ABSTRACT

DONATO FHUNSU. Lost and Found in Translation?: The European Christian Missionary Influence on African Culture in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* and Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*. (Under the direction of Professor Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi.)

The treatment of religion is pervasive in African, African American, and African Diaspora literatures. One particular aspect of this treatment is the European Christian missionary presence in the African world. However, despite the large amount of recent theoretical and philosophical work that addresses religion, critics who write about African, African American, and African Diaspora fiction seldom deal with religious and biblical traditions in the novel. In this project, I explore, through the theory of translation and the notion of the vernacular, the European Christian missionary impact on African culture in two novels: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* and Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*. Building on Lamin Sanneh’s work (*Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*) showing that Christianity is a “translated” religion, I argue that since translation (in its cultural dimension and its linguistic dimension) shapes the way in which a given society receives a work, an author, a literature (like The Bible), or a culture, the Christianity that Africa and the African Diaspora have received has been “translated” in specific ways and with specific effects. I contend that both Adichie and Walker function as African conjurers, who, utilizing the polyglossial form of the novel, dig up the harmful roots embedded in the African psyche through the process of conventional European Christian conversion (harmful roots such as those described by Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and Albert Memmi), and bring to the surface a healed self and community. Through the conjure, what is lost in translation in the conventional European Christian conversion is a recovered interconnected African Christian sacred practice that integrates the world of the unborn, the world of the living, and the world of the dead, and, in the process, pushes the boundaries of the conventional European understanding of “religion” in general and of “Christianity” in particular.