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Religious Identity in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

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The study concludes that religious identity is depicted by stereotypical concepts and religious-based actions, i.e., actions that have pure religious motivations. The natives' masculine identity strengthens their religious identity. Their racial identity does not affect their religious identity, while ethnic and class identities have some weak positive impacts. The personal attitude of the protagonist is opposite to the native communal mainstream. The results also reveal that religion is the base of almost all the characters' actions. The study confirms the validity of applying the ICT on fictive data and reinforces the bidirectional influence between identity and communication as identity is conceptualized through the confrontations with others.

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I. Introduction

a) Introduction

The novel *Things Fall Apart* is one of the African fictive works that depict intercultural conflicts that occurred in the Nigerian society during the colonial time. Therefore, it can serve as a source of data that is useful for intercultural communication (IC) studies. Thus, this paper attempts to investigate the religious identity concept in the novel based on the IC theory.

The term *identity* refers to the concept one has about himself, and the others have about him/her. It can be conceptualized by answering the question: how do we come to perceive who we are and how do others see us? Through communication with others one can understand how his identity is presented and perceived. Therefore, identity exploration is closely related to the field of intercultural communication (IC), because it is constructed, maintained, and developed via contact with others (Hecht and Lu 2014).

The formation of identity is a complex task as it is a set of meanings and a combination of various characteristics, each of which has a certain degree of contribution in shaping and maintaining it. Thus, our identity is affected by religion, race, class, social norms, familial disciplines, gender, and nationality. These factors influence human communication, perception, and identity, as well.

King (2003) considers religion as one of the most influential aspects of identity development. This is because a person's religious knowledge and practices impact his worldviews and relations with everything around him. Samovar and Porter (2004:48) identify religion along with family and countries as "three main 'deep-rooted structures' that help individuals form their identity and influence their perceptions, as well." The religious identity is defined as 'the sense of belonging and commitment to religion and religious society' (Molaiy et al. 2016). Thus, conceptualizing religious identity is not a simple task if we take into consideration the complexity, which arises from its interrelation with the other identity dimensions such as age, class, ethnicity, gender, profession and level of education. In addition, the degree of religiosity varies from one individual to another due to their differences in accepting and practicing the spiritual guidance (Alston1975, cited in Mydin et al 2017).

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) was chosen because it, firstly, depicts cultural and social conflicts taking place in an African community. The writer enriches the novel's theme with various aspects of cultural clashes that make it serve as a fruitful source for sociolinguistic research. Secondly, the novel attracted readers' attention, gained their appreciation, and was translated into several languages. Chinua Achebe's novel was even chosen as educational materials for secondary school students here in Sudan. Thirdly, it is relevant to the study topic as religious identity seems to be central in its themes.

b) Objectives of the Study

This study aims to investigate the effect of religious identity on the relationships between the characters in the novel and how religious identity is expressed in the characters' dialogues. As well as it determines to show what types of identities and other cultural factors influence the formation and maintenance of religious identity, portrayed in the novel *Things fall apart.*

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c) Hypotheses of the Study

The study claims to have found the following in the novel:

Religious identity in the form of either the cultural group's pre-set stereotypical images about the others or in the form of the strong belief of a group of people that everyone else must be wrong and/or mad unless he/she shares their own beliefs or belongs to their ethnic group.

Racial, ethnic, gender, and personal dimensions have a great influence on the formation and maintenance of religious identity, as expressed in the novel.

The characters' relations are negatively impacted by the differences in their religious identities to the degree that these differences became the cause of misunderstanding and various types of conflicts.

d) Methodology of the Study

Since this study is concerned with analyzing a particular written text, it does not need to apply a method of data collection. It takes a qualitative approach to data interpretation. According to Eskola and Suoranta (2008, cited in Hirvonen 2014), the scientific criteria of the qualitative method are not based on *quantity*, but *quality* of data. Therefore, qualitative studies systematically select samples of data and analyze them as in-depth as possible (Hirvonen 2014). Thus, the qualitative method can serve as an effective tool for data analysis in the current paper, since it is mainly concerned with understanding and interpreting the issue under investigation (Mason 2002). The analysis is sub-divided with headlines according to the detailing concepts and the relevant issues of the religious identity, which are clearly stated and discussed in this study.

Another qualitative method used in this study is discourse analysis (DA). According to Gee (2010: 9), 'there are two types of DA in the field of linguistics.' The first one is a descriptive approach that describes how language works and why it works in that way. The other one is the critical approach, which 'not only describes how the language works, but also takes a stand on social and political issues and brings up questions of power' (ibid).

This study mainly applies descriptive discourse analysis (DDA), but partly uses critical discourse analysis (CDA). The DDA is limited to the analysis of expressions of religious identity occurring in the novel themes. In contrast, the CDA analyses implicit meanings interpreted from the context of the novel or attempts to make clear the hidden purposes of the writers behind the particular piece of writing. This means that the scope of the study includes the contextual surface analysis of the novels and the critical interpretations of the writer's symbolizations concerning religious identity.

e) Scope of the Study

This paper is limited to the exploration of religious identity, the influence of the other dimensions on it and its effect on the characters' relations; it is not concerned with analyzing all identity dimensions and concepts. The study is led by the intercultural communication theory (ICT) so it is not supposed to search the data freely to come up with a new theory. The investigation is limited to the themes of the novel, so it is not based on any data from the context of the novel (the Nigerian society where the author lived and about which the novel talks).

f) General Background of the Novel Things Fall Apart

In the recent time, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) can be counted as one of the most outstanding literary works (Salami and Tabari 2018). Therefore, it has caught the attention of a wide range of readers both inside and outside Nigeria (ibid). Chinua Achebe's (1930-2013) parents converted to Christianity, but his grandparents were still firm believers in their traditional culture (Kenalemang 2013). This was useful for him, that is, to possess a rich knowledge of both the British culture as well as Nigerian culture. This novel was written in his response to what the Europeans depicted of African culture. He, therefore, portrayed the African society in a fictional district in Nigeria, presenting the actuality of Ibo society. The novel aimed to reflect the influence of European colonialism from African perspectives. It also aimed to reflect on positive and negative influence of the Europeans on the lifestyle of the Ibo society (Kenalemang 2013). The novel gives a vision of the Ibo life and an insight into the differences and conflicts in their cultural, religious, and political traditions (Fischer 2004).

g) Summary of the Novel Things Fall Apart

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 several 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 strict rules and customs that they believe are the core foundation to pleasing the gods, and none can disobey these rules. If anyone does, 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 spilled blood of an Umoufia clanswoman. Therefore,

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Okonkwo was punished by the gods for this. As the novel develops, he is exiled from his land (Umoufia) because 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).

II. Literature Review

a) Definition of Religious Identity

EbstyneKing et al (2013:188) define it as 'the extent to which an individual has a relationship with a particular institutionalized doctrine about ultimate reality'. It is the 'sense of belonging' to a religious group due to the acceptance an individual has to the group's beliefs (Molaiy et al. 2016: 4). Kim and Bradford Wilcox (2014:3) label it as religiosity and define it as 'any kind of religious beliefs and practices that can reflect one's religiousness'.

The above definitions highlight the conception that religious identity refers to the individual affiliation to a group, because of sharing its members' beliefs. The degree of belonging or commitment to the group varies from one believer to another according to various factors including the attendance of religious practices,
The quality of contact with the group, the influence of the religious category, the individual preferences, social norms, situations and lifestyles as well as some other factors will be discussed in detail later (Agbiboa 2013).

b) The Measurement of Identifying Religiosity

Despite the great attention given to religious identity in the previous studies, the scholarly measurement identifying it remains problematic. This is due to the dynamic nature of the social and individual identities as well as its conflation with the other identity dimensions such as ethnic or racial categories (Martin and Nakayama 2010).

The measure adopted in the current study for considering the individual or the individual's behavior as being *religious* depends on the motivation underpinning the behavior or the nature of the action itself. That is, every individual behavior is labeled as *religious* if it depends on religious guidance. The individual himself is considered religious when he acts according to the beliefs of the group he belongs to. The degree of religiosity could be measured by comparing the individual with his associates or/and whether he actually follows the authentic group guidance.

c) The Role of Religion in Identity Formation

Among the social dimensions of identity such as race, ethnicity, gender, and political parties, religious affiliation has its importance in identity formation (Martin and Nakayama 2010) as it serves as a source of meaning and legitimacy for life activities and everything from peace and war to 'notions of morality and issues of sex' (Henera et al 2017: 2). It is also thought to play a significant role in maintaining group identity and strengthening relationships, especially among immigrants(Peek 2005).

d) Factors Affecting Religious Identity

It is pointed out above that identity is constructed by oneself and in interactions with the larger group (Ting-Toomey 1999). Our view of ourselves is greatly influenced by cultural, personal, social and relational factors (ibid). Thus, identity formation is a process accomplished by a multitude of factors including family, gender, cultural, ethnic, and individual socialization (Samovar et al 2009). Every individual, then, is a member of different social and cultural groups (ibid), hence, 'everyone's identity is formed and influenced by all identity groups he or she participates in' (Horáková2007:12). Religious identity formation, maintenance, and modification depend on the influence of the other identity dimensions such as parenting, social pressure (Loewenthal 2010), cultural norms (Cohen 2011), race, ethnicity (Martin and Nakayama 2010) and personality (EbstyneKing 2003).

Therefore, the paper argues that the above-mentioned identity dimensions influence religious identity construction, so it is desirable to have a brief background about each of them as well as some knowledge about the way they impact religiosity as shown in the literature.

i. *Gender*

Gender identity refers to the social notion that clarifies the characteristics to be a man or a woman. It is the social meaning ascribed to male and female social categories in a society (Wood and Eagly 2009). It socially specifies what roles are associated with men and women in a particular time and space (Ting-Toomey 1999). It refers to how a certain culture differentiates masculine and feminine social roles (Samovar et el 2009:158). To understand the nature of gender differentiation, it is essential to refer to the cultural values and institutions that determine the masculine and feminine roles (Wood1997; Ting-Toomey1999). Culture, then, determines dress, colors and clothing styles, the expressions associated with each gender, and the communal role each plays and even activities and sports (Martin and Nakayama 2010).

One of the most influential sources that affect the formation of gender identity is religion (Klingorov and Havlicek 2015). King (1995, in Klingorov and Havlicek 2015:3) argues that 'gender roles are primarily

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constructed through religion, culture, lifestyle, and upbringing'. This highlights the close influential relations between religious and gender identities.

ii. *Race and Ethnicity*

Racial and ethnic identities seem the same to many people and the differentiation between them is 'unclear or confusing'(Samovar et al 2009:156). Broadly speaking, racial identity is tied to the group connection based on having distinguishable biological characteristics (ibid) such as color and other physical heritage. At the same time, ethnic identity refers to one's sense of sharing a group heritage, history, homeland, language (ibid), traditions, costumes, values and behaviors (Martin and Nakayama 2010). Although both share the sense of belonging to a racial group, ethnic membership has a wider sense than racial identity as it includes self-identification and knowledge about the group's history and values (ibid).

Religious identity is closely related in its formation to ethnic identity (Peek 2005) and sometimes they conflate to the extent that it would be difficult to view them in terms of belonging (Martin andNakayama2010). For example, in Nigeria, Islam spread in the north among the Hausa tribe till it is assumed that every Hausa man is a Muslim by virtue of ethnicity, and in the south, Igbo people are assumed to be Christians. This close nexus between religion and ethnicity in Nigeria made many people think that being Muslim means assimilating Hausa ethnicity (Anthony 2000).

iii. *Class Identity*

Each society has its own way of classifying its sub-cultural classes. Some societies base the categorization on racial, religious or political dimensions. The social reactions and practices are, therefore, shaped on the bases of these social classes. Martin and Nakayama (2010: 194) report that 'the magazines we read, the food we eat, and the words we use often reflect our social class position'. This classification leads us to the notion of majority and minority groups. The culture of the majority group is consciously or unconsciously the one which dominates the society: 'It is taught at schools and referred to in the media' (Horáková 2007:10). Such class discrimination often results in intercultural misunderstanding and cultural clashes as we will see in the novel under study.

iv. *Personality*

It is stated above that individual identity has two facets of self-concepts, one is derived from an individual's knowledge of his group membership (group identity) and the other is derived from the other kinds of personal attributes (personal identity) (Vignoles 2017). The personal or individual identity dimension is thought to be a sum of all identity dimensions (Martin and Nakayama 2010). Personal identity includes the personal preferences and choices. It was stated so far that individuals, who are members of a group, cannot be typically similar to each other in accepting and practicing the group values and behaviors (Jung and Hecht 2004). Each group member differs from the other in the extent to which he or she identify with the larger group (Vignoles 2017).

v. *Stereotyping*

According to Lippman (1922, cited in Whitley and Kite 2006), stereotype is a picture in the head. Stereotypes refer to the 'beliefs and opinions about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviors of members of various groups' (ibid). It is a mental picture held by individuals about a group on the bases of oversimplified opinions and biased judgment (Patel et al 2011). Mai (2016:2) defines it as an over-generalized view about a certain group of people or a culture. It can be concluded from the above definitions that a stereotype is a mental picture, which an individual forms about a certain group and generalizes it to all the group members. Stereotyping is formed because of the lack of accurate knowledge about others in situations where there is not enough time to search the truth (ibid). Another reason for holding stereotypes is cultural prejudice (Holliday et al 2010). This is because, prejudice is - as it will be explained- a negative attitude formed as a result of not having accurate knowledge about others, so it serves as a basis for stereotyping.

III. Analysis and Discussion

In this unit we provide samples of the analysis. We bring chosen extracts from the novel and analyze them according to the IC theory to see if the study´s hypotheses are true or not. This unit is sub-titled with suitable headlines to simplify understanding the novel's themes.

a) The Clansmen, Earth Goddess, and the Fathers

The native people in the novel lived in small groups, each one of them representing a separate clan. Every clan had its own customs and laws. The clansmen worshipped different Gods, some of these Gods were more important than others and each had its role in the people's life and in their relations. The most respected God was the Earth Goddess, which was responsible for protecting their crops and conducting their behaviors. Their religious identity, therefore, was closely linked to the laws of *Ani,* the Earth Goddess, as everyone's behavior was thought to be directed by *Ani*'s wishes. Moreover, the clan set severe punishment for everyone who ignored *Ani*'s will.

> *The Feast of the New Yam was approaching, and Umuofia was in a festival mood. It was an occasion forgiving thanks to Ani, the earth goddess, and the source of all fertility. Ani played a greater part in the life of the people than any other deity. She was the ultimate judge of morality and conduct. And what was*

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more, she was in close communion with the departed fathers of the clan whose bodies had been committed to earth.(Achebe: 32)

It is also noticeable that *Ani* was closely related to their former fathers and both impacted the clan's morals and activities. The ethno-religious backgrounds influenced the clansmen's identity as their behaviors were to adhere to the God's laws and inherited from their departed fathers (ancestors).

b) Okonkwo's Personal Attitude

Ogbuefi Ezeudu (the old brave man) visited Okonkwo to inform him that Umoufia decided to kill the boy (Ikemefuna, a boy from another clan who was given to Umoufia in compensation of an Umoufian women killed there) and that he should not bear hand in the murder of the boy, as the boy called Okonkwo father. When Okonkwo later paid a visit to his best friend Obierika, he blamed him of not taking part in the killing.

"I cannot understand why you refused to come with us to kill that boy," he asked Obierika. "Because I did not want to," Obierika replied sharply. "I had something better to do.""You sound as if you question the authority and the decision of the Oracle, who said he should die.""I do not. Why should I? But the Oracle did not ask me to carry out its decision.""But someone had to do it. If we were all afraid of blood, it would not be done. And what do you think the Oracle would do then?""You know very well, Okonkwo, that I am not afraid of blood and if anyone tells you that I am, he is telling a lie. And let me tell you one thing, my friend. 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.' (Achebe: 58)

In the beginning of their conversation, Okonkwo pretended to be unaffected by the killing, as he said '*that boy*' to show that he is not weak. Actually, he was affected to the degree that he could not eat for two days. This was an example the contradiction between Okonkwo's personal and enacted identity layers. This contradiction created misunderstanding between the two close friends.

Okonkwo did not taste any food for two days after the death of Ikemefuna. 'He drank palm-wine from morning till night, and his eyes were red and fierce like the eyes of a rat when it was caught by the tail. (Achebe: 55)

Okonkwo tried to show that he killed the boy to fulfill the Oracle's will, though he was told not to participate. Okonkwo did so to appear tough and strong. Here, Okonkwo broke the clan's religious instructions for the second time (the first was the breaking of the Pace Week), because his personal identity contradicted with the communal identity. The source of his personal contradicted identity was his fear of failure:

Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did his little children. Perhaps down in his heart, Okonkwo was not a cruel man. But his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness. It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic, the fear of the forest, and of the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw. Okonkwo's fear was greater than these. (Achebe: 12)

Okonkwo's fear of failure affected his relations with his children, family, and kinsmen. He wanted the people around him to perceive him in a way that differs from his real personality. He always chose to be seen as strong and unaffectionate, so he forced himself to perform actions that contradicted his religious and social norms. The religious identity seemed to be superior to the personal one in almost all of the themes of this novel. However, the personal identity here appeared to challenge the religious, a thing which is seldom to occur in such a high-context society.

c) Male and Female Crimes

In the centre of the crowd a boy lay in a pool of blood. It was the dead man's sixteen-year-old son, who with his brothers and half-brothers had been dancing the traditional farewell to their father. Okonkwo's gun had exploded, and a piece of iron had pierced the boy's heart. The confusion that followed was without parallel in the tradition of Umuofia. Violent deaths were frequent, but nothing like this had ever happened. The only course open to Okonkwo was to flee from the clan. It was a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman, and a man who committed it must flee from the land. The crime was of two kinds, male and female. Okonkwo had committed the female because it had been inadvertent.(Achebe: 108-109)

During his father's funeral, *Ezeudu*'s son was accidentally killed by Okonkwo's old gun. The clan considered such kind of crime as a female crime, as the doer had no intention to act it beforehand. To categorize crimes into male and female reveals the association between religion and gender differentiation. Men were thought to be strong and brave, so they were expected to do things intentionally, whereas women act inadvertently for they were thought to be soft and sensitive.

Anyone who killed a clansman would be cast out of his land. This law would have its great effect when it came to the issue of the converts, who would leave their clan's local religion and cause troubles to the natives, but no one could dare to kill any of them, because they still belonged to the clan.

As soon as the day broke, a large crowd of men from Ezeudu's quarter stormed Okonkwo's compound, dressed in garbs of war. They set fire to his houses,

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demolished his red walls, killed his animals and destroyed his barn. It was the justice of the earth goddess, and they were merely her messengers. They had no hatred in their hearts against Okonkwo. His greatest friend, Obierika, was among them. They were merely cleansing the land which Okonkwo had polluted with the blood of a clansman. (Achebe: 109)

The group of men, who came in wearing war clothes to destroy Okonkwo's belongings, aimed to achieve God's will. Their action had a religious base. They were religiously convinced to treat their friend in a way that had no social or logical excuse. This shows that the clan's men followed the religious customs blindly and the religious effect on people's treatment to each other was great. When religion was in contradiction to individual wills and preferences, it was the religious-based action which was the strongest. Although Obierika was the most intimate friend to Okonkwo, his religious commitment pushed him to bear hand in the destruction of his friend's compound.

Obierika was a man who thought about things. When the will of the goddess had been done, he sat down in his obi and mourned his friend's calamity. Why should a man suffer so grievously for an offence he had committed inadvertently? But although he thought for a long time, he found no answer. (Achebe: 109)

Though Obierika obeyed God's will as all of his clan did, he kept thinking about the calamity of his friend. He asked himself a question that criticizes the customs of his clan: Is it justice to exile a man out of his land because he committed a crime accidentally? If a man was participating in the funeral of his friend using his gun in the way everyone else used it and it happened to kill a boy by an unexpected explosion, is it his fault? The question Obierika kept asking himself seems logical and denoted some sort of criticism to local religion.

Obierika's personal identity thus did not agree with all the native customs, but the strength of the main communal identity made him to hide his own preferences and follow his people without internal consent. This showed that the local customs were supported by the communal identity not the personal.

d) The Missionary in Umoufia

The missionaries had come to Umuofia. They had built their church there, won a handful of converts and were already sending evangelists to the surrounding towns and villages. That was a source of great sorrow to the leaders of the clan, but many of them believed that the strange faith and the white man's god would not last. None of his converts was a man whose word was heeded in the assembly of the people. None of them was a man of title. They were mostly the kind of people that were called efulefu, worthless, empty men.(Achebe: 125)

Obierika visited his friend for the second time with interesting news. Based on the fear raised by the story of Abame, the white man settled himself peacefully among the clan's men and started to spread his new religion. The leaders of the clan got angry because some of their own people began to leave their religion and follow the new one. The religious conflict started between the two opposing religions and the adherents of each one began to employ all available means to maintain their religious identity. Although the natives noticed the danger approaching them, they attempted to convince themselves that all the converts were worthless people that would not break the unity of the clan. One of their religious leaders was called *Chielo*, the priestess of the Oracle. Chielo tried to keep the clan's people firm in their religion by giving an abusive description of the new religion and those who converted to it:

Chielo, the priestess of Agbala, called the converts the excrement of the clan, and the new faith was a mad dog that had come to eat it up. (Achebe: 125)

Chielo's words clarified that the religious cohesion between the people of the same clan was the strongest element that tied the people together. This was because she described the converts with a disgusting word (*excrement)*, although they still had the same race, nationality, language, and family relations as the natives. The religious change thus affected the native relationships to the degree that made the priestess use such disgusting words about those, who have the same race when they changed religion. These words back up the argument that religion was the most effective identity component and it played the most influential role in shaping identity. Chielo also illustrated the new faith as a dog eating up human waste. This illustration may stand as a barrier that makes people flee from embracing the new faith.

Some of the clan's customs provided some sort of help to the strangers to put a knife on the rope that tied them together. One of these customs was their disrespect to those, who did not have honorable titles among them. They are called *efulefu*, worthless people, who were unimportant people according to the clan's classification. The new religion profited from these neglected people and easily attracted them to its camp.

The social class categorization of having some natives, who were considered worthless, emanated from religious thoughts. That is, classifying native people into high and low classes had its religious root. They believe that the poor man whose farm did not produce much harvest had ill-treated his personal God. Their Gods were thought to encourage work, so the man who was lazy was not a God-fearing man and thus he was not respected by the clansmen. This was the case of *Unoka* (Okonkwo's father) who was ill-fated due to laziness in work. When he visited the Oracle to consult him, he was

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told by the priest that his laziness was the cause of his bad harvest and it also offended Gods and fathers:

> *"You have offended neither the gods nor your fathers. And when a man is at peace with his gods and his ancestors, his harvest will be good or bad according to the strength of his arm. You, Unoka, are known in all the clan for the weakness of your machete and your hoe. When your neighbors go out with their axe to cut down virgin forests, you sow your yams on exhausted farms that take no labor to clear. They cross seven rivers to make their farms- you stay at home and offer sacrifices to a reluctant soil. Go home and work like a man."*(Achebe: 5)

Since the title of honor in the village was gained by having good harvest, and the harvest itself needed God's acceptance, then the title had religious basis.

e) The Religious Conversation

> *"If we leave our gods and follow your god," asked another man, "who will protect us from the anger of our neglected gods and ancestors?""Your gods are not alive and cannot do you any harm," replied the white man. "They are pieces of wood and stone."When this was interpreted to the men of Mbanta they broke into derisive laughter. These men must be mad, they said to themselves. How else could they say that Ani and Amadiora were harmless? AndIdemili and Ogwugwu too? And some of them began to go away.* (Achebe:127-128)

The natives were shocked by the white man's answer that their Gods were harmless, so the communication barrier rose to its peak and some of them began to leave, thinking that they must not waste their time with a mad group of men. The local religious faith was deeply rooted in the natives' lives for successive previous generations, so they believed that the one who opposed it must surely be mad. Therefore, when the missionaries discovered that the discussion would be of no value, they tried to soften the meeting by singing some seductive songs to seduce the Ibo hearts. Benefiting from the inter-religious dialogue, the white man began to learn more about the others and himself as well. This confirmed the argument that intercultural communication helps the individual to make sense of his own identity through learning how he differs from the others. That is, identity is conceptualized in communication.

The natives' stereotypical concept towards the strangers rose and they made sure that the white man must be mad to think that their Gods were harmless. This stereotypical image took its basis from the local prejudice that everyone who was different from their way had to be wrong.

> *After the singing the interpreter spoke about the Son of God whose name was Jesus Kristi. Okonkwo, who only stayed in the hope that it might come to chasing the men out of the village or whipping them, now said "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 crowd agreed."I did not say He had a wife," said the interpreter, somewhat lamely."Your buttocks said he had a son," said the joker. "So, he must have a wife and all of them must have buttocks."* (Achebe:128)

The evangelists' mission became more difficult after Okonkwo's question which seemed logical and gained the acceptance of the crowd. The interpreter got confused and tried to justify his last words, but he was not successful, so the joker profited from the communication mistake the interpreter made in the beginning and made fun of him. Okonkwo's participation in the meeting gave the natives a superior position and feeling that they may remain firm in their religious identity.

The pre-set stereotypical concept the white man had about the natives, that they were primitive as their way of life and their limited knowledge about the world showed, made him treat them in a simplified way that put him in confusion. Had he thought that they might have been clever and provided him with difficult questions, he would have changed the way of negotiating with them. The white's man exclusive perception let him to assume that all that the heathens would say is false and the only truth was found in his own religion. Therefore, the white man was stunned by Okonkwo's question, to which he found no answer, so he started singing so as to make the audience forget about the question:

> *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. He shrugged his shoulders and went away to tap his afternoon palm wine.* (Achebe:128)

The missionaries' reasoning seemed weaker when they ignored the question, so the indigenous stereotype that the white man was mad became more evident to the crowd. Therefore, the missionaries turned to use ways other than conversing to attract the natives to the new faith. The lack of knowledge about the target culture and religion remained an obstacle for the white man and it restrained his mission of converting natives.

f) Ethno-gender Actions

Okonkwo's thought was caught by the social ethno-gender view. He kept regretting that he would be pleased if Ezinma was a boy, because she resembled him and agreed with him in his ideas. Nevertheless, Ezinma would not be valuable for him because she could not fill the space of the boy in the masculine society, which did not provide a considerable space for women to represent it. According to the native gender-based point of view the effeminate men are not respected:

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At the beginning of their journey the men of Umuofia talked and laughed about the locusts, about their women, and about some effeminate men who had refused to come with them. (Achebe:51)

Here their gender-based differentiation was linked to their religious-based customs. They blamed those who refused to bear hand in the killing of Ikemefuna of being cowards and effeminate. This view has a positive effect in strengthening their religious identity as they associated femininity to the new religion and masculinity to their local one:

*To abandon the gods of one's father and go about with a lot of effeminate men clucking like old hens was the very depth of abomination. (*Achebe:134)

The white man and all his followers are seen by the natives as effeminate, so it is an abomination to follow them.

g) The First Woman Convert

And for the first time they had a woman. Her name was Nneka, the wife of Amadi, who was a prosperous farmer. She was very heavy with child. Nneka had had four previous pregnancies and child-births. But each time she had borne twins, and they had been immediately thrown away. Her husband and his family were already becoming highly critical of such a woman and were not unduly perturbed when they found she had fled to join the Christians. It was a good riddance. (Achebe:132)

After it became clear to some of the natives that their own people believed in wrong things, numbers of them fled to the new faith. One of these new converts was *Amadi*'s wife *Nneka* (another sample of sudden conversion). According to the clan's customs, the name Nneka was given to children meaning: 'Mother is supreme', that is, mother is most important of all. This is because, they believed when life is bad and sad, one needs to go to one's mother land to find help, as Okonkwo did when he was exiled. Therefore, Okonkwo gave the first baby born for him during his exile, the name Nneka –'*out of politeness to his mother's kinsmen*' (Achebe:143).

After the conversion of the first woman, carrying the name Nneka, a sign by the writer that the local religion had lost the most important member of all. This also illustrates that strong influence of religion in people's identities, as the clan got rid of the most respected member for the sake of their faith. The conversion of Nneka was due to the wicked thoughts of the local faith. She suffered a lot from the custom of throwing children alive to die in the Evil Forest as she lost four couples of twins. Moreover, her in-laws had been cursed by her, so they regarded her conversion a good riddance. Her husband and his relatives were influenced by their religious and social custom to ill-treat her. Thus, how the individual perceives himself and how the others see him depend on racial, cultural, and religious factors in which religion is the most influential one of them all. This confirmed that the religious identity could be expressed in such religious-based actions.

h) Religion-based Clash

A clash occurred between the converts and the natives when one of the new Osu converts was accused of killing the most respected animal in the village. The holy snake or python was thought to emanate from the God of Water, and it was held in high reverence as it was called 'Our Father' and it was allowed to go everywhere it wished:

The royal python was the most revered animal in Mbanta and all the surrounding clans. It was addressed as "Our Father" and was allowed to go wherever it chose, even into people's beds. It ate rats in the house and sometimes swallowed hens' eggs. If a clansman killed a royal python accidentally, he made sacrifices of atonement and performed an expensive burial ceremony such as was done for a great man. No punishment was prescribed for a man who killed the python knowingly. Nobody thought that such a thing could ever happen. (Achebe:139)

The natives were provoked by the news of the killing the royal snake and they thought that the Christians had overstepped their boundaries. Okonkwo angrily said that:

Until the abominable gang was chased out of the village with whips there would be no peace. (Achebe:139)

During the clan meeting, some people seemed ready to fight back for the sake of their faith. Okonkwo, who began to take part in the affairs of his motherland, strongly replied to *Okeke*, who preferred to take no action in the incident:

"Let us not reason like cowards," said Okonkwo. "If a man comes into my hut and defecates on the floor, what do I do? Do I shut my eyes? No! I take a stick and break his head. That is what a man does. These people are daily pouring filth over us, and Okeke says we should pretend not to see." Okonkwo made a sound full of disgust. This was a womanly clan, he thought. Such a thing could never happen in his fatherland, Umuofia. (Achebe: 140)

Okonkwo uttered some disgusting words to show his anger and make others ashamed of not punishing the undesirable Christians. This response showed aspect of the native identity that they were ready to fight for the sake of their religion as they agreed with Okonkwo's opinion to punish the strangers. Okonkwo's view was also affected by his masculine identity, so he considered Okeke's opinion to be

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womanish and a sign of cowardice that could not happen in his father's land.

> *"Okonkwo has spoken the truth," said another man. "We should do something. But let us ostracize these men. We would then not be held accountable for their abominations."Everybody in the assembly spoke, and in the end, it was decided to ostracize the Christians. Okonkwo ground his teeth in disgust.* (Achebe:140)

Okonkwo's opinion gained the preference of the meeting and the crowd decided to exclude all the Christians from the village activities. Although Mbanta is not Okonkwo's land, it is only the homeland of his mother's relatives, Okonkwo was allowed to co-operate with them against the converts, who were ethnically children of Mbanta. This means that the religious link was stronger than the ethnic one. The converts, on the other hand, had joined the Christian camp, although they differed from the missionaries in race, culture and nationality. This highlights the essential role religion plays in forming people's sense of belonging (identity).

i) Summary of Things Fall Apart

> *How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. 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.* (Achebe:155-156)

The unity of the clan was broken by the coming of the new religion. The clan's men were no longer acting together because the sources of their opinions differed. They would not fight together as they used to do when they were following the orders of the same Gods and elders. The white man started with cutting the thickest rope that tied the clan's members together, which was religion, and succeeded to seduce some of them. Then he made a part of the clan fight the other for him. This confirmed that the religious bond was stronger than the ethnic and cultural, and it also confirmed that the religious change affected the people's relation as it set new criteria of hate and love.

IV. Conclusions

By applying the IC theory on this fictive data the study resulted that the corpus serves as a fruitful tool for the intercultural communication study as the novel depicts the cultural clashes took place in Nigeria during the colonial era. The study investigated the illustrations of the religious identity which appears to be clearer in what is termed the religion-based actions. As the study adopted the measurement of counting or categorizing the certain action as religious by having pure religious motivations, the results reveal that most of the prominent clashes between the members of the two distinctive societies are underpinned by religious causes. Thus, the study concluded that religion plays an essential role in forming or shaping the life of almost all of the novel characters, though the level of religiosity differs from one individual to the other. The aspects of the native culture are highly influenced by their traditional religion as they have religious reasoning for most of their cultural norms. With regard to the effect of the identity dimensions and the other social factors on the religiosity, the gender identity seems to be the most influential dimension as it supports the indigenous faith because the natives consider – according to their masculine concepts- every feminine action carried out by the strangers as a sign of abomination to the new religion. This deep-rooted concept restrains the conversion to the new faith.

a) First Question and Hypothesis

The study supports the first hypothesis that religious identity is expressed in a form of stereotype-based treatment. That is, the characters in the novel, who differ in faith, treat each other in a way that was influenced by their pre-set stereotypical concepts. However, it also shows that the religious identity is clearly illustrated in many religion-based actions. That is, many of the novel's actions have purely religious reasons or are influenced by religious motivations. For example, the individuals were to follow the religion-based customs blindly, without questioning, even if the individual thought the custom was wrong, but he had no choice to refuse. They took actions that they do not like to do, because they were pushed by religious reasons such as destroying the house of their friend, whom they still loved, only to achieve God's will.

b) Second Question and Hypothesis

Racial Identity: The analysis does not show any effect of the racial identity on the religious identity formation or maintenance, so the results do not support the study hypothesis here.

Ethnic Identity: The results reveal that the ethnic identity affected the formation and maintenance of the religious identity, but its effect was so weak that it could not overcome the impact of religion. That is, the religious identity is stronger than the ethnic identity.

Gender identity: The results show gender differentiation in the characters' treatment. The native society is more masculine, and it considers the strangers to be more feminine. This natives' masculine viewpoint serves as a factor that strengthens the local religious customs.

Class Identity: The results reveal that there is little effect of the class identity on the religious one.

Personal Identity: The results reveal that village's society is a high-context type of society and the communal identity takes a superior position over the personal. In the high-context society, the personal identity is enacted

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when the communal became weak due to the emergence of the new alternative, because the dominance of the communal identity restrains the individuals from applying and enacting their personal preferences.

c) Third Question and Hypothesis

The results support this third hypothesis and show great effect of the religious differences on the relation between the characters of the novel, both between those who have distinct religions and those who belong to the same religion.

The religious change thus affects the native relation to the degree that makes the priest to use disgusting words against those who have the same race when they changed religion. Changing religion also causes Nwoye to forsake his relatives and tear himself away from all of the previous religion's customs. He disowns his father and family and puts his Christian teacher and guide in the place of the father.

d) Intercultural Communication and Identity

The results of the study support the argument that identity is constructed and conceptualized through communication. Besides they confirm the bidirectional influence between identity and communication. For example, the confrontations with the strangers make the natives understand aspects of their identity and provide them with chances to understand themselves through comparing their ways with those of the strangers.

The results also confirm the validity of applying DDA and ICT on fictive data.

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