

“Chike’s School Days” And “Dead Men’s Path” By Chinua Achebe: A Phenotextualization Of Religionwise Culture Shock

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Abstract: Using Edmond Cros’s sociocriticism, the article shows the extent to which Chinua Achebe phenotextualizes religionwise culture shock in such short stories as “Chike’s School Days” and “Dead Men’s Path.” Achebe puts into phenotext the religious conflict between Christianity and Odinani by portraying and verbalizing insubordinate and alienated characters like Amos, Sarah, Elizabeth, Chike and Michael Obi, who reject Odinani, the Igbo traditional religion, because of their inferiority and superiority complexes, as well as their spiritual intolerance. It appears from the religiously and culturally antagonistic genotext and phenotext penned by Achebe that Christianity actually is as “the humanitarian religion,” “the Fascist Religion,” which questions, transgresses, opposes, tyrannizes, swallows up and brings down Odinani.

Keywords: Achebe, Christianity, Cros, culture shock, Igbo, Odinani, phenotextualization, religionwise, short stories, sociocriticism.

Resume: Using Edmond Cros’s sociocriticism, the article shows the extent to which Chinua Achebe phenotextualizes religionwise culture shock in such short stories as “Chike’s School Days” and “Dead Men’s Path.” Achebe puts into phenotext the religious conflict between Christianity and Odinani by portraying and verbalizing insubordinate and alienated characters like Amos, Sarah, Elizabeth, Chike and Michael Obi, who reject Odinani, the Igbo traditional religion, because of their inferiority and superiority complexes, as well as their spiritual intolerance. It appears from the religiously and culturally antagonistic genotext and phenotext penned by Achebe that Christianity actually is as “the humanitarian religion,” “the Fascist Religion,” which questions, transgresses, opposes, tyrannizes, swallows up and brings down Odinani.

Mots clefs: Achebe, christianité, Cros, choc culturel, odinani, phenotextualisation, religieux, sociocritique



Introduction

With an *oeuvre* focusing on the Igbo customs and traditions, the impacts of Christianity, and the conflict between the Occidental and African traditional values in the wake of the advent of colonialism¹, Chinua Achebe claims to be a champion of his people's cultures and traditions. In his short fictions entitled "Chike's School Days" and "Dead Men's Path", two stories excerpted from *Girls at War and Other Stories*, he shows his predilection for the culture clash² between the Western faith (Christianity) and the traditional African religion³ (Odinani⁴). Such a liking leads to postulate that Achebe's "Chike School Days" and "Dead Men's Path" are a phenotextualization of religionwise culture shock. The questions that can be answered read thus: To what extent are the selected short stories a

¹ Colonialism brought about an encounter between Europe and Africa, a contact which results in a religious clash, as shown in the following: "The contact of the Africans with the Europeans marked the major conflict of cultures. It is one of the outcomes of colonialism. Most often, religion, social organization in which culture dominates, and political structure form the basis of culture conflict." (Mba, 2013: 36)

² Although Achebe has not invented the theme of the culture clash between Europe and Africa, the innovative ways in which he deals with this topic transforms him into a prominent advocate of African (Igbo) cultural values. This idea is summed up as follows: "Achebe is considered as one of the most important figures in contemporary African literature. His novels [and short stories], which chronicle the colonization and independence of Nigeria, are among the first works in English to present an intimate and authentic rendering of African culture. His major concerns, according to Abiola Irele, involve "the social and psychological conflicts created by the incursion of the white man and his culture into the hitherto self-contained world of African society, and disarray in the African consciousness that has followed." (Draper, 1992: 1)

³ As a traditional African religion in Igbo land, Odinani is a polytheistic religion opposed to Christianity which is monotheistic. In point of fact, the Igbo people worships scores of gods. If Chukwu is the "supreme" god, and Agbala the god that is able to tell the future and talk to the spirits of dead fathers, Ani is the female god portrayed as follows: "Ani is the goddess of the earth and harvest. Many people in the Ibo village sacrifice animals to Ani to entice a good harvest for the year. She is called upon many times during the year to bless crops (i.e. the Feast of the New Yam). It is also said that it is a crime against the earth goddess (Ani) to kill a fellow clansman (chapter 13). (Kucharski, 2015). Ani is also referred to as Ala, the Alusi or goddess of the earth, fertility and mortality, as shown in these terms: "Ala (also known as Ani, Ana, Ale, and Ali in varying Igbo dialects) is the female Alusi (deity) of the earth, morality, death, and fertility in Odinani. She is the most important Alusi in the Igbo pantheon. In Odinani, Ala rules over the underworld which holds the deceased ancestors in her womb. Her name literally translates to 'Ground' in the Igbo language, denoting her powers over the earth and her status as the ground itself. Ala is considered the highest Alusi in the Igbo pantheon and was the first Alusi created by Chukwu, God almighty. Ala's husband is Amadioha, the sky god." (Crayola, 2012)

⁴ "Odinani (Igbo: *òdìnnàni*) comprises the traditional religious practices and cultural beliefs of the Igbo people of southern Nigeria." (Afulezy, 2010) "Odinani" or "O di n'Ani" in a literal sense means the following: "It is anchored on the Earth Deity, a creation of the Supreme Creator". "Okike" (Creation), "Alusi" (Supernatural Forces or again Deities), "Mmuo" (Spirit) and "Uwa" (World), which are the four complex constituents of the cosmos, are the fundamentals of "Odinani". On top of these four elements into which the cosmos is divided according to the philosophy of the Igbo traditional religion, can be mentioned the golden rule of religion related to the useful coexistence on earth. (Omenani, 2012)



phenotextualization of religionwise culture shock? What are the implications of the production of the phenotext of religious conflict between Christianity and Odinani? To succeed in broaching the selected topic, it would be helpful to define terms like “phenotextualization” and “religionwise culture shock”.

The word “phenotextualization” has been coined after Julia Kristeva’s term “phenotext”, which “refers to the text as a “fact” or an “appearing” in its concrete manifestation or material form.” (Kristeva, quoted in Bodine, 2002: 29) If the “phenotext” means the physical text, then “phenotextualization” could mean the act of textualizing or rendering as text, the fact of creating the printed text. Put differently, “phenotextualization” is the result of textualizing, or again a written form. It makes reference to the typographical version of the literary text. As for the phrase “religionwise culture shock”, it encompasses two important terms: “religionwise” and “culture shock”. While “culture shock” refers to “a series of events and experiences” (Naysmith and Corcoran, 2001), which reveal the direct and antagonistic confrontation of European culture (Christianity), and African culture (Odinani), the adjective “religionwise” means concerning religion. The expression “religionwise culture shock” not only designates the cultural clash, the religious conflict occurring between a Christianity (introduced into Igbo land by colonialism), and an Odinani existing and practiced in its natural environment, but also the “state of disorganization as existing when a conflict of standards arises and the new standards begin to take root one by one, disrupting the fairly well integrated pattern of old standards” (Holt, 1940: 744). The collapse of the traditional religion (Odinani), or again social and spiritual disruption happens as a result of such an encounter. The recourse to the noun phrase “religionwise culture shock” can also be accounted for by the fact that religion is a “cultural component” (Qun et al, 2019: 447).

The aim of this article is to show the extent to which “Chike’s School Days” and “Dead Men’s Path” put into phenotext the religious conflict between Christianity and Odinani, the Igbo traditional religion. To this goal, Edmond Cros’s sociocriticism will be used, since it is a sociocritical theory of the cultural subject, which deals with the ways in which history is incorporated into the literary text, not at the level of the contents, but on the formal plane. (Cros, 2003: 53); thus, the study zeroes in on the structures of the phenotext in order to interpret the spiritual aspects, the antagonistic tensions existing between the religions in contact. In other words, the phenotext will be reconstructed by taking into account the semiotic and ideological dimensions of the author’s writing, thereby explaining “its fault lines, its internal contradictions – in the end, its irreducibly social nature.” (Cros, 1988) That



is why terminologies such as “intertextuality main line”, “ideosemes”, “morphogenesis”, “genotextuality”, “cultural subject/(pheno)text”, “genotext”, “phenotext” and “the discursive formation”, will be used as metalanguage for the analysis, which falls into two parts. While the first section examines the abandonment of Odinani, the Igbo customary religion, the second part investigates ways in which Odinani appears as a defeated Igbo belief.

1-Rejection of Odinani, the Igbo Traditional Religion

Before tackling Amos’s rejection of Odinani in aid of Christianity, it would be sensible to set the scene by enlightening the reader about the cultural and spiritual values of Odinani. These are perceived through the narrative function which the diviner performs in the studied short story because he epitomizes Odinani and Igbo ways. He is “The Seer [playing the role of] Custodian of Regenerative Wisdom in Traditional Society” (Ojinmah, 1991: 1). Not only is he the guardian of the Igbo people’s customs and traditions, but also the advocate of its revitalizing lore, a philosophy in the absence of which the collectivity, usually, is ill-fated. (Ojinmah, 1991:1) Actually, the diviner is a medicine man, a character who is believed to have special magic powers of healing. He is the traditional priest by whom the Igbo gods give their messages. As such, he is endowed with great powers with which he reads the past, the present and the future. This character to whom old Elizabeth pays a visit in order to find a remedy to Amos’s spiritual “sickness”, is portrayed as “the man of the four eyes”, a greatly powerful and wise man:

This diviner was a man of great power and wisdom. As he sat on the floor of his hut beating a tortoise shell, a coating of white chalk round his eyes, he saw not only the present, but also what had been and what was to be. He was called ‘the man of the four eyes.’ As soon as old Elizabeth appeared, he cast his stringed cowries and told her what she had come to see him about. ‘Your son has joined the white man’s religion. And you too in your old age when you should know better. And do you wonder that he is stricken with insanity? Those who gather ant-infested faggots must be prepared for the visit of lizards. (Achebe, 1972: 37)

The aforementioned quotation proves that the diviner is truly powerful because as soon as Elizabeth gets into his hut, he throws his “stringed cowries”, and tells her about the reason for her visit. In fact, he informs her about Amos’s and her own conversion to Christianity. With his “prophetic vision” (Ojinmah, 1991: 76), the seer guesses the question Elizabeth asks herself about her son’s “madness.” The sacred wisdom of the diviner can be measured by his use of Igbo proverb expressed as follows: “Those who gather ant-infested faggots must be prepared for the visit of lizards.” As a prophet sent by the Igbo gods to teach the people, the seer is viewed as a wise man, an (old) individual who uses an Igbo proverb to



give Elizabeth and her son Amos the message of the Igbo divinities. The aforementioned paremy conveys a meaning, which “the white man’s religion” expresses thus: “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6: 23). In other words, one reaps what one sows, which means that Amos, who has abandoned his fathers’ traditions and customs and religion for the white man’s belief, in the name of which he decides to marry an *Osu* woman, must be ready to pay for the drawbacks of his deeds and heresy.

The price of such sacrilege and self-denial of a free-born person who makes himself into an *Osu* or again a slave, is the isolation of the individual, who sets himself against the whole Igbo community and its customary and religious laws. As a linguistic material drawn from oral literature, the Igbo proverb used by the diviner in “Chike’s School Days”, as well as the one uttered by priest *Ani* in “Dead Men’s Path”, is a way in which Achebe pays homage to spiritual orality by showing that the religious discourse is an art in Igbo land. (Djangoné-Bi and Okafor, 1979: 342) Therefore, in the traditional locale where the indigenous proverb is pronounced, the divine verb plays a very important place. (Djangoné-Bi and Okafor, 1979: 342) In such a milieu, the art of conversation is preponderant since it values parole, speech, which encompasses traditional and religious wisdom. As African scholars put it, the indigenous proverb is the “noyau de la philosophie traditionnelle [et religieuse]” (Djangoné-Bi and Okafor, 1979: 343), that is to say, the “the hard core of the customary [and religious] philosophy”; the fundamental element of Igbo lore and spirituality. As a master of orality and endogenous religiosity, the diviner, who feels affection for his people’s sayings, and uses an Igbo proverb to teach a moral lesson to old Elizabeth and her son Amos, is aware that the local maxim is an essential aspect of the spiritual discursive aesthetics. Achebe could have found the English equivalent of the Igbo aphorism which he puts into the diviner’s mouth (“Those who gather ant-infested faggots must be prepared for the visit of lizards”), but he did not do it. Quite the opposite, he has conserved its traditional form, its original flavour. (Djangoné-Bi and Okafor, 1979: 344) By the use of the quoted adage, the diviner shows that he is a custodian of *Odinani* and the Igbo customs and traditions; and above all an expert in Igbo-philized and spiritualized parlance.

For the Nigerian writer, the Igbo prize Igbo epigrams because they bestow a status of good speakers upon people who use language skilfully and wisely. Achebe writes: “Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten.” (Achebe, 1972: 17) An old man, the diviner “eats words with the proverbial palm oil,” which points out to his proximity to the wisdom of the traditional religion. (Djangoné-Bi and Okafor, 1979: 344) The diviner’s customary



utterance to old Elizabeth encompasses time-honoured truth which gives weight to his warning and makes him into a repository of Odinani, as well as the Igbo age-old customs. With a stock of Igbo proverbs which the seer embodies, it can be said that he is a reference book, a reservoir of proverbial wisdom and spiritual values, which are the wise man's food. (Munonye, 1969: 184). All those customary and spiritual assets did exist and made the traditional community so stable and thriving that they are considered as stability and endogenous development factors in the African universe existing before Africa's contact with Europe. Such an idea is expressed thus by Kofi Awoonor (1976: 252):

To Achebe, the African world before the arrival of Europe was a well-integrated one, with dignity and honour... As a story of the tragic encounter between Africa and Europe, [*Things Fall Apart*] is an attempt to capture and restate the pristine integrity which has been so traumatically shattered by that confrontation.

Achebe's ancestors' cultural and religious values have not been created at random in the customary society; they have a purpose, which is expressed in these terms: "Our ancestors create their myths and legends and told their stories for a human purpose [...] Their artists lived and moved and had their being in society, and created their works for the good of that society." (Achebe, 1975: 19). Such humanitarian lore has been established for "the good of the [traditional] community" (Achebe, 1975: xiii), for its benefit and well-being. The usefulness of the traditional religion, which is practiced through the use of "Dead Men's Path", is further shown in the utterance of the village priest of *Ani*. This seer says the following to Michael Obi, a character incarnating the white man's ways:

'Look here, my son,' said the priest bringing down his walking-stick, 'this path was here before you were born and before your father was born. The whole life of this village depends on it. Our dead relatives depart by it and our ancestors visit us by it. But most important, it is the path of children coming in to be born...' (Achebe, 1972: 81)

The quote above shows the importance of Odinani for the villagers. In point of fact, as the old man puts it, the living of the entire collectivity is contingent upon this century-old "path". For the old seer, the inherited track not only allows the deceased to "depart" the village by it, to allow the ancestors to pay a visit to the villagers by it, but also permits the infants to be born to get to the village by the hereditary path. Talking about the preponderant roles of the passageway blocked by Michael Obi, who believes that the school "cannot allow people to make a highway of our school compound" (Achebe, 1972: 81), and that "The whole purpose of our school [...] is to eradicate just such beliefs [because] Dead men do not require footpaths" (Achebe, 1972: 81), Nonyelum Chibuzo Mba (2013: 35), writes the



following: “Dead Men’s Path” is an exposé of the belief of the Igbos in the relationship between the living and the dead ancestors and the unborn child. The path is symbolic of three realms of existence: the dead, the living and the unborn.” Odinani, a cult in which the ancestors are venerated, is practiced through the interdependence between these three worlds of life. Like a Cartesian and Christianized Michael Obi who closes the path because he thinks that venerating the ancestors by using a footpath “is just fantastic [and that] Our duty is to teach your children to laugh at such ideas” (Achebe, 1972: 81), Amos, his wife Sarah, his mother Elizabeth and his son Chike, turn down the sacred and ethnic wealth of Odinani, in aid of Christianity, the “monotheistic religion” (Venner, 2013: 90), a revealed spirituality founded on the belief that there is only one God.

The prayers and hymn-singing which are done daily on a regular basis are not only the signs of Amos’s family’s rejection of Odinani, but also the proofs of the family’s adoption of the white man’s religion. Achebe writes: “Amos had many years before bought a tiny bell with which he summoned his family to prayers and hymn-singing first thing in the morning and last thing at night. This was one of the ways of the white man.” (Achebe, 1972: 35) These “prayers and hymn-singing” open and close the family’s day marked by steady family prayers performed “in the morning” and “at night”. Here, it is worth mentioning that this object, the “tiny bell”, which is “a hollow usually cup-shaped metallic device that makes a ringing sound when struck” (*Merriam Webster’s Dictionary & Thesaurus*), which Amos purchased many years ago, is one of the symbols of the practice of the white man’s religion. In point of fact, not only do the strokes of the “tiny bell” allow Amos to tell the hours of prayers to the members of his family, but also this instrument suggests the idea that each member from Amos’s family places his/her faith in Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit and in God the Father. It is with such a tool that Amos “summons” the members of his family to “prayers and “hymn-singing”, which are acts and practices of prayers and songs of praise to God. The sentence (“This was one of the ways of the white man”), points out that Christianity is not the initial religion of Amos, his wife Sarah, their five daughters and their unique son Chike. It also shows that the family has been converted to Christianity, a religion of which practice appears as one manifestation of the Western culture and civilization.

Chike, as well as his two elder sisters, is brought up in a family setting marked by an education based on Christianity, a religion which the white man brought when he came to colonize and civilize the indigenous populations in Africa, precisely in Igbo land. The heterodiegetic narrator utters the following: “Like his sisters Chike was brought up ‘in the



ways of the white man', which meant the opposite of [the] traditional [religion]" (Achebe, 1972: 35). In this sentence, it is implicitly shown that "the ways of the white man" embodied in Christianity are opposed to "the traditional ways and spirituality of the black man" incarnated in Odinani, the customary religious beliefs. As a result, it can be inferred that Amos's family has abandoned his people's traditional customs and traditions, and has adopted Christianity, the white man's religion. As a child, Chike receives the sacrament of baptism which proves that he is now a Christian, that is to say, an individual who believes in the teachings of Jesus Christ. As such, Chike is part and parcel of God's children, those whom have been baptized in a Christian church, and whom are born anew by the act, the ceremony of baptizing:

The child received three names at his baptism – John, Chike, Obiajulu. The last name means 'the mind at last is at rest'. Anyone hearing this name knew at once that its owner was either an only child or an only son. Chike was an only son. His parents had had five daughters before him. (Achebe, 1972: 35)

Chike's two other given names ("John" and "Obiajulu") are significant. If the first one, i.e. "John", refers to the patron saint after which he is named in the Christian religion, i.e. Saint John as one of the disciples of Jesus Christ, the second one, i.e. "Obiajulu", which means in Igbo language "the mind at last is at rest", alludes to Odinani, and to the traditions and customs of the Igbo people for whom children's given names have a significance in the vernacular. Expressed in the Igbo dialect, the word "Obiajulu" signifies that with Chike's birth, Chike's parents are finally satisfied because after bearing five daughters, their sixth infant is a boy. So from this birth their mind, their spirit can be at rest, since they are no more worried because the long-awaited son and heir is now born.

On top of practicing Christianity in the family, Amos sends Chike to a school where he is taught the beliefs of the Christian religion. As a matter of fact, this Christian family further demonstrates its adoption of "the white man's ways" by sending Chike to school, particularly to the "religious class" in which he learns to sing, to dance and where he is also taught the catechism, which is corroborated by these terms: "Being so young, Chike was sent to what was called the 'religious class' where they sang, and sometimes danced, the catechism." (Achebe, 1972: 38) The lexis "catechism" should be underlined and explained. In point of fact, in Christianity the word "catechism" refers to the teaching of the Christian doctrine and moral to the people who are baptized. A catechized boy, i.e. one who is instructed by means of a catechism, Chike is to develop into a Christian who has been



received into the Christian church. The actions and speeches, performed and uttered by the characters of Amos and Chike, as well as those done and held by Amos's mother (Elizabeth), the diviner, and Michael Obi, reveal the idea that Odinani is under threat from the development of Christianity and the Western school, notably "the new school" (Achebe, 1972: 79).

Rejected by Amos, his family, Michael Obi and his wife Nancy, Odinani concedes defeat faced with Christianity, since its practice carried out through the *Osu* caste system and the veneration of the ancestors, which are age-old traditional and spiritual norms existing in the Igbo customary society, falls in disuse with the Christianization and the closure of "Dead Men's Path". From such a bitter observation, it can be elicited that the sociality of such phenotextualities as "Chike's School Days" and "Dead Men's Path" is a disrupted one since, starting from Odinani's rejection in aid of Christianity, the fictional society portrayed has undergone and is still facing a perpetual disruption today. It could even be said that the African and Igbo phenotextual microcosm is "No Longer at Ease" since "Things Fall Apart" perennially. The spiritual life from the times of the Okonkwos, the Amoses, and the Michael Obis up to the existence in the contemporary epoch is uneasy, not certain to last, not safe. Such a religious uneasiness portends failure for Odinani which is nothing else than a vanquished Igbo spirituality.

2- Odinani, a Vanquished Igbo Spirituality

Christianity vanquishes Odinani, i.e. it defeats the Igbo traditional spirituality completely in a religious and cultural competition in which both religions and cultures are involved. To better evaluate how Christianity wins against Odinani and the traditions and customs of the Igbo people, the study should be started with a presentation of what Edmond Cros calls "intertextuality main line" ("axe de l'intertextualité"). For Cros, "intertextuality main line" corresponds to all the semiotic material prevailing before the work of writing and encompassing not only the anterior texts, but also the historical matter retransmitted, as well as the represented society where different social practices take place. (Cros, 2003: 197) Thanks to Cros's metalanguage termed "intertextuality main line", the study will deal with what an *Osu* is in the Igbo traditional society, how he is discriminated against by the customs in the past, and how nowadays he has become a free person owing to the white man's religion. Setting the scene of the religionwise culture shock that breaks out between



Christianity and Odinani when Christianity enters into contact with the indigenous spirituality, Mba writes what comes next:

Certain traditional customs are countered by religious injunctions of Christianity. Such [sic] is exhibited by the contrast between the concept of status and social class in which the caste system (*osu*) became a social problem being unaccepted by the society of Umuofia, and accountable by Christian religion which believes in equality of man in the eyes of God. This and many others [sic] related issues bring about clash between new Christian converts and their kinsmen who remained loyal to the traditional religion and ways of life. The interpreters and court messengers were not the only threat to the customs and traditions of the people. The new class of natives produced by the school and church also formed another conflict group with the people. (Mba, 2013, p. 39)

The extract above shows how Christianity opposes the Igbo traditional law about the *Osu* caste system. Formerly accepted and obeyed by everybody, the Igbo social class establishment is questioned by the “new Christian converts” who “believe[s] [now] in equality of man in the eyes of God”. But the tribesmen who still practice Odinani and the ancestral ways do not tolerate such affront from the part of the proselytes. Thus, a confrontation is caused by this disagreement. How can this be accounted for? Actually, in the past, an *Osu*, an outcast, was not only owned by one of the diverse gods of the clan, and the latter lived on the margins of society, but also he/she was not shown any deep respect. He/she was rather scorned and disliked, and above all expectorated at; he/she was not allowed to get married with a free-born person, and was denied any possibility to get any titles of his/her clan. When he/she passes away, their dead body was placed in the earth in the Bad Bush by their relatives. The passage below sums up the condition of the *Osu*, as shown in the “intertextuality main line”, that is the socio-historical, cultural and religious background to the Igbo referential society:

In the past an *Osu* could not raise his shaggy head in the presence of the free-born. He was a slave to one of the many gods of the clan. He was a thing set apart, not to be venerated but to be despised and almost spat at. He could not marry a free-born, and he could not take any of the titles of his clan. When he died, he was buried by his kind in the Bad Bush. (Achebe, 1972: 36)

Enslaved to clannish gods, objectified, or again reified, and discriminated against, the *Osu* was formerly treated unfairly and inhumanely by the “free-born” people. The terms “*Osu*”/“free-born” (person) are ideosemes which refer to the genotextual utterance, the historical matter. These ideosemes are also morphic or again morphogenetic elements composing the genotext, which is considered as an ideological product (Cros, 2003: 62). Cros defines the morphogenetic field as a virtual space where several morphic components work.



He describes the word “morphogenesis”, from which the adjective “morphogenetic” derives, as a fruit of history which incorporates a historical material. “Morphogenesis” itself is a concept which refers to the functioning of the genotext whereby emphasis is placed on the origin and the essential role of forms. (Cros, 2003: 73 and 197) The vocable “morphogenesis” can be similar to the lexis “genotextuality”. Redefined by Cros, the designation “genotext” refers to the socio-historical, cultural and spiritual context corresponding to an ungrammaticalized enunciation, in that this statement has not been put into formula yet in the phenotext, the printed text (Cros, 2003: 55). With Julia Kristeva, the appellation “genotext” is connected with the process of generation of the signifier system. (Cros, 2003: 57)

The phenotext emerges from the clashing coincidence of two contradictory discourses which are about the fundamental stakes of the society. (Cros, 2003: 54) Achebe’s “Chike’s School Days” and “Dead Men’s Path” are good examples of a cultural and religious clash in which the opposing worldviews of the Western and the African/Igbo cultures are exposed. Thus, if the Occidental ways are considered “modern”, the African ones are deemed to be backward. Therefore, Odinani, as well as the Igbo customs and traditions, becomes synonymous with backwardness, which is opposed to modernity, civilization and sophistication conveyed by Christianity, “the humanitarian religion” (Venner, 2013: 90), which has come to reduce the suffering and to improve the living conditions of the *Osu*, the marginalized, those who are discriminated against in postcolonial Umuofia. These contradictions and plurality reveal the modality in which history (the contact of the cultures and religions and the crisis generated) is incorporated into the phenotext. (Cros, 2003: 53-54) An antagonistic phenotext can only be created by a conflicting genotext in Achebe’s “Chike’s School Days” and “Dead Men’s Path,” where Amos’s and Michael Obi’s religious intolerance, their foolhardiness and their affront to the traditional religion have brought about nothing else than the ingredients of a spiritual conflict between Christianity and Odinani.

Amos, Chike’s father, who is a “free-born” individual, has chosen to turn himself into an *Osu* by getting married with Sarah, an *Osu* woman, in the name of Christianity. This act is an unprecedented event in Igbo land because Amos has made himself an *Osu* while being fully aware of his deed, and people think that he has gone mad, he has lost his head because of “the new religion.” The heterodiegetic narrator puts this thought as follows:

Chike’s father was not originally an *Osu*, but had gone and married an *Osu* woman in the name of Christianity. It was unheard of for a man to make himself *Osu* in that way, with his eyes wide open. But then Amos was nothing if not mad. The new religion had



gone to his head. It was like palm-wine. Some people drank it and remained sensible. Others lost every sense in their stomach. (Achebe, 1972: 36)

Paying attention to the phenotext's unsaid by resorting to what Louis Althusser terms "symptomal reading" (Althusser, quoted in Cros, 2003: 15), allows to better explain the aforementioned quote. Applying a "symptomal reading" to the quoted excerpt means doing a reading which pays more attention to what the text silences than to what it expresses. What is implicitly meant is that Christianity has made Amos become so much blind that it is as if he has drunk too much palm-wine which has made him become drunk. In the great quantity of palm-wine he has absorbed, he has lost good sense, reason in his stomach full with this alcoholic liquid so that people say that he is not aware of his deeds. The comparison of Christianity with the corrosive effects of palm-wine on heavy drinkers of palm-wine reveals the extent to which Christianity is harmful to Odinani and to the traditions and customs of the Igbo people. Like palm-wine which brings the drunk person to "lose every sense in their stomach", the white man's religion has made Amos gone mad, because "with his eyes wide open", that is being fully conscious of his act, he made himself an *Osu* by marrying Sarah, an *Osu* woman. From a status of "free-born" man, Amos becomes willingly an *Osu*, a slave, because of his marriage with Sarah, his *Osu* spouse. As a result, this atypical wedding is qualified as a "mad marriage venture" (Achebe, 1972: 36).

Amos's act is a rebellion against Odinani and the traditions and customs of his people. He has transgressed a traditional and spiritual norm by breaking the *Osu* caste system's prescription in the name of Christianity. It can be said that Christianity has triggered off a negative transformation of Amos who sets himself against the rules of his clan by his "mad marriage venture." Through Amos's action, Christianity clashes with Odinani and the Igbo customary norms; both ways, the white man's and the Igbo's, come into a religionwise conflict.

The divine clash between Christianity and Odinani is all the more serious that Mr Brown, the white missionary, is Amos's unique helper in his "mad marriage venture". Mr Brown backs Amos up in his rebellious undertaking, as mentioned in this sentence: "The only person who supported Amos in his mad marriage venture was Mr Brown, the white missionary". (Achebe, 1972: 36) Actually, Amos becomes involved in this foolhardy enterprise because of Mr Brown's fortification and encouragement, which is expressed in this utterance: "Amos had emerged from Mr Brown's parsonage greatly fortified." (Achebe, 1972: 36) From the excerpt highlighting Amos's spiritual metamorphosis, two significant terms ("fortified" and



“parsonage”) can be mentioned and analyzed for enlightenment about Amos’s defiance against Odinani.

The lexis “fortified” means that Amos is made to feel stronger and braver against Odinani and its supporters, and that it is in the name of “the new religion” (Christianity) that Amos summons enough courage and determination to defy Odinani, as well as his people’s customs and traditions, by marrying an *Osu* woman. Meaning the house provided by a church for its pastor, the term “parsonage” is a symbol of the setting up of Christianity in Amos’s village. But the word “parsonage” also stands for the source of Amos’s religious strength, which makes him bold, foolishly adventurous in his rejection of his people’s ways, and which leads him to adopt the white man’s. In behaving so, Amos shows that he is alien to the white man’s customs, because “the European culture [and religion] which he has imbibed sees marriage as an individual’s affair rather than being public / communal affair as in African culture.” (Mba, 2013: 43) Amos has become alienated from the Igbo spirituality and ways. His attitude makes the reader feel that he no more belongs to the Igbo community. Like Michael Obi who deprives himself of the support of Ndume local inhabitants by opposing their practice of Odinani in “Dead Men’s Path,” Amos does without Odinani. As a result, he appears as an “alienated individual,” whose alienation stems from “cultural diversities / experiences.” (Mba, 2013: 42) An explanation of the word “alienation” will help the reader to make himself a mental picture of the type of alienation which Amos undergoes. The term is explained as follows:

Alienation is a social phenomenon and the alienated individual is non-conformist. He is usually too humble to participate in what others are doing. His passions and concerns differ significantly from others in his society. Alienation is constant nostalgic feeling of loneliness. The alienated person is grossly misunderstood by his society and this could expose him to danger. People could term him mad and thus reject his mode of life. This situation could endanger his life or even make people to want to destroy him. [...] Further study of alienated characters in African fiction reveals that they are in three categories namely, alienation emanating from cultural diversities / experiences; alienation from individuality: decisions and expected actions; alienation and individual’s perception of his society. (Mba, 2013: 42)

As institutions introduced into Igbo land by colonialism, Christianity and School have respectively represented factors through which Amos and Michael Obi have both assimilated the white man’s culture and religion. The religionwise clash stems from their experiences of the African and European customs. (Mba, 2013: 42) On the one hand, the theological conflict which breaks out because of Amos’s marriage with Sarah, and on the other hand, the sacred



clash occurring between Michael Obi, the newly appointed Headmaster of Ndume Central School, and the villagers owing to the closure of “Dead Men’s Path,” whose utilization expresses the local inhabitants’ practice of Odinani and their ancestors’ ways, not only separate Amos and Michael Obi from their society, but also prove that both characters are “alienated individuals,” “non-conformists,” since they do not follow the beliefs and practices of their forefathers. Put differently, they are dissenters who do not conform to their collectivity’s customary and spiritual standards.

As a Christian and a deviant, Amos makes the *Osu*, the outcast, or again the social class of untouchables, or again “the enslaved to Igbo traditional gods,” to acquire freedom thanks to Christianity, which appears, here, as a “humanitarian religion” (Venner, 2013: 90), which removes the pains and brings comfort to the marginalized, the excluded and the objectified. By converting to Christianity, by getting married with an *Osu* woman and by becoming thereby an *Osu*, Amos has set himself, his *Osu* wife and their children free from their bondage to the *Osu* caste system. It is no wonder that his son Chike tells one of their “non-Christian neighbours” (Achebe, 1975: 68) that they do not eat “heathen food,” that is “pagan food,” food offered to the idols. Amos’s child’s rebellion against Odinani is depicted as follows:

One day a neighbour offered a piece of yam to Chike, who was only four years old. The boy shook his head haughtily and said, ‘We don’t eat heathen food.’ The neighbour was full of rage, but she controlled herself and only muttered under her breath that even an *Osu* was full of pride nowadays, thanks to the white man. And she was right [...] Now all that had changed, or had begun to change. So that an *Osu* child could even look down his nose at a free-born, and talk about heathen food! The white man had indeed accomplished many things. (Achebe, 1972: 36)

The passage mentioned above shows that the advent of the white man’s religion (Christianity) has brought about great changes in the cultural and social life of Africans, particularly through the case of the Igbo people. These mutations are even more perceived through two sentences: “Now all that had changed, or had begun to change,” and “The white man had indeed accomplished many things.” These syntaxes sum up the quintessence of the paper in that they reveal the idea that the advent of the white man’s ways, particularly Christianity, makes “Things” such as the worshipping of ancestors, or again the traditional religion of the Africans/Igbo and their customs and their traditions to really “Fall Apart.” In other words, it could be asserted that Odinani “Falls Apart” with the establishment of Christianity in Igbo land. Therefore, it could be thought that “today [...] everything is upside down.” (Achebe, 1972: 38) Indeed, the introduction of Christianity into Igbo land has turned



Okonkwo's world "upside down," it has caused large changes and "A confusion [...] in [...] [the local] religion" (Venner, 2013: 90), and in his people's lives, as well. The connection between "Chike's School Days," "Dead Men's Path," and *Things Fall Apart* is manifest since Achebe's three writings share the same topic, notably the religionwise culture shock. First dealt with in 1958, in Achebe's first novel, the theme of "cultural conflict" is repeated again in *Girls at War and Other Stories* (1972), which is a proof that this subject matter is Achebe's favourite keynote. A concern which gives rise to the birth, the start of "African fiction," thereby making Achebe into the "founding father of African literature," as expressed in the excerpt below:

The themes of colonial domination and cultural conflict mark the real beginning of the African fiction. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* published in 1958 is very important at this period. Such thematic concern dominates the literary writing of 1950's to 1960's by African elites [...] The Anglophone African writers believe in realism, that is, representation of situation as it is. To attest that Africans have culture, Chinua Achebe presents Igbo culture in *Things Fall Apart* in which the killing of Ikemefuna is a typical example. To the Africans, the whites are not the agents to telling about God because every society has its own religion. *Things Fall Apart* is a reaction against colonialism. Achebe creates an imaginary Igbo society focused on a man whose dignity is centred on the Igbos and his excesses or extremity was abhorred. (Mba, 2013: 33)

Actually, Okonkwo's downfall in *Things Fall Apart* is synonymous with the collapse of the Igbo cultural and spiritual values embodied by the novel's protagonist. Likewise, Odinani is vanquished, defeated in "Chike's School Days," where characters like Amos, his child Chike, and his wife Sarah bring the customary spirituality, as well as the customs and traditions in use in the Igbo community to fall in disuse. By forbidding Chike to eat "heathen food," Sarah makes Odinani get into a situation in which it is no longer being used since the whole collectivity's spirit of sharing and solidarity is disrupted, as expressed in the extract below:

Sarah taught her children not to eat in their neighbours' houses because 'they offered their food to idols.' And thus she set herself against the age-old custom which regarded children as the common responsibility of all so that, no matter what the relationship between parents, their children played together and shared their food. (Achebe, 1972: 35)

As shown in the quote above, it is in the name of Christianity that Sarah prevents her son Chike from eating the food offered by their neighbours, because they are not converted to Christianity. They are considered as pagans, idolaters and idolatresses who "offered their food to idols," that is, to the spirits or again gods of the clan. If idolatry, or again idol worshipping, or again the adoration of ancestors and Christianity do not go hand in hand, then refusing food



“offered to idols” equates to oppose Odinani and one of the customary values of the Igbo people who view the education of children as a collective responsibility of the whole community. This entails that despite the misunderstanding of neighbouring parents, their children can play together and share their food. The practice of Christianity brings Sarah to question such spiritual and customary values as socialization, socialism and solidarity, which are promoted by Odinani and the traditions and customs. In point of fact, a Christianized Sarah, who “set herself against the age-old custom”, which fosters children as wealth belonging to the whole community, is put in an awkward position since Christianity, which is a religion that is based on the teachings of Jesus Christ and the belief that he is God’s son, does not forbid social mix of God’s children and food sharing. On the contrary, it encourages God’s children to meet and spend time with one another in a friendly manner and in order to enjoy themselves. So friendship, solidarity and love are fostered by Christianity, and yet there is a confusion and a clash between the practitioners of both religions. A character like old Elizabeth, who has converted to Christianity like her son Amos, also embodies the religious crisis, which is grasped by the fact that she straddles two religions: Christianity and Odinani. The spiritual shock occurring in old Elizabeth is all the more profound that she finally returns to Odinani. Such a return is not at all synonymous with a victory of Caliban⁵’s faith over Prospero’s. On the contrary, this fluctuation between Odinani and Christianity equates to a failure of the traditional worship. Her practice of Odinani before the advent of “the new religion”, her abandoning Odinani and embracing, or again taking up Christianity, and her dropping Christianity and her returning to Odinani, prove that she is racked with doubt and that her African and Igbo faith is not steadfast. The lack of spiritual steadfastness shown in her three oscillatory postures not only reveals indisputably that her life is in utter disorder, but also that she has lost her customary religious and cultural identity, her Africanity and her Igbophilia.

Elizabeth’s final return to Odinani because she cannot stand her son’s marriage with an *Osu* woman and Amos’s turning himself into an *Osu*, despite his free-born person status, symbolizes a defeat of an Odinani whose values have fallen in disuse. Indeed, characters like Elizabeth, Sarah, Amos, Michael Obi and Chike have all contributed to the collapse of Odinani, as well as the breakdown of the customs and traditions of their people. It can be

⁵ A prominent character in *The Tempest*, a play by William Shakespeare (2009), Caliban, who is depicted as half human and half monster, represents the Black enslaved, colonized and dominated over by Prospero, Shakespeare’s protagonist portrayed as an embodiment of the White, the colonizer, the dominator. In the context of colonialism in which Europe and Africa meet, the African/Igbo spirituality refers to Caliban’s religion, i. e. Odinani, which is opposed to Christianity, Prospero’s faith, or again the Occidental religiosity.



asserted that Christianity has triggered off “the progressive erasure of old religious beliefs” (Venner, 2013: 123), in Igbo land. It can even be said that Christianity, which jeopardizes the traditional religiosity, can be likened to “The Fascist Religion” (Gentile, 2002), a worship which does not allow any opposition.

Like the warning tale *Little Red Riding Hood* (Lang et al, 2005), “Chike’s School Days,” as well as “Dead Men’s Path,” is a “cultural text,” defined as a fragment of intertext of a certain kind which intervenes in the genealogy of writing according to specific functioning modes (Cros, 1991: 131). In “Chike’s School Days,” and likewise in “Dead Men’s Path,” two types of cultures and religions confront each other: the Western civilization (Christianity) and the African/Igbo culture and spirituality (Odinani). In the ensuing religionwise culture shock, Odinani surrenders, it admits that it has been defeated and wants to give up struggling. Such a spiritual and cultural defeat is voiced by Okonkwo, a character being “an embodiment of Ibo traditional values and its excesses” (Ojinmah, 1991: 11), in *Things Fall Apart*. In point of fact, Okonkwo arrives at the conclusion that “the white man has put a knife on the things that held them together and they have fallen apart.” (Mba, 2013: 39) As an epitome of Odinani and Igbo customary values, Okonkwo collapses by committing suicide. Similarly, Odinani, the traditional religion in which the ancestors are worshipped and which is exemplified by the law of *Osu* caste system in force in the traditional society, falls in disuse in “Chike School Days” and “Dead Men’s Path.” Achebe himself gives further reasons why African psyche made up of African culture and spirituality was defeated by the European civilization and religion, when he says what follows:

When I was a schoolboy it was unheard of to stage Nigerian dances at any of our celebrations. We were told and we believe that our dances were heathen. The Christian and proper thing to do was for the boys to drill with wooden sword and the girls to perform, of all things, Maypole dances. Beautiful clay bowls and pots were only seen in the homes of the heathen. We civilized Christians used cheap enamel-ware from Europe and Japan; instead of water pots we carried kerosene cans. In fact, to say that a product was Ibo-made was to brand it with the utmost inferiority. When a people have reached this point in their loss of faith in themselves their detractors need do no more; they have made their point.” (Achebe, 1973: 9.)

Mentioned in Achebe’s utterance quoted above, such words as “heathen” (repeated twice), and “loss of faith in themselves,” testify to the fact that Odinani and the whole of Igbo culture are totally defeated. The defeat is all the more lamentable that the Igbo come to self-denial, or again “self-contempt,” an attitude “which leads the African into believing that they are inferior to all other races.” (Ojinmah, 1991: 3). To Achebe, accepting “racial inferiority” on any ground is a spiritual and cultural sin which he will not pardon if he were in God’s



shoes. He writes: “If I were God I would regard as the very worst our acceptance – for whatever reason – of racial inferiority.” (Achebe, 1975: 44) Achebe, who attempts to remove “racial, religious and cultural inferiority” from Africans’ minds by teaching them “Where the Problem Lies” (Achebe, 1983:1), “Where the rain started to beat” and “Where they began to dry themselves,” through Chike’s and Michael Obi’s stories, respectively in “Chike’s School Days” and “Dead Men’s Path,” does nothing else than tell the reader that Odinani’s defeat is synonymous with the failure of African and Igbo soul and ethos, notably society’s ethical beliefs and outlooks. With his collection of poems about the Biafran civil war titled *Beware Soul Brother* (1972), Achebe has warned his African peers, artists, intellectuals and teachers about the worst form of death, which is the demise of the “soul,” the psyche, the spiritual death.

Conclusion

Using Cros’s sociocriticism, the study of a phenotextualization of religionwise culture shock in “Chike’s School Days” and “Dead Men’s Path,” has revealed that Odinani collapses in a confrontation with Christianity. Put differently, Achebe writes the cultural and religious clash. Thus, Odinani the Igbo customary religion has been rejected by Amos’s Christianized family, the Igbo spirituality has fallen in disuse, a sign indicating that it has been defeated by Christianity. The crisis which Odinani goes through is partly due to the inferiority complex developed in such characters as Amos, Chike, Sarah, Elizabeth, and Michael Obi. These paper characters have experimented the superiority complex caused by their conversion to Christianity. Because they have adopted the new religion, they believe that their African spirituality is primitive and inferior to the white man’s which is deemed civilized and superior. In the name of Christianity, Cartesianism and Modernity, Amos and Michael Obi have respectively married an *Osu* woman and closed the “Dead Men’s Path.” Their rebellious deeds testify to the fact that they are culturally and spiritually dead since their Africanity and their Igbophilia, or again what makes them Africans and Igbo has been voided so that they are neither Blacks/Igbo nor Whites. Such characters who set themselves against their community’s ancestral, social, traditional and religious practices can only fail and be doomed to incurable spiritual disease, as shown in Michael Obi’s and Amos’s cases.

As an embodiment of “The Novelist as Teacher,” Achebe wrote “Chike’s School Days” and “Dead Men’s Path” in order to teach his people “where [they] went wrong, where the rain began to beat [them]” (Achebe, 1975: 44), “where” they became ashamed of their customs and traditions and their spirituality. Put differently, both short stories are didactic



pieces of writing by which Achebe endeavours to instruct African societies, as Achebe himself puts it as follows:

[My goal is] to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement [...] I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past – with all its imperfections – was not one long night of savagery from which the Europeans acting on God’s behalf delivered them. (Achebe, 1975: 44-45)

For Achebe, any worthy African writer should re-educate the African about “Africa’s past” (Rogers, 1976: 1), by “map[ping] out what we are going to be tomorrow,” i. e., “act[ing] rather than [...] react[ing] [...] determin[ing] what kind of society we want, how we are going to get there, what values we can take from the past, if we can, as we move along” (Lindfors et al, 1972: 11-12). Achebe is adamant about the African writer’s role as a teacher and holds the view that the latter “cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done.” (Achebe, 1975: 45) Consequently, “The Novelist as Teacher”, who is unable to escape the mission of restoring his people’s cultural and spiritual dignity, should be a visionary whose task is “to provide a vision for those who are going to order [...] society.” (Maduka, 1981: 5-18). As “a participant in the drama of social change in Africa [Achebe] [...] use[s] his skills to help shape the future of the society” (Maduka, 1981: 13), by (re)appropriating African cultural and spiritual heritage helpful in finding out appropriate solutions to Africa’s development setbacks. Such an undertaking will bring Africans to know “where to begin to dry [themselves]” (Achebe, quoted in Ojinmah, 1991: 8). That is why “Chike’s School Days” and “Dead Men’s Path” are meant to prevent Africans from “take[ing] off before we have repaired our foundations” (Ojinmah, 1991: 12), to guide them to “first set the scene which is authentically African,” so that “what follows will be meaningful and deep.” (Achebe, 1973: 10) Works of art like “Chike’s School Days,” “Dead Men’s Path,” and *Things Fall Apart*, are indisputably fictions by which Achebe makes reparation for “our foundations.”

The paper provides enlightenments about the causes and the drawbacks of the religious clash between Odinani and Christianity. The ineffectiveness of “the cure” (Achebe, 1972: 37), suggested by the diviner in order to cure Amos of the madness, “the insanity” he “is stricken with” (Achebe, 1972: 37), since he “remained insane” (Achebe, 1972: 37), despite the fact that his mother “old Elizabeth performed the rites” (Achebe, 1972: 37), as well as the inefficaciousness of Michael Obi’s “modern and delightful [ideas]” (Achebe, 1972: 78), and above all his “modern methods” (Achebe, 1972: 78), prove that the transposition of the



values of “the Enlightenment” in colonial and post-colonial Africa, particularly in Igbo land, is a total fiasco. If in the 18th century Europe, scores of writers and scientists held the view that “science” and “reason” were more preponderant than “religion” and “tradition,” it is not the case in the Africa/Igbo land of the 20th century, where novelists and scholars like Achebe prove the contrary to be true. Through Amos’s and Michael Obi’s plights, Achebe shows that in Igbo land “Igbo spirituality” and “Igbo customs and traditions” are more important than Cartesianism, notably “science and reason.” Such a stand entails that being oneself or again being deeply rooted in one’s cultural and spiritual values is beneficial since it is a catalyst for endogenous individual and collective development. Daniel Etounga-Manguelle’s interrogation in his book entitled *L’Afrique a-t-elle besoin d’un programme d’ajustement culturel?* (1990), not only hints at the discussed issue, but also enlightens Africans about the urgency to recapture their cultural and spiritual identity. Chinese and Japanese who remained themselves despite their openness to European civilization, are culturally, spiritually, economically and financially developed today. Their localized socio-economic and philosophical growth has been generated not by the IMF’s and World Bank’s “Structural Adjustment Plans”, but rather by their own “Cultural Adjustment Plans⁶”.

Another benefit is about the enlightenment connected with the issue of adaptability and the drawbacks of unadaptability. Amos’s and Michael Obi’s are highly unadaptable characters who have been unable to adapt to the new socio-cultural situation. Like Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, Amos and Michael Obi have not changed their African and Igbo mentality and attitudes to suit the colonizer’s ways and religion. As a result, they fail to reconcile Odinani and Igbo customs and traditions with Christianity. The clear inference is that Igbo spiritual and customary universe has “Fallen Apart.” Amos’s, Michael Obi’s and Okonkwo’s successful attempt to reconcile the need for continuation of the veneration of the ancestors with preoccupation for espousing another religiosity, could prevent them from remaining uncured, insane and from being dead spiritually (Amos), from undergoing disgrace (Michael Obi), and from committing suicide (Okonkwo). Had they borrowed from the

⁶ The IMF and World Bank initiated in the 1970s and 1980s “Structural Adjustment Plans”, which were economic and financial reforms meant for pulling Third World countries’ economies which were in deep recession out of recession. In view of the failure of these policies in Africa, Daniel Etounga-Manguelle, an economist from Cameroon, suggests “Cultural Adjustment Plans” in order to allow African countries to effect endogenous development grounded on true transformation caused by a “humanistic culture”. Inner revitalization by which Africans remain themselves while belonging to their contemporaneity, radical change of mentalities, and culture adapted to present-day realities will trigger off technology transfer carried out in Africa by Africans and for Africans.



Western culture and religion what is positive by adjusting it to their own ways and philosophy, they would have fulfilled their missions successfully. As adaptive individuals, Amos, Michael Obi and Okonkwo could create conditions for a peaceful and harmonious coexistence of the African/Igbo and the Occidental cultures and religions.

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