

**Advancing Queer-Inclusive International Human Rights Law Education
in Nigerian Classrooms Through Indigenous Storytelling: Stories from a Law
Classroom at Eko (Lagos, Nigeria)**

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Abstract

This study grounds itself in contact theory and imagined contact theory to argue that contact and simulated/imagined contact with queerness contributes to the eradication of homophobic prejudices. Using international human rights soft law – the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights’ Resolution 275 on the protection against violence and other human rights violations against persons on the basis of their real or imputed sexual orientation or gender identity – for its persuasive effect, this study seeks to centre the importance of attitude-focused work in the advancement of queer rights as well as in the engagement with queer-inclusive soft law standards in Nigeria, and more specifically in Nigerian universities. Based on an empirical storytelling intervention conducted at the University of Lagos, this study seeks to demonstrate the potential of the joint use of indigenous storytelling and Resolution 275 as attitude-focused and empathy-driven advocacy tools for advancing queer rights in Nigeria. In doing so, the study contributes to reimagining soft law and queer rights advocacy in terms of pedagogies as well as queer Nigerian classrooms as sites for queer rights advocacy.

KEYWORDS Queer rights; Nigeria; indigenous storytelling; African Commission Resolution 275

1. Introduction

At the time of the first draft of this research paper in 2021, a video capturing the humiliation of a young intersex Nigerian was going viral within Nigeria. In the video, not only is the young intersex person subjected to degrading treatment, including verbal abuse, but they are made to publicly denounce another person, also present, who has sexually abused them.¹ There are many intersecting issues in the above narrative, but all of them strikingly point to the fact that queer persons, including minors, are disproportionately affected by human rights violation, victimisation and secondary victimisation at the hands of state and non-state actors in Nigeria. Queer persons are also subject to the exclusionary and hostile heteronormative systems in which they live, work and survive. This homophobic hostility is based on the widely held perception that queerness is unnatural, demonic, not Nigerian and should be punished.²

While this study recognises that the term queer comes with various controversies,³ it adopts 'queer' as a succinct umbrella term to refer to the entire range of identities outside the scope of heterosexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and sex characteristic(s). Besides, the term signals the dominance and hegemony of heteronormative norms which are therefore constructed and capable of being

¹ [Trigger warning: what follows is a disturbing description of the incidents in the video, namely psychological, physical and sexual violence imposed on a queer person in the public space.] From the words and locations mentioned in the video, it can be deduced that the video was shot using a smartphone in Delta State Nigeria, in the southern part of Nigeria. In the video, the young intersex person is stripped naked and made to kneel in front of a metal beam, in public, amidst a crowd of mostly men. These men refer to the intersex child and their genitals by abusive names. The individual is then forced by the man shooting the video to lay on the ground with their legs spread ajar. The camera zooms in on the intersex child's genitals and the word 'hermaphrodite' is shouted repeatedly by the spectators. The camera moves to an adult male who is also on his knees beside the intersex person and he is asked to take off his clothes. The intersex person reports that the man beside them threatens and sexually violates them (as well as other children in the neighbourhood) and that there are a few other men who had escaped that do the same. This intersex person reports that they hawk packaged water on the road for a living.

² The Initiative for Equal Rights (TIERS) Nigeria 'Veil of silence- documentary' (2017) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wR5dOIUOUjs&t=3s> (accessed 10 July 2022); TransValid 'LGBT women in Nigeria speak out through a book' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PCZSIKEPs4> (accessed 10 July 2022).

³ Douglas Clarke 'Twice removed: African invisibility in western queer theory' in Sokari Ekine and Hakima Abbas (Eds) *Queer African Reader* (Pambazuka Press 2013) 175; J Halley 'Queer theory by men' in Martha Albertson Fineman, Jack Jackson and Adam Romero (eds) *Feminist and queer legal theory: intimate encounters, uncomfortable conversations* (Routledge 2009) 26, 27.

deconstructed. Thus, queer as used in this study calls for the unsettling of norms by looking beyond their seeming indestructibility.

This paper steps into the discourse on homophobia in Nigeria with the belief that the dire state of queer rights in Nigeria is the consequence of queer exclusionary attitudes and queer exclusionary laws both of which are rooted in colonial legacies and indigenous hegemonies. As such it is important for currently ongoing Nigerian queer rights advocacy to articulate itself in a way that it complements law, policy and queer rights contestations with attitude-focused interventions.

This paper engages with indigenous storytelling as a functional attitude-focused tool to complement ongoing queer rights advocacy. Indigenous storytelling is here understood as the composition and reception of narratives about a people, their evolving culture and their subjectivities within the confines of the cosmopolitan world.⁴ Indigenous storytelling is particularly vested in embracing subjectivities and complexities because of the gap it attends to writing back to dominant reductive and exclusionary narratives and norms. Even in this, indigenous storytelling is not so much an oppositional tool as it is an evolving, self-reflective tool. The resort to storytelling is a recognition of how public imagination is constructed and curated through words and narrative representation and aesthetics.

Thus, in discussing the connection between international queer rights advancements, indigenous storytelling and the status quo of queer persons on the ground, this paper argues that international soft law lends itself as an institutionally grounded persuasive tool that guides addressing both anti-gay laws and negative attitudes with the ultimate purpose of improving the lived realities of queer persons in Nigeria.⁵ Indeed, soft law has

⁴ That said, this study recognises the heavy contestations around the term of 'indigenous storytelling'; Charles Ngwena *What is Africanness: contesting nativism in race, culture and sexualities* (Pretoria University Law Press 2018) 3 – 8; Jan Carter-Black 'Teaching cultural competence: an innovative strategy grounded in the universality of storytelling as depicted in African and American storytelling traditions' (2007) 43(1) *Journal of social work education* 43; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the mind: the politics of language in African literature* (1986) 13; Chinua Achebe, 'The African Writer and English Language' in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (eds), *The post-colonial studies* (Taylor & Francis 2006) 286.

⁵ Edwin Egede, 'Bringing human rights home: an examination of the domestication of human rights treaties in Nigeria' (2007) 51(2) *Journal of African Law* 268; Frans Viljoen *International human rights law in Africa* (2007) 527.

been defined as the set of non-binding norms of international law, including international human rights law standards that can be relied on to reliably flesh out the meaning and legal implications of binding norms of international law and international human rights law standards.⁶

There are several queer inclusive soft law instruments that emerge from global and regional human rights institutions including the United Nations, the Organization of American States and the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (hereinafter: the African Commission). Notably in this regard are the Yogyakarta Principles on the application of international human rights law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity (Yogyakarta Principles). Issued in 2006 and supplemented in 2017, the Yogyakarta Principles provide a very elaborate articulation of the international human rights of sexual and gender minorities.

However, the present research will focus on another specific soft law instrument, the African Commission's *Resolution on the protection against violence and other human rights violations against persons on the basis of their real or imputed sexual orientation or gender identity* (Resolution 275).⁷ Adopted in 2014, Resolution 275 is the focus of this study owing to its particularity emerging from local and regional activism by African queer rights and queer inclusive civil society responding to the wide-spread homophobic violence on the African continent as well as its being passed by an African institution.⁸

Resolution 275 calls on African states to eradicate on all forms of discrimination, violence and stigma on the grounds of actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity and

⁶ Romola Adeola, Frans Viljoen and Tresor Muhindo, 'A commentary on the African commission's general comment on the right to freedom of movement and residence under article 12(1) of the African charter on human and peoples' rights' (2021) 65(S1) *Journal of African Law* 131,151; Japhet Biegon 'The incorporation of the thematic resolutions of the African commission into domestic law' in Ololade Shyllon (ed) *The Model Law on Access to Information for Africa and other regional instruments: soft law and human rights in Africa* (Pretoria University Law Press 2018) 192, 193.

⁷ Resolution 275, adopted at the 55th ordinary session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, 2014 ('Resolution 275').

⁸ Coalition of African Lesbians 'THE COMMISSION-From Silence to Resistance' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q97-g6PbgJY&t=2s> (accessed 12 April 2023)

expression. Resolution 275's provisions refers to articles 2,3, 4 and 5 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the rights to non-discrimination, equal protection of the law, life and bodily integrity. While Resolution 275 is only of persuasive effect internationally and in Nigeria, the African Charter has been domesticated in Nigeria and bears the force of a local enactment.

This paper draws from the author's wider doctoral research that explores the potential of the joint use of African commission-based soft law and indigenous storytelling as empathy fostering tools across three Nigerian law faculties. In a recently published chapter titled 'Decolonising the Nigerian law classroom: analytic diary on indigenous storytelling at Niger Delta University' the intervention and findings at the Niger Delta University were discussed through the lens of decoloniality.⁹ The present paper vests itself instead in discussing the intervention and findings as regards potential of the joint use of indigenous storytelling and soft law at the University of Lagos, through the lens of queer theory.

The intervention hereby analysed is classroom-bound. Here, the classroom specifically refers to the unique composition of the 12 third year law students who availed themselves as research participants at the University of Lagos. The siting of this classroom in a Nigerian university is inspired by previous queer rights field studies carried out across Nigerian universities by other Nigerian scholars such as Okanlawon, Epprecht and Egya that demonstrate the potential of Nigerian classrooms as a legitimate site for queer rights advocacy.¹⁰ The siting of this classroom is also based on the inclination of this research to reimagine soft law as a creative pedagogical tool to be used in the context of storytelling

⁹ David Ikpo, 'Decolonising the Nigerian Law Classroom: Analytic Diary on Indigenous Storytelling at Niger Delta University, Nigeria' in Azubike Onuora-Oguno (ed), *Promoting Efficiency in Jurisprudence and Constitutional Development in Africa* (Springer 2023) 257-281.

¹⁰ Kehinde Okanlawon, 'Homophobic bullying in Nigerian schools: the experiences of LGBT university students' (2017) *Journal of LGBT Youth* 55; Boladale Mapayi et al, 'Homophobia and perceptions about homosexuality among students of tertiary institution in Nigeria' (2016) 14(3) *Gender and Behaviour* 7630; Boladale Mapayi et al, 'Sexual orientation and quality of life among students of Obafemi Awolowo University' (2015) 15(4) *African Health Sciences* 1070; Marc Epprecht and Sule Egya, 'Teaching about homosexualities to Nigerian university students: a report from the field' (2011) 23(4) *Gender and Education* 370; AT Bucknor-Arighbede & SA Omotoso, 'A perception study on same-sex marriage and gay practice among selected Nigerian youths' (2015) *Journal of Sourcing for Nigerian Journalists Reporting on Gender and Sexuality*; Kehinde Okanlawon, 'Perceptions and attitudes of heterosexual Nigerian university students towards LGB persons' (2020) 17(2) *Journal of LGB Youth* 166.

and for the purposes of persuasion and empathy fostering, and ultimately for the unsettling of hegemonic norms.

The remainder of the paper is structured into five parts: part two looks the state of queer rights in Nigeria; part three theoretically grounds attitude-focused advocacy; part four examines the relationship between Resolution 275 and indigenous storytelling; part five elicits the story behind the study carried out at the University of Lagos; part six offers a conclusion.

2. The State of Queer Rights in Nigeria

The state of queer rights in Nigeria is discussed under two sub-themes: that of Nigeria's legal framework regarding queer rights in Nigeria and that of the lived realities of queer persons in Nigeria.

2.1. Legal Framework regarding Queer Rights in Nigeria

Queer rights in Nigeria can be deduced from, on the one hand, legislation specifically targeting queer individuals or, on the other hand, human rights norms addressing the population at large. As such, the criminalisation of queer persons in Nigeria occasioned by the *Armed Forces Act*, *Penal Code* (applying in Northern Nigeria), *Criminal Code Act* (applying in Southern Nigeria) and the *Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act*, is set against the backdrop of Nigeria's towering national and international human rights commitments.¹¹ There are also other in-state legislation that further reiterate the homophobic sanction/prescription stance of these federal legislation such as the *Same-Sex Marriage Law of Lagos State*, the *Prostitution, Lesbianism, Homosexuality, Operation of Brothels and Other Sexual Immoralities (Prohibition Law) of Borno State*, the *Prostitution and Immoral Acts (Prohibition) Law of Kano State*, the *Same Sex Marriage*

¹¹ Criminal Code Act Cap C38 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004 secs 214 & 217; Penal Code (Northern States) Federal Provisions Act Cap P3 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004 sec 130; Armed Forces Act Cap A20 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004 sec 81; See also Anthony Nwazuke and Chinedu Igwe, 'A critical review of Nigeria's Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act' (2016) 45 Journal of Law, Policy and Globalisation 179-184.

(Prohibition) Law of Lagos State; and the Sharia Penal Code Law (adopted in 12 Northern Nigerian states).¹²

Nigeria is party to a plethora of international human rights treaties as well bound by several national human rights commitments. The most notable of Nigeria's national human rights commitments is the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (As Amended) which provides for the state obligation to protect the human rights of all its citizens.¹³ There are also other complimentary national human rights enactment such as the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (VAPPA) (adopted across 18 states in Nigeria) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights Ratification and Enforcement Act (African Charter Act).¹⁴ The African Charter Act is particularly noteworthy because it is a domesticated version of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, an international treaty.¹⁵ The African Charter Act introduces an obligation for the state to protect the human rights of everyone, with rhetoric of 'everyone' being grounded in the African Charter's queer inclusive nature and potential.¹⁶ The rights provided for in the African Charter include the rights to equality and non-discrimination, life and bodily integrity, dignity, liberty and security of person, fair hearing, freedom of belief, freedom of expression, association, assembly, and movement, to name a few.¹⁷

In 2014, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the international treaty body for the African Charter, passed Resolution 275. Resolution 275 clarifies that the obligation of African states to protect the human rights of its citizens includes the obligation to eradicate all forms of stigma and violence on the grounds of actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity.¹⁸ Resolution 275 is a soft law norm, and

¹² Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Law of Lagos State (2007); Prostitution, Lesbianism, Homosexuality, Operation of Brothels and Other Sexual Immoralities (Prohibition) Law of Borno State (2020); Prostitution and Immoral Acts (Prohibition) Law of Kano State (2000); Sharia Penal Code Law (adopted in 12 Northern Nigerian states).

¹³ Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (As Amended).

¹⁴ Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act; African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (adopted 27 June 1981, entered into force 21 October 1986) (1982) 21 ILM 58 ('African Charter').

¹⁵ African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Ratification and Enforcement) Act.

¹⁶ *Social and Economic Rights Action Centre (SERAC) and Another v Nigeria* (2001) AHRLR 60 (ACHPR 2001) ; Viljoen (n 5) 216.

¹⁷ African Charter (n 14), arts 3 – 12.

¹⁸ Resolution 275 (n 7), arts 1,2, 3 and 4.

unlike the domesticated African Charter, it does not create any state obligation. However, Resolution 275 is an authoritative articulation of the scope of Nigeria's commitment under the African Charter Act. Articles 60 and 61 of the African Charter make reference to soft law such as Resolution 275, which may be used for clarification and interpretation of the African Charter. Such interpretation of the Charter must thus be inclusive of and applicable to queer persons as well-being construed to ground freedom from discrimination and violence on the grounds of actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, expression and sex characteristics.

The position of international human rights law is clear on the state's obligations to protect and respect the human rights of queer persons.¹⁹ This clarity stems from the emergence of queer-inclusive international human rights soft law and their implications for the content of human rights treaty obligations at the international and regional level.²⁰ However, these advancements do not sufficiently reflect on the lived realities of queer persons and groups on the African continent, particularly in Nigeria. In Nigeria, queer persons are subject to dire human rights violations and disproportionately suffer crisis situations at the hands of state and non-state actors.²¹ This is further complicated by the preponderance of anti-gay laws and the frequent incidents of homophobic hostility based on the prevalent notion that homosexuality is unnatural and un-African.²²

¹⁹ Adrian Jjuuko, 'The protection and promotion of LGBTI rights in the African regional human rights system: opportunities and challenges' in Adrian Jjuuko and Sylvia Namwase (eds), *Protecting the human rights of sexual minorities in contemporary Africa* (Pretoria University Law Press 2017) 260; African Commission 'Guidelines on combating sexual violence and its consequences in Africa' ACHPR (2017); UN Human Rights Council Res 17/19 (14 July 2011) UN Doc A/HRC/RES/17/19; UN Human Rights Council Res 27/32 (2 October 2014) UN Doc A/HR/RES/27/32.

²⁰ Viljoen (n 5) 262.

²¹ Amnesty International 'Amnesty international report 2015/2016: the state of the world's human rights' (2016) 277; Human Rights Watch 'Tell me where I can be safe' (2016) 21, 22,27,30; The Initiative for Equal Rights '2021 Human rights violations report: based on real or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity/expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) in Nigeria' (2022) 8.

²² Steve Aborisade, *The tragedy of misrepresentation and under-reporting gender and sexual minorities in Nigeria* (Projekthope Nigeria 2017) 16; Danoye Oguntola-Laguda & Adrian van Klinken 'Uniting a dividing nation? Nigerian Muslim and Christian responses to same-sex marriage (prohibition)act' in Danoye Oguntola-Laguda and Adriaan van Klinken (eds) *Public religion and the politics of homosexuality in Africa* (Routledge 2016) 39, 40.

Sogunro describes the legal contestation of the homophobic stance of the Nigerian legal system as minimal given the only recent upsurge of activist involvement in the human rights, courts and legal spaces.²³

Besides, Sogunro's argues that the Nigerian socio-political elite employs legal and political power to forge the Nigerian legal system into compliance with the legacy of heteronormative Victorian morality as embodied in received colonial laws now adopted into national legislation.²⁴ While Sogunro views elite hegemony and homophobia as an attachment to Victorian morality, Aderinto discusses Nigeria's elite hegemony and homophobia as elements that are themselves self-sustaining and neatly parallel (similar but untethered) to Victorian morality.²⁵ Aderinto equates this hegemony with a self-reinforcing sense of heteronormative cultural nationalism among Nigerian elite men and women.²⁶

The present study, while aligning with Sogunro's view on local elitists' conspiracy, centers Aderinto's position that this conspiracy, however exclusionary, is also indigenous to Nigeria. In other words, the hegemonic exclusion of queer persons by the Nigerian legal system is not entirely attributable to the received English laws or Victorian morality, but is also rooted in indigenous Nigerian hegemonies. This hegemonic heteronormative nationalism constitutes a reductive and exclusionary understanding of the multicultural society that Nigeria is.

²³ *Teriah Ebah v The Federal Republic of Nigeria*(2014)-Suit FHC/ABJ/CS/197/2014 which challenged the constitutionality of the SSMPA but was struck at preliminary for lack of locus standi; *Ifeanyi Orazulike v Inspector General of Police* (2014) unreported, Suit FHC/ABJ/CS/799/2014- the applicant brought action against state parties for violation of human rights and unlawful arrest and the court awarded the applicant compensation and public apology from state parties; *Pamela Adie v Corporate Affairs Commission* (2018) unreported, Suit No FHC/ ABJ/CS/827/2018- applicant brought action for violation of freedom of assembly and refusal of registration of organization and court upheld state refusal on the ground of organization being criminalized by the SSMPA.

²⁴ Ayodele Sogunro, 'Against 'the order of nature': towards the growth of queer lawfare in Nigeria' in Adrian Jjuuko et al., (eds) *Queer lawfare in Africa: Legal strategies in contexts of LGBTIQ+ criminalisation and politicisation* (Pretoria University Law Press, 2022) 206, 214.

²⁵ Saheed Aderinto, *When sex threatened the state: illicit sexuality, nationalism and politics in colonial Nigeria* (University of Illinois Press 2015) 11,15.

²⁶ Ibid 31-33.

2.2 The Lived Realities of Queer Persons in Nigeria

Nigeria's multiple sociocultural spheres are rooted in a rich multicultural and cosmopolitan past and present. From its indigenous cultures, Nigeria has yielded several incidents of identities and expressions that resist heteronormative standards. Iconic instances are those of the *ekwe*, *'yan daudu* and *ade*.

The *ekwe* is indigenous to the Igbo nation. The *ekwe* is a title conferred on Igbo women, in the Igbo town of Nnobi, who are perceived to have been prospered by the goddess Idemili.²⁷ The conferment of this title grants the women the prerogative to attend and actively participate in community meetings and perform family functions that are usually restricted to men. Some of these family functions includes blessing family brides at weddings, and taking on brides of their own, to procreate and co-parent with them if they so desire.

The *'yan daudu* is indigenous to the Hausa nation of Nigeria. The Hausa nation is known for its proximity and interaction with the Trans-Saharan trade. The *'yan daudu* are persons that are born as male but publicly take on the female persona as gender expression.²⁸ *'Yan daudu* usually have hotel and restaurant businesses or serve as hosts in them. There have been instances of *'yan daudu* serving as intermediaries between sex workers and their clients.²⁹ Historically, *'yan daudu* have also been known to hold prestigious positions in faith communities such as the *bori*.³⁰

The *ade* holds prestigious faith-based positions as well. The *ade* is indigenous to the Yoruba nation. The *ades* are male-born priests who are devoted to an orisha and are perceived as their consorts.³¹ Some of the *ades* take on traditionally female persona and attire while executing their roles.

²⁷ Ifi Amadiume 'Theorising patriarchy in Africa: kinship ideologies and system in Africa and Europe' in Oyeronke Oyewumi (ed) *African gender studies: a reader* (Palgrave Macmillan 2005) 95.

²⁸ Rudolf Gaudio, *Allah made us: sexual outlaws in an Islamic African city* (John Wiley & Sons 2011) 17, 34, 61.

²⁹ Stephen Murray and Will Roscoe (eds) *Boy wives and female husbands: Studies of African Homosexualities* (Palgrave 1998) 94.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Lorand Matory, 'Gendered agendas: the secret scholars keep about Yoruba Atlantic religion' (2003) 15(3) *Gender and History* 409; Randy Corner and David Sparks, *Queering creole spiritual traditions: lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender participation in African-inspired traditions in the Americas* (Routledge 2004) 421; Paul John, *The transformation of Brazilian candomblé: secrets, gossips and gods* (Oxford University Press

Besides these indigenous Nigerian resistances to heteronormativity, Nigeria also bears the history of traditional homegrown patriarchal structures as well as exclusionary imperialist socio-cultural conditioning. With evidence of ethnographic and historical studies, patriarchal norms have been integral to some Nigerian cultures. Evidence exists in the studies by Pearce and Achebe. While Pearce engages with the Yoruba nation and discusses the socialisation of children, particularly female children to be submissive, Achebe addresses the prevalence of patriarchy in Igbo land that punished whatever was perceived as excessive usurpation of masculinity.³² The prevalent sociocultural norms and nuances of local elite in early Nigeria were also steeped in patriarchy. The dominance of exclusionary heteronormative socialisations in Nigeria is a project jointly formed by colonial and local constructions as well as the exclusionary interpretations of the Christian and Islamic faith.³³

These hegemonic norms are jointly sustained through coloniality and the preponderance of indigenous hegemonies. The earlier published chapter on 'Decolonising the Nigerian law classroom' delivers a more detailed conversation on the coloniality of hegemonic norms. However, in this paper which adopts a queer lens, it is recognised that the hegemonic preponderance of heteronormativity in Nigeria erodes the humanity of queer lives and identities. This translates to outraging 2021 statistics such as the 624 persons across 27 states that reported being violated by state and non-state actors on the grounds of their actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.³⁴ 2022, in close range with the 2021 statistics, shows that 561 persons across 24 states reported

2002) 41.

³² Nwando Achebe, *The female king of colonial Nigeria: ahebi ugbabe* (Indiana University Press 2011) 183; Tola Pearce 'Dispelling the myth of precolonial gender and equality in yoruba culture' (2014) 48(2) Canadian Journal of African Studies 318.

³³ Aderinto (n 25) 31; TIERS Nigeria (n 2).

³⁴ TIERS Nigeria, '2021 human rights violation report based on real or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity/expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) in Nigeria' (2022) <https://theinitiativeforequalrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/2021-Human-Rights-Violations-Report.pdf> (accessed 13 May 2023) 8.

being violated by state and non-state parties based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.³⁵

Alongside these statistics, a 2020 released Netflix film *Finding Hubby* features a line that says 'It (homosexuality) is common in high society Lagos', thereby demonstrating an acknowledgement of queerness as part of Nigeria's sociocultural reality.³⁶ Similarly discussed by Sogunro, Nigeria's political history features public acknowledgement (although malignant) of the existence of queer subculture.³⁷ Queerness, as complex and varying as it is, is an undeniable Nigerian reality.

3. The Relationship between Resolution 275 and Indigenous Storytelling in Educational Institutions

Soft laws such as Resolution 275 are by nature persuasive and, as such, lend themselves as advocacy tools for persuasive approaches. The effective use of persuasive tools for persuasive approaches is an important advancement for queer rights advocacy in Nigeria because it complements the focus of pushing for the recognition of state obligation, with a focus on shifting attitudes. As such, Resolution 275 complements the interpretation and implementation of existing state obligations in matters of human rights protection and promotion. Besides the obvious institutional advancement that Resolution 275 is for queer rights on the African continent, it also lends itself to Afro-queer rights advocacy groups, practitioners and stakeholder as a persuasive tool that can be used across multiple spaces to further and solidify the advancement of queer rights.³⁸

Resolution 275 recognises stigma as an incidental part of homophobic violence. This research understands stigma to connote exclusionary attitudes as well as oppressive

³⁵ TIERS Nigeria, '2022 human rights violations report based on real or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity/expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) in Nigeria' (2023) https://theinitiativeforequalrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/PRESS_2022-Violations-Report_20Dec21.pdf 6.

³⁶ Femi Ogunsanwo, *Finding hubby* (2020).

³⁷ Sogunro (n 24) 206, 210

³⁸ Romola Adeola, Frans Viljoen and Tresor Muhindo (n 6) 151.

socio-cultural positionings of communities and systems towards queer persons. The unjustness of these exclusionary attitudes and socio-cultural conditionings, as addressed in Resolution 275, constitute as much a human rights violation as physical and tangible forms of hostility and violence. As a matter of fact, as implied in Resolution 275, the eradication of physical and tangible forms of homophobic violence is as urgent as the deliberate eradication of intangible forms of homophobic violence such as homophobic stigma, attitudes and knowledge systems.³⁹ It is therefore crucial that queer rights advocacy against homophobic violence in Nigeria addresses the touching of hearts and the shifting of attitudes.

There are thriving queer rights stakeholders and organisations in Nigeria that advance queer rights through manifold thematic work such as legal advocacy, sexual health service provision, faith-based advocacy, literary and media advocacy. However, there is a widespread silence among Nigerian queer rights stakeholders and organisations as regards Resolution 275. This silence may be attributed to state-induced factors such as the generally hostile environment for queer rights work occasioned by law and attitudes. The silence may also be attributed to non-state induced factors such as the restrictive mandates of Nigerian queer rights organisations, the bulk of which are focused on sexual health. There is also the silence among other human rights stakeholders such as educational institutions owing to the existence of internal hegemonies that are exclusionary of queer rights engagements. Owing to issues of independence, the national human rights commission has so far remained silent on Resolution 275. However, with the queer-inclusive work of the Network of National Human Rights Institutions (NANHRI), there is potential for future queer-inclusive engagements at the level of national human rights institutions stemming from the NANHRI's Resolution 275 focused interventions.⁴⁰

³⁹ Resolution 275 '[c]alls on State Parties to ensure that human rights defenders work in an enabling environment that is free of stigma, reprisals or criminal prosecution as a result of their human rights protection activities, including the rights of sexual minorities', Resolution 275 (n 7).

⁴⁰ NANHRI and Centre for Human Rights, 'A Guide for African National Human Rights Institutions for Implementing Resolution 275 in Africa' (Report, 2020), https://www.chr.up.ac.za/images/researchunits/sogie/documents/NANHRI_Guide_for_NHRIs_on_Implementing_Resolution_275V002.pdf (accessed 12 April 2023)

NANHRI is vested in advancing international human rights law engagement among national human rights institutions.

However, it is generally the case that the potential of soft law within and outside the court room is not fully realised owing to its persuasive nature as well as the nonengagement by stakeholders such as civil society, academia and practitioners across other fields. To realise this potential and advance soft law on the African continent, it is crucial for these stakeholders, in particular educational institutions, to take part in soft-law based human rights advocacy activities. To accomplish this, it is important for educational institutions to reimagine soft laws, not just as law in themselves, but also as pedagogical tools suitable for engagement and interaction across disciplines.

In engaging with the role of educational institutions on the African continent as a site in need of transformation and one needed to lead this transformation project, it is crucial to recognise the importance of inclusive and constructive decolonial approaches. As to the practicality of decoloniality in contemporary African classrooms, Tamale speaks to the need for social constructivist, consultative and non-hierarchical approaches as well as transdisciplinary engagement with issues such as human rights.⁴¹

Within this decolonial framework and in view of exploring the complementarity of persuasive approaches, this study adopts the narrative approach, i.e. storytelling as a tool, particularly indigenous storytelling. The practice of storytelling has been very common in human cultures across nations. Iconic forms of storytelling include oral tradition, literary works, performance arts, fine arts, photography, and film. In discussing the sociology of sexual storytelling, Plummer describes storytelling along two paths: storytelling as a symbolic interaction and storytelling as a political process.⁴²

As symbolic interaction, storytelling covers the process that begins at the coaxer (stimulus that demands the creation of the narrative), the actual creation of the narrative, the power

⁴¹ Sylvia Tamale, *Decolonisation and afro-feminism* (Daraja Press 2020) 236, 270.

⁴² Ken Plummer, *Telling sexual stories: power, change and social march* (Taylor and Francis 2019).

dynamics at play between the stimulus, the creator, the circumstances from which they both emerge as well as those in which the story is created. Here, storytelling also includes the audience, and the meaning-making journey that begins during their experience, and never ends.

Storytelling as a political process encompasses the power dynamics as regards resources, economic, class, race, gender and domicile factors at play in the creation, reach, legality, sustenance and consequences of the storytelling practice on the co-creator of the stories and the community in which it is told or has reached. The indigeneity of indigenous storytelling is located in how much of these overlapping symbolic and political processes recognises, respects and reflects the subjectivities and autonomy of the people and circumstances in which and for which storytelling productions are created and used.

Indigenous storytelling, as an attitudinal-focused tool is an important complement to the advancement of soft law when used jointly because it relies on capacities such as that of being an imagined contact and empathy fostering tool, a tool for communal collaboration, an educational tool as well as a tool for decolonisation. Intergroup contact has been recognised to have the capacity of fostering empathy and reducing intergroup prejudices.⁴³ However, storytelling has also been shown to have the capacity to simulate this intergroup experience, foster empathy and reduce intergroup prejudices.⁴⁴

Indigenous storytelling is a co-creative process that involves several actors in the community at the levels of co-production, joint experience and even joint meaning-making journeys. The communal experiencing and engagement with stories itself foster inter-

⁴³ Lindsey Cameron et al, 'Changing attitudes with a little imagination': imagined contact effects on young children's intergroup biases' (2011) 27(3) *Annals of Psychology* 708; Rhianon Turner, et al, 'Imagining intergroup contact can improve intergroup attitudes' (2007) 10(4) *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations* 427, 431.

⁴⁴ P Matthijs Bal and Velkamp Martijn, 'How does fictional reading influence empathy? An experimental on the role of emotional transportation' (2013) 8(1) *PloS One* 1; Jan Carter-Black, 'Teaching cultural competence: an innovative strategy grounded in the universality of storytelling as depicted in African and African American storytelling traditions' (2008) 23(2) *Affilia* 31; Charlotte Alston, 'Standing on tradition' (TEDxTalk, 29 November 2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZDa1giUw9EA> (accessed 10 September 2022).

personal and intergroup empathy and cohesion. Queer-inclusive indigenous storytelling can also serve as knowledge-based resistance to the prevalent notion that queerness is aberration and queer people should be excluded. Indigenous storytelling as a complementary tool for the advancement of soft law can also accomplish communal re-orientation, further shifting its audience towards empathy and a more compliant embrace of queer-inclusive soft law human rights standards.

It is imperative that queer rights advocacy incorporates attitude-focused components such as those implied in Resolution 275. While advancing queer-inclusive international human rights soft law, shifting of attitudes is important in unity of place and time.

4. Theoretical Grounding for Indigenous Storytelling and Attitude-focused Queer Rights Advocacy

As evoked above, storytelling is integral to the advancement of queer rights. As a matter of fact, there have been recurrent incidences of the use of storytelling to engage with queer identities and advance the dignity of queer persons globally, on the African continent and in Nigeria. Some of these instances include: the Gerald Kraak Anthology series; Queer Africa anthology series; and even earlier iterations of queer storytelling interventions.⁴⁵

That said, the use of storytelling as a pedagogical tool to advance queer-inclusive attitudes and institutional engagement with queer-inclusive soft law in unity of place and time is yet to be fully embraced. This study's approach to leverage stories as a complimentary tool for changing attitudes is founded on the disciplinary area of law and literature, as well as on various theoretical groundings. These theoretical groundings include: contact and imagined contact theories; queer theory and the cognitive dissonance theory. The law and literature discipline advances that it is important to

⁴⁵ Jacana Media, 'An anthology and prize on the topics of gender, human rights and sexuality, for writers and photographers across Africa' <https://jacana.co.za/gerald-kraak-anthology-and-prize/> (accessed 10 September 2022); Barbara Boswell 'Queer Africa 2 - new stories' <https://gala.co.za/books-and-resources/publications-and-publishing/mathokos-books/queer-africa-2-new-stories/> (accessed 10 September 2022)

complement the process of legal education with stories because stories humanise this process in a way that doctrinal and formalistic engagements with law do not.⁴⁶ Contact theory grounds that intergroup contact and interaction can curb intergroup bias and prejudice. Imagined contact theory complements contact theory by providing that in the event where intergroup contact or interaction is dangerous or impossible, this interaction can be simulated through other approaches such as engagement with art and storytelling that reflects the realities of the group that should be present.⁴⁷ An important aspect of storytelling as pedagogical tool to advance the human rights of queer persons is the incorporation of the desire-based approach. Desire-based approach to storytelling calls for the representation of minorities as persons with complexities as opposed to reductive representations of persons as merely victims of human rights violations.⁴⁸

Queer theory applies in this research to ground the expansive understanding and engagement with soft law standards beyond the scope of black letter legal advocacy approaches and to embrace the potential of queer-inclusive soft law as a tool that can be leveraged across various sites besides formal judicial and quasi-judicial sites.⁴⁹ As regards legal education, employing a queer lens inclines legal pedagogies to resist dominant formalistic methods of teaching and learning law and human rights. The dominant legal pedagogy as it exists in Nigerian universities is the engagement with law through a doctrinal and hierarchical approach where the teacher imparts information on the law students, the law students internalise it and are assessed based on their capacity to regurgitate that which has been passed. This is an imperialistic approach to engaging with human rights which in itself embodies undertones of coloniality. Doctrinal approaches to legal education flatten the humanity and subjectivities of the students, transforming

⁴⁶ Maria Aristodemou, *Law and literature, journeys from here to eternity* (Oxford University Press 2001) 10; John Morison and Christine Bell (eds) *Tall Stories? Reading law and literature* (Dartmouth Publishing 1996) 12.

⁴⁷ Cameron (n 44) 708; Turner (n 43) 427, 431.

⁴⁸ Eve Tuck, 'Suspending damage: a letter to communities' (2009) 79 (3) *Harvard Educational Review* 418.

⁴⁹ Mathias Detamore, 'Queer(y)ing the ethics of research methods: toward a politics of intimacy in researcher/researched relations' in Kath Brown and Catherine Nash (eds) *Queer methods and methodologies: intersecting queer theories and social science research* (Routledge 2010) 173.

them into passive non-autonomous receptors as well as rob law classrooms of the rich learning opportunities that students embody individually and collectively.

Centering the queer lens in this study is further rooted in decolonising the law classrooms. Decoloniality as integral to the queer lens is also inspired by Tamale's engagement with the decolonisation of classrooms as translating to resisting hegemonic institutional ethos, resisting exclusionary and oppressive curricula as well as unsettling non-consultative and undemocratic pedagogical approaches.⁵⁰ In reading decoloniality into queer theory, this study centers inclusive, democratic and social-constructivist learning approaches. In viewing law students through the queer lens, they are considered equal stakeholders in the interactive process and construction of meaning in the law classrooms. Storytelling is a decolonial and queer process because by its very nature it resists formalistic engagement with social-cultural norms and even the law, and calls for democratic and social interaction. These features resist the unquestionability of norms and legal standards in the law classroom.

My study's centering of the queer lens through fostering inclusive interaction in the law classroom is also based on the recognition of the cosmopolitan configuration of teachers and students identities in university classrooms, and how each identity serves as a buffer to guide against the others' dominance or unquestionability.⁵¹ These cosmopolitan identities, emerging through access and engagement with globalisation, are rich sources and opportunities for the formation of meaning as well as the fostering of positive attitudes through social interaction in the classroom.

Cognitive dissonance theory consists of the logic that an inconsistency in belief within a person creates a discomfort that urges that person to move away from that discomfort by establishing consistency across the persons beliefs.⁵² Dissonance owing to disparity in

⁵⁰ Tamale (n 41) 236.

⁵¹ Mark Geveisser, *The pink line: the world's queer frontiers* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2020) 18; Kwame Appiah *Cosmopolitanism: ethics in a world of strangers* (Penguin 2006) 93.

⁵² Leon Festinger, *A theory of cognitive dissonance* (Stanford University Press 1957) 3.

world views and beliefs is a logical consequence of meaning-making through social interaction especially in a multicultural and vastly cosmopolitan context such as the university classroom. As Appiah argues, cosmopolitanism questions homogeneity, and by extension, this diversity of thoughts also questions hegemonic, deeply seated norms.⁵³ Tamale argues that the continuity of oppression and exclusion are based on the status of their being considered as commonplace, regular and unquestionable, a status they have acquired through time.⁵⁴ Simply because they are not questioned, they are considered commonplace, logical and even natural. The present study employs the potential of emerging disparities in perspective as contributory to the unsettling of hegemonic homophobic norms and the advancement of queer-inclusive attitudes in law classrooms and universities.

The expression of cognitive dissonance theory becomes clearer in the plot of the field study discussed below. These theoretical backgrounds are centered in this study because of their engagements with human beliefs, emotions and prejudices as important elements in the advancement of inclusivity and shifting negative attitudes.

5. The Story of the University of Lagos

This section addresses an empirical indigenous storytelling intervention that I conducted at the University of Lagos (ULA) in February 2020. This intervention, with a focus on Nigerian classrooms, was designed to interrogate the capacity of indigenous storytelling to curb homophobic attitudes and advance the awareness and embrace of the visions of Resolution 275 to eradicate homophobic stigma and violence. The intervention will be considered under two subsections: research method, and findings.

⁵³ Kwame Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: ethics in a world of strangers* (W. W. Norton & Company 2006) 1, 4.

⁵⁴ Tamale (n 41) 235.

5.1 Research Method

The research material for this study revolves around a three-part short story titled 'Khaki' which was orally performed and recorded as audio files.⁵⁵ It also formed the inspiration for a Resolution 275 promotional flyer (reproduced below).

In 'Khaki', Adanna, a young female Nigerian law graduate, leaves home in the Southern part of Nigeria for the Northern part of the country to participate to the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme that is compulsory for all Nigerian law graduates. 'Khaki' is split into three parts. In the first part, Adanna encounters gender-based violence as she is sexually assaulted in the bus on her way to the NYSC camp. In the second part, Adanna encounters ethnicity/faith-based violence as she is threatened by male Muslim colleagues at the secondary school she has been posted to teach. In the third part of the short story, Adanna encounters homophobic violence as she is ambushed in her room, caught with a female lover and unlawfully arrested for homosexual charges.

Storytelling engagement with participants was framed through a preliminary survey form, focus group discussion prompts and a final survey. This research material was uniformly applied across three Nigerian universities: the University of Lagos (ULA) located in Lagos, the Niger Delta University (NDU) located in Bayelsa State, and the University of Ilorin, located at Kwara State Nigeria. In the present study, I focus only on the experiment carried out at ULA because of its specific location, in Lagos, as the most central and cosmopolitan city in Nigeria.

At ULA, the intervention involved 12 research participants and took place across three days. These research participants were all third-year students of the Faculty of Law. On the first day, the study was introduced to the 12 students, the consent forms were administered. The students and I sat in a circle, then they filled out the preliminary survey forms with questions to interrogate their attitudes towards a hypothetical queer person in

⁵⁵ The three parts of 'Khaki' were verbally performed and produced into the three sound files ('Khaki1', 'Khaki2' and 'Khaki 3') with backing music. The voice acting was done by a female colleague and the author, who also post produced the sound files.

their family. After this, I informed them that I was going to play a sound file (Khaki1). I also invited them to listen with their ears and their hearts. Before the sound file began playing, I gave each research participant a piece of paper to write down the thoughts that occurred to them while they listened. The sound file was about 15 minutes long. This was followed by an hour-long focus group discussion where they shared their thoughts on the characters, the situation of gender-based violence and what they thought was a proper response to the situation.

The same process was repeated on days 2 and 3 for the sound files Khaki2 and Khaki3. On the second day and third days, the plots and conversations were on faith/ethnicity-based violence and homophobic violence respectively. On the third and last day, after the focus-group discussion, the research participants were given a short break of a few minutes. After the break, we had a conversation guided by the Khaki-inspired Resolution 275 promotional flyer, and a copy of Resolution 275. After this conversation, the research participants completed the final survey form which had questions designed to interrogate the attitudes of the research participants towards a hypothetical family member that may be like Adanna (the same-sex loving protagonist in 'Khaki').

5.2 Research Analysis and Findings

The preliminary survey data, the focus group discussions data and the final survey data gathered at ULA have been analysed through a qualitative and thematic approach. While the approach for the surveys has been deductive, insofar as the analysis was based on preset calibration of positive, negative and neutral attitude towards queer persons, the approach for focus groups has been inductive, thereby organically giving space for emerging ideas and themes to define the scope of the engagement.

5.2.1 Before Khaki: Analysis of the Preliminary Survey

The preliminary survey was designed to interrogate the attitudinal positions of the research participants before their experience of the story and conversation on Resolution 275. Based on the reports of previous attitudinal surveys in Nigeria, there was the preliminary assumption that attitudes towards queer persons would either be positive

(queer accepting/inclusive) or negative (homophobic). As such, these were the initial preset themes of positive and negative attitudes. However, there began to emerge attitudinal positions that were neither neatly inclusive nor homophobic, and this established the third category 'neutral'. Within these three categories, there were four levels of thematic coding.

The negative attitudes yielded two themes: hostility towards queer persons, and rejection of queer persons. Owing to prevalence of homophobia reported in previous national attitudinal surveys and university-based studies, homophobia and the rejection of queer persons were expected at the preliminary survey. Some of the research participants considered queerness and queer persons as unnatural and immoral aberrations that should be corrected.

I would most definitely try to make my queer sibling look inward and search for their true self because we are from the same parents and they cannot be different - ULA10

I will speak sense to my queer sibling to show why they should perish such thoughts and take them for deliverance – ULA2

I believe it's demonic for you to be having feelings for someone of the same sex – ULA5

Some of the research participants indicated that they would take up disciplinary measures (active retributive violence) to correct the queerness of their queer sibling. Other research participants expressed that they considered effeminate boys and masculine girls irritating, and same-sex loving people were simply a shock to them.

The neutral attitudes yielded two themes: denial of the existence of queerness; and inquisition as to queerness. The range of attitudes between acceptance and rejection are hardly discussed in reports or surveys. However, it is important for this range in between to be discussed because it is demonstrative of how grey areas between attitudinal poles can better direct needs assessment for attitude-based advocacy interventions. At ULA, some of the research participants expressed indifference towards queer persons and

queer expressions and were more inclined to carry on as though queer persons and queerness did not exist. Some of the research participants also communicated being confused and uncertain of how to respond to queerness.

I am indifferent about how anyone conducts themselves. - ULA 6

If my sibling told me that he/she was attracted to a person of the same sex, I would be very confused and be quiet – ULA1

Some of the research participants genuinely wanted to know more by interacting with queer persons. Some of the research participants were open to accepting queer gender expression while being utterly dismissive of queer sexual orientation.

I believe that effeminate boys and masculine girls are within the bounds of character/behavior wise, still acceptable. But if to the extremes of crossdressing, gender modification, honestly not a fan...and if we do not draw the line even at male to female relationships, then where will it end? - ULA3

The positive attitudes yielded three themes: inclusive affirmation of queerness; the defense of queerness and resignation towards queerness. Several reports and attitudinal surveys conducted at national level and in universities have indicated the existence of queer allies among Nigerians generally and within university communities. Afrobarometer studies have also shown that acceptance is more likely among younger persons as well as persons who have access to social media, formal education and urban domicile. As such, it is no shock that while there is a prevalence of homophobic attitudes, some research participants at ULA were defensive of queer persons to the extent of physical and litigious retaliation on behalf of their queer friend/relative in the event of a homophobic attack. This also includes participants open to being nurturing of victims of homophobic violence. Some of the research participants were affirming of queer persons as well and were open to their queer relatives reaching for affirming and more authentic expressions of themselves.

If my sibling was beaten up because he was caught in a compromising position with someone of the same-sex, I would treat the wounds he got from the beating and if it is much more serious, I would take him to a hospital - ULA7

I would still like to know why my queer sibling has that feeling and try to convince him against it. But if it's what he wants then I all I can do for now is wish him well. He has the right to do what is appealing to their spirit – ULA12

Resignation towards queerness was expressed by some research participants where they conceded that queerness is immutable. Other research participants expressed that they were open to having civil and peaceful conversations while reminding their siblings of the prevalent homophobia from the society.

5.2.2 During Khaki: Analysis of the Focus Group Discussions

The purpose of exploring three different themes on violence and have the three different focus group discussions was to assess the attitudinal harmony of the research participants across these different themes at various point between the preliminary and final surveys. The theme for the first session was gender-based violence. The theme for the second session was faith/ethnicity-based violence. The theme for the third session was homophobic violence. Guided by the theory of cognitive dissonance, the established consistency across two themes of violence is expected to urge the reaching for harmony across three themes of violence. At the ULA, this attitudinal harmony was struck, among some research participants across three different focus group discussions, on the position that violence should be stopped and that the victims of violence should be defended/protected.

I feel like the whole society itself should be reoriented. Starting from even the older generation and beside that people can't speak up again these days... She felt like what do we know. We are just children. So actually, I feel like the whole psychic should be reoriented. - ULA1(Session 1)

I feel like if this people actually agreed to send their children to school, like the girls to school, there should be some kind of agreement signed. Like you can't just come and

interfere with her while she is in school. I feel like that is totally disrespectful to the educational system and to the teacher. There should be an agreement that parents should not just walk in and drag the child out of class. - ULA1 (Session 2)

Yes, I feel like N. Y. S. C. Should like write some kind of security for its corper. Because you can't just send people in society that you know that... familiar with, because they should write some kind of security system. - ULA1 (Session 3)

Sometimes effeminate boys and masculine girls used to irritate me in all honesty. - ULA1 (Preliminary survey)⁵⁶

Establishing this attitudinal harmony/congruence across these three different types of violence is an important goal in affirming Resolution 275's position on equating homophobic violence and stigma to other forms of violence and stigma. Similarly, it is important to equate the urgency of eradicating homophobic violence and stigma to the urgency of eradicating other forms of violence and stigma. It is important to note here that Adanna's sexual orientation was not revealed until the third session. As such, establishing a congruence across the three parts translates into establishing harmony in the treatment of queer and persons whose sexual orientation are either unknown or not in contention.

5.2.3 After Khaki: Analysis of the Final Survey

The final survey was designed to interrogate the attitudinal positions of the research participants after their experience of the story and conversation on Resolution 275. Guided by the preliminary survey, the final survey also coded along the lines of the pre-determined categories of negative, positive and neutral.

The negative attitudes yielded three themes: hostility towards queer persons; dislike and non-support for queer persons; and verbal conversion therapy. The negative attitudes expressed after the experience of 'Khaki' and the conversation on Resolution 275

⁵⁶ An instance of attitudinal congruence from the beginning on anti-violence regardless of identity.

advanced the just treatment of queer persons on arrest, verbal disclosure of dislike of queerness and verbal attempts to convert the queer person.

No matter how acceptable we paint homosexuality to be, it does not change the fact that it is wrong and should not be legalised. - ULA6

Homosexual people should be treated like every other person and if they are caught, they should follow due process in executing punishment. - ULA7

I would rather that homosexuals be made to go through therapy sessions and rehabilitations rather than time in jail. - ULA 6

Although these inclinations do not embrace queer humanity, they are devoid of homophobic violence and built on the recognition of the injustice of homophobic violence. The neutral attitudes yielded four themes: belief that women turn lesbian because of previous cases of violation; unphased by the experience of 'Khaki'; passive and undecided about queer persons; ambiguous response. The neutral attitudes advanced by some research participants were shared in response to self-assessment questions. Some research participants reported to have been unphased by the experience of 'Khaki' and the conversation on Resolution 275. That said it is important to note however that some of these participants did in fact demonstrate a shift in their attitudes towards queer persons in their other responses in the final survey.

No, the focus group had no influence on how I feel about people like Adanna. Well, Adanna was a victim of life's unfortunate side and more than anything. I think she needed to be understood and listened to. (Preliminary survey) I personally do not believe that homosexuality is alright. I feel that being attracted to someone who has the same biological components as you is not okay. But then my religion and morality has contributed greatly to this.). - ULA10

No, listening to Khaki has not impacted on how I feel about persons like Adanna. Yes, experiencing the first two parts of Khaki had an impact on how I felt about Adanna in the end... (Preliminary survey: Well, I believe it is demonic for you to be having feelings for someone of the same sex.). (Final survey: After Khaki, I still feel that homosexuality is repugnant however, this is not a reason for violence whatsoever.) - ULA5

Some research participants expressed indecision as regards their position on queerness. Interestingly, some of the research participants theorised that while Adanna's situation was pitiable, she must have become lesbian in reaction to her previous violation from men.

The positive attitudes yielded three themes: acceptance and protection of queer persons; and embracing the implications of Resolution 275. Some of the research participants acknowledge the outright inhumanity of homophobic violence. Other expression of acceptance of queer persons included affirmation and defense of the humanity of queer persons. Some of the research participants reported to have been moved by the storytelling experience towards more empathy and being more protective of queer persons.

Everyone should be given room for fair hearing to express themselves no matter the offence or crime they commit. Jungle justice should be discouraged at all cost. Adanna was not treated well such that she is human and she has rights which should be respected. The violation of Adanna's rights is really bad and degrading. - ULA8

The advocacy and protection of other fundamental rights regardless of their orientation. Though, where a right stops another begins. However, certain rights are not to be denied regardless of the circumstances. - ULA4

As stated earlier, this paper is distilled from a wider doctoral thesis covering empirically assessed indigenous storytelling interventions across three Nigerian universities. It is acknowledged, as grounded in the Afrobarometer 2020 release titled 'All in this together', that high queer inclusive tolerance levels are more prevalent among persons who are younger, more educated and urban situated.⁵⁷ As such a few layers about the demographic of my research participants in a cosmopolitan city such as Lagos aligns them within the scope of persons who are likely to be more queer tolerant than the wider Nigerian society. From the wider study it was found that attitudes towards queer persons

⁵⁷ Afrobarometer "All in this together": Africans tolerant on ethnic, religious, national, but not sexual differences' (2020) 14.

in the context of the group focused on at the University of Lagos exist at various points in a continuum across hostility, neutrality, protectiveness, awareness and conformity with Resolution 275, and indigenous storytelling can play a contributory role in shifting these attitudes further away from hostility and closer towards protectiveness, even when the audience does not realise that this shift is happening or has happened. This intervention also consolidates prior studies on the potential of Nigerian universities as a suitable site for the advancement of queer rights.⁵⁸

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

This study discusses the legitimacy of indigenous storytelling as complementary for Nigerian queer rights advocacy. Stories are important because they inform attitudinal elements of queer rights advocacy. Attending to attitudinal elements is important in Nigeria because of the deplorable state of queer rights. While there are several ongoing and commendable queer rights-focused advancement initiatives in Nigeria, the dire state of queer rights in Nigeria results from both legal and attitudinal challenges faced by queer persons. As such it is important for queer rights advocacy interventions to embody both legal and attitudinal approaches. Owing to negotiated autonomy of national human rights institutions and civil society, thematic and socioeconomic constraints, there has been a silence by Nigerian queer rights stakeholders on the advancement of international soft law such as Resolution 275 which constitutes a conduit for African institutionalisation of queer inclusivity and a call for the eradication of homophobic violence. Besides, there has also been insufficient focus on attitudinal shift by Nigerian queer rights stakeholders. This paper demonstrates that indigenous storytelling, through imagined contact and empathy, has the capacity to foster empathy towards queer persons and advance queer-inclusive soft law such as Resolution 275. The research carried out at the University of Lagos

⁵⁸ Kehinde Okanlawon, 'Homophobic bullying in Nigerian schools: the experiences of LGBT university students' (2017) *Journal of LGBT Youth* 55; Boladale Mapayi et al, 'Homophobia and perceptions about homosexuality among students of tertiary institution in Nigeria' (2016) 14(3) *Gender and Behaviour* 7630; Boladale Mapayi et al, 'Sexual orientation and quality of life among students of Obafemi Awolowo University' (2015) 15(4) *African Health Sciences* 1070; Marc Epprecht and Sule Egya 'Teaching about homosexualities to Nigerian university students: a report from the field' (2011) 23(4) *Gender and Education* 370; AT Bucknor-Arighbede & SA Omotoso 'A perception study on same-sex marriage and gay practice among selected Nigerian youths' (2015) *Journal of Sourcing for Nigerian Journalists Reporting on Gender and Sexuality*; Kehinde Okanlawon 'Perceptions and attitudes of heterosexual Nigerian university students towards LGB persons' (2020) 17(2) *Journal of LGB Youth* 166.

offered qualitative data showing that attitudes towards queer persons exist on a continuum between homophobic hostility on the one hand and inclusivity/defense/protection of queer persons on the other. Although this study makes no claim to attribution of attitudinal shift among students to the use of indigenous storytelling, it builds on the already existing scholarship that grounds the legitimacy of Nigerian classrooms as sites for queer rights advocacy. The use of indigenous storytelling, jointly with queer inclusive soft law such as Resolution 275, leverages this legitimacy and advocacy opportunity that Nigerian classrooms embody, and plays a contributory role in shifting attitudes further and further towards inclusivity/defense/protection of queer persons.