and Chigozie Obioma perform a form of epistemic resistance, inviting readers not just to understand Igbo culture, but to inhabit its worldview. What the Authors Did to “Bend” English: A. Direct Insertion of Igbo Words (Lexical Borrowing).

Both Achebe and Obioma retain key Igbo terms without translation or italics a conscious refusal to exoticize or “other” African language. By embedding words like *chi* (personal spiritual guardian), *ogbanje* (a reincarnating spirit child), *ndichie* (ancestors), and *egwugwu* (masked ancestral spirits) directly into English prose, they compel the reader to engage with Igbo cosmology on its own terms. This strategy resists the colonial impulse to explain,

domesticate, or subordinate non-Western concepts to English equivalents. The refusal to translate becomes an assertion: some realities cannot be reduced they must be learned.

3.1.1. Clipping and Syntax Bending

Clipping: Achebe often condenses English expressions to mirror the concision and metaphorical density of Igbo speech. For instance, the line “He has put a knife on the things that held us together” (from *Things Fall Apart*) avoids abstract Western phrasing like “He has destroyed our social cohesion.” Instead, it evokes a visceral, physical rupture rooted in Igbo understandings of kinship as tangible, interwoven bonds.

Syntax Bending: Obioma, particularly in *The Fishermen* and *An Orchestra of Minorities*, reconfigures English sentence structure to echo Igbo oral traditions.

Consider the chi’s narration:

“I am the chi of Ndume, the chi of one who is called Chinonso, the chi of the son of one who was called Ndume...”

This recursive, incantatory rhythm mimics ritual invocation and ancestral lineage recitation, bending English grammar to serve spiritual and communal memory rather than linear narrative logic.

3.1.2. Semantic Bending: Re-defining English Lexicon

English words are infused with Igbo philosophical weight. Terms like “spirit,” “fate,” and “god” are stripped of their Christian or Enlightenment connotations and re-anchored in Igbo metaphysics. In Obioma’s work, for example, the chi is not a “guardian angel” but a co-creator of destiny active, fallible, and intimately entwined with human agency. This semantic shift bends the English lexicon to carry meanings that resist Western dualisms of divine vs. human, fate vs. free will.

3.1.3. Temporal Bending

Obioma further disrupts Western narrative temporality by collapsing linear time. The chi-narrator in *An Orchestra of Minorities* speaks from a future vantage point, recalls past incarnations, and witnesses the present simultaneously embodying the Igbo conception of time as cyclical and layered. This temporal fluidity challenges the realism of the European novel and reorients the reader toward an ontology where ancestors, the living, and unborn coexist in continuous dialogue.

Bending as Resistance

Collectively, these techniques constitute more than stylistic innovation they are acts of epistemic decolonization. By bending English to the contours of Igbo

thought, Achebe and Obioma refuse linguistic assimilation. They do not merely write in English; they write against its imperial assumptions. The result is not bilingualism as accommodation, but as reorientation: the reader must shift cognitive and cultural frameworks to fully enter the text. In this way, bending becomes a powerful mode of resistance one that asserts the sovereignty of Igbo knowledge systems within the global literary canon.

CHAPTER FOUR

BLENDING

4.1. Blending

Synthesizing Languages and Cosmologies for “Blending” in the works of Chinua Achebe and Chigozie Obioma denotes a deliberate, creative synthesis of Igbo and English, oral and written traditions, indigenous cosmologies and global modernity. Far from mere stylistic choice, this blending functions as a decolonial strategy a recodification of narrative form that rejects the colonial binary of “traditional” versus “modern,” “native” versus “civilized,” or “myth” versus “reason.” Instead, it constructs a hybrid literary code that centers African epistemologies while engaging the global literary landscape on its own terms.

4.1.1. Code-Mixing and Polyphony

Linguistic Sovereignty

Both authors deploy code-mixing not as ornamentation but as an assertion of linguistic and cultural sovereignty. Igbo words are embedded within English syntax without apology or full assimilation, challenging the hegemony of colonial language.

Achebe: In *Things Fall Apart*, the sentence “He called his sons and his wives and told them that he was going to take kola” retains the Igbo term kola

untranslated. The ritual significance of the kola nut (symbolizing hospitality, communion, and ancestral blessing) is conveyed through context, not explanation, demanding the reader engage with Igbo cultural logic on its own terms. Obioma: In *An Orchestra of Minorities*, he writes “He was an ogbanje, a cursed child, one who comes and goes.” Here, the Igbo concept is introduced first, then glossed not to subordinate it to English comprehension, but to anchor meaning in Igbo ontology before offering a provisional translation. This inversion of explanatory hierarchy affirms that Igbo thought is the primary frame; English is the secondary vessel. This polyphonic language resists monolingual imperialism and constructs a third space a literary creole that is neither fully “native” nor “colonial,” but authentically postcolonial

4.1.2. Blending Myth and Modernity

Cosmological Continuity

Rather than juxtaposing “tradition” and “modernity” as opposing forces, both authors weave them into a single ontological fabric, revealing how spiritual frameworks persist and transform under colonial and neocolonial pressures. Achebe integrates Igbo cosmology chi (personal god), ancestral spirits, the Oracle of the Hills and Caves into a narrative that also includes colonial courts, missionaries, and bureaucratic administration. The tragedy of Okonkwo is not

merely political but cosmological: the collapse of a world where spiritual and social orders are interwoven. Colonialism doesn't just impose new laws; it severs the connection between human action and divine balance. Obioma translocates Igbo metaphysics into a globalized present. In *An Orchestra of Minorities*, the ogbanje myth traditionally tied to infant mortality and cyclical reincarnation is reimagined through the lens of transnational migration. Chinonso's journey to Cyprus becomes a modern ogbanje cycle: his soul is caught between Nigeria and Europe, belonging fully to neither. The spiritual law of the ogbanje thus becomes a metaphor for neocolonial displacement, where economic exile replicates the existential liminality of the cursed child. This blending shows that myth is not obsolete it adapts, offering explanatory power for contemporary crises.

4.1.3. Blending Genres and Forms: A New African Aesthetic

Both authors reject the Western novel's formal purity, instead fusing genres to create a narrative mode that reflects the complexity of African experience. Achebe merges oral storytelling proverbs ("proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten"), folktales, communal dialogue with the conventions of European realism. The result is a novel that feels both intimate and communal, individual and ancestral.

Obioma goes further, weaving together Igbo epic poetry, spiritual testimony, Greek tragedy (with its chorus-like *ndichie*, or ancestors), and the migrant bildungsroman. *An Orchestra of Minorities* is narrated by Chinonso's chi, a guardian spirit who recounts his life to the divine council a structure echoing both Igbo cosmology and Homeric epic, yet wholly original.

This formal hybridity produces an African-centered aesthetic that is not insular but globally resonant, speaking to universal themes of fate, love, and exile through distinctly Igbo lenses.

4.1.4. Blending Narrative Levels: Ontological Pluralism

Perhaps most radically, Obioma (and to a lesser extent Achebe) collapses Western ontological boundaries between the material and spiritual, human and divine. In *An Orchestra of Minorities*, narration operates on four interwoven planes: The human: Chinonso's lived experience his love, ambition, betrayal, The spiritual: The chi's perspective, offering moral commentary and cosmic insight. The ancestral: The *ndichie* (ancestors) who serve as a chorus, judging and guiding. The divine: Chukwu, the supreme deity, to whom the chi must justify Chinonso's life. This multi-layered narration enacts an Igbo worldview in which reality is not dualistic (body/soul, sacred/secular) but holistic and relational. The self is never isolated; it exists in constant dialogue with

ancestors, spirits, and the divine. By embedding this cosmology into narrative structure, Obioma recodes the novel itself as a site of spiritual inquiry not just social commentary.

Blending as Recodification

For Achebe and Obioma, blending is not assimilation it is reclamation. Through linguistic hybridity, cosmological synthesis, generic innovation, and ontological pluralism, they forge a literary code that refuses the epistemic violence of colonialism. Their works do not merely “include” African elements into a Western form; they recenter African ways of knowing as the foundation of narrative itself. In doing so, they offer a model for postcolonial literature that is at once rooted and global, ancestral and contemporary a true recodification of world literature from the margins.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY

5.1. Summary

This chapter introduces the central concept of recodification the strategic reworking of language, symbols, and narrative forms as a mode of cultural resistance in postcolonial literature. It outlines the study's purpose: to examine how Achebe and Obioma reclaim Igbo identity by recoding indigenous epistemologies within their novels. The chapter presents the research questions, defines the scope (focusing on narrative technique, cultural symbolism, and linguistic innovation), and explains the qualitative methodology based on close reading and postcolonial/decolonial theory. It also provides brief contextual background on both novels and their significance in African literary canon.

5.1.1. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This chapter situates the study within key theoretical discourses, including postcolonial theory (Said, Bhabha, Spivak), decolonial thought (Mignolo, Quijano), and African literary criticism (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Obi Wali). It explores concepts such as cultural hybridity, linguistic imperialism, epistemic violence, and the politics of orality. The literature review surveys existing scholarship on *Things Fall Apart* and *An Orchestra of Minorities*, highlighting

gaps particularly the under-exploration of recodification as an active, creative resistance strategy. The chapter argues that while much has been written on cultural loss in Achebe and trauma in Obioma, less attention has been paid to how both authors reconstruct Igbo cosmology through narrative form itself.

5.1.2 Recodification in *Things Fall Apart*

Language, Proverbs, and the Reinscription of Igbo Worldview

Focusing on Achebe's 1958 novel, this chapter analyzes how recodification operates through the integration of Igbo proverbs, folktales, rituals, and communal values into an English-language narrative. It demonstrates how Achebe subverts colonial discourse by centering Igbo logic, justice systems, and spiritual beliefs thereby resisting the erasure of precolonial identity. The chapter examines Okonkwo's tragic arc not merely as personal failure but as a symptom of cultural dislocation, while arguing that the novel's very structure its cyclical time, communal narration, and embedded orality enacts a counter-narrative to colonial historiography. Achebe's use of English is shown not as capitulation but as a tactical recoding of the colonizer's tongue.

5.1.3 Recodification in *An Orchestra of Minorities*: Cosmology, Orality, and the Ancestral Voice as Resistance

This chapter turns to Obioma's 2019 novel, exploring how recodification manifests through the novel's unique narrative architecture the chi (ancestral spirit) as first-person narrator. It argues that Obioma revives and reconfigures Igbo metaphysics by placing indigenous cosmology at the heart of a modern tragic narrative. The chi's voice embodies oral tradition, mythic time, and moral accountability, challenging Western notions of individualism and linear progress. Through Chinonso's journey, the chapter examines how neo-colonial forces (corruption, religious dogma, economic inequality) threaten cultural continuity, and how Obioma counters this through linguistic hybridity, ritual symbolism, and the recentering of ancestral wisdom. The novel is read as a contemporary act of epistemic resistance.

5.2. Conclusion

This study has explored the concept of recodification the deliberate reworking, reimagining, and reassertion of indigenous language, symbols, cosmologies, and narrative forms as a profound mode of resistance in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Chigozie Obioma's *An Orchestra of Minorities*. Though separated by more than six decades and distinct historical moments colonial incursion versus neo-colonial disillusionment both novels converge in their commitment to safeguarding Igbo identity against erasure. Far from passive

lamentations of cultural loss, these texts actively reconstruct and reinscribe Igbo epistemologies into the literary imagination, transforming the English language and Western narrative conventions into vessels for indigenous thought. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe recodes colonial discourse by embedding Igbo proverbs, communal values, ritual practices, and oral aesthetics into the very fabric of his prose. His narrative structure cyclical, polyphonic, and rooted in collective memory challenges the linear, individualistic logic of colonial historiography. Okonkwo's tragedy, while personal, becomes emblematic of a larger cultural rupture, yet the novel itself stands as a counter-archival act: a testament to a world that existed, resisted, and endured through storytelling.

In *An Orchestra of Minorities*, Obioma extends this project into the contemporary era, deploying the chi an ancestral spirit and narrator as both a formal innovation and a philosophical anchor. Through this cosmological lens, Obioma recodes modernity itself, interrogating the failures of post-independence Nigeria while reaffirming the enduring relevance of Igbo metaphysics. Chinonso's suffering is framed not merely as personal misfortune but as a spiritual and ethical journey governed by ancestral law, communal accountability, and cosmic balance. The novel's lyrical fusion of myth, realism,

and oral tradition enacts a decolonial poetics that resists the flattening forces of globalization and religious hegemony.

Together, these works demonstrate that resistance in postcolonial literature is not only political but deeply textual and linguistic. Recodification, as analyzed in this study, emerges not as mimicry or nostalgia, but as a creative, generative act one that reclaims narrative sovereignty and re-centers indigenous ways of knowing. Achebe and Obioma, in their respective eras, do not simply write about Igbo culture; they write from within it, using the novel form to perform cultural continuity, critique power, and imagine futures rooted in ancestral wisdom.

Ultimately, this research affirms that literature can be a site of epistemic resilience. In a world still grappling with the legacies of colonialism and the homogenizing pressures of global modernity, *Things Fall Apart* and *An Orchestra of Minorities* remind us that to recode is to remember, to resist, and to renew. Their enduring power lies not only in what they narrate, but in how they narrate offering blueprints for cultural survival through the art of storytelling itself.

5.3 Recommendations

To move beyond merely critiquing colonial and neo-colonial domination and to actively dismantle their lingering influence in literature, education, and cultural production this study proposes the following decolonial recommendations:

Decenter English as the Default Medium of Literary Legitimacy.

While Achebe and Obioma skillfully recode English, true decolonization requires challenging the hegemony of colonial languages altogether. Institutions should prioritize the creation, publication, and academic study of literature in indigenous African languages (e.g., Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa). Funding, translation initiatives, and literary prizes must be redirected to support mother-tongue writing, thereby breaking the epistemic dependency on European linguistic frameworks that continue to define “universal” literary value.

Decolonize Literary Canons and Pedagogy

University curricula across Africa and the Global North must be radically restructured to decenter Eurocentric theories and texts.

Things Fall Apart and *An Orchestra of Minorities* should not be taught as exceptions within a Western canon but as entry points into a broader, self-determined African literary tradition rooted in oral epistemologies, communal ethics, and indigenous cosmologies. Courses should be co-designed with

knowledge keepers, elders, and cultural practitioners not just literary scholars trained in Western academia.

Reject the “Postcolonial” as a Permanent Condition

The term “postcolonial” often implies that colonialism is a concluded chapter, masking the continuity of imperial power through economic, religious, and cultural channels. Scholars and writers must shift toward decolonial frameworks that explicitly name and resist ongoing structures of domination such as missionary evangelism, neoliberal extractivism, and Western publishing gatekeeping. Recodification should not merely adapt to these systems but seek to render them obsolete by building autonomous cultural ecosystems.

Support Community-Based Knowledge Production

Literary and cultural work must be re-rooted in community contexts rather than elite academic or global publishing circuits. Writers’ collectives, village storytelling circles, and indigenous publishing cooperatives should be empowered to produce narratives that answer to local ethical and spiritual frameworks not market demands or Western aesthetic expectations. This shifts

authority from the colonial “gaze” back to the community as the site of meaning-making.

Reclaim Narrative Sovereignty Through Indigenous Form

African writers should be encouraged not as a stylistic choice but as a political act to abandon Western narrative conventions (linear plot, individualistic heroism, secular realism) in favor of forms that embody indigenous worldviews: cyclical time, collective agency, spirit narration, and moral cosmology. Obioma’s use of the *chi* and Achebe’s proverbial structure are not “innovations” within English literature they are assertions of narrative sovereignty. Future writing must deepen this rupture, not bridge it.

In essence, recodification must evolve from resistance within the colonial system to the active construction of alternatives outside it. True decolonization in literature does not mean writing better English novels about African trauma; it means imagining and enacting stories that no longer need to justify their existence to Europe. By centering Igbo and other African epistemologies as complete, self-sufficient, and futurist systems of knowledge, we move beyond postcolonial reaction toward decolonial creation. Only then can literature become not a mirror of oppression, but a blueprint for liberation.

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