

## **Exploring the Forbidden and the Taboo: the Queer Novels of Selected Third Generation Nigerian Writers**

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### **Abstract**

In the preamble to their first publication on third-generation Nigerian writing, Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton recognise the reality of a new literary tradition in contemporary Nigerian novels with a predilection for themes that were heretofore circumvented or considered taboo. These writers openly dwell on topics such as homosexuality, incest, and sexual abuse. The tendency to expose the taboo has been systematically incorporated into the Nigerian literary oeuvre, bringing back the age-old debate of what should constitute Nigerian literature. This article explores ways in which some third-generation Nigerian novelists have given voice to previously marginalised subjects. The novelists are in league to write on the forbidden topics that are shrouded in secrecy by their predecessors and have heeded the exhortation to write on the current challenges of modern Nigeria without the veil of secrecy. They dared to break the silence on the queer practice that takes place in the secret closet of the bedroom, and have been generally considered to be un-African

Keywords: Queer theory, third generation, taboo themes, Nigerian novels, homosexuality

### **Introduction**

Nigerian literature has been largely characterized by resistance to colonial rule, post-independence disillusionment, neo-colonialism, globalization and its aftermath. Pioneer novelists, Chinua Achebe, J, P Clark, Christopher Okigbo, Wole Soyinka, T.M Aluko and a host of others, wrote anti-colonial literature that debunked the derogatory image of Africans in European novels and worked towards restoring their African uniqueness implanted in a cultural heritage contaminated by the colonisers. Charles Nnolim observes that their thematic pre-occupation “stresses and promotes the innate dignity of the black man” (55). Writers who came after them generally called second-generation, in the words of Adesanmi and Dunton, were born into the colonial situation, but their formative years were shaped by independence and its aftermath (14). Following independence in 1960, Nigeria fell into the hands of ruthless leaders. Since then, it has witnessed nine military coups, four different republics and a civil war that lasted for three years. Thus, the majority of the writings of this generation, especially its fiction and poetry, were a form of protest against the neo-colonial government of the time. Writers “revel in the depiction of the pathetic circumstances of the poor masses in the society” (Nnolim58).

The seemingly endless post-independence political tussles and transitions that plagued Nigeria are still topical as writers continue to record the transitions, frustrations, protests and

attacks against insensitive leaders for wanton looting of the national treasury and insensitivity to the plight of the masses. The dictatorship regimes of General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida and late General Sani Abacha were specifically marked by gross human rights abuse, inhumane executions and imprisonments of human rights activists for which many intellectuals were either executed or driven into self-exile. First and second-generation Nigerian novelists identify with the socio-political and economic conditions of the nation, rather than the personal lives of their characters. According to Lindsey Green -Simms, African literature, “for the most part, loudly and forcefully neglected to tell the stories about the love, joy, and heartbreak of African men who love men and women who love women”(142).

The 21st century witnessed a literary renaissance in Nigerian scholarship, both on the continent and in the Diaspora. This period witnessed the emergence of what is widely regarded as the "third generation" that is characterized by the exploration of themes circumvented by their predecessors. This has given rise to a variety of African queer discourses. They heeded the call of Nnolim to write “a new image of the African personality which will be fashioned along with the need of the 21st century” (2009, 3). Jane Bryce declares that "third generation novels embody the effect of forty years of failed democratic rule, military dictatorship, corruption, state violence and the war on those who are either children or unborn at the time of the event which could set Nigeria on its post-colonial path" ( 63).

A number of them grew up during the regimes of military dictators and are disillusioned by their socio-political experiences. Thus, they see the world in a new light. Simms argues that “What twenty-first century or third generation Nigerian writing often does is to resist the dominant in ways not previously done before and to tell diverse stories about same-sex desire that are neither monothematic nor moralistic”(142). Simms implies that they ignore the euphemistic portrayal of sex and sexuality by their predecessors, by their bold and explicit discussions of the queer.

This essay is anchored on the Queer theory primarily developed by discourse on sexuality along lines developed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* and Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*. Following the work of Michel Foucault, these are among the most influential texts on the queer, They argue that there is no strict distinction between male and female, taking their hint from Michel Foucault that sexuality exists on a variety, with some people preferring sex partners of the opposite sex, others desiring partners of both sexes

The term 'queer' has been used to suggest a wide range of sexual orientations other than the male-female binary. Queerness is connected to the unusual, strange, odd, or something abnormal and derogatory. In recent times, queer has become synonymous with bisexual, lesbian, and gay themes, but its critical context also includes such topics as cross-dressing, intersex bodies and characters, gender uncertainty and gender-corrective surgery. One of the core concepts of queer is that gender manifestation is fluid. A queer novel explores a different aspect of sexuality obtainable in diverse ways. African queer theorists expand the concept of queerness through research and written accounts acknowledging the existence of queer history in Africa.

Third generation Nigerian novelists have explored topics previously marginal, skidded in silence; the unspoken, secret taboo themes, issues understood to be un-African, condemned in the Christian, Islamic as well as in traditional African religion, such as incest, homosexuality, trans-sexuality, lesbianism, child prostitution, human body part trafficking, Sodomy, and openly discussing sex in its raw state. Sex has sacred and religious connotations in most African societies. Ansah argues that "As far as Africans are concerned, sex is a realm considered to be a taboo and sex taboo form a code of sexual conduct that any deviation from it is deeply detested" (209). While not arguing that queerness may have existed and prospered before any external entrances on the continent, Africans are known to be heterosexuals and queer individuals are stigmatized.

Homosexuality, lesbianism and incest attract sanctions and punishments ranging from banishment to being stripped naked and paraded around the community which is followed by cleansing and integrative rituals (Sanitover 23). The enactment of laws prohibiting queer practices confirms its presence in Africa which contemporary Nigerian novelists reveal in their works. The passion to uncover the sexuality of characters by third generation novelists has been considered an anathema by the previous generation of writers; Femi Osofisan for instance, remarks that:

Up to at least till the turn of the new millennium, you will observe, the exploration of romantic love or sex as a theme is remarkably rare in the output of writers. Virtually, no literary work dared venture, except the deflated language of metaphor or refrainment echo, in the contentions area of carnal experience ... but nowadays, when we look at our new crop of writers... and note their seemingly unbridled surrender to the goddess of Eros, the question that inevitably rises to confront us is, has our present literature walked away from that original purpose? (31- 42).

Osofisan's words imply that queer depiction is relatively new in Nigerian novels where heterosexuality is regarded as the norm. This act of indigenizing the queer is what Ogaga Okuyade associates with a “badge of newness and nowness.” However, Adesanmi and Dunton, Lindsey Green-Simms and Unoma Azuah provide pieces of evidence that this silence and secrecy does not erase same-sex relations and queer men and women entirely from African history. Dunton’s “wheyting be dat” points to Wole Soyinka’s *Interpreters*, Yambo Ouloquen’s *Bond to Violence*, Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Our Sister Killjoy*, J.P Clark’s play *The Raft* as early African literature that feature gay characters. Lindsey Green-Simms examines the treatment of homosexuality in 21st-century African literature. Green- Simms admits that these forms of literature merely acknowledge the presence of the queer but do not bring the act into discourse (141). More recently, gay clubs, the internet, mobile phones and various social network websites are been used by LGBTQ citizens as a forum for contact, information and interaction (Emama 43). Online journals and magazines such as *Q-Zine*, provide queer Africans with opportunities to celebrate queer life free from punishment or stigmatization. Many have relocated to queer-friendly countries such as South Africa, America and Europe. Thus, Chris Abani’s *Graceland*, Jude Dibia’s *Walking with Shadows*, Chinelo Oparanta’s *Under the Udala Trees*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half a Yellow Sun*, *Americanah* and Lola Shoneyin’s *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives* will be examined as literary expressions of queerness in contemporary Nigerian literature.

### **Non-consensual gay sexuality and Incest in Chris Abani’s *Graceland***

Christopher Abani examines the negative influences of modernity and globalization on youths in Nigerian cities. *Graceland* paints an extremely disturbing picture of post-civil war rural and urban settlements where degrading sexual practices such as child prostitution, incest, homosexuality and other negative vices abound. In the words of Adesanmi and Dunton, *Graceland* is “one of the first published Nigerian texts to deal with sexual transgression” (2005,11). Elvis, the protagonist, is exposed to European culture and art through dance, music and movies from birth. Strong western influences permeate the novel. However, Afikpo is where Elvis experiences his first traumatic encounter of sexual awakening, incest and patriarchal sex abuse.

Abani did not specify that Elvis is a homosexual, but, instances of the queer practice with Elvis as an involuntary participant shows the violent nature of masculinity in the novel.

Simms observes that “homosexuality exists in *Graceland* in the form of violence and nonconsensual act” (144). For instance, after Elvis’s friends, Obed and Titus have watched European blue movies, Titus relates “howa woman took a man’s penis in her mouth and sucked out his soul while he yelled in pain ...white and lacy, dripping from her mouth” (196). Out of curiosity, the boys agree to Obed’s suggestion that they experiment with what he had seen in the movies. His argument is that: “Dese were two men. I do not know, but dey were doing it and it might be alright because dey do it in de movies”(197). Initially, Elvis condemns the act saying:“Dat is homo, it is a taboo, forbidden” (196). Nevertheless, he pairs with one of his friends. Unknown to them, Elvis’s uncle, Joseph has entered the chapel and watches the boys. While the other boys escape, Elvis is caught and forced to practice oral sex, and eventually, violently raped by Joseph. Abani explores the graphic description of homosexuality with accuracy and plainness that shock the reader thus:

He opened his fly and Elvis saw his huge erect penis pop out ...The man placed his hands roughly on his shoulders and forced him down on his knees. His penis was level with Elvis's face, a twitching cobra ready to strike “suck it” the man hissed... “Suck it” he hissed again, thrusting his hip forward so that his penis brushed Elvis’s mouth. Reluctantly, he let the tip in, sucking it slowly, as though eating a stick of sugarcane. The man trembled, making guttural noises in the back of his throat... He pulled Elvis’s head back into his crotch, ramming his penis down his throat so hard. Tiring of this ...he spurns Elvis around... Elvis felt him hard against his buttocks, and then a burst of fire ripped him into two. The man tore into him again and again... Elvis passed out (198).

At a later time, Jerome, a soldier massages Elvis’s body with a cream that will burn him as a form of punishment for participating in a riot against the government. He concentrates on Elvis's manhood and observed how relaxed it made him feel. “He took Elvis’ penis in one hand and gently smoothed the paste over it. Working it up and down until Elvis felt himself swell. Jerome massages Elvis’ penis faster and faster. It is not long before Elvis shuddered and shoots semen all over his torturers. ‘So you be homo, ’*Jerome* said, laughing breathlessly.” (295).In the end, both incidents leave Elvis devastated. The silence and shame that follow translate into hatred for men. He seeks freedom in the female folk.

The incestuous relationship between father and daughter is another record in the novel. Abani captures the act of sexual violence by post-civil war soldiers on their daughters. Joseph, an ex-Biafran soldier, sexually exploits and abuses his daughter, Efua. Elvis explains that while the act lasted, “Efua was lying on the bed, legs spread wide while Uncle Joseph grunted away in

between them... Efua stared straight at him, (Elvis), her teeth biting her lower lip. Apart from the tears streaming down her face and the soft birdlike mews coming from somewhere in her throat, her face was impassive” (64). Such an act of debasing female sexuality is not exaggerated. Yvonne Vera’s *Under the Tongue*, Calixy the Beyala’s *Your Name Shall be Tanga* and Jude Dibia’s *Unbridled*, portray naïve, vulnerable, defenseless female protagonists, who are victims of incest. Abani depicts boys and girls as victims of sexual abuse from men who ought to protect their own.

Closely related to this is the incident where an American tobacco company shows films to young children and uses the forum to pass packets of free cigarettes to everybody in the audience, irrespective of their age (146). In major cities of Nigeria, it is very common to see minors engage in smoking, teenage prostitution and drug abuse. In *Graceland*, Elvis is horrified as a kid of not more than twelve with small breasts approached him for sex: “She begins to stroke his sex, despite himself, he felt his lust swell; she smiled and placed his hand on her breast” (311). Although *Graceland* indicts western influence through porn movies among rural dwellers and American Tobacco Company offering free cigarettes to children for decades in Nigerian urban and rural areas, he did not hide his liking for exposing the taboo.

### **“Outing” and Male queerness in Jude Dibia’s *Walking with Shadows***

Jude Dibia wrote his first Nigerian novel in the wake of the ban on same-sex union. The novel seems to be a response to Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton’s call for more African writings on the queer. They argue that “the practice of homosexuality within African society remains an area of experience that has not been granted a history by African writers”(445). According to Green-Simms, “Dibia’s *Walking with Shadows* is the first West African novel to feature a protagonist struggling with his identity as a gay man”(148). Dibia, like Adichie, Oparanta and a host of others aim is to counter the notion that homosexuality is un-African and take a position in support of queer citizens following the January 7, 2014 act by the Nigerian government that was signed into law, criminalizing a range of sexual activities, mandating up to fourteen years in prison for same-sex couples who cohabit or enter into marriage, punishing those supporting gay organizations with a ten-year prison sentence, and making any same-sex public displays of affection illegal.

The text is a gay Bildungsroman that narrates the journey from denial to acceptance of Adrian Ebele Njoko and his wife, Ada. Adrian is a successful businessman, happily married and

remains faithful to his wife and child until Tayo Onasanya, a former employee on a revenge mission, reveals his gay status to his friends and family. Simms describes *Walking with shadows* as a groundbreaking novel and the first to explore what it means to be gay in Nigerian fiction (148). Dibia takes his readers on a trip around the country to establish the fact that gay men and women exist in Nigeria. For instance, Adrian's mono-sexual friends, Femi and Abdul have been together for over ten years in Lagos. Abdul responds to Adrian's questions on how they managed to stay together without detection and stigmatisation, "I love myself and my life and I love Femi. This is all that matters..., I don't go about advertising the fact that I am queer"(27). Ada accompanies a friend to a place where she encounters many Nigerian women who are comfortable and happily married to gay men. One among them is a bisexual, while others enjoy the luxury and freedom provided by their gay husbands. Ada wonders: "the society has evolved, I missed it all" (146).

Similarly, Adrian visits gay clubs in Nigeria where influential men, politicians, businessmen and women meet, but do not openly declare their status for fear of societal stigmatization. Adrian, calls it a "Sexual revolution" (118). He becomes Dibia's mouthpiece when he says: "sleeping with a man or woman is a matter of individual choice" (207). Dibia demystifies the idea that queer sexuality is un-African, taboo, and forbidden through the character of Adrian, a Nigerian. However, he presents LGBTQ Nigerians in a different light. These men and women are heterosexual gays who enjoy marriage and procreation. But, secretly engage in extramarital homoerotic affairs. In the end, Adrian and Ada witness a complete metamorphosis.

### **Woman to Woman Love in Chinelo Oparanta's Novels**

Chinelo Oparanta's loyalty lies with the ostracized LGBTQ citizens of Nigeria who are forced to hide their gay identity. The authorial endnote of *Under the Udala Trees* supports their struggle against societal rejection and discrimination thus: "This novel attempts to give Nigeria marginalized LGBTQ citizens a more powerful voice and a place in our nation's history"(323). Oparanta's novels, *Under the Udala Trees*, and *Happiness like Water* are purely lesbian-friendly narratives. The stories examine same-sex erotic practice between Nigerian women who yield to their sexual drives to love only their kind. Their sexual preference is not influenced by western contact or ideas, but, by a natural human desire for comfort and sexual gratification with people of the same sex.

*Under the Udala Trees*, reflects the love between Ijeoma and Amina. Their religious and ethnic difference is not a barrier. The girls share similar trauma of separation, loss of loved ones and rejection, occasioned by the Nigerian/Biafra civil war. The teenagers bond together through sexual intimacy to relieve the trauma of their loss. This brief period of intimacy gives them a sense of belonging and fulfillment. Many instances of consensual erotic love between them can be cited in the novel. Ijeoma, the narrator, describes their first union in plain words: “We took in with our fingers the curves of our flesh, the grooves. Our hands rather than our voices seemed to be speaking. Our breaths mingled with the night sounds. Eventually, our lips met...This is the beginning, our bodies touched by the fire that was each other's flesh.”(117). This experience of sexual pleasure with Amina indicates that intimacy can be a source of release from abandonment and traumatic situations. Ijeoma expresses another explicit moment of intimacy with Amina in a way that reveals all about female-to-female desire:

She cupped her hands around my breast, and took turns with them, fondling and stroking and caressing them with her tongue...she continued along, leaving a trail of kisses on her way down my belly, she travelled farther, beyond my belly, farther than we had ever gone. I moaned and surrendered myself to her. I did not until then know that a mouth could make me feel that way when placed in that part of the body where I never imagined a mouth could belong(123-4).

This intense moment is disrupted by the intervention of their benefactor, the school teacher. Ijeoma is sent to her widowed, Christian mother, who subjects her to rigorous religious sessions. Scriptural passages that abhor same-sex union abound in the novel. Shifting her tale between spirituality and sexuality, Oparanta question why societies normally envisage homosexuality as a sexual deformity that could be cured with prayers, and deliverance and how religion makes it virtually intolerable for gay persons to love God. Ijeoma is forced to marry her childhood friend, Chibundu, with whom she has a daughter. She tries to be a happy and good wife to him but fails. Eventually, when Ijeoma finds love again with Ndidi, she uncovers the difficulty of talking about same-sex love that can elicit sexual pleasure as heterosexual intercourse, “I moved to her front, knelt before her. I pressed her wet flesh firmly with the tips of my fingers, and then my fingers found themselves inside, enveloped by her warmth. She gasped. The gasping transformed into moaning. I moved my fingers slowly in and out...it did not take much time. She let out a cry, and I found myself overcome by emotion” (200)

Oparanta’s short story collection, *Happiness Like Water* depicts a society-friendly queer perspective. In two of her stories “America,” and “Grace, ”the protagonists are lesbians.



“America” is about young Nnenna Etoniru, who plans to leave Nigeria for the United State to reunite with her female lover, Gloria. America seems to be Utopia for LGBTQ citizens as Nnenna’s father presumes that she will be free with the sort of love that she has for Gloria (117). An interesting inclusion is the reaction of Nnenna’s Nigerian parents to her gay status. When mama discovers her daughter and Gloria on the sofa making love, her initial shock gradually gives way to acceptance. However, she responds “a woman and a woman cannot bear children... woman is made for man” (98-99). Her reaction differs from that of Ijeoma’s mother in *Under the Udala Trees*. Nnenna’s father supports, encourages and defends his daughter thus: “love is love.” (100) Oparanta creates Nigerian parents who support their children’s sexuality without regard for family values and morality.

### **Queer sexuality in Adichie’s novels**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie alters the stereotypical portrayal of sexuality in Nigerian literature. She defends her strong desire to write about sex and the intimate lives of her characters in an essay entitled, “African and the Biafran experience” thus: “I was determined to make my novel about people who have sex, eat food and laugh, about people who are fierce consumers of life” (50). Adichie’s novels copiously explore female erotica, unveiling the silence and taboo associated with female sexual pleasure or lack of it. The themes of *Half of a Yellow Sun* include adultery, fornication and infidelity. Women in the novel possess explicit knowledge of sex. This is evident in the characters of Kainene and Olanna: educated, rich and independent women who know what they want from men. They refuse wealthy suitors, openly flout societal values, defy traditional norms and damn the consequences. These women choose to co-habit with any man they desire, initiate sex and control the action. For instance, Olanna finds Odenigbo attractive and takes the initiative to woo him (29). Adichie reverses the role of patriarchal domination of female sexuality. Her women enjoy and openly express the pleasure of sex. Explicit details of intimacy between Odenigbo and Olanna with Olanna in charge abound in the novel. When Ugwu eavesdrops on his master and Olanna in his bedroom, he observes that “Olanna was moaning loudly, sounds that seemed so unlike her, so uncontrolled and throaty” (25).

Adiche lucid depiction of women savouring the pleasures of coitus to demystify the silence and shame associated with female participation and enjoyment of sex. One of such scenes with Odenigbo and Olanna is described thus: “She unbuckled his trousers; she did not let him take it off. She turned her back and leaned on the wall and guided him into her” (298). In

variance with the depiction of women as passive receivers of sex for procreation, Adichie explores sex for female pleasure, soothing and rehabilitation. Femi Eromosele argues for "the use of sex as a means of emphasising the humanity of the characters, it is also used to perform other symbolic functions. For example, the lovemaking episodes between Odenigbo and Olanna are a metaphor for the nature of their relationship: it is a relationship unlike the typical African man-woman relationship, a relationship in which the woman takes the lead" (104). The narrator describes another lovemaking scene with Olanna in charge: "They climbed silently into their mattress on the floor. When he slid into her, she thought, how different he felt, lighter and narrower on top of her. He was still, so still, she thrashed around and pulled at his lips...he began to thrust and her pleasure multiplied, sharpened on stones so that each tiny spark became a pleasure on its own" (246). Although Adichie portrays sex as a healthy, loving union between a man and woman, the role of women as givers as well as receivers is clear. The extracts are her construction of sex as a fundamental part of human existence that must not be private or shielded in secrecy.

Similarly, Kainene, Olanna's twin chooses the expatriate Richard Churchill as her partner. Like her twin sister, Olanna, she dictates the time and place of their lovemaking. Richard is surprised that contrary to Major Udodi's words about white men sexually exploiting black women, Kainene is not a novice when it comes to sex. In discussing their first night together, the narrator states: "They undressed quickly. His naked body was pressed to hers and yet he was limp. He explored the angles of her collarbones and her hips, all the time willing his body and his mind will work better together, willing his desire to bypass his anxiety. But he did not become hard. He could feel the flaccid weight between his legs"(63). Kainene assists Richard to overcome his erectile dysfunction and with time, intercourse between them becomes regular with Kainene in charge. Kainene and Richard engage in regular lovemaking for relaxation and rehabilitation through the war regardless of their cultural difference.

Women in *Half of a Yellow Sun* are equipped with sexual autonomy and freedom to engage in a sexual relationship with men of their choice. For instance, Olanna approaches Richard, her sister's man for sex, just to get back at Odenigbo for his infidelity: "She took her dress off. He was on top of her and the carpet pricked her naked body and she felt his mouth limply enclose her nipple... everything changed when he was inside her; she raised her hips, moving with him, matching his thrust" (234). Similarly, men and women in the novel sample different partners, Olanna and Mohammed, Odenigbo and Olanna, Odenigbo and Amala,

Richard and Susan, Richard and Olanna, and Richard and Kainene. Even Odenigbo's house boy is not left out as he masturbates regularly, fanaticizes about Nnesinachi and secretly meets with Chinyere in the boys' quarters for sex (127). He would imagine that he is with Nnesinachi while she calls him Abonyi. The narrative catalogues the practice of exchanging partners for erotic desires among expatriates who "have sex with one another's wives and husbands, illicit coupling that was more of passing heat-blanching time in the tropics"(237).

Beyond the explicit sex and sexuality in Adichie's literary oeuvre, characters use unrefined words to describe body parts and openly discuss intimate encounters with their lovers. For instance, Alice and Olanna share secrets about the virility of their male partners matter-of-factly. Alice expresses her sexual dissatisfaction with her boyfriend thus: "He will jump on top of me, moan oh-oh-oh like a he-goat and that was it (she raises her index finger to show how small his manhood is) with something as small as this, as if I know when he started or stopped" (335). On the other hand, Olanna happily informs her that with Odenigbo, she experiences sexual satisfaction: "My husband knows how to do and with something like this: 'she clenched her fist to illustrate the size of Odenigbo's penis'" (335). Another female character, Marcia attributes her glow and beauty to good sex (365).

When Olanna informs aunt Ifeoma of Odenigbo's infidelity, Ifeoma reacts with vulgar words thus: "How can Odenigbo insert his penis into the first hole he could find in Olanna's absence" (236). Likewise, Kainene confronts Odenigbo over Amala's pregnancy thus: "did your mother pull your penis and insert it into Amala" (241). Olanna uses obscene words to express disappointment at Kainene's betrayal, "the good one does not fuck her sister's lover" (246). Femi Eromosele contends that "the success and setbacks in the relationship between characters in the novel are predicted on sex. Sex is the major theme that drives the plot in *Half of a Yellow Sun*" (104).

Adichie mirrors the different nature of male and female sexuality and queerness in *Americanah*. Several instances of odd sexuality run through the novel. For example, Ifemelu's boyfriend abroad, Curt derives sexual erection from acting out strange roles and encourages Ifemelu to play along. Obinze on the other hand is fascinated with the smell of virginal secretion from Ifemelu's underpants. While Ifemelu is unpretentious in the way she expresses herself and compares her first kiss with Obinze with that of her previous boyfriend. Adichie continues to

oppose the view that sex is meant for male pleasure alone by narrating how she attains orgasm with the now married Obinze: “Ifemelu would tell him, “No baby! don’t come yet, I’ll kill you if you come, ‘she would say, or ‘No, baby, don’t move,’ she would dig into his chest and move at her rhythm, and when finally, she arched her back and let out a sharp cry, he felt accomplished to have satisfied her” (462). Closely related to this is how Obinze’s cousin and her boyfriend, Nicholas, flaunt their nudity in the open. “They used to fuck in public..., Ojuigo walks about in Nicholas's T-shirt with nothing underneath. While Nicholas wears a pair of jeans with nothing above” (238).

Adichie’s use of bisexual union is obvious in *Americanah*. An example is how Obinze’s old schoolmate, Emenike flirts with his wife’s colleague, Philip, at a party in London. While in Nigeria as a student, he had joined others to lynch a senior student, Hadomi, and shout after him: Homo! Homo! for paying junior students to suck his dick. Unknown to them, Emenike is secretly queer and unable to express his ambiguous sexuality in a homophobic environment (270). Another man, Mekkus describes his friend's driver as an “economic homosexual “that engages in homosexuality for economic reasons. (472). These characters, like those portrayed in Dibia’s *Walking with Shadows*, abound in many African communities. Women are not left out as Maribelle and Joan are lesbians. Paula, Blaine’s ex, Paula experiments with both men and women. (334). For Adichie, sexual orientation is by choice and queerness is a normal human nature that cuts across cultures, races and traditions. This conclusion is in tune with Eromosele’s words that Adichie “does not believe in succumbing to the restrictions placed by society on sexual orientation, and thus homosexuality and lesbianism are portrayed as simply human characteristics, and not as unAfrican codes of behaviour” (110).

### **Demystifying the Phallic Symbol in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives***

*The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives* prioritize issues of female sexuality. Shoneyin deflates the myth and taboo surrounding male virility in Baba Segi’s polygamous household. Ezekulie Chinelo observes that: “*The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives* deals copiously with taboo subjects such as sex, sexual pleasures and infertility, using taboo vocabulary and erotic language” (42). In patriarchal societies, determining a woman’s worth is based on her ability to procreate. An assumed childless woman undergoes serious mental and psychological trauma, while her husband is assumed to be virile and productive. *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives* reverses the norm. Ishola Alao, also known as Baba Segi, is the husband of Iya Segi, Iya Tope,

Iya Femi and Bolanle. Baba Segi's wives marry him for different reasons other than love. Seven children from his first three wives are enough to prove his virility. But, Baba's desire for more children brings a fourth educated wife into the family. His wives describe Baba's power of domination by the size of his manhood, "His penis is so big that two men can share it and still be well hung" (132). Iya Tope confesses "that after a night with him, the stomach is beaten into the chest by that baton that dangles between his legs" (50). However, his wives lack sexual pleasure and pregnancy from his love-making.

Iya Segi, the first wife, and mother of the home is the first to know of Baba's sexual inadequacies. She resorts to adultery to establish her place in the society. She secretly provides a solution for Baba's sterility through his driver, Taju with whom she produced two children. Iya Segi learns from her mother's tutoring that "Men are nothing. They are fools. The penis between their legs is all they are useful for" (97). After two children, Iya Segi concentrates on her business and begins to develop an erotic desire for the woman that sells tomatoes, which she calls "a whole path of life that I have never trod." (98) Mama Segi continues: "I was awash with lust. I couldn't get the girl out of my mind" ...I can't explain why I want her for myself" (101). In the words of Simms, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* includes lesbian desire as one of many secrets that Baba Segi's four wives keep from him" (154)

By including a character that prefers the love of women in a story about rape, infidelity, and patriarchal power, Shoneyin shows that it is often heterosexuality that is a threat to itself.

Iya Tope accepts tutoring from Iya Segi. She finds love with the meat seller in her neighbourhood. She states: "he made my body sing, made me howl when he bends over me... he made my body whimper" (185). She neglects her mothering duties for pleasures with the meat seller, to the extent that Iya Segi scolds her: "I will not let you destroy this home with your excess... I have not known anyone that worships a penis as you do" (86). Iya Tope spends three days a week of what they called, "pummeling and hammering" from Baba Segi and describes her one day with the meat seller as a 'healing' (86). She comments that "I would have happily given up my nights as well. There are weeks I ached so much I could hardly sit" (83). She continues with the meat seller for four years without Baba Segi's knowledge, producing three children, whose paternity she attributes to her husband.

Iya Femi complains that Baba Segi is too mechanical when it comes to sex. "There is no sucking, no licking, no nuzzling, no moisten" (170). She compares him to Tunde, her lover, and

continues to seek sexual pleasure and satisfaction from Tunde, who fathers her two children. These women deliberately commit adultery, but, they are not castigated for it.

Bolanle, the youngest, educated wife of Baba Segi is not free from Baba's hammering. She becomes the object of his mockery when he states: "I pounded her until she was crossed-eyed... all the pounding is in vain" (4). Baba angrily tells Bolanle, "Your barrenness is a shame to me" (4). Bolanle compares every trust from Baba Segi to her sad memory-being raped and gives explicit details of intercourse with him: "he returned at midnight to hammer me like never before. He emptied his testicles as deep into my womb as never before, he wanted to fuck me pregnant" (44). When Bolanle could not bear a child after two years of Baba's pummeling, she becomes an object of ridicule until it was discovered that Baba is sterile.

Shoneyin's modern-day polygamous narrative disrupts male power. Baba Segi is the head, but his wives control the money, sex and power. They manipulate his sexual weakness to their advantage and engage in the forbidden, the taboo, but, are not punished or ostracized from society.

After a period of self-realization, Baba advises Akin: "when you want to marry, take one wife and one wife alone ...listen to your wife." (106). This seems to be one of Shoneyin's underlying messages. Shoneyin, like Adichie, gives human qualities to sex as Eromosele Femi(2013:11) asserts in his essay on Sex and sexuality in Adichie's novels that Adichie " does not believe in succumbing to the restrictions placed by society on sexual expression, thus homosexuality and lesbianism are portrayed as simply human characteristics and not as 'un-African' code of behaviour"

## **Conclusion**

This article has explored how some third-generation Nigerian novelists have uncovered formally tabooed topics such as an explicit depiction of sexual intimacy, incest, marital infidelity and the verbalizing sexual satisfaction or lack of it. Opatá and Ohaegbu rightly observe that "African Literature are works that spring from African socio-cultural background, deals with the problems of Africans and offers to the west African perception of the human condition" (12). The texts explored present a fresh perspective on formally prohibited topics in order to demystify the shame and secrecy surrounding sex and sexuality. In this age of the internet and social media, colonial influence permeates all areas of African life. However, the fact remains that African

values still exist and must be promoted in their literary works to children and youths in order to retrieve their lost traditional values and inculcate them in the young generation.

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