

Original Research Article

The Causes and Effects of the Religious Conversion on the Native Identity in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958)

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to investigate illustrations of the religious conversion in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958). It attempts to explore the factors affecting the religious change as well as the impact of conversion on the native identity and relations. The paper takes the qualitative approach of data analysis as its purpose is to analyze a written text. It uses the descriptive discourse analysis (DDA) method led by the intercultural communication theory (ICT). The results show three types of conversion (gradual, sudden, socialized) depicted in the novel. The results also reveal that the contact with the new religion's advocators, among other reasons, is the most influential factor that causes change. The results confirm the effect of the religious conversion on the native identity and relations as well. The paper also reinforces the validity of applying the ICT on fictive data and contributes something new to the field,

Introduction

The novel, *Things Fall Apart* (TFA), is thought to be one of the most famous works in the African literature. It has thus attracted many researches from literary and social perspectives, Salami and Tabari (2018). It depicts part of the African life during the colonial period in Nigeria. It narrates the conflicts occurred between the natives (the Nigerian Ibo people) and the colonizers (the Christian white men), so it constitutes as a fruitful corpus for the intercultural communication (IC) studies.

Intercultural communication is defined as 'interaction between people whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems are distinct enough to alter the communication event' Samovar & Porter (2004, p. 15). Since the field of IC is concerned with the study of communication when it occurs between people whose cultural backgrounds are different, the novel TFA could be a good data-base for this study as it depicts the cultural conflict between the Ibo and the white man.

The previous studies in the field of IC did not show much research in the area of fiction as few studies were conducted in light of the IC theory (Hirvonen, 2014). However, this paper can be significant in attempting to investigate the religious conversion in the novel through the ICT perspective. The study argues that this sort of fictive data (the novel) can serve as a fruitful source for the IC analysis that it may add something new to the application of ICT in the fictive works.

The novel depicts change of the native religion from the traditional faith of the Ibo tribe into Christianity. Many Ibo people turned to Christianity during the colonial era. This study assumes that this religious change is due to some factors and it has its effect on the personal and communal layers of the native identity. Therefore, the study attempts to investigate the illustration of the religious conversion depicted in the themes of the novel to reveal its causes and effect on the native identity.

Objectives of the Study

The current paper attempts to explore the illustration of the religious conversion in the novel (TFA). It determines to investigate the factors affecting the natives to change faith as well. In addition, it aims to highlight the effect of the religious conversion on the native identity.

Hypotheses of the Study

The paper hypothesizes that the converts change faith in three different types: gradual, sudden and socialized. The paper assumes that this change is due to the touch with the new religion's advocates. The paper also argues that the religious conversion would have its impact on the native identity as religion is the most influential factor in identity formation and maintenance.

Method of the Study

This paper tries to analyze a form of written text, so it does not employ any method of data collection. The paper uses the qualitative approach for analyzing its data. Unlike the quantitative, the qualitative method is based on the *quality* of data. Eskola and Suoranta (2008, in Hirvonen, 2014). Thus, it is the suitable tool for exploring the data of this paper which is mainly concerned with investigating the novel to understand the concept of conversion.

The paper uses the discourse analysis (DA) method to interpret the data. DA is considered as a method used in the qualitative approach Denzin and Lincoln (2011, cited in Hirvonen 2014). The paper adopts the descriptive approach of DA as it describes how language works and why it works in that way (Gee, 2010). The paper thus takes extracts from the novel and analyzes them deeply to give answers to the questions and to show whether the arguments are true or not.

The method of analysis is guided by the intercultural communication theory ICT. The theory highlights the interplay between identity and communication. That is, people communicate their identities with each other, and their identities could be perceived through communication. Martin and Nakayama (2010) stated that people communicate their identity to others, and learn who they are via communication. Identity, hence is created through negotiation with others. Thus, CTI assumes that identities are shaped, reinforced and modified in communication with others (Hecht et al., 2005).

The Scope of the Study

This paper is limited to the investigation of the religious conversion, its causes and effects on the native identity. It is not concerned with exploring the native identity in details. The method of analysis is led by the intercultural communication theory, so it does not explore the data freely without the guidance of the ICT.

Theoretical Framework

Functions of Religion

Religion plays an important role in determining life's meaning and the way religious adherents lead it. It determines what sort of beliefs, virtues, practices or morals one should obtain. It controls people's relations with each other and to what extent one may build close bonds. Besides, it determines what is allowed or forbidden concerning food, drink, types of commerce, contracts, everyday activities and even the use of polite and taboo expressions. Religion affects human values to the extent that some may choose to kill others or die so as to show their religious commitment or love (Patel et al., 2011). However, the tragic killing of innocent people in contemporary actions, including the 'terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001' Martin & Nakayama (2010, p. 169) and the disgusting murder of the worshippers in two Muslim mosques in New Zealand on the 15th of March 2019 are two examples, among others, that are thought to have religious motivations, though they resulted from misinterpretations of religious texts. This is because 'every religion advises its followers to be good' Zhang (2013, p. 11) and if people applied religions as they were originally taught without deviations the world would live in peace (ibid). In sum, religions have their significant role in shaping our perception of the world and forming the 'most foundational aspects of our identity, including attitudes, beliefs and preferences' (Emmons and Paloutzian, 2003, cited in Sachdeva, 2016, p. 3).

Definition of Religion

According to Sachdeva (2016, p. 3), religion is a 'set of practices and beliefs built on the idea of a higher being, and on attaining sacred experiences through structured rituals'. Mydin et al (2017) stated that religion tells about the external God and commands actions. Samovar et al (2009) drew attention to the origin of the term, which comes from the Latin stem *religare* meaning "to tie". They regarded this as an implication to the believers' link to what is sacred.

The above definitions clarify that religion commonly refers to a set of beliefs one has of God, practices to perform, values and teachings that organize and control life. These selected definitions only provide a surface meaning of religion fitting the scope of the paper, and do not go deeper into any irrelevant details.

Religion and Culture

As the present paper is positioned in the intercultural communication field, and the conception of religion was made clear, it is important to have insight into the relation between religion and culture. Previous literature explains the interplay between religion and culture, and the way each of them contributes in shaping and reinforcing the other. Cohen (2011) pointed out that religion shapes, constitutes, includes and transcends culture. It interacts with culture and is influenced by it. For example, the Arab world culture is generally influenced by Islam and impacts it, so does the U.S. culture with Christianity. Samovar et al. (2009) considered religion as an element of every culture because it gives the cultural values and activities meanings legitimacy. Most cultural norms and actions have religious roots and causes Giddens (1998, cited in Molaiy et al., 2016). Culture, on the other hand, is thought to be the context upon which religion is situated. The philosopher of religion, Paul Tillich, put it as 'religion is the substance of culture, and culture is the form of religion' (Agbibo 2013, p. 5). This highlights the strong interdependences between the two as religion is the meaning-giving source of culture that determines the social aspects religion may have, so each of them cannot be clearly perceived in the absence of the other (ibid).

In sum, beliefs are thought to have the deepest influence on 'every aspect of life or ways of living' - culture- Agbibo (2013, p. 3), due to the meanings that they give to views of life and death. For example, most cultures have certain superstitious beliefs, deriving their legitimacy from religious texts or individual religious interpretations. Some may think that doing or seeing certain things is thought to bring good or bad luck, some others forbid certain behaviors, thinking that they are signs of evil or causing God's anger. The current paper thus argues that religion shapes, constitutes and transcends culture. It interacts and it is influenced by it.

Religion and Intercultural Communication

Based on the argument that intercultural communication occurs when 'people from different cultures come together to interact, communicate, and negotiate with each other' Groff (2002, p. 2), and religion is one of the deep structures of cultural formation Samovar & Porter (2004), then the religious effect on the cross-cultural communication will be comprehensible. To put it in slightly different words, the religious diversity which results in cultural variety has an inevitable impact on the communication between cultures.

Zhang (2013, p. 9) pointed out that 'religious beliefs are such an influential factor in intercultural communication because they affect our conscious and unconscious minds, as well as the manner in which people communicate.' Particularly, if one takes into consideration the religious conflicts and consequences on the communicative process worldwide like the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (Martin & Nakayama, 2010).

Commenting on the American film, *Innocence of Muslims*, that described Islam as "cancer" Al-Majbari (2012), Zhang (2013, p. 8) stated that the Muslim world's interactions to the film 'hindered different people with different cultures and different religious beliefs from their intercultural communication'. Based on the above, previous literature shows many research findings stating that religion works as a crucial factor, positively or negatively impacting intercultural communication (Wrench et al. 2006; Ameli & Molaei, 2012; Holmes & O'Neill 2012; Mydin et al., 2017).

The Concept of Conversion

Religious conversion is one of the most controversial issues in the humanities and social sciences (Cigan, 2013). 'The English word "conversion" is derived from the Latin *convertere* which means "to revolve, turn around" or head in a different direction' (Gooren, 2010, p. 10). The word conversion thus stands originally for the turning to or from a different direction. 'The end result is supposed to be a change of mind and a change of heart'(ibid: 10). Nock (1933, p.7) defined it as 'the reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier piety to another'. He also explained that the turning from the previous religion to the new one is due to the knowledge that the old is wrong and the new is right (ibid). Nock's definition emphasizes the claim that conversion requires knowledge about the new religion which convince the convert that the old faith is wrong.

When the convert turns back to his/her original religion which he/she converted from, this is termed as *deconversion*. Thus 'conversion and deconversion are two sides of the same coin' (Gooren, 2010, p. 10).

When it comes to turning back to Islam from any other deity, some Muslims prefer to term it as *detersion* (Boz, 2011). Mydin et al. (2017, p. 4) reasoned that as returning to Islam is returning to the 'state of *Fitrah*' as the individual regains his state of God-consciousness and submission'. They explained the state of *Fitrah* as the faith of worshiping one God. Rambo and Farhadian (1999) identified seven-stage process for religious conversion.

The seven phases are as follows: (1) *Context*, the environment in which the change happens. It contains the factors that facilitate or constrain change. (2) *Crisis*, a stage in which there is a sudden breaking or confusion that leads to stage three; (3) *Quest* stage wherein the individual becomes a knowledge seeker so as to confront his problem; (4) *Encounter* stage in which the convert seeks knowledge with the advocate to fill the empty space in his heart; (5) *Interaction* stage in which the convert and the advocate confer changes in thoughts and actions; (6) *Commitment* is the phase whereby the questioner makes up his mind to turn to the new life system and desert his old one; (7) *Consequences* stage whereby some factors will contribute to affect the individual's firmness of his new commitment (Boz 2011, p. 5).

Then, Boz (2011) pointed out that it is not necessary that every conversion should go through these phases. That is because, some converts were not intending to change religion, rather they fell in contact with the adherents of the new religion or sought knowledge for the sake of curiosity and they have been unconsciously led to conversion (ibid).

According to Harun et al. (2012) religious conversion has three types: *sudden*, *gradual* and *socialized*. *Sudden Conversion* occurs in a very short time. The convert turns from being obedient to disobedient to his religion due to an extraordinary event that causes the individual to change his mind. *Gradual Conversion* takes much time and goes through phases (may like seven-stage process identified by Rambo and Farhadian (1999) above). *Socialized conversion* is a process that takes a long time and the religious values are bred on the adherents since childhood, or since an early time through learning without knowledge. There are many factors that influence religious change. They differ from one individual to another. Boz (2011) emphasized the effect of the *social interaction* or *contact* with the adherents of the new faith. He also added that relationships, processes and ideologies play a role in providing a prevailing situation for religious change.

Harun et al. (2012) considered *religious conflict* to be the most influential factor for religious conversion. That is, an individual may face difficulties in absorbing or defending his own religious beliefs, or he is unconvinced with his place in community or have conflicts with the religious leaders. Religious conflict also occurs when someone wants to do something that he cannot do, or he ought to do something that he hates. 'These situations lead to the guilty feeling, and then they want to purify their sins' (ibid, p. 4). In addition, they considered *Search of Meaning of life* to be an influential factor. Religion, as noted earlier, helps individual find answers to the divine questions and provides him with the reasons to live. They also stated that conversion needs *religious support* which comes from congregation members, religious leaders. The financial and emotional support provided by the family, friends or religious brothers play an important role in enhancing conversion.

Beck and Jessup (2004) identified two types of religious motivations for conversion: *intrinsic* and *extrinsic*. The first describes the person who believes and practices religion for pure religious purposes, while the latter stands for those who use their religion just to achieve non-religious goals. Religious conversion has a great effect in individual and group identities. This is because all the aspects of one's life which are based on the previous faith will be spontaneously changed after conversion (Harun et al. (2012)). They exemplified conversion with building: the new building will be established in the same place of the old one which was different from it (ibid). It is important to note here that the other aspects of one's life which do not contradict with the new pattern system, these aspects are not necessarily expected to be changed.

Summary of the Novel

The setting of the novel is in a small fictional district in Nigeria. It is centered on the life of its protagonist Okonkwo. Okonkwo is a brave, famous man and is respected by all the nine villages of the district Umoufia. Unlike his father, who was known to be weak, afraid of blood, lazy and poor because he does not like work. Okonkwo has three wives and a number of children, among them is Nwoye, the eldest son of the first wife, who converted to the new religion. For this purpose, conflict arose between Okonkwo and his son. His 10-year-old daughter Ezinma is beloved to him, because she has similar ideas in life to her father. The people of Umoufia belong to the same cultural clan and know nothing about the world around them. The clansmen have many different gods that they worship. They have strong rules and customs that they believe are the core foundation to

pleasing the gods and none can disobey these rules and if anyone does so then they believe he must be mad. Okonkwo did so by killing his foster son Ikemefuna, who was given to him as a compensation for the spilt blood of an Umoufia clanswoman. Therefore, Okonkwo was punished by the gods for this. As the novel develops, he is exiled from his land (Umoufia) as a result of accidentally killing a young man. When he returns to his village, he finds that the whites changed the village's lifestyle by introducing their religion (Christianity) and the new European culture, so 'Things Fall Apart'. He tries to drive the missionaries out of his land, so he kills one messenger in a meeting. He discovers that his people would no longer join him to fight the white man, because they let the other messengers escape. As the white man's justice is searching for him, Okonkwo, once known as the bravest man of Umoufia, is found dead (Achebe, 1958).

Discussion

As soon as his father walked in, that night, Nwoye knew that Ikemefuna had been killed, and something seemed to give way inside him, like the snapping of a tightened bow. He did not cry. He just hung limp. He had had the same kind of feeling not long ago, during the last harvest season [...] Nwoye had heard that twins were put in earthenware pots and thrown away in the forest, but he had never yet come across them. A vague chill had descended on him and his head had seemed to swell, like a solitary walker at night who passes an evil spirit on the way. Then something had given way inside him. It descended on him again, this feeling, when his father walked in that night after killing Ikemefuna. (Achebe:54)

Nwoye was the elder son of Okonkwo, who eventually deserted his local religion and converted to Christianity, the new religion, as it filled the empty space in his heart. Despite the effort that Nwoye's father pooled to keep him firm to his fathers' religion, Nwoye found his way to the new religion as a result of some customs in the native religion that caused him to desert it. One of these customs was throwing innocent twins in the evil forest for fear of bad luck, together with some other reasons (as will be discussed later) that contributed to make Nwoye change his identity.

Nowye's conversion developed into several phases and was influenced by some factors (see: 2.5). Before the coming of the new religion Nowye did not enter the *context phase*, e.g., the contact with the new religion's advocate, however he was *searching for the meaning of life*. This was one of the factors that later led him to convert. Nowye's conversion thus was *gradual type* of religious change that took a long time and went through several stages. *Obierika*, Okonkwo's best friend, was grieved by this custom as his wife was forced to let her twin children die. He expressed his misery in words that bore some criticism to the God's will, as it was his habit.

He remembered his wife's twin children, whom he had thrown away. What crime had they committed? The Earth had decreed that they were an offence on the land and must be destroyed. And if the clan did not exact punishment for an offence against the great goddess, her wrath was loosed on all the land and not just on the offender. As the elders said, if one finger brought oil it soiled the others. (Achebe: 109)

Obierika criticized his local religion of injustice because the Earth Goddess ordered the abandoning and death of innocent children, who had committed no crime, and it grieved their parents. The Earth Goddess' punishment would overwhelm the whole clan if the twins' parents refused to cast them away. Throwing twins, then, was not a personal matter that one could take responsibility for alone, but it was a social issue that concerned the whole community.

"The three white men and a very large number of other men surrounded the market. They must have used a powerful medicine to make themselves invisible until the market was full. And they began to shoot. Everybody was killed, except the old and the sick who were at home and a handful of men and women whose chi were wide awake and brought them out of that market." He paused. "Their clan is now completely empty. Even the sacred fish in their mysterious lake have fled and the lake has turned the color of blood. A great evil has come upon their land as the Oracle had warned." (Achebe: 122)

This terrible story was one of the means used by the white colonizers to let their religion spread without any forceful opposition. The story spread among the village to pave the way for the new religion and to weaken the native religious identity, because the new religion had powerful guns and strong magic powers that could not be confronted by the villagers' ways.

The way Obierika told the story reveals a message that the clans' men would not be able to defend their land and they would no longer be able to confront the strangers.

From the concept of the *religious conversion*, the coming of the white man served as the context on which the change would happen. The white man generally used the policy of the gradual conversion, so he took some steps whereby to make the natives reach the phase of committing the new religion and lifestyle.

The coming of the new religion inaugurated the first phase of the religious conversion, *context*. In this stage the advocates (the Christians) came to the land of the Ibo people and they started conversing about their religions. The contact with the new religion was the most influential factor for change as the Ibo people would not have turned to Christianity unless they were colonized by them or contacted with them in one society. This confirmed the argument that being in touch with the new religion is the most effective factor of conversion.

But there was a young lad who had been captivated. His name was Nwoye, Okonkwo's first son. It was not the mad logic of the Trinity that captivated him. He did not understand it. It was the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow. The hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul—the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed. (Achebe:128-129)

Nwoye's captivation to the new religion was not due to his satisfaction with its faith, for he did not understand it either. The new religion actually rescued him from the native customs of the clan that he considered violent and unjust. It was stated earlier that the murder of Ikemefuna was the last event that put a sharp knife on the rope tying Nwoye to his kinsmen. Without thinking of the new religion's belief, Nwoye absorbed it for it coincided with his nature. Nwoye was much like his grandfather Unoka, who feared fighting and war.

"What are you doing here?" Obierika had asked when after many difficulties the missionaries had allowed him to speak to the boy. "I am one of them," replied Nwoye. "How is your father?" Obierika asked, not knowing what else to say. "I don't know. He is not my father," said Nwoye, unhappily. And so Obierika went to Mbanta to see his friend. And he found that Okonkwo did not wish to speak about Nwoye. It was only from Nwoye's mother that he heard scraps of the story. (Achebe:125-126)

Nwoye had completely changed his identity to a Christian boy and he declared to Obierika that he no longer belonged to the clan. Changing faith meant changing identity, because Nwoye disowned his father and deserted his family and land. He broke all the clan's rules as he left the land of their exile and came back to Umoufia before the fixed date of their return. This proves the argument that religion is the most influential component in shaping identity and the religious link is the strongest in people's relations (see: 2.1). This can be clearer with the new position of Nwoye among the strangers. Although Obierika is the closest friend of Nwoye's father and they share the same race, Obierika found difficulty to meet the boy and he could not do so without the permission of the missionaries.

Changing religion was the turning point that changed Nwoye into a new character that had nothing to connect him with his natives, neither his race nor his family relation. Nwoye had reached the semi-final stage of the religious conversion, e.g., commitment (see: 2.5). He had made up his mind to desert his family's local religion and adopted the new one. By reaching the commitment stage, Nwoye had got rid of all the customs that were based on the previous religion, so he confidently replied Obierika that Okonkwo was no longer his father that he knew nothing about him.

One morning Okonkwo's cousin, Amikwu, was passing by the church on his way from the neighboring village, when he saw Nwoye among the Christians. He was greatly surprised, and when he got home he went straight to Okonkwo's hut and told him what he had seen. The women began to talk excitedly, but Okonkwo sat unmoved. It was late afternoon before Nwoye returned. He went into the obi and saluted his father, but he did not answer. Nwoye turned round to walk into the inner compound when his father, suddenly overcome with fury, sprang to his feet and gripped him by the neck. "Where have you been?" he stammered. Nwoye struggled to free himself from the choking grip. "Answer me," roared Okonkwo, "before I kill you!" He seized a heavy stick that lay on the dwarf wall and hit him two or three savage blows. "Answer me!" he roared again. Nwoye stood looking at him and did not say a word. The women were screaming outside, afraid to go in. "Leave that boy at once!" said a voice in the outer compound. It was Okonkwo's uncle, Uchendu. "Are you mad?" Okonkwo did not answer. But he left hold of Nwoye, who walked away and never returned. (Achebe:133)

This time Nwoye decided to totally leave his clan, family and their ways and he left them and their ideas as early as the white man held the first meeting in Mbanta, but his fear of his father held him back from declaring his new faith at that time. As Nwoye used to go secretly to attend the Christian congregations he was in the stage of *encountering* which is the phase when the convert has trusted the advocator and started getting knowledge from him (see: 2.5). When Okonkwo punished his son for approaching the Christians, Nwoye has reached the peak of the identity crisis by which he made up his mind to turn religion

and abandon the previous one. This incident was the turning point moment when Nwoye enter the *interaction* stage where he went to Mr. Kiaga to consult him about moving to Umoufia for learning the new religion away from the touch of his father.

He went back to the church and told Mr. Kiaga that he had decided to go to Umuofia where the white missionary had set up a school to teach young Christians to read and write. Mr. Kiaga's joy was very great. "Blessed is he who forsakes his father and his mother for my sake," he intoned. "Those that hear my words are my father and my mother." Nwoye did not fully understand. But he was happy to leave his father. He would return later to his mother and his brothers and sisters and convert them to the new faith. (Achebe:133-134)

This point clearly shows that once one changes faith, he/she changes identity, because the new faith will change all of the individual views about everything based on the previous religion. One starts to change his mind about the things he loves and hates, for the criteria would be the new thought which is based on the new faith. Harun et al., (2012: 2) pointed that: 'All aspects of the person's life which previously follow his own patterns based on his religion, after a religious conversion, will be spontaneously changed'.

This argument seemed to me generally true for many converts in this study but not for all. Some converts abandoned all the native customs and challenged them, like the overzealous convert Enoch who appeared to be more Christians than the Christians themselves. The analysis will show some more examples of native converts who deserted the whole local life style such as the titled man who threw his titles away and the group of converts who came back to the village and boasted rude words to the clan's Gods and the village people cursed back them and their mothers too.

However, the study has shown that some other converts still maintained some of the old native customs and some of their old identity aspects. These old identity aspects remained for sometimes and later began to faint as it was the case of Nwoye who converted to the new religion without knowing anything about its reality in the beginning. So he had some aspects of his old identity as he got afraid of visiting the church for it was built in the Evil Forest. But later when he began to be somewhat a strong convert he appeared more courageous to join the Christians in everywhere.

The new converts in the church, as we will see later in details, were disturbed by the coming of the Osu people (outcast people who have different God and way of life) to the church. The new converts refused to join them in the beginning but they later accepted due to the effort Mr. Kiaga made to convince them. We can conclude here that the aspects of the old identity will be expected to be changed after conversion but the degree of change differs from one individual to another. Some converts change all the aspects some others gradually change them and some others only change few of them. The criteria of love and hate would be in agreement with the new religion, so the father's position in Nwoye's heart would be filled with Mr. Kiaga, his master and guide to the new faith. Changing religion caused Nwoye to forsake his relatives and tear himself away from all of the previous religion's customs.

As Okonkwo sat in his hut that night, gazing into a log fire, he thought over the matter. A sudden fury rose within him and he felt a strong desire to take up his machete, go to the church and wipe out the entire vile and miscreant gang. But on further thought he told himself that Nwoye was not worth fighting for. Why, he cried in his heart, should he, Okonkwo, of all people, be cursed with such a son? (Achebe:134)

Although Okonkwo was angry of his son since his childhood and kept beating him for his effeminate behavior, Okonkwo did not totally disown him until he joined the new religion. This showed that the difference between the boy and his father in the masculine and feminine behaviors has its effect on their relations, but it did not reach the point of separating them. However, when it came to adopting a new faith, Okonkwo could not bear to deal with him and so did Nwoye.

The case of the Osu people showed some other reason behind the religious conversion. The Osu could be introduced as follows:

He was 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. Wherever he went he carried with him the mark of his forbidden cast—long, tangled and dirty hair. A razor was taboo to him. An osu could not attend an assembly of the freeborn, and they, in turn, could not shelter under his roof. He could not take any of the four titles of the clan, and when he died, he was buried by his kind in the Evil Forest. How could such a man be a follower of Christ? (Achebe:138)

The calamity of the Osu people was due to the native ethno-religious custom. The Osu were deprived of all their rights and were thought to be abominable their whole life. They were convinced that if any of them tried to live like the ordinary people,

he or she would die. When the Osu saw that the new religion broke the local customs and took care of twin children, they thought they would similarly be welcomed:

These outcasts, or osu, seeing that the new religion welcomed twins and such abominations, thought that it was possible that they would also be received. And so, one Sunday two of them went into the church. There was an immediate stir, but so great was the work the new religion had done among the converts that they did not immediately leave the church when the outcasts came in (Achebe:137)

Although the converts had embraced the new religion and they were no longer taking religious knowledge from the natives, still some of the local beliefs remained in their hearts. Their ethno-religious identity was still rooted, so they refused mixing with the Osu people according to the local custom. This confirmed the argument that the conversion of the natives was *gradual* type of conversion, because they did not get rid of all their native customs at once. They turned to the new religion in stages. The final conversion stage was the *consequence stage* where the converts faced difficulties that was about to weaken their allegiance to the new faith. One of these consequences happened due to the fact that they were to mix with the Osu people whom were thought to be cast out. This conflict rose as a result of remaining some native customs after converting. It could be noticed that the native dogmatic rules drove some of those who suffered from it to join the new faith, which profited from these limitations.

The coming of the Osu to the church put the Christian teacher and guide of the congregation into a great confusion. He could not refuse them, though the new converts wanted to, because his religion considered all people equal, and if he, in turn, accepted them he might lose the first converts, who believed that mixing with them was impossible. Mr. Kiaga chose to welcome the Osu and began to clear up the ethno-religious remains of the converts' previous faith. He did his best to explain for his students a wider sense of belonging under the Christian umbrella that included even the Osu. The new converts ought to know that their identity had changed, and the local thoughts should no longer conduct their activities:

"Before God," he said, "there is no slave or free. We are all children of God and we must receive these our brothers." "You do not understand," said one of the converts. "What will the heathen say of us when they hear that we receive osu into our midst? They will laugh." "Let them laugh," said Mr. Kiaga. "God will laugh at them on the judgment day". (Achebe: 137-138)

The converts remained affected by the native customs to the degree that some of them decided to return to the village if their teacher insisted on accepting the outcasts among them. The converts kept reasoning with that social view. That is, they feared of what might be said about them by the natives. This highlights the interplay between religion and ethnicity. However, the effect of religion was superior to the ethnic norms as the angry converts finally agreed to accept the Osu when their teacher insisted on that.

This growing feeling was due to Mr. Brown, the white missionary, who was very firm in restraining his flock from provoking the wrath of the clan' ...' And so, Mr. Brown came to be respected even by the clan, because he trod softly on its faith. He made friends with some of the great men of the clan and on one of his frequent visits to the neighboring villages he had been presented with a carved elephant tusk, which was a sign of dignity and rank. (Achebe:157)

The cultural understanding helped Mr. Brown to avoid falling into cultural clashes, so he succeeded in building good relations with the natives that enabled him to attract them to his schools, where he taught them the new faith without their knowledge. Mr. Brown's understanding of the indigenous culture resulted from his long talks with many leaders of the clan. One of these great men was called *Akunna*, from a village near to Umoufia

Conclusions

The current paper has three main hypotheses. It hypothesizes that the religious conversion is illustrated in the paper in three types gradual, sudden and socialized. It also assumes that the reason behind conversion is the contact with the advocates of the new religion. As well, it hypothesizes that conversion affects native identity and the relation between the characters. Here we will show the results of each hypothesis.

The First Hypothesis

The results support the argument that conversion occurs in all of the three types. Some converts change faith suddenly due to an extraordinary event without going through the conversion stages. Nwoye's conversion was a sample of the *gradual*

type. The white man generally uses the policy of *gradual* conversion, since some of the native converts do not get rid of all the local customs at once, some customs take time to be ignored.

Mr. Brown's policy to change the natives through learning the new faith in his schools without their knowledge is an example of the *socialized* conversion.

The study assumes that the gradual conversion follows a seven-stage process (2.5). The results show that Nwoye is an example of the convert who follows the *gradual* type of conversion, as he goes through most of the stages of gradual conversion until he reaches the phase of complete change. The results reveal the following stages: *context*, the contact with the new religion; *encountering*, the convert trusts the advocator and starts getting knowledge from him; *interaction*, the convert consults the advocate to move to Umoufia to learn the new religion away from the influence of his father; *commitment*, to change faith and adopt the new one; *consequence stage*, the converts face difficulties that are about to weaken their allegiance to the new faith.

The Second Hypothesis

The results support the argument that the most influential factor for religious change is the intercultural and inter-religious context in the village due to the coming of the white man. However, the analysis reveals some more reasons for religious conversion. For examples, the personal interpretations of the native religion and some of the religious customs provide some excuses to those who criticize it and those who desert it. When the new religion wins the challenge, it gains the first three converts. This challenging example allows the people in the clan, who have rebellious thoughts, to think that many of their local religious customs are wrong, so some natives, who are delaying their declaration to the new faith to see what will happen to the missionaries, announce their allegiance to the new religion.

The native dogmatic rules drove some of those who suffered from it to join the new faith, which profited from these limitations. The strictness of the local customs cause some of them to convert to find some sort of freedom in the new religion to perform their own preferences. If the native way would be somewhat flexible and allow the natives to choose what suit them, the number of converts may be smaller than this. The cultural understanding helps Mr. Brown to avoid falling into cultural clashes, so he succeeds in building good relations with the natives that enable him to attract them to his schools, where he teaches them the new faith without their knowledge

The Third Hypothesis

The results support the third hypothesis and show some impact of the religious conversion on the native identity and relations. For examples, conversion causes Nwoye to forsake his family and befriend the Christians. On the contrary, his father disowns him and no longer regards him one of his children. Changing faith means changing identity, because Nwoye broke all the clan's rules as he leaves the land of their exile and comes back to Umoufia before the fixed date of their return. This proves the argument that religion is the most influential component in shaping identity and the religious link is the strongest in people's relations (see: 2.1). This can be clearer with the new position of Nwoye among the strangers. Although Obierika is the closest friend of Nwoye's father and they share the same race, Obierika finds difficulty to meet the boy and he cannot do so without the permission of the missionaries.

Changing religion is the turning point that changes Nwoye into a new character that has nothing to connect him with his natives, neither his race nor his family relation. Religious conversion thus has great effect on the family and social relation as it changes the criteria or bases upon which relations are made. The results also show that the aspects of the old identity are expected to be changed after conversion but the degree of change differs from one individual to another. Some converts change all the aspects some others gradually change them and some others only change few of them.

Relevant Findings

The results show that the novel title *Things Fall Apart* refers to the fracture or change of the native identity due to the coming of the white man with his new faith.

The results confirm the reliability and validity of the method of data analysis. Although, the reliability of the results is based on the correct application of the ICT theory that guides the analysis, the matter sometimes seems somewhat subjective as it depends to some extent on the background of the researcher and his personal observation. This opens the chance for more studies in the same area and other researchers may come up with different results. Particularly, if we take into consideration the nature of identity, which is dynamic and especially in intercultural contexts where no two persons may seem the same.

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