

Research Article

The Ideological Concept of Suicide in Southern Nigeria

Gabriel A. Ejomafuvwe ^{1,*} 

¹ Department of English Language and Literature. Faculty of Social Science, Near East University, Nicosia 99138, North Cyprus, via Mersin 10, Turkey

*Corresponding Author: Gabriel A. Ejomafuvwe, E-mail: gabrielejomafuvwe1@gmail.com

Article Info	Abstract
Article History	This study examines how ideology and cultural beliefs shape the moral classification of suicide in Southern Nigeria, contrasting the views of the Yoruba (South-West) and the Igbo (South-East) ethnic groups, through the application of Althusser's Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), Durkheim's Suicidology, and Joiner's IPTS. The integration of these three provides a comprehensive view on how society dominate the ideological belief systems; construct and enforce the moral classifications of suicide, which then align with and explain the specific types of social integration failures or excesses (Durkheimian categories), observed in the Yoruba and Igbo cultural contexts in arguing about the perception of suicide as "good" or "bad". A qualitative, interpretive, and comparative textual analysis of four major literary works which are <i>Death and the King's Horseman</i> by Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi's <i>The Gods Are Not to Blame</i> , <i>The Concubine</i> by Elechi Amadi, and <i>Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart</i> is used. While the Yorubas sees suicide as an escape route (especially those of high-status individuals), the Igbos does not. This comparative analysis demonstrates that the moral evaluation of suicide is not universal but is dynamic, context-dependent, and deeply rooted in the prevailing belief systems maintained by a society's cultural apparatuses.
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1. Introduction

This study explores how ideology and cultural beliefs shape the concept of suicide in Southern Nigeria, focusing on the contrasting belief systems of the Yorubas (occupying the South-West region of Nigeria) and the Igbos (occupying the South-East region) cultures. Employing Althusser's Ideological State Apparatus, Durkheim's suicidology and Joiner's IPTS as its theoretical frameworks, this study focuses on analyzing the concept of "good" versus "bad" as pertaining to suicide and an individual's intent. It uses

Death and the King's Horseman by Wole Soyinka, *The Gods Are Not to Blame* Ola Rotimi (both plays), *The Concubine* by Elechi Amadi, and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (both novels) as literary case studies to illustrate and highlight how a culture may view this as a heroic act, (iku ya j' esin that is, "Death is honorable than shame or reproach"); while the other condemns it as a profound abomination (nso ani, "sacred taboo"). Furthermore, it demonstrates that the moral classification of suicide is not universal but is rooted in the dynamic, widely accepted ideological beliefs of a society.

Employing the concept of good and bad of the act of suicide and how it is fundamentally an ideological construct shaped by a society's belief systems, the study focuses on Southern Nigeria, a region within the West African nation of Nigeria. Furthermore, the study shows that the moral classification of suicide is not universal but is rooted in the dynamic, widely accepted ideological beliefs of a given society. It is widely acknowledged that Nigeria is a multi-cultural nation (Femi, 2024), achieving independence in 1960 (Achebe, 2011; Eriş, 2023), after being amalgamated in 1914 by the British colonial administration for political and economic expediency (Isiani et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2022). This historical act merged the Northern and Southern Protectorates, with the latter comprising groups like the Yoruba (South-West) and Igbo (South-East) (Ngu, 2014).

The long historical encounters between the African continent and the West, beginning with Portuguese trade, extending through the Transatlantic Slave Trade and colonialism, profoundly influenced and changed the ideological processes of Africans (Newitt, 2010); hence, it is important to comprehend the complexities of the dynamics of culture, which inherently evolve and shaped both by internal and external influences (Isiani et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2022). This external influence necessitates the 'Dynamic Culture Concept'. The amalgamation and subsequent colonial administration introduced new systems and ideas that challenged existing indigenous frameworks (Tri, 2024).

This research links the "dynamic culture concept" to the analysis of suicide by showing that, despite these external pressures, the deep-seated indigenous ideological frameworks of the Yoruba and Igbo regarding life, death, duty, and spiritual obligation remain distinct and continue to dictate the moral and cultural classification of self-killing. As such, the study uses the different cultural perceptions of suicide found among these two major ethnic groups to illustrate how the act of self-killing is fundamentally an ideological construct classified as either good or bad based on the society's prevailing, historically informed belief system.

Historically, the Yoruba under a democratic monarchy, like the Oyo empire, developed a profound cultural ideology of accountability. This is exemplified by the historical expectation that a failed *Alaafin* (monarch) was expected to commit suicide, captured by the saying “*iku ya j’ esin*” (death is more honorable than shame) (Aborisade, 2015; Okùnádé, 2024). Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman* (1975) powerfully illustrate this cultural imperative, where ritual suicide is connected to spiritual continuity, duty, and respect. Playwright Ola Rotimi’s *The Gods Are Not to Blame* (1968) further recontextualizes this tragedy within the Yoruba cultural framework.

In sharp contrast, the Igbo, known for their historically unbiased society as depicted in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958), regard life as a sacred gift from the gods (e.g., names like *Chinwe Ndu*—“god owns every life”). Consequently, the act of self-killing is deemed the gravest sacrilege, or “*nso ani*” (abomination), against the earth goddess. An individual who commits suicide is denied traditional burial, rites and above all disposed of in the evil forest, necessitating cleansing rituals “*ikpu aru*” (Amadi, 1966).

From a broader perspective, the study of suicide has been a focal point of scholars. As a result, research on existing literature on suicide in Nigeria often focuses on mental health, general statistics, or the negative perceptions of the act (Ele, 2017; Iweama et al., 2024). Due to this regard, a significant gap exists in the detailed comparative analysis of indigenous Nigerian cultural ideologies that morally differentiate suicide and specifically fails to critically examine and contrast traditional worldviews where the act can be perceived as right versus wrong. Furthermore, there is a lack of rigorous application of the Althusserian ideological framework to explain how these contrasting views on life and death are institutionally maintained and internalized.

From this point of view, this study, therefore, bridges the sociological suicidology (Durkheim) with critical philosophy (Althusser) to provide a chronological ideological analysis of suicides as seen by the traditional Yoruba and Igbo cultures, by utilizing canonical African literature to justify that ‘good’ and ‘bad’ suicide are ideologically constructed systems of belief rather than universal truths.

It is worthy to note that the basic objective of this research is to analyze how culture shapes individuals’ perceptions of suicide in Southern Nigeria, studied through the lens of ideological frameworks, specifically aiming to examine ideology as a belief system that informs contrasting cultural attitudes towards self-killing. In addition, it seeks to explore how the moral classifications of suicide, such as ‘good’ or ‘bad’, are constructed within Yoruba and Igbo cultures; and afterwards, it connects and contrasts these ideological

findings to the selected literary works. Ultimately, the study intends to demonstrate that cultural perceptions of suicide are context-dependent and rooted in prevailing belief systems, rather than universal moral standards.

The study aims to address two core questions concerning the ideological concepts of suicide in Southern Nigeria:

1. What are the cultural and ideological interpretations of suicide within Yoruba society?
2. How do Yoruba and Igbo belief systems differ in their moral and cultural framing of suicide?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Suicide: A Global Public Health Pandemic and Its Traditional Context

Suicidal ideation is the conceived thought of an individual with the intent to kill oneself (WHO, 2020). An annual death rate of over 700,000 people dying by suicide globally (WHO, 2023), it becomes the second leading cause of death among young adults from age 15 to 29 (Arensman et al., 2020). Due to this, Iweama et al. (2024) claimed that suicide is mostly common among young adults, with a calculated rate of over 17.3 per 100,000 in 2016, exceeding both the global (10.5/100,000) and African (12.0/100,000) average rates. No doubt, suicide is a worldwide pandemic and should be raised as a public health concern (Jidong et al., 2025; Knipe et al., 2022), with a negative effect on 14.6 million people yearly (Nichols et al., 2021).

2.2. Suicidology Theories

Maraun (2013) explains that suicidology theories are the causes, patterns, and mechanisms of suicidal thoughts (ideation) and behavior (attempts and completion), aiming to move beyond singular psychological explanations to inculcate interpersonal, social, and environmental factors.

Although there are several types of suicidology theories, the research basically explains these two theories: Durkheim's Suicidology, and Joiner's Interpersonal Theory of Suicide (IPTs). With each explaining a different facet of suicide encompassing the sociological mechanism, the moral classification, and the individual psychological drive, respectively.

2.2.1. Classical Sociological Framework: Durkheim and Althusser

Émile Durkheim's Suicidology (1952) establishes the foundational sociological principle that suicide is a social fact, classifying the act based on the individual's degree of integration and regulation within their

society. While Louis Althusser's Ideology Theory (1968) provides a critical philosophical exposition for determining the moral dismissal or acceptance (classification) of the act.

Hence, the project employs the integration of two key sociological and philosophical concepts: that is, Louis Althusser's theory of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) and Émile Durkheim's theory of Suicidology. These frameworks are utilized to explore the relationship between societal belief systems or ideology, and the act of suicide within the context of Southern Nigerian culture, specifically focusing on the Yoruba and Igbo ethnic groups.

On another level, the concept of suicide cannot be discussed without mentioning the pioneer in the person of Emile Durkheim (1952). Durkheim categorizes suicide as the act of self-killing, either directly or indirectly, negative or positive. From this perspective, the mindset of a suicidal person does not matter, as much as the results and the consequences of their actions (Pickering & Walford, 2000). This study contrasts this idea, by showing how the ideological, social, cultural and religious belief of someone could determine the outcome regarding the concept of suicide. Regarding Durkheim, he identifies four factors that lead to suicide:

1. Egoistic suicide: unable to get integrated into the social way of life. This feeling is what leads to depression, whereby the victim sees life as meaningless (Harriford et al., 2008). Durkheim refers to it as excessive individuation. He further claimed that suicide is mostly common among unmarried singles, especially men who could not achieve their goal in society or get connected to a stable social life (Thompson & Kenneth, 1982).
2. Altruistic suicide: this is as a result of over-involvement in social function or being overzealous with group goals or beliefs (Harriford et al., 2008). This is a type of suicide where an individual is ready to lay down their life with the motive that it is for the good of their society. It is often seen in military and other religious settings. Sigmond Freud (1922) refers to this kind of involvement as 'group psychology' whereby an individual gets motivated through their involvement in a group to the point of being a fanatic.
3. Anomic suicide, as identified by Durkheim, is the type of suicide that revolves around the issue of an individual's morality in connection to that of society. Harriford et al. (2008) refer to it as moral confusion merging with the lack of social direction. Specifically, it is the type of suicide whereby an individual kills itself as a result of social failure, or the struggle to maintain a particular social status with no results.

In the novel, *Things Fall Apart*, if the protagonist Okonkwo had killed himself when he was sent to exile

after losing his social status among the nine elders who rule the community, and his wealth, he would have been guilty of Anomic suicide.

4. Fatalistic suicide: this type of self-killing is as a result of abuse, too much domination, or excessive regulation of one's social life that hinders a person's freedom, free will, and future (Harriford et al., 2008). Durkheim's work (Durkheim 1897, Durkheim 1952) provides a foundational framework for the sociological study of suicidology. In addition, his theory outlines two core aspect: individuals who engage in suicide due to excessive integration within social groups—whether through collective ideologies or social obligations—and those who do so as a consequence of insufficient integration or weakened social ties (Mueller et al., 2021).

One limitation of Durkheim's theory is that he does not explicitly define the dimensions of social integration, even though sociology focuses on the patterns and quality of social connections (Bearman, 1991; Pescosolido, 1990; Pescosolido, 1994). Another limitation is that he does not address the extent to which socially agreed-upon moral norms regulate and coordinate the attitudes and behaviors of a community (Abrutyn & Mueller, 2016; Bjarnason, 1998).

On the other hand, Althusser's concept of ideology is perceived as a systematic set of beliefs, values, and thoughts that are often unconsciously accepted by individuals and function to maintain the established social, economic, and political order. This ideology is transmitted and reinforced through various institutions, which Althusser terms Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA), such as the family, education system, and religion. Within this framework, the study posits that the very notions of 'good' and 'bad,' or 'right' and 'wrong,' surrounding the act of suicide are not universal moral truths but are, in fact, ideological constructions promoted by a society to suit its dominant beliefs. The research aims to demonstrate how these beliefs are 'imaginary' yet are perceived as 'real' and are willingly upheld by the masses, thereby determining the social perception and cultural acceptability of suicide (Althusser, 1968).

Ideology to Althusser (1968), as perceived in the context of political doctrine, is a system of ideas that shapes individuals' thoughts and behavior to conform to the state's expectations. This conformity is often achieved through subtle means, such as cultural norms, social institutions, and ideological state apparatuses (ISAs), which influence people to willingly accept and internalize certain beliefs and values. These ISAs, including family, religion, education, and social peers, fine-tune individuals from birth to adhere to societal norms, creating a sense of moral obligation to conform.

The relationship between individuals and their world is complex, and ideology operates on both conscious and unconscious levels. According to Althusser, ideology represents the way people live their relation to their conditions of existence, rather than the actual relation itself. This creates an "imaginary" or "lived" relation, where individuals perceive their reality through the lens of ideology. As a result, the distinction between right and wrong becomes ideologically based, shaped by societal norms rather than objective truth (Althusser, 1968).

Althusser's work highlights that ideology is not just about conscious thoughts or straightforward relationships. Instead, it is about how people experience and interpret their connection to the world around them (Althusser, 1968). This connection is complex, multifaceted, and often unconscious, revealing more about how individuals perceive their reality than the reality itself.

On the other hand, the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) is the use of forces to ensure the people are obliged to social norms, law, and order through the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) agents, such as the military, police, law courts, and other government or social task forces. From this perspective, this research therefore focuses on how the concept of right and wrong culturally differs through the belief in suicide using the southern Nigerian culture as a case study.

By examining how societal institutions, norms, and values shape perceptions of suicide, these frameworks reveal the relationship between ideology, culture, and individual behavior. It contextualizes suicidal behavior within Southern Nigerian culture, highlighting the role of societal norms and values in influencing attitudes towards suicide. This framework can inform culturally sensitive interventions and policies addressing suicidal behavior in the region.

2.2.2. Contemporary Psychological Framework: Joiner's Interpersonal Theory

Robison et al. (2024) note that Thomas Joiner's Interpersonal Theory of Suicide (IPTS; Joiner, 2005) provides the essential psychological component for analysis by focusing on the proximal factors that shape an individual's desire to die. According to IPTS, this desire emerges from the simultaneous presence of perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness.

The Interpersonal Theory of Suicide (IPTS) directly addresses this study's cultural objectives by explaining individual's psychological consequences triggered by the prevailing ideological frameworks (Ribeiro & Joiner, 2009). In the Yoruba context, the theory suggests that fulfilling a ritual duty, such as the sacrifice is viewed as the overwhelming Perceived Burdensomeness created by failure or shame, thereby

channeling the psychological drive towards a culturally sanctioned and "good" outcome. Conversely, in the Igbo context, the social and spiritual rejection inherent confirms extreme Thwarted Belongingness and dramatically amplifies Perceived Burdensomeness (due to the perceived defilement of the land), leading directly to the severe, "bad" moral classification and societal ostracism of the act.

Thus, while Durkheim and Althusser establish the societal structure and moral label, Joiner's IPTS explains the universal psychological drivers that the contrasting cultural ideologies either reward (Yoruba) or punish (Igbo).

2.3. African Suicidology and Its Limitations

African Suicidology is an emerging field that examines suicide and suicidal behaviors through the indigenous African knowledge systems, prioritizing spiritual, cultural, and cosmological factors which the western clinical models are oblivious about (Kabir et al., 2023; Mars et al., 2014; & Onger et al., 2023). Scholars such as Brooke et al. (2025) and Oyetunji et al. (2021) identified a key feature, which is the analysis of suicide not as an individual psychological crisis, but as an event that profoundly disrupts the cosmic and social order (e.g., the Igbo concept of *nso ani*) (Ele, 2017). This approach highlights self-killing as potentially driven by factors external to the individual, such as divine retribution (e.g., *ikpo ma* or *inu iyi* “to invoke the deity” or “to swear to the deity”), the inescapable demands of ritual duty and prestige (e.g., the Yoruba *iku ya j'esin* “death is better than shame”) (Aborisade, 2015; Ele, 2017; Emedo & Christian, 2025; Lawrence, 2021). Among the Yoruba people, this type of death is often necessary for purification rituals to restore harmony to the land and the collective, a reaction distinct from purely clinical or psychological models of intervention.

African suicidology faces significant theoretical and empirical limitations. Due to the continent's vast diversity means, there seems to be no single, unified African theory. As a result, the ideological models are highly localized and often contradictory (Mars et al., 2014), (this is seen in the Igbo condemnation of this act as against the conditional Yoruba acceptance). In understanding the difference between the clinical western system and the traditional African system, the latter tends to frequently blur the line between voluntary self-killing (suicide) and involuntary death inflicted by spiritual forces, creating methodological conflicts with standardized western definitions (Emedo & Christian, 2025). The African sociology is faced with severe constraints, primarily the widespread underreporting and misclassification of suicide due to intense socio-cultural and religious stigma, which invalidates epidemiological data and affects accurate

public health planning (Ndosi, 2006).

Moreover, the lack of standardized research methodologies, coupled with resource constraints in mental healthcare and data collection systems across many African nations, presents a major obstacle to African suicidology advancement (Atewologun et al., 2025; Knettel et al., 2024; Manganyi & Sodi, 2025). While it offers crucial contextual depth by validating indigenous interpretations of life and death, it struggles with empirical breadth and theoretical standardization.

2.4. Ideological and Cosmological View of Suicide in Igbo Culture

Since this study aims at exploring the ideological processes of suicide among the southern Nigerian, suicide among the Igbo people is perceived to be more than a personal issue as it involves the spirit world, ancestral beings, humanity, and the entire universe (Ele, 2017). Life is seen as a divine gift, so death is meant to come naturally at an old age. Due to this reason, and the teachings about rejoining one's ancestors after death, suicide is considered morally wrong among the Igbo of Southeast Nigeria (Emedo & Christian, 2025). They further explained how suicide could be proclaimed on an individual as a capital punishment based on judgment (judicially). This research does not recognize this as suicide but rather murder. This is because suicide is recognized as a voluntary act. Traditionally, people who die by suicide are denied certain burial rites that prepare the soul for the afterlife. To further buttress this, Agha (2003) viewed suicide as a sin against God and also a sign of emotional disorder. It is highly frowned upon by the Igbos, thereby making it to reflect in their names, such as Chinenye Ndu ("god gives life") and Chinwe Ndu ("god owns every life") reflect the belief that only God controls life and death. In other words, life is a gift, and only the owner of the gift can take it back. Ele (2017) highlighted it by explaining how the gods could inflict harm or take an individual's life if they wrongfully swear or take an oath before the deities in Igbo tradition and African cosmology. And the gods could also influence a murderer to commit suicide if the relatives of the murdered victim seek vengeance. According to him, "this invocation process is called 'ikpo ma', it is only in such a case that suicide is considered in the Igbo land. Aside from that, suicide is greatly frowned on." In certain spiritual cases, called *inu iyi* (to swear), the gods punish someone who falsely swears an oath by causing terrible suffering—swelling, decay, and eventually suicide.

Crossman (2025) notes that strong social connections and a sense of belonging make suicide less likely, since people who feel part of their community tend to find meaning in life. A related practice, *ikpo*

ma, involves calling on a deity to avenge a murder when the killer is unknown. The god forces the guilty person to take their own life, meaning the suicide is directed by divine power, not the individual's own choice. Outside of these rare spiritual scenarios, suicide is strongly condemned in the Igbo culture.

2.5. Ideological and Cosmological View of Suicide in Yoruba Culture

Similar to the Igbo people, Yoruba perceive suicide to be an abominable act and highly frowned upon by society and the gods of the land (Lawrence, 2021). Although before the civilized (dynamic culture construct) influence on suicide, traditionally, suicide is considered to be a thing of class and dignity to a certain group of people. While the Yoruba people generally categorize suicide as an evil and abominable act and a "bad death" that is a revolt against destiny, this condemnation was historically mitigated for individuals of high social standing. Customarily, the Yoruba society perceived suicide as a noble act amongst certain high-status individuals to leave behind overwhelming and dishonorable challenges. The individuals granted this privilege, akin to "social elites". Some of which could include kings who are on the verge of losing their crowns thereby facing deposition, warlords at the verge of losing a war or/and spiritually inclined individuals facing humiliation (Aborisade, 2015).

For these individuals, suicide was rationalized as a necessary means of preserving their high-profile status, respect, and dignity, as well as that of their communities. This perspective is succinctly summarized by the notion that suicide "becomes respectable when the life it ends had once reached great heights and inspired the choices of others" (Aborisade et al., 2023; Mazrui, 1965).

2.6. Rationale for Literary Case Selection

The selection of these four literary works is fundamental to the study's comparative and ideological objectives, as they serve as authoritative cultural texts explicitly depicting the traditional, pre-colonial, and early colonial ideological frameworks surrounding suicide. Two texts were chosen for each ethnic group to facilitate a direct contrast: Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) and Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame* (1968) exemplify the Yoruba perspective, where the required ritual suicide of Elesin Oba in the former and the inevitable fate of the protagonist in the latter provide concrete examples of the Altruistic Suicide mechanism and the honorable imperative of *iku ya j'esin*. Conversely, Chinua Achebe's seminal work *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* (1966) are foundational texts for the Igbo worldview, with Achebe's depiction of Okonkwo's suicide and his subsequent consignment to

the evil forest providing the definitive illustration of the spiritual defilement of *nso ani* and the resulting communal ostracism. These works were chosen because they powerfully portray the specific acts of suicide (or its moral imperative) and their societal consequences, providing the tangible evidence necessary to analyze how the Ideological State Apparatus (Althusser) operates to assign the contrasting moral labels of "good" versus "bad" to self-killing.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design utilizing an interpretive, comparative, and textual analysis approach. Since this study aims at exploring the ideological, cultural and moral perceptions of suicide, a qualitative method is most appropriate for analyzing the subjective meanings, beliefs, and symbolic representations embedded in a society's ideology.

The data analysis will primarily employ Thematic and Comparative Content Analysis, integrating the theoretical frameworks to interpret the moral and ideological meaning of the texts. The design is specifically structured to critically examine the ideological frameworks (Althusser's ISA, Durkheim's Suicidology and Joiner's IPTS) to conceptualize how the notions of 'good' and 'bad' suicide are constructed by directly contrasting the cultural and ideological beliefs surrounding suicide between the two selected ethnic groups: the Yoruba (South-West) and the Igbo (South-East) of Southern Nigeria by using Textual sources from four literary works to illustrate, substantiate, and illuminate the ideological perceptions of suicide within their respective cultural contexts.

3.2. Data Sources

The data sources for this research are derived from four literary works (African literature) analyzed as case studies, as they reflect the ideological belief systems of respective cultures concerning suicide. These literary works include “*Death and the King's Horseman*” by Wole Soyinka, “*The Gods Are Not to Blame*” Ola Rotimi (which are both plays), “*The Concubine*” by Elechi Amadi, and Chinua Achebe’s “*Things Fall Apart*” (both which are novels).

3.3. Data Collection

Data collection will include Thematic Analysis which will be conducted by systematically isolating and coding key textual evidence that describes the act of suicide, the motivation of the deceased (e.g., fear

of shame, fulfilment of duty), and the community's subsequent reaction (e.g., purification rites, burial). This systematic excerpting, critical interpretation and relativity of the selected literary works to explore the “good” and “bad” ideology of suicide among the South-West and South-East region of Nigeria.

To better represent the reasons for collections and use of these literary works, the table (Table 1) below shows the summaries of the four literary works selected, detailing their cultural context and the specific ideological element they were chosen to illustrate for the comparative analysis.

Table 1. Key Ideological Elements and Rationales for Selection.

S/N	Literary Work	Author	Cultural Context	Key Ideological of Element Illustrated	Rationale for Selection
1	Things Fall Apart (1958)	Chinua Achebe	Igbo (South-East)	Nso Ani (Sacred Abomination). Suicide as defilement against the Earth Goddess.	Provides the definitive illustration of the "bad" moral classification, the resulting spiritual ostracism, and the denial of traditional burial rites, aligning with a failure of Durkheimian regulation.
2	The Concubine (1966)	Elechi Amadi	Igbo (South-East)	Fatalism/Divine Ownership (Chinwe Ndu). Life and death are controlled solely by deities.	Reinforces the Igbo cosmological view that life is owned by the gods, indirectly supporting why voluntary self-killing is considered sacrilege.
3	Death and the King's Horseman (1975)	Wole Soyinka	Yoruba (South-West)	Iku Ya J'esin (Death is preferable to shame). Suicide as ritual duty and Altruistic sacrifice.	provides the core example of the "good/honourable" moral classification and the Altruistic Suicide mechanism, where self-killing is necessary for spiritual continuity and the communal good.
4	The Gods Are Not to Blame (1968)	Ola Rotimi	Yoruba (South-West)	Shame/Fate Avoidance. Suicide as an escape from unendurable disgrace and moral collapse.	Illustrates a secondary Yoruba justification where suicide, though tragic (Anomic context), is accepted as an honorable means of avoiding catastrophic, personal shame.

Table 1 Summarizes the rationale of the selected literary works (This table was compiled by the author for the purpose of this study through the comparative analysis and synthesis of the selected literary works (Achebe, 1958; Amadi, 1966; Soyinka, 1975; Rotimi, 1968) to establish the ideological rationale for case selection.

3.4. Data Analysis

The collected data, once coded, will be subjected to theoretical application, with Althusser's Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) employed to analyze the pronouncements of cultural authorities and the structure of rituals, demonstrating how ideology reinforces the moral classification of suicide as “good” (Yoruba) or “bad” (Igbo). Concurrently, Durkheim's Suicidology will categorize the characters' motivations,

determining if the acts align with Altruistic (over-integration/duty) or Anomic (social collapse) mechanisms, and the Joiner's IPTS explaining the universal psychological drivers that the contrasting cultural ideologies either reward (Yoruba) or punish (Igbo).

A comparative table compares the ideological underpinnings, Durkheimian classifications, and community consequences across the Yoruba and Igbo case studies, demonstrating that the moral classification of suicide is a dynamic, ideologically constructed system.

3.5. Methodological Limitations and Ethical Considerations

The methodological approach is subject to scrutiny and as a result, stemming several limitations primarily from the data source and the scope of cultural representation. The most significant constraint is the use of canonical African literature as the primary proxy for complex, traditional ideologies. These works are fundamentally fictionalized interpretations by individual authors (Soyinka, Achebe, Rotimi, Amadi), meaning they may not perfectly reflect the lived reality or diverse beliefs across all regions and periods of the Yoruba and Igbo groups.

The study also faces theoretical and scope limitations. The findings necessarily involve generalization across sub-groups, as both the Yoruba and Igbo nations comprise numerous dialects and sub-cultures that may hold slight variations in their cosmological views of death and belief system. The analysis is therefore restricted to the major ideological tenets depicted in the literature rather than exhaustively surveying all sub-ethnic belief systems.

The study also deliberately blurred out the contemporary clinical data; the study does not incorporate current suicide rates, psychiatric diagnoses, or treatment outcomes, as its purpose is to analyze the cultural meaning of suicide, not its modern incidence.

The research is also guided by the ethical responsibility to respect cultural beliefs, necessitating caution to ensure that the application of Western-derived sociological theories (Durkheim, Althusser, Joiner) does not essentialize or misrepresent the complexity and sacredness of indigenous African cosmologies concerning life and death.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. The Yoruba Ideology of Honorable Duty and Shame

The Yoruba perspective, as captured in the works of Soyinka and Rotimi, reveals an ideological apparatus that allows suicide to be biasedly classified in term of class as not merely as a personal tragedy,

but as a necessary and honorable act of duty. This classification directly counters the colonial interpretation of self-killing as a criminal offence, establishing a profound cultural imperative tied to spiritual continuity and the avoidance of irredeemable disgrace.

4.1.1. The Altruistic Imperative: Duty and the *Iku Ya J'esin* Maxim

Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* serve as the primary literary illustration of Altruistic Suicide, where the act is a required fulfilment of a collective spiritual duty. Elesin Oba's commitment is absolute, framed by him not as a choice but as a predestined path: "I am master of my Fate. When the hour comes, watch me dance along the narrowing path..." (Soyinka, 1976, p. 6-12). This commitment is the highest expression of the maxim '*iku ya j'esin*' (death is preferable to shame/dishonor). Elesin asserts that "Life is an honour. It ends when honour ends" (p. 12). This classifies the required ritual as a sacred "errand." The moral judgment here is inverted: non-suicide is the criminal act (p. 41) against the communal spiritual order, as demonstrated by the catastrophic consequence that follows the Colonial Officer's intervention. Furthermore, the supreme sacrifice by Elesin's son, Olunde when he kills himself in the place of his father (p. 52), reinforces the power of this ideology. Having been educated abroad, Olunde's voluntary death proves that the cultural imperative remains a fundamental Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), superseding modern education and colonial law.

4.1.2. The Anomic Context: Shame, Fate, and Restoration

Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame* exemplifies how the Yoruba ideological apparatus extends acceptance to self-killing driven by personal, overwhelming shame, aligning with an anomic suicide mechanism. Queen Ojuola's suicide is a direct response to the discovery of her incestuous defilement, which violates the core of her identity as a woman and mother. Her self-mutilation and subsequent death (Rotimi, 1968, p. 69) functioned as a tragic means of escape from an unendurable disgrace, upholding the spirit of the *iku ya j'esin* principle. The community's reaction frames her death not as a sacrilege, but as a necessary closure, granting her "a burial of honour" (p. 71). This demonstrates that the Yoruba ISA permits suicide if the act successfully restores or preserves dignity in the face of irreversible social or moral catastrophe, contrasting sharply with the immediate and absolute condemnation found in Igbo culture.

4.2. The Igbo Ideology of Abomination and Spiritual Retribution

Traditionally, in accordance with the Igbo worldview, suicide is uniformly classified as the gravest

sacrilege, *nso ani* (abomination), rooted in the dominant belief that life is a sacred gift (*Chinwe Ndu*) controlled only by the gods. This ideological stance results in extreme social and spiritual consequences for the deceased and their community.

4.2.1. The *Nso Ani* Abomination and Thwarted Belongingness

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* provides the definitive literary evidence for the Igbo ideological framework. When Okonkwo commits suicide, the community's immediate and universal reaction is not grief, but horror and paralysis (Achebe, 1958, p. 165). The act is explicitly identified as an "offence against the earth" (p. 165), demonstrating that the Ideological State Apparatus (via religion and tradition) classifies the suicide as an attack on the cosmological order itself. The ultimate punishment is the complete Thwarting of Belongingness (Joiner, 2005) and spiritual continuity: the body is deemed "evil" and is deprived of normal burial rites, requiring sacrifices to "cleanse the desecrated land" (p. 165). Okonkwo, despite being "one of the greatest men in Umuofia," is reduced to being buried "like a dog" (P. 165) by strangers, confirming that the spiritual prohibition supersedes all considerations of status, aligning with a Fatalistic interpretation of society's rigid norms.

4.2.2. Suicide as Divine Justice and Moral Consequence

Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* reinforces the Igbo belief that "self-killing is usually tied to divine retribution or moral failing, aligning with both Anomic and divinely directed mechanisms. Madume's suicide is the final, tragic consequence of his greed ("big-eye") (Amadi, 1966, p. 4, 16, 73 & 77) and the spiritual punishment inflicted by the Sea-King (p. 195). When the community finds his body, it is immediately deemed "abominable" (p. 76). The handling of the body, requiring the fortified medicine man, Anyika, to cut it down and transport it to the outskirts forest (Minita) (p. 76), is a direct consequence of the *nso ani* taboo. This case exemplifies how the Igbo ISA views the act as intrinsically "bad," and the denial of funerary rites, including "no mourning, no second burial" (p. 81), serves as the ultimate social and spiritual deterrent, solidifying the ideological classification.

4.3. Cross-Cultural Comparison: Ideology, Morality, and Consequences

A systematic comparison of the Yoruba and Igbo ideologies reveals a profound divergence in how the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) constructs the moral universe of suicide. Table 2 below is created using qualitative research methods based on thematic coding and theoretical interpretation.

Table 2. Comparative Ideological Frameworks of Yoruba and Igbo Suicide: Durkheimian Alignment and Consequence.

Themes	Yoruba Ideology (Altruistic/Anomic)	Igbo Ideology (Nso Ani/Fatalistic).
Ideological Imperative	Preservation of Honor/Lineage Status over physical life (ISA: Tradition/Monarchy).	Preservation of Ontological Order (ISA: Religion/Cosmology).
Durkheimian Alignment	Altruistic (Elesin: over-integration/duty) or Anomic (Ojuola: status collapse/shame).	Primarily Fatalistic (rigid norms) or Anomic (Okonkwo: personal despair/failure).
Consequence for Deceased	Burial of Honour, Renown, and Spiritual Continuity (Elesin's son, Olunde, Ojuola).	Denial of Burial Rites, Spiritual Ostracism, and Defilement (Okonkwo, Madume's body to Minita).
Joiner's IPTS Link	Suicide alleviates Perceived Burdensomeness by fulfilling duty or escaping shame.	Suicide alleviates Perceived Burdensomeness by fulfilling duty or escaping shame.

Table 2 presents a cross-cultural comparative analysis that systematically contrasts the ideological frameworks of the Yoruba and Igbo ethnic groups regarding suicide, based on the synthesis of four canonical literary texts. It demonstrates that the moral verdict on self-killing is ideologically constructed rather than universal.

This comparison clearly demonstrates that the moral verdict on suicide is not universal but is entirely context-dependent. The Yoruba ISA sanctions self-killing when it serves as a functional tool for social hierarchy and honor maintenance, while the Igbo ISA absolutely prohibits it to safeguard the sanctity of the cosmological order.

5. Conclusions

The study established that the moral classification of suicide is not a universal constant, but a dynamic, ideologically constructed system of belief maintained by a society's cultural framework. Through the application of Althusser's Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), Durkheim's Suicidology, and Joiner's IPTS, a sharp ideological contrast was found in Southern Nigeria. Among the Yoruba, self-killing can be viewed as an "Honorable Duty" (Altruistic Suicide), tied to avoiding irredeemable shame, and is thus culturally sanctioned as 'good' in specific high-status circumstances, as illustrated in the tragedy of Elesin Oba and Queen Ojuola. Conversely, the Igbo culture considers suicide to be universally a grave abomination against the Earth goddess and the spiritual order. This marks the act as 'bad' and a crime against the community, resulting in extreme social and ritual exclusion, often reflecting Anomic/Fatalistic Suicide, as seen with the character Okonkwo.

In conclusion, the study confirms that the acceptability and consequences of self-killing are purely dependent upon the prevailing ideological belief system transmitted through cultural apparatuses.

5.1. Theoretical and Scholarly Contributions

This research makes significant contributions across multiple fields. To Sociology and African cultural studies, it provides empirical depth to Durkheim's typology by demonstrating that the moral verdict on suicide is not inherent in the sociological mechanism but is ideologically assigned. The study shows that the Altruistic mechanism can result in either honor (Yoruba) or eternal damnation (Igbo, if viewed as a sacrifice to escape supernatural consequences). The application of Althusser's ISA offers a novel understanding of how indigenous cultural institutions actively construct and maintain these contradictory moral realities. To Literary Studies, the analysis elevates the canonical works of Achebe, Soyinka, Rotimi, and Amadi from mere historical narratives into vital ideological documentation, confirming their utility as primary sources for understanding pre-colonial African moral philosophy and social control.

5.2. Broader Implications and Policy Recommendations

The ideologically framed perceptions of suicide have critical implications for contemporary mental health and suicide prevention strategies in Nigeria.

1. **Mental Health Intervention:** The findings suggest that suicide prevention programs based solely on Western psychological models (e.g., depression as the primary cause) may fail because they ignore the cultural motivations and ideological consequences. For instance, appealing to an individual's self-worth may be ineffective if their underlying motive is a cultural imperative to avoid collective shame (PB/TB link). Interventions must therefore be culturally bespoke, integrating community and spiritual leaders to redefine 'honor' and 'duty' in modern, life-affirming ways.
2. **Public Health and Policy:** The strict Igbo taboos, while effective historical deterrents, create profound stigma and underreporting in public health data, hindering accurate epidemiological assessment. Policies should focus on providing safe, accessible support that respects traditional moral boundaries while ensuring that the deceased receives dignity and that the land is symbolically cleansed, thereby mitigating the pressure that leads to concealment and misclassification.
3. **Educational Context:** The concept of suicide should be addressed in educational frameworks that emphasize the difference between historical duty (Yoruba) and modern responsibility, fostering a contemporary ideology that preserves life while integrating modern accountability.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

The major limitation of this study is its reliance on canonical and historical African literary works, which, while effective for ideological analysis, may not fully capture the complexities and changes in contemporary, urbanized Southern Nigerian culture and modern suicide patterns. Consequently, the findings have limitations that lead to the generalization of the complex, diverse demographics of 21st-century Nigeria.

Future research is strongly recommended to focus on collecting recent, field-based, primary qualitative data. This research should include ethnographic studies and in-depth interviews with community elders, religious leaders, and urban youth to determine precisely how traditional ideologies currently influence the contextual motivations and specific suicide demographics in contemporary behavior among the Yoruba and Igbo. This will provide the necessary clinical and sociological depth to complement the ideological framework established here.

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