



**MADONNA
UNIVERSITY**

**INTERNATIONAL
JOURNAL**
OF EDUCATION AND ARTS

VOL. 1, NO 4

2023



International Journal of Education and Arts Vol.1 , NO 4 Nov. 2023

The Weight of Tradition and Superstitions: An Interrogation of Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees*

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Abstract

The study examines the influence of tradition and superstitions on the existence of the characters of Chinelo Okparanta – an Igbo writer in the diaspora. The novel is set in 1960s [Nigeria](#) and follows the story of Ijeoma, a girl growing up in war-torn Nigeria who must come to terms with her sexuality and the conflict this presents in society. In particular, the paper is interested in examining the choking weight of tradition and superstition as portrayed in the selected literary text. It constitutes the discussion of various factors that affect people at different levels in association with tradition and in this case, same-sex relationships. The main objective of the paper is to analyse how homosexuality became a weighty tradition for an African writer of Igbo descent. Major scholarships on alternative sexualities have simultaneously exploited the erotic possibilities of same gender relationships and stigmatize it as grossly repulsive, un-African and most unlikely. The paper utilises W.E.B. Dubois' theory of “Double Consciousness” in the reading, analysis and interpretation of this text. The findings reveal that the writer's predilection to Eurocentric ways influences her assertions as reflected in her choice of characters that like her are cast in the in-between space. These characters shuttle

between points of inclusion and exclusion and view heterosexuality as weighty and confounding. The dearth of queer criticisms is a reflection of the perception by most Africans that homosexuality is inherently alien to African cultures.

Keywords: Tradition, Weight, Nigeria, Homophile, Chinelo Okparanta

Introduction

The tradition of a people is what marks them out distinctively from other human societies in the family of humanity. The study of tradition and culture in all its vastness and dimensions belongs to the discipline known as anthropology, which studies human beings and takes time to examine their characteristics and their relationship to their environments. These peculiar traits go on to include the people's language, dressing, music, work, arts, religion, dancing, and marriage and so on. It also goes on to include a people's social norms, taboos and values. Values here are to be understood as beliefs that are held about what is right or wrong and what is important in life. This paper will illustrate that African traditions and values can be appraised from many dimensions in addition to examining the method of change and the problem of adjustment in it. Here, it is hoped to show that while positive dimensions of our culture ought to be practised and passed on to succeeding generations, negative dynamism of our culture have to be dropped in order to promote a more progressive society.

Before we can have an appraisal of African traditions and values, it is necessary for us to have an understanding of the concept of tradition and its meaning. This will help us grapple with the issues we will be dealing with in this paper. This consists of gender mobility in post colonial African society. In Nigeria, particularly the Igbo Region, an anti homophobic politics finds itself unable to open up gay-affirmative spaces without running the risk of being traditionally insensitive. Green (1997:800) defined tradition as “a [belief](#) or behaviour (folk custom) passed down within a group or [society](#) with

symbolic meaning or special significance with origins in the past. Etuk (2002: 13) is of the opinion that “an entire way of life would embody, among other things, what the people think of themselves and the universe in which they live – their world view – in other words, how they organise their lives in order to ensure their survival”. The English word *tradition* comes in the words of Congar (2004:9) from the [Latin](#) *traditio* via [French](#), the noun from the verb *tradere* (to transmit, to hand over, to give for safekeeping), it was, he opines, “originally used in [Roman law](#) to refer to the concept of legal transfers and [inheritance](#)”. According to Giddens (2003:39), “the modern meaning of tradition evolved during the [Enlightenment](#) period, in opposition to modernity and [progress](#)”.

As with many other generic terms, Boyer (1990:7) notes that there are many definitions of tradition. The concept includes a number of interrelated ideas; the unifying one is that tradition refers to beliefs, objects or customs performed or believed in the past, originating in it, transmitted through time by being taught by one generation to the next, and are performed or believed in the present Tradition-oriented societies opines Simon (2008:9) have been “characterized as valuing [filial piety](#), harmony and group welfare, stability, and [interdependence](#), while a society exhibiting modernity would value "individualism (with free will and choice), mobility, and progress.”

Tradition is selective in what it absorbs or accepts from other people who do not belong to a particular cultural group. It is usually contrasted with the goal of [modernity](#) and should be differentiated from customs, conventions, [laws](#), [norms](#), routines, rules and similar concepts. Traditions can persist and evolve for thousands of years—A number of factors can exacerbate the [loss of tradition](#), including [industrialization](#), [globalization](#), and the assimilation or [marginalization](#) of specific cultural groups. In an attempt to capture the exhaustive nature of Tradition, Bello (1991: 189) sees it as “the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenge of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms thus distinguishing a people from their neighbours”. Tradition

is passed on from generation to generation. The acquisition of culture/tradition is a result of the socialisation process. Explaining how it is passed on as a generational heritage, Fafunwa (1974: 48) writes that:

The child just grows into and within the cultural heritage of his people. He imbibes it. Culture, in traditional society, is not taught; it is caught. The child observes, imbibes and mimics the action of his elders and siblings. He watches the naming ceremonies, religious services, marriage rituals, funeral obsequies. He witnesses the coronation of a king or chief, the annual yam festival, the annual dance and acrobatic displays of guilds and age groups or his relations in the activities. The child in a traditional society cannot escape his cultural and physical environments.

This shows that every human being who grows up in a particular society is likely to become infused with the tradition of that society, whether knowingly or unknowingly during the process of social interaction. We do not need to have all the definitions of tradition and its defining characteristics for us to understand the concept and meaning. It is true that tradition is universal but each local or regional manifestation of it is unique. The cultures of traditional African societies, together with their value systems and beliefs are close, even though they vary slightly from one another. Using Nigerian tradition for instance, Antia (2005: 17) writes that “Nigerians always behave differently from the French, or Chinese, or Americans or Hottentots, because Nigerian beliefs, values and total thinking are different from those of the French, Chinese, Americans or the Hottentots”.

Tradition has been classified into its material and non-material aspects. While material tradition/culture refers to the visible tactile objects which man is able to manufacture for the purposes of

human survival; non-material tradition comprises of the norms and mores of the people. While material tradition is concrete and takes the form of artefacts and crafts, non-material is abstract but has a very pervasive influence on the lives of the people of a particular culture. Hence beliefs about what is good and what is bad, together with norms and superstitions, are all good examples of non-material culture. Tradition is not static. It is always changed and modified by man through contacts with and absorption of other peoples' cultures, a process known as assimilation. Anita (2002:17) aptly captures it when she states that “tradition is not fixed and permanent”. Indeed, this research agrees that tradition needs to change but argues on the idea of the change. People go on in their daily lives trying to conform to acceptable ways of behaviour and conduct.

Persons who do not conform to their immediate society's values are somehow called to order by the members of that society. Based on traditional considerations, some forms of behaviour, actions and conduct are approved while others are widely disapproved of. To show the extent of disapproval that followed the violation of values that should otherwise be held sacred, the penalty is sometimes very shameful, sometimes extreme. African culture, with particular reference to the Igbos of South Eastern Nigeria, for instance, has zero tolerance for gay life. Etuk (2002: 22) writes that “no group of people can survive without a set of values which holds them together and guarantees their continued existence”.

Literature Review

Under the Udala Trees is gay literature. Gay literature is a collective term for literature produced by or for the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) community which involves characters, plot lines, and themes portraying male homosexual behaviour. The term is now used most commonly to cover specifically gay male literature, with a separate genre of lesbian literature existing for women. Historically, the term 'gay literature' was sometimes used to cover both gay male and lesbian literatures. There are many authors who write gay literature. But most of the times their voices are neglected by the society probably because such societies are sensitive

to such writings. Virginia Woolf is one of the famous writers in gay literature. Her book *Orlando*, is a book which Woolf wrote with her friend and lover Vita Sackville-West. In this book, the gender-fluid main character lives throughout several centuries as both men and women. Larsen was also a queer writer. Although it's never been confirmed that Larsen was bi, her fiction, some of which is very obviously based on her own life hints that she was familiar with same-sex attraction. This is super-noticeable in *Passing*, where there are a lot of pretty hot glances between the female protagonist, Irene, and her long-lost friend, Clare. Michael Cunningham's 1990 novel, *A Home at the End of the World*, made another mark in queer novel which centres on an alternative family: a gay man and his best friend plan to have a baby together, and end up letting an old college friend join in. Other famous queer authors are Rita Mae Brown, E. M. Forster, and the South African K. Sello Duiker and so on.

In as much as homosexuality has received significant acceptance in Africa, Abadir (2015:264) notes that out of the fifty-five African states recognised by the United Nations and African Union, homosexuality has been outlawed in thirty-four countries. This has consequently led to few literary writers and critics in the field. The notion of the homosexual African is ludicrous because the definition of the ideal African is the masculine symbol of his race and makes no room for any sexual ambiguities. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* sets the record straight through detailing African sexual practices. In addition to the oral tradition, this novel emphasized that the African male during colonialism was a man defined on three fronts: his valour in battle, his ability to provide for his family and his capacity to procreate.

This three-pronged symbol became a cultural vaccine against the colonialist interpretation of what an African man should be. Thus the issue of sexual enjoyment, let alone liberal attitudes to sex is alien to Umuofia. The conclusion one gets is that homosexuality could not have existed in Achebe's Umuofia prior to the colonial diffusion. Thus African writers take a very extreme Afrocentric view of homosexuality seeing it not as an individual choice with which to explore one's sexuality but a western aberration that is part of the

psychological baggage of colonialism. Chinelo Okparanta released her debut novel, *Under the Udala Trees* – a celebration of the revolutionary nature of queer love – in 2015. Since then, it has created electric buzz among reading circles owing to the nature of its content: a book that covers the normalcy of homosexuality in Nigeria, a country that is well known for its virulent homophobia and punitive anti-gay laws. Munro (2009:753) opines that “to come out as a gay African is often understood to be a contradiction in terms”. Sexual identity has become caught up in the politics of racial authenticity and postcolonial nationalism. Since the 1990s, heads of states from Uganda, Namibia, Zambia, Swaziland and Kenya have followed Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe's lead in passing anti-gay laws, and making public statements denigrating homosexuals as both un-Christian and un-African. In the same vein, Zanzibar's parliament unanimously passed a new law in April 2004 instituting harsh prison sentences for same sex-sex acts; in this case, homosexual has been pronounced un-African and un-Islamic. Nigeria, on the Same Sex Marriage Act, 2013, prohibits a marriage contract or civil union entered into between persons of the same sex, and provides penalties for the solemnisation and witnessing of same thereof. Consequently, the Guardian news on Nigeria States,

Nigeria's President Goodluck Jonathan signed a bill on Monday that criminalises same-sex relationships, defying western pressure over gay rights and provoking US criticism.... The bill, which contains penalties of up to 14 years in prison and bans gay marriage, same-sex 'amorous relationships' and membership of gay rights groups, was passed by the national assembly last May but Jonathan had delayed signing it into law (theguardian.com).

Homosexuals in Nigeria and other African states are frequently the targets of mob violence, with the crimes committed against these individuals going uninvestigated, even when the victims are killed. Indeed, in Northern Nigeria as well as Mauritania and

Sudan, being arrested as a homosexual can result in the death penalty, while in Uganda, a convicted homosexual can be sentenced to life in prison. In some countries individuals can be publicly lashed for the "crime" of being gay; engaging in same-sex behaviour in Angola, Mauritius, Morocco and Mozambique can result in a sentence of hard labour. American President Barack Obama has urged African states to decriminalize homosexuality, and other members of the international community have discussed putting in place economic sanctions against countries because of their stand on the subject.

Various African leaders have pushed back; however, claiming that acceptance of same sex relationships is a purely Western idea and one that is completely alien to Africans. Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta said in response to President Obama, "There are some things that we must admit we don't share.... It's very difficult for us to impose on people that which they themselves do not accept" (NP). According to *The African Sun Times*, Kenyan Cardinal John Njue (Jan:2014), Archbishop of Nairobi and president of the Kenyan Episcopal Conference, [commented](#) that, "Those people who have already ruined their society...let them not become our teachers to tell us where to go...I think we need to act according to our own traditions and our faiths".

Twelve African nations have no laws criminalizing homosexuality, but even in these "safe havens" [discrimination](#) against gays and lesbians is common. South Africa remains the exception to this trend; its 1996 Constitution was the first in the world to prohibit discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. To this Munro (2009:753) attributes to "the engagement with the legacies of colonialism". Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* provides what for many has become the classic position on the relation between Africa, the West, and homosexuality. Fanon's double move consists not only of associating white racism with homosexuality but also simultaneously insisting that no indigenous homosexuality exists in Africa. Fanon suggests that while transvestism may occur among some Martiniquans, these men lead normal sex lives and can "take a punch like any 'he-man'" (Fanon 1967:180). In Fanon's account then,

homosexuality becomes associated on the one hand with racism and colonial oppression and on the other with effeminacy. In Achebe (1958:52), one of the elders, in commenting on a practice of gender roles in Abame and Aninta shows us how rigid Umuofian traditional practices are when it comes to sex, “The world is large,” said Okonkwo. “I have even heard that in some tribes a man's children belong to his wife and her family.” “That cannot be,” said Machi. “You might as well say that the woman lies on top of the man when they are making the children”.

It is not only Achebe's work which brings this convenient view of African sexuality. Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* depicts a society that is exclusively heterosexual. In this text the practise of arranged marriages, as shown by Ekwueme and Ahurole, underlines that children were exposed at a young age to the concept of a heterosexual lifestyle. Ekwueme is 5years old when he is engaged to Ahurole who is eight days old at the time. One gets the idea that there is no other alternative that exists in this pre-colonial society. Ekwueme's father, Wigwe, is depicted as taking part in a ceremony that is essentially a communal event. Thus one realises that heterosexual marriages create strong bonds within the village as well as beyond it. Amadi (1966: 123) explains:

The day for the formal presentation of wine arrived. This time Wigwe was accompanied by several village elders. They were all neatly dressed in gay wrappers and sang their way to Omigwe. As they passed by, housewives peeped out with wistful looks in their eyes, their minds thrown back to the day when like Ahurole they waited anxiously for the wine party to arrive at their fathers' compounds.

In these texts, there are cultural avenues for no place for homosexuality. None of the characters have sexual feelings for their own sex nor do they describe one another in sexual tones. The idea is that this society and, by extension, African society prior to colonialism was exclusively heterosexual and had cultural and

spiritual pillars that supported the institution of marriage. The African homosexual is an individual with a fragmented personality, overwhelmed with shame and hopelessness.

It remains true that the great majority of texts in which the subject occurs stigmatize homosexual practice as profoundly un-African activity: a perspective succinctly expressed by the grandmother in Yulissa (1984: 16) when she inquires, “homosexual? Wheyting be dat”. Wisner (2015:7) has described the novel as exceeding his expectations, in that it “quietly undermines the readers' expectations”. The present research could not agree more in that most readers feel disappointed with the world view explicated in the book. Ayi kwe Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* mentions homosexuality, at times explicitly. The text, narrated in an oral quality comes across as being more culturally rooted in a past that is untainted by the foreign footprint. It suggests that the behaviour of the indigenous people has been forever altered by the appearance of the coloniser. Armah wants to project that women's primary obligation is to carry the seed of man and to populate the earth. The sexual excesses of homosexual encounters that are described at the beginning of the text are fruitless in the natural order in that they only relate to the lesser human needs such as debasement.

There is nothing spiritual or purposeful in those sexual acts. There is no link with nature, no idea of harvest. Armah suggests that homosexuality is what separates the African from the European. Heterosexuality is what defines the black tradition of family and identity. For Armah the colonial culture is one that is inhuman not only in terms of its barbaric practise of slavery but the shocking sexual preferences as well. When the Arab calls forth the Askari the narrative voice Armah (1979:23) states:

He strode forward at the urgent call and in a moment was naked upon his master's back, ploughing the predator's open arsehole while the master tried to keep his forgetful penis in Azania. Then the joy of having his Askari mount him overwhelmed all Faisal's senses.

Words such as 'ploughing' and 'predator' and 'mount' help construct a

picture of animalistic behaviour. The Askari is seen as a pack animal that has mounted and is ploughing a predator's arsehole. The idea is to portray the encounter as inhuman or outside what is natural. So, couched in the violent description there is the tone of disapproval. These Askaris are not even presented as human. The narrative voice describes them as 'zombies' (20) which effectively denies them an identity to par even with animals. They have become outside nature as to be soulless. So, for an African to become a homosexual that implies that you are not in control of your actions and are simply acting out an urge that is beyond the realms of nature. One thus inhabits a place outside the natural and should be pitied or treated as a thing. Since the African is one who sees sex as a merging of the human and spiritual world, being a zombie is to throw the homosexual into an abyss. Armah later emphasises the central point, that Africa fell in part through its collaborators, as he comments on the African monarch Jonto, (1979:65) "he came among us with a spirit caught straight from the white predators from the desert".

In an interesting example he shows how Jonto, expresses a morbid sexuality that he has learned from his contact with the white slave traders. "He loved particularly the tender arseholes of boys not yet in the thirtieth season. Some he had oiled for ingress but in his happiest moods he dispensed with oil, preferring as lubricant the natural blood of each child's bleeding anus as he forced his entry" (65). With Juma we see homosexuality as a result of an association with the white man's sadistic desires. Homosexuality thus is not seen as genetic but as something that one catches through associating with certain races. In Armah's text one does not choose to become homosexual, one is forced by circumstances but ultimately such a choice creates a zombie out of one. It is a choice that is worse than death in that it gives you no peace, just loathing. It is hence telling why Juma no longer wants to remember his life as an Askari, "The need for forgetfulness was still strong in him. No one pressed him anymore, of his own will he chose action as his best conversation with us" (Armah 1979:147).

In Igbo society again, an antihomophobic politics finds itself unable to open up gay- affirmative spaces without running the risk of

being culturally insensitive. Some critics have for instance cited Ifi Amadiume on the changing construction of gender in Nnobi society. Amadiume shows how the institution of woman-to-woman marriages in pre-colonial Nnobi society suggests that there existed in this Igbo society certain fluidity in the gender-sex system so that biological sex did not necessarily determine social gender. But the force of Amadiume's argument is lost in her consideration of sexual practices. For having demonstrated gender-mobility in pre-colonial society, Amadiume proceeds to insist that the phenomenon of woman marriages should not be misread as any kind of institutionalized lesbianism. She further suggests that such a reading would be “shocking and offensive to Nnobi women” (Amadiume 1987: 7), for whom lesbianism remains a foreign practice. My point by citing this work is to show how even the most sophisticated feminists and the most engaging critics of patriarchy can nevertheless lend themselves to a theoretical silence or even downright hostility when issues of homosexuality are raised.

Theoretical Framework

The study is guided by the theory of Double Consciousness. This is because double consciousness is the platform through which one can investigate issues bordering on one looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. This theory deals with the writing and reading of literature written in previously or currently colonised countries or literature written in colonising countries which deals with colonization or colonised people. Notable theoretician in this field is W.E.B. DuBois. The theory focuses particularly on the idea according to (DuBois 2008:2) that “the African must navigate the voyages of life from within a form of two-ness”. It also deals with the way in which literature in colonizing countries appropriates/distorts the language, images, scenes, tradition and so forth in colonised countries (Lye, 1998).

Among the themes explored in this text are war, family, mother-daughter relationship, religion and homosexuality. All with the exception of Homosexuality are in tune with the traditional

practices of the African. For the purpose of this research, double consciousness was useful in analyzing how the weight of tradition, (homosexuality) in the words of the major character, (Okparanta, 2016:362) “Chidimma and I were choking under the weight of something larger than us”, is truly sniffing life out them. Emphasis was laid on the body of African scholarship which is placed on the idea that same gender sexuality activity is rare in traditional African society and therefore, is alienating in its impact. The marked emphasis Chinelo places on Ijeoma progressive degeneration as she discovers first one, then another means of degrading herself is reminiscent of the gradual descent to perdition of an Igbo morality tale.

Methodology

The research was mainly qualitative. It was conducted through an analytical research design. Analytical research as a style of qualitative inquiry is a non interactive document research which describes and interprets the past or recent past from selected sources (Macmilliam and Schumacher, 1997). These sources may be documents preserved in collections or participant's oral testimonies or as in the case of this research, a literary text of an author. This design is ideal in a situation where a researcher attempts to analyze a situation and make evaluation. For the present study, it was instrumental in examining the purported choking weight of tradition on Okparanta's major character.

Data Collection Techniques

The study was mainly library based. It began with a preliminary study of the available related literature in the library which formed the basis for secondary data. The primary data was generated through content analysis of the selected text. Nachmias (2009: 87) defines content analysis as “any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics of messages”. Qualitative content analytical approaches focus on analyzing both the explicit or manifest content of a text as well as interpretations of latent content of texts- that which

can be interpreted or interpolated from the text, but is not explicitly stated in it. (Granhein and Lundman, 2003).

In the current research, reading, analysis and interpretation of the selected text was done to establish that the major theme which is homosexual practice is invariably attributed to the detrimental impact made on Africa by the West.

The Queer Contrary to Tradition in *Under the Udala Trees*

Chinelo Okparanta, the author of *Under the Udala Trees* is a Nigerian-American writer who was born in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, and relocated to the United States at the age of ten. She received her BA from The Pennsylvania State University, her MA from Rutgers University, and her MFA from the University of Iowa. She was one of Granta's six New Voices for 2012 and her stories have appeared in Granta, The New Yorker, Tin House, Subtropics, and elsewhere. A Colgate University Olive B. O'Connor Fellow in Fiction as well as a recipient of the University of Iowa's Provost's Postgraduate Fellowship in Fiction, Okparanta was nominated for a US Artists Fellowship in 2012. She has been awarded additional fellowships and faculty appointments/visiting professorships at Columbia University, Purdue University, Middlebury College, Howard University, City College of New York, and Southern New Hampshire University. She is currently Assistant Professor of English & Creative Writing (Fiction) at Bucknell University, where she is also C. Graydon and Mary E. Rogers Faculty Research Fellow. She is a winner of a 2014 Lambda Literary Award, a 2016 Lambda Literary Award, and the 2016 Jessie Redmon Fauset Book Award in Fiction, the 2016 Inaugural Betty Berzon Emerging Writer Award from the Publishing Triangle.

Under the Udala Trees tells the story of a young girl Ijeoma who had to face many problems in her life and was the victim of the horrific days of war. Ojoto was the place where the protagonist of the story lived. They were from the Igbo tribe who live in their traditions/culture. The novel starts with a colourful atmosphere. The children run after the butterflies and the seasons were all normal as per the cycle of nature. But everything changes when the shadow of war hits

Ojoto. It was in 1967 that the war began. And by 1968 the whole Ojoto was covered in the darkness of the war. The war uproots everyone. Children roam in the streets with 'begging bowls' and starving bellies. The story is centred in the traditional/religious beliefs that have six parts in total which consists of seventy-seven chapters. The author embedded the story with beautifully capturing sights of Nigeria that the readers could feel the place. Characterization of the novel is also very attractive. The novel does not have a large cast. Primarily, it revolves around Ijeoma, her mother, and Ijeoma's lovers. One of the features of this novel is that the author has regularly used the tribe's language in the conversations in the novel.

After the war the children were denied of their education. And more than that it was the mental and the physical problems they had to face including Ijeoma. Following an air raid at the start of the novel, Ijeoma and her mother Adaora escape unharmed but her father was killed. This leaves Ijeoma under Adaora's care. The death of Uzo has a profound effect on Adaora's mental health, sending her into a trance-like state. Eventually, Adaora soon decides to send Ijeoma away to the far away town of Nnewi, to live with family friends, under the idea that it's safer and the right thing to do although Ijeoma is reluctant to move due to the strong bond she has to her mother as well her young age. Ijeoma is taken in by a School Teacher, where she soon meets Amina, who becomes the object of her affection. The illicitness of the relationship and hesitation stemming from homophobic views from society puts strain on their relationship. Adaora, through frequently visiting Ijeoma, slowly begins to realise the affection that Ijeoma and Amina have for each other and expresses utter disapproval, quoting the bible and making Ijeoma swear allegiance to God and ultimately, to end the relationship and stop having 'wrong' feelings for each other. Eventually, Ijeoma is sent back to Aba to live with Adaora again while Amina remains with the school teacher. Ijeoma's relationship with Amina slowly fizzles out thereafter.

Back home in Aba, Adaora makes it her goal to turn Ijeoma straight and preach (from the Bible and tradition) that homosexuality is wrong and that she must change (become heterosexual) to make it

right. Adaora preaches that no lesbian relationship is right and that Ijeoma will feel the full force of God's wrath and also be on the sidelines if she doesn't change her ways and end this lifestyle. Ijeoma is initially resistant to the strong influence exerted by her mother but eventually succumbs to the power of tradition and tries to change and live a heterosexual life.

Having succumbed to the culture of her people, Ijeoma then takes a new, heteronormative outlook on life, marrying a man, with the objective to appear 'normal' in Nigerian society. She however eventually meets another female, Ndidi, whom she falls in love with. Adaora eventually realises the affection between the two and once again repeatedly bellows her disapproval and objection to her daughter's love for Ndidi. Ijeoma soon afterwards marries her childhood love Chibundu in order to make her mother happy and fit in with heteronormative standard. Not too long afterwards, the two eventually have a child together. Ijeoma's marriage and relationship altogether with Chibundu eventually takes a turn for the worse when he finds some love letters Ijeoma had intended to send to Ndidi, and confronts her over this.

The two end up fighting, Ijeoma eventually realises, through critically reinterpreting her married life and all it's worth, that if tradition is truly as dynamic as it purports, then it will include people of any sexual orientation, such as herself. Ijeoma then decides to leave the marriage with a man she ultimately never loved according to critics but who they have forgotten Ijeoma was the first to initiate intimacy even when they were kids (Okparanta 2015:57-8) "I knew Chibundu felt the awkwardness too.... But for some strange reason, I found myself feeling a need to equalize the awkwardness between us. ...And so, after no more than a few seconds, I leaned in and gave him the kiss". The novel ends on a note according to Ijeoma's dream, as she woke with a start, frantic, drenched in sweat, gasping for air. It was then she realised that herself and daughter were both choking under the weight of tradition and superstition and of all their legends.

Although homosexuals have gained more acceptances over the past decade in the United States and other Western countries,

they've actually lost rights over the past few years in many areas of Africa. Same-sex relations are currently [outlawed](#) in at least 34 of the 55 African states, with Nigeria's Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act being among the strictest. Speaking on behalf of the president, his aide Reuben Abati [said](#), "This is a law that is in line with the people's cultural and religious inclination. So it is a law that is a reflection of the beliefs and orientation of Nigerian people....Nigerians are pleased with it" (NP).

The truth is that his statement is not an exaggeration of the population's stance on the issue; a recent Pew Research Center survey determined that [98%](#) of the country disapproves of homosexuality. Igbos of the South Eastern Nigeria maintains the heteronormative view as their tradition demands and therefore, assumes that sexual and marital relations are only fitting between people of the opposite sex. It involves the alignment of biological sex, sexuality, gender identity, gender roles in a way that privileges heterosexuals.

Conclusion

This study discusses the lesbian nature of an Igbo tribal girl, Ijeoma and strictly maintains that homosexuality does not need to be quarantined in a European framework for it to be condemned and shunned without fear of shame in an African world view. This story is Chinelo's story as well as Ijeoma's because, in the context of writing this novel, she has described herself as a champion for love. One wonders the kind of love that is. It is established also that the major theme foregrounded by the text which is same gender sexuality is so far removed from the tradition/culture of this tribe. W.E.B. DuBois' theory of "Double Consciousness" was applied to analyse the behavioural pattern of an Igbo teenager who was versed in the amorous ways of her world by initiating the first intimacy with a boy of her age but later grew up after coming in contact with alien cultures to realise that she is been choked by the weight of her peoples' tradition. For the most part homosexuality involving Africans is seen as a result of coercion which further stereotyped the practise as unnatural and devoid of genuine affections. Literature on the subject,

homosexuality is stigmatized as being alien to traditional African mores and author's desperate attempt to create a surreal existence will only make an African inhabit a place outside the natural and should be pitied or treated as a thing.

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