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The Theme of Infidelity in *Ajo Obi*: A Reader Response Approach

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Abstract: Thematic study is an area in any literary study that cannot be easily overlooked. It is an area that cuts across the three major genres of literature. This paper examines the literary text *Ajo Obi* which is written by I.G. Nwaozuzu in form of drama with the view of studying the theme of infidelity as portrayed in the text. This work aims at showing the ambiguity of the claim of innocence by the accused in the text. It also brings to light how cultural divergence brings about different interpretations of an action. The data for this study are drawn from intensive study of the literary text *Ajo Obi*. Following a qualitative research paradigm the study adopts reader response approach in its analysis. Findings show that there is a kind of uncertainty in the claim of innocence by the accused in the text. Again cultural divergence is also found to bring about differences in interpretation of an action.

Keywords: Culture, Drama, Infidelity, Reader response and theme

1. Introduction

Literature is fraught with so many definitions. The word literature originated from Latin word 'littera' which means 'all written accounts'. Generally, literature means any written material, but specifically, it is a work of art through which life is seen and explained. Drama, prose and poetry have their bases on literature as a work of art. Literary works come from the mind. It explicates people's worldview in terms of what happened, what is happening what will happen and what can happen.

Drama as one of the three major genres of literature originated from Greek word 'dran' which means 'to do', 'to act' or 'to perform'. It is a literary form that tells the story of human conflicts by the means of dialogue and action (Igiligi and Ogenyi; 2002). One of the essential element of drama is 'theme', which forms the main focus of this study. Theme is the central idea of any play. The text under study which is *Ajo Obi* is adorned with so many themes of which 'infidelity' is the one this paper sets out to investigate.

Infidelity as it is viewed in this study is the violation of marriage vow or contract through adultery or unfaithfulness to sexual loyalty in marriage. A marital commitment usually includes a state or implied promise of sexual loyalty to one's partner. Such commitment defines and keeps the relationship.

In traditional Igbo society, there is a limitation to the extent of intimacy a married woman should have with any other man outside her husband. The way the conduct of a married woman is conceived in a traditional Igbo society varies from one community to the other. Example in Enugu state and Delta Igbo area, culture restricts married women from having a rapport of any sort with other men outside their husband. Such closeness is spared only for one's husband and that is why in such places, if there is anything a man wants from a woman or to give a woman, he does that through her husband to exculpate the woman from wrong accusation. However, the case is different in some parts of Igbo society like Imo and Abia.

Therefore, this study sets out to examine the theme of infidelity in *Ajo Obi* as interpreted by different readers from different cultural areas of Igbo land. The specific objectives of this study are to show the ambiguity of



the claim of innocence by the accused in the text and also investigate different cultural views on sensitive issues raised in a literary work. With regards to the scope of this study, there are many themes in the literary text under study. They will not be handled in a single study of this nature. Hence our major focus is on the theme of infidelity which can be argued as a central theme in the study text. A study of this nature is particularly relevant in projecting some cultural values and philosophies of most African Igbo communities especially those that have raised sensitive arguments. It is another way of presenting some cultural restrictions placed on women; that which many scholars see as marginalisation. It can also be relevant to subsequent scholars on the line of study a scholar can take in a literary study. The study is capable of sensitizing other studies on the same issue or related issues in the same text or other literary text.

The text was given to two sets of students (Set A and set B) to read and say their opinion on the theme of infidelity in the text. Those in set 'A' which is made up of students from Mbano, Umuahia and Ngwa are all from the Eastern Igbo cultural area while those in set 'B' made up of students from Ovoko, Enugu-Ezike and Aku are all from the Northern Igbo cultural area. These groups were set following an argument that arose in a literature class about the question of infidelity leveled against two characters (Onyema and Obiageli) in the study text; *Ajọ obi*.

2. Literature review

Abad (1978:7) sees the content of a work of art as the subject matter of discourse; that is, the whole idea or information contained in a literary text so as to express objective reality. He adds that factors that govern cultural conventions must be taken into account in order for the theme of a text to be selected appropriately. He posits that the adequacy of a chosen theme is often the indication of the meaning a society gives to the genre. Implied in Abad's (1978) observation is that what is selected as a theme in a particular text is determined by the emphasis and recognition a cultural group gives to such a literary text or genre together with its symbolic value in a particular cultural setting. In other words thematic materials are seen as social products. Implied in Abad's observation is that the treatment of the themes of a particular subject needs to be carefully explored because, the choice of each theme and its relevance to a certain situation is always based on social, cultural and historical factors. This is because he sees each expression as a reflection of cultural communication. He sees the thematic domains as the reflection of social realities and historical events.

Okiche (2016) applies the new historicism as a theoretical framework in the study of thematic trends in popular literature in South Africa and Nigeria. Looking at some South African and Nigerian popular literatures, Okiche finds out that the message of popular literary artists are clear, they write about the change in their environment as they provide some form of guidance to the people trapped as a result of the change. He also notes that some popular authors in Nigeria like Soyinka, Elechi Amadi, and Achebe reflect numerous thematic concerns in their works which range from corruption, quest for materialism, hard work, violence, disease, honesty and a lot of emphasis on obedience. Okiche observes that the works of popular authors are didactic and vital in the transformation of the society. Okiche equally notes that South African popular literature is mainly a product of their experience during apartheid with all its inhuman face and treatment on black majority. Using fugal's text for example, Okiche remarks that the text's preoccupation is the negative effects of apartheid among black South Africans. He sees the theme of Humiliation of the black South Africans by the colonial white minority. He also sees fugal revealing the theme of social and economic inequalities in South Africa. This theme is traced to where black workers and their families are exploited extensively by the white ruling class. However, in taking the Historicists approach to the study of thematic strands in popular literature Okiche observes that writers from South Africa and Nigeria give a historical (creative) account of events that have occurred in their time through their literature.

In, the work titled, thematic preoccupation of Nigerian literature, Adetuji (2017) takes a critical approach to the review of recurrent themes in most Nigerian literatures. He finds out that much of Nigerian literature is a lamentation of the harsh and inhuman condition in which the majority of Nigerians live in. Example in *Things Fall Apart*, he sees the theme of religion, anti-colonialism, and so on. In Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*. He sees the theme of mortality after life. In *the wedlock of the Gods*, he sees the themes of marriage, custom and tradition. In *Abiku* (a poem) he sees the theme of reincarnation. Coming to beatification of area boys, Adetuji observes the theme of moral decadence and superstition. In conclusion, Adetuji (2017) states that the themes seen give out the picture of the real life and manner of time in which the literary works are written. In



other words a literary work captures the realities in the society. It is through the themes in a literary work that the writer can project what he sees in the society.

Akazeze, (2018) follows a critical discourse analytical approach to look at, 'Creative dissidence and revolutionary temper in selected Igbo written poems. One of the major objectives of the study is to investigate the themes of creative dissidence and revolutionary temper in the selected poems. The themes relating to creative dissidence and revolutionary temper seen in the poems include: the themes of corruption; that is living a life of dishonesty, the theme of incursion; that is raiding intrusion into another, the theme of sycophancy; unbridled praise, the theme of tribalism and nepotism; that is favoritism and allegiance to a particular group or tribe and the theme of bad leadership (incapacity to handle the affairs of the land). Akazeze's study on creative dissidence and theme relates to the present study in the sense that they all talk about themes in written literary work. However, they differ in their area of focus and in the scope of the study. While Akazeze's (2018) work is on selected Igbo poems, the present study is mainly on a single theme of infidelity in an Igbo drama text.

Literary Themes can be complex as it can be varied. Yet, some themes in literary works can easily be identified. Mancini (2018) defines a literary theme as, 'the main topic (or topics) at the center of a story (or any literary work). If we go by this definition we can say that the theme is what a literary work is all about. Mancini sees it as a common mistake when the definition of theme is limited to the moral of a literary piece. He explains that while the moral must be a specific lesson or point of an author, the theme can be more general. It could be an idea or a topic that reappear throughout a literary work (story, poem or play). The implication of Mancini's (2018) explanation is that a moral lesson in a literary work can be a theme but a theme does not have to be a moral lesson. Mancini, in the study of some of the most common themes in literature comes up with themes that are recurrent in most literary works. Such themes observed are; the theme of crime, enmity, coming of age (or maturity), death, overcoming odds, capitalism, technology, love, religion, humanly versus nature, the individual versus the society, family, good versus evil, war, and so on.

The review of literature so far presents thematic study as an important part of the literary system. It cuts across the different genres of literature. With regards to the present study, which is captioned, 'reader response approach to the study of the theme of infidelity in an Igbo literary text, it is pertinent to have a brief review of what reader response is all about along with some other views relevant to this study.

2.1 Reader's Response Theory

Reader's response theory was first propounded in 1938 by an American literary critic Louise Rosenblatt in *Literature as exploration* (Rosenblatt; 1938). Rosenblatt termed this theory transactional reader's response theory. For him a written work does not have the same meaning for all the readers, and that individuals bring background knowledge, beliefs, values, cultural expectations and reading context to the act of reading. With him in the transaction type of reader's response theory are Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss. Iser (1974) believes that the convergence of text and the reader brings the literary work into existence and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but always must remain virtual, as it is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader. Robert Jauss focuses majorly on historical dimension of reader's response theory rather than the individual reader.

Another type of reader's response is subjective reader's response led by Norman Holland and David Bleich. According to Anderson (2012), Holland maintained that reader's responses to a text are emotional and are influenced by each individual's psychological needs. Like Holland, Bleich also locates meaning in the reader's mind. This view failed to address the possibility of multiple subjectivities.

The other type of reader-response theory is socio-cultural reader's response whose proponent is an American literary critic Stanley Fish. Anderson (2012) in her studies said that fish introduces the concept of "interpretive communities' within which a reader is situated and constrained. Since these communities adopt a set of assumptions about the stylistic characteristics of the texts and how they can be understood, a reader will start with initiated assumption which determines what is perceived. Anderson (2012) concludes that Rosenblatt, Iser, and Jans consider both the reader and the text, Holland and Bleich consider reader's psychology while Fish (1980) concentrates on the reader within a socio-cultural context.



2.2 Deconstruction Criticism

Deconstruction criticism is a literary theory that holds that meaning is indeterminate. It is a theory that holds that a text has multiple interpretation. Therefore a reader is expected to interpret it over and over again. No single reading is irrevocable; it can always be displaced by a subsequent one. This theory was propounded by a French Philosopher Jacques Derrida in 1967. Paul De Man is also an American literary critic who is also known as a deconstructionist (Cuddon; 2003). Since they believe that literature cannot definitely express its subject matter, deconstructionists tend to shift their attention away from what is being said to how language is being used in a text.

According to Gunney and Gunney (2008), the tenets of deconstructionism include:

1. Language is inherently unreliable; that is language is operating on the basis of differentiation. There is no direct link between the signifier and the signified.
2. There is no single word. This means that the shape of a word is determined by its referent.
3. Reality determines the shape of our language. This means that we have to work with meaning that is produced with the help of 'difference' and do not directly derived from the world they refer to.
4. Words are never stable and fixed in time. Since words are not determined by the relationship with what they refer to, they are always subject to change.
5. Meaning is the product of differences and it is always subject to a process of referral. The context of use determines the meaning.

2.3 Babelist Theory

Babelist theory is a semantic theory that holds that the study of meaning is fraught with confusion and subjectivity. The theory was propounded by Nwaozuzu (2013). The babelist theory states that man can never use thought independently to arrive at the finite meaning of linguistic structures such as words and sentences. It goes on to say that thought which helps man to decode linguistic elements can only have expression in language in order to arrive at meaning. In as much as human thoughts differ even on the same issue, situation and position, meaning is shrouded in confusion hence babelism. In addition, cultural background may contribute to the misconception of what the message may mean (Nwaozuzu: 2013).

The place of relatedness of the three theories reviewed for this study is in the fact that they all acknowledge, directly or indirectly, that the understanding of a particular text is not fixed. That is to say that a text could be given different interpretations by different readers in different contexts. Therefore, the theoretical framework that is basically followed in this study is that of the reader response theory of Fish (1980) which concentrates on the reader within a socio-cultural context.

3. Background of the Text

The drama starts by showing Ezenwata and Onyema as good friends and partners in business who live together in a house before Ezenwata's marriage to Obiageli. After Ezenwata's marriage, Onyema leaves the house to settle in his own house, though maintaining his relationship with Ezenwata like a brother. The rising of action in the drama starts with Onyema giving Obiageli a golden bangle as her birthday gift.

Ezenwata from that point starts accusing them of having an affair. At a point in the drama, Ezenwata pretends to repent of what he claims and begs Onyema for forgiveness asking him to attend a reconciliation party he plans organizing. At the party, he informs Onyema that they will be going to Lagos that night for their business contract scheduled to take place the following morning. They set off to Lagos that night after the party. Ezenwata's dead body is seen in his room the following morning. The dramatic question becomes, 'what and who killed Ezenwata?'

As the drama progresses, and from the police investigations, all fingers point at Onyema as the culprit. Ironically, Onyema is eventually confirmed to be in Lagos at the time that Ezenwata is found dead. Ezenwata's death becomes a mystery to the police detective. The heavy suspicion is that Onyema must have killed Ezenwata to marry Obiageli who is accused of dating him. When Onyema marries his love, the picture becomes clear that he



never intends marrying Obiageli. Uche, the police detective that is investigating Ezenwata's death dismisses the case on the ground that Onyema is innocent. Uche himself eventually marries Obiageli. However how Ezenwata killed himself on their way to Lagos is eventually revealed (Nwaozuzu; 1998).

4. Presentation of Data

Among the Themes in Nwaozuzu's *Ajo Obi*, the theme of infidelity has been the most controversial theme. There are usually varied opinions whenever this theme is raised. Some scholars see infidelity in *Ajo Obi* when there are others who see it otherwise. Set A of our controlled group are from Mbanjo, Umuahia and Ngwa. They are among the scholars who do not see infidelity as an obvious theme in the text, *Ajo obi*. Their response/report goes like this:

We do not see infidelity in *Ajo obi* with regards to the accused persons; Obiageli and Onyema. All we can say is that there is a misconception of infidelity initiated by Ezenwata, (Obiageli's husband). Going by the story line of the play, Ezenwata's restiveness stems from his erroneous suspicion of his wife and his best friend. Ezenwata is controlled by evil mind and wrong assumption. At the beginning of the play, Ezenwata and Onyema are presented discussing business as close partners. They are presented as people with a common interest. Going from page five, we see Onyema coming to Ezenwata's house and Ezenwata receives Onyema in a manner that shows that the latter's presence is needed in the former's house:

Ezenwata: O – O. Ehee nwoke m, ana m emekwanu ka m kpoo gi na foonu, Chukwu mere ebere i bata nnoo! (Oh! My man, I am even trying to call you on the phone. God has made it that you are here at the required time.)

Onyema: Dalu, Ama m na i ga-atu anya m maka okwu banyere ahia ahụ anyị tūrū n'ofesi. (Thank you I know you will be looking forward to seeing me because of the goods we are expecting from the overseas)

In page six (6) one sees more discussions that buttress their common interest in money matters:

Onyema: O – O ginị kwa? (What again?)

Ezenwata: I jebeghi n'ihu oru Nchafe, ka i jiri anya gi hi ihe mbize mere akwa mmiri ahụ were anyị narị nde naira ise. (Have you not been to the site to see for yourself what erosion done to the the bridge that cost us five hundred million)

Our observation here is that it takes two people that have known and understood themselves very well to be too close as to do serious business (like the ones identified here) together. Onyema's business in Ezenwata's house has nothing to do with Ezenwata's wife. This can be seen in the remarks made by Onyema as Ezenwata calls Obiageli; his wife to the scene where he (Ezenwata) is discussing business plans with Onyema.

Onyema: O! Obijị echetaghizi m na i no n'ulo. (Oh Obijị, I didn't remember that you are in the house)

Obijị: O bu ya kpatara i jughị ase m? Unu bido kwuwe okwu orungo unu. Unu na-echetakwanị ihe ozo? (Is that the reason why you did not ask of me? Once you people start your business talk, do you remember any other thing?)

This discussion between Onyema and Obiageli is an evidence that Onyema does not come to Ezenwata's house because of any other thing apart from the business they own together. If Onyema has Obiageli in mind, he would have at least asked of her and the children as he enters Ezenwata's house as it is done in Igbo culture. Right from the time, where Ezenwata calls in Obiageli to the scene, his evil mind towards innocent Onyema and Obiageli is obvious especially as Onyema wants to apologize for not observing the culture of asking about Ezenwata's family members when he came to the house.



Ezenata cuts in:

Ezenwata: Onyema hapugodu ya ka o jeere m ozi doo (Onyema leave her to run errand for me please)

Onyema: O – O na-ese? (Has it become a problem?)

Ezenwata: Mba o naghị ese, hapu ya ka o jee ozi m ziri ya... (No, it is no problem but leave her to attend to what I asked her to do.)

One can easily sense rudeness and bitterness in the heart from Ezenwata's address to Onyema yet, Onyema tries to move on with Ezenwata. Obiageli on her part also obeys her husband (Ezenwata) by leaving the stage as soon as she is dismissed.

Ezenwata's reaction in this setting shows that his main problem in the play is governed by his own corrupt mind. He accused Onyema of having affairs with his wife and that it is for that reason that he offers his wife a gift of a golden bangle on her birthday. Onyema shows that he has nothing had in his mind towards Ezenwata's wife when he asks;

Onyema: E mere m ihe ojuo zunye nwunye gi mgbanaka olaedo ubochi... Emume nchete afoya? (pg 21). (Did I do anything wrong by buying a golden bangle for your wife on her birthday?)

When Obiageli was accused openly by Ezenwata also, she expresses great surprise by the unanticipated act of her husband as she says:

Obiageli: I di n'ura na-ekwu ihe a ka ara o biala gi? (pg 25). (Are you sleep-talking or have you become insane?)

In page (28) Obiageli goes on to lament over the accusation:

Obiageli: Eze amaghị m na etu a ka I di. Ihe niile nwoke a na-emere m bukwanyu n'hi gi. (Eze I don't know that you are like this. All that this man is doing for me is even because of you.)

Onyema's explanations to Uche in page (163) on his relationship with Ezenwata shows that they are like blood brothers.

Onyema: Ulo o - okwari nke m soro ruo.

... agwara gi na abughị m obia na be ezenwata tupu a luta obii, anyi abuo
bi n'ulo ahụ. Oge obii na-
abia ka anyi ji jikotakwa aka
ruo ulo nke m bi n'ime ya...

(Is this house not the house I took part in the building of? I told you that I am not a visitor in Ezenwata's house. Before Obii was married, two of us were living in that house. When Obii was to be married was when we joined hand together again to build the house I live in now.)

If one goes by these observations, one can not easily see Onyema's attitudes to Obiageli as geared towards infidelity. Onyema was already part of Ezenwata's house before Obiageli was married. One big problem Onyema and Obiageli have in the play is that both of them allowed themselves to fall into Ezenata's trap by allowing Ezenwata to snap them together during the pretended reconciliation party organized by Ezenwata. Ezenwata's intension is to use the picture to indict them more and more.

In their innocence, they fall into that trap by allowing the party to hold, attending the party, and by believing Ezenwata in everything he says.

(Page 50):

Ezenwata: E e, Obii!



... Biko Onyema

bja ebe a taa, nabata

ya nke oma, ka o mara

na o nweghizi ihe m buuru

ya n'obi (Eeh Obii please...if Onyema comes here today, give him a warm welcome so that he will know that I don't have any grudges against him anymore).

Even as the party is going on, Ezenwata insists that obiageli should greet Onyema:

Ezenwata: Obij, I keleela Onyii? (Obii, have you greeted Onyema?)

Obij: Ana m ekele ya, o hubeghi m? (Am I to greet him, has he not seen me?)

Ezenwata is the one suggesting the greeting between Onyema and Obijageli, at the same time he snaps them as they greet each other so as to use it against them. As a matter of fact, a clear look at the whole scenario shows that Ezenwata is a man of evil mind and evil schemes. This observation is also made by Obiageli in page (27):

Obijageli: Ha gwakwara m na i bu Onye ojoo, na I siri ike mmeta. (They told me that you are a bad person, and that you are difficult to please).

All we can see in the play is mainly false accusation and not infidelity. In page (29) Obiageli makes this known as she says:

Obijageli: (Bewe akwa) Eze! Ihe a i na-ebo m bukwanu ebubo. O nweghi mgbe Uche m jiri gbata na ya... (Crying) (Eze! This is just an accusation you are leveling on me. My mind has never crossed that...).

Those in set B are made up of students from Ovoko, Enugu Ezike and Aku Igbo communities. They believe that Obiageli and Onyema are guilty of the accusation. This group is made up of students from a culture that limits a married woman's proximity to another man other than her husband. The argument presented by this group goes thus:

The highest respect a woman should accord her husband is to avoid any closeness to another man because such show of closeness suggests extra marital intention. The argument goes like this: What Obiageli said at page 90, shows that Obiageli and Onyema are close. Example:

Obijageli: Ehee! Eze mechara kwube n'etu mu na Onyema siri makudo. onwe anyi adighi ya mma n'obi... (Ehee! Eze later began to say that he was not happy the way I and Onyema hugged each other)

In our cultural areas, a married woman does not, for any reason, embrace another man. On page 105, from the dictative's speech, it is shown that Onyema and Obiageli are that close that he does not see anything bad in buying her a golden bangle which she asked her husband to buy for her. For Onyema to buy that bangle without giving it to her through Ezenwata; her husband; shows that Onyema only wanted to show Obijageli that he loves her more than her husband. See, what Uche asks Onyema at page 105?

Uche: Kedu ihe kpatara I ji zutara ya mgbaka olaedo o rioro di yaka o zutara ya? (Why did you buy for her the golden bangle she begged her husband to buy for her?)

Onyema: E chere m na m na-emenyere enyi m nwoke ebe nwunye ya no. (I thought that I am helping my friend by doing so.)

If his intension is truly to help his friend; Ezenwata; concerning the wife, he would have given that bangle secretly to Ezenwata to give his wife so that the wife will be happy that her husband has provided for her need. Being that Onyema was around when Obiageli was asking her husband to buy that gift for her, it is believed that Onyema purposely bought the bangle behind



Ezenwata for Obiageli in order to show her that he loves her more than her own husband. Therefore, something is very much fishy as regards this show of affection.

Moreover, in our cultural areas, total submission to the will of one's husband is of a great priority in marriage just as it is written in the book of Ephesian chapter five from verse twenty two to twenty five (Eph 5:22 – 25). A woman that is resisting the will of her husband is suspected to be engaging in extra marital affair; that means that there is another man that she is pleasing at the expense of her husband. This is seen in the character of Obiageli in the text at page 8 and 9 from what transpired between Ezenwata and Onyema.

Ezenwata: Biko Obii emechaa ka gi na Onyema kpawa. Gaa n'akpa di n'ime ebe m na-ekowe akwa wetara m akwukwo cheeki m. (Please Obii later you and Onyema will discourse. Go to the bag inside my wardrobe and get me my checkbook).

Onyema: Obiibja (Obiageli elegharia anya). (Obii come (Obii turned around to look)).

Eze: Onyema hapugodu ya ka o jeere m ozi, i ma... (Onyema please leave her to run errand for me, you know...)

Onye: O na-ese? (Is there any problem in that?)

Eze: Mba o naghiese, hapu ya ka o jee ozi m ziri ya. Ihe a ga-eme taa karriri akari. (No there is no problem in that, just leave her to attend to run the errand for me. There are a lot to do today).

Onyema: O dika I ji aka ekpe teta ura taa. (It is like you woke up from the wrong side).

Eze: Gi onwe gi ji aka nri. (You yourself woke up from the right side).

Onyema: O gi mazikwa (Obiageli abata nye di ya akwukwo cheeki). (It is you that knows (Obiageli then entered and gave the checkbook to her husband).)

Eze: Mhm jewekwa jee ruwa ihe I na-arụ (Obiageli atugharia choo ikele Onyema, Ezenwata ekwubichie) Asi m gi hapu anyi jewe ebe I na-eje. (Mhm! Go and continue what you were doing (Obiageli turned and wanted to greet Onyema, Ezenwata interrupted) I said you should leave us and go back to continue what you were doing).

In this scene Obiageli is left with options to choose who to please between Onyema and her husband. The husband wants her to leave immediately, but Onyema wanted her to come closer. Obiageli should not have wasted any time trying to please Onyema or make him feel better if there is nothing extra between two of them. She should have left immediately to make her husband feel better instead.

Our conclusion there is that, Obiageli and Onyema are guilty of the accusation leveled against them (that is, infidelity).

5 Discussion of the Findings and Conclusion

One of our findings is that the set 'A' respondents who are from Mbanjo, Umuahia, and Ngwa are students from cultural areas where there are no strict sanctions on a married woman coming close to a man. That does not mean that married women are allowed to be loose with men or do what they like with men in these cultural settings.

However, there are no laws forbidding them from receiving kindness from the opposite sex when and where necessary. The set B respondents from Ovoko, Enugu-Ezike and Aku are from the Northern Igbo cultural areas where there are usually so many cultural sanctions or taboos on married women especially. In these areas, married women are not free to give a man even a handshake, no matter the closeness of the man to the woman's family. Again, in a place like Ovoko and Aku, it is gathered that a married woman will not receive a gift from a man without the consent of the husband. A married woman will not even sit down on the same seat a man gets up from without cleaning the seat with a piece of cloth or spread a piece of cloth on the seat before sitting on it.

So, it is no wonder that set B' data/report shows a vehement motion for the claim of infidelity in the study text. Their line of argument supports Ezenwata's suspicion without looking at any other possible reason behind



Obiageli's or Onyema's actions in the play. If one goes by their line of argument, then one may as well say that Obiageli is still in a relationship with Onyema even after her second marriage to Uche. In scene four (pg. 145-171) we see Onyema featuring in Uche and Obiageli's house by invitation. Yet, the visitation does not bring about any suspicion or problem.

Set 'A' respondents easily believe that there is no case of infidelity between Onyema and Obiageli with strong points from the text. Going by their cultural area; "nwanne di na mba," and "ezi enyi ka ajo nwanne" (a brother can be a foreigner and a good friend is better than a bad brother). This group does not see anything wrong with Onyema giving the wife of his closest friend and business partner a gift on her birthday. Rather, they see Ezenwata accusing his wife because of the evil mind he has as a bad person already. They see him as even trying to enforce what he accused the two characters for.

However, the reactions got from the two groups with different cultural settings show that it is possible for a reader's culture to affect a reader's appreciation of a text. This observation goes in line with Fish's (1980) reader response proposition that a reader will start with initiatory assumptions which determine what the reader perceives from the text read.

In the present study, we can see that the interpretation readers from Ovoko, Enugu-Ezike and Aku (who came from the socio-cultural context where there are so many taboos on married woman when it comes to man woman relationships) is harsh on Onyema and Obiageli. They perceive the relationship between Onyema and Obiageli as a case of infidelity, whether stated or implied. This is because their cultural background will see such close relationships between Onyema and Obiageli as cases of infidelity.

On the other hand, the set 'A' respondents from Mbanjo, Umuahia and Ngwa who do not attach any significant meaning to what is not obvious vehemently see nothing wrong with a woman relating cordially with her husband's friend. After all, Ezenwata never told his wife that Onyema is not a good man. They rather see Ezenwata as raising a false alarm.

In conclusion, therefore, a look at the response of the readers of *Ajo obi* in this study really shows that a text may not have the same meaning for all the readers. In this reader response study, a set sees the theme of infidelity while a set fails to see it so. Each set of respondents has convincing points to maintain its points against the other. Again, Fish (1980) claims that the readers background knowledge, beliefs, values, cultural expectations and reading context are brought to the reading of the text. This tenet is confirmed in the arguments (data used) put up by the groups that read the study text. There is no unanimous agreement on the theme of infidelity in *Ajo obi* because the readers are from different socio-cultural backgrounds, values, beliefs, and knowledge. These factors affected the way they analysed the theme of infidelity (as plus or minus infidelity) in *Ajo obi*. On these observations, we can say that the theme of infidelity in *Ajo obi* is plus or minus (infidelity in *Ajo obi* = +/-). It depends on the angle from which one approaches it (that is the reader's approach).

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Conflict of interest

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