

The Missionary Question in *Things Fall Apart* and *The Color Purple*

by

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Abstract

The Christian missionary as the harbinger of colonialism in Africa has been given critical attention in Chinua Achebe studies. On its part, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* has been seen as bearing the experiences and existential vagaries of African Americans in America. However, the complementary nature of Christian missionary activities as represented in both works has missed critical interest despite that in *The Color Purple*, we are offered in a substantial measure textualised missionary activities, which to readers is an unexpected and curious version of the diasporan involvement in the presumed purely white civilizing and Christianising mission to Africa. Through postcolonial and close readings that focus on the categories of outside/inside perspectives of origin and identities and the problematic of sameness within contrast involving the narrators and some characters, the relationship of complementarity of the Christian missionary venture in both texts is bared. It concludes that the complementary nature of this venture in re-informs and questions at the same time the discourse of (post)colonialism through offering a paired and somewhat alternative view to a conventional African representation of the missionary question in African literature, ascribed to the white man alone.

Keywords: Chinua Achebe, missionary venture, *The Color Purple*, *Things Fall Apart*, Alice Walker, Nigerian literature; African American literature.

Did I mention my first sight of the African Coast? Something struck in me, in my soul, Celie, like a large bell, and I just vibrated. Corrine and Samuel felt the same. And we kneeled down right on deck and gave thanks to God for letting us see the land for which our mothers and fathers cried – and lived and died – to see again (149).

Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*

In history the Christian missionary venture in Africa has received enough mention and documentation. Few aspects of this documentation, commerce, religion, and imperialism as well as the complex interrelationships of these concepts and their consequent bearings on the spatio-temporal landscape of Africa have attracted polemical debates and contributions. Continuing to be manifest as a hangover, missionary activities have been represented in discourses, especially those pertaining to how the gospel was disseminated and what accessories went with it.

One person, in the missionary ventures in Africa, whose footprints on the sand of time will remain indelible, was Dr. David Livingstone. He advocated for the simultaneous engagement of commerce and Christianity. Ross, a reverend minister like Livingstone and one who has made notable contributions to Livingstone scholarship, says more of him:

Livingstone's apprenticeship in southern Africa enabled him to reshape Philip's famous definition of the missionary task as Christianity and Civilisation, to include Commerce as the third 'C'. So when he took off to the north in 1852, he arranged that George Fleming, a trader, should go with him. It was legitimate commerce and Christianity that were going to save Africa's peoples both from their degraded and degrading cultures and from the even more destructive power of the slave trade. For in Livingstone's eyes even degraded African traditional culture had some virtues that the slave trade and slavery threatened to destroy. . . . If Christianity and legitimate commerce were the key to the uplifting of Africa's peoples, then central Africa with its dense population had to be opened up to them – all the more urgently because of the threat of the Portuguese and Swahili slave trades. The need to bring this about dominated the rest of his life and cannot be separated from his deep Christian faith. As he understood it Christian mission could not be limited to the work done by missionary societies ("David Livingstone").

Following his ideal, Livingstone earned a reputation of having been critical of the European colonial venture and brutality in Southern Africa. As a substitution for these, he suggested that "commerce" should go with "Christianity" by which he meant honest trading going together with missionary activities. However, he might have meant something honest, at least, in theory and, to himself alone, in practice. But, one impediment to be taken to heart with regard to everyone practicing his theory is that future generations would definitely outlive and outsize his dreams.

Though Ross believes that he was misrepresented and that he never meant the arid mercantilist notion that pervaded Victorian England and the then commercialized world (“David Livingstone”), Porter, a Professor of History at Kings College, London and author of *The Origins of the South African War: Joseph Chamberlain and the Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1895-1899* (1980), holds that this slogan of Christianity going together with honest commerce begun by Livingstone was short-lived (597-621). Anyone in this century of materialistic global commercial village, who knows better, will suspect that the reality backing up this slogan would not hold out for long. Today, we have not just the traces of, but a much more pervasive culture of, commerce and commercialization that began with the Industrial Revolution, a penchant for which was inimical to the missionary venture as will be observed in the analysis of *The Color Purple*.

This fairly long discussion of Livingstone and the discourse of missionary venture in Africa is an important one. It serves as context, overtly or otherwise, for the missionary question in (pre-) colonial Africa which *The Color Purple* and *Things Fall Apart* echo. A word should be said about the above context. Dr. Livingstone seems to be lacking the capacity for ethnocentrism [the powerful’s justification of the imposition of their culture on those they classified as inferior (Dobie 209)], othering [viewing those different from oneself as inferior (210)], and demonic othering [the dominant culture seeing the ‘other’ as evil (210)]. Having emerged from a dominant culture, he should not have surprised anyone if he exhibited his superior stature flagrantly by seeing the other culture as evil, in which case, the brutality meted to African people by his countrymen would have been justified by him. Of course, this does not mean he never attempted to other the African subject; only that his was not from the angle of cheerless othering, uncharitable dismissal, and disparagement from the perspective of Eurocentric superiority. His othering was a different sort – from the Judaeo-Christian religious stance where Christ’s love is the model for all his dealings with African people, before whom the powerful justified the imposition of their own culture on those they deemed to be lesser in status – “the subalterns of imperialism” (Spivak 84). The concepts of othering, demonic othering and ethnocentrism, which Livingstone almost totally escapes, on one hand, on the other, will guide the postcolonial critical approach of this article, implicitly and explicitly. Bhabha is one of the most highly renowned figures in contemporary post-colonial studies and currently in Harvard University, where he is Anne F. Rothenberg Professor of English and American Literature, African-American Studies and Culture. He declares that in the “construction of otherness,” “sign of cultural/historical/racial difference” is brought to play (18).

The Color Purple was read as representing the enhancement of the strength of its two major characters through the epistolary form (Wall 83-97); as exhibiting its characters’ emotional growth (Ross, ‘Selfhood’ 69-84); as positing the repression of women by religion and culture and the freedom arising from the rejection of these (Hall 89-97); as a comparative analysis of the archetype of rape between one of its major characters and Philomena in Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* (Cutter 161-80); and as representing gender designation and sentimentality (Warhol 182-87). On the other hand, a character like Okonkwo, in *Things Fall Apart*, has come under close scrutiny (Elder 58-64 and Jeyifo 847-59). Okonkwo and Ikemefuna as well as the problematic of guilt are examined by Opatá while the existential vagary of the Igbo in a new order engages Wise’s attention (71-79; 1054-70).

From the critical studies on both texts, the missionary question has been largely passed over. Although Quayson, a Professor of English and the inaugural Director of the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies (CDTS) at the University of Toronto, Canada, who has published extensively in the areas of postcolonial studies and cultural theory, African Studies and in diaspora and transnationalism, examines the missionary question, he does this through the prism of the traditional figure of feminism and the dialectic nature of the text's relationship to the real (Quayson 117-36). Mackenzie, born and raised in Africa, and has brought his experiences to bear in his widely published researches on the colonial and postcolonial condition with regard to church work, discusses the missionary venture from an economic angle when he states that, "in return for adherence to Christian doctrine, the church offers explicit routes for individual economic advancement" (128-38). By this, he means that there was success, especially with respect to Achebe's work, but where the missionary issue was discussed, it was seen as one of the vestiges or accompaniments of colonialism.

From the above studies, one learns that no critical study, by and large, has been carried out on the hierarchy of identities that allow meanings to emerge from the hidden depths of both texts, nor on the mutual complementary form of these texts as regards the missionary question. Out of the many distinguished literary works representing the reminiscences of Africa in the diaspora, only *The Color Purple*, devotes a substantial part of its plot to the textualising of missionary activities. It turns out to be offering readers the unexpected and curious version of the diaspora involvement in the presumed purely white civilizing mission to Africa, the sort of account found in Mongo Beti's *Poor Christ of Bomba* (1956) and others. With *Things Fall Apart* referred to as the catalyst of African literature and as a foremost documentary literary evidence of the colonial ventures in the 'Dark continent' (George 448; Emenyeonu xiii), I judge that it would make scholarly sense to read it against the *The Color Purple* using the above concepts in order to disclose how these works, at once, implicate and help hierarchies of identities to appear on the front burner. In effect, the wide Atlantic gulf separating both the African and the American continents is somehow linked up in the textual unities found in both texts.

Unlike historical discourses, they nonetheless offer ostensive representations of missionary activities which will interest literary critics when their complementary and dialectical natures are investigated because they re-enlighten and interrogate the discourse of (post)colonialism by offering an alternative perspective to a conventional African focused representation of the missionary venture in African literature which have always presented the view that this project was undertaken by the white man alone to the exclusion of others – both native and diasporic African peoples. Reading both works this way, we discover, somewhat, the problematic of the existing simple outlining of the 'successes' and 'failures' of the (ad)venturing missionaries.

Despite the synonymy of both works to missionary literature, as hinted earlier, they also possess statuses of difference in comparison to historical discourses of the missionary question – thanks to the immanent features of literary works of art. As literary art, possessing characters and the relationships amongst them, some helpful categories used in conjunction with the postcolonial critical concepts earlier mentioned enable one to see the relationship between the missionaries and the indigenous peoples.

The first is the outside/inside perspectives of origin and identities of the narrators and some characters in the two texts. The second category is the deep semantics of imagery whose vibration rapidly aids, complicates and frustrates, at the same time, the missionary question, and in the case of Celie in *The Color Purple*, enables the gradual but progressive awareness of the external world with the crucial end of imbuing the texts with meanings. In the long run, these meanings, *accessed through close reading and the others*, accentuate the status of complementarity of both texts. In analyzing all these, I will keep outsiders who are not missionaries and who are not aiding or involved with the missionary ventures out of view.

In locating the origins and identities of the narrators of both works, it categorise the narrators, through whom we see the events, as belonging to the racial groups of their authors either as black or white, without adducing proofs from the texts as it discloses identities and motivations behind the actions interpreted. The authors are indisputably self-evident, but are the narrators so? Textual evidences will help to unveil them. The narrator of *Things Fall Apart* is sympathetic to Okonkwo and seems to have been conversant with Okonkwo's activities long before the white man came. For this reason, he is an African – probably, Okonkwo's contemporary, a fact that sets him in opposition to Achebe, when the latter is taken as the narrator. On the other hand, the epistolary narrative technique of *The Color Purple* gives the answer away that the narrators are African Americans. One hurdle remains - are they Walker's contemporaries?

The narrator in *Things Fall Apart* presents the missionary question to us in two systematic and overlapping ways such as through Obierika's visits to Okonkwo and through the missionary venture at Mbanta, where Okonkwo was having his exilic stay. The visits, as spicing interludes of Okonkwo's years of exile, also are a technical device that gives an offhand view of the state of affairs in other places amongst the Igbo clans thereby seeking, though without obvious obligation, to explode Okonkwo's frame of mind that his mother's place and clansmen, by allowing the missionaries a space in their clan, are women. They also deflate the privileging of Umuofia in Okonkwo's view which remotely kick-starting the upward ascension of the emotional torture that culminates in his suicide.

The same grid of ascension runs in the people's emotional reception of the missionaries who, relatively, but far removed from Livingstone [at best, his is charitable othering], were Eurocentric: from mere jocular and teasing uneasiness to utter hate and disdain, leading to the state of chaos and the burning of the mission church. The sense of strangeness and disdain in which the Umuofians hold the missionaries bespeak the nature of persons they are, at least, to the Umuofians – as strangers who have come from outside. Attitudinal evidences abound to this effect. First, the white man on his arrival is given the Evil Forest to build his 'shrine', that is, his church. Second, he is laughed at. Third, he is seen as not fit to have fellowship with, especially as he regards the disregarded of the Umuofia community. Four, he has to go preaching to them from house to house to get them to come to his shrine. The second receptive attitude – his being held in derision – begets the fourth. The sum of these attitudes is that he first attracts the *efulefus*. These are the charlatans, the *osus* and the disregarded in Umuofia clan. They were people whose identifying imagery is given in the mould of "a man who sold his matchet and wore the sheath to battle" (Achebe 101).

As the priestess of Agbala, Chielo, categorises them, the converts are “the excrement of the clan” while the new religion is the “mad dog that had come to eat it up” (101). Later, he wins some nobles. The same attitudinal difficulty is encountered in *The Color Purple*. Nettie gives us an outsider’s attitude of another missionary toward the Olinka’s the people she came to evangelize, albeit unsuccessfully, after twenty years, “she thinks they are an entirely different species from what she calls Europeans . . . she says an African daisy and an English daisy are both flowers, but totally different kinds” (Walker 142).

Ethnocentrism, othering – demonic othering (its swap, charitable othering) – and mimicry are intricately lumped together in what a subject expresses. We observe this interweave in the missionary Nettie speaks of. This missionary approximates Christianity to European civilization and personalizes it when Livingstone depersonalizes it. To her, Christ is an item of European cultural superiority and Christianity is a European civilization. Furthermore, if African people must be perceived, it must be through the window of this narrow background. Though she is not a colonizer, an administrator, but a missionary, who ought to be guided by an a colonial and positively differing ethic of charity as the Bible holds, she presents herself as a specimen of one who puts into practice the concepts of ethnocentrism and othering half-way, that is, without really looking down disdainfully on the subject being othered. The consequence of this is that, in her hands, the concepts became extended, adding a new dimension to how else it can be manipulated and applied by the Other in his encounter with African people in literature.

Just as the identities of the narrators locate their origins as insiders perceiving outsiders, as observable in *Things Fall Apart* and as outsiders perceiving insiders in *The Color Purple*, so also do the major characters’ identities indicate their origins. Through these identities, one sees more clearly the historic-temporal incidents that constitute the places where they are, accounting for, to a large extent, the tragic twist and frustration in both works. These identities privilege and support the problematic of the missionary question and the aporetic make-up of some characters, such as the Samuels – including Nettie – in *The Color Purple*, the white missionaries amongst the Igbo clans and the autochthonous members of those clans in *Things Fall Apart*.

The outrage provoked in the entire Igbo group by the ‘capture’ of Ogbuefi Ugonna, a titled man, by the missionaries and the joining of the *efulefus* to the church is not so much for the colonising mission as for the negative perception they hold of the white man, regarded as a stranger and an outsider. Here, ethnocentrism is encountered, accessed, and assigned a place in the native’s worldview which it resists, at least, given the contexts of both works. As a Eurocentric outsider, spreading the germ of individualism co-occurs with the outsiders’ religion. It is in the mood of every person in Umuofia, but Obierika seems to be the one that phrased it poetically by saying, “He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart” (124-23).

This was after the same Obierika called them “these strange men” (101), a remark establishing the position that stands in a dialectic relation to the reverence in which the Umuofians hold their tradition, the tradition of their fathers. It points to the white man as an outsider, and because he is seen as an outsider, he is underrated. To this end, the white man as an Other directs his labours to the African person to make him recognize his status as a superior person on African soil.

From this situation of mutual Otherness and the identities that situate the origins of major characters of both works, another weighty issue arises which accentuates the representation of the missionary question in *The Color Purple*: the Christian missionaries that are racially not an Other but geographically an Other. It is the case of the insider indeed coming in as an outsider, one whose archetype as missionary is rare in African literature. To further the characterization of this Other, I will begin by saying what this Other, represented as the Samuels in *The Color Purple*, is not in African literature. The Samuels do not look like the “band of ordinary men like us” (98), recognised by Obierika in his reference to the protégés of the white man – coolies, servants, cooks, and teachers. These minions are all strands of the Other, an outsider. The female arm of this group in contemporary Nigeria is described as a people who are “able to see the invisible,” who have “recourse to the sacred,” and are “coworkers with God” (Ogbu 165). The Samuels are not what Ezeulu has in mind when he sent his son to learn the white man’s ways in *Arrow of God*. They are not Father Higler who has come to banish darkness from the people through the means of Christianity in Obinkaram Echewa’s *The Land’s Lord*. They are not also like Okoli, who kills a sacred python in Mbanta to show off his zeal of his new found faith. They are not the sort of persons who unmask (‘kill’) an *egwugwu*. What then are they? Here lies the complex status of the Samuels in *The Color Purple* and the reason the success of their missionary venture is scanty; as Samuel says, ‘we failed so utterly’ (Walker 241). The Samuels come from outside – the Americas, or they are those who once left inside – Africa, for outside, only to return to the same inside, the Olinkas of Africa, from diaspora, in the mould of Livingstone to erect structures that will produce religious mimic men.

The outsiders of *The Color Purple* vigorously contrast with the outsiders of *Things Fall Apart*: the missionaries and their protégés, baring essential differences. One area where this is apparent is in their attitudes and the roles played by the burden of memory on some characters. For instance, in *The Color Purple*, because of the peculiar status of the Samuels as belonging to a special Other, as they neared mainland Africa and seeing its coast, while on the deck of the ship conveying them, they kneel down to worship God:

Did I mention my first sight of the African Coast? Something struck in me, in my soul, Celie, like a large bell, and I just vibrated. Corrine and Samuel felt the same. And we kneeled down right on deck and gave thanks to God for letting us see the land for which our mothers and fathers cried – and lived and died – to see again (149).

Even Dr. Livingstone, no matter how good-intentioned he was, could not have felt this much. In this realization of nostalgic dreams and yearnings of generations in the children of this moment is the distinctive feature of the identity of the Samuels which excludes them from, and includes them with, other missionaries. It also explains why they are not really held in high esteem in America before they set forth; why they are not really regarded by fellow missionaries in Olinka; and why they are held in suspicion and are seen as bearing ‘spoilt’ civilization amongst the Olinkas. From their peculiar identity, theirs is really a difficult situation! Here, engaging in charitable othering in order to espouse mimicry is bogged down and set in quandary.

Another difference within sameness, though not of identity, but linked to it in both works, is in their missionary styles, which are motivated by the lens through which the natives are viewed – demonic or charitable othering. Even between these, there are degrees of differences. The Samuels’ style is a little bit permissive – they drink palm wine and are allowed to be entertained by the roofleaf ceremonies which were outlawed and banned outright by the last missionary. Contrasting the former, that is, the white missionaries in *Things Fall Apart*, who see their venture as a moral or Christian obligation their conversion obliges them, the latter do this with the highest degree of care and love. We glean this from Nettie when she says that the Missionary Society of New York “did not say anything about caring for Africa, but only about duty” (Walker 142). Theirs is an identity-directed purpose. Again, while in *The Color Purple* the church is separate from government, in *Things Fall Apart*, the church is somewhat the harbinger of the government of the day. In this, what seems to be gain to the missionaries of *Things Fall Apart*, turns out as a loss to the Samuels because of government distancing and, later, disruption.

The Samuels’ missionary venture, compared to those of *Things Fall Apart*, is an utter failure. If anything, it is the commerce that went with Christianity, a veritable and valuable accessory in *Things Fall Apart* that hindered the missionary venture in *The Color Purple*. This means with missionary work comes merchandise; with Christianity comes commerce; or in the words of Dr. Livingstone “legitimate trade.” But how far this legitimacy is going to be followed, long after Livingstone was gone is only a matter of prediction considering how difficult it was for slavery, that human historical dent hugely rooted in demonic othering, to be replaced. But it is much clearer in literature. The Olinkas, happy when the road construction begins, are to be sad forever. Their ancestral lands are not like the roofleaf that grows again. We hear Nettie say, “Our church, our school, my hut, all went down in a matter of hours . . . the whole territory, including the Olinkas’ village, now belongs to a rubber manufacturer in England” (175). The Olinkas have been translated to labourers, “clearing the forests on each side of the road, planting rubber trees” (175). The white man doing all this is not alone, “he has brought his army” (176), turning the missionary field into a mercantilist field. The same situation obtains in *Things Fall Apart*, where things uneconomical quickly became essential economic goods, setting in motion the gradual erosion of the autochthonous cultural life of the people as the commercialization of all things gains foothold. We hear the narrator’s lament, “the white man had indeed brought a lunatic religion, but he had also built a trading store and for the first time palm-oil and kernel became things of great price, and much money flowed into Umuofia” (Achebe 126).

The growing enthusiasm of the Umuofians contrasts the frustration of the Samuels agitating the simple notion that the missionary venture in Africa was a success. Here is how Nettie reports Samuel's self-confession of their dismal outing:

It seems so improbable, he said. Here I am, an aging man whose dreams of helping people have been just that, dreams. . . . TWENTY YEARS A FOOL OF THE WEST, OR MOUTH AND ROOFLEAF DISEASE; A TREATISE ON FUTILITY IN THE TROPICS, Etc. Etc. We failed so utterly (Walker 241).

The Samuels are not alone in this failure. There also are other family members, such as Althea and Aunt Theodisa, who have also gone belly up in their missionary ventures in the Belgian Congo. One last thread of difference between the Samuels and the missionaries of *Things Fall Apart* is that the former are able to go to such a mission partly through the generous donation of African Americans members of over a hundred churches in New York on account of their love for Africa. These members could defend Africa "with a drop of a hat" unlike the missionaries of *Things Fall Apart* who have solely the support of their missionary society (142). The donors' love, devotion, and sacrifice to the Samuels' enterprise, qualifying as an advancement of the course of charitable othering, did not pay off in the long run.

Though the Samuels are the inside come back again from outside, while the white missionaries in *Things Fall Apart* are the outside entirely, both groups of missionaries bear interfaces of similarities that may appear to blur areas of contrasts existing between both texts. In these interfaces, demonic and charitable othering cancel out themselves, as the principle of universal love, the love of man for his fellows, gradually becomes visible. In *Things Fall Apart*, the killing of twins is stopped by the missionaries by rescuing them when they are thrown into the Evil Forests. Of course, like the missionaries of *Things Fall Apart*, those of *The Color Purple* also work hard to abolish murder, twins-discarding and other revolting activities such as killing a wife for committing adultery. For example, Nettie tells us that amongst the Olinkas, a woman could be killed if accused of adultery or witchcraft – something that rests on some code of morality which even the Bible and literary works such as Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* give credence to; but "thank God (and sometimes Samuel's intervention) this has not happened" since their arrival (Walker 172). Yet there are points where this relationship gets complicated, what I call the outside-outside complication of the two texts which is more pronounced in *The Color Purple* – missionary against missionary. Figures of white missionaries in *Things Fall Apart* and those of the African Americans appear to be stewing in attitudinal complications that tend to dishearten the latter. Nettie states,

My spirits sort of drooped after being at the Society. On every wall there was a picture of a white man. Somebody called Speke, somebody called Livingstone. Somebody called Daly. Or was it Stanley? I looked for a picture of the white woman but didn't see one. Samuel looked a little sad too, but then he perked up and reminded us that there is one big advantage we have. We are not white. We are not Europeans. We are black like the Africans themselves. And that we and the Africans will be working for a common goal: the uplift of black people everywhere (143).

Out of this fix and complication of identities, the Samuels are determined to overcome the challenge and achieve success.

Moreover, excepting few distinctions, the Samuels and Rev. Brown could be categorised as being alike, in approaching the mission of othering through the mission work. But the Samuels' are more down-to-earth than any missionary in *Things Fall Apart*, at least, in seeing their flock as one of their own. When Samuel has time for self-reflection, he makes some gravely penetrating statements towards this end and the anguish caused by lack of understanding:

The Africans never asked us to come, you know. There's no use blaming them if we feel unwelcome. . . . they don't even recognize us as the brothers and sisters they sold. . . . we love them. We try every way we can to show that love. But they reject us. They never even listen to how we've suffered. And if they listen they say stupid things. Why don't you speak our language? They ask. Why can't you remember the old ways? Why aren't you happy in America, if everyone there drives motorcars? (Walker 243).

Their failure is depressing, compared to the missionaries of *Things Fall Apart*. Yet, much is deposited in it, such as a burdened speech resulting in hierarchies of identities. Perhaps, sameness of colour may have contributed immensely to this as could be deciphered from above, but even at this, one is reminded that the white woman in *The Color Purple* who dies a year before the Samuels' arrival and who was living miles away, recorded less successfully. She could not boast an appreciable missionary feat capable of dwarfing the Samuels'.

The understanding of the structure of difference within sameness amongst the missionary groups in both texts and the illumination it has brought to the outside-inside relationship and the impact of the African world on them as people who were not granted entrée could be further enhanced by a commensurate analysis of the same structure of contrast in identities and othering processes within the two missionary groups in both works. Within the nucleus of the sameness of the insiders coming into Africa as outsiders, that is, the Samuels, there is difference, revealing a dilation of identities, both as a unit and as individuals. In *The Color Purple*, an all-black composite unit, "a family", as Nettie says, comes to Africa (33). But within this unit and with its irrefutable characteristics of sameness and singleness of purpose, "missionary work in Africa", for which they "feel they were born" (133), Nettie represents a difference inasmuch as, primarily, she is a teacher and not a preacher, offering subsidiary services to the furtherance of the overall goal.

Again, she is not related to the Samuels by blood. Here, we have a situation one is disposed to term difference in sameness. Besides Nettie, there is the paradox of belongingness of Samuel's and Corrine's children: Adam and Olivia, to Samuel's nuclear family. Only Nettie knows this at a time. What she thinks is 'Christian charity' in the adoption and care of Celie's two children, has, in actuality, been paid for, having been sold to them by Pa (182). They are her niece and nephew.

It must also be noted that the missionaries in *Things Fall Apart* cannot be excused from also having their nucleic differences within sameness – the sameness and motivation of purpose. Differences exist between Rev. Brown and Smith, on one hand, and amongst the lackeys of both white missionaries – African people, on the other. Within the latter, a difference within sameness is detectable, specifically between the court messengers and the overzealous Umuofians and Mbantans – the likes of Nwoye, Okonkwo's son, Enoch, the unmasker of a masquerade in Umuofia, and Okoli. In the case of the former set, a brief illustration is needed. Mr. Brown, the narrator confirms, "was firm in restraining his flock from proving the wrath of the clan" (Achebe 126). This earns him respect "because he trod softly on its faith" (126). In contrast to Mr. Brown, his substitute, Rev. Smith sees this as permissiveness and backsliding. He inaugurates a detour to Brown's policy of "compromise and accommodation" by proclaiming that the prophets of Baal must be slaughtered (130). Whilst Okoli, in his overzealousness, kills a sacred python in Mbanta and dies for it, Enoch replicates similar offence by unmasking an *egwugwu* and survives; his is a survival that must lead to the death of a noble, Okonkwo. On that Sunday, the *egwugwu* have been persuaded to retire for a short while so that Christians could go to church when he boastfully fulfils his threat of unmasking (*killing*) an *egwugwu*. The consequence? The church built by Mr. Brown is burned down. Somewhere else, too, the court messengers, who are lackeys of the white man and who "were greatly hated in Umuofia because they were foreigners and also arrogant and high-handed" (123), carried on with the same attitude of brashness leading to Okonkwo's suicide. Both are the same in the mission of begetting religious mimic men; only that one believes it should be done discretely and the other, counting on the colonial administration's support, conceitedly. The consequences of these differences in sameness, especially, in perceiving the other, are tragically far-reaching inasmuch as even with the supposed racial prestige the white man enjoys, an issue of note throughout African literature and, especially, in the texts being analysed, the white man is still known or referred to as superior to African people. He is always seen as a stranger, an *outsider*. Of course, he occupies a somewhat elevated profile in *Things Fall Apart*. But he does seem to exceed Obierika's word, *clever*, a term that could naively be picked up as suggesting superiority.

The tragic twist in *Things Fall Apart* hinges on this condition of strangerhood, the perception of the newcomer as a stranger. Like Samuel said, the Olinkas "don't even recognize us as the brothers and sisters they sold". This understanding leads to their summation that they never noticed them in the same manner the Umuofians never really 'noticed' the missionaries until their strangerhood and difference emerged conspicuously.

So when the twin force of colonial government and the missionary activity tries to plane out this difference via ensuring an uninvited assimilation and subjugation, whether as demonic or charitable othering, an unhelpable catastrophe is in the air in *Things Fall Apart*. Thereafter, the catastrophe is thus quickly set in motion and could hardly be rolled back until it culminates in Okonkwo's fall. His fall, therefore, is figural in that it signifies the fall of the old order and the values this order represents.

Besides the category of contrast within sameness and sameness within contrast both within and between these two texts and their impacts on the missionary question, there is another category – a subterranean vibration of imagery, the cognate perceptual codes borne from the Other's sphere of discourse. It is the unseen baggage from yonder shore, which strangers' coolies can never help him with, but which aids and also tends to frustrate the missionary venture in these works despite their belonging to different literary traditions. In *The Color Purple*, these indispensable notions are: God, the roofleaf, while in *Things Fall Apart*, complicated images of Jesus, the Son of God, God, and effeminacy are locatable. The last is derived from the word: *woman*. From Livingstone to the Samuels, in both texts, the perceptual prism, a form of superstructural lens, is God. In *The Color Purple*, it is the roofleaf and other deep semantic imagery about which opposing parties, marked by varying identities, hold opposing views. God and roofleaf refer to supernatural beings in both texts. While the second only acquired its image through a circumstantial incidence in *The Color Purple*, the former is a universal super-being which the cosmology of *Things Fall Apart* recognizes as Chukwu, a dense concept, related to Jesu, the son of God. It is the igniter of discourse between Mr. Brown and Ogbuefi Akunna. It is also the resonant image Celie collapses into the image of man in *The Color Purple*.

Beginning with the image of God, we hear Celie say, "the God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgetful and lowdown" (Walker 199). But Celie uses a linguistic item – "mens" – her background of inferiority and borderline-life supplies her. The same linguistic unit shows up again as Ballard articulates Christian missionaries' perception of what African people worship as "Black Mens God" (197). One would say that the God-image is very problematic. From Nettie's end, we observe her struggling to set up a pantheistic worldview when at the end of narrating the roofleaf ritual of the Olinkas to Celie, she collapses the roofleaf to Jesus Christ (an aporetic image in *Things Fall Apart*) and to God by concluding that, "We know the roofleaf is not Jesus Christ, but in its own humble way, is it not God?" (160). To Celie, a woman seems to be opposed to man, the being she has approximated to God. She gives off the image of the feeble before the strong.

But this image of effeminacy and all that it represents: cowardice, feebleness, frailty, fragility, delicateness and so on, pulsates from beneath in *Things Fall Apart*. The woman image, or say that of a wife, is what disrupts the logic of the missionary's argument in *Things Fall Apart*, when he says Jesu Kristi is the only Son of God who died to save mankind from sin. It is a major reason why they are held in derision and never taken seriously by Okonkwo. It seems tenable to assert that the more reflective characters of *Things Fall Apart* are the very set of characters that exude nobility and the sense of underrating the white man. And one finds a pointer to this from Okonkwo's argument with the missionary:

“You told us with your own mouth that there was only one god. Now you talk about his son. He must have a wife, then. . . . The missionary ignored him and went on to talk about the Holy Trinity. At the end of it Okonkwo was fully convinced that the man was mad” (103). Okonkwo agitates the ‘logic’ of the alien faith, and by extension, the mission of charitable othering, by presenting a superior commonsensical biological logic based on rationality and which was lamely and evasively ignored by the missionary. This is where one of the most vibrant provocations of the crisis that rocks the work is located – this holding of one’s own ethnocentrism while seeking to disrupt the unity of principle in the Other’s encroaching perceptions and actions. With a disparity in intensity, it is also manifest in both works.

Amongst the insiders of both works, the concept of the saviour strengthens this ‘holding on to one’s own ways’ as it also smears the turgid lines of differences between insiders and outsiders. Unlike the Olinkas whom the roofleaf delivers from utter annihilation of draught and harsh elements in *The Color Purple*, the Umuofians never needed to be protected or ‘saved’ and delivered from sin by any saviour. One of the persons who holds this view is, again, Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*. Umuofia could deliver itself from the clutches of this foreign power, Okonkwo believes, for which he dares but he is isolated for doing so. The roofleaf is a complicated image: the roofleaf is, first, seen as ordinary vegetation and, later, as God by the singular spectacular act of preservation of a dying community. It is God; the Olinkas, in tacit resistance to the Other, equate it to the missionary’s God to which the missionaries – the Samuels, have no superior logic to counter like the Umuofians have, at least not in the text, *The Color Purple*.

Whether God is worth equating is another issue altogether for some other probes. But mattering for now is that the same logic that works with the Olinkas in equating it to a benevolent element of nature also appears to be working in Celie in equating it to another element – a malevolent element of nature in Pa, and therefore, man as a species of God. And contrary to the Olinka’s God, the roofleaf, who answers when prayed to, Celie has this to affirm: “when I found out (that God is white) I thought God was white, and a man, I lost interest. . . . he don’t seem to listen to your prayers. Humph! Do the Mayor listen to anything the colored say?” (202). This means that the God she knows, like the man she also knows, answers no petition.

The hard-heartedness of the mayor toward the plights of the coloured people in the text shows he is like God as Pa, Harpo, Mr. ___, Grady and others. That which is abstract is made concrete by these comparisons. Going by this negative attribute, there is the natural inclination to seek for alternatives. Hence, Shug lectures that “God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God” (202). As evidenced by Celie’s letters, an examination of the lives of religious people like Samuel and Nettie would reveal that their God does not, in due course, answer prayers.

The purpose of the Umuofians and the Olinkas, in this war of logic, to dismantle the Other’s sense of unity as they guard their own is later continued, at a larger scale and different realm, by the physical presence of the colonialists in *The Color Purple*. Samuel’s and other missionaries’ goal of “helping people” (242), is hereby dealt a severe blow by the construction of a road *en route* Olinka to the hinterland.

As an image of impoverishment through an external agent, since the road dislocates the natives' system of worship and truncates the missionaries' mission of *helping people*, appears to echo Celie's approximation of man to God and God to man, in that, no help from this agent of dislocation is forthcoming when help, succour, and solace, in times of pain, are grimly needed. Hacking into the Other's logic and the rejection of pleas are here connected. So the Olinkas, despite myriads of pleas are encroached upon, dislocated and displaced. With their lands taken, they become tenants in their own lands. No prayer is heard; no petition is honoured; and no provision is handed out. Perhaps, the only explanation for all these, despite several approximations to the God image, is that he is inscrutable.

The image of inscrutability is related to this image of God, as a nonlistening hearer of prayers. The God image resides at the very heart of the conflict that inhibits mutual assimilation of both the outsiders and insiders of both texts. A hint of God's inscrutability is evident in the discussion had between Brown and Akunna. Akunna refers to him as being very majestic and awe-inspiring, the reason sacrifices are given to smaller gods so they could approach him in *Things Fall Apart*. Then, Mr. Brown replies: "In my religion Chukwu is a loving Father and need not be feared by those who do His will. But we must fear Him when we are not doing His will," and said Akunna" (Achebe 128). To which Akunna picks up: "Who then is able to know his will" (128). This is not answered by Mr. Brown, leaving a gaping rift in worldviews between them. This inability to bridge the fissures in worldviews that hugely cement their identities is significantly responsible for the turn of fortune and impediments to the missionary ventures in both texts.

Nonetheless, the Olinkas seem to have succeeded where the Umuofians failed – that is if Okonkwo, by virtue of being a leader and possessing a reductive logical knack, could serve as its figure. Now, the lack of this reductive logical power does not extinguish the missionary activity in *Things Fall Apart* while its presence in the Olinkas does not make the missionary venture of the Samuels successful. Here, in literature, we meet a dead end, a cul-de-sac where different strands of complications seem to be equally valid and competing for attention in their own rights for the elucidation, aiding, and frustration of the complementary nature of the missionary question of *Things Fall Apart* and *The Color Purple* keeping in view the presumed simplistic 'success' of the missionary ventures or in Dr. Livingstone's articulation of the 18th century evangelical mission that legitimate commerce could go hand in hand with Christianity in a critical endeavour of improving Africa. We meet in *Things Fall Apart* and *The Color Purple* with a dismal falling short of the spirit of Livingstone's conceived and cherished notion, the marriage of convenience between charity and othering in making African people Christians within the context of colonialism, wider sphere of demonic othering and ethnocentrism.

To sum up, the belied working of postcolonial critical concepts as ethnocentrism and othering (also enlarged as *charitable* othering as opposed to *demonic* othering), the complementary nature of the two texts regarding the missionary question indicate, in the interaction of characters, a key issue often overlooked in the critical studies of these two works.

This article has teased out the subtle (post)colonial attitudes underlying the ventures undertaken in Africa under several guises, while offering an alternative perspective to a conventional African focused representation of the missionary venture in African literature where the white man alone has always been seen to have undertaken this venture to the exclusion of others. In showing this complementarity, the two broad categories resorted to for analysis, are: the outside/inside perspectives of origin and identities of the narrators and some characters and second, the profound subterranean imagery of both texts. In the first category, whereas in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, it is the white man that comes with a Christianising mission from outside, an outright outsider, whereas in Walker's *The Color Purple*, fellow blacks from outside, but racially and originally from inside, serve as veritable associates of the missionary effort. There is therefore a problematic of contrast within sameness and sameness within contrast amongst the three spheres of human identities in both texts: namely, the white man, indigenous African people and the 'homecoming' of the African-American missionary group. The three form a triangle of mutual interrelationships. One discovers in the second category that the complementary status of the missionary question and the superstructural and text-based formations of characters and the hierarchy of their identities these elicit are prodded by the subterranean vibration of imagery that aids, frustrates, and complicates complementarity just as it problematises the 'successes' and 'failures' of the missionary venture. In effect, we are asked to rein in our traditional views and knowledge about the missionary venture in Africa and examine the issues in their permissible ramifications in literature before making our judgments.

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