

POSTMODERNISM, SEXUALITY AND IDENTITY RE-INVENTION IN AFRICAN QUEER NARRATIVE: JUDE DIBIA'S WALKING WITH SHADOWS

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Abstract

This paper interrogates the conscious silence on homosexuality by writers and critics of African literature in their works. The paper adopts queer theory and some aspects of Judith Butler's gender performativity as its theoretical positions, and also relies on close reading of Jude Dibia's Walking with Shadows for analysis of some extrapolations. Findings in this paper reveal that, within the African context, the idea of sexuality has always been heterosexual and any other differing sexuality is seen as queer and non-normative. This, to some extent, accounts for why some African writers and critics, over the years, consciously omit sexuality from the content of African literature, as if it were not an aspect of African life. Wherever sexuality is mentioned, it is always given a favourable portraiture. Against this backdrop, this paper concludes that it is high time African writers and critics broke away from the erstwhile culture of silence and began to explore sexual identities like other socio-political issues in African societies.

Keywords: homosexuality, sexuality, identity re-invention, hetero-patriarchy, queer narrative.

Introduction

The postmodernist influence on human culture may not be complete without an examination of how it affects views on human sexuality. Postmodernism as a movement plunged the world into a universe of fragmentation with the neo-Victorian principles gradually giving way. Postmodernity has also witnessed the upsurge of digitization and the gradual dismantling of traditional ways and ethos. Udoinwang and Akpan (2023) thus aver that "Digital transformation comes with baggage alien to the African culture...." New tenets reacting against some aspects of modernism emerged and consequently, traditional authority became an institution embroiled in protestation and corruption; morality also became subject to personal opinion rather than societal opinions and sanctions. According to Mckeating (2000) in his article entitled "The Legacy of Postmodernism", postmodernism is "the tipping point where all taboos are uprooted and all universal expectations are discarded". For Rich (1991).

...postmodernism is a paradoxical recursive and problematic method of critique. It encourages transcendence through limitation, while simultaneously decentering the concept of absolute

transcendence. To this end, it encourages the development of a heightened sense of self in relation to itself and the world around it. Postmodernism assumes ontology of fragmented being. Where modernism asserts the primacy of the subject in revealing universal truth, postmodernism challenges the authority of the subject and thus, universal truth based on it. Postmodernism aspires to reflect the critical knowledge as a process rather than a product. The truth therefore remains elusive, relative, partial and always incomplete.

These may have given rise to the propagation of deviant sexual choices which dismantle the assertion of heterosexuality as the normative sexuality.

In poststructuralist and postmodernist structure, the idea is to reverse the binary structure to allow a discourse on the other. There is more of a revolutionary temper in the existing order. The structuralist creed therefore connotes that once a discourse is built, it automatically gives room for a counter-discourse to be raised. Thus, with the workings of the postmodernist principles, grand narratives are dismantled to pave the way for smaller narratives, coupled with the "... haunting debacles of the past continuum" (Udoinwang, Affiah and Udoette, 2023) that are difficult to sweep under the carpet in the postmodern, postcolonial present. The reason for the continued response from these smaller narratives is to have a balanced and more objective discourse. When the other is discussed, space is created for the differences to begin to emerge. Hence, this gives credence to the emergence of queer discourse and criticism.

Queer is a relatively new branch of study or theoretical speculation and has only been named as an area in the 1990s. The term "queer" is more or less an appropriated term which is taken from its earlier derogatory nuances employed by the LGBTQ people and scholars as a way of boldly accepting their identity in the midst of dominant cultures that promote homophobic responses to sexualities that are unconventional. Key exponents of queer theory include Judith Butler, Adrienne Rich, Michael Foucault, among others, whose works on sexuality, identity and lesbian studies continue to be very pivotal in the field. According to Butler (2005), "queer theory emerged from gay/lesbian studies and pays attention to the social construction of categories of normative and deviant sexual behaviour. However, while gay/lesbian studies, as the name implies, focus largely on questions of homosexuality, queer theory expands its realm of investigation". In queer theory, an attempt is made to merge the earlier field of gay studies with lesbian studies and also account for other forms of deviant sexualities.

The basic assumption of the queer critics is that heterosexuality is not natural but rather, it is the social construction that conditions members of the society towards aligning their sexuality to the norms expected by the culture. Thus, in queer theory, there is recognition of how society conditions the sexuality of members in terms of what is seen to be acceptable or not. Queer critics refute hetero-patriarchy which is a term deployed to account for how patriarchal norms and structures promote compulsory heterosexuality and how it is biased in favour of heterosexuality. Harris (1991) opines that:

Queer theory insists that all sexual behaviors, all concepts linking sexual behaviors to sexual identities, and all categories of normative and deviant sexualities, are social constructs and set of signifiers which create certain types of social meaning. Queer theory follows feminist

theory and gay/lesbian studies in rejecting the idea that sexuality is an essentialist category, something determined by biology or judged by external standards of morality and truth.

For Klages (2005) and other queer theorists, “sexuality is a complex array of social codes and forces, forms of individual activity and institutional power, which interact to shape the ideas of what is deviant at any particular moment, and then operate under the rubric of what is “essential”, “natural”, “biological” or “god-given”.

In queer theory, the individual’s sexuality is not final or absolute but is seen as fluid, fragmented and dynamic, constantly alternating within ranges of possible sexualities. Therefore, it has to be noted that queerness does not exist mainly in the (sexual) act, in the literal or traditional sense of same sex relationships, but rather, queerness exists based on the sexual possibilities, situations and options which the individual finds himself or herself. This idea is particularly within the context of homo-social bonding which in conventional terms can be called “sisterhood” or “brotherhood”; an act where the female character turns to another female character for emotional and psychological support when crisis erupts in a heterosexual relationship.

Male bonding also occurs where the male character turns to another male character for understanding in an event where the relationship fails. Queer critics highlight instances in female relationships when queerness arises even though heterosexuals would not admit of such queerness. It tries to point out the fact that sexuality is not clearly defined but is based on a continuum. Hence, the queer reading of a text is that reading where sexualises the meaning of the text beyond conventional perceptions of sexuality.

Queer criticism concerns itself with the issue of gender roles. In literature, these roles are subtly interpreted and are deeply psychological. The roles create a set of expectations that define an individual’s identity. Udoette and Akpan (2023) posit that: “these expectations, among other things, include how men and women, as well as boys and girls, should behave and look like, and what they ought to do and also not to do”. For instance, the man who loves to be in the kitchen preparing meals where the kitchen is usually assumed to be the woman’s space, and also the case of a woman who takes on tasks that are traditionally seen to be exclusive of men is queer. What queer theory does is to sexualise these role reversals and once that is done, a queer reading of the text can begin. The queer critic also tries to account for the homoerotic dimensions of the text, that is, the depictions in a text that appeal or are likely to appeal to same-sex people.

Basically, queer theory is an activism directed into literary regions to refute biased perceptions against people with strange sexuality. The usual practice is to show how even heterosexual texts have queered meaning. Apart from this, there is also an attempt to date back the canon to show that homosexuality is as old as mankind and likely to be found in every society as against the usual notion that it is a strange development that came with modernism and as part of the degenerating cultural values of man.

It is noted that some societies, mostly Western societies, have changed their laws to accommodate queerness in all its forms, but this acceptability exists side by side with

homophobia and transphobia. There have been reported cases where queer people have been ostracized, shamed, beaten and even killed. In such circumstances, identifying oneself as having a non-normative sexuality is difficult because of the inherent dangers. This affirms Akpan and Akpan's (2022) observation that "Despite the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), more than six decades ago, there has not been any convincing progress in the aspect of entrenching full individual rights and privileges". It took great courage for people to start coming out in the 1990s. These were top celebrities who triggered series of agitations, rallies, public protests, demonstrations and many more which took years before lawmakers were persuaded to change the laws regarding the LGBTQ (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer) community and these laws have kicked a notch further with the legalization of same-sex marriages. However, in most part of Africa, some critics have considered the LGBT idea as part of colonization that spanned different levels, that the struggle is still ongoing. Affiah, Udoinwang and Amaku (2023) assert thus that "From the moment of its first contact with the West, from the yesteryears of colonialism to the present days of neocolonialism, Africa has been locked in a struggle against foreign domination".

Despite the accommodation of queer people by these Western countries, most African countries have rigidly kicked against homosexuality. This may not be further from the African cultural affiliation to heterosexual relationships, as Nwiyi and Udoette (2022) rightly aver that "cultural configuration dictates, to a large extent, what is conventional, moral, disdainful or otherwise among members of the community". Homosexual acceptance is perhaps one of the most socially unwelcomed, touchy and politically thorny topics to broach in contemporary Africa. Cock (2023 cited in Lyonga, 2014) is of the opinion that "the ferocious backlash against homosexuality that is characteristic of many African politicians and the strong homophobia within African populations is grounded in the "notion that homosexuality is 'unafrikan'".

Such anti-gay viewpoint has for a very long time been repeatedly espoused in African societies through Christian churches or Muslim doctrines, through strong political hate speech, customs and traditions and in day-to-day dialogue. Dunton (1989) buttresses Cork above when he argues that "in Africa, non-normative sexuality is read or studied and criticised as not only "unchristian but also unAfrican". Therefore, the rejection and criminalisation of homosexuality and the intense societal homophobia associated with it in the majority of African nations have forced most homosexuals to live closeted lives; hiding their sexuality from the society around them. It is for this reason that Udoinwang and Akpan (2023) aver that "the efforts at navigating African postcolonial societies out of the miasma of primordial ethno-conscious doldrums, socio-political corruption, moral atrophy, religious and gender violence... remains an important thematic aspect of modern African literature since the formation days till the present".

Within the African literary scene, the picture is not different. It is curiously noted that, in Africa, there have been little or no studies on sexuality generally, neither has there been on homosexuality specifically. Although, Rebecca Usoro and Monica Udoette (2014) incorporate the thematic range of African literature to include "all creative imaginations which articulate dimensions of social experience..."; the discourse on sexuality has been somewhat neglected. The subject has been treated as a taboo and is usually met with complete silence or outright rebuff. Nguyemi (2007), the gender sociologist observes that:

In most African societies, the subject of sexuality sparks angry reactions, when it sparks reaction at all...homosexuality is also considered 'a whiteman thing'-something most Africans only know exists in the white world somewhere across oceans, but which they do not, cannot, identify with them.

In other words, just like others discussed above, the idea of homosexuality is generally considered foreign to Africa, supposedly having been introduced by the white man. This has led to the mystification of sexuality as something not to be discussed. The consequence is that African writers rarely write about sexuality, as though it were not an aspect of African life. In the same vein African critics also rarely pay serious critical attention to this subject in their assessment of African literature, leading to what could be described as a conspiracy of silence. Furthermore, this conspiracy of silence seems to be adroitly reinforced by what Akpan and Udoette (2023) term "the highly patriarchal colouration of the African society".

However, the silence of African writers and critics on the subject of sexuality is gradually becoming insecure, with the events of the recent time. Indeed, the outlawing of homosexuality in many African countries and the spate of violence it has provoked has caused a stir in many parts of the world. Akpan (2021) views the above development "as an agonizing index of deformities that characterize the socio-political space of the postcolonial African nation states". This gross denunciation of individual choices and preferences amounts to the repudiation of rights and corroborates Usoro and Udoette's (2020) position that any "act that undermines individuality...may be termed as dehumanization".

The above has prompted an upsurge of writings in this direction. This affirms Akpan and Okon's (2021) that in the face of socio-political inanities, "literature becomes the rallying point and a convenient platform through which the situation could be projected and addressed". This also affirms Okpiliya and Akpan's (2020) argument that: "The author's commitment in exposing these realities in the society is in tandem with the sacred responsibility of a writer and, also underscores the all-important role literature plays in the society". In Nigeria for instance, writers like Jude Dibia, Chinelo Okparanta, Arinze Ifekandu, Chimamanda Adichie, Unoma Azua, among others, have begun to raise serious questions about sexuality through their works and advocacy campaigns. The same is true about writers like the South African Sello Duker, Tendai Huchu of Zimbabwe, Biyavanga Wainaina of Kenya, among others. In view of this, it becomes notable that the contemporary generation of African writers does not seem to share in the silence on those subjects which the earlier generation considered unspeakable. Akpan (2022) confirms this when he avers that "African writers, using various approaches and in all genres, have continued to explore, in their critical enterprises, these travesties of change and its socio-political and religious consequences in contemporary African society". They have begun to understand that "an accustomed recognition of certain kind of meaning of certain words and phrases...could result in a bias understanding of the world" (Etuk and Urujzian, 2018). To contest this, they seem to be interested in those aspects of human life that the previous writers shied away from, for reasons best known to them. The above corroborates Affiah, Amaku and Akpan's (2022) argument that African literature "... has always been a signpost for not only advertising its cultural milieu but also providing insights into its socio-political concerns".

It is in this spirit that this paper critiques Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* as one of the disruptive pathfinders in the crusade to confront this long silence on African sexuality. The study is also structured not only to advocate a reverse of the binary structure of heterosexuality as the normative sexual culture, but also to canvass for an accommodative social space for every individual regardless of his or her sexual identity.

Review of Related Scholarship

Since its publication in 2005, Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* has received a lot of accolades and reviews. But besides the fanfare that has trailed the novel in Western and African mass media, the novel has received rigorous scrutiny from expert critics of both the aesthetic and sociological appeal. For instance, Amonyeye (2017), in his article entitled "On the Censored Narrative: Toxic Masculinity and Disidentification in Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows*", describes the novel as an important gay advocacy fiction that has inspired many third-generation Nigerian writers like Unoma Azuah, Chinelo Okparanta, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and others to tackle homosexuality. The critic is of the opinion that in some parts of Nigerian society, there are so many "boxes" to be classified into, but the most important ones are tribe, religious affiliation and sex. He is critical of the Nigerian dependence on religion and its principles as the yardstick for measuring the essence of an individual's life. The author further opines that homophobia in Nigeria appears not to have eventfully materialized overnight but, an internalized process, nourished as the boundaries between the public and the private increasingly became blurred.

Amonyeye concludes that the novel does not only manifest elements of inter-sectionality by highlighting the dynamics between patriarchy, sexuality and the hierarchies which reinforce power imbalance, but also aims to clearly acknowledge that homosexuality exists in Nigeria, assign normalcy to gay people, highlight the hostility of the Nigerian society for gay people, and finally advocate for tolerance. Clearly, Dibia's text parallels what Udoette and Nwiyi (2015) project as characters attempt at "doing everything possible to enact the change they seek in their lives but social stereotypes ...seem to undermine their efforts".

Also, in his review of Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows*, Sokari (2014) expresses his deep admiration for Dibia who daringly explores a dreaded phenomenon in the African literary and social milieu. He avers that Dibia is more open and empathic towards gay men when compared to Wole Soyinka in *The Interpreters* and views *Walking with Shadows* as a "subtle manifesto" for the oppressed gay man in the society who constantly lives in denial of his sexuality in a bid to conform to the societal set standards of the ideal son, father, husband, brother and man in general, as the case may be. He likens Dibia to Binyavanga Wainaina, who does not shy away from taboo topics, including writing graphically about incest. The author concludes that the idea of sexual queerness is socially constructed and is a new form of colonization but does not explore in detail the factors behind homophobia among African elites, except suggesting that homophobes are either stuck in the past or are negatively influenced by American Pentecostalism.

Yakubu (2016) in his review of *Walking with Shadows* duly recognizes the novel as one which emerged at a time when Nigeria was battling with the idea of homosexuality as an "unafican" perversion. He reveals that although some early Nigerian writers and their writings hint at queer presences in their narratives. They however conceal the queer characters and their

gender role versatility to create portraiture of a strong, masculine image of a heterosexual male which practically overdoses the need to depict an alternative sexuality in fiction.

The critic praises Dibia for breaking loose of traditional and topical themes in African literature and “toppling the stale discourses of post colonialism, poverty, history” to construct brand new tales that create space for the queer body in literature. The critic further asserts that the theme of *Walking with Shadows* is a timely effort in African literature for trying to replace socially named and presumably stable categories of sexual orientation with a new fluid movement for varying individual homosexuality and bisexuality.

Okpiliya and Akpan (2021) in their interrogation of African sexuality in Dibia’s *Walking with Shadows* rather differ from the scholarships examined above. While others agree that homosexuality has been an integral part of African life, they emphasize the heteronormative nature of African society and maintain that such sexual identity is not only strange in the continent, but also part of the inglorious and continuous domination of African values by the West. The authors attribute the silence of African writers and critics on sexuality to the fact that sexuality has never been an issue in Africa, given the heteronormative nature of the continent. They conclude by applauding the Nigerian government for making efforts to stamp out this development in the country, through the signing into law of a bill criminalizing homosexual practices in the country. However, Udoinwang and Amonyeze (2020) fault the above action when they posit that “Nigeria with her voluptuous potentials for greatness and continental leadership soon descended into an anarchic hellhole soon after independence”.

It is against the backdrop of the above critical comments that this paper consolidates its position and aligns with the position of the above critical scholars, except Okpiliya and Akpan, by acknowledging the presence of homosexuality in Nigeria and refute as normal, the cruel treatment meted out to queer people by their families and society in general.

Broaching the Silence in *Walking with Shadows*

Walking with Shadows (2005) is Dibia’s debut in literary craftsmanship. From the blurb, the novel is said to be “the first Nigerian novel that has a gay man as its central character and that treats his experience with great insight, inviting a positive response to his situation” (about the author). In this novel, Dibia breaks the long silence on the prevalence of homosexuality in the Nigerian society, contrary to the popular-held opinion that the sexual preference is immoral and foreign. Whitehead’s quote in one of the preliminary pages of this novel bares it all: “What is morality in any given time or place? It is what the majority then and there happen to like and immorality is what they dislike.

This catchy quote foregrounds the universe where the novel is set. The quote is also stylistically motivated and perhaps aims at emphasizing the position of the author that morality is relative and dependent on the opinion of the “majority”. Hence, the acceptability of homosexuality basically lies in the hands of this majority who, through their whims and caprices, censor what they term “normative behavior” or “grand sexuality” and in the process silencing the voices of the “deviant”, “odd”, “queer” or “non-normative” sexuality. The quote further gives credence to Sokari’s (2014) assertion that “queer is the new colonised”.

The prologue of the novel which captures Ebele's baptism and need for rebirth opens to the reader the world of the little Ebele which literally means "sympathy" and connotes weakness (Amonyeze, 2017). He is a young boy who battles with his sexual identity since childhood. For instance, on his way to his baptism, he is captured by the sight of one of the male vendors. His fondness of Obinna, his brother's friend, among others, is the reason "his ten years old mind was in a hurry to rid itself of the pathetic person it had always known as Ebele" (15). Hence, for him, the baptism is going to cause Ebele-the queer boy to die spiritually and give room for Adrian, the ideal man with a lifestyle in conformity with societal approval, to be born.

Showing a mastery of linear plot and characterization, Dibia creates Ebele as Adrian's alter ego to represent all that society would have queers to be: weak, pathetic and in dire need of salvation. The prologue therefore showcases the plight of Ebele torn in between two identities and his resolve to embrace the personality of Adrian which is considered normative in the hetero-patriarchal Nigerian society.

Thus, *Walking with Shadows* is a pathetic story of Adrian, a young Nigerian head of risk business unit of a telecom firm, who battles to be accepted by his society despite his sexual identity. Largely set in Lagos, the novel reveals how Adrian's previously perfect marital life with Ada comes crashing after Tayo Onasanya, a vindictive ex-colleague discloses information about his gay past to his family. Once Adrian's sexual orientation becomes exposed to his family and general public, the author showcases with deep sympathy the crisis tearing Adrian's family apart on account of his sexuality. Ada, his wife, receives the news with great shock and retorts angrily: "you knew this and still deceived me and still married me and still had the guts to make love to me and put your thing in me" (23).

For Sokari (2014), "the infelicitous repetition of "still" in the quotation above, signals her shock, anger and bewilderment". Ada's shock and disdain are not far-fetched from the homophobic nature of Nigerians who see homosexuals as dirty, perverts and sex maniacs which is why she immediately opts for a HIV/AIDS test. For Ada, "being gay was certainly not in African culture. The whole idea was so foreign, so unnatural" (35). Not even Adrian's pacification could suppress her anger and pain: "Being gay was my past and when I met you, all that didn't matter since it wasn't me anymore and I loved you. Honey, I never wanted you to find out about that part of my life" (23). Ada dismantles Adrian's defense and revokes his ability to love as she utterly rejects him and sends him away. She exclaims: "Stop talking about love...I just need you to stay away from me and Ego...there is nothing for us to say to each other right now" (25). With this, Adrian leaves the house dejected and heartbroken and unsure of where to turn to for support.

Amidst his indecision, he finds himself back in the fold of his erstwhile gay friends, who give him the sense of belonging he craves. Udoette (2014) reveals that "basically the victim of oppression needs a kind of consciousness-raising move to realize that bonding and friendship is therapeutic". The foot mat in front of Abdul and Femi's apartment with the inscription "Welcome Home" (42) offers a calming reassurance to Adrian after Ada throws him out. His quick retreat to Abdul's flat and his nostalgic return to Champagne, the gay bar, hints where his heart truly is. Thus, Abdul's apartment becomes a safe haven for Adrian to negotiate his shaky identity. Amonyeze (2017) asserts that "the way the novel orders aspects of Adrian's

experiences in a cause and effect manner and creates an atmosphere of persecution buys into the fear of queer criticism" (14). Through this, Dibia showcases that the LGBTQ community which is constantly condemned by all and sundry is capable of showing deep love and providing the support denied its members by the homophobic society.

Dibia explores Adrian's childhood for clues about his non-normative sexual desire. Even as a child, Adrian had known that he was gay. He had always known that he was different from his brothers. His experience with Ekene in the bathroom confirms this as: "he felt that his closeness to Ekene was not entirely platonic. He had no name for it then...but as he grew up experiencing this feeling for other boys and then men, he knew the words: homosexual, gay!" (24). Being the second of three boys, Adrian, who was always ill and extremely shy, knew early enough that he was not like Chiedu who was his mother's favourite or Chika who was his father's champion.

Thus, he grew up a needy, attention-deprived child who would sneak behind his father, while the father combs his hair just for the tiny droplets of water to fall on him. For Adrian, these droplets were "showers of love", and through this way he could be touched by his father because this was the closest he ever felt to his father. This fuels the queerness in Adrian's behaviour. Adrian's fondness of Obinna, one of Chiedu's friends at school is queered. According to the narrator, "whenever Obinna was around, Adrian's eye lit up and he felt his heart flutter. When Obinna smiled at anything Adrian said, he was overjoyed for the rest of the day for being noticed (48-49).

Also, in movie choices, it is strange that Adrian's favourite; romantic comedy, was one with a hilarious gay character. Chiedu and his friends disrupt the movie featuring a gay character who the toddler obviously empathizes with and castigates the movie as "fagotty". Chiedu's nonchalant use of such foul language at an early age opens Adrian's childish eye to the heteronormative experience of ordering and the likelihood of his abnormality. Also, his favourite game happens not to be the violent or "manly" kind which his brothers force him to play in their parent's absence but rather the feminine game "ringaringa poker". This informs Yakubu's (2016) assertion that "these are the psychological factors proffered by Dibia himself in the narrative that might have all contributed in Adrian's sexual identity".

Furthermore, the reaction of Adrian's relatives, and the society at large, to his sexual identity illuminates the prevalence of homophobia in Nigeria. Adrian's brothers, Chiedu and Chika, like Ada, find it hard to recover from the shock. Chiedu, in a state of confusion, asks Adrian: "Why didn't you just keep this whole issue to yourself? No one had to know. We all could have just continued the way we were" (53). They would rather have Adrian live in denial in order not to stir up controversies in the family or society than come out of the closet and experience inner peace. Adrian feels elated that his "secret" is out in the open as he no longer feels the need to keep languishing in hurt and denial. Abdul one of Adrian's friends sums up the plight of the gay man in the society thus:

Everyday in a gay man's life, he is constantly hurt by the people he loves most. His family, his friends, and even society. We have to live with rejection every day and that hurts. We have to grin and bear it constantly so that other people are comfortable at our expense (33).

In Abdul's opinion, the society would rather have that queer sexual choices or preferences are kept silent in a bid to emphasize the pretense that they do not exist and that, the only form of sexuality prevalent in the Nigerian society is heterosexuality. For queer theorists like Dunton, Okolo, Amonyeze among others, this is the height of hetero-patriarchal conspiracy against the sexual minorities. For Lopang (2014), "the oppression and subjugation of the queer nation is the reason why earlier African novelists failed to adequately represent queerness in their works of art because for them, the need to project a worthy masculine picture to counter the stereotype of the African set by the westerners overrode the need to pay attention to such "unimportant things".

The reactions of Adrian's family to his sexual identity buttress the fact that even the family unit is not left out of homophobia as they all reject him as soon as the news breaks out. This reaction is typical in Nigeria today as families have over the years taken to social media, newspapers etcetera to openly reject their children's queer lifestyle. Udoinwang and Akpan (2022) aver that "the situation reflects the realities of present-day life-drama, the pervasion, the troubling and traumatising humanitarian situation". However, there are cases of more liberal and supportive families who are tolerant of sexual identities of their members. This attitude of supportive families is aptly described by Udoette (2014) as the penchant of a contemporary generation who often bridge communication gaps and "offers diversity in terms of ...shifting relationships as well as a plethora of ideas". In this narrative for example, it is after much deliberations that Chika and Ada then decide to accept Adrian and give him their support with Ada resolving to train Ego their daughter to be more liberal and accommodative of the LGBTQ nation more than she ever was. Dibia utilizes this part of the plot to advocate a more liberal approach to queerness in the Nigerian society. This has proven to be a welcome approach as the popular Nigerian showbiz personality Charles Oputa popularly known as "Charlie boy" sometime ago, took to his Instagram handle to express his support for his lesbian daughter Dewey Oputa, whose lesbian status has paved way for her cyber bullying and backlash from religious bodies.

Dibia reechoes the fact that tolerance and support by the family unit, especially, is very paramount to the LGBTQ nation who at this juncture is quite vulnerable and in dire need of love and affection. Thus, in this narrative, when Chika tells the wincing Adrian "I love you Bro" (160) after his torture in the hands of Pastor Matthew, Adrian is suffused with emotion and delightfully hugs Chika. Amonyeze asserts that Chika is the "author's fantasy of Nigeria as initially hostile, mocking, unsympathetic but finally transforming to empathize and accept the individual for who he is" (14). Dibia also presents the character of Rotimi as one of the novel's voices of reason through which he buttresses his point that right-thinking people should always stand with the oppressed minorities.

In addition, Dibia satirizes the attitude of religious bodies like the church, which has established itself as a core homophobic structure in Nigeria. Adrian's baptism and wish for rebirth at the beginning of the novel launches a broadside at the absurd belief that religion can correct sexual orientation. In Nigeria, the notion is that everything is fixable through religion and spirituality. Hence, it is not uncommon to hear people proffer churches as solutions for typhoid and fever, malaria, poverty, and of course homosexuality which is seen as "demonic". Adrian's flogging by Pastor Matthew reveals the dynamics of homophobic

violence perpetrated by the religious bodies which people should naturally turn to, for love and support. In the opinion of Ode (2011), “the religious correction reflects the possibilities offered by satire as a vehicle for socio-political and cultural commentary within the institution of the novel”. Thus, rather than being an agent of support for the debilitated and displaced homosexual, religion becomes an agency which metes out judgment to him.

Through the conversation among the women in Carol Obosi’s house, reality dawns on Ada that homosexuality is seriously entrenched in the Nigerian society but homosexuals have chosen to live “closeted” lives to avoid the harsh stings of stigmatization of the homophobic Nigerian society. Ada comes in contact with characters such as Carol, Temi, Hadjiya etcetera who all admit to having gay husbands, who practice their sexuality in secret but present a picture of heterosexual men to the world.

Again, Dibia propagates the argument of queer critics who assert that queerness transcends the sexual act itself to include attitudes, bondings, closeness and even thoughts. Hence, for the author, sexuality is biological and an individual could be homosexual by orientation but still indulge in heterosexual relationships. This is possible through heteronormativity which Gaudio (2014) describes thus:

Heteronormativity is not just a matter of acting or feigning one’s desire for intimacy with someone of the opposite sex. Rather, it involves concluding oneself as heterosexual citizen, in accordance with prevailing social norms. And in Nigeria, as elsewhere, heterosexual citizenship is a rather complicated, difficult affair.

Homosexuals therefore are forced by societal norms to settle down with the opposite sex whereas their hearts yearn deeply for something different. This therefore explains Adrian’s disinterest in sexual activities with his wife, how he is able to stay for six years without seeking male relationships and how he is able to resist the advances of Yahaya and Rotimi respectively. A confused Rotimi who claims to be heterosexual recounts his experience with Ella, (a suspected gay back in secondary school, who was always withdrawn and sober), his sexual experience with Debo his male friend and his attempt to initiate an affair with Adrian, perhaps to show an affinity with the latter. He ponders that although “he was not gay yet he would have kissed another man. He would have kissed Adrian” (153).

Heteronormativity causes the queer individual to live in denial, embrace heterosexual relationships but all the while feeling incomplete. Even the young ones exhibit tendencies of being queer. For instance, Nkechi’s little son, Kamdi is also perceived as queered. Like Adrian when he was little, Kamdi seems to prefer female toys, games and acts like a girl. This, of course, terrifies Nkechi who immediately tries every measure to make sure he does not turn out to be gay. These characterizations are Dibia’s tools for showcasing the magnitude of homosexuality which has taken over the country, continent and the world in general.

Also, Dibia highlights the extent of the homophobic attitude of Nigerians to the LGBTQ people. In this narrative, Mr John, with his exposure, enlightenment and academic qualifications treats Adrian with contempt when he discovers Adrian is gay. The narrator describes him thus: “Though John acted as pleasantly as always, Adrian could discover an

uneasiness in his normally cool countenance. He offered Adrian a seat but quickly withdrew his hand after a brief handshake. It was as if John was afraid that by touching him, he would be infected" (69). Others at the office, as well, do not hide their resentment of the one-time heroic colleague who was the toast of all. They murmur greetings at him, avoid eye contact and treat him with disdain. Even the security officers, who used to be at his beck and call, suddenly stop washing his car or hanging around to receive wads of naira notes which he frequently doles out to them.

Dibia also identifies gossip as a tool of social sanction on not only Adrian at his work place, but also Ada who feels its harsh stings at the wedding reception. It is the society's way of passing judgment on queer individuals and family, who would then become the topic of the day. In the grand scheme of things, Dibia projects a country which would be more liberal and accommodating of the emerging forms of sexualities featured in the postmodern world. For instance, Ada's promise to train her daughter to be tolerant and liberal to the LGBTQ nation is a typical echo of the author's wish for Nigeria to be totally purged of homophobia.

Conclusion

This study has revealed how Dibia has unpretentiously and skillfully crafted the narrative to showcase the plight of oppressed gay and lesbians in the Nigerian society. His commendable dexterity in setting off the queer discourse in the Nigerian literary scene may as well be one of the reasons why queer activism is fast becoming a trend in the Nigerian society. Dibia therefore breaks out of the erstwhile culture of silence which surrounds the discourse of homosexuality in Nigerian literature before now. Through analysis of some extrapolations in the text, the paper has not only argued that Dibia has clearly acknowledged that homosexuality exists in Nigeria, but has also attempted to assign normalcy to gay people, highlight the hostility of the Nigerian society for gay people and finally, use his writing as a tool of advocacy for tolerance. Through his activism, the author has become an agent of change in the homophobic and hetero-patriarchal Nigerian society.

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