

REPRESENTATIONS OF STRANGER IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART* AND CHIGOZIE OBIOMA'S *THE FISHERMEN*

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Abstract: The concept of stranger has long been debated in social sciences and humanities in terms geographical and linguistic differences. The stranger is then often then- if not always- presented as a person originating from another area or community. Consequently, he perceived as an enemy and treated as the 'other', that is, different from oneself. This is known in literary criticism as alterity or otherness. Fortunately, writers from both the first and latest generations, such as Chinua Achebe and Ngozie Obioma question this one-legged dimension of the concept respectively in *Things Fall Apart* and *The Fishermen*. The main objective of this research is to revisit the traditional representation of stranger in African literature. In this respect, Edward Said's version of postcolonialism, orientalism and Claude Duchet's method, sociocriticism, provide the necessary tools to investigate and find out new connotations of the word 'stranger' in precolonial African communities as well as colonial and postcolonial ones in the novels under study. The death and exile of characters, who embody this one-sided representation of stranger, shows that exclusion has never been the prevailing rule in human communities.

Keywords: stranger, alterity, orientalism, sociocriticism.

ECRITURE DE L'ETRANGER DANS *THINGS FALL APART* DE CHINUA ACHEBE ET *THE FISHERMEN* DE CHIGOZIE OBIOMA

Résumé: La question de l'étranger a fait l'objet de plusieurs débats en sciences sociales et humaines en terme d'appartenance géographique ou linguistique. L'étranger est alors souvent, pour ne pas dire toujours, présenté comme une personne originaire d'une autre communauté. Par conséquent, il est perçu comme un ennemi et traité comme l'autre, différent de soi. Fort heureusement, des écrivains, aussi bien de la première que de la dernière génération, comme Chinua Achebe et Chigozie Obioma s'interrogent sur cette représentation unijambiste du concept d'étranger dans leurs oeuvres respectives *Things Fall Apart* et *The Fishermen*. L'objectif du présent article de revisiter la conception traditionnelle de la notion d'étranger. A cet effet, la critique postcoloniale dénommée l'orientalisme d'Edward Said et la sociocritique de Claude Duchet, nous ont permis de déceler les différentes constructions de l'étranger dans l'Afrique précoloniale, coloniale et postcoloniale dans les oeuvres qui constituent le corpus. La mort et l'exil des personnages, qui incarnent le rejet de l'étranger, montre que l'exclusion n'a jamais été la règle dans les sociétés humaines.

Mots-clés : étranger, altérité, orientalisme, sociocritique.

Introduction

The French word 'étranger' is often translated into English as foreigner, stranger or alien. Whereas foreigner is "indeed endowed with a legal meaning: it refers to a person who is not a citizen of the country in which he resides." (Kristeva, 1991: 41), stranger is associated with the unknown, the unfamiliar, a distinction between self and the other. As for alien, it commonly means "belonging to a different country, race, or group, usually one you do not like or are frightened of"¹. No matter the translated version used, the three concepts raise the question of location to make a clear difference between someone who is at home and another person who is not a member of this home. Popescu, quoting the anthropologist Mole (1972), makes a clearer distinction stating that "*home*, is a place for exercising ownership...whereas *away*, though a similar place, is the possession of another"². Therefore, *Home* is for the native whereas *away* is used for the stranger/foreigner/alien. Space fuels scholarly debates on the concept of stranger/foreigner/ alien in social sciences and humanities where the latter is perceived as the other, someone different from self, and treated accordingly. For example, Tzvetan Todorov in his research documents distance as a source of rejection and persecution of the Persians. In this respect, Todorov refers to Herodotus, the ancient Greek historian, as the founding figure of cultural differences as he writes:

« Among the other peoples, they respect, after themselves, their close neighbors, then the latter's neighbors, and so on, according to the distance separating them; the most distant peoples are for them the least worthy of respect: as they consider themselves the most noble people from all points of view, the others' worth ranges for them according to the rule in question and the most distant nations also seem the most despicable. » Todorov (1999 : 243)

In this paper, the concept of stranger is preferably used to embrace the three English word. The stranger's perception as the other also pertains to the relationship between African literature and European one because the former is referred to as the non-native literature. That is why it is known under different names like 'anglo', 'franco' and luso and the suffix 'phone' to designate colonised people's literature'. Phillipe (2012) denounces this categorisation she names 'ghettorisation' of the writer in exile in a foreign land. Backing Phillipe, Gayatri Spivak terms this demarcation between Africans and Europeans as the Other versus the other where "the Other corresponds to the coloniser and the other is the colonised. (Aschroft et al, 2007 :156). Nonetheless, the coloniser was not exempted from this categorisation on the colonised land either :

« Dans les textes littéraires où circulent personnages occidentaux et personnages africains, en effet, nous croyons pouvoir percevoir de part et d'autre et à dimensions égales, des sentiments d'étrangeté, de déchirure, de frustration de la perte, et des attitudes de repli et de synthèse face à la culture étrangère... chaque groupe vit l'action de l'autre comme une étrangeté, un scandale et surtout comme une menaçante expérience qui déracine les convictions anciennes³. » Abossolo (2010: 2)

¹ <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/alien>

² POPESCU Corina Daniela, "Several Representations of the Foreigner in Romanian Popular Epics Notes for a Folkloric Imagology" https://diversite.eu/pdf/12_1/DICE_12.1_Full_Text_p107-p118-Corina-POPESCU.pdf, p.110

³ My English translation : "In literary texts where both Western and African characters are featured, it is believed to perceived equally from both sides feelings of strangeness, of being torn apart, frustration from loss, withdrawal and synthesis before the foreign culture...each experiences the actions of the other as an oddness, a scandal and above all a threatening situation that uproots old convictions."

Clearly, no matter what power relations are, a person outside his own territory is always treated differently. However, in Africa, the word stranger carries various connotations. Chinua Achebe and Chigozie Obioma, though both Nigerians of Igbo origin from different generations in terms of birth and literary career, enlighten the reader on the traditional African perception of strangers and the different transformations this concept undergoes from colonial to postcolonial times respectively in *Things Fall Apart* and *The Fishermen*. The main research question is to find out how Achebe and Obioma construct each strangeness and otherness/alterity. This research question is subdivided into two sub-questions: who is a stranger in Africa especially in Igbo and Yoruba communities in the novels? Is alterity still relevant in characters' daily life? The hypothesis sustaining this study is that Achebe and Obioma employ the word strangers in different ways in *Things Fall Apart* and *The Fishermen* to deconstruct its primary interpretation. The main objective of this paper is to revisit the traditional representation of stranger in African literature. In this respect, Edward Said's version of postcolonialism, orientalism, and Claude Duchet's method, sociocriticism, provide the necessary tools to achieve this objective. The paper is twofold. In the first section, a typology of strangers in accordance with African realities is discussed. In the second, the stranger as the other; alterity/otherness, is explored in both novels.

1. The Stranger in Igbo and Yoruba communities.

Fictional narratives function as a mirror of the communities where the writer himself lived. Achebe grew up in his Igbo hometown, Ogidi, in southeastern Nigeria whereas Obioma was brought up in Akure, Yorubaland, in Ondo State, in Southwestern Nigeria. For this reason, the story in each novel under study is rooted respectively in Igbo and Yoruba culture and traditions at a specific time. Therefore, narrative spaces, characters' names, beliefs, and themes in the novels reflect Igbo and Yoruba's fears and aspirations, etc. It is then quite impossible "to find a work of literature that get rid of the approaches and values of the(*sic*) life, as no writer has been brought up entirely unexposed to the world around him." (Khan, 2021:79) Every fictional narrative has then a social dimension which is the purpose of Claude Duchet's sociocriticism as Cros writes:

"Sociocriticism aims to bring out the relations existing between the structures of literary (or cultural) work and the structures of the society in which this work is deeply rooted. This theory claims that the encounter with ideological traces and with antagonistic tensions between social classes is central to any reading of texts." Cros (2011:32)

Inspired then by the story of the Whiteman's intrusion into Igbo and Yoruba communities, Achebe and Obioma scrutinise the following thorny issue: who is referred to as a stranger? Generally speaking, in an African context, a stranger is any relative who does not live under the same roof with the person to whom he pays a visit including siblings, grown-up children, parents and relatives, etc. on a visit in their kinsmen's house. This first definition privileges blood as a criterion of membership to a common *home* even if a kinsman lives in a distant land. House is then the place that "necessarily implies nativity, integration through the practice of the native group's custom, a sign of recognition of membership."⁴ As a result, a stranger is a known person, a familiar. Okonkwo, the protagonist in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, during his exile in his motherland, Mbanta, falls into this category of

⁴ POPESCU, *op.cit.*, p.109

stranger as his maternal uncle, Uchendu, explains: "Why is Okonkwo with us today? This is not his clan. We are only his mother's kinsmen. He does not belong here. He is an(*sic*) exile condemned for seven years to live in a strange land...." (Achebe, 2008:106). In other words, Okonkwo is a stranger although he is a grandson in Mbanta. Simply put, Okonkwo is at home; therefore, he deserves hospitality and must be accorded attention and respect. On this basis, in some African communities- for example, in Benin -water is first and foremost given as a sign of welcome to any traveller. Among the Igbos, Kola is offered instead because it symbolises life as Okoye says; "He who brings kola brings life." (Achebe, 2008: 5).

The heterodiegetic-omniscient narrator employs Okonkwo's ostracism from his fatherland, Umuofia, as an irony to ridicule phallogocentric African communities that often claim children's ownership because Fatherland is the *home* where their umbilical cord is buried and the motherland the *away*. Paradoxically, the *away* becomes the *home* when these children experience hard times just like Okonkwo when he inadvertently kills Ezeudu's sixteen-year-old son during the traditional farewell dancing as the narrator recounts: "The only course open to Okonkwo was to flee from the clan.... And before the cock crowed Okonkwo and his family were fleeing to his motherland. It was a little village called Mbanta, just beyond the borders of Mbaino. (Achebe, 2008: 99). Uchendu, Okonkwo's maternal uncle, in his speech castigates this extreme selfishness and intolerance of patriarchal communities.

"A child belongs to its father and his family and not to its mother and her family. A man belongs to his fatherland and not his motherland.... A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness he seeks refuge in his motherland. Your mother is there to protect you. She is buried there. And that is why we say mother is supreme." Achebe (2008:106-107)

Through Obierika, Okonkwo's best friend, Achebe criticises harshly such legal dispositions in African traditions. This is a strategy, as Msiska wrote in the introduction to the 2008's *Things Fall Apart*, to make Africans "understand that traditional religious belief and practices are not a dogmatic orthodoxy- they are open to interpretation..." (Achebe, 2008: iv). Motherland is therefore a symbolism of *home*, a place where one is always given the heartiest welcome. On behalf of blood ties, a child can definitely, sometimes temporally, acquire the status of resident like Okonkwo although he showed up unexpectedly. Okonkwo is given some land on which to build his house, to farm during the upcoming planting season, to install his personal god and three hundred seed-yams to begin his trade. Despite this brotherhood, Okonkwo yields to despair because of his extreme chauvinism since Mbanta is *away* not *home*. For him, his stay in his motherland is like beginning life anew without the vigour and enthusiasm of youth, like learning to become left-handed in old age as Oripeloye wrote "to be in exile is considerably more than being in another country, it is to live with myself knowing my estrangement. It is to know that I do not belong here" (2015: 155). This makes his maternal uncle, Uchendu, like a mother, invite him to be clear-headed as he explains.

"Your duty is to comfort your wives and children and take them back to your fatherland after seven years. But if you allow sorrow to weigh you down and kill you, they will die in exile.... These are now your kinsmen. He waved at his sons and daughters. You think you are the greatest sufferer in the world. Do you know that men are sometimes banished for life. Do you know men sometimes lose all their yams and even their children? I had

six wives once. I have none now except that young girl who knows nor her right from her left. Do you know how many children I have buried- children I begot in my youth and strength? Twenty-two. I did not hang myself, and I am still alive. If you think you are the greatest sufferer in the world ask my daughter, Akueni, how many twins she has borne and thrown away.” Achebe (2008:107)

Uchendu’s words are full of wisdom, they are words of comfort and encouragement that a man in a strange land needs to feel like at home. Interestingly, Uchendu ends his speech with a song people sing at women’s funeral that is more meaningful than his long speech: *“For whom is it well, for whom is it well? There is no one for whom it is well”* (Achebe, 2008:108). The solidarity Okonkwo benefits from his mother’s kinsmen is simply praiseworthy and this does not exclude his own friends. The warm welcome Uchendu extended to Obierika during his visit reflects Igbo communities’ openness towards strangers. Obierika’s visit occurs at the very beginning of the colonial rule where hospitality as a factor of social cohesion is being eroded. Uchendu is heartbroken to see all this happen under his eyes as he tells Obierika: “I knew your father, Iweka.... He had many friends here and came to see them quite often...Your generation does not know that. You stay at home, afraid of your next-door neighbour. Even a man’s motherland is strange to him nowadays” (Achebe, 2008:109).

Another usage of the word stranger in this paper is related to internal migration to refer to the movement of people within the same country for economic, educational, professional or any other purposes as permanent residents. The settlement of the narrator’s Igbo family, the Agwus, in Akure, a Yorubaland in *The Fishermen* is a distinctive feature of African culture as Benjamin says: “Akure, a town in the west of Nigeria, where we had lived together all our lives”. (Obioma, 2015:3) This is evidence that ethnic differences do not matter so much since in Akure, both Igbo and Yoruba live peacefully. A stranger, in this second sense, is then used to mean inter-ethnic cohabitation, which does not rob his nationhood. On behalf of this, in the whole narrative, the Agwus have never been reminded of their Igbo origin. In contrast with European communities where the stranger “takes on all jobs and tries to be tops in those that are scarcest... those that nobody wants but also in those that nobody has thought of...” (Kristeva, 1991:18), in Akure, the narrator’s father, Mr. James Agwu, works in the Nigerian Central Bank and his mother runs a fresh food store in the open market in Akure. Benjamin, the narrator, and his siblings were all born, grew up and attended school there. If not for their names, Mr. Agwu’s children may be assimilated to Yorubas for they speak the language of the community where they are. The Agwus’ full immersion into Yoruba community and culture is an expression of ethnic tolerance and internal mobility in African countries. In a nutshell, African communities are inwardly spiritual for their understanding of community life reflects an Exodus verse on strangers’ integration: “Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him : for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 22, verse 21).

An expression of this can be seen in children’s home training in Yorubaland which is not the exclusive of biological parents’ but the whole community’s business. It is this sense of cooperation among people of the same community despite ethnic differences that make Mama Iyabo reports the narrator and his older brothers’ fishing trade to their mother as the narrator reports: “The woman had seen us.... The woman was Mother’s friend.... When Mother came home that afternoon, much earlier than usual closing time, we saw at once that the neighbour had reported us. Mother was deeply shaken by the weight of her ignorance

despite living with us in the same house..." (Obioma, 2015: 20-22). In short, Mama Iyabo's denunciation consecrates the narrator's family as entire members of the Yoruba community. This, however, does not turn them into Yorubas. *Home* is still Amano located within the Ngwa area of Abia State. The Agwus did not adopt, for instance, Yoruba cultural rites for the burial of Ikenna and Boja although Akure is the place where they were born. The notion of space is then central to the status of a stranger. Simply put, no matter how long a person stays in a strange land, it does not turn him into a native as Popescu quoting Bernea, the Roumanian ethnologist, explains :

"Our people's opinion of the foreigner is extremely conclusive for the significance of location and the problem of space. The man who entered the village, coming from elsewhere, no matter how much he would stay, still remains a stranger. His integration is almost impossible and if it is done, it is only formal, because he preserves the characteristics of the place where he came from. His integration and adaptation are a matter of nature, of substance." Bernea (2005: 43)

The third and final usage of the word 'stranger' in Africa is racial to make the demarcation between Whites and Blacks. Fortunately, Achebe points out this issue to reveal the non-racist dimension of indigenous African communities in contrast with the Egyptian's where the stranger is automatically associated with the image of coloniser as Rachdi confesses "pour l'Égypte moderne... l'étranger... c'est l'Occidental, ... qui s'est installé sur le sol égyptien durant le protectorat britannique entre 1882 et 1922" (RACHIDI Naïma 2014:1). Africans, on behalf of life's sacredness do not subject systematically a stranger to rejection unless the latter is reluctant to social integration. In *Things Fall Apart*, Mr. Brown's social integration in Umuofia is not only indicative of the tolerance of African communities but it also underscores the stranger's ability to win his guest's heart: "Mr. Brown preached against such excess of zeal. Everything was possible... but everything was not expedient." (Achebe, 2008:142). This motto earns him great respect in the clan to the extent that he is presented with a carved elephant tusk during his frequent visits, which is a sign of dignity and rank among the Ibos. This tolerance of the other makes Mr. Brown draws the Igbo elders' attention to the dangers awaiting their future Igbo generations if the clan leaders do not allow their children to go to school:

"Mr. Brown ... prophesied. He said that the leaders of the land in the future would be men and women who had learnt to read and write. If Umuofia failed to send her children to the school, strangers would come from other places to rule them. They could already see that happening in the Native Court, where the D. C. was surrounded by strangers who spoke his tongue. Most of these strangers came from the distant town of Umuru on the bank of the Great River where the white man first went." (Achebe, 2008:144)

Mr. Brown is not only a thoroughly missionary but also a true Christian. Despite Okonkwo's rudeness, he sends his son, Nwoye, to the new teacher training school and pays him a visit as soon as he has learnt of his return. Mr. Brown's humility shows that a stranger "has become within the scope of religious and ethical constructs, a different human being who, provided he espouses them, may be assimilated into the fraternities of the "wise," the "just," or the "native." (Kristeva, 1991: 2). In short, as it is recommended in the Scriptures, indigenous African communities do not favour stranger's discrimination, subjugation or marginalisation: "And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. *But*

the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself ; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt : I *am* the Lord your God” (Leviticus 19 verse 33-34). In contrast, changes in communities have altered the perceptions of the stranger who has become the other, somebody different from self.

2. Alterity in the novels.

According to the online *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, alterity is defined as the state of being or feeling different in appearance or character with what is familiar, expected or generally accepted. In this section, stranger is used to mean the other, that is, the discrimination, subjugation or marginalisation of a person on the basis of his non-membership to a specific group. Whites and Blacks are addressed as strangers to each other. To this end, postcolonialism as a critical theory helps decipher the negation of the stranger in colonial and postcolonial Africa. More particularly, Edward Said's version, known as orientalism, studies the binary opposition between the West and the Orient where the latter is “the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, ... and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other (Said, 1979:1). Orientalist discourse, for Said, is more valuable as a sign of the power exerted by the West over the Orient than a ‘true’ discourse about the Orient (Aschroft et al, 2007:153). Strangeness is also used here to emphasise intra-ethnic oppression, that is, Africans' contempt for their brothers. As for inter-racial representation of the stranger, Mr. Rev. Smith is the incarnation of Whites' perception of the Blacks as a stranger in *Things Fall Apart* on behalf of their skin colour and their pretended civilised mission. Christianity contributed Mr. Rev. Smith's construction of otherness between Whites and Blacks. The narrator expresses it clearly as follows:

“He saw things as black and white. And black was evil. He saw the world as a battlefield in which the children of light were locked in mortal conflict with the son of darkness. He spoke in his sermons about sheep and goats and about wheat and tares. He believed in slaying the prophets of Baal.... Our Lord Himself stressed the importance of fewness. Narrow is the way and few the number.” (Achebe, 2008:147)

Smith's vision is discriminatory and imperialist. For him, traditional African social, political, economic and religious institutions must be erased and replaced by western ones, which, he believes, are more appropriate. This institutional transformation results in the spread of evils such as betrayal, fratricide, tribalism, downfall of brotherhood and unity among Africans. The transfer letter the narrator's father is issued in Obioma's *The Fishermen* is a metaphorical representation of the end of social cohesion in postcolonial Africa as the narrator states, “Whenever I think of our story, how that morning would mark the last time we'd live together, all of us, as the family we'd always been, I begin- even these two decades later – to wish he hadn't left, that he had never received that transfer letter” (Obioma, 2015:6). The rivalry in *The Fishermen* was born out of the encounter of the Agwu's children, Ikenna, Boja, Obembe and the narrator – Benjamin- with Abulu, a madman. Their encounter is a metaphorical construction of the power relations between the West and the Orient which Said explains as follows: “Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.... European gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (1979:3). Obioma himself confesses that the madman's encounter with the children is an analogy to explain the decay in postcolonial African communities.

"It also has a political aspect to it. I wanted to talk about how West Africa – where the boys are from –[...] had everything that was unique in its own way, uniquely African. But the Western people came and said, 'this is inferior, this is barbarian,' and imposed their own way of life. And this is what the madman [Abulu] does to the boys. They are happy people at the beginning of the novel. They all had dreams... and then the madman intrudes."⁵

It is through a prolepsis- Genette's word for prophecy- that Abulu injects fratricide among Mr. Agwu's sons breaking into smaller pieces a once peaceful family: "*Ikenna*, you shall die by the hands of a fisherman.... *Ikenna*, you will be mute.... *Ikenna* you will be crippled.... Your tongue will stick out of your mouth like a hungry beast and will not return back into your mouth, *Ikenna*, you will swim in a river of red but shall never rise from it again" (Obioma, 2015: 83-84). From this day things start to fall apart in Mr. Agwu's family. Ikenna becomes defiant, distrustful and a strange boy as Obembe tells their mother: "Mama, it began the day we met Abulu at Omi-Ala." (Obioma, 2015:77) Abulu's prediction begets alterity as brothers become strangers to one another which the narrator's mother states heartbroken: "Ikenna... and Boja... are strangers now." (Obioma, 2015:101). Finally, Ikenna is killed by his brother, Boja, who later commits suicide by throwing himself into the well. In the aftermath, Mr. Agwu's third boy, Obembe, seeks vengeance by killing Abulu, convinced that he alone is responsible for his elder brothers' tragic death. It is through an allusion that Obembe convinces his junior brother, Benjamin, to join him in his murder plan as it can be read:

"You see, Ben," he said, "the people of Umuofia were conquered because they were not united." The white men were a common enemy that would have been easily conquered if the tribe had fought as one. Do you know why our brothers died?.... "The same way-- - because there was a division between them.".... "Do you why Ike and Boja were divided?".... "Abulu's prophecy; they died because of Abulu's prophecy.".... Abulu killed our brothers. He is our enemy." Obioma (2015:195-196)

Obembe's retaliation highlights the hatred that spreads among brothers in postcolonial African communities. A major drawback of hatred is sectarianism which the narrator exemplifies through his transfer letter. This letter is an opportunity for Obioma to address Nigeria's bipolarisation, that is, North versus South, as legacy of the colonial rule. Benjamin, the narrator gives accounts of his father's narrative on how Igbos are discriminated in Yola, a town in the North where, his father's employer, the Central Bank of Nigeria, has transferred him. Benjamin's report is simply poignant:

"Yola, he reiterated, was a volatile city with a history of frequent large-scale violence especially against people of our tribe- the Igbos. We continued to push him until the bloody sectarian riots of March 1996 erupted. When Father got on the phone, he recounted...how he narrowly escaped death when rioters attacked his district and how an entire family was butchered in their house across the street from him. Little children killed like fowls." Obioma (2015:7)

⁵ Perromat, Prune, *A Conversation With Chigozie Obioma, Literary Show Project*, p 4, in <http://www.theliteraryshowproject.com/conversations/2016/6/26/a-conversation-with-chigozie-obioma>. Consulté le 14 septembre 2017.

There is then no surprise that the first white settlers be classified as true strangers if Nigerians can kill one another. For earliest Africans, the white skin is something unfamiliar and unknown. The unknown, Freud recognises, is terrifying as he states: “on pourrait en conclure que quelque chose est effrayant justement parce que pas connu, pas familier.... Tout ce que l'on peut dire, c'est que ce qui est nouveau devient facilement effrayant et étrangement inquiétant”⁶ (1919:7). Therefore, the encounter of Africa with Europe places each continent in the position of alterity for geographical, linguistic, religious, cultural and civilisation purposes. The first white settlers are then strangers, unknown people whose presence among Africans arouse feelings of fear, anxiety and hatred. On behalf of the terrifying nature of the unknown, African communities relate the inexplicable to the supernatural world, which is of the domain of the deities. This is the reason why Abame elders appeal to the help of the Oracle to understand the origin of the locusts metaphorically referring to the Whites as Obierika recounts: “...it told them the strange man would break their clan and spread destruction among them. It said that other white men were on their way. They were locusts... and the first man was their harbinger sent to explore the terrain” (Achebe, 2008:111). Locusts are known as short-horned grasshoppers; their swarms not only announce rain in Igbo cosmology but they can be insects of ill omen as well.

“Locusts were forerunners: they swarmed Akure... at the beginning of rainy seasons.... For rain healed the land after the dry season.... But the rain would come down with a violent storm...turning whole cities into strange rivers. It would transform the locusts from harbingers of good things into the heralds of evil. Such was the fate that followed Boja's head injury brought to the people of Akure, to all Nigerians, and to our family.” (Obioma, 2015: 128-129)

In Achebe and Obioma's narratives locust swarms have brought respectively colonisation and fratricide. It is through the first colonialist in Abame in *Things Fall Apart* that Achebe elaborates on precolonial Africans' reaction to alterity because the indigenous people have ever seen such a creature as Obierika explains “He was not an albino.... And he was riding an iron horse. The first people who saw him ran away, but he stood beckoning to them. In the end the fearless ones went near and even touched him.” (Achebe, 2008:110). In this case, the white man's skin colour nurtures resentment, suspicions, worries and obviously rejection, discrimination, otherness because of his strangeness. For this reason, their harbinger in *Things Fall Apart* is killed and his iron horse tied to the sacred tree out of fear as in any primitive communities where “the foreigner was an enemy to be destroyed.” (Kristeva, 1991:2). However, Achebe, as a son of an earlier African catechist and having been bred in cartesian rationalism, refutes the white man's marginalisation as the other-no matter its spelling- because the stranger can be sometimes the native's saviour. On this ground, Achebe rejects some traditional beliefs and practices that actually impede Africa's development. This is shown in the triumphant victory of the white man's urbanisation of the 'evil forest' over Mbanta elders' conviction of this forest as a poisonous gift as the narrator mockingly states:

⁶ FREUD, Sigmund. (1919), “L'inquiétante étrangeté”, (Das Umheimliche), Translated from German to French by Bonaparte Marie and E. Marthy, 1933, Québec : Les Classiques des Sciences Sociales, p.7 “ it could be concluded that something is frightening precisely because it is unknown, unfamiliar.... All that can be said is that what is new becomes easily frightening and strangely disturbing,

"The inhabitants of Mbanta expected them all to be dead within four days. The first day passed and the second and third and fourth, and none of them died. Everyone was puzzled. And then it became known that the white man's fetish had unbelievable power. It was said that he wore glasses on his eyes so that he could see and talk to evil spirits. Not long after, he won his three converts." Achebe (2008:120)

Ironically, Achebe uses the new religion called 'strange faith' or 'mad dog' as a shelter and home for marginalised people like the *efulefu*, twins and *osu* who are treated as strangers in their own community. In fact, *efulefu* are strangers due to their lack of physical strength and titles. They are referred to as worthless men whose word is not heeded in an assembly. As for the twins, they are regarded as abomination out of African ancestors' ignorance of the biological mechanism underlying their birth. Obierika is very critical of the twins' sacrifice on the pretense that "Earth had decreed that they were an offence in Igbo communities." (Achebe, 2008:100). The story of Nneka as the first woman converted to Christianity for having born four times twins and forced to throw them for mere superstition is outstanding. As for the *Osu*, their discrimination is historical and religious in the sense they are what would be called "a *kratophany*" in Comparative Religion, a subject or object charged with power of an extraordinary type." (Arazu, 1998:115). An *Osu* is a "person dedicated to a god, a thing set apart – a taboo forever and his children after him. He could neither marry nor be married by the free-born. He was in fact an outcast, living in a special area of the village, close to the Great Shrine..." (Achebe, 2008:125). For an *Osu*, therefore, Christianity is a key to enjoy basic human rights.

Still, very critical of intra-victimisation, Achebe uses the stigmatisation of the white man's court messengers to examine rejection by one's own brothers as it can be read: "These court messengers were greatly hated in Umuofia because they were foreigners and arrogant and high-handed. They were called *kotma*, and because of their ash-coloured shorts they earned the additional name of Ashy-Buttocks." (Achebe, 2008:139). The overzealous court messengers used their position to oppress their own brothers and this does not exclude the titled men who are subjected to degrading work such as clearing the government compound and fetching wood for the white commissioner. The *kotma*'s behaviour strengthens their status as "the Other" and reduces any possible good collaboration between them and the local inhabitants, their brothers and the other.

Furthermore, in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe condemns human sacrifices in rituals, especially the war captives as they are classified as strangers. This, is, indeed a dark hidden dimension of the traditional African communities that Achebe harshly criticises through the execution of a fifteen years old boy, Ikemefuna, from Mbaino, an Igbo community, to appease The Oracle of the Hills and the Caves because his parents are said to have killed an Umuofia daughter, Ogbuefi Udo's wife. The most appalling of Ikemefuna's story is his stay in Umuofia as a member for a long time before being slaughtered like a goat as if captives were animals, winners should breed. The name by which Ikemefuna calls Okonkwo, 'Father', highlights Achebe's displeasure at human sacrifice. It is simply a filicide, which the Umuofia community also condemns. An expression of this disagreement can be seen in the piece of advice the oldest man in Umuofia, Ogbuefi Ezeudu, gives Okonkwo.

"That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death.... Yes, Umuofia has decided to kill him. The Oracle of the Hills and the Caves has pronounced it. They will take him

outside Umuofia as is the custom, and kill him there. But I want you to have nothing to do with it. He calls you his father.” Achebe (2008: 46)

Ezeudu’s opinion is an expression of some African elders’ open-mindedness and their questioning of some traditional laws and practices. As a version of Achebe in the novel, Obierika, has a similar viewpoint: “If I were you, I would have stayed at home. What you have done will not please the Earth. It is the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families.... If the Oracle said that my son should be killed I would neither dispute nor be the one to do it.” (Achebe, 2008:53). In contrast, Okonkwo, by all means, is representative of the narrow-minded Africans who commit themselves to a blind Pan-Africanism as it could be guessed from his use of the following proverb: “A child’s fingers are not scalded by a piece of hot yam which its mother puts onto its palm.” (Achebe, 2008:53). The scene of Ikemefuna’s execution is so strange, extraordinary and surreal that its violence affects not only the reader but Okonkwo himself who, despite his masculinity, does not taste any food for two days and keeps on drinking palm-wine from morning till night. Ikemefuna’s death reveals the hidden stranger in Okonkwo as he wonders: “When did you become a shivering old woman. You who are known in all the nine villages for your valour in war? How can a man who has killed five men in battle fall to pieces because he added a boy to that number? Okonkwo, you have become a woman indeed.” (Achebe, 2008, p.51). Each person carries a stranger within himself; a stranger that often expresses itself in form of transgression. In a nutshell, each person is both a native and a stranger. Therefore, the death and exile of characters who embody this one-sided representation of stranger- Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, Ikenna, Boja, Obembe and Abulu in *The Fishermen*- shows that exclusion has never been the prevailing rule in human communities. For the sake of a peaceful and harmonious world, togetherness must be human beings’ distinctiveness.

Conclusion

The concept of stranger like a traditional African well is endless. The more it is explored, the broader it stretches its boundaries. Both novels under scrutiny offer diverse interpretations that illuminates the reader’s representations. From Achebe and Obioma’s perspectives, it is clearer that the concept of stranger/foreigner/alien is a mere lexical construction human beings coin to justify prejudices and discrimination of the other. Space should no longer matter for whatever the skin colour and wherever a person is, anyone must feel at home because, in this twenty-first century, the world is a planetary village. In other words, community life should be promoted and preserved instead of individualism as in a village setting. Killing then a stranger is killing one’s relative for we are the same. Concepts like stranger must be deconstructed, decolonised in order to expand positive channels for there is a single human race. The world is a family indeed.

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