

Same gender love and sexuality: An interrogation of Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees*

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Abstract

Under the Udala Trees introduces a lesbian theme and envisages new types of daughters in her delineating of lesbian sexual identity. Critics have variously exploited the erotic possibilities of homophilic relationship in African literature and stigmatized it as grossly repulsive, un-African and most unlikely. The engagement of the West with the African continent is generally identified as exploitative and homosexual activity is seen as a particularly resultant aspect of this. The emphasis on the disfigurement of the accepted norms is placed on the idea that same gender sexuality is rare in traditional African society, more so in the Igbo society of the South Eastern Nigeria. The paper is informed by the post colonial theory and clearly interprets escalated gay existence in post-war Igbo region as a strange phenomenon but a maturation of the pressures of long years of racial exploitation and oppression as well as the precipitated expectations of the post –colonial era. The marked emphasis the author places on Ijeoma's progressive degeneration as she discovers first one, then another means of degrading herself is reminiscent of the gradual descent to

perdition of a morality Igbo tale. It is generally gathered that alternative sexualities that are evident across Africa, from gay bars in Accra to the after-effects of homo-sexual relations of the male dormitory system in Apartheid South Africa, where migrant men lived in cities separated from their wives, girlfriends and families for long periods and had to explore different sexualities from the norm is invariably attributed to the detrimental impact made on Africa by the West.

Keywords: *Homophilia, Interrogation, Un-African, Postcolonial, West*

Introduction

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. In the words of Brenna Munro, “to come out as a gay African is often understood to be a contradiction in terms” (753). 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, Kim Kovacs in the the Guardian news on Nigeria States,

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. Unanimously passed by Nigeria's House of Representatives and signed into law by (then) President Goodluck Jonathan on January 7, 2014, the law imposes a penalty of up to 14 years in jail for individuals committing homosexual acts and up to 10 years in jail for anyone who "administers, witnesses, abets or aids" a homosexual man or woman (the guardian.com).

Homosexuals in Nigeria and other African states according to Kim kovacs are frequently the targets of mob violence, with the crimes committed against these individuals going uninvestigated, even when the victims are killed. In his article, Nigeria's Stance on Homosexuality kovacs asserts that, "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”(the guardian.com).

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 in his response reported Kiran Moodley in an article in the Independent newspaper 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, 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” (africansuntimes.com).

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 attributes to “the engagement with the legacies of colonialism” (753). 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'" (180). In Fanon's account then, homosexuality becomes associated on the one hand with racism and colonial oppression and on the other with effeminacy.

Literature Review

In as much as homosexuality has received significant acceptance in Africa, Abadir M. Ibrahim 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" (263). 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. These 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. Whatever views one might have of Achebe's seminal work, the assertion is that the African male had only one sexual identity and it was not one that was necessitated by individual nuances but by deep rooted cultural norms and values. One of the elders, in commenting on a practice of gender roles in Abame and Aninta shows us how rigid Umuofian cultural 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" (52).

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.

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 (123).

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. Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* provides us with the stereotypes that govern same sex relationships but it looks at these relationships from an entirely different perspective. As the title suggests, the novel looks at how characters make sense of their place in the post colonial environment and how the need of a spiritual anchor is important in dealing with the pressures of modernity. Of particular note is the character of Joe Golder an American expatriate who is openly homosexual. Soyinka raises awareness that African cultures are not as exclusively heterosexual as other writers make it out to be. Golder's discussion with Sagoe, a Nigerian journalist shows the phobia that the African has towards spending the night in Golder's apartment. There is the stereotype that homosexuals have

insatiable appetites and will instinctively jump on someone to satisfy their warped carnal urges. Sagoe is reflecting Ayikwe Armah's portrayal of the homosexual as a depraved individual whose appetite for debauchery cannot be assuaged. Golder is keen for Sagoe to come clean on his phobia.

“Wait.” He came closer, almost pleading. “Tell me something, quite honestly. Are you afraid of me?” Sagoe went past feeling; his mouth slacked open and remained there. “You needn't look so astonished. I want an honest answer. Are you afraid of me?” (198).

Sagoe is a journalist and no doubt is well read as to the different forms of sexuality but he is unable to deal with the idea of sleeping under the same roof with a homosexual. His reaction shows that education is not enough of a tool to remove irrational fears and doubts. Golder as a historian is able to inform Sagoe that homosexuality is not a white ailment and that even African cultures have been practicing homosexuality without being coerced by colonialists.

Do you think I know nothing of your Emirs and their little boys? You forget history is my subject. And what about those exclusive coteries in Lagos?”

Sagoe is forthright in living in the comfort of ignorance by stating that, “if you don't mind, I'll persist in my delusion. (199).

The Interpreters is one of the first novels from West Africa to suggest that homosexuality was not a colonial burden that came across the Atlantic. It shows how Africans were unwilling

to acknowledge the real possibility that being gay has nothing to do with the dictates of geography or with one's culture. *The Interpreter* is critically read nevertheless as the emblem of everything that is wrong with a Western-based, romanticized Afrocentricity. This critical reading emphasizes Joe's alienation from his Nigerian colleagues who read him as a doubly foreign person- not only is he an American but also one who engages in sexual practices unknown (at least so far as these interpreters are concerned) in indigenous Nigerian society, for instance, Femi Ojo-Ade writes about Golder, "he is a strange person, full of contradiction and self-hatred" (748). Joe Golder becomes in this reading an impotent (homosexual) character that can only poach upon African subjects (such as the young boy Noah) and be the cause of destruction. In one episode in the novel, the young boy Noah jumps off the balcony to his death, the narrative suggesting that his death is caused by Joe's sexual advances. The incident is read by most critics as Soyinka's last straw in rebuke of Golder. Thus Derek Wright writes, "Noah is subsequently left at the mercy of the neurotic American quadroon Joe Golder, whose attraction to blackness is more sexual than racial and whose inevitable homosexual advances results in the boy's death" (122).

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 Maddy Yulissa's play *Big Berrin* when she inquires, "homosexual? Wheyting be dat"(16). In Dillibe Onyeama's novel, *Sex Is a Nigger's Game*, the stereotypical identification of homosexuality with the West is compounded

with a bizarre regurgitation of Western racist myths of black sexual superiority. When Chidi, a male prostitute, is taken up by a voyeuristic homosexual, Sir Brian, the erotic effect of the episode is predicated on an enhanced, specialized emphasis on Chidi's value as sexual commodity, while at the same time Sir Brain himself absolves Africa of the stigma of sexual inversion, commenting that this was, "largely imported by the early colonists and by Westernized African"(76).

The exclusive attribution of homosexual activity to the West is equally common place in more substantial African literature. In J.P Clark's play *The Raft*, for example, kengide and Ibobo comment that white men are "bestly, indulging in sodomy to "keep sane" in their barracks and boarding schools (127). There is a clear projection here of the alienating effect that the notion of homosexuality is assumed to have on an African society: an effect which is related consistently in other texts to the general experience of alienation faced by Africans living under colonial rule- or when in contact with the West in some other contexts. Ayikwe 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 culture 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 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” (23). 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 worlds, 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, “he came among us with a spirit caught straight from the white predators from the desert”(65). 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). Altman Dennis states that, “homosexuality is no longer considered an expression of “really” being a woman in a man’s body (or vice versa), but rather as physically desiring one’s own gender without necessarily wishing to deny one’s masculinity/ femininity” (26). However, as Juma’s character shows, there is none of the conscious effort at labelling oneself that which Altman’s definition implies. 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. There is none of the element of choice that Altman makes reference to. 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” (147).

Under the internal colonization maintained by apartheid in South Africa, dissident blacks may find themselves in prison, (though not in prison alone) where the severity of constraint generates homosexual activity. Here again, homosexuality is stigmatized as being alien to traditional mores: its prevalence in South African jails metaphorically stands for the extreme distortions in social organizations established by the regime. In Gibson Kente's play, *Too Late*, the young man Saduva is arrested after a sequence of episodes that illustrate in graphic detail the appalling constraints under which blacks live; Saduva's life outside is mirrored by his experience inside the prison when the cell boss Matric- rendered an exploiter under an exploitative system- seizes his food and then calls him over to his side of the cell for sex. The emphasis on the disfigurement of accepted norms brought about under apartheid is foregrounded again in Dennis Brutus' poem "Letter to Martha:6", an inmate's need for cigarettes is so great he has to force himself not to think of smoking, knowing that otherwise he may end up by buying them with sex. In kofi Awoonor's *This Earth, My Brother*, the houseboy Yaro has left his white master "because he wanted to turn him into a woman" (24), while in both Caya Makhele's *L'Homme au Landau* and Sarif Easmon's short story, *For Love of Therese*, the degeneration of expatriates is marked by their turning away from their wives and developing sexual relations with boys. Nadine Gordimer in her earlier novels before *None to Accompany Me* complies with the stereotypical constructions of homosexuality and lesbianism as related to freak sexuality, personality disorder or emotional disturbance in her unconscious representations of sexual identity. A deviant daughter, Maxine,

in her short story, “Siblings” in *A Soldier’s Embrace*, uses lesbianism as a pretext for enigmatising herself in order to distance her from her white middle- class family. Maxine is described as a self- outcast who “could find no place for her” (39) and cuts off her ties both with her family and the world. After victimising her family through many suicide attempts and arrests on drug charges, she afflicts them by boasting that she now lives a lesbian. Another example of homosexual identity in Gordimer’s work is Terry in *The Conservationist*, the farm owner Mehring’s homosexual son. Homosexuality in this novel is a metaphor for the sterility of the white man’s line in Africa, which contrasts significantly with the black’s resilience in their land. Mehring’s line becomes extinct when Terry leaves South Africa to live with his divorced mother in New York and never returns to his country. His sexual orientation can be read as symbol for the heirless white civilisation in Africa as represented by Mehring’s leftist mistress: “And if I had children, I don’t believe in inheritance of property, unearned possessions, the perpetuation of privilege” (77). Gordimer grants no tenure of African land to the white landowner, Mehring, who in the end gives up both his family and his farmland. Both Terry and Maxine exemplify social deviance, both could find no place in their society and have very weak ties with their family. Gordimer’s earlier work thus reproduces the traditional marginalisation of homosexual and lesbian children as alienated and demonic Others.

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" (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.

From the ongoing, it is clearly gleaned that gay existence is invariably attributed to the detrimental impact made on Africa by the West. Yet even if this practice is acknowledged in some passages of these works, allocated a specialized role in traditional society, it still is stigmatized.

Alternative African Sexuality in Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees*

Inspired by Nigeria's folktales and war, *Under the Udala Trees* is a deeply searching, powerful debut about the dangers of living and loving openly. *Under the Udala Trees* is gay literature. Gay literature is a collective term for literature produced by or for the

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) 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.

The novel is set during and immediately after the Biafran war. In 2016, as part of the Annual Lambda Literary Awards, the novel won an award for "Best Lesbian Fiction" (NP). The story is centred on the traditional and Christian beliefs. It has six parts in total which consists of seventy-seven chapters. The author has embedded 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 appealing features of this novel is that the author has regularly used the tribe's language in the conversations in the novel. The novel opens in 1960's Nigeria, following the tale of Ijeoma, a young girl who lives in a small town called Ojoto with her mother, Adaora, and father, Uzo, in the middle of the Nigerian Civil War. Following an air raid at the start of the novel, Ijeoma and her mother Adaora escape unharmed but her father, Uzo, is 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 as 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.

The story is actually narrated by Ijeoma herself in a story telling mode. It is as if she wanted to make the readers know why she was sent off and about how she met Amina, a girl even more adrift than herself, separated from her family because of the ragging war and from the northern part of the country. Over the course of *Under the Udala Trees*, the heroine, Ijeoma, discovers she's a lesbian, at first fighting her inclinations and trying to fit in, but later accepting that she's different from many of her peers. 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 in the Guardian Newspaper 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. Igbo of the South Eastern Nigeria maintains the

hetero normative view 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. What Adrienne Rich calls compulsory heterosexuality is very far from an African perspective because she states that it is an ideology that lays the foundation towards understanding heterosexuality as both structural and institutional. According to her, it creates a society where lesbian homosexuals are expected to conform to hetero normative norms or live on the sidelines. When the grammar school teacher finds Amina and Ijeoma under the sheets, with no clothes on, he is startled and gasps for breath. This is because what he has seen is exactly what his tradition and religion speaks against. The first word he utters is an abomination because to him that was what Ijeoma and Amina were engaging in. The grammar school teacher was quick in reminding the girls that even the Bible and the Koran condemn homosexuality. He must have noticed the Bible on the table when he grabbed the lantern because he turned back to the table, set the lantern back down, and grabbed the Bible. Pointing to it, he cried,

An abomination! . . . He looked directly at me. He shouted, that is what it is if a name is to be given to it! That is what the Bible calls it!" Now he turned to Amina. He shouted at her too. "The Koran condemns it as well. I don't know much of Islam, but I know enough to know that the Koran and the Bible see eye to eye on this matter! (108).

To come out as a gay African is still understood to be a contradiction in terms. Immediate family, especially in Africa, becomes the agent of engendering the hetero normative ideal in the younger generation. In several instances in *Under the Udala Trees*, Ijeoma's mother constantly instils in her daughter Ijeoma with both religious and cultural ideas that a man and woman were meant to be united by marriage as opposed to a marriage between men and men or women and women. Her mother helps in promoting heterosexual values. According to her, lesbianism has no place and Ijeoma must acknowledge hetero normativity, "There's nothing more important now than for us to begin working on cleansing your soul" (65) her mother would tell her. Adora's deepened God's expectation made clear during the Bible study sessions starting from the book of Genesis to make Ijeoma understand what she wanted to teach her,

For this reason, a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. She repeated that last part: 24 N'ih nkea ka nwoke garapu nna-ya na nne-ya, rapara n'aru nwunye-ya: ha ewe ghtuanu-aru. She said, "Nwoke na nwunye. Man and wife. Adam na Eve. { ne ghenti? Are you listening?}" She was shaking her finger, a reminder and a warning. I nodded. She said it again: "Nwokenanwunye. Adam na Eve. Man and wife (62).

Due to the fact that Adora's husband died during a raid by a rebel group, Ijeoma's mother symbolises patriarchal authority, which she has internalised; she aims to ensure that Ijeoma submits to hetero normativity. One Biblical passage is used several times to emphasise the concept of hetero normativity, a

passage that is often quoted by Ijeoma's mother: "Leviticus 18: Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is an abomination!" (75). In another of such occasions of "cleansing" Ijeoma and getting her to submit to heterosexuality, Adora uses an example of a bicycle; she tells her daughter that marriage assumes the shape of a bicycle. She states that the man is one wheel and the woman the other wheel and that one cannot do without the other. This influences Ijeoma's decision, later on, to marry her childhood friend Chibundu not because she wants to but because that is what society expects of a young woman. She even thinks that marrying Chibundu would make her seem normal and she does not have to worry about being found out. This inevitably leads to bitter compromises. Ijeoma marries Chibundu. He finds his own reasons for resenting his wife, spying on her, and raping her repeatedly. But even though she tries to be a happy and goodwife to him, she fails. Thinking about her mother she tries to stick on with any unwanted situation with her husband. But as time passes, Ijeoma is contending with her feeling for the lesbian relationship, which she must keep as a secret and finally makes a fateful decision that allows her to explore her natural feelings. For Ijeoma, homosexual feeling is not only felt for Amina alone. When Amina was married to another man she was completely lost. To cope up with the feelings she feels a kind of sexual feeling to a local teacher, Ndidi. But she keeps it as a secret. By drawing on this text, the study hints at a modern attempt at discussing alternative African sexuality. There is still an impasse because Ijeoma is left to live on the sidelines when she finally left Chibundu's house.

Conclusion

This study 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. The need to project a strong, masculine image of a married male in Africa overrode the need to depict an alternative sexuality. Homosexual relationships were presented as alien to the African continent and showcased as colonial side effects that corrupted the African personality and in cases, reduced him to a catatonic state. The idea of African sexuality was chiefly that of a man who slept with a woman to provide children and hence continue the important link with his culture and his ancestors. Sex was not seen in a sensual light by these writers. In this manner it is understandable why homosexuality is seen as going against nature and the ancestors in that it was presented as self-serving which, because of the spiritual link of childbearing, was symbolic of cultural identity and purpose. In spite of the beautiful rendition by the author of how the true feeling of a person should dominate and be expressed whatever the circumstances be, it remains a fact well known in Nigeria, with a special focus to the South East region, that an anti homophobic politics finds itself unable to open up gay-affirmative spaces without running the risk of being culturally insensitive. The critics who hailed the novel as a powerful tool that raises voice for the people who are asked to subdue their true feelings and lead their lives as the society decides also agrees that for an African to become a homosexual implies that you are not in control of your actions and are simply acting out an urge that is beyond the realms of nature. For the most part homosexuality involving Africans was seen as a result of coercion which further

stereotyped the practise as unnatural and devoid of genuine affections. One thus inhabits a place outside the natural and should be pitied or treated as a thing.

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