

Demobilising the Phallic Order: Narrating Female Heterosexual Agencies in Queer Narratives

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Abstract

Studies on gender and sexual violence, most especially Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), have mostly regarded women and wives as victims and men, with husbands as perpetrators of violence (Chinweizu 1990; Coker-Appiah and Cusack 1999; and Fonchingong 2006). This study attempts a revisit of such discourses especially their representations in fictional narratives. In achieving this, I examine the perspectivisation of women and wives as upholders and perpetrators of sexual oppression towards male homosexuals and bisexuals in African fictional narratives. Two purposively selected texts – Alaa Al Aswany’s *The Yacoubian Building* and Jude Dibia’s *Walking with Shadows* –, representing Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa, are used in the examination and discussion of the roles of women in male-victimhood within male homosexual narratives. In the analysis, I apply Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of Agency as theoretical framework. Central to the discussions is the identification that women characters play critical roles as moral police and upholders of heteronormativity in the lives of the male homosexual and bisexual characters. The study concludes that the oppressive agencies of the women characters in the studied narratives repress the sexual agency of the queer characters; and that these are destructive to same-sex relations and culminate in emotional and psychological trauma.

Keywords: *victims, perpetrators, sexual oppression, homosexuality, agency, african fiction*

It is indubitable that there exist patriarchal structures and institutions that see to the sexual repression of homosexuals in African narratives on sexuality. Despite these restrictive spaces in the performances of their selves, however, homosexual characters continue to find ways to express their sexuality, even though in muffled tones. The gap that the present study addresses is the contributions of women to the denial, stifling, and withdrawal of male homosexual agency. One is thus motivated to ask: Are women involved in the oppression and traumatising of the male homosexual? If they are, how active are these women as participants and perpetrators of the ostracisation and denial of self-assertion for homosexual men within the constructs of African fictive narratives? Within which societal constructs do these women navigate their agency? In this study, different forms of power and the performances of control



by women, the multifarious dimensions to the oppression of male characters by women, and how the denial/lack of sexual agency by homosexual characters emanate from or are worsened by female characters, are identified, examined and discussed. More specifically, this study discusses how women's agency as wives is mapped out as perpetrators of sexual violence against homosexual and bisexual men. This is predicated on the realisation that sexual violence can manifest or be realised in multiple and different forms. These range from the psychological, emotional, and/or, physical, and these have significant implications on the lived experiences of the male homosexual characters.

The majority of Africans and African societies still find it difficult to come to terms with sexual practices different from heterosexuality. The fossilised attitudes and orientations to gender and sexuality enable the popularised perspectivisation of homosexuality as an aberration and transgressive act. These attitudes have also been manifested in the characters in the texts studied. Thus one finds male characters as well as their women counterparts speak out against homosexuality in the texts under study. However, what this study dwells on is how serious and life-defining the actions of the women characters in these works are and how the patriarchal repression homosexuals experience compares to the oppressive agency that these women assert. To this end, this study discusses how men, homosexual characters, are placed at the mercy of women characters who determine the outcome of the performance of these men's sexuality. Through these depictions and representations, one is enabled to identify and make statements on what African writers are saying on the place of women in controlling the sexuality of men and (re)writing the earlier narratives of male dominance upon the sexuality of women.

Although a significant portion of existing literature focuses on male dominance and masculine power, it is arguable that women have more power than is acknowledged for, or, even within certain situations, are more powerful than men. Even within contexts where women are oppressed by subsisting patriarchal structures, they still find ways to assert their influences as wives and mothers. It will be argued in this study that although homosexuals are regarded as less than men and are in the same class with women, as victims of patriarchy, women characters in the works to be discussed seem oblivious of the fact of their 'equative victimhoods'. Instead, and despite the fact that the writers give these women characters spaces within which they exercise their selves – being seen, heard and adequately represented –, these women are still acting within the framework of patriarchy. Thus, no matter how powerful they are, they are subordinated to and perform from within the limitations and affordances of extant patriarchal constructs.

Theoretical framework

Pierre Bourdieu's Agency theory, with particular attention to his concepts of *habitus* and *field*, is applied to the analysis of the fictional narratives. Pierre Bourdieu is a social theorist and his theory on agency and structure focuses on the ways social structures and human actions come together to foster social change and possibilities in a social order through what he calls 'habitus'. For Bourdieu, the knowledge of history reshapes the present and future possibilities as individual actions are based on what they know or believe. Bourdieu also posits that power is both culturally and symbolically created, in such a way that it changes through the coming together of agency and structure. He believes that established structures and power relations can be revisited and resisted, therefore he comes up with different concepts to explain power

and social change. These concepts are the concept of *habitus*, the notion of *capital*, *fields*, and *doxa*.

Habitus are socially constructed norms that guide the way individuals think and behave. It is “the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them” (Wacquant, 316). It is important to note that, though *habitus* are socially constructed, they are neither fixed nor permanent, as social actors can decide to change their *habitus* from one to another.

Capital can be material, social, cultural or symbolic, and the interplay among them brings inequality in different classes within society. This order of differences between classes is unconsciously accepted by people; it gives them a sense of who they are and what they can be in the society. Cultural capital influences and “provides the means for a non-economic form of domination and hierarchy as classes distinguish themselves through taste” (Gaventa, 6). Cultural capital is very important, as it plays a vital role in power relations and it can be acquired and transferred from one place to another. *Fields* are places or sites of performances where individuals express different kinds of capital, and they are also sites for competitions. Boudieu’s concepts of *habitus* and *field* are relevant in helping this study arrive at “a cultural understanding of the intersections of class, sexuality and gender” (Shilling, 231).

This is especially as Bourdieu’s theory of the *habitus* captures the nuances of everyday practices and the mundane rationality that informs them. The body is at the heart of Bourdieu’s sociology; it is recognized as a commodified, material bearer of symbolic value that develops in conjunction with social forces and, in this sense, is central to the maintenance of social inequality. Bourdieu recognizes the ways in which bodily orientations develop as the body becomes a lifelong project, integral to one’s sense of self. For Bourdieu, bodies bear the imprint of the social because of three main factors: the configuration of a person’s *habitus*, his or her social location, and the development of his or her tastes (232).

According to Tamale, “the study of sexualities cannot be abstracted from power... It is a dialectical, circuitous process that allows for back-and-forth movement and empathetic understanding, and recognizes the fusion between sexualities and various structures of power” (48). Therefore, Boudieu’s theory of agency is in tandem with this study’s objective of explaining social relations and exploring issues surrounding sexuality, and how homosexuals negotiate the structure of oppression and victimhood. It is also invaluable in its engagement of the notions of power and powerlessness, agency and victimhood, and how issues surrounding sexual identities can be internalised, revisited and negotiated. In addition, the concept of *habitus* through the dyadic postulations of structure and agency is explored in the portrayal and (re)presentation of sexuality in the selected novels.

Alaa Al-Aswany’s *The Yacoubian Building* and Religious Oppression

Alaa Al-Aswany’s *The Yacoubian Building* is the story of the residents of the Yacoubian building who, with the exception of a few characters, are portrayed as the struggling class of the society. With residents ranging from Zaki Bey el Dessouki, a womaniser, to Hatim the homosexual and Taha the religious extremist, Al-Aswany’s novel characterises flawed individuals who are disillusioned with their place within the world they find themselves in. From these, the author foregrounds his characterisation of Hatim, his main character.

Cairo, the setting of Al-Aswany's text, is a foremost metropolis in the Egyptian nation. As a African-Middle East country, Islamic influences are pervasive in its social, religious and cultural landscape. According to Eidhamar (2014), Muslim discourses have very strong implications on the views and stance of the publics on a contentious, divisive and combustible topic as same-sex relations. Although within studies that have explored non-heteronormative sexualities in Arab Islamic history, there is the identification that sexual relations between men have been represented as socially accepted and something frequently done, it must be noted that there is no permission for the indulgence in these actions within public glare (El-Rouayheb 2005). In fact, tensions exist continuously on the possibility and acceptance of living an LGBT life and being a true Muslim (Momin & Valliani, 2016).

Though the novel has episodic plots, it is easy to follow the story of Abdul and his wife and how they are influenced by the other residents of the building. Turan notes that the building is a microcosm of the larger Cairo community:

... a microcosmic representation of the society, garbage and bug infestation with connotations of decay, filth, and death as the shared destiny of the residents is rather alarming. Yet, this situation also compels the residents to interact and communicate with each other, move beyond their isolation and form unexpected relationships and alliances (10).

The alliances and relationships the residents form strengthen their perspectives and opinions on how to live and survive. Both the men and women form groups and alliances, and Alaa Al-Aswany shows how the women in the building formed their own alliance and discussed matters pertaining to their husbands and families. He particularly emphasises the women's perception of their sexual relations with their husbands, and this, in a way, forms women's opinions of themselves and their place in a patriarchal society. He states:

As for the women, and without regard for their degree of religiosity or morality, they all love sex enormously and will whisper the secrets of the bed to one another, followed, if they are on their own, by bursts of laughter that are carefree or even obscene. They do not love it simply because as a way of quenching lust but because sex, and their husband's greed for it, makes them feel that despite all the misery they suffer they are still women, beautiful and desired by their menfolk (Aswany, 15).

Sexual relations with their husbands for these women is their way of affirming that they are essentially needed in, and integral to, the lives of their husbands. Aswany characterises these women as dependent on the approval they receive as sexual beings. Accessing agency through the compulsory heterosexuality of their husbands thus becomes an important aspect of the lives of the women residents of the building, and it seems this is the only space within which they have a voice in the building from which they can exercise and assert their power. The women are carefree and vocal about this aspect of their lives and they exchange notes on their experiences. Aswany goes further by portraying the influence heterosexuality has on the daily activities of these women when he explains:

Do these brief hours of pleasure not furnish her with proof that her wretched life is somehow, despite everything, blessed with success? It would take a skilled painter to convey to us the expression on the face of a woman on the roof of a Friday morning, when, after her husband has gone down to perform the prayer and she has washed off the traces of love-making, she emerges to hang out the washed bedding – at that moment, with her wet hair, her flushed complexion, and the serene expression in her eyes, she looks like a rose that, watered with the dew of the morning, has arrived at the peak of its perfection (Aswany, 15).

Reducing women and their relevance in the novel to that of sexual objects whose life goals and achievements are determined by their ability to sexually satisfy their husbands is Aswany's way of showing how highly the women value their heterosexual relationships. This portrayal also serves as a background to understand how these women will react to and perceive a bisexual man or the performance of homosexuality by men in the building. Hidiya, Abdul's wife, is delightfully welcomed into the alliance of women, following her relocation from the village to join her husband in Cairo. She naturally becomes like the other women of the building, since they were raised within the same religio-cultural field, sharing their ideology and ways of life. Abdul however continues his homosexual relationship with Hatim and his "life proceeded virtually without problems, but his relationship with his wife Hidiya remained tense. She was happy with her cosseted new life, but something deep and sharp continued to smolder between them – it would flare up, then die down and sometimes disappear from sight, but it was there" (Aswany, 155).

Hidiya gets to know of Abduh's homosexual relations with Hatim, though her knowledge is still based on suspicions; the comfort she enjoys which she knows comes from her husband's friendship with Hatim keeps her mute. Her (in)decision on the situation may be viewed from two perspectives. The first could be an inability to wrap her head around the reality and to confront her husband on her suspicion/discovery. This is because not only has her husband been married to her and has fathered a child in line with the heteronormative expectations, he holds a reasonably respectable job, one which also demands a very high degree of hetero-patriarchal displays. The other inclination is in line with Murray, who is of the opinion that "Abduh's wife, Hidiya, knows but does not acknowledge that that her new cosseted life flows from her husband's homosexual liaison. Her public version for the favours is that Hatim appreciates that Abduh is honest and depends on Abduh's work" (184). Within the unfolding narrative, it is obvious that Hidiya leans towards the second option. This is easier for her as Abduh had suppressed his homosexual life to a point where it would be difficult for his wife to accuse him of nurturing and practicing same-sex relationships. Probably cognisant of the ambivalence of his wife, Abduh knowingly does not give voice to this part of his life and, by so doing, Hidiya also decides not to voice her suspicions. Leaning on the aphorism – see no evil, hear no evil, they thus found it convenient to exist from a vantage position of silence, deafness, and blindness. According to Guillaume, 'silence as doing' reflects the intentional withholding of overt action, and it is still a form of action 'from the perspective of the state/the powerful to that of the subaltern' (476).

The confusion on the state of affairs and the restrictive field from which they both act are further sustained in the interactions. Abduh knows that Hidiya's religious and heterosexual fields place her in a position to judge and criticise him. However, in order to make up for his inadequacies, Abduh who is "shamefaced and irritable, avoiding her eyes" (155) tries to force

Hidiya to speak out. To his scream of “Say something, you dumb cow!” (155), Hidiya only replies “God forgive you” (155). Hidiya does not want to be a part of Abduh’s performance of the closet. She knows that, for Abduh to freely live as a homosexual, he needs her complete ignorance of his acts or a level of covert acceptance shown through verbal acts, for to be in between, knowing and pretending not to know is unacceptable to Abduh. Abduh continues to look for ways to make the open secret about his homosexual relationship become totally open “[o]nce Abduh responded to a mysterious inner urging. He was sick of the pretense of ignorance and the oppressive weight of the matter on his heart, and in the depths of his soul he wanted a confrontation with Hidiya instead of this painful equivocation. If she would just burst out in his face and accuse him of being a sodomite, he would be freed of the burden and tell her everything” (Aswany, 155-6). It can be deduced that Abduh’s actions are prodded by feelings of guilt, first of his homosexual sexual dalliances which he internally adjudges as immoral, unacceptable and despicable; and the thought that he was not living up to the expectations of his wife. However, Hidiya on her part continues to make it difficult for him to navigate these treacherous misgivings by denying the acquiescence and shared peace which he craves. She also keeps up appearances with their neighbours by telling them that Hatim depends on her husband’s work because Abdul is honest. Hidiya’s actions are evocative of Banerji’s (2012) and Bonthuys and Erlank’s (2012) identification and assertion of the difficulty which the public acknowledgement and performance of homosexuality attracts in Islamic contestations of homosexuality.

Alongside her marked reticence to attend to and call out her husband’s behaviour, Hidiya is portrayed here as calculating and exploitative. One can submit that she is simply using Abduh for financial assurance while still maintaining her conviction of heterosexual and religious superiority. The financial status and struggles of the other men to earn a living in the building is evident to Hidiya and she knows how different and highly placed her husband is, financially, from them. Hidiya “deftly assigns [her husband] the job of nest provisioner; the job of nest protector; and the job of ogre or disciplinarian of the nest. If he fails to provision the nest to her satisfaction, he suffers her contempt, as well as his own, for not living up to his macho expectations” (Chinweizu, 74). Abduh is the sexual prostitute who works, grudgingly, to provide comfort for Hidiya. Sedgwick in *Beyond the Horizon* discusses what she calls the “epistemological privilege of unknowing” and the “privileges of ignorance” and this is the comfortable place within which Hidiya hides herself. She deliberately performs her ignorance of Abduh’s homosexuality so as not to become a party to his transgressive acts from the religious context which is used to denounce homosexuality. In line with this religious dictate, according to Zulkffli and Rashid (2016), homosexuals are publicly eschewed in Muslim contexts and are perceived as sinners. Hidiya latches on this knowledge although she also comfortably continues to enjoy the gains of her husband’s ‘work’. ‘Work’ within the context thus becomes a linguistic and an emotive shield for Hidiya. With it, she is able to navigate her denial of Abduh’s homosexual reality. Abduh on his part “was sick of the pretense of ignorance and the oppressive weight of the matter on his heart, and in the depths of his soul he wanted a confrontation with Hidiya instead of this painful equivocation. If she would just burst out in his face and accuse him of being a sodomite, he would be freed of the burden and tell her everything” (Aswany, 155-6). For Hidiya, performing ignorance or unknowing gives her the power to keep Abduh in his closet for as long as possible while she is also able to publicly act and assert the image of a perfect union. When Abduh realises that she knows of his homosexual relations and that she is merely exploiting him while enjoying the material comfort and other

privileges of ignorance and unknowing, he tries to be in control of events. However, it is clear that Hidiya is not ready to relinquish her position of unknowing alongside the benefits that accrue from her demeanour.

On his part, Abduh tries to show his wife that he is still the virile heterosexual man that she married and that his same-sex relation with Hatim does not affect his heterosexuality. Also, his knowledge of the perception of the women in the building about sexual intercourse with their husbands gives him an amount of leverage over his wife. He decides to make up for his shame by “making love to her extremely violently, as though he were trying to stop her thoughts or assaulting her to punish her for knowing about his homosexuality” (Aswany, 155). In fulfilling his connubial duties to her, Abdul secures his home and position among the residents of the Yacoubian building, while he also hopes that Hidiya will continue to keep his secret. He believes that with his exaggerated sexual performances, Hidiya, like the other women, will have something to show that her husband is truly taking care of her. While, in addition, and unlike the other women, she has a husband who provides for and meets her financial needs. Aswany portrays Abdul as an overburdened man who continually needs to prove to his wife that he is in charge and capable of providing for her needs especially financially and sexually. He continues to perform the complex masculinities of a heterosexual, a breadwinner, a homosexual, and a servant. He navigates these fields and in between his wife Hidiya, and his homosexual lover, Hatim, Abdul is seen struggling to satisfy both sides and keep these identities separately, and successfully.

Hidiya continues to enjoy her new life without guilt and pretends not to realise the power she has over her husband and the psychological struggle Abdul is going through. What is evident in her behaviour is her use of the Islamic codes to exonerate herself from Abdul’s acts on the one hand and also to make Abdul feel better about his transgressive acts. She specifies once that: “Abu Wael, may Our Lord preserve you for us and send you our daily bread by honest means. I wish you’d put aside a little money that we could use so you could open your own kiosk and wouldn’t owe anybody anything. Not Hatim or anybody” (Al Aswany, 156). While there is a subtle mockery of Abduh’s money-making route in her reference to ‘honest means’, in her own way, Hidiya prays and suggests that her husband should hold on to Hatim till he is able to save enough and start his own business. She encourages Abdul to continue with Hatim especially as he has a goal that will enable him to provide for his home and become a financially independent man. This continues till Hidiya knocks on the door of the lovers, carrying her sick son. They lost the child and everything changes. Hidiya is grief-stricken and no longer cares about financial comfort. The writer remarks that on the night their child died:

[...] they did not sleep. In fact, they became wrapped in a long conversation that soon turned angry and eventually became a bitter and violent fight whose echoes could be heard all over the roof. Hidiya’s voice could be heard raised in reproach and challenge, while Abduh’s voice grew lower and lower until it became completely silent (Aswany 210).

The details of their argument are not made known to the readers, but the information that Hidiya reproaches Abduh and that her voice was raised and was the stronger while Abdul’s was the weaker is suggestive to the readers that Hidiya blames their child’s death on her husband’s sinful acts, acts that, at this point, she asserts she was not a part of. Abdul’s eventual silence

after the ‘bitter and violent fight’ further suggests that he accepts the blame and accepts whatever terms and conditions his wife puts to him as his punishment. It is therefore no surprise that the next day, Abduh is in surly mood as he relocates his family from the Building to Imbaba, a decision that is clearly not of his volition:

On the following day, once the burial and mourning procedures were over, the roof people were taken aback to find a large truck pull up at night in front of the building. Then they saw Abduh helping the workers to move the furniture from their room. The residents inquired anxiously and Abduh informed them that they were moving to another room, in Imbaba. His face was dejected and his manner so off-putting as to stop them from showing their surprise or even from bidding him farewell with appropriate warmth (Aswany, 210).

From Abduh’s mien, it is evident to the readers that relocating from the Yacoubian Building is Hidiya’s idea and that he is merely complying because he has no choice. Hidiya capitalises on Abduh’s ill-feeling and remorse over the death of their son and his perceived complicity in the death by his unavailability. She enforces her will on her husband and cuts him off completely from Hatim and the residents of the building who he had formed an alliance with overtime. Other residents are shocked at the sudden decision to relocate. They are further shocked at Abduh’s withdrawn countenance, one which contrasts to his regular open and welcoming outlook. Hidiya’s influence on him and her use of religious guilt to keep Abdul in order is quite effective so much so that when Hatim successfully finds Abdul after several attempts, Abdul did not welcome the idea of a reunion with Hatim. He

suddenly exploded, “Stop it, Hatim Bey! God forgives us, my son died because of me.”
 “Meaning what?”
 “Meaning Our Lord punished me for sinning with you.”
 “So everyone whose son dies is being punished by God?”
 “Yes. Our Lord, Glorious and Mighty, ‘delays but does not forget’. I offended greatly with you and I deserve to be punished”
 “Who made you believe that? Your wife Hidiya?”
 “What business is it of yours if it was Hidiya or anyone else? I’m telling you it’s over between us. Each one goes his own way. I don’t see you and you don’t see me ever again.”

His voice was agitated and strangled and he was shouting and waving his hands as though to push himself past the point of no return (Aswany, 231).

In rejecting Hatim’s offer of a continued homosexual relationship, Aswany makes it evident to Hatim and his readers that Abdul was acting the religious script his wife had written on his mind. The fear of Hidiya and by extension of the Islamic codes restricts him from engaging in homosexual relations again. Within these codes, homosexuality or being gay is represented as deviant, immoral, and an action of rebellion against God; they also discountenance the possibility of a gay person recognising as Muslim (Jamal 2001; Siraj 2009). By the time Hatim becomes successful in using money to lure Abdul back for just a night, “Abdul decided privately that he would not inform Hidiya that he had seen Hatim because if she knew she would make his life hell” (Aswany 233). This is the writer’s first time of making the readers

know, directly, of Hidiya's influence over her husband since the death of their son. Making Abduh's life a living hell is Hidiya's way of punishing her husband and holding him accountable for the loss of her child. Aswany continues to describe how Hidiya makes Abduh suffer:

In fact, she hadn't gone a day since the death of the child without fighting with him and abusing him and calling God's wrath down upon him. The sorrow had caused her to lose her mind and she had become a heavy burden on his nerves, treating him as though he had murdered his son with his own hands. The sad thing was that the feeling of guilt had seeped into him from her and taken him over, often preventing him from sleeping (Aswany 233-4).

This excerpt shows how Hidiya plays the victim in order to make her husband suffer for the death of their son. Filled with sudden piety and absolving herself of all complicity in the whole event, she takes up the role of the religious clergy who reminds her followers of the impending wrath of God over sinners. She constantly reminds her husband of his son's death and the need to distance himself from the cause of his spiritual downfall, his homosexual affair with Hatim. As the religious police in Abdul's life, she knows that the power of guilt is enough to keep her husband in check and she uses this to her advantage. It is from this hangover and repetitive imposition of religious ideals that Abduh goes to meet Hatim for their date. After emptying "a number of glasses" (Aswany, 234) of whisky, "Abduh slaked his lust in Hatim's body three times in less than an hour without uttering a single word, as though he were enthusiastically performing an unwelcome task in order to be quit of it" (Aswany, 235). During his drunken state, one imagines that Abduh acts his true self, without inhibition. Within him, he longs for Hatim and would wish to escape from his wife's nagging, to fulfill his sexual longing. He acts this out by physically revealing his lust for Hatim's body thrice. However, when the alcohol wears out, Abduh comes back to his senses. Remembering how his life is with his wife and her religious expectations, he decides to choose between heterosexuality and homosexuality.

With his wife's influence and oppressive presence overshadowing Hatim's, Abduh "let out a hideous noise, something like the roar of an angry wild animal, and fell on Hatim, kicking him and punching him. He grabbed hold of him by the neck and started beating his head with all his might against the wall till he felt the blood spurting hot and sticky over his hands" (236-237). Hidiya becomes the force that influences and directs Abduh's actions especially as he sees killing Hatim as a sort of cleansing and propitiation for his sins. In personifying the corruption, immorality and lust which he feels into the person of Hatim, he realises that as long as Hatim is still alive, he will continue to have to choose between heterosexuality and homosexuality. This sustained and perpetuating contention will ultimately ensure that his wife will continue to guilt-trip him. He is thus condemned into becoming a murderer, while Hidiya, for whom he had gone the whole way to satisfy and please, will once again likely absolve herself of the crime.

What stands out in Hidiya's role in Abduh's eventual downfall is that she consciously exercises her hold over her husband's life as a matriarchal figure. Not only is Abduh cognisant of this in his consistent attempt at fulfilling her needs and desires, he also is unable to accept his sexuality and instead runs away from its acknowledgement. Hidiya's compulsive nature of reining in Abduh's bisexuality however is often to her personal gains and towards ensuring that her husband lives in tandem with the society's definition and construct of masculinity.

When she gets information that Abduh does not stay within these normative lines but had instead strayed, she first wielded silence as a manipulative tool, after which she resorted to constant nagging, linguistic bashing and moral denunciations. Everything however goes downhill with the child's death, where Hidiya's reactions turned violent. Although it is obvious that a child's death may have huge psychological toll on the parents, Hidiya does not provide Abduh any emotional opening to mourn. He is made to feel guilty as if he had intentionally strangled the child to death with his own hands. Abduh does not come back from this deprecatory ostracisation. It is arguable that Hidiya would have been contented with sharing his husband for the financial safety he benefits from Hatim while also keeping the public image of a happily married woman who is enjoying her 'heterosexual' husband if not for the huge loss which the death of the child represents. Thus while Abduh bears the brunt for his attempts to escape from himself, to conform to the standards which his wife has established for him, Hidiya represents the invisible moralistic conscience, albeit a fallible one, which results in Abduh's murderous rage.

Punishing a Homosexual Past and Breaking the Home Front in Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows*

Walking with Shadows is the first Nigerian novel that openly discusses the plight of homosexuals in Nigeria. The work is about Adrian, a homosexual, who changes his sexuality, and marries Ada so as to be accepted and respected in society. He also becomes a father, increasing his heterosexual status. A vengeful former employee, Tayo, however outs Adrian's sexual past to Adian's wife, and this becomes the beginning of an end for Adrian and the world he built for himself. Dibia's novel shows how socially constructed norms about sexuality continue to hinder the agency of sexual minorities in African countries like Nigeria.

Women's roles as primary agents in enforcing heteropatriarchal norms and forcing the male characters to conform to hegemonic masculinity are evident in Dibia's work. The character of Ada, Adrian's wife, and her politics of othering and exclusion will be examined in this section so as to determine the role she plays in forcing Adrian to seek for a home outside the shores of Nigeria. It is evident in the novel that belonging and having a home is very important to Adrian as this is the catalyst that made him change his sexual orientation. By the time Adrian knows that his vengeful ex-colleague had called Ada, his wife, to leak his secret, all he could think of is Ada and the home he had built with her. He fears that "his world as he knew it would be destroyed" (Dibia, 19) and he will be alone. The fear overwhelms him so much so that even after he got involved in an accident on his way home to see Ada and tell her his story, all he could think of is how to get home and how "[h]e was going to lose his family. He was going to lose his life; a life that had taken him a long time to build" (Dibia, 20). Dibia makes it plain to his readers how much value Adrian places on his heterosexual marriage. After he had come to the acceptance that he can perform heterosexuality, he had done all he could to successfully perform heteronormative masculine role publicly and has attached great emotional attachment to his marriage. Ada who had heard the news he wanted to tell her by himself confronts him with "Is it true? ... Apart from me, have you been with another one... another *man*?" (Dibia, 22). Putting *man* in italics here, Dibia calls attention to the fact that Ada might not have worried so much if the 'another one' her husband had been with had been a woman. "When she said "*man*", it was in a low murmur forced out of her breath. Her eyes held his with desperation, pleading for him to say it was all a lie" (Dibia, 22). Adrian's fate lies on him

affirming the fact that he had been a homosexual before he married Ada though Ada is not directing the question to him in a way that will make it simple enough for Adrian to discuss with her his sexual identity crisis and how he decided to be a heterosexual. She persists, ““Are you gay, Adrian?” ...a little too calmly. “Have you been gay all this while we’ve been married?”” (Dibia, 22). The fear of not being understood and rejected overclouds all other feelings for Adrian and like a small child anticipating an impending punishment, Adrian struggles with how to give voice to his sexuality and to ‘out’ his past to his wife. Dibia describes the situation thus:

Adrian finally looked away. His heart was beating so fiercely (sic) she must have heard it, and there was an ungodly throbbing in his head. He could almost swear that she could hear his heart beat. His legs became weak. His mouth dried up instantly making him thirsty. His breathing was short but deep. He remembered this feeling as a child when he had done something really bad and his dad would tell him to go and kneel down in his room and wait for him. This was the feeling of impending punishment. But the waiting was the real punishment, not necessarily the beating to come (Dibia, 22-23).

It is obvious that Ada constitutes a yardstick for Adrian. This is the kind of power and hold that Ada has on her husband and, though Adrian seeks love, understanding and tolerance, he is aware that his wife might turn out to be like his parents and brothers. After explaining that his homosexual life ended before their marriage, Ada refuses to come to terms with his explanation. ““You were?”” She repeated it slowly. “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). It becomes clear to the readers that Ada is not considerate of Adrian and only thinks about herself. Using the word ‘thing’ to describe Adrian’s penis shows how she reduces Adrian’s attempt at heterosexuality to nothing worthy of consideration. She, of course, doubts that Adrian ever really loved her; instead, their marriage had only been a ruse, a convenient means for which he had merely covered up his tracks. She also concludes that their sexual activities together had been a fake and forced performance, since Adrian had been deceptive in his sexual orientation. Dibia makes his readers pity Ada’s plight as she is the deceived woman who marries a homosexual unknowingly. She reasons:

This could not be happening to her, [...] she had the perfect marriage. She was the envy of her friends. She had a lovely home, a beautiful child and a caring husband with a fantastic job. How would she face the world and hold her head up proudly? How would she face her family, *his* family? How would she tell her daughter her father was a fraud? How could she live with him? (Dibia, 23-24)

Ada had married Adrian because he is handsome, successful and financially buoyant. Subsequently, he had successfully performed heteronormativity and lived up to Ada and the society’s expectation of a man. Ada had been a beneficiary of heteropatriarchy and parts of the dividends she had enjoyed is being the envy of her friends. As Adrian no longer conforms to Ada’s expectation, she starts thinking about herself and how she would fix “the broken pieces of her life”. Adrian begs her: “This is not necessary, Ada. I know you are upset, I understand that, but don’t do this. This will destroy us, our family” (25). While acknowledging the validity of Ada’s upsetness, Adrian attempts to appeal to Ada’s sense of reasoning so that they can

together make a proper decision, one he hopes will not lead to the destruction of their family. Ada, beyond being consoled and ignoring reasoning and tolerance, sends Adrian out of their home and Dibia, in his narration, follows the thoughts of Adrian. He is very concerned and worried about the outcome of his outing in relation to his wife, daughter, workplace, and extended family. The author writes:

WORRIES FLOODED in his already troubled mind as Adrian drove off. Was he on the verge of losing his family? Maybe. Had he committed a crime for loving a woman and creating a beautiful family with her? Perhaps. What was he really being punished for? Being gay? Betraying his sexuality? Going straight? Being a committed husband and father? Exposing fraud at his workplace?

But he didn't want to be away from his wife, his daughter. They had become an integral part of his existence. They had been the support he had needed for years. All his life he had been afraid that he would end up alone, and they had been there to let him know that this would not happen. Now, he felt very alone. Abandoned. And it was scary (Dibia, 26).

Giving the readers the opportunity to see how intense Adrian's fears are is Dibia's way of shifting the readers' sympathy from Ada to Adrian. Dibia uses capitalisation to call attention to Adrian's psychological trauma after his encounter with Ada, especially as his fears are becoming a reality. The excerpt also interrogates the conundrum which homosexuality represents for the homosexual and for the larger society. In a quandary, Adrian wonders why homosexuality has been criminalised and why he is being punished for his attempts at struggling to meet the societal demands of being heterosexual and building a family in line with normative constructs. The excerpt also foregrounds the bivalence of the psychological turmoil to which homosexuals are subjected: he is restricted from, actually forced out of, the field of being a full-blown homosexual and yet is also being denigrated for performing heterosexuality because of his past, a past he continually runs from. His immediate fear is of losing all he had worked hard to build: his family, and being abandoned, left alone. Unfortunately, instead of eliciting understanding and pity from Ada in acknowledgement of his personal struggles and attempts at fulfilling her expectations, Ada's cultural knowledge and understanding of masculinity and sexuality does not embrace Adrian's homosexual past, or his claim to performing heterosexuality and being faithful and committed to his heterosexual marriage. For Ada,

[...] being gay was certainly not in African culture. The whole idea was so foreign, so unnatural. But while everyone knew it existed, the probability it would be so close to home was one she would never have imagined. There had been people in school she suspected of being gay, and she had always believed she was tolerant of their lifestyle and sexual choices. She could hardly call herself tolerant now! Now that it was her reality (Dibia 35).

Ada's thoughts expose her understanding of a homophobic society whose norms are clearly against homosexuality. This field of knowledge is where she acts from and she is honest enough to agree that she is influenced by this cultural scripting. She does not understand or believe how possible it is for Adrian to change his sexuality from a homosexual to a heterosexual. She

is fixed in her idea of what homosexuality is, an aberration that will bring shame to her. Ada represents a large group of people who, in real-life, mouth being homosexual allies but who, when faced with challenging situations, betray their homophobic sides. Thus, although Ada had always consented to and acknowledged the presence of homosexuals from her school days and had assumed that ‘she was tolerant of their lifestyle and sexual choices’, she is unable to endure it when it comes close to her, becomes her reality. Ada starts to think over the signs she had ignored over the years about Adrian’s physical looks. She recounts that:

Adrian was a pretty man, gentle in spirit with an elegant gait. She had once told him he walked funny, a calculated yet animated strut. He spoke with elegance and polish. His hair was always in place, always perfect. His eyebrows a perfect bow. His mustache eternally trimmed. The twinkle in his eyes when he laughed! His voice? Soft and musical ... Adrian was so immaculately neat. He was always arranging things and had all the best ideas for doing up the house. Those subtle signs and she had totally ignored them, even when her spirits had whispered to her (Dibia, 37-38).

Ada reduces Adrian’s masculinity to his physical appearance and she reminds herself that “[h]e wasn’t exactly her type” (Dibia, 38) and she would not have married Adrian if not that “her type of men were not interested in her” (Dibia, 39). Her preference of men totally negates what her husband represents, as she “liked her men a little rough around the edges and not so pretty” (Dibia, 39). Adrian’s smooth ways and perfect outlook are not in line with Ada’s masculine ideals, and she reasons that she had married him “out of her own selfish need ...” (Dibia, 40). She models her expectations of masculinity along the lines of roughness and violence and in marrying Adrian, “[s]he wanted him to be more aggressive, more man” (Dibia, 41). Again, Ada acts out the general notion that surrounds homosexuality: that homosexual men are always effeminate. Being picky about looks and spending so much time preening are regarded as qualities which patriarchy has not availed to men. Men are often sexualised as rough, gruff, coarse and un-cosmetic. And Adrian does not fit these specifications. Surprisingly, however, the qualities which Ada found smooth and endearing, although still short of her expectations, are suddenly rubbished because of her knowledge of Adrian’s homosexual past. Ada does not act alone. Her idea of the importance and necessity of marriage in order to fulfil societal demand trickles at the background. Dibia shows how much Ada’s marriage meant to her. Ada was brought up in a strict African home where her movements were restricted and marriage becomes a means to escape and become independent:

[w]herever she was, she had to be home by seven or else her father would ground her. ... No boys in the house, no boys on the phone and no late nights. She hadn’t developed any good social skills to help her in the men department. ... she found herself emotionally challenged when it came to meeting the opposite sex (Dibia, 39).

Her situation is exacerbated by the fact, that prior to her meeting Adrian, she had been a naïve and unexposed lady in terms of relationships with men. Thus, it was easy for Adrian to sweep her off her feet. Upon knowing of Adrian’s sexuality, Ada is therefore distraught because she feels that she had struggled more than Adrian to make her relationship with Adrian successful and lead to marriage as it was for her “[a]n escape from her boring existence! Independence from her family!” (Dibia, 40). Her marriage becomes a ‘power arena’ for her, a place where

she has agency, freedom and can assert authority. Ada is portrayed as a woman whose ideas about sex, sexuality and masculinity are shrouded in ignorance. She grows up in a culture where there is little or no discussion on sexuality and she is shaped by this background. She knows almost nothing apart from what her parents and restricted environment allowed her to know. She is out to please the society and her parents and she abstained from premarital sex and married, a virgin, because of what her parents “would say if they were to find out” (41). Dibia makes Ada the woman whose orientation and education about sex is laidback and full of stigma for women. It is therefore clear that the relationship was one between the naïve and the reticent. Dibia explains Ada’s unworlly innocence thus:

She believed that after sex a woman would be branded with the stains of the act. Sex would be imprinted on her and people would be able to smell it. She believed she would even walk differently, giving herself away. Her young mind had been programmed like this, which was quite ridiculous as she was educated. Yet no amount of school could erase a lifetime of the dread inspired by her parents’ warning about sex. Then there was the risk of pregnancy (Dibia, 41).

Sexuality for Ada is fixed in heteronormativity and her character shows that as an individual that had been brought up to dread normative heterosexual sexual relations and regard it as a dirty act, coming to terms with homosexuality will be almost impossible. She is also always mindful of public perception of her actions and indulgences. The power Ada acquired as a married woman becomes more pronounced when she becomes aware of Adrian’s past homosexuality. She becomes the authority to decide if Adrian’s actions were permissible or not in her home. In essence, Ada, a victim of regulated female sexual desire who has internalised the restrictive norms surrounding sexuality, becomes elevated in her status in the social hierarchy of gender due to her heterosexual ideals. It is from this background that she acts as an agent to oppress Adrian who had been repressing his homosexual desires over the years in order to be accepted and have a home of his own. She exercises her heteronormative and moral superiority and sends Adrian out, rendering him homeless. In trying to come to terms with her oppressive actions towards Adrian because of his sexuality, Ada compares her mind-set about her job as an interior decorator, a western import, and her perception of her husband’s sexual difference and

[...] realized the irony of the services she provided and the cultural values she wanted so desperately to hold on to. She was selling modernity and globalisation... . Most of her best pieces were imports from the West, from Europe, and America. Yet while embracing the aesthetics of these places, she was not willing to adopt the parts of their culture that challenged that which she held dear as traditional African values. She still strongly believed that the concept of homosexuality was very much contrary to African culture. It was an import, like violent rap music, sophisticated armed robbery, nudity as fashion, and all rubbish (Dibia, 135).

Ada is portrayed as purposeful in directing her anger at Adrian for being a homosexual before he married her. She felt cheated and deceived and “[t]he thought of Adrian brought a wave of bitter anger in her” (57), she “sounded curt” (Dibia, 81) to Adrian on a call, speaks “coldly” (Dibia, 81), speaks “defiantly” (82), on a phone call with her, “Adrian could hear Ada’s

restrained breathing, masking her seething anger”(82), cuts “him off from his home, his family” (82), had wished that Adrian will look “haggard and weighed down with worry ... suffering from all this” (90), “backed away from him and remained mute” (93), “made him uneasy being alone with her” (93). She guilt trips Adrian: “Why me?.. why did you make this happen to me...” (93), “I was a virgin, Adrian. I had no past to share with you and you put me at risk of HIV” (94). At a point, she could not bear to think of Adrian or the times they had spent together so much so that when her daughter, Ego, who resembles Adrian a lot, tries to hug her, “Ada almost tossed her aside in shock” (36). Dibia depicts her as a good example of a woman scorned, a woman who tries to get back in her own way.

Ada’s internalised homophobia and actions make Adrian’s fears come true. He had wished for love and acceptance from his wife and when she sends him out, the days he spent in the hotel “had been two days of torture” (82) for him, “the loneliness was crushing him”(82) and he craved her “understanding and love, or he would lose faith in himself” (83). He tries to “block the pain; block out the fear” (74) by “channelling all his energy into work” (74). He had the gait of “a defeated man” (95). There is “pain and anguish in Adrian’s heart” (105) and all he could remember is “Ada rejecting him and asking him to leave” (105). When Adrian visits Abdul, the latter notices that “Adrian was in bad shape and what was more significant ... was that he was smoking again. That was not a good sign” (117). Adrian’s eyes were “wild like a beast. There was a lost look in his eyes, a pained look filled with desperation” (117). This description resounds the extent to which Adrian has been hit by his family travails.

Dibia gives Adrian the opportunity to voice out his trauma and fears. He tells Abdul how much his marriage and home mean to him as it is the home he made for himself: “I can’t lose my family. I’ve worked so hard to have what I have today. I’ve had to make so many sacrifices. I had finally found some acceptance in my sad life and now this!” (118). Adrian and Ada had married for the same reasons, to have a home of their own, have freedom and agency and though Ada has been heteronormative, all the while, Adrian seeks for a home that will totally change his personality and sexuality. It is this need for a home that Adrian tries to make clear to Ada as he solicits her support. Adrian even renounces his past as a ‘sad life’, invariably suggesting that being with Ada and having a family are what make him happy. As it is evident that the power for Adrian to have a home rests on Ada, Adrian tries to make his wife reason along with him and to become convinced that he is a changed homosexual. The performance of a changed sexuality is strange to Ada and, in her continued resistance, Adrian rethinks his sexuality once again and decides that he had been untrue to himself because of his need for a home.

The plight of African mothers when their children fail to conform to societal expectations is raised by Dibia. For Dibia’s women characters, especially Adrian’s mother, Ada, and Nkechi, Ada’s cousin, the need to mould socially acceptable men becomes one of their duties. Ada who is a wife thinks her husband is who he is because of her failings. She queries: “I was asking myself all through if it was my fault. Maybe I turned him away. Maybe I wasn’t doing something right... You can’t know how inadequate I felt” (73). After coming to terms that she could not be solely responsible for Adrian’s sexuality, her thoughts shift to Adrian’s mother and how relieved she had looked when Adrian married her. Nkechi becomes worried when she noticed over time that her son, Junior, has effeminate traits. Her maternal instincts realises that playing with dolls will make him “become one of those sissies” (101). She had noticed a pattern, “never see[n] him playing with the other boys outside. He has footballs and other toys but he prefers to play with Kamdi’s toys” (101), he is “usually too

quiet and withdrawn” (99), he is “effeminate” (166) and she asserts that it is “my duty to notice and correct it before it is too late. I can’t encourage him to continue with his girlish ways” (166). Nkechi, Ada’s cousin, had earlier snapped at and hit her son, acting “out of fear” (100) and her children had been shocked at her actions. Her husband is depicted to be more acceptable of their son’s difference and warns “[m]y son is not a homosexual ... And don’t you ever lift your hand to strike him again” (101). Nkechi “could not bear the thought of raising a boy who would turn out to not be a real man” (102). She takes it upon herself to mould her son’s masculinity and sexuality along the normative lines especially after knowing of Adrian’s homosexuality. She is ready to overlook the fact that her son avoids her as long as he turns out ‘well’. Nkechi fears to be in the position of Adrian’s mother in the future. Adrian’s mother has done “everything to make him normal” (183) and the absence of love and acceptance that Adrian experienced while growing up was one of her ways of hardening him when his parents noticed that he was weak (182-3). In the ways of the traditional society, she is the failed mother who failed to instill the necessary values in her son. In this cultural space, her son is not acceptable and she is the remote cause. After Adrian is forcibly outed and Chiedu makes him go through exorcism, Adrian’s mother visits him. Adrian, expectant of love and care, is disappointed when his mother in different forms and using different words repeat “... why are you doing this to us?”. It is evident that she is a matriarch on the mission to remind her child that there is a community larger than him and even though Adrian might regard himself as an individual who deserves his happiness, he is a part of a whole, a cultural structure with expectations. Apart from repeating the words ‘we’ and ‘us’ to remind Adrian that he is a part of the group, she subtly tells him that he is regarded as an ‘Other’ who will not be accepted or tolerated till he conforms to the expected norms. It is ironical that Adrian’s performance of heteronormativity is misunderstood by his family and the society he wishes to please. He is no longer the ‘Other’ but he is still regarded as such.

These women characters are made to take up the roles of (re)directing and (re)modelling the masculinities and sexualities of the non-conforming male characters in the novels using different means. They give what they regard as ‘tough love’ so as to get these men to accept and conform to heteropatriarchy. In exercising their power, these women uphold traditional heteronormativity which they regard as an African standard that cannot be lowered. As earlier discussed, due to Ada’s rejection of Adrian and disinterest in continuing their marriage, Adrian has a rethink of his life and sexuality. He realises that his life had been a lie all the while and though he would have still remained a heterosexual had Ada been willing, claiming back his homosexual identity is the best for him. According to Okolo “although his family later begins to sympathize with him, he relocates: what he needs is not their sympathy but their understanding, acceptance and full integration into their lives” (5). Dibia makes it evident to his readers that Adrian would have remained in Nigeria, a homosexual, like his friend Abdul, if his family had accepted him for who he is especially at the point when he realises that he could no longer perform heteronormativity.

Conclusion

That women play critical roles in the perception, performance and the negotiation of homosexuality among gay men has been asserted in this study. It has been established thus far that the inability of women characters, in the narratives studied, to deconstruct sexuality and accept the possibility of homosexuality is rooted in the women’s personal gains, which could

be based on economic considerations as in the case of Hidiya; and hinged on social status as in the case of Ada, Nkechi, and Adrian's mother. Hidiya's psychological and emotional influence on her husband until he kills his lover – Hatim, Ada's rejection of a continued heterosexual marriage with Adrian which makes him lose what he needed most: a home to call his own, make them complicit in the sexual oppression which have become commonplace occurrences in the victimhood of the homosexual community. These women characters, through their exercising of their power within the patriarchal structures of hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality, become accomplices and active participants in the ostracisation of homosexuality and they see to it that these men do not practice their sexuality freely (Herek, 1).

According to Hardiman, Jackson and Griffin, oppression is “a system that maintains advantage and disadvantage based on social group memberships and operates intentionally and unintentionally, on the individual, institutional and cultural levels” (58). The heterosexual women discussed in the texts have an advantage over the homosexual characters because of the difference in their sexualities and the social acceptance of one and the rejection of the other. In the hierarchy of patriarchy, it is through this sexual difference that these women have power and dominance and are able to perpetrate physical, psychological and emotional violence on the homosexual men. Through their actions, one perceives the hierarchisation of sexualities and masculinity with heterosexual men topping the pyramid, followed by heterosexual women, while homosexuals exist at the base.

Hidiya and Ada, as wives, use what Chinweizu calls bridepower, and ‘wifepower’ to control their men. These women place their husbands in positions of weakness and deprive them of agency, as they want them to fit into the traditional roles that society has scripted for them. It is clear that these women believe that there are patriarchal privileges they stand to benefit from if these men conform. It is also apparent that, although these men would have preferred to be active players in determining and expressing their sexual preferences, it is the women in their lives that exert measures to control, limit or destroy such possibilities.

From the foregoing, the women characters in the novels discussed in this study can be regarded as members of a retributive system that rewards goodness and punishes perceived wrongdoings. They are members of what Fry calls the “morality cult” (21). They are the agents of social control clothed in the garbs of wives. Their belief in upholding heteronormativity makes them hostile to any perceived performance of deviance or difference. They are the moral police who are willing to destroy relationships and make the non-conforming male characters go through physical, psychological and emotional trauma as forms of punishments or reforms so as to uphold the moral values they regard as standards. Thus to get some closure and achieve a sense of self-realisation, the male homosexual finds means to survive. Adrian moves out of Nigeria to continue his search so as to be able “attain this precious object, even though [they may] spend all of [their] live[s] hunting for it (Eagleton, 168)”. On the other hand, Abduh kills Hatim because he thinks that killing Hatim will make him “recover the pure (if fictive) self-identity and self-completion” (Eagleton, 168).

The two novels examined in this study are continued narratives of works that show the influential roles women characters play in the lives of queer people. These fictional narratives depict them as heterosexuals who find it difficult to tolerate and accept male homosexuals, and instances can also be found in works like Diriye Osman's *Fairytales for Lost Children*, Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*, and Tendai Huchu's *The Hairdresser of Harare*. The implication of such portrayal is that the structures that makes the politics of labeling and

othering of queer people possible, enable women and other heterosexuals to sexually oppress homosexual men, and for as long as these structures are not revisited and deconstructed, queer people's agency will be denied.

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