

Culture Conflict in Obii Okwelume's 'The Sudden Return': Dilemma of The *Osu* Caste System in Igboland, Eastern Nigeria

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Abstract

Conflict is both human and phenomenal. The conflict between cultures in contact is phenomenal. This study aims at exploring phenomenal conflict between Western and African cultures in Obii Okwelume's 'The Sudden Return', a collection in his *Those Who Live in Glass Houses*. It leans on Absalom's and Kanu's Indigenous Wholistic Theory (IWT), a theory of indigenous identities and phenomena that have to be treasured and sustained across ages. Using qualitative method and text-content analysis, the study shows how the hero and heroine seek an end to the past of their Igbo-African marriage culture that forbids 'a freeborn' from marrying 'a slave', based on their acquired Western knowledge of marriage without caste, discrimination or cultural embargoes. For them, the Igbo *Osu* (slave) caste should be a forgotten past, which should not be allowed to thwart any lovers' marriage. Contrarily, for the hero's parents and the elders of their Igbo society, to forget the past culture, which produced culture of today and the future, implies to forfeit the future. The study concludes that culture contact presents dilemma and ideological conflict, as in between Igbo and Western cultures on the notion of 'freeborn' and 'slave' (*Osu*), which Okwelume's two lovers strongly contend against from Western perspective, so they could go ahead and get married, but all to no avail. The study recommends innovative and non-discriminatory reconstruction (re-make) and reformation of cultural practices that get rid of 'freeborn' versus 'slave' dichotomy and the likes for future generations, just as the ancients had made the past culture for today's generation.

Keywords: Culture conflict, Obii Okwelume, 'the Sudden Return', Dilemma, Forget, Forfeit, *Osu* Caste

Introduction

Conflict is an inevitable occurrence that has been with humans since the beginning of the human race. It is the remote cause of the invention and continuous production of both crude and sophisticated implements for protection and defence at both individual and group phases. That is, conscious of the reality that conflict is inevitable among humans and animals alike in the ecosystem, human beings had decided to create tools and weapons for attack and self-defence. This reality is evidenced in the words of Pope Urban's words about 'taking glory in arms to the defense of Christ' (Bainton 94). The inventions, which began with hunters, farmers, goldsmiths and their like ancient technicians, later got into the hands of scientists, modern and post-modern technicians and technologists, and what have you. The implication of the foregoing is that it is humans' desire to secure themselves from attacks from their fellows and wild animals that they invented, sustained and kept on advancing different tools, weapons, ammunitions and gadgets for attack and counter-attack (defence).

From time immemorial, humans clash in their interests, ideas, thoughts, preferences, practices and so on. The clash results to different forms of conflict. In what lends credence to the foregoing, Ogbu Nwachukwu is of the view that 'most wars, which humanity has engaged, arose and still arise because of misguided conflicts arising from differences in faith (beliefs)' (157). Nwachukwu's observation is apt and highlights the fact that conflict is inevitable among human beings, and it usually arises from a

clashing two or more ideologies, interest, thoughts, opinions or ways of life, etc. For example, religious conflict across generations has often sprawled from a clash between the doctrines and dogmas, interests, precepts, etc. of one religion and those of another religion. That is the case of Islam against Christianity, following misguided and misunderstood religious messages among contemporary Muslims in particular, whose (mis)conception of Christians and the other religions as infidels remains the bane of the religious conflict between them and Christians as well as the faithful of other religions (Nwachukwu 159).

In the words of Henry the navigator of Portugal, explorations and expeditions of discovery ‘formed part of the never ending war between Christianity and Islam (573). Conflict arising from religious intolerance/difference arguably led to the discovery of America by Italian explorer, Christopher Columbus, sponsored by the Spanish Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella (Henry 575). Also, humans have had conflict over food, material and non-material aspects, means or ways of life, power and leadership, natural and human resources, and for space, identity, recognition, new world orders, and so on. There is usually a sustained competition over and for these. Conflict over these has usually taken different forms. That of cultural hegemony, as in Western sustained global cultural hegemony, is a phenomenal phase of conflict made possible by humans. The cultural hegemony of the global West grounds Western international hegemonic politics and socio-economic, technological, and otherwise supremacy. Given the foregoing, this study seeks to show how European (Western) culture clashes with Igbo (African) culture in the course of being in contact, whereby the former tends to exert hegemonic influence and control over the African culture. In the text under study, we shall learn of how the Igbo culture, through its ardent adherents, resists the attempts to change and make past Igbo cultural practices because of those of the West.

Despite the fact that conflict is inevitable, a lot can be done to get it resolved, managed or averted. It takes concerted efforts, viable peace negotiation and conflict resolution measures, effective language use, tactical creative and critical writing and in-depth intellectual brainstorming, to mention but a few, to resolve, manage and/or avert conflict. Much has not been written on Obii Okwelume’s ‘The Sudden Return’ that sees to its portrayal of culture conflict at the point in which the past is being forgotten, while the future is being forfeited. Also there is the problem of writers giving headache without giving prescription, cure or treatment for it in Obii Okwelume’s ‘The Sudden Return’. This is evidenced in his appreciable portrayal of culture conflict between Igbo-African and Western cultures without giving a resolution or a compromise between the two cultures in conflict, represented by the hero (Nwapa) with his heroine (Chimamanda) intended wife, and his parents with their elders and family members holding on to the *Osu* caste practice.

As in other texts (e.g. Tess Onwueme’s *Broken Calabash*), there ought to be a compromise of point or agreement between the hero and his parents. In other words, the culture conflict between Western and African cultures on the impossibility of marriage between the so-called *Osu* (slave) and the ‘freeborn’ has no denouement even at its climax. Meanwhile, in the physical world, outside Okwelume’s literary world, it is believed that when a male freeborn marries a female *Osu* (slave), she gets freed automatically and becomes a freeborn too. Marriage thereby absolves her of her slave status. In Onwueme’s *Broken Calabash*, the unfavourable culture of female circumcision along with other unfavourable gendered cultural practices are finally banned by the king along with his cabinet in order to embrace modernity and imbibe Western culture of not circumcising females. Nevertheless, one understands that the strained negative impact of Western culture on African culture is what had influenced Okwelume’s literary construction of unshaken resistance against Western cultural attempts to do away with (forget) the past of the Igbo *Osu* cultural practice in marriage contraction. It is a show of contemporary disposition of decolonisation of African marriage and its allied indigenous practices right at the parental home of the African individual. However, there ought to be a remedy to the situation rather than the outright stoppage of the proposed marriage between the hero and the heroine. The research is geared towards reviewing the age-long *osu* caste system in the present dispensation with the eagle eyes of the elders and custodians of the Igbo culture and ameliorate the perceived chaos and trauma experienced by the present generation.

The purpose of this study is to do a textual analysis of culture conflict between Western and African cultures. The analysis is intended to show how individuals are influenced not only by their parental (indigenous) culture, but also alien culture(s) that they are exposed to while in social contact for purposes such as education, work, business transaction and thereabout. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- (i) Describe the situation of culture conflict between African and Western cultures, as in the text;
- (ii) Show how individuals get confronted with complex cultural embargoes and discriminatory practices that thwart their intentions for marriage and thereabout;
- (iii) Explain how to safely navigate the dilemma situation of forgetting the past and forfeiting the future.

Conceptual Review

Here, two major concepts (culture and conflict) shall be given a conceptual brief. Accordingly, culture, Madu notes, 'is an essential part of the human phenomenon, a sum total of what a people do in art, work, play, in language, religion and science, and in what they have in values and achievements' (140). This definition takes a wholesome approach to capture all that makes up a culture. Tracing the word 'culture' to the German word *kultur*, a term associated with the more civilised or knowledgeable Germans of days, Emeana points out that culture is the label for group identity, which offers the people making up the group 'a configuration of meanings and behavioural norm controlling their perception of reality and programming their mindset' (45).

Ezeanyika defines culture as ways of life that include 'knowledge, belief, art, moral, law, custom and many other capabilities and acquired by man as a member of the society' (32). This definition points out the material and non-material aspects of culture, with the latter taking precedence by the mention made. For Nwosu and Kalu, culture is 'the gamut of the knowledge, belief, customs, traditions, and skills that are available to the members of a society' (3). This definition also emphasises group membership, which makes it conventional. The members are those who conventionalise all that constitutes their peculiar culture. What past members of the ancient generation of a cultural group made as their material and non-material ways of life become sustained across generations, with only a few getting eroded and some others changed from time to time.

All the foregoing definitions share the common fact that culture describes everything about a particular people as a group having their own conventionalised ways of life. For this paper, culture refers to the distinct ways in which a given people do things and live their lives, which include how they eat, cook, dance, dress, marry, and bury the dead, and so on. The point of emphasis here is that culture varies from one group to another.

Conflict is said to mean a struggle between parties over desirable value, or claim to status and scarce resources, in which the aims of the conflicting parties are not only to gain the desired value, but also to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals (Musa, Shabu and Igbawua 21). Also, conflict is noted to mean a clash or disagreement between two or more groups, who have incompatible and sometimes competing differences, divergent views or believes that their aspirations or goals cannot be achieved simultaneously' (Yusufu, Aliyu and Ogaji 227).

This study describes conflict as a situation of disagreement, tension, violence, and clash of interests, which might be tractable or intractable and intra- or inter- personal or group. Given the foregoing, culture conflict is a conflict situation between two or more cultures, whereby what constitute the respective cultures in contact clash with each other or one another. Take for example, culture conflict in the text under study arises from the situations in which Western culture has nothing like *Osu* (slave) caste and is thereby opposed to it being what would thwart the proposed marriage between the hero, Joseph Campbell, whose Igbo name is Nwapa, and the heroine, Mandy, whose Igbo name is Chimamanda.

Leaning on Western culture, Nwapa and Chimamanda fault the *Osu* practice and attempt to forget about it, as a thing of the past. The clash is what propelled the resistance from Nwapa's family, who consider forgetting it as a forfeiture of the future. That is because doing so would gradually wipe out the notion and leave the new generations of the future with no story about the *Osu*. That is, allowing Nwapa and Chimamanda to get married would imply putting an end to the present practice of *Osu* and forfeiting its future.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on Indigenous Wholistic Theory (IWT), put forward by Absalom in 2010 and developed further by Kanu in 2016. IWT holds that every cultural group has an indigenous worldview and means of relating to the world (Absalom 75; Kanu108). It follows that Igbo cultural group has its own indigenous ways of life that must be followed by those belonging to it. That is what Okwelum demonstrates by making his typical Igbo characters mount strong resistance against Western cultural attempts to do away with their cultural practices, like the marriage practice of going back home rather than just getting married overseas, making traces of the past about either party's family background, forbidding marriage between the freeborn and slaves (*Osu*), and so on. The Igbo worldview grounds such practices among the people.

Also, as Kanu notes, 'the dynamics of reality are based on the relationships and interconnections' (108). This means that Igbo people, like every other given people, are individually interconnected existentially by their cultural ties. The Igbo culture is also interconnected with other African cultures that together make up the broad African culture. Also, Igbo culture is a dynamic phenomenon that grows and expands in the course of its contact with other cultures. Nevertheless, it remains selective of what to imbibe from other culture(s) in contact and what to do away with. Again, that is what the author demonstrates in his portrayal of culture conflict between African and Western (European) cultures in contact.

Related Literature

The danger of forgetting the past of African heritage in forfeiture of the future of it is captured by Wole Soyinka thus: 'To ignore this simple route to a common humanity and pursue the alternative route of negation is, for whatever motives, an attempt to perpetuate the external subjugation of the black continent' (Soyinka xii). Soyinka notes that the basic existential locus of the African is predicated on a non-separable tripod of the past, the present and the future. The past belongs to the ancestors, the present to the living and the future belongs to the unborn. Each is predicated on, and patently irreducible from the other. They form the thread of existence which is a cyclic conundrum that we dare not tamper with, without heavy costs (124).

Frontline European powers (Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Portugal and Spain) competed for supremacy within European power politics. To demonstrate national preeminence, these countries sought for, and acquired territories around the world, including Africa. Industrialisation and other like social problems, such as unemployment, homelessness, poverty, social displacement, further whetted Europe's interest in Africa. The colonisation of Africa presented Europe with an opportunity to 'acquire a surplus population.' Thus, between December, 1884 and February 1885, 'European powers haggled over geometric boundaries in the interior of the continent, disregarding the cultural and linguistic boundaries already established by the Native indigenous African population' (Grade8 – Term3, 5). Africa's colonization was equally impelled by the prevalent depression in Europe where the powerful countries like Germany, France and Great Britain were losing money. Africa seemed out of harm's way with its abundance of raw materials that could offer abundant profit. Therefore, through cheap labour, (of Africans) 'Europe easily acquired products like ivory, rubber, palm oil, wood, cotton, and gum; all of which became of much importance due to the industrialisation of the mid-18th century to early 19th century' (6). Thus, Europe's economic, political, and religious conflicts of interest resulted strategically in the balkanization, colonisation, and exploitation of Africa.

Africa's leaders were equally implicated in the colonisation of the continent. Rivalries among African kings quickened the colonisation process. Conflicts of interest emerged where African kings and chiefs

competed among themselves to be the richest, the most influential and the most powerful. This justifies the scholarly assertion that ‘any new theory must recognize that imperialism was as much a function of its victims’ collaboration or non collaboration of their indigenous politics, as it was of European expansion’ (Yerima 37). Grade8 –Term3 asserts that due to the intractable conflicts among these leaders, ‘Europeans took advantage of the situation and persuaded some local leaders to align with them to fight against other leaders’ (7).

With the entrenchment of colonisation in Africa, morality questions arose. The Europeans were hard pressed to frame and decipher the existence of the Muslim Swahili trade ‘which made them to want to implement the Three C’s: Christianity, Commerce, Civilization’ (2). Grade8 –Term3 further affirms that in their trysts to etch Christianity, bring Western style education, and ingrain monogamy in African societies, “missionaries often felt threatened by warfare within Africa; hence, they called on European governments for protection and intervention” (7).

To justify colonialism and the so-called civilization of the African, colonisers wrote a new-fangled, stilted, and evidently un-ballasted pre-colonial history of the colonized, depicting them as barbarous, predatory, degrading, and bestial. This was eminently designed to justify the supremacy of western civilization (Fanon 150). The colonizer proceeded systematically to condemn, excoriate, and liquidate African cultures whether they understood their mechanism and philosophic underpinnings or not. They essentialized all Africans as one uniform cultural entity under the derogatory banner ‘Negro’.

The fact that Russia and most of the old Soviet Union are Europeans, yet, they do not see eye to eye in certain areas of cultural beliefs and practices makes nonsense of the colonialist assumption that all Africa is a univocal cultural arena. Fanon notes that African intellectuals often fall into this clever trap by trying to establish a common African or ‘Negro/ culture: “To upset this, the colonized individual feels the need to return to their so-called ‘barbaric’ culture, to prove its existence and its value in relation to the West” (151). Fanon points out that this thinking is erroneous. For, when the African intellectuals set forth to articulate a continental culture for the Negro, they realized that “every culture is first and foremost national (154,158,172). Fanon’s summation is that the struggle for national liberation is the essential struggle for the terrain where national culture can grow since national culture cannot grow under conditions of colonial and even neocolonial domination (168).

As colonization impinged negatively on the political socialization of Africa so it holds a vise-like grip on the history, culture, literature, and moral stay of the colonized people of Africa. To justify the outrage called colonialism, the predatory colonialists enlisted certain strategies to antagonize any sense of philosophic and upward leaning achievements which Africa could boast of prior to the advent of the colonisers. They systematically falsified Africa’s history, culture, education system, religious and spiritual ethos as well as economic and social system, ingraining and reifying their own world views, social practices and systems and concepts of morality as the logo-centric equivalent of the essential ingredients of what may be called civilized. To further justify slavery and colonialism they denied that Africa had a past, a culture and even moral values. Kwame Nkrumah notes that “such disparaging accounts had been given of African societies and their cultures as to justify slavery; and slavery posed against these accounts served as positive deliverance of our ancestors”(18).

George Anaso and Christopher Nwabuike Eziaba also lend voice to the debate. In their words, ‘Western imperialism was such that European history and literature were very strong forces used in cementing imperialism in the minds of colonised nations, to the denigration of their history and literature (culture)’(82). Anaso and Eziaba go on to note that the Western imperialism, orchestrated through their cooked-up history and manipulated literature, ‘was rooted in the Western universalist conceit which regarded as superior every thought and idea from the West over those from all the other races of the earth’ (82). The emergence of a new breed of educated African writers and writings exposed to a good extent, the fallacies of imperialist history and literary trend as they etched the truth about Africa’s historic-cultural stay (Anaso and Eziaba 83).

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God* and even *No Longer at Ease* serve as pace-setter protests in the skein/vein of cultural regeneration. His other novels *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*, his war poems collection *Beware, Soul Brother*; his collection of short stories largely based on the civil war – *Girls at War and Other Stories*, the political/book tract *The Trouble with Nigeria* and his last full-length memoir *There Was A Country* all address the socio-political conflicts thrust onto not just Nigeria but Africa at large through largely colonial and neo-colonial factors/forces. This is in line with Achebe's statement that literature serves as a corrective instrument since it engages often to place in proper and correct perspectives racial and other forms of farcical representations of particularly African cultures by presenting a vivified version of the other side.

In "Colonialist Criticism," Achebe challenges the pushers of high culture to "Let every people bring their gift to the great festival of the world's cultural harvest and mankind will be all the richer for the variety and distinctiveness of the offering" (68–90). This is Achebe's poser to "the colonialist critic, unwilling to accept the validity of sensibilities other than his own" (Achebe68). *As Publishers Weekly* points out, Achebe stoutly believes that literature is a medium that can help Africa overcome the negativity learned in its encounter with the West (24).

Mohammed Fauzy El-Dessouky characterizes Achebe's cultural conflict as two-dimensional. There is the internal conflict traceable to the same culture among its members and "sometimes inside a specific character. Then there is the external conflict that takes place between two cultures the African and the British" (98). Solomon T. Plaatje works to debunk or expose the imperial falsification of the traditional life of his Barlong ethnic group. His aim is to reinvent and reinterpret history from the viewpoint of his African cultural milieu (Anaso and Ezeifa, 84). According to Couzzens, Plaatje aptly and diligently captures this view in *Mudhi* (10).

Virtually all literary writings by African writers are both committed and postcolonialist both in content and texture. This fact underpins Achebe's philosophic statement in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* that no one but the insane would be chasing rats when his/her house is on fire (32). Several of these works aside those of Achebe and Plaatje have treated/focused on post-colonialist conflicts that linger on the African soil and psyche. Right from the 1950s to the present, serious or canonical literary works have been placed on the table of world literature by Africans whose imaginative enterprise border on the African condition. The writings cut across all the genres of literary engagements.

This study employs the qualitative method and text-content analysis. Descriptive, interpretive and analytic tools are employed for the analysis of both primary and secondary data. The chosen text constitutes the primary data, while related literatures make up the secondary data sources.

Analysis of Literary Text

The problematic of the time-worn yet subsisting *osu* caste system, practised in so many parts of Igboland, is the central subject of this play, "*The Sudden Return*". The *osu* were/are people dedicated to the gods for one cultural reason or the other. It becomes a taboo to have anything done with the *osu*. No free born Igbo may marry a member of the caste. Thus, the *osu* are stigmatized and regarded as unclean and, therefore, lower than the normal member of the tribe. With the advent of colonialism and its supervening influence, especially via Christianity, most native cultural practices were destroyed since the colonist propagated a mindset that cried and still cry all of them barbarous, undemocratic, and uncivilized.

However, in spite of efforts to destroy these cultural practices, a good number of them resist outright destruction thereby posing a threat to certain orders in so-called civilized conduct or behaviour. One such time-honoured practice is the *osu* caste phenomenon. Despite that the Eastern Nigeria Regional House of Assembly proscribed the practice of the caste system throughout the region in 1956, the practice persisted on a grand scale even through the waning days of colonist occupation down to political independence and thereafter. Today, even though the practice is no longer popular and new dedicatees are hardly found anymore, the stigmatization of perceived offspring/generation of erstwhile members of the caste exists even though it remains as pockets of incidents.

The characters in the text

John Campbell whose Igbo name is Nwapa suddenly returns home from the United States of America where he has lived for fifteen years with his parents and siblings. His itinerary brings him home to seek his family's support and approval to marry his heartthrob, Chimamanda, alias Mandy. Both had met in the US where they have lived most of their adult lives and had all but consummated a marriage but for the fact that Mandy's father, a Professor, insisted that the couple return to Nigeria, the source and the cradle, to obey tradition by seeking mutual consent from each couple's familial lineage. John Campbell returns ahead of his wife-to-be, for advance meeting and possible minor preparations with Papa.

Since his father had died in a car accident in the US along with his mother, John Campbell depends on his grandfather, Papa, for the needed nod and blessing preparatory for the arrival of his fiancée, who is on her way en route from Lagos to Onitsha by land. However, things turn awry as Papa announces that John Campbell cannot marry his intended wife because her family is of the untouchable caste, *osu*. Of course, John Campbell is unconvinced and undeterred as he protests and thinks the system is barbaric, retrogressive and behind the times. In the course of his queries and protestations, he is informed through a flashback, what led to his (John Campbell) wife's *osu* status. He still has his doubts and more prodding questions reveal the variegated means and circumstances under which a person became *osu*.

His grandfather, Papa equally lays bare, the implications for him and the entire family for marrying an *osu*. Meanwhile, Mandy eventually arrives, full of excitement but in no time she learns to her dismay, the posture of John Campbell's family and indeed all members of the village: No free born of this village may marry anyone from Mandy's family in Nwangwu-Akwu village. Of course, to make assurance doubly sure, Papa had sent out an emissary, Ejike, Madam Do-Good's husband to make enquiry about Mandy's family background. Whereas Mandy expects her fiancé to be firm, forthright, and decisive on their planned marriage, in spite of what she considers old-fashioned ideas and practices, John Campbell urges caution. He is not yet convinced on why he should not go ahead with the marriage but he equally does not wish to blast into anything that might spell disaster for him and his people. Exasperated and somewhat disappointed at John Campbell's prevarications, Mandy calls quits to the marriage and walks out on him, amid the man's half-hearted or, at best indecisive overtures and protestations.

Okwelum seems to titillate our senses to revisit certain cultural practices that are at best at the crossroads of extinction, the *osu* caste system in particular. He is not unaware of the imperatives of culture contact, culture domination and dynamisms attending the same. He notes the assimilationist issues facing African migrants. Nwapa and Chimamanda had to change their names to John Campbell and Mandy, respectively in order to fit into the American society. The excuse is that the white superordinates could not pronounce their names hence the necessity to change same to what they could mouth. It is in this same vein that the colonial settlers changed local/native names to suit their sensibilities. They condemned certain African names as fetish, idol worship and uncivilized while foisting their 'Christian' names on the people.

It is in accordance with the dictates of western civilization and of reified awareness that John Campbell has to marvel that the locals still hold the 'backward' belief in the 'retrogressive' caste system. He is confronted with the pulsating social differentiation that still lingers in the village of his nativity, which presently puts a distance between his aspirations/personal ambition and the perceived collective order of age-long familial safety and long-lasting social responsibility:

Nwapa, going straight to the point...Marrying anybody from Nwangwu-Akwu village is not a task for someone in your position...No one from the seven villages that make up our village group, goes to marry another, man or woman, from Nwangwu-Akwu. *No freeborn who talks of marriage even steps foot in Nwangwu-Akwu* (Emphasis added, Okwelum 143).

The italicized clause above makes a definite statement and this introduces the cultural snag that sets a distance. To protect herself, her children and her late husband's sprawling properties from greedy brothers, Nwakaego, Mandy's great grandmother had run to Amadioha shrine where she pledged perpetual servitude to the deity in exchange for the needed protection. When anyone made such a pact,

that person and their entire generations became *osu*, dedicated to the deity. They were forever untouchables and immune from human oppression as well as communion and cooperation. This has a rebarbative effect on the principal's offspring and even possessions ad infinitum. With his exposure and reeducation, neither John Campbell nor his fiancée is expected to easily succumb to such a seemingly outlandish culture. This is, predictably the initial and immediate response from the scandalized John Campbell:

I don't see why I can't marry Mandy. All these happened in the *past*. We've all had good and bad experiences in the past, but we must move on from them and become better people. My father always told us that the lion's power lies in our fear of it and I am not afraid to make a move no one has before (Okwelum 149).

By this reference to the past as something that is old, gone, and forgotten, John Campbell reconfirms his ignorance of the social cultural milieu at play. He exhibits the sensibilities of an assimilated African no longer in tune with the veins of cultural stay in the environment of his original existence. That is why he feels that this kind of culture subsists because people like Papa who should make it die still encourage and propagate it: "Things cannot change when those who should change them continue to make them stay" (Okwelum 152). The wiser old man, Papa insists that "Certain things, we can't change. But we must try not to break existing customs and live with what is until these things die naturally" (Okwelum 152).

Professor Uzondu, Mandy's father, fully understands the working of the *osu* culture. He equally is aware of the communal ethos of the African rules of engagement, which effectively spells a distance from the individualist posture and practice in the West. Uzondu equally knows that the extended family system is very strong and marital issues are not individualistic but collective under the aegis of the extended family system. This is why he insisted that Nwapa and Chimamanda visit home to seek approval. His is an acid test on the *osu* system to see whether or not it had died, being an *osu* himself. Mandy and her fiancé do not have this knowledge. Mandy had earlier tasted the bitter cup of stigma in the hands of some Igbo ladies who snubbed and shouted at her right there in the United States. Though she had also been given snippets of the situation, probably by her father, she did not think it serious, nor does she feel it is connected with her any longer since she had lived all her life in the western world.

It is now that they have come home that they must get to learn the real rudiments. When Papa refers to Mandy as 'this strange girl', John Campbell is taken aback and exclaims: "Strange girl? What's strange about her? I practically live with her in the US" (Okwelum 152). He is patently ignorant that the Igbo consider blood lines when they talk of marriage. Blood lines equally include the history of the genealogical tree. In this culture, ancestral vestiges count either positively or negatively in accordance with the people's time-honoured sensibilities. This is even Biblical: "I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments" (Deuteronomy 5:9 – 10 (KJV)).

This is partly why papa tells Nwapa that "marriage is not straightforward anywhere in the world," and that here (the Igbo society), "marriage goes beyond a man and his wife. *It also involves close kin*" (emphasis added, Okwelum 152). Close kin emphasizes the extended family system which establishment is timeless. It suggests a connection, an unbreakable connection between the past and the present which ensures continuity. Nwapa thinks it is as simple as seeing his grandfather and Chimamanda's own nuclear family. Papa lectures him further:

It involves more than seeing me or the girl's father. Before a young man starts talking about marriage, he must first speak to his parents just like you are doing now. Your parents would now approve or disapprove. But before they take a decision, if the girl or her family is unknown to them, they must send emissaries to visit the girl's village to do a little investigation on her family background (Okwelum 152).

This is a very important difference between the Igbo traditional system and that of the West in marital issues. The necessity to find and establish familial background is to find out whether, among numerous

other things, certain diseases are running in the family – thank heaven even western orthodox medicine has since confirmed that some sicknesses are hereditary. This painstaking inquiry leads to parental/familial approval or disapproval. This is imperative because the child, just like the couple, is considered the communal belonging of not just their nuclear family but that of the entire extended family and the village and community at large. Papa explains further, the necessity for enquiry before marriage:

This is why in each case the family embarks on enquiry: Where there is a problem like in this case where the girl involved is *osu*, *it is my duty to tell you that no road leads to that place that you must look elsewhere for marriage* (Emphasis added, Okwelumbe 153).

The italicized statement above is repeated by Ejike, Do-Good's husband and a well-educated man; as well as Elder Timothy, who is an elder in the church (Okwelumbe 171,185). This shows that such a statement has become one of the given or taken-for-granted platitudes among the people. Even with John Campbell's stout resistance on the grounds that "She wasn't born *osu*, her family has been free from that horrible tag all their life and she has been away from Nigeria almost all her life" (Okwelumbe 171), he (John Campbell) is soon to find how feeble his vehement protestation sounds to the ears of these custodians of a waning but resistant culture.

The cultural resistance finds strength and expression in the need to sustain the cyclic nature of the Igbo world of communalistic and paterfamilias existence. Nwapa, therefore, learns from Papa, Ejike and Elder Timothy that marriage in this part is not individualistic as he wrongly holds in his "I thought we are talking about my life here? Why do we keep talking about the extended family?" (Okwelumbe 172). He had earlier voiced his naivety about the philosophy of living including marital matters in the Igbo society when he defended Mandy and her suitability for marriage based on her struggles, her strength, and perseverance. He fails to understand that these qualities are marginally important to the system, compared to her family tree, its history and continuity. This too runs inexorably on the cyclic compass of the world of the ancestors, the world of the living and that futuristic world of the unborn.

Nwapa thus finds the people ignorant of his would be wife. Ironically, the people seem to know her better than he does. He knows her from the white man's lens of individualist standpoint, not from the African view of the communal. This is why Papa tells him "You cannot spoil the family history and lineage by tainting it with *osu* blood. Once you do a thing like that, you stand alone and against members of your kindred" (173). Logically, it could be argued, the *osu* concept is not a thing of blood heredity. But, illogically, it is. Matters of belief and faith often defy logic. That is why people receive Holy Communion and believe it is the body and blood of Christ. The *osu* caste practice and belief is simply as illogical as the logic of virtually all faiths.

It is thought provoking and sobering that Nwapa, not conceding to let go of Mandy, though, nevertheless insists on establishing the fact of the *osu* practice in order to better gain proper insight and perspective on the subject. This might give him the vantage foreknowledge which will enable him better grapple with the sensibility upon which it operates and then, seek to overcome it if need be. That is why he agrees with Mandy that "the past had nothing to do with us because the tradition had since been abolished" (Okwelumbe 174). However, unlike Mandy, he has learned from both Papa and Ejike that the abolition had remained a paper tiger and many elders of the village had circumscribed ceremonies that could confer veritable actuation of the theoretical abolition. John Campbell sincerely intimates Mandy that "Like you, I told him that it was a past that had no connection with your present generation. He, however, told me that once one is born into such family, the stigma remains with him and that nothing can take such stigma away, unless death" (Okwelumbe 174).

Queried by Mandy whether this seemingly illogical assumption should now affect their marriage, Nwapa hits the nail on the head:

You know me; I had a different view on issues like this before now. *Grandpa has made things clearer a bit. I now understand the consequences of doing things like this without hearing from those who were there before us.* My father always says that a man who urinates in a stream should always remember that his family would drink the same water. *I am not in a hurry to act*

on the new information we have now about the practice. But I want us to do everything necessary to make sure that we do not take any decisions that would cause problems for our families in the future (Emphasis added, Okwelumbe 175).

This sets the stage for Chimamanda to storm out of the marriage, western style. This is instructive. A typical African bred girl would have exercised restraint as her husband is merely being cautious. But her impatience reiterates, ironically through her name – Chimamanda: My *Chi*, the life force among the Igbo will never fail. This signifies continuity of the Igbo ethos. It is, in this exhibition, symbolic and Nwapa comes to that realization. He has secured the past and the future of his people but coming to the present, Mandy threatens its consummation by quitting the marriage. However, Elder Timothy and Papa quickly and superbly secure the present and reassure its eminence in grand style: “Let her go, my son,” says Elder Timothy. “This happens all the time.” Papa proceeds to nail it:

You see, my son, in this part of the world men don’t commit suicide when a woman leaves, instead we should celebrate our freedom once more... the opportunity to go back into the wife market and take another one...we have too many beautiful girls in this village. Obedient. Intelligent. They can cook more than any girl you will find in America. You will find a better girl here so don’t worry about the one who just left (Okwelumbe 184).

Thus, the resolution in the conflict of life in this work tilts in favour of locale and local colour and content. It upholds the declining status of African tradition progressively bastardized by the combination of western miseducation, cultural coercion, and inferiority complex. Okwelumbe thus resets the musical chairs for cultural revival which harmonizes the cyclic order of the universe of the African Igbo.

Conclusion

This study has made a concise textual analysis of the chosen text. It shows a mixture of Western and African cultures, which results in or heightens the conflict between them. The conflict arises from the clash between them. It follows that culture contact presents dilemma and ideological conflict, as in between Igbo and Western cultures on the notion of ‘freeborn’ and ‘slave’ (*Osu*), which Okwelumbe’s two lovers (Nwapa and Chimamanda, the hero and the heroine) strongly contend against through lenses of Western perspective on cultural practices, so they could go ahead and get married, but all to no avail. The recommendation suggests for innovative and non-discriminatory reconstruction (re-make) and reformation of cultural practices that get rid of ‘freeborn’ versus ‘slave’ dichotomy and the likes for future generations, just as the ancients had made the past culture for today’s generation. There should be a synergy between the cultures and the past and the future of the people.

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