

Upturning dominant ideologies of sexualities in selected contemporary Nigerian fiction

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Abstract

The challenges faced by twenty-first-century youths are increasingly complex in a globalised world where transnational mobility and cross-cultural interactions have become commonplace. There is a need for literary scholars and critics to examine the interactions arising from these transnational contacts, and how they reshape ideological constructions of sexuality and identity. This study investigates how dominant cultural ideologies governing sexuality are represented in Iweala's *Speak No Evil* and Emezi's *The Death of Vivek Oji*, and how the texts' protagonists, viewed through Antonio Gramsci's theory of the organic intellectual, resist and reshape prevailing social and cultural norms. It also explores how globalisation shapes non-normative identities and creates hybrid spaces of belonging. The findings reveal that sexuality is portrayed in the texts as both a site of control and disruption. This is instantiated by the protagonists' lived experiences, which unsettle dominant narratives, and open space for alternative, self-defined identities. The findings also establish that organic intellectuals challenge dominant ideologies, creating spaces where sexual expressions intersect with global influences, disrupting cultural hegemony and allowing alternative narratives to emerge. Globalisation and migration act as catalysts that dismantle established norms and foster a more inclusive discourse on sexuality. Ultimately, the primary texts demonstrate that contemporary Nigerian fiction is increasingly interested in reimagining sexuality beyond the binaries of tradition and modernity, offering fluid and intersectional frameworks

that expand the possibilities of identity, belonging, and self-expression within a globalised world.

Keywords: Globalisation, sexuality, cultural hegemony, organic intellectuals, ideologies.

Introduction

Sexuality in contemporary society is influenced by a complex interplay of cultural, social, political, technological, educational, and global factors. This evolving discourse reflects ongoing transformations in societal attitudes and individual experiences. As societies become more interconnected, the challenges confronting youths become increasingly multifaceted, particularly those arising from cross-cultural dynamics of globalisation. Globalisation has heightened the imperative to question established norms and to assert individual identity amid competing conceptions of personhood and social recognition. Consequently, as transnational interactions reshape ideas across borders, youths nowadays exhibit greater tolerance and acceptance of diverse sexualities that were previously considered unacceptable before the rise of globalisation and technological advancement (Ayoub & Garretson, 2017).

African societies often maintain positions that contrast with Western perspectives, particularly regarding sexuality. There is a persistent denial of the existence of non-

heteronormative sexualities and identities (Montle, 2021). Heterosexuality remains the dominant ideology in Africa. In Nigeria, for instance, homosexuality is criminalised and carries a penalty of fourteen years' imprisonment (Bourbeau, 2019). The Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act of 2013 imposes a fourteen-year prison sentence on individuals in same-sex marriages and broadly penalises those who encourage or tolerate same-sex relationships (Adebanjo, 2015). Onanuga and Onanuga (2023, p. 3) describe such individuals as being "adjudged to be complicit in non-heterosexual practices".

The Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act, in conjunction with prevailing societal attitudes, has contributed to widespread homophobia, including violence, intolerance, and segregation directed at homosexual, lesbian, and queer individuals (Olaogun, 2024). Despite these adversities, the LGBTQIA+ community in Nigeria (Lubem et al., 2026) has exhibited considerable resilience. Societal perspectives on homosexuality have shifted across generations: while youths in the 21st century increasingly display tolerance and sensitivity toward the LGBTQIA+

community, older generations, particularly those influenced by 19th- and 20th-century values, often retain intolerant and homophobic views. This generational divide underscores the ongoing struggle for acceptance and equality. Analyses by Akanle et al. (2021) and Eguvwebere and Akoni (2024) further elucidate these evolving societal attitudes. Authors such as Jude Dibia, Chinelo Okparanta, Akwaeke Emezi, Unoma Azuah, Nnann Ikpo, and Uzodinma Iweala exemplify literature's capacity to foster critical dialogues about heteronormativity. Operating within transnational contexts, these writers foreground sexuality, identity, and freedom, reflecting the lived experiences of contemporary African societies and their diasporic communities. The increasing interaction between local cultures and global ethical frameworks necessitates the adaptation of critical paradigms to interpret the expanding discourse on sexuality.

Adesanmi and Dunton (2008), in their article "Introduction: Everything Good Is Raining: Provisional Notes on the Nigerian Novel of the Third Generation," offer a comprehensive analysis of emerging trends in Nigerian literature, focusing on third-generation writers. They identify a shift in thematic concerns, narrative styles, and a growing willingness among contemporary authors to address previously taboo

subjects, including queer identities. Historically, such themes were suppressed in African literary discourse due to conservative cultural, religious, and societal values. Adesanmi and Dunton argue that third-generation Nigerian writers are actively challenging traditional norms, thereby creating space for queer narratives within African literature. By operating in transnational contexts, these writers foreground issues of sexuality, identity, and freedom, which reflect the lived realities of modern Nigerian society in both home and diaspora. The current article demonstrates that the inclusion of queer themes in modern Nigerian literature disrupts the longstanding heteronormative expectations held in African literature, and positions the new narratives as essential for understanding evolving social, cultural, and political realities. By situating queer African literary writing within this broader narratives, Adesanmi and Dunton highlight its significance in redefining Nigerian storytelling and contributing to discourses on identity, resistance, and social change. Akung et al. (2024) further acknowledge that transnational movement disrupts existing identity formations. LGBTQIA+ narratives in African literature thus constitute a vital shift in African cultural discourse and shape contemporary understandings of identity in African society.

African literature has historically served as a counter-discursive space that interrogates dominant ideological structures (Eguvwebere & Ogheneruemu, 2019). While earlier literary scholarship often addressed neo-colonial and political hegemonies, contemporary narratives increasingly focus on the regulation of sexuality as a central site for ideological control. Etuk and Ibuot (2024) opine that cultural hegemony is not only class-based but also tied to colonial epistemologies governing sexuality and morality. This study expands the counter-hegemonic inquiry to include the politics of sexual identity and heteronormative dominance and would be guided by two interrelated research questions, namely: (1) how does hegemonic common sense shape the role of traditional intellectuals in the selected texts?; (2) in what ways do organic intellectuals resist and reconfigure dominant ideological structures?

Theoretical Framework

The current study thrives on the theoretical background of Gramsci's (1971; 2010) theory of cultural hegemony. Antonio Gramsci propounded the concept of cultural hegemony in his prison notebooks, following Karl Marx's theory of the superstructure, which refers to the ruling class and the base (the proletariat) (Gramsci, 1971). Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony explains how dominant

groups use culture to maintain power. This process involves creating and perpetuating ideologies that shape societal norms and values, thereby sustaining the status quo. This control is achieved by propagating ideologies (beliefs, assumptions and values) through social institutions. Cultural hegemony offers insight into how cultural practices and institutions give rise to social hierarchies, as well as resistance to and renegotiations of the dominant ideologies. The hegemonic theory posits that legitimate power is established and sustained through coercion and consent, grounded in the connection between power and legitimacy. It relies on socialisation, experiences with social institutions and exposure to cultural narratives and imagery that reflect the ruling class's norms, beliefs and values. These values reflect the class-specific values of the dominant group and provide an unpremeditated consent that validates the dominant group. Class-specific ideas are transformed into common sense through the dissemination of ideology by organic intellectuals.

Common Sense

Cultural hegemony operates subtly, influencing even those marginalised, as they often internalise the values of the ruling class. Cole's (2020) analyses identify the fluidity of hegemony, noting that it can be challenged through counter-narratives and alternative ideologies. However, this

requires significant effort as dominant norms are deeply ingrained in everyday life.

"Common sense" in Antonio Gramsci's theory refers to the everyday beliefs and assumptions people accept as natural and self-evident, often without critical reflection (Gramsci, 2010). Unlike philosophical or scientific knowledge, common sense is a collection of cultural norms, ideologies, and practical ideas absorbed through social interaction and upbringing. Gramsci argues that these beliefs, though seemingly neutral, are profoundly shaped by the ruling class to serve its interests. By embedding their values into the collective social sense, the dominant group secures consent and maintains hegemony, as individuals often conform to these ideas without realising their influence. The dominant group subtly uses the concept of common sense to entrench cultural hegemony. Common sense sustains societal inequalities by naturalising social hierarchies and masking their historical and political origins. Gramsci's analysis shows that common sense is not static; it evolves as society changes. Counter-hegemonic forces can challenge dominant ideologies by reshaping what is considered "common sense" through education and critical thought. Challenging the narratives that constitute common sense offers a pathway for social change (Al Areqih, 2022; Crehan, 2002).

Gramsci (2010) identifies one of these counter-hegemonic forces as organic intellectuals.

Organic Intellectuals

In his *Prison Notebooks* (2010), Antonio Gramsci introduces the concept of organic intellectuals, as distinct from traditional intellectuals. Organic intellectuals emerge directly from their social class, particularly the working class, and actively participate in shaping that class's ideas, values, and culture. Unlike traditional intellectuals, who are often seen as detached and serving the interests of the dominant class, organic intellectuals are deeply rooted in their communities' economic, social, and political realities (Crehan, 2002). Traditional intellectuals often serve to reinforce the dominant ideology, while organic intellectuals work to develop counter-hegemonic ideologies. Gramsci (2010) argues that every social class produces its intellectuals, who are essential to the class's ability to achieve cultural and political leadership or hegemony. Organic intellectuals play a crucial role in articulating the aspirations and struggles of their class, fostering a collective sense of identity, and developing strategies for social change. They are central to building a counter-hegemony, which involves challenging the dominant class's worldview, constructing an alternative set

of ideas and gaining the broader society's consent.

Crehan (2002) adjudged that organic intellectuals are not simply conveyors of abstract ideas but active partakers in their communities' lived experiences, struggles, and aspirations. They play a pivotal role in shaping the cultural narratives that sustain or challenge societal power structures. Crehan illustrates Gramsci's argument that culture is a battlefield where different social classes compete for ideological dominance (2002, p. 158).

The book, *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism* by Thomas (2009) offers a comprehensive exploration of Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony by focusing on the critical role played by organic intellectuals in challenging and transforming dominant ideologies. It emphasises that Gramsci's theory of hegemony extends beyond mere political domination to encompass the cultural, ideological, and social leadership that ruling classes exercise over subordinate groups. This hegemony is maintained through coercion and consent, as the dominant class successfully imposes its worldview as common sense knowledge, accepted by society. In this context, organic intellectuals are crucial in disrupting the hegemonic order. Through their efforts, organic intellectuals

contribute to a collective intellectual and cultural project that can weaken the ideological grip of the dominant class. This analysis underscores the transformative potential of organic intellectuals. By situating organic intellectuals within Gramsci's broader concept of hegemony, Thomas (2009) shows how they are essential to the processes of resistance and the formation of new emancipatory ideologies. Also, Shakoor et al. (2024) explore "Cultural and Political Hegemony in Atia Abawi's *The Secret Sky*" through Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony. They argue that *The Secret Sky* reflects how hegemonic power is maintained in Afghanistan's socio-political contexts, mainly through the enforcement of rigid cultural norms, religious practices, and patriarchal authority. The study emphasises the role of organic intellectuals in challenging this hegemony, drawing parallels between Gramsci's ideas and the characters in the novel who resist dominant ideologies. The study reveals how characters in *The Secret Sky* confront societal pressures, questioning the legitimacy of the power structures that sustain gender inequality, ethnic tensions, and political dominance (2024). These acts of defiance serve as examples of what Gramsci describes as the process of building counter-hegemony, where subordinated groups assert their own

cultural and political identities in opposition to the ruling class.

Globalisation and advanced communication technologies increasingly help to challenge traditional hegemonic structures. Stuart Hall and other scholars have explored how globalisation disrupts cultural hegemony by introducing diverse voices and perspectives, resulting in a more fluid and contested cultural landscape. Hall (1997) argues that globalisation fosters new forms of cultural exchange, enabling interactions and mutual influence among cultures and producing hybrid cultural forms. However, he also cautions that globalisation is not neutral; it often perpetuates power imbalances, with dominant Western cultures exerting significant influence over non-Western societies and contributing to cultural homogenisation. While globalisation can facilitate the dissemination of diverse cultural practices, it simultaneously reinforces cultural hegemony, particularly through media representation. Nevertheless, the global circulation of culture creates opportunities for resistance and redefinition, as local cultures adapt and reinterpret global influences to maintain their distinct identities. These dynamics underscore both the opportunities and challenges globalisation presents for cultural diversity, a tension that is especially evident in the domain of sexuality, where traditional

norms and heteronormativity are increasingly scrutinised and redefined.

While Gramsci's work primarily addresses the relationship between culture and power under capitalism, it offers a valuable framework for re-examining contemporary cultural ideologies shaped by globalisation. This study adopts a counter-hegemonic perspective, presenting alternative viewpoints, values, and social organisations that emerge through globalisation and migration to challenge dominant heteronormative sexualities in the two texts under study.

Globalisation

Globalisation is a multidisciplinary concept that cuts across diverse disciplines- art, the social sciences, economics, culture, literature, etc. Anthony Giddens defines it as "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (Giddens, 1990, p. 64). It is a phenomenon that eliminates the boundaries of nations in the quest for transnational relationships. Migration and cross-cultural interaction are products of globalisation as the world becomes a global village. Globalisation impacts all aspects of life within a nation-state, including economic components, politics, ideology and culture (Prasad & Prasad, 2007). It has

transformed the world into an interconnected web of cultures, economies, and ideologies. This interconnectedness has profound implications for cultural and individual identities, particularly among youths who are more exposed to diverse perspectives and ways of life than ever before. Falase and Ogunwale (2020), in *Nigerian Youth and the Rhetoric of Globalisation*, discuss how globalisation sustains cultural hegemony in Nigerian society, which particularly affects the youth. Exposure to Western ideals through media and global economic forces often challenges Indigenous cultural norms, leading Nigerian youths to adopt Western attitudes and consumer behaviours. While facilitating global connectedness, this process also marginalises local traditions and values, promoting a cultural shift where global ideologies dominate and creating tensions between traditional values and contemporary global trends.

Globalisation has facilitated a cross-cultural exchange across all artistic endeavours, allowing Nigerian artists to draw inspiration from diverse global influences while sharing their unique perspectives with international audiences. Margaret Efurhieve's analysis of the impact of globalisation on the Nigerian music industry reveals a transformative landscape characterised by both opportunities and challenges (Efurhieve, 2021). Her

examination underscores the complex dynamics of globalisation in the Nigerian music industry, illustrating how it serves as both a catalyst for innovation and a potential threat to cultural integrity. In literature, the rapid pace of these changes has led to a revaluation of norms and belief systems, especially those concerning sexuality and identity. As borders blur and cultures mix, there is a growing need for self-assertion and for revising identity constructs. Literary artists have a crucial role in reflecting these evolving realities, depicting characters who grapple with the complexities of modern life and the intersection of global influences with local traditions. Recent scholarship has foregrounded the concept of imposed identity as a discursive mechanism through which heteronormative and nationalist ideologies regulate subjectivity in Nigerian fiction (Eguvwebere & Akoni, 2024). In their analysis of *Speak No Evil*, Eguvwebere and Akoni (2024) demonstrate how familial and religious structures enforce heterosexual conformity through silence, shame, and moral discipline. Building on this insight, the present study broadens the inquiry to examine how many contemporary Nigerian texts upturn such imposed identities through narrative resistance. Al Areqi (2022) investigates how deeply ingrained societal norms and religious beliefs shape individuals' perceptions of themselves and their

identities. He examines how dominant cultural forces, particularly in conservative societies, often impose rigid standards of behaviour, morality, and self-expression. Ultimately, Al Areqi argues that religious and sociocultural values, while vital to community coherence, can also inhibit personal growth and self-identity when used to enforce conformity. In the work, "Unsettling the Boundaries of Taboo in Contemporary Nigerian Poetry: An X-ray of Selected Romeo Oriogun's Poems", Anigala(2024) examines the cultural impact of globalisation on Nigerian poetry. Specifically, the study reveals how globalisation has facilitated the introduction of non-normative sexualities and identities, challenging traditional taboos. The novels used for this study exemplify this, as their respective protagonists are part of a larger global community.

Upturning dominant ideologies and the acceptance of LGBTQIA+

Youths in the 21st century are increasingly embracing ideologies and practices that were once considered taboo, a shift largely driven by the proliferation of cross-cultural ideas through globalisation and rapid technological advancement. The expansion of social media and global communication platforms has enabled young people to engage with a wide range of cultures and perspectives on sexuality and identity.

Modern Nigerian writers like Iweala and Emezi recognise the need to accommodate the imbalance posed on African cultures by the West through globalisation and migration in their literary works. Their protagonists interact within a multicultural society. Iweala's *Speak No Evil* (henceforth, *SNE*) explores the influence of globalisation on African youths and families living in the diaspora. For example, the character, Niru, a Nigerian who is in the United States and faced with a culture that accepts his sexuality on the one hand, and on the other hand, having a father who addresses him from the standpoint of his Nigerian roots, where his proclaimed sexuality is abominable navigates between his Nigerian culture, comprised of his family and church, and the Western culture, represented by his school and his friend, Mildred.

The protagonist in Emezi's *The Death of Vivek Oji* (henceforth, *TDVO*) and his friends are children of a multicultural community called the 'Nigerwives'. Emezi introduces the multiethnic community of the Nigerian middle class that includes 'Nigerwives' – foreign-born women who married Nigerian men. Nigerwives have cultivated a unique lifestyle and community, organising themselves to protect their interest. Ngũgĩ (1986) refers to these sets of middle-class Nigerians as "the petty bourgeoisie" (pp. 12-13). They worked actively to enthrone imperialism and played an intermediary

between the West and the colonised. They assimilated Western culture and worked assiduously to uphold it.

Hegemonic Common Sense and Traditional Intellectuals

As proposed by Gramsci, cultural hegemony gains control through the circulation of ideologies propagated by social institutions such as homes, schools, churches, courts, the media, etc. Iweala's *Speak No Evil* and Emezi's *The Death of Vivek Oji* present a rich discourse for analysing cultural hegemony and the tension between traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals, where the latter emerge from marginalised groups. The texts articulate the struggles faced by organic intellectuals as they challenged existing structures.

Iweala's *Speak No Evil* presents us with two opposing ideologies according to Gramsci, as projected by the traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals respectively, with heteronormative ideology acting as the dominant ideology. The characters: Niru's parents, Rev Olumide and Bishop Okereke, are all traditional intellectuals who uphold hegemonic ideologies sustained by common sense assumptions. Niru (the Protagonist) has a different sexual orientation from his parents. This we see in his exchange with his mother: "Because boys aren't supposed to like other boys, my mother said to me when I asked what the

pastor meant when he said America was living under the shadow of that abomination, homosexuality... she said, God said man is for woman and woman is for man. That's how it's supposed to be. Moreover, God is always right." (SNE, p.25).

Obi, Niru's father's reaction to Niru's preferred sexuality, crystallises his abhorrence of the cultural norms inculcated in him through common sense assumptions during his formative years in Nigeria. The father describes his sexual orientation as an abomination and threatens to escort him to 'Holy Spirit Chapel' or 'Mountain of Fire' for deliverance (SNE, p.45)

While having a family meeting with Pastor Olumide, Niru's father describes Niru's sexual orientation as 'psychological and spiritual corruption' (SNE, p. 67). Niru's parents could not understand how their son could claim he is sexually attracted to the male gender and are determined to go out of their way to cure him of what they perceived as a demonic sickness. They believe his condition can be cured in Nigeria through spiritual counselling and deliverance.

Niru's parents took him to their pastor, Reverend Olumide, another Nigerian migrant, to save him from the shackles of sin. Reverend Olumide's Sunday preachings

resonate with Niru's parents as he classifies any homosexual act as unclean. The pulpit becomes another avenue for exposing adherence to homosexuality and portraying it as a sin and a temptation that must be defeated at all costs. Like Niru's parents, he also insists that Niru would be saved through scriptures.

Earlier in the novel, Niru explains his parents' difficulty in coming to terms with the fact that they live abroad. Despite his years in the United States, Niru's father still imbibes hegemonic heteronormative ideologies and finds it challenging to assimilate the American culture. Niru points this out: "For all the years they've lived abroad, they are still so very Nigerian. I can sometimes see the mental strain on their faces when they try assimilating to some of the more grating aspects of American life" (SNE, p.28).

OJ, Niru's elder brother, sums up his father's ideology thus:

Nigeriatoma... An acute swelling of ego and pride that affects diaspora Nigerian men, rendering them unable to accept the idea that a true home might exist outside of their birth country" (SNE, p. 73).

Home, within this context, represents the Nigerian ideologies. Nigerian laws do not tolerate homonormativity. We deduced this

from Niru and Meredith's discussion when Niru informs her of his parent's plan to take him to Nigeria in search of a cure. "*Don't they kill gay people in Nigeria...they don't kill people, it's just fourteen years in prison* (SNE, p.78).

Bishop Okereke, the leader of the Nigerian church Niru's father visited with Niru in a bid to deliver him of his sexual interest in men, reiterates Niru's father's stance. He blames Niru's sexual orientation on the demon of homosexuality that has become entrenched and accepted in America.

On the other hand, Niru has no affection for or attachment to his Nigerian roots. His rejection of his Nigerian roots pre-empts his rejection of Nigeria as home and refusal to uphold any indigenous ideology, especially one he is at variance with. He feels no familial bonding towards Nigeria and dreads his family's occasional visit to Nigeria

When his father begins to beat him up and abuse him for being gay and saying he needs help, he challenged him with the question, "What if I don't need help?" (SNE, p.67). Niru, emboldened by America's progressive attitudes towards sexual orientation and fundamental human rights, believes that he should have the freedom to live as he chooses. His perspective aligns with the prevailing ideology of migrants.

Migration does not simply relocate a subject; it repositions them within a different ideological field. Through everyday socialisation, education, media, and peer networks, Niru internalises a framework in which sexuality is treated less as moral deviance and more as a matter of personal freedom. This shift echoes Anthony Giddens's account of globalisation as the intensification of social relations across distance. Ideas about rights and identity travel with people and reshape local subjectivities. In effect, migration produces a hybrid ideological consciousness. Niru's claim to self-determination is not merely personal; it is enabled by a transnational circulation of norms that unsettles inherited structures of control and opens space for self-articulation.

Niru's rejection of his parents' ideology validates the stance of some cross-cultural social institutions that encourage youths to be outspoken and comfortable with different sexual identities. Niru challenges both his pastor and his father, who try to explain that his sexual preference for the same sex is wrong. They see it as unhealthy because African society does not embrace it, and it also brings shame and disgrace to the families of homosexual individuals. When his father retorts, telling him it was better he murdered someone, he replies to him in a way that is not African and

disrespectful, asking his father what his problem is: "What is your problem? I say as I stand up" (*SNE*, p. 147). The reaction of Niru's parents, particularly his father's attempts to 'correct' his sexuality, exemplifies the enforcement of cultural hegemony within the family structure.

Similarly, Emezi's *The Death of Vivek Oji* reveals the ordeal of the protagonist, Vivek, who looks and acts contrary to his gender and resorts to hiding his true self from his parents. In the text, Vivek's family represent Gramsci's traditional intellectuals. His typical Nigerian father and his Indian mother, (who has lived in Nigeria for most of her adult life), have an aversion to queer people and homosexuals. Therefore, Vivek cannot express his true identity at home. He lives his life trying to find himself and, simultaneously, trying to keep what he discovers far away from his parents, who are supposed to be his close confidants. Hence he expresses thus:

I'm not what anyone thinks I am. I never was. I didn't have the mouth to put it into words, to say what was wrong, to change the things I felt I needed to change. And everyday it was difficult, walking around and knowing that people saw me one way, knowing that they were wrong, that the real me was invisible to them. It didn't even exist to

them. So: if nobody sees you, are you still there? (TDVO, 2020, p. 82).

Vivek's actions reveal the dichotomy between his parents' generation and his own. His parents and his relatives' constant disapproval affect him negatively. We get a glimpse of his mind in the expression below:

I was drowning. Not quickly, not enough for panic, but a slow and inexorable sinking, when you know where you're going to end up, so you stop fighting, and you wait for it to all be over. I had looked for ways to break out of it—sleeping outside, trying to tap life from other things, from the bright rambunctiousness of the dogs, from the air at the top of the plumeria tree—but none of it had really made any difference. So I was giving up; I had decided to give up. That afternoon, Somto and Olunne burst into my room and spoiled my whole plan. (TDVO, p.89).

Vivek grapples with his unfolding identity and is psychologically disturbed as he believes no one understands him. He feels cut off from his family and society. He also understands that he is different and wonders how his parents and society will treat him if they fully grasp how different he is. Aside from his home, the church represents another social institution where

personalities like himself are branded evil and must be exorcised. Kavita's search for a cure for her son's perceived sickness leads them to the church of her sister-in-law, Mary. The pastor declared Vivek was possessed by a very wicked spirit, a strong demon. He was restrained and severely beaten in an attempt to be delivered of the devil possessing him.

Mary's firm belief in her pastor's declaration confirms the society's spontaneous consent to cultural hegemony. The congregation, therefore, sees no wrong in their actions as they seek to validate the ideology of the ruling/dominant group. Therefore, while Vivek withdraws from his family and home, he finds solace in some friends, youths of his age group, who have been thrown into a new world with an uninterrupted flow of information and cultural exchange.

Organic Intellectuals and the Resistance of Dominant Ideologies

In Iweala's *Speak No Evil*, Niru's admission of his attraction to the same sex as himself and Meredith is an assertion of an alternate ideology different from his family belief – an American ideology. Niru represents the organic intellectual as he grapples with his sexuality. His preference directly challenges the heteronormative ideology imposed by his Nigerian heritage. Niru's admission and actions represent a

counter-hegemonic stance against the heteronormative structures that dictate masculinity and obedience for immigrant African families. His ultimate rejection of his immigrant family's ideology aligns with Gramsci's concept of the organic intellectual who disrupts the status quo established as common sense by the dominant group. His friendship and interactions with his childhood friend and classmate are further endorsements of his stance. Meredith's ideology originates from her Western cultural affinity and acceptance of homosexuality as opposed to Niru's family's Nigerian cultural affiliation. Meredith installed Grinder and Tinder apps on Niru's phone, which set off a series of actions and events. Meredith represents another example of Gramsci's organic intellectual, whose characterisation creates an avenue to legitimise Niru's sexual orientation. Her support helps Niru to challenge his parents' dominant ideologies. The effect of the migrant culture on Niru is also seen in Niru's discussion with Meredith when he informs her of his parent's plan: "You don't have to go, he can't make you go, that's like abduction, Meredith said when I told her my father was taking me to Nigeria. She said, shit, I can't believe he hit you like he beat you up" (SNE, p. 77).

Further, in Emezi's *The Death of Vivek Oji*, Vivek's defiance, unlike Niru's, who battled

with internal conflict and external suppression, is more radical as he fully embraces his sexuality despite the dangers. His actions conform strongly to Graham's view of organic intellectuals, as he questions and subverts dominant narratives on gender and sexuality in Nigeria. Vivek's stance fosters a collective resistance among his childhood friends, Juju, Olunne, and Somto, children of the organisation of Nigerwives – 'a group of women, foreign like her, who were married to Nigerian men and were aunties to each other's children' (TDVO, p. 29). The organisation helps them to assimilate the Nigerian culture. Vivek's mother, being an Indian, belonged to the group. Though they have stayed in Nigeria for decades, they still maintain ties with their different countries and foreign cultures. Their worldview impacted their children and their responses to people of different sexual orientations. These youths have grown to accept that their friends can have romantic feelings for the same sex, to be cross-dressers, and even to be vocal about it. Emezi, in *TDVO* reveals this in one of Vivek's interactions with his friends, Olunne and Somto who visited him in his room to share news from other places. They sympathised with him and identified with him, admitting that "there's probably something more interesting going on" (TDVO, p.90).

From the above interaction, Vivek realises that things could be different with his peers. While most people, especially his family members, believe he is not normal, his fellow youths believe there is something "interesting" about him and consider him beautiful in his unique way. Dominant ideologies accepted hitherto as the norm are now being questioned in a generation where people have become more vocal about their sexuality, irrespective of what it is. Vivek's reaction to this is one of surprise. On one occasion, he thanks his cousin Osita, who is more tolerant and tries to see things differently.

This is further buttressed by the fact that in the Western world, there is now a global movement referred to as the LGBTQIA+ where queer, lesbians, homosexuals, gays and every other expression of sexuality and identity differences among human beings are allowed to thrive.

Vivek becomes more comfortable with his sexuality among his peers than with his parents. With them, he begins a new journey towards freedom. Their friendship creates a space where non-conforming identities can exist outside societal dictates. This mirrors Gramsci's idea of the organic intellectual's role in cultivating counter-hegemonic spaces. Vivek's friends represent the promoters of an emerging dominant ideology, introduced by the

Nigerwives' global worldview and the contemporary realities against the traditional ideology. They represent the burgeoning crop of youths who, in this age of social media, are more vocal and receptive to ideas that were abominable in the past and willing to challenge the status quo. The upturn is seen in their inclination towards protecting their friend, Vivek and further expressed in the verbal exchange between one of them, Somto, and Vivek's mother after Vivek's demise:

That is not who my son was!" shouted Kavita, throwing the pictures to the floor. "I don't know what you people did to him, but that was not my son! That was not my Vivek!" "He didn't belong to you," Somto growled, and they all looked at her, appalled. "You keep talking as if he belonged to you, just because you were his mother, but he didn't. He didn't belong to anybody but himself. And the way you're behaving now—that's why we couldn't tell you. That's why he lived the last months of his life as a secret. That's why he couldn't trust you. You think you own him, when you didn't know anything that was going on in his life. (TDVO, pp. 239-240).

Somto's outburst and challenge of Vivek's mother, Kavita, is born out of the irritation that even in his death, the mother still

struggles to accept her son for who he was. In death, she still stubbornly believes that her son is an abnormal person who was sick and needed help.

Vivek's death plays a dual role. Firstly, it highlights the failure of institutions like the family, the school and the church to protect the lives and freedom of people with different sexual orientations in society. Secondly, his death and the insistence of the mother to unravel the mystery surrounding it forced the friends to reveal Vivek's actual personality to the mother and her subsequent acceptance. This aligns with Gramsci's argument that organic intellectuals continue to influence society beyond their physical presence, shaping future resistance movements. This validates Vivek's friends' rise to a hegemonic position as they construct a dominant ideology, which makes Vivek's mother to see the need to also convince her husband Chika, that their son was not sick, as they erroneously believed:

We don't know anything about him. You just had this your idea of who your son was supposed to be, and you were so busy having your affair that you missed out on his last months on earth. We can't keep insisting he was who we thought he was, when he wanted to be someone else and he died being that person, Chika. We failed, don't you see?

We didn't see him and we failed (TDVO, p.173).

The above analysis corroborates the views of scholars like Paquette, Priyadharshan, and Biswas who believe that Vivek's death is the effect of dominant logic in social institutions which exalt heteronormative practice. Nevertheless, the current paper takes a unique stance in arguing that the dominant ideology was eventually overturned within the primary texts as a result of the activities of the organic intellectuals. Vivek's parents replaced the inscription on the headstone on his grave with 'Vivek Nnemdi Oji Beloved Child' as a 'last gesture for their dead child, their belated apology' (TDVO, p. 337). His death becomes the catalyst for their attitudinal change. The inscription attests to Vivek's non-binary identity. His death foregrounds his journey towards self-acceptance, challenging the rigid gender binaries and heteronormative expectations prevalent in Nigerian society.

Vivek's relationship with his cousin Osita and his friends produces a counter-narrative to the dominant ideology, showing the power of community and unity in resisting oppressive norms. Unlike Niru, Vivek did not have the opportunity to confront his father and challenge his notions about homosexuality. Niru, like Vivek's friends, challenges his notional

categorisation as abnormal to assert his sexuality and identity.

Conclusion

Contemporary narratives of sexuality increasingly reflect tensions between inherited cultural norms and emerging global discourses of identity. In the selected novels, queer subjectivity is constructed within a space marked by religious and cultural constraints, which seek to regulate sexual expression. However, these constraints are persistently destabilised through acts of self-articulation and resistance. Drawing on Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, this study demonstrates that figures such as Niru's parents and religious authorities in the primary texts operate as traditional intellectuals who sustain dominant heteronormative ideologies. In contrast, the protagonists' struggles toward self-recognition and disclosure position

them as organic intellectuals who unsettle these structures through lived experiences. The findings of the study further reveal that globalisation, mediated through media and transnational cultural flows, contributes to the reconfiguration of sexual identity by expanding the vocabulary through which desire and belonging are expressed. However, this does not produce a uniform acceptance; rather, it generates uneven and often conflicted negotiations of identity. Ultimately, the study argues that both Iweala's *Speak No Evil* and Emezi's *The Death of Vivek Oji* present sexuality as a site of ideological struggle where hegemonic norms are challenged, reworked, and occasionally reinforced. These texts, therefore, contribute to broader literary conversations on how contemporary African and diasporic fiction reimagines identity within shifting cultural and global contexts.

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