

# Translating Igbo Gods into German, Cultural Distance and Intercultural Postcolonial Communication.

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## Abstract

A culture's gods provide insight into its cultural epistemologies, worldviews, establish its cosmologies and connection to the divine will, and detail the beliefs and values that form the bases of behavior, unity, and collective action of its people. The translation of gods is thus more than the exchange of information but also the representation of a people making it, therefore, the space for the contact, conflict and negotiation of cultural knowledge, values and beliefs, and differences, and for determining the international cultural standing of cultures. This study examined the translation into German of purposively selected Igbo god's and divinities in Chinua Achebe's classics *Things Fall Apart* (TFA) and *Arrow of God* (AOG) within the context of intercultural postcolonial textual communication/relations. Lawrence Venuti's Domestication and Foreignisation translation approaches serve as framework while critical intercultural and translation analysis was descriptively applied to data.

Key Words: Igbo gods and deities, German translation, Chinua Achebe, Intercultural postcolonial communication,

## Introduction

Languages approach the relations between terms and meanings from two channels or perspectives namely onomasiology and semasiology. The onomasiological perspective approaches the relations beginning with the meaning, function or concept of an entity and then moves to the word(s) to name it or that names it; while the semasiological approach begins with the word or name and examines its meanings. Onomasiology emphasises how a concept is named while semasiology focuses on the meaning of a word or name. Both are subfields of semantics hinged on the formal linguistic relations between naming and meaning (Glynn 2015). Assmann used the term "theological onomasiology" (1996, 25) to explain the Babylonians' translation practice of equating two gods by defining their common functional definition or cosmic manifestation. The onomasiological approach becomes then both an interlingual and cross-cultural translation

technique that can establish the common functionality of gods in different languages and cultures though they bear different names and shows “how a given unit of meaning is expressed in different languages” and cultures (Assmann, 25).

The establishment of functional commonality between gods of cultures in asymmetrical relations could have significance in intercultural postcolonial textual relations; for cultural translation, to which the cross-cultural translation of gods belong, is equally located within the textual discursive field of intercultural power relations not only in terms of culture but also of language that underpins culture (Smith 2008). Asad (1989) notes the unequal power relations between Western and Third World languages “governed by institutionally defined power relations between languages/modes of life concerned” (157). He asserts:

Because the languages of Third World societies ... are “weaker” in relation to Western languages (and today especially English), they are more likely to submit to forcible transformation in the translation process than the other way around. The reason for this is first, that in their political-economic relations with third-world countries, Western nations have the greater ability to manipulate the latter. And secondly, Western languages produce and deeply *desired* knowledge more readily than third world languages do (The knowledge that Third World languages deploy more easily is not sought by Western societies in quite the same way , or for the same reason). (157-158)

Asad’s conclusion is that “the process of ‘cultural translation’ is inevitably enmeshed in conditions of powers – professional, national, and international” (Asad 1989, 163) implying sensitivity to the power relations embedded in the translation process.

Both Igbo and German(ic) cultures were/are polytheistic with distinct pantheon of gods. Although loyalty to the gods was displaced by Christianity among the Germans and replaced by dominant loyalty to the monotheistic Christian God and though there has also been divided allegiance to traditional Igbo gods due to the incursion of Christianity in Igboland during colonisation, both cultures reserve the memory of their gods. And as Takov and Banlanjo, citing Kwasi Wiredu (1999), note:

We must affirm that before the advent of the Scientific era, (and one may add the Metaphysical era), all cultures existed in prescientific outlook, wherein

tough questions about reality and natural phenomena were explained by recourse to the activity of gods or mythical reasons. Therefore, Western anthropologies who are often scandalised or puzzled by the virtual ubiquity of references to gods and all sorts of spirits in traditional African explanation of things, are rather guilty of being unfamiliar with the folk thought of their own cultures (Takov and Banlanjo 2022, 2914-2915).

This study examined the translation into German of Igbo god's and divinities in Chinua Achebe's classics *Things Fall Apart* (TFA) and *Arrow of God* (AOG) within the context of intercultural postcolonial textual communication/relations. The 'postcolonial' references the subsisting unequal/asymmetrical linguistic and cultural relations between European and African societies that are traceable to the period of geographically bounded colonial subjectivities. Based on a comparative and descriptive research design, the study adapted Lawrence Venuti's domestication and foreignization translation conceptual framework and deployed critical intercultural and translation analysis to examine how power and inequalities influence the communicative transposition of the names, functions and meanings of five purposively selected Igbo gods into German namely *Chukwu*, *Chi*, *Ala*, *Amadioha*, and *Ekwensu*..

### **Domestication and Foreignisation**

Lawrence Venuti formulated the theoretical strategies of Domestication and foreignization in the management of linguistic and cultural distance as well as cultural otherness in translation building on the formulation of the German theologian and philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher had in a lecture in 1813 on the different methods of translation argued that "there are only two. Either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him" (Lefevere 1977, 74 cited in Venuti 1995, 20). The Domestication and foreignization theory basically details the adaptation of the content of the foreign cultural source text to suit a desired or predetermined reception in the target text. In deploying domestication, the translator deliberately adapts the linguistic and cultural elements of the translated text to the conventions of the target language and culture. The translator thus creates a fluent and transparent text devoid of linguistic and cultural peculiarities of the source text and by which the target readership reads the translated text in the familiarity and even meanings of the target language and its cultural norms and values. In producing a domesticated target text, the translator is invisible for the target text reads like the original, which it is not. On the other hand, the translator may decide to foreignise

the target text by retaining the foreign and exotic cultural elements of the source text, leaving the target reader to grapple with the difficulties of comprehension and especially of encountering the cultural other. Describing the practice of reading and evaluating translations prevalent in the United Kingdom and United States and providing simultaneously a description of domestication in what he calls “illusionistic effect of discourse” and “The illusion of transparency” Venuti states:

A translated text, whether prose or poetry, fiction or nonfiction, is judged acceptable by most publishers, reviewers, and readers when it reads fluently, when the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer’s personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text—the appearance, in other words, that the translation is not in fact a translation, but the “original.” (1995, 1)

Venuti sees translation as meaning relations conditioned by cultural and linguistic differences and tied to the interpretations which the translator gives to the source text’s chain of signifiers in the target text. This relation announces the “violence” that inhabits the very purpose and activity of translation namely “the reconstitution of the foreign text in accordance with values, beliefs and representations that preexist it in the target language, always configured in hierarchies of dominance and marginality, always determining the production, circulation, and reception of texts” (1995, 18). Transparent translations are deployed in intercultural political relations of power acting as a tool of conquest and cultural erasure comparable to the conquest of colonial societies, expanding imperialism abroad while strengthening xenophobia in Anglo-American homelands (1995, 17). Reviewing the flow and value of translation contracts between the 1960s and 1990s which was dominated by transparent translation into English, Venuti notes the far reaching consequences not only of the trade imbalance to the advantage of the Anglo-American cultural, political and economic establishment but also of the transparent translation strategy:

By routinely translating large numbers of the most varied English-language books, foreign publishers have exploited the global drift toward American political and economic hegemony in the postwar period, actively supporting the international expansion of Anglo-American culture. This trend has been reinforced by English-language book imports: the range of foreign countries receiving these books and the various categories into which the books fall show not only the worldwide reach of English, but the depth of its presence in foreign cultures, circulating through the school, the library, the bookstore, determining diverse areas, disciplines, and constituencies—academic and religious, literary and technical, elite and popular,

adult and child. British and American publishing, in turn, has reaped the financial benefits of successfully imposing Anglo-American cultural values on a vast foreign readership, while producing cultures in the United Kingdom and the United States that are aggressively monolingual, unreceptive to the foreign, accustomed to fluent translations that invisibly inscribe foreign texts with English-language values and provide readers with the narcissistic experience of recognizing their own culture in a cultural other.

On the other hand foreignisation as an ethnodeviant translation signifies the difference of the foreign text by disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the target language and even choosing to translate a foreign text excluded by domestic literary canons, for instance, or using a marginal discourse to translate it (Venuti 1995). Apparently preferring foreignisation, Venuti regards it to be “a form of resistance against ethnocentrism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism, in the interests of democratic geopolitical relations (1995:20). Venuti did, however, concede that a resistant translation may not necessarily result to increased faithfulness, but can equally result to ‘abusive fidelity’ that leads to the loss and gain of some features of the source text.

The Domestication and foreignisation theory of Venuti establishes the critical relevance of translation in textual intercultural communication and relations especially in examining questions regarding the construction and representation of cultural and national identities, the manipulation of cultural knowledge, the exclusion and stigmatization of the other, and the valorization of ethnocentrism. It can also promote mutual understanding in a healthy exchange of cultural knowledge and bring peoples and cultures to mutual understanding. His preference for foreignization in translation can thus be understood as “an ideological call to respect foreign texts and ethics of mutual globalized discourses” (Abderraouf 2019, 77).

Objections raised to Venuti’s domestication and foreignisation theory in translation include the arguments that prioritizing the foreign in translation would not only make the translator to betray his language and culture but would also result to excessive literalisation and the inaccessibility of target texts to the target readership (Pym 1995), that adopting foreignising strategies in translation by minority and marginal languages will result in their own eclipse by dominant languages and cultures (Cronin, 1998), that the critical terminologies of the theory – domestication, foreignisation, resistance, violence – are not precise, identifiable, and measurable (Tymoczko, 2000), and that the theory is weak in challenging and displacing ethnocentrism, racism, cultural narcissism, and imperialism (Pym 1996, Shamma 2005).

Notwithstanding the arguable deficiencies of Venuti's theory, it is relevant to this study in descriptively assessing the extent to which the translation of Igbo gods into German managed cultural difference, distance and meaning relations of both cultures located on opposite sides of the postcolony, account for asymmetry, and promote mutual respect of both cultures. The debate over which of domestication or foreignisation should prevail in translation will drag on. Both, however, can be seen as "a continuum that offers heuristic tools for translators to cope with the different cultural aspects in the translation process" (Abderraouf 2019:81), and not to normatively ascribe to the two concepts the binary opposites of being good and bad. A good translation could possibly contain features of both domestication and foreignisation.

### **Gods, Translatability and Intercultural International Relations**

The name or word 'God/'god', absent in the original Greek and Hebrew biblical scripts, is mostly traced to old English 'god', derived from proto-Germanic 'got', German *Gott*, which is of uncertain origin, perhaps from PIE \**ghut-* meaning, among others, "that which is invoked" (Liebermann 2015, Etymonline); Originally a neuter noun in Germanic, the gender shifted to masculine after the coming of Christianity and the translation of the Gothic Bible from the Greek in the 4<sup>th</sup> century by Bishop Wulfila (Hatto 1944, Liebermann 2015). The modification made on the Proto-Germanic *got* aligns it with Judeo-Christian monotheistic and monolatry conception of God as the supreme and ultimate supernatural Being, who created all things and besides whom there is no other 'god' (Mbaegbu 2015, 140). Literature on divinity recognize the term God as the supreme or ultimate reality, but more generically, god, as any being with more than natural attributes and powers that receives worship and/or which may have control over a specific aspect of reality. Germanic religion was both polytheistic and pantheistic comprising a pantheon of many gods rather than a single one, many of which were anthropomorphic nature deities. Being a form of nature worship in which everything was full of goods, water, spring, stream and river, mountain, tree and plant, air, wind and storm were evidence of divine powers friendly to man or superterrene forces and powers against him (Tenbrock 1979, Gerrish 1987, Eke 2013).

Key deities included *Odin (Wodan, Woden or Wotan)*, the chief deity, god of wisdom, magic, war, and death. He sacrificed an eye for knowledge and was associated with ravens and runes; god of wisdom and war; *Thor (Donar)*, god of thunder and protection. Armed with his hammer *Mjölfnir*, he defended humanity and the gods from chaos; *Tyr*, god of justice and war, known for his sacrifice

of a hand to bind the wolf Fenrir; *Freya*: goddess of love, beauty, fertility, war, and magic of the Vanir pantheon, receiving fallen warriors in the afterlife in her hall, *Folkvangr*; and *Frigg*: goddess of marriage, prophecy, and motherhood of the Aesir pantheon, wife to Odin, There were other deities like *Loki* (a trickster), *Balder* (a god of light), and numerous local or nature gods tied to rivers, forests, and household life (German Culture, 2025). The names and specific attributes of these deities vary between tribes and regions. Germanic gods are, however, not immortal and while there was a chief god (*Odin* or *Wod(t)an*), he was not supreme and almighty. This fluid, myth-focused religion emphasized the cyclical nature of the world, the importance of fate, and was characterized by rituals, local cults, and rich burial practices like ship or wagon burials.

Traditional Igbo religion is 'Monopolytheistic' comprising the worship of one and many gods in which "One Supreme Being and the many gods that receive sacrifices, prayers and petitions in Igbo land either on their own or carry the same to *Chi-Ukwu* (the Greatest Chi or Spirit) who is the ultimate recipient of the essence of all sacrifices"(Mbaegbu 2015, 144). Major God/gods in Igbo culture include *Chukwu* (the Greatest Chi), *Chi* (Personal god), *Amadioha* (the thunder god), *Ala* (the Earth goddess), *Ekwensu* (trickstargod, devil), *Anyanwu* (the sun god), and *Ikenga* (god of personal strength, achievements, success, and time). Besides, there are many other deities and spirits in the divinity landscape. Some of these deities may have different names according to Igbo regions.

The significance and relevance of the gods of cultures in translation and intercultural communication/relations interests this study. In identifying the prompts of intercultural translatability in ancient states and empires, Assmann (1996) notes that one of the reasons for the tolerance of foreign religions was the sealing of international treaties by solemn oaths invoking the gods of both parties; and the gods which names were invoked have to be "necessarily equivalent as to their function and in particular to their rank" (Assmann 1996, 26). This role of the gods made theology a concern of international law. Thus while the names of the gods of the various cultures and religions may differ as a result of the untranslatability of the names, the specificity and equivalence of functions must be well established; and the functional comparability of gods in the various cultures became an important metric for the political and social standing of cultures in international law and relations. This establishment of commonality among gods of the various cultures in interaction helped to forestall the ascription of potentially harmful negations on the other culture due to difference and to mitigate the effect of firmly fixated cultural otherness through

the “elaboration of absolute strangeness, isolation, avoidance and even abomination” (Assmann 1996, 270).

Aguilar-Moreno notes that the victory of the colonial conquest was marked by the destruction of indigenous religions and their gods; “The Spanish conquest and colonization of the American continent involved the destruction of diverse indigenous cultures and the imposition of a new culture on the defeated . . . The pre-Columbian peoples both in Mesoamerica and the Andean region had a deep ancestral religion that the Spanish suddenly questioned and eventually destroyed.” (2016, 87). In Africa, Displacing African gods through conquest, particularly by colonial powers and missionaries, involved a spiritual and psychological war that aimed to destroy indigenous identities and systems of belief by replacing ancestral deities with foreign, Abrahamic ones (Abba and Onunkwo 2016). This process was carried out by devaluing African traditions as demonic or savage, renaming and reinterpreting deities, imposing foreign religious education, banning rituals, and even using forced conversions as leverage for land and services, ultimately leading to the marginalization and suppression of indigenous spiritual practices (Kanu 2021).

The cultural conflicts and power asymmetries established between European and African cultures during colonialism persist overtly and covertly in the postcolony. Western cultural hegemony continues to dominate, weakening and incorporating African cultural values and institutions. Consequently, there are continued struggles against colonial marginalization and domination on the side of African cultures.

### **Translating the gods**

*Arrow of God* (AOG)<sup>1</sup>, the third in the trilogy of Chinua Achebe’s African postcolonial narratives, being richer in depth and details of Igbo culture and traditions reinforces the first, *Things Fall Apart* (TFA)<sup>2</sup>, the African classic that launched African culture into the global cultural and narrative space and contextualizes postcolonial narrative discourse between Africa and the Euro-America/the West. The novels, set in Igbo traditional past, are a harmony and coherence of the mosaic details of the Igbo African cultural identity set to refute the insidious Euro-American

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1. In the analysis, AOG is used in internal reference for the Arrow of God source text: Achebe, Chinua (1964)

2. TFA is used in the internal reference for the Things Fall Apart Source Text: Achebe, Chinua(1958)

claims that Africa had neither Language, culture nor history. African gods are part of the cultural components of this identity. A culture's gods provide insight to its mythical explanation of existence and mysterious nature, articulate its perceptions of the universe, underpin its worldviews, establish its cosmologies and connection to the divine will, and detail the beliefs and values that form the bases of behavior, unity, and collective action of its people, (Olivadese 2025, En Tong Au 2025). Five gods of the Igbo purposively sampled from TFA and AOG and their translations into German are hereby examined. These gods are *ChiUkwu*, 'Chi,' *Ala*, *Amadioha*, and *Ekwensu*. The three translations of TFA into German by Richard Moering (Achebe 1958/1959), Dagmar Heusler and Evelin Petzold (Achebe 1958/1983) and Uda Strätling (Achebe 1958/2012), and the single translation of AOG into German by M. von Schweinitz and Gudrun Honke (Achebe 1964/1994) are used alongside the original source texts for the study.

### **Chukwu**

In TFA (143-144), the Igbo deity *Chukwu* is detailed in a cross-cultural conversation on religion between the white missionary to Umuofia, Mr. Brown, and one of the great men in the neighbouring village to Umuofia, Akunna. Akunna introduces *Chukwu* as the Igbo equivalent of the supreme God, who made heaven and earth in Mr. Brown's Christian religion. Akunna adds that *Chukwu* "made all the world and the other gods" to which Mr. Brown protests asserting that there are no other gods. Akunna explains that the other gods are in the service of *Chukwu* as intermediaries between *Chukwu* and humans just as analogously the colonial District Commissioner in Igboland is in the service of the queen of England.

*Chukwu*, correctly spelt *Chi-Ukwu* (also referred to as *Chineke*, *Obasi*, *Olise*). All three major German translations of TFA retain the Igbo word *Chukwu* as in the source text namely Moering (Achebe 1958/1959, 198-199), Heusler and Petzold (Achebe 1958/1983, 197-198), Straetling (Achebe 1958/2012, 195-196). This translation by direct borrowing is certainly in agreement with a widely accepted procedure or technique in translating whereby proper names of persons and the names of gods of cultures, which are part of the cultural landscape and are artefacts of their cultures are untranslated (Newmark 1982, 70; Hermans 1988, 13; Farahzad 1995, 43; Hervey, Higgins and Loughirdge 1995, 20-24; Assmann 1996). This technique foreignises the source names to the target readership. The conversation around the deity in the text provides the rank and identification of *Chukwu* among Igbo deities.

Besides the explanation provided by the narrator in the source text, short in-text explanations occasionally occur in all the three target texts. However, Heusler and Petzold, and Straetling have glossaries in their separate translations; as footnotes in Heusler and Petzold, and as endnotes in Straetling. These glossaries are translator interventions that mediate meaning, and how the target reader interprets, understands and views the source culture. Uda Stretling includes a glossary entry on *Chukwu* thus:

Der Begriff, den die christlichen Missionare übernahmen und unter dem die Igbo heute im Allgemeinen »Gott« verstehen. Der Igbo-Forscher Donatus Nwoga wendet allerdings ein, die Vorstellung eines einzigen, höchsten Gottes sei ein letztlich westliches, christliches und fremdes Konzept. Chukwu wird auch als *obasi* bezeichnet, dieses Wort und auch *chineke* haben in etwa den gleichen Bedeutungshof. (Achebe 1958/2012, 232)[The term adopted by Christian missionaries and by which the Igbo today generally understand "God." However, Igbo scholar Donatus Nwoga argues that the idea of a single, supreme God is ultimately a Western, Christian, and alien concept. Chukwu is also called as *obasi*; this word and *chineke* have roughly the same meaning.]

The glossary entry of Straetling ambiguously suggests that the Christian white missionaries gave the Igbo the name of their God, *Chukwu*. An ambiguity which Mbaegbu contests in asserting “A thorough examination of the metaphysical assumptions of the Igbo and their world view will inevitably reveal that their assumptions were not the constructs of the people who were their colonizers or from whom they migrated (2015, 144). The Igbo believes in a supreme being who is the causality of existence. The Igbo call Him by various names which designate His essence, omni-attributes and manifestations among humans most notably *Chi-Ukwu*, (the Supreme supreme Spirit/Being). He is also called, *Chineke*, i.e. Chi (the Spirit)-na (that)-eke (creates), and *Osebuluwa* or *Olisebuluwa*, i.e. *Olisa* (God), *bulu*(carry) and *Uwa*(world) - *the Spirit that carries the world*, *Obasi di n’ elu* (*the Lord who is above*) - the Supreme Being who carries and sustains the world. Besides and arising from this supreme God are lesser spirit and non-spirit beings namely gods, ancestors, spirits, man, animals, inanimates (the elements – earth, air, water, fire), etc “through whom he replicates his potency” (Ezeugwu and Chinweuba 2011, 27, 43, see Kanu 2018 on Chukwu). The German translators avoided a comparative functional translation of the Igbo *Chukwu* with a German god. However, in this case, it could be argued that the German chief god, Odin, is not in the rank of the Igbo supreme and immortal Spirit that created all things including the other gods.

## Chi

The narrator of the Okonkwo story in TFA relegates the observation that Okonkwo's achievements and successes in life are not entirely due to luck but more the result of determination and hard work for proverbially "When a man says yes his *chi* says yes also". (TFA 19). In AOG (136), the white man's messenger, a stranger to the clan, is led to the house of Ezeulu, chief priest of Ulu, the communal deity of Umuaro, by a young man of Umuaro while the chief priest's friend, Akuebue, was visiting. Ezeulu answers to the turn of the conversation to how a complete stranger could have found the compound of the chief priest with the proverb "No matter how many spirits plotted a man's death, it would come to nothing unless *his personal god* took a hand in the deliberation". *Personal god* is Chinua Achebe's transliteration of *chi* in his novels in the effort to make this unusual Igbo deity somewhat understandable to the foreigner.

The three translations of TFA have translated thus: Moering (Achebe 1958/1959, 34) "wenn ein Mann »ja« sagt, auch sein *Chi* »ja« sage [When a man says yes, his *chi* says yes also]; Heusler and Petzold (Achebe 1958/1983, 35) "wenn der Geist und die Tat eines Mannes übereinstimmen, dann ist auch sein persönlicher Schutzgott nicht weit" [When the spirit and the act(ion) of a man concur, then his personal guardian god is not far away]; and Strätling (Achebe 1958/2012, 45) „wenn ein mann ja sagt, auch sein chi ja sagt“ [when a man says yes, his *chi* also says yes]. Schweinitz and Honke renders the AOG source text thus, "Wieviele Geister es auch immer sein mögen, die beschließen, daß ein Mensch sterben soll, sie haben keinen Erfolg, wenn *sein eigener Gott* nicht bei der Sache mitspielt" (Achebe 1964/1994, 166)[However many spirits decide that a man must die, they will not succeed if *his own god* did not take part in the plan]. (Emphasis mine).

*Chi* in Igbo metaphysics of being is the spiritual double of the physical person with whom the physical person is in a steady but complex web of relations in the journey to destiny (Chukwukere 1983). The *chi* is simultaneously separate and the same with its physical double. *Chi* is conceived as a chip of Chiukwu; the sustaining essence of Chiukwu (Okpala 2002). The individual person does not have absolute possession of the *chi*, though it belongs to him or rather is assigned to him by Chukwu and *chi* is not also a guardian of the physical individual in the nature of the western concept of guardian angel (see Eke 2023); for a *chi* can orchestrate the destruction of its physical person; Unoka, Okonkwo's father is narrated to be an 'ill-fated' man "he had a bad chi or personal god, and evil fortune followed him to the grave, or rather to his death, for he had no grave"(TFA p.14).

In the TFA translations, Moering and Strätling retained *chi* untranslated using the literal and borrowing techniques that foreignise, while Heusler and Petzold have elaborated on what the respective ‘yes’ [ja] in the proverb supposedly mean, omitted the *chi* name and explained the deity to be ‘*personlicher Schutzgott*’ [personal guardian god] most presumably transferring the epithet of guardian from ‘guardian angel’ or patron saint of the Christian faith known to the target readership to the *chi* deity. These translation techniques of omission and providing meaning (‘interpretive elaboration’) somewhat domesticate the *chi* to the target readership considering especially that the translation not only ignored the complexity and mystic/mystique of personhood inhabiting the *chi*, it also degraded the Igbo deity to a mere spirit by ambiguously associating it to angels, who in the Christian religion are only “ministering spirits’ (Hebrews 1, 4), (Eke 2023). The translation also replaced the Igbo *chi* with a non-Igbo deity. Strätling further glossed *Chi* thus “Ein zentrale Figur im Glauben der Igbo ist das *chi* als personlicher Schutzgeist, der das Schicksal eines jeden bestimmt“(Achebe 1958/2012, 228) [A central figure in the Igbo faith is the *chi* as a personal guardian spirit that determines the fate of each individual]. The glossary entry of Strätling, which partially domesticates *chi* by implicitly associating it with guardian spirit/angel, ignores the complexity of causality in the relation of *chi* and its physical double, a man can say yes, even when his *chi* is, in the least, hesitant and his *chi* will agree with him “Okonkwo said yes very strongly; so his *chi* agreed” (TFA 1958, 21).

Schweinitz and Honke in AOG translated literally within the restraint of Chinua Achebe’s descriptive transliteration of *chi* from the Igbo as ‘personal god’ and avoided the pitfall of Heusler and Petzold (Achebe 1958/1983) and Strätling (Achebe 1958/2012), whose rendition as ‘personal guardian god/spirit’ degraded and misrepresented the Igbo deity, *chi*. Thus a man can as well influence his *chi* and determine or, in the least, codetermine his destiny by resilient will and hard work

German traditional religion has an equivalent of the Igbo *chi* called *Ichheit*, which is borne in the linguistics of the name “German/Germanen” (German/Germans). It roughly compares functionally with the Igbo *chi*. This mystical/mythical individuality in German cosmology is the divine presence in the individual by which the individual produces the causality of his destiny. It is “both immortal soul and spirit that proceeded from and ultimately would go back to the *Ur* (God); for it is a piece or a ray of God” (Eke 2023, 5-6, see List 2005[1920]). The German translators possibly

did not find any functional equivalent to both deities of traditional Igbo-African and German-European.

### **Ani (Ala) – the Earth goddess**

In TFA, Achebe (1958, 116-117), the white man with his co-evangelists and Igbo interpreter arrived Mbanta village. In his first outreach to the community, he tells them of the one true God that lives on high, who they must forsake their false gods of wood and stone to worship. An old man asked him “which is this god of yours, *the goddess of the earth*, the god of the sky, Amadiora of the thunderbolt, or what?”

Ala (Ani) is the foremost supernatural female force in the Igbo pantheon of gods; the goddess of fertility, custodian of Igbo morality and tradition in cooperation with the spirit of the departed, venerable and deified ancestors, to whom she is home in the underworld; for they are buried in her womb (Chukwumah 2015, Ele 2019, Aneh 1993). She is believed to have been created the only daughter of Chiukwu, and is the wife of Amadioha, Chiukwu’s minister of justice (Kanu 2021), and the ‘all-seeing’ preserver of the moral code and tradition as well as the arbiter of *Nso-Ani* – the code of ethical beliefs and practices, morals, norms and taboos necessary to maintain the dynamic equilibrium existing between the various spheres of Igbo cosmic perception. (Aguwa 1993, Chukwumah 2015).

Moering (Achebe 1958/1959, 160-161), “Erdgöttin” [Earth goddess], Heusler and Petzold (Achebe 1958/1983, 162), “Erdgöttin” [Earth goddess], and Strätling (Achebe 1958/2012, 161) “Göttin der Erde” [goddess of the earth] have all translated *Ala* literally as earth goddess true to the source text. Strätling included a gloss on *Ani* – „Ani ist hier eine Dialektvariante des Namens der Erdgottheit Ala, höchste Inkarnation des weiblichen Prinzips; Ezeani ist ein verbreiteter Igbo-Familiennamen“ (Achebe 1958/2012, 228); [Ani is a dialect variant of the name of the earth deity Ala, the highest incarnation of the feminine principle; Ezeani is a common Igbo surname]. By including the Igbo name of the goddess in the glossary, Strätling achieves a full foreignisation of the name in the translation.

The narrator’s elaboration on *Ani* as the ‘goddess of the earth’ without the mention of her name in this particular text unit builds on the already introduced name of the goddess in TFA (14, 23-24.). The literal translation of the goddess here and the additional glossary entry of Strätling are

considered adequate to intercultural communication except for what the translations would not add, a functional comparative ‘allusion’ to the German goddess of fertility, Freya.

### **Amadioha (Amadiora, Kamalu)**

Amadioha is the Igbo god of thunder and lightning and Chiukwu’s minister of justice, believed to be the created son of Chiukwu and the husband of Ala. He ensures that the natural order as set by *Chukwu* is not upset, that *nso-ani* is enforced, and avenges the anger of Chiukwu on the wicked especially for secret and undetected crimes (Kanu 2021). The etymology of the name Amadioha comes from two conjoined words ‘Amadi’ (title for a freeborn man) and ‘oha’(community or people), meaning – man of the people and shows this deity as standing for the collective will of the people or as the god who speaks for the people.. His symbol is the white ram and a man carrying a sledge hammer. Amadioha is also known as the sky god and embodies “justice, community will, and divine power” (Ezeme 2025).

In TFA (40), the narrator describes the wrestling match between two seeming equally matched contestants, Ikezue and Okafo, that would end in a draw when Okafo takes advantage of a miscalculation by his opponent and responds as “quickly as the lightning of Amadiora” to throw Ikezue down. The figurative expression “quickly as the lightning of Amadiora” idiomatically means “in a flash”, but contains metaphoric allusion to Amadiora, the Igbo god of thunder. The translators render the expression literally as “Rasch wie Amadioras Blitzstrahl” in Moering (Achebe 1958/1959, 58) [Fast as Amadiora's lightning], “blitzschnell, wie ein Blitzstrahl Amadioras...” in Heusler and Petzold (Achebe 1958/1983, 60)[Lightning fast, like a flash of Amadiora's lightning], and “Schnell wie der Blitz des Amadiora...” in Strätling (Achebe 1958/2012, 68) [Fast as the lightning of Amadiora]. The borrowing translation technique is appropriate here; for it preserves the name and allusion to an Igbo god. Strätling further included a glossary entry on Amadioha to assist the readership’s comprehension of the source culture; “*Amadiora*: Donnergott, die Entsprechung zu Shango bei den Yoruba (oder zum germanischen Thor)” (Achebe 1958/2012, 230) [*Amadiora*: God of thunder, the equivalent of *Shango* among the Yoruba (or the Germanic *Thor*)]. The functional comparison with the Germanic god of thunder and lightning, *Thor*, is instructive here within intercultural postcolonial communication and relations.

## **Ekwensu**

Ekwensu is a major deity in the Igbo pantheon ranked alongside Amadioha, Anyanwu, and Ala. He is the created son of Chukwu and the god of war, chaos and violence, and of bargains; very crafty at trade and negotiations (Kanu 2021, 64). He is thus the patron god of warriors and a desired accomplice for victory in tough negotiations (Udoye 2011, 46). Ekwensu is invoked during times of conflict and war and banished during peacetime to avoid bloodshed which it always incite in the community. In Igbo traditional thought, Ekwensu “is that ontological mysterious violent force which when aggravated or invoked could be effectively used either for good or destruction” (Ekwunife 1995, 76). He is said to possess people who are quick to anger. He was a force of chaos and change and ruled over the wicked spirits and the chaotic forces of nature. Death was its perpetual companion. (Metuh 1981). As Kanu (2021, 65) elaborates:

Whenever an unfathomable act of evil is committed by someone considered incapable of such a crime, possession by *Ekwensu* is a common explanation. Without excusing the person’s conduct, this attribution of the origins of such criminal depravity to a superhuman power allows the Igbo to acknowledge that there are some levels of inhumanity humans cannot reach on their own.

This Igbo deity is starkly different from Satan or devil of the Christian faith (Onah, Uwaegbute and Eze 2024, 6)

In AOG 14-25, the clan of Umuaro sends an emissary to the clan of Okperi to present to them the options of peace and war over a piece of land both clans lay ownership claims. The fiery tempered Akukalia, whose mother hails from Okperi, with two accomplices, was the emissary. Unfortunately, Akukalia and the two young men accompanying him came to Okperi on Okperi’s market day – the Eke Okperi, in which the elders of Okperi could not be summoned to receive the very important and urgent message from Umuaro. Udueze, Otikpo and Ebo were three men Akukalia and his companions met in Okperi. In the bid to force a summons of the elders of Okperi by Akukalia, a bitter argument ensued and Ebo, seemingly unaware of the truth of his insult, called Akukalia ‘a castrated bull’. Maddened by shame and pain, Akukalia rushed into Ebo’s Obi, took his Ikenga from the family shrine, rushed out and split Ebo’s Ikenga into two. Ebo was aghast at the sight of his split Ikenga. In anguish, and desperation, Ebo reached for his gun, loaded it and shot Akukalia to death. The narrator relays that “what happened next [the tragedy] was the work of Ekwensu, the bringer of evil” (AOG, 24). Later, Umuaro might have not pursued the case of

Akukalia's death and perhaps the whole land dispute also "as Ekwensu seemed to have taken a hand in it" (p.25)

Schweinitz and Honke translated the text literally, borrowing the name of the deity into the target text "Was dann geschah, war das Werk Ekwensu, das Unheilstifters" (Achebe 1964/1994, 35)[What happened next was the work of Ekwensu, the mischief-maker] and "Umuaro hätte es dabei belassen, und vielleicht wäre der ganze streit um das Land damit erledigt gewesen, da anscheinend Ekwensu seine Hand im Spiel hatte"(Achebe 1964/1994, 35)[Umuaro would have left it at that, and perhaps the whole dispute over the land would have been settled, since Ekwensu apparently had a hand in it]. Furthermore, Schweinitz and Honke has a glossary of terms and the entry on *Ekwensu* reads "Name des Teufels" (Achebe 1964/1994, 278)[Name of the devil], which is an imposition of the Christian religion's devil on the Igbo deity and a displacement of the Igbo god. The glossary entry could have explanation on who and what Ekwensu is in the Igbo culture and even further functionally compared the close resemblance to the Germanic god, *Loki* (the god of mischief, trickery, and chaos, blood brother of the chief god, Odin. *Loki* is neither fully good nor evil).

## Conclusion

Five Igbo deities purposively selected from two classics and postcolonial literary works of Chinua Achebe, TFA and AOG, have been analysed translationally and interculturally within the framework of Lawrence Venuti's domestication and foreignisation theoretical translation approaches and intercultural postcolonial communication and relations. The five Igbo African deities have been translated using literal and borrowing translation techniques, which mainly foreignise the names of the Igbo gods to the target readership. However, the interpretive-elaboration intervention techniques used by the translators to describe and explain the deities in the glossary overtly or implicitly domesticate the deities imposing the meanings, values, and perceptions of the target culture on the Igbo African gods.

Except in the translation of the Igbo African god, *Amadioha*, by Udah Strätling where functional commonality is established between it and the Germanic god of thunder, *Thor*, there is no functional association made, partially or wholly, between any other of the Igbo African gods and any of their Germanic counterparts. Whereas the translation in some cases did impose the

Christian-western religious alternatives on the understanding of the Igbo African gods to the target reader, it will not associate Igbo traditional deities with their traditional German counterparts.

The dual strategy of imposing Christian-western religious alternatives on the Igbo deities and dissociating them from their functional and rank equivalents in traditional German religion belie the asymmetry of postcolonial communicative relations where African traditional religious epistemologies and meanings are erased and replaced or miniaturized and overshadowed with Christo-western alternatives and, in this instance, the German European traditional deities are also distanced and protected in their ‘primitive sacredness and superiority’ from comparative functional association with traditional their African equivalents.

The non-establishment of comparative functionality and rank between the Igbo African deities and their traditional German equivalents and the imposition of Christo-western alternatives on the Igbo gods in the translations show the regard of African religion and cultures in the translations to be inferior to the Christo-western cultures in international intercultural textual relations. Though the translators ‘may not’ have been deliberate in distancing the two cultures and may have prioritised other considerations and challenges in the translating process, the validating of postcolonial inequalities in intercultural relations between African and euro-western cultures is a major outcome of their translations of the Igbo deities.

Although foreignisation and domestication approaches have been applied at varying degrees in the translations, the unequal use of the domestication approach in the glossaries, undermined the full value of foreignisation envisaged by Lawrence Venuti and has not led to equal and democratic intercultural relations in translation communication.

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