“Un-silencing Queer Nigeria”: Representations of Queerness in Contemporary Nigerian Fiction

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Tahzeeb Akram

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Supervisor: Associate Professor Lynda Gichanda Spencer

Abstract

This thesis analyses contemporary queer Nigerian fiction, particularly queer representations regarding law, religion and culture in Nigeria's heteropatriarchal and queerphobic society. I explore a number of authors' use of different literary forms and platforms to promote and represent non-conforming genders and sexualities in queerphobic Nigeria. These narratives show queer people navigating the heteronormative society vis-à-vis marriage, family, intimacy, work, violence and rights activism. I draw on Western and African gender and queer theories for the concepts, definitions and critical terminologies used in this thesis. African queer theorists and activists are highlighted for their reclaiming queer history from among the early records in Africa as well as contemporary queer Nigerian literature and activism. Religion and queerness are crucial themes in Chinelo Okparanta's same sex women's novel, *Under the Udala Trees*. Using queer African Christian theology against Nigeria's conservative socio-religious setting, I demonstrate that queerness is not a threat to Nigerian's Christian faith, and that mutual coexistence of queer sexuality and Christianity advances queer rights in that society. Nnanna Ikpo's *Fimí Sílẹ̀ Forever: Heaven gave it to me*'s problematises heteronormative masculinities and the manufacturing of heteropatriarchy and queer masculinities in Nigeria. I examine the protagonists who are both victims of and perpetrators in their queerphobic society. The socio-legal focus I employ examines the impact of the 2014 Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act on Nigeria's already marginalised and oppressed queer community. There are vast opportunities for queer Nigerian artists to create, publish and promote queer identities in the safe and enabling space of online platforms via physical distancing between the queer community and the queerphobic society. From the digitally published *14: An Anthology of Queer Art*'s two volumes, five short stories are analysed regarding different forms of intimacies in queer men's relationships. These queer contemporary fiction writers offer complex representations of queerness within Nigeria's heteropatriarchal and queerphobic society that polices non-normative bodies through religion, culture and the law. Such literary texts, digital literary platforms and activism vitally provide queer Nigerians a progressive space to assert queer presence, voices lives and rights to educating and re-socialising their society towards humaneness.

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Chapter One: Navigating Queerness within Africa

> [B]eing queer in Africa, a queer Africa and queering Africa are not the same thing across time, borders, and internal boundaries (Pumla Dineo Gqola 1)

1.1 Introduction and Context

The past two decades of the 21st century have seen an increase of queer literary texts emerging from Africa. In previous years, queerness and queer characters were indeed depicted in African literature; however, queer representation was either not fully defined and/or queer characters were relegated to the background, appearing only as secondary or marginal characters in the text. Discussing the portrayal of homosexuality in literature, Marc Epprecht observes that first-generation African writers had indeed "recognised the possibility of love, dignity and 'moral honesty'" (*Recent Trends* 153), but it is contemporary queer African writers in the 21st century who have taken the step to revolutionise representations of queerness by crafting more nuanced narratives, including other sexualities and, most importantly, acknowledging the voice of the marginalised queer via central foregrounding in the text.

This study explores and analyses representations of queerness in contemporary Nigerian fiction, with a focus on four areas in particular. The first relates to the reconciling of religious faith and queerness among queer people, specifically discrimination faced by queer Christians and, to a lesser extent, queer Muslims. The second pertains to the law and society, a relationship that promotes the manufacture of heteropatriarchy and forces the wearing of heteropatriarchal masks by queer people. The third area relates to the ranges of intimacy among queer people, from relationships built online, to those experienced via work transactions, to sexual and romantic connections. Finally, the fourth area of focus is on online literary platforms and the digital publishing industry that aid queer literary representation. I will analyse these four focus areas via discussion of Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees*, Nnanna Ikpo's *Fimí Sílẹ̀ Forever: Heaven gave it to me*, and two volumes of *14: An Anthology of Queer Art*.

In this chapter, I define and contextualise the terminology, concepts and theories used throughout this thesis. First, I look at the concepts of gender, heterosexuality and heteronormativity. Next, I look at the term 'queer' and its reclaimed origins and fluidity or dexterous use to push non-heteronormative boundaries in terms of additional 'other' sexualities apart from its original homosexual and lesbian connotations. I then look at the development of queer theory itself and existing debates as to whether the conceptual tools

developed within non-heteronormative activism to expand the discourse on queerness can be regarded as a fully-fledged theory of queerness–queer theory–in its own right.

I move on to look at the emergence and significance of African queer theory, its reclaiming of pre-colonial historical accounts showing the existence of non-heteronormative or queer bodies in Africa, identities, social roles and practices as indicative of yet more complex sexualities beyond those conceived under Western non-heteronormative epistemologies. I then survey briefly the Western religion and law under European colonialism on the African continent and how the new colonial state formation impacted and began its 'disciplining' and reshaping of African bodies, social practices and social identities, in particular related to gender and sexuality and more especially with regard to the predominant idea and constructions of heteronormativity.

Last, I look at contemporary queer literature from Nigeria, the country from which I have chosen literary texts to analyse in terms of the four areas previously mentioned, that is, religion, the law, range of intimacy, and use of online literature platforms in relation to queer representation. I conclude the theoretical scope of the study presented in this chapter by an outline of the remaining chapters of the thesis.

1.2 Queering, Queerness and Queer Theory

Most literature prior to the 1960s–1970 was limited with regard to gender roles and sexuality. The convention was to create and represent heteronormative societies, in which heterosexuality is regarded as the norm. The focus on conventional gender and (hetero)sexuality norms hindered the possibilities for forms of gender and sexual identities outside of the dominant heteronormative confines. The emergence of non-heteronormative representations is relatively new in contemporary literature, following in the footsteps of queer activism and emerging theorising on queerness within the social sciences. It is thus necessary to first explore contemporary definitions and developments regarding gender and sexuality.[1]

Gender, according to Stevi Jackson, can be defined as the encompassing of "dicing or distinction *between* women and men, female and male, […] the characteristics and identities embodied through membership of them" (106). The distinction or separating of gender identities and characteristics is the foundation and means of establishing and maintaining the

[1] In this study, when I speak of 'gender', it is in reference to 'men' and 'women'. When I speak of sexuality, I am referring to sexual orientation. "Male" or "female" are mainly used when referring to other scholars use of it, that is, to remain consistent when a cited academic or theorist using it in their own work.

idea of heteronormativity as well as heteronormative lifestyles and societies within which roles are prescribed and associated with the two genders of man and woman. In *The Prize and The Price: Shaping Sexualities in South Africa*, Melissa Steyn and Mikki van Zyl define heteronormativity as an ideal based on the rigid understanding that there are only two gender categories, men and women, each with "predetermined gender roles […] particularly visible in 'family' and 'kinship' ideologies" (3).

The assumption of heteronormativity is that the two genders can only have specific or fixed roles to perform within the family and society, which form the basis of heteronormativity. Heteronormative roles position men as the heads and breadwinners of the household/family and women as the domestic keepers who perform such tasks as cleaning, cooking and child rearing. It is expected that men and women perform or undertake these roles while also fulfilling the social obligation of marrying and reproducing. Heteronormativity thus also presumes there is only one sexuality and hence that all men and women are heterosexual.

Jackson defines sexuality as the encompassment of "all erotically significant aspects of social life and social being" (106); these include relationships, intimate relations and practices and identities (106). 'Heterosexuality', the term ascribed to sexual dynamics between members of the opposite sex, however, is far more complex than appears in this definition. Jackson sees heterosexuality as much more than a sexual expression; it is "a key site of intersection between sexual and non-sexual aspects of social life" (Jackson 107), and thus is "by definition, a gender relationship ordering not only sexual life but also domestic [life and relationships]" (Jackson 107). 'Ordering' implies social ordering in which (hetero)sexual engagement reinforces all other roles in which the gendered--man-woman, dominant-subservient--binary, established in the heteronormative family and household, transfers to all other aspects of life, including the social, political and economic.

Jackson reinforces the notion of the intertwining of heteronormativity, regarding the gender binary, and heterosexuality, which is "reproduced in everyday life not only through talk, but also through routine activities in which gender, sexuality and heterosexuality interconnect" (Jackson 114). What Jackson means here is that heteronormativity relies on heterosexuality for its social structuring. In other words, heteronormativity arises from heterosexuality and the gender binary of man-woman; social relations emerge from the idea that sexual relations occur between men and women; this fixes conventional representations of hetero-societies and hetero-people. Thus, heterosexuality is never as straightforward as it appears; as Jackson argues, is not *just* about desiring or engaging in sexual acts with the

opposite sex, but about living all other aspects of life within the limited scope of the gender binary.

Heterosexuality, as Rudolf Pell Gaudio observes, is about fulfilling the role of a heterosexual citizen "in accordance with prevailing social norms" (62). These specific roles and associations are, as stated above, prescribed for men as head of the household/family and women as domestic keepers of the household/family. The notion of heterosexual citizenship points to the gender binary's permeation into all other social institutions, including political structures; thus, we may infer that the state itself is a 'hetero-state' or a state that is structured along sexist lines of the men-women as opposites and respectively superior-inferior; this has political and legal implications for how citizens are related to by the state in terms of its laws, policies, rules and regulations. The state's political disciplining role thus follows from the idea and practice of the gendered family and the patriarchal nature of heteronormative society.

In *The Prize and the Price,* Epprecht argues that "lifelong heterosexuality is not a natural condition but has to be carefully cultivated and constantly recreated […] in the face of changing material circumstances and in relation to multiple marginal identities and practices" (*The Prize* v). He further observes that when we problematise heteronormativity, and the factors that are derived from it, "[p]eople's dignity, creativity and complex sexuality can be freed up from the toxicity and limitations of the past" (*The Prize* vi). More importantly, Jackson points to the fluidity of sexuality, in that sexuality has no real boundaries as it includes and adapts to emerging forms of sexualities as well as the bodies inhabiting it (107).

As such, sexuality cannot be clearly defined because what one person finds sexual another may not, and people's sexual preferences are different and differ. Jackson thus argues that heteronormativity is seen as both a 'normative' sexual practice and a 'normal' way of life (Jackson 107). The 'normal', which in this context refers to sexual desire and what is deemed socially acceptable, including sexual behaviour, establishes itself from the 'norms' asserted by the field of sociology emanating from the post Second World War 1950s–1960s social norms used to make sense of society at that time (Jackson 109).

Although gender and sexuality are individually significant, it is important to understand how they intersect. Sexuality and gender, as Tamale argues, "go hand in hand; both are creatures of culture and society, and both play a central and crucial role in maintaining power relations in our societies" ("Researching" 11). A heteropatriarchal society, the most common and powerful form of culture and society, forms the basis of and beginning

point from which to dissect the interplay of sexuality and gender.[2] It is within the context of heteronormativity that the intersection between gender and sexuality is created and established. While gender and sexuality are interconnected, Jackson points out that gender is considered the first thing people 'recognise' before sexuality. This is because "a gendered sense of self precedes awareness of ourselves as sexual" (Jackson 116). By this I take Jackson to mean that one first experiences themselves in language and society as a boy or a girl before becoming cognisant of their sexual identity. I argue further that gender is also recognised before sexuality because of the stereotypical attributes that are assigned to genders under heteronormativity.

Gender and sexuality–as social attributes–coincide with heteronormative expectations; thus boys/men *must* appear as (hyper)masculine, distinct in their embodiment of the head of the family/household sense, while girls/women therefore *need* to appear feminine, distinctly female in the domesticated sense; both must physically *show* their socially ascribed gender.[3] Thus, femininity denotes the traits girls/women are socially expected to embody and masculinity the traits boys/men are socially expected to cultivate.

In terms of the stereotypical sense or attributes mentioned above, heteronormative female identity or femininity include girls/women appearing physically weaker in comparison to men, being emotional and having and showing maternal instincts. For boys/men's attributes revolve around being and appearing hypermasculine–being aggressive, rough, assertive and physically stronger than girls. Hypermasculinity is the exaggeration of this stereotypical masculine behaviour; thus boys/men must appear more aggressive not just vis-à-vis girls/women but in terms other boys/men; similarly, hypermasculinity is associated with having a high libido and being physically strong.[4]

Sexuality, however, is more subtle in its embodiment, and it is here that I wish to introduce the notion of the 'other' and 'othered' sexualities. Steyn and van Zyl argue that the primary understanding of non-heteronormative bodies is an associated one, that is, that non-heteronormative bodies are first and foremost not heterosexual and heteronormative. Therefore, immediately these "bodies and their desires" (Steyn and van Zyl 4) are more than

[2] Throughout this thesis, I refer to 'patriarchy' and 'heteropatriarchy'. By 'patriarchal' I mean an ideology and social system in which men are viewed as superior. However, I view the concept of patriarchy through an intersectional lens that includes all types of identity groups and sexualities, as it emerges from the predominance of heteronormativity, gender and sexuality. Thus, my use of the terms and concepts of the patriarchal and heteropatriarchal in this thesis also refer to the heteropatriarchal social system and ideology that positions heterosexual men as superior to women *and* queer people.

[3] Femininity and the gender expectations attributed to women will be explored further in Chapter 2

[4] Hypermasculinity and the stereotypes attributed to men will be explored further in Chapter 3

the norm and become ‘othered’ and are excluded and oppressed for being unconventional. Ilan Kapoor contends that since heteronormativity privileges heterosexuality and sees it as the natural link between the genders, any other sexuality is immediately seen as “abnormal, unnatural, defective” (1613) and therefore ‘other’ and to be ‘othered’. In this context, same-sex relationships, such as homosexuality and lesbianism, are two labelled forms of sexualities that are considered to emerge after heterosexuality. ‘Other’ sexualities are thus always to be read and related to socially as in comparison to and secondary to the norm and therefore as lesser.

Daniel Ude Asue explains that ‘homo’ means “one or same” (399) and together with ‘sexuality’ means the sexual, erotic and/or romantic relationships between people of the same gender. Kapoor cites Michel Foucault who asserts that “homosexuality is a Western construct of the 19th century, at which time it became a site of systematic legal, religious and medical investigation” (1613). While Kapoor acknowledges the existence of ‘sodomy’ as a sexual practice and same-sex relations before the emergence of ‘homosexuality’ as a term, he views it with the predominant negative social lens (1613). Foucault argues that “[t]he sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (43).

I interpret Foucault to mean that while those who engaged in same-sex relations--‘sodomy’, linked to the biblical negative meaning of sin, were initially viewed as a social abnormality. Because homosexuality had thus been so hidden up until sexuality became more studied and understood under sociology as a social phenomenon, homosexuality moved from its status as aberration and more acceptable as a category of sexuality, although initially still regarded within a discriminatory frame. In other words, the acknowledgment of homosexuality as a distinct sexual category within the social sciences does not necessarily mean complete social acceptance, but possibly mere tolerance.

The term ‘gay’, like homosexuality, refers to same-sex relations and is commonly to men while ‘lesbianism’ describes same-sex relationships between women. Tom Boellstorff’s informs the terms ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ as emerging approximately fifty years after the term ‘homosexual’ (290). The term ‘gay’ was originally a borrowed French word meaning to be happy or jolly; however, as Thérèse Lalor and Johanna Rendle-Short explain, ‘gay’ took on different meanings and associations over time. ‘Gay’ came to mean or refer to immoral pleasures, male prostitutes, and homosexual men (Lalor and Rendle-Short 148). Cheryl Clarke argues that lesbianism, regardless of how openly a woman embraces it, is a form of rebellion because women’s same-sex desire is a shunning of men and by extension heteronormativity, heterosexuality and heteropatriarchy.

By merely existing, the lesbian rejects patriarchy because she discards in its entirety the notion of the heteronormative expectations of her gender, one that depends on a man for anything relating to sexual identity, including sexual pleasure. By asserting being other than the "female heterosexual", the lesbian has "rejected a life of servitude implicit in Western, heterosexual relationships and has accepted the potential of mutuality in a lesbian relationship–*roles* notwithstanding" (Clarke 128). Hence, lesbians have redefined the role of women in society on their own terms.[5] Lesbianism and homosexuality, however, are only two examples of sexualities that are referred to as 'other'; these 'other' sexualities reject and revolutionise the rigid depiction of sexuality (and homosexuality) in modernity discourse.

Among the other sexualities are asexuality, bisexuality and pansexuality.[6] Drawing on the University of Texas's Gender and Sexuality Center's glossary of terms, I define the following three terms as such. 'Asexuality' is commonly defined in terms of individuals who experience little or no sexual or romantic attraction, the degree to which ranges depending on the individual ("Glossary" para. 9). 'Bisexuality' is the sexual and/or romantic attraction and/or behaviour relating to both the two traditionally viewed genders--men and women--and beyond the conventional confines of gender ("Glossary" para. 15). 'Pansexuality' is the sexual/romantic attraction/behaviour towards multiple genders ("Glossary" para. 54). These are but a few labelled sexualities which have entered the discourse of sexuality theory.

Having introduced the 'others' of sexuality, I now focus on 'queer' sexuality. Epprecht explains that the term 'queer', like the term 'homosexuality', originated in the West in post Second World War America and was used as a pejorative reference to same-sex persons (*Heterosexual Africa?* 12). Nevertheless, it was soon reclaimed by activists and members of the gay liberation movement who began to use 'queer' as an umbrella term in theoretical and other research (Epprecht, *Heterosexual Africa?* 12-13). The term 'queer' is often used within the community of those self-identifying with non-heteronormative sexualities, initially referred to as the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, or better known as the abbreviated LGBT acronym. This non-heteronormative community continued to evolve into what is currently the LGBTIQA+ community, which includes the added intersex, queer/questioning and asexual/allied plus members and sexual self-identities.[7]

[5] The exploration of same-sex women's desire and its rejection of patriarchy will be expanded in Chapter Two.
[6] These definitions are meant to provide information regarding the 'othered' sexualities; I do not intend to infer, however, that any sexuality adheres to strict definitions and restrictions; rather Imaintain that all individuals are subject to fluid and flexible identities and definitions according to their personal preference.
[7] At the time of writing this thesis, the commonly used abbreviated acronym is LGBTIQA+

The earlier point made by Steyn and van Zyl that anybody who is not heteronormative is considered non-normative is reflected in the acronym which acts as a symbol for 'other' sexualities as well as 'other' non-normative bodies, that is, intersex or transgender/transexual. The '+' is used as a placeholder to refer to all sexualities still emerging, and has succeeded in more accurately describing the notion and reality of all other sexualities relating to human beings and their various societies. However, while 'queer' has a place within the greater community of non-heteronormative sexualities and bodies, it is able to also stand on its own.

Epprecht describes the term as "as a convenient shorthand to describe an anti-essentialist approach […] that is open to the whole range of human sexual diversity" (*Heterosexual Africa?* 13). Eric Malewski, however, argues that "queer has taken over where the term gay left unfinished business" (337), this in reference to homosexual men. Similarly, Patrick Dilley argues that "queer has become a "substitute for *gay and lesbian,* and to include others whose sexuality and/or gender places them outside of society's idea of 'normal'" (457-458). Dilley suggests a plainer definition that simply asserts 'queer' as meaning 'not heterosexual' (457).

Drawing on the critics mentioned above, I define 'queer' as an all-encompassing and fluid term that designates every sexuality, gender, body, desire and identity falling outside of modernity's heterosexual and heteronormative narrow gender binary of men and women. While my definition is influenced by these academics' respective works, mine is still sufficiently simple to be applicable to the textual analysis I wish to later undertake in this study.[8] The reason for insisting on this simpler yet sufficient definition is it can be applied to anyone without limiting the sense of them or their sexual identity, which is usually a concern with the use of non-heteronormative sexual identity terms.

It is here that I want to discuss the challenges faced by the queer community in addressing issues relating to discrimination and oppression of persons with non-conforming genders and sexualities. Homophobia and queerphobia refers to the non-acceptance of non-heteronormative bodies and their sexual desires, regardless of whether they are acted upon by those who hold these desires or not.[9] These social fears and discriminatory attitudes directed at queer people often take the form of verbal abuse, physical violence, and in cases where these ideas are incited through social and/or political support, criminalisation of the non-

[8] While I use the term 'queer' as my primary referent in this thesis, some academic scholars use terms such as 'homosexuality' and 'lesbianism', which I use at times to remain consistent with their cited works. I will also at times use the term 'same-sex' to specify the nature of queerness in a particular context.

[9] I use the term 'queerphobia' when addressing the violence, oppression and discrimination against queer individuals and communities; however, some quotes from my academic sources are presented using their cited 'homophobia'.

conforming body and sexual identity. Such discriminations are also acted upon women who do not conform to conventional traditional gender roles, even heterosexual men who do not uphold the dominant masculinity expected of them in patriarchal society are similarly targeted.

Otosirieze Obi-Young argues that:

> [O]ppression based on gender, sex, and sexuality can be eradicated if the problem of gender is fixed, because all of them exist in that most basic of binaries – femininity versus masculinity–a competition that patriarchy developed and, in order to not lose it, developed misogyny. Homophobia overlaps with misogyny. Heterosexual homophobes hate homosexuals because they disrupt their system of power, they assume positions not meant for them. The purportedly "dominant" lesbian often assumes masculinity, the purportedly "subordinate" gay often assumes femininity. The success of misogyny lies in ensuring that the dominating people are male and the subordinate people female. Which is why male weakness is immediately connected to femininity; all unconventional, softer masculinities are portrayed as feminine. And this equation of femaleness with weakness, this deliberate resort to misogyny in an issue that should exclusively be "male," is a defence mechanism that aims to reassert the primacy of a structure that had, to the male chauvinist homophobe, been temporarily challenged. ("Un-Silencing" para. 72)

Regarding gender and sexuality oppressions, Obi-Young singles out gender as the fundamental cause because society, as mentioned earlier, categorises everyone as either man or woman, validating each according to their appropriate masculine or feminine personas. Hence Obi-Young's additional argument that society makes masculinity and femininity compete in order to manufacture hate or misogyny, which is the key means by which men's heteropatriarchal power is maintained.

This gender-based hate or misogyny leaks into oppression of sexuality through the gender expectations that threaten the heteronormative ideals that expect men must be hypermasculine and only attracted to women, and women to be feminine, subordinate and only be attracted to men. Thus, the overlap of misogyny and what Obi-Young refers to as 'homophobia' but which I choose to refer to as 'queerphobia'. These 'other' sexualities are viewed as threatening to society by mere fact of their existence, for to appear to be or be anything not resembling non-heteronormative instantly makes one a threat to heteronormative/misogynistic norms. The main source of misogyny's and queerphobia's hate, according to Obi-Young, is the domineering presence of patriarchy in society, with its heteronormative role expectations, power demands and sexual identity prescriptions.

Hate and violence stem from the dire need to keep the masculine control that for centuries has been the norm. For example, in a heteronormative society any man who exhibits 'feminine' qualities such as affection or emotions is considered weak and unable to uphold

the expectations of his gender such as sexual desire towards women.[10] Likewise, a woman who exhibits 'masculine' qualities such as strength and courage is assumed to no longer be capable of fulfilling the designated roles of her gender. Furthermore, even masculine men and feminine women who desire the same sex are still a threat to heteronormativity and thus targets for oppression and discrimination, as referred to by Obi-Young.

In response to heteronormative hatred towards non-conforming genders and sexualities, the much-needed discourse of queer theory emerged. Teresa de Lauretis is accredited with coining the term 'queer theory', which was established when she realised the need for furthering the discourse on lesbian and gay studies. This development in the discourse and study of sexualities, according to Annamarie Jagose, "can be seen as its latest institutional transformation" (2). Jagose argues that queer theory "describes those gestures or analytical models which dramatize incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender, and sexual desire" (3). For Katherine Watson, however, queer theory "is perhaps misleading in the sense that it is not a clearly unified body of work but one that continues to evolve [and is] characterized by sets of 'theories' which utilize the term 'queer' for a variety of purposes" (68). Thus, queer theory is "a framework for understanding the constitution of identities […] a revisioning of fields of the erotic and the flow of desire, and […] a method to disturb the heteronormative" (Watson 79).

Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner argue that the word 'theory' in fact creates the false expectation that the discourse will provide solutions to queer issues (348). However, queer theory outlines the foundation and groundwork needed to comprehend queerness in relation to factors such as society, politics, race, gender and art. According to Dilley, when queer theory intersects with a type of text, "a book or a film […] a conversation, a life story, sexual activity, history, a gathering place, or a social trend" (459), it opens it up to a more diverse discussion and understanding of queerness. Dilley's broad definition goes hand in hand with Lee Edelman's that points out the danger of being too specific when defining queerness or queer theory: "we are inhabited always by states of desire that exceed our capacity to name them. Every name only gives those desires […] a fictive border" (345). Lastly, Momin Rahman comments that queer theory "is focussed on the uncertainties of identity categories" (951-952).

My stance on queer theory is that as an analytical tool, it should be able to refer to and render itself to application of any critical text or discussion analysing queerness and the ways

[10] The concept of subordinate masculinities and its precarious existence in a heteropatriarchal society will be explored in Chapter Three.

in which it is restricted, liberated, perceived and/or represented. I concur with Edelman that restricting something as complex as queerness disadvantages the discourse. I also hold that whether deemed positive or negative, any discussion on queerness helps break the barrier of silence that for too long has prevented academics and theorists from engaging with queerness. Discussion of sexualities and gender is sensitive terrain as labels and discourses are predominantly in English and do not always succeed in transcending the language barriers emerging from the West. More importantly, though, with regard to discussing queerness in Africa, 'queer' is sufficiently broad to allow for the inclusion of genders, sexualities and sexual dynamics that "cannot be adequately translated into European languages" (Osinubi, "Queer Prolepsis" xv). The same would apply to many other spaces in the Global South.

African queer theory is vital in its primary concern to excavate, reclaim, acknowledge and make visible historical accounts of queerness in Africa and for situating contemporary African queerness within an authentic African discourse. I delineate African queer theorists from Western queer theorists as those writing and speaking about queer Africa, with the view of problematising and expanding the concept of queerness as well as African identity. The African theorists I refer to in this study include Sylvia Tamale, Serena Dankwa, Keguro Macharia, Taiwo Osinubi, Otutubikey Izugbara, Lindsey Green-Simms and Unoma Azuah. For the purposes of this thesis, their contributions help me with mapping the history of African queerness, its erasures and the countering of such erasures by pushing and problematising the socio-historical accounts of queerness within African societies, history and theorising from the Western perspective.

1.3 Mapping Queerness on the African Landscape

Prior to colonialism, little written record of the lives of queer bodies in Africa existed, mainly because African history was largely constituted in the oral form, or kept oral accounts of events. Ashley Currier and Joëlle Cruz argue that "[a]ntigay speakers often cite lack of historical evidences proving that African societies accepted or tolerated same-sex sexualities or relationships" (340). This argument assumes that prior to historical records which were written and kept by missionaries and colonial administrators, African history was altogether non-existent. Although there exists a minimal amount of written accounts of precolonial African history, in recent years there has been an increase in the published works of accounts that do exist. These pre-colonial written accounts acknowledge the existence of queer history in Africa, enabling the tracing of queerness throughout the continent.

Gaudio points out that prior to the arrival of missionaries and colonists in Africa, communities of non-conforming individuals were present on the continent (61). Beginning with East Africa, Neville Hoad accounts the 1886 history of "the last indigenous ruler of Buganda, the kabaka (sic) (king) Mwanga [who] executes over thirty pages at his royal court, apparently for refusing to have sex with him" (xi). This history is soon erased when barely a "century later, controversy arose in many sub-Saharan African countries about the un-African nature of homosexuality" (Hoad xi). Edgar Nabutanyi's research claims that this suppressed historical account is noteworthy as it can be seen how Mwanga's sexuality was vilified and used as a means of furthering the Christian missionary cause (443). What is clear, nonetheless, is that the historical records provide evidence that there were men having same-sex sexual relations in Africa before the advent of colonialism-modernity on the continent.

In the Southern Africa context, Busangokwakhe Dlamini provides accounts of mining towns in which older men who self-identified as 'heterosexual' still had intimate relationships with their "mine compound 'boy-wives'" (130) when away from home to work as migrant labourers on the mines. Their 'boy-wives' were assigned the traditional domesticated roles of women and performed such tasks as cooking, cleaning and availing themselves for sexual acts with their 'husbands'. These relationships were transactional, with the 'husbands' providing professional mentorship and protection to their 'wives' in exchange for domestic and sexual benefits (Dlamini 130). Although these were same-sex relationships, they mirror the conventional gendered roles of a heterosexual couple, with youth denoting a subservient female role in the relationship to accord with the gender male-female binary.

Moving to the West of Africa, Rosemary Haskell centres her work on Senegal's Wolof term to designate queer men, 'gorjigen'.[11] 'Gorjigen' translates to mean 'man-woman' and is used to refer to nonconforming men, ranging from men who engage in same-sex relations to men who take on the attire and roles traditionally associated with women (Haskell 66). The gorjigen are socially accepted but refused Muslim burials.

The above example provides evidence of the existence of gender fluid identities that sometimes also included non-heteronormative sexualities. Written historical accounts from Nigeria also evidence non-conforming masculinities. Gaudio focuses much of his research on queer Nigerian men, with his main historical example of gender fluidity, which also extends to the present from the northern regions of Nigeria that has a predominant Hausa population;

[11] Thabo Msibi's "The Lies We Have Been Told: On (Homo) Sexuality in Africa" includes a variation of the spelling; he refers to 'gordjiguene' (67).

this population includes a 'traditional' category of feminine men, called 'yan daudu" (61), with 'traditional' referring to the category as predating Western colonialism in the region.

These are men who dress and behave like traditional Hausa women; for centuries, they have been accepted by their community and families. Their ambiguous gender and sexuality emanate from the yan daudu not fitting into any gender or sexuality type or category. Some yan daudu do not reject the expected heterosexual role and relationships for Hausa men such as marrying women and having children, but they do so while dressing as women and undertaking roles that would conventionally be regarded as feminine.

In addition, most African societies are heteropatriarchal and female same-sex relationships are less visible than that of men's. Ashley Currier and Therese Migraine-George observe that women's same-sex relations in Africa "have largely been shaped by silence and secrecy" (133). Serena Dankwa provides an explanation for this in her argument that because of "the increasing vocalization and intensification of same-sex hostilities, concealment is indispensable to female same-sex relationships" (198). I concur with Dankwa, who further observes that "there seem to be spaces where women voice and practice their passions and desires beyond the public eye" (193). I will argue further in this study that these silences and hostilities become more pronounced when anti-queer rhetoric is also more pronounced, such as with the recent reintroduction of colonial laws, political reemphasis and state stance on anti-queer laws in Nigeria and Kenya.[12]

This silence and secrecy, however, does not erase same sex relations and queer women entirely from history. For example, early records show that Basotho women in Lesotho had strong communal relationships that included sexual encounters with other women that occurred alongside their heterosexual marriages to men (Currier and Migraine-George 135). Similarly, Thabo Msibi identifies the Igbo and Yoruba women of Nigeria who because of their wealth, status or inheritance, often took on the title or status of 'male'. This re-gendered title enabled them to assume the power, authority and control associated with being male; they owned land, ruled over their families, and in some cases had women sexual companions and/or wives (Msibi, "The Lies" 65). Msibi importantly observes that sexuality in Africa relies more on gendered roles than on labels or terms, which indicates that "Africans have always seen sexuality in highly complex ways" ("The Lies" 65).

This indicates sexuality in Africa as going beyond labels and categories such as homosexual, lesbian and bisexual, which further frees sexuality and sexual desire from the

[12] I will discuss in more detail these laws and their associated hostilities further on in this chapter, as well as in chapters two, three and four.

restraints of Western notions. I argue in this thesis that this is a progressive and subversive means of viewing sexuality as it poses a bigger rejection of heteropatriarchal social impositions. It also enables recognition of Africa's historically nuanced take on sexuality and gender to emerge into view in contemporary society, which is labouring from the dominating impact of Western colonialism, including in its social practices and epistemes. Historical evidence relating to Msibi's argument is visible in his research on the practice of Igbo and Yoruba women taking wives through the male title; Busangokwakhe's record of miners and their 'boy-wives' also points to this.

Using Steyn and van Zyl's foundational conceptualisation about non-normative and by extension queer identities, queerness evidently plays a significant part in Africa's history. My understanding of this history of Africa pertains to some forms of queerness having always existed in various societies on the continent; these include a variety of non-conforming individuals, identities and relationships. While, admittedly, there is a need for comprehensive research, reinterpretation of early records and fuller mapping of the continent to reach clearer conclusions about the locations and ways in which queerness existed in Africa, I have nonetheless presented the handful of examples above to show that precolonial African societies possessed complex and dynamic understandings, forms and practices relating to sexuality vis-à-vis the West.

Indeed, the most significant question regarding sexuality in Africa is answered. Can queerness be considered African? Yes, queerness is African because queerness existed and flourished prior to any foreign arrivals on the continent. Queerness in any form is a significant and valuable component of many, if not all, African cultures, communities and traditions. Thus, the contemporary concern need not be about authenticating queerness in Africa, but problematising the misbelief that queerness is uniform and not unique to each society and culture in Africa.

In her introduction to *Queer Africa*, and presented in this chapter's epigraph, Pumla Dineo Gqola addresses the key issue of Western understanding of queerness and queer theory in relation to Africa. She poses the following question in this regard: "what are the exact meanings of 'queer' when it rubs up against 'Africa'"? (1). As already mentioned, for Gqola "being queer in Africa, a queer Africa and queering Africa are not the same thing across time, borders, and internal boundaries" (1). Mere acknowledgment of the validity of Gqola's question immediately discredits the colonial intention to view African and Africans in terms of uniformity. In *African Sexualities: A Reader*, Tamale observes that the "term 'African sexualities' immediately provokes the questions: who/what is African? What is sexuality?"

and "[w]ho determines what qualifies as African sexualities?" (1). Tamale's questions, as with Gqola's, helps discredit the colonial intention to, as Tamale phrases it, "standardise global ideas about African sexualities, often erasing questions of diversities and complexities of sexual relations" ("Introduction" 2).

In other words, discussing queerness, queer and queering in Africa is a complicated undertaking because the definitions of these notions are fluid and continually changing. Being queer in Nigeria might differ from the experience of being queer in South Africa. Similarly, being queer in the period prior to the Biafran war is likely to be different from being queer in contemporary Nigeria. Queer identities in the same country and in the same era are different for each individual because personal, religious, cultural and familial influences affect each member of society differently and in different ways; thus it is important when discussing queerness in Africa to be cognisant of the multiple queer realities and experiences across the continent.

Moreover, while acknowledging and celebrating Africa's unique and diverse queer individuals and communities, it must also equally be recognised that many parts of Africa share a similar response to queerness, which unfortunately amounts to queerphobia that aims to oppress queer people and suppress queerness in various places on the African continent.

1.4 Introducing Religion, Colonialism and the Law in Nigeria

I now want to focus on the state, legal and religious restrictions that work to suppress queerness in Africa. I provide an initial general context of queerphobic legislation and socio-religious views in some African countries before wholly situating the focus on Nigeria, with which this thesis is primarily concerned in terms of its emerging queer literature. I then give an overview of queerphobia in Nigeria, focussing on social and political attitudes that have culminated in the passing of Nigeria's anti-queer laws in 2014. The discussion in this section is aimed at contextualising religion and the legal system in Nigeria, which are of significance to the aims of my thesis that are discussed in detail in further chapters.

The belief that queerness, specifically homosexuality, is an imported threat to African ideals and morals is often used to justify the harsh legal condemnations of queer bodies on the continent. Nevertheless, Gerbrandt van Heerden argues that the misunderstanding may be directly located in historical misinterpretation, that is, that rather than homosexuality, it is in fact homophobia that the West has exported to Africa (para. 19). Epprecht similarly notes that the notion that "homosexuality is un-African" ("The Making" 769) is a view entertained by many African leaders to justify anti-gay laws; yet this belief that queerness is alien to Africa

stems from early European missionaries and colonial attitudes, laws and practices that were forcefully imposed on African societies.

The advent of missionaries, colonial rule and the subsequent spread of Christianity resulted in strict prohibition of any conduct that posed a threat to heterosexual marriage and heteronormative behaviour. As Tamale succinctly states, "[t]he law turns sexualities into a space through which instruments of state control and dominance can be deployed" ("Introduction" 3). Rimamsikwe Kitause and Hilary Achunike's research maps the growth of religion, both indigenous and imported, in Nigeria. Kitause and Achunike estimate the arrival of Islam in Africa to be 1000-1100 A.D., pre-dating European colonialism by at least five or six centuries (47). Islam had also brought predominant codes of Islamic conduct relating to heterosexual marriage, based on particular scholarly interpretations of the Qu'ran, including that presented through sets of laws, known as *Sharia*. These laws and interpretations, as Charmaine Pereira observes, instilled restrictions on sexuality and gender that saw the promotion and implementation of strict heterosexuality and heteronormative marriages, often in terms of the suppression of women and their sexuality (55).

According to Winnie Mucherah, Elizabeth Owino and Kaleigh McCoy, there are distinct queerphobic similarities in socio-political and religious views in different parts of the continent, based on their study review of forty-nine African countries, forty of which have anti-queer laws. Their study is instructive regarding the range of legal oppressions against queer people in these countries: "[s]ome nations have a penalty of life in prison (Sierra Leone, Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe), while others have a death penalty (Mauritania, Nigeria, and Sudan)" (225). The primary focus of this thesis is Nigeria, however, I find it instructive to provide some insight into the legal responses to queerness in Kenya and South Africa; the latter examples will help with situating the context of queerphobia in Nigeria and for the purpose of the texts in Chapter Four that touch on Kenya and South Africa as well.

Olalekan Lalude, in his work on the moral and human rights perspective of anti-queer laws in Africa, argues that queer people in "Africa have suffered being dealt with as a criminal category" an attitude that "seems to have a root in British colonial laws which seem to have been largely influenced by religious considerations" (212). This is clearly evident in Nigeria as prior to colonial intervention, but post the arrival of Arab Islam on the continent, the region currently known as Nigeria comprised of two distinct legal systems, namely, customary law and Islamic (Shariah) law. According to Chan Tov McNamarah, the customary law, although discriminatory against women, did not outwardly condemn

queerness (McNamarah 515). This is to say that while it may have been socially frowned upon by some, it was not illegal in the indigenous/customary African legal system.

Both Christianity and Islam introduced their own legal systems, laws and religious-legal values by first peacefully introducing it and recruiting new members into their respective folds. However, both religions found it difficult to rapidly spread the religion and eventually employed more forceful means of imposing the religions onto the indigenous societies. For Islam, the tactic of force occurred in 1750 A.D. while Christianity, after being introduced in the 15th Century, heightened its outreach and missionary work in phases that spanned centuries as different sects of Christianity were introduced (Kitause and Achunike 47-48). Once Islamic laws and Christian doctrines had been adopted and socially entrenched, it is not a straightforward matter of removing them from African societies, even if this was desired; this is especially true, taking into account that the imposed laws were harsh and have been instilled as a strategy to discipline the land, highly problematic to say the least.

Msibi notes that the "laws used to condemn same-sex acts in Africa were introduced during colonialism" ("The Lies" 69). The anti-queer laws introduced into Africa through European colonialism have seen the former British colonies, for example, Nigeria still evidencing "inherited versions of the colonial 'sodomy law'" (McNamarah 498). This law enacts prohibition of non-heteronormative relationships and sexual identities; it not only condemns sodomy amongst men to restrict relations among sexually active homosexual men, but it also serves as a deterrent of homosexuality or non-heteronormativity in general.

Kenya also inherited its anti-queer laws from its history as a British colony and despite adopting a new constitution on 27 August 2010 that replaced the post-independence constitution of 1963 the country has upheld the old post-independence constitution's anti-queer laws (Lalude 213). Lalude informs that Kenya has a fourteen-year prison sentence for anyone found guilty of practicing homosexual relations, which as a violation of its penal code effectively criminalises "carnal knowledge of a person against the order of nature" (214). The law highlights the Kenyan state's legal stance on queerness as not just criminal but also unnatural.

Unlike Kenya, South Africa's 1996 constitution is testament to the post-apartheid government's need to create a distinctively different kind of state, one that is democratic. The constitution is favourably recreating South Africa's image as the first country to recognise the constitutional rights of its queer citizens. Subsequently, the government has also added to and amended its laws to further protect the rights of queer citizens, including transgender rights and equal adoption rights for same-sex couples.

However, as Mark Massoud argues, South Africa's progressive constitution "did not reflect the attitudes of most South Africans who did not support gay rights. The government created a gap between its acceptance views and conservative social attitudes of its citizens" (301). This gap is different to the gap between queer acceptance and non-acceptance in countries such as Kenya, because in the latter case, intolerance is supported by the state. Thus, when asked to give their view on whether or not homosexuality should be accepted, 90% of Kenyans responded in the negative; the same question posed in South Africa revealed only 32% of its citizens responding in the affirmative, which amounts to not even a full third of its national population (Mucherah et al. 256).[13]

In Nigeria, in 2006, the Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Bill (hereafter SSMP Bill) was unsuccessful in being passed into law on at least two occasions in the National Assembly (Kaleidoscope 5).[14] Nevertheless, in November 2011, the SSMP Bill was passed by the Senate of Nigeria and, in July 2013, the country's House of Representatives passed the bill. On 13 January 2014, the then president, Goodluck Jonathan, signed and passed the bill into law. Thus, Nigeria's Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act (hereafter SSMP Act) became law. The SSMP Act is a definitive marker in Nigeria's negative stance on queer bodies; it states that "[t]his Act prohibits a marriage contract or union entered into between persons of same sex, and provides penalties for the solemnisation and witnessing of same thereof" (*Same Sex* 1).[15]

Zethu Matebeni and Jabu Pereira argue that the colonial queerphobic laws in Nigeria "continue to exist in postcolonial times" (7). Moreover, new additional laws which can be seen in contemporary Nigeria have made the country an extremely antagonistic place for queer bodies, with its queer citizens forced into a negative relationship with their country. Thus, Section 214 […] of the Nigeria Criminal Code states that adults who engage in consensual same sex activities will be penalised with a jail sentence of up to 14 years. Section 217 also criminalises an even broader category of "gross indecency" between men; punishing the offender with up to three years in prison […] The Sharia Penal Code stipulates the

[13] Kenya, South Africa and Nigeria's views on queerness will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

[14] Variations include the Same Sex (Prohibition) Bill from 2006 and the Same Gender Marriage (Prohibition) Bill of 2008.

[15] While the name of the law contains the word 'marriage', it is not limited to just same-sex marriage; it also refers to the criminalisation of same-sex relationships and civil unions; if a citizen falls foul of this law, they can be sentenced for up to fourteen years imprisonment. The law further prohibits citizens from participating in or operating social organisations, such as clubs, that welcome queer people; if found guilty of these prohibitions, Nigerian citizens can be sentenced to up to ten years in prison. The SSMP Act can also be used to sentence for up to ten years in prison anyone witnessing a same-sex marriage or is aware of but does not report same-sex relationships or social activities.

severest of punishment for same-sex relations–a maximum penalty of death by stoning. Further, the Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act of 2014 has introduced a law that sentences any convicted homosexual who engages in same sex marriage or civil union to a 14 year jail term. (Azuah 28).

The SSMP Act was widely accepted by the Nigerian population: "98% of the population do not believe that homosexuality should be accepted" (Green-Simms 142). This statistic evidences a majority anti-queer population, reinforcing the earlier mentioned physical and other dangers with which queer people live in Nigeria. The existence of these harsh laws do not restrict queer people from danger from the state only; there are numerous accounts of Nigerian citizens taking the 'law' into their own hands by verbally and physically attacking queer or 'suspected' queer people for reasons of national and religious honour.[16] Law and religion are used instrumentally by the state to condemn queer citizens to support the myth or false claim that queerness is un-African, this despite evidence to the contrary by a number of historians and academics.

Contemporary Nigeria, in addition to its anti-queer legal system, is socially and institutionally hostile to queer people. The examples recounted in this discussion serve to show the extent of the social repression that leads to daily harassment of queer people. In June 2018, more than a hundred people attending a birthday party in Asaba were accused of being queer, beaten and arrested (Nstabo). On 17 December 2018, "11 women were detained […] in the northern state of Kano, where anyone convicted of having lesbian sex can be sentenced to death by stoning" (Jackman para. 1). According to Josh Jackman, these women were arrested on suspicion of planning a lesbian wedding, which the women denied, stating they had merely been planning a party. Commenting on the arrests, the Hisbah director general, Abba Sufi, stated: "[w]e cannot allow such despicable acts to find roots in our society. Both Islam and Nigerian laws prohibit same-sex relationships" (Jackman para. 7).

The state-sponsored and police-inspired queerphobia is further written about by David Hudson. Dolapo Badmos, Chief Superintendent and Public Relations Officer in Lagos, famous and infamous in turns, publicly called the public to report acts of homosexuality, inciting publicist members to themselves 'root' out any potential suspects (Hudson para. 3). An Instagram post warned: "if you are a homosexual in nature, leave the country or face prosecution" (Hudson para. 3). These incitements of queerphobia further marginalise queer communities in Nigeria.

[16] The queerphobic attacks perpetrated in the name of national and religious honour will be discussed further on in this chapter.

Keguro Macharia refers to the policing of queerness as a policing of love; he argues that "[a]cross a range of geo-histories, minoritized practices of labor, religion, and intimacy have been framed as examples of attenuated, corrupt, or perverse loving" (68). Macharia terms the policing of love and the framing of different forms of love as perverse as "a minoritizing technology" (68). I argue that the queerphobic socio-political rhetoric discussed in this thesis fit within Macharia's minoritizing technology and, further, that to counter this technology of diminishing queer people is offered in contemporary queer Nigerian literature, which I will next discuss.

1.5 Contemporary Queer Nigerian Literature

The religious and legal repression of people's sexualities and overwhelming queerphobia in Nigerian society prompts Matebeni and Pereira to rhetorically ask where to "find a space in this world for queer bodies and the real societies they live in" (9). In this regard, I argue that in the Nigerian context, art and literature offer this alternative space. As Ikhide Ikheloa argues, "[a]rt for the vulnerable is way of creating physical and psychological space that is comforting and nurturing" (*We are Flowers* 4).[17]

It is here that I want to clarify what I define as queer literature. I argue that queer literature is any form of literature that focusses on or represents queerness or queer character/s. Additionally, I define queer artists as both artists who self-identify as queer or who create art representing queerness in some form. However, such literature may also be problematised in terms of the label 'queer literature', which in itself places restrictions or limitations on the genre. Obi-Young explains his hesitancy in this regard, seeing the category 'queer literature' as "lend[ing] a whole range of writing to simplistic labelling, an expectation of singularity" ("Un-Silencing" para. 29). He suggests switching to the description 'literature about the queer experience' (para. 28) which he defines, firstly, as work that focuses on queer characters, their queerness and struggles and/or triumphs regarding heteronormativity.

Secondly, Obi-Young asserts this as literature that could centre on the everyday events or experiences and not just on the queerness of a queer character. Lastly, he suggests such literature as possibly being about a focal character that is not queer but who narrates, observes and/or engages with other characters who are queer. Kelechi Njoku expands that a work about a villainous person who is also queer is also acceptable within this category as such works acknowledge the existence of queer people but, however, since there already

[17] This quoted excerpt is from *14: An Anthology of Queer Art: We Are Flowers,* a two-volume anthology discussed later in this chapter and in Chapter Four.

exists a multitude of negative queer representations, such works would pose difficulties for engaging in queer-driven discussions ("Un-Silencing" para. 38-39).

Obi-Young questions whether there were no queer artists at all in the works of Chinua Achebe and other first generation African writers ("Un-Silencing" para. 14). While there is no proof of any of the first-generation writers having been queer, queerness was not completely absent from their respective works. Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*, published in 1965, portrays a homosexual male character called Joe Golder. However, Green-Simms argues that although the portrayal of Golder is perceivably moving, the novel contributes to a 'sustained outburst of silence', an outburst that has, 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" (141).

Hoad terms Soyinka's characterisation of Joe as "diasporic homosexuality" (21), which I understand to mean the creation of a queer character but with his origins in another country, thus distancing queerness from Nigeria but still including it in Nigerian writing. The portrayal of the homosexual Joe as half black and an American whose attempts at 'finding' his Africanness in Nigeria constantly result in failure. Soyinka's portrayal of homosexuality does not make for a strong example of queer literature. Nevertheless, the work is still important as part of Nigerian queer literary history. As previously mentioned, it is not a question of whether or not queerness was present in the works of first-generation' writers, but rather about its rarity in post-independence Nigerian literature and the ways in which queerness was grappled with and represented.

Nigeria's contemporary literature reflects a gradual process of development, begun with the introduction of queerness through central male characters. Chris Abani's 2004 novel, *Graceland*, centres on Elvis Oke who is desperate to escape in every way possible his depressing life in Lagos, including donning an Elvis Presley costume, plastering his face white and liberally using feminine makeup to shift to a free-spirited mindset. Elvis Oke is caught between his father's hypermasculine persona and his own cross dressing, experimental masculinity. Christopher Ouma argues that *Graceland* presents a "gendered discourse of masculinity" (78) that allows for and contributes to a discussion of queer masculinity and is able to exist alongside the restrictions of heteronormativity.

I see Soyinka's *The Interpreters* is an early queer text that predominantly focusses on same-sex men's desires and experiences in which Abani employs the Elvis Oke character to portray more diverse and fluid sexual and gender identities. As Green-Simms observes, Elvis Oke impersonates "Elvis Presley in heavily caked on white-face make-up, likes to dress in

women's clothes, and has both heterosexual and homoerotic desires" (141). This supports my argument that contemporary Nigerian fiction provides an alternative space for the depiction and expression of queer bodies. Nonhlanhla Dlamini expresses this as follows: "[c]ontemporary Nigerian writing maps out the sphere of sexuality in order to engender debates on sexualities, thereby opening up the enforced gender binaries to rewrite and re-imagine a range of sexual identities" (8). Green-Simms additionally observes that:

> [e]xamining the body of literature produced in Nigeria, the country with some of the most draconian laws against homosexuality on the continent as well as some of its most noted literary voices, sheds light on how the literary community critiques discourses of homophobia and explores the everyday fears, desires, pleasures, and anxieties of those who experience same-sex attraction. (141)

Thus, according to Green-Simms, despite of Nigeria's queerphobic laws, the content and volume of literature emerging from Nigeria illuminate the positive and negative experience of the Nigerian queer community and its members. Jude Dibia's 2005 novel, *Walking with Shadows*, is credited for being the first Nigerian novel with a central gay protagonist. Dibia portrays the hardships that his protagonist, Adrian Njoko, faces in deciding whether or not to risk his heteronormative life as a family man for the chance to live his truth as a queer man. The development of contemporary queer literature in Nigeria continues to grow from the contemporary pioneers, Abani and Dibia.

In 2017, Nnanna Ikpo published his debut novel, *Fimí Sílẹ̀ Forever: Heaven gave it to me*, which depicts the difficulties faced by queer men--such as those portrayed by the fictional characters, Elvis and Adrian in *Graceland* and *Walking with Shadows*--in the period of the passing of the SSMP Act in Nigeria. However, it is important to note Taiwo Osinubi's critical observation, that "[a]lthough scholars have now acknowledged the frequency of same-sex desire and same-sex relationships in African literatures, they have yet to recognize that the sexually queer subjects in African writing are overwhelmingly male" ("The Promise" 675).

Osinubi refers to 'African' queer literature in his above argument, which I extend specifically to the case of Nigeria where we see queer literature to initially have emerged with a dominant focus on queer men. There has, however, been a more recent shift in the trajectory of Nigerian queer literature linked to the different generations of Nigerian writers, from Soyinka's portrayal of queerness attributing queerness to a non-Nigerian central character to Abani's Nigerian queer man who crosses boundaries of sexuality and gender. Both authors and their contemporaries have indeed provided noteworthy representations of

queer men but it is still imperative to acknowledge the dearth of queer Nigerian women representations.

Flora Nwapa's statement is revealing in this regard:

> [t]here was a lot to be said for marriage, for a man one was able to rely on and cherish and all that. But when there was no one such man, what should a woman do? Create the man? Take second best? Live alone, *have another woman as they do now in Europe and America*? (23)

Even though Nwapa acknowledges female same-sex desire as a possibility, she, however, only views it as a last resort if a suitable man cannot be found and as a calculated choice, and even then as a choice that is a Western one and thus un-African. However, considering the time in which Nwapa was writing, it is significant that she acknowledges same-sex desire at all.[18]

Osinubi argues that while Nwapa's work empowers women via its reflections on sexual pleasures and desires, its predominant lens remains heterosexuality ("The Promise 679-680). Dobrota Pucherova expands, arguing that while early African and specifically Nigerian writers wrote about same-sex women's desire, "for the most part, it remains on the level of gesture or metaphor" (108). I understand Osinubi's and Pucherova's respective arguments to importantly point to the trajectory of development in queer women's literature on the continent, which began with initially recognising and emphasising women's sexuality, then moving away from heterosexual desire via subtle indications of same-sex desire. This trajectory culminates in contemporary queer women's literature.

Contemporary writers such as Unoma Azuah, Lola Shoneyin and Chinelo Okparanta present more nuanced representations of queer Nigerian women.[19] Shoneyin's novel, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, is a subtle depiction of queer women's sexuality and relationships within an overt, strongly heteropatriarchal context. Her novel centres on Baba Segi and his four wives, offering hints at queer women's representation. Azuah's *Blessed Body: The Secret Lives of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Nigerians* offers colourful and courageous insight into queer lives in Nigeria, including that of women. Okparanta's novel, *Under the Udala Trees*, is centrally about queer women and their resilience in persevering in an overtly Christian queerphobic society. All these works depict queer women's different experiences of queerness; their queer sexualities and desires, if directly mentioned, are presented as natural and intimate, not a forced choice for want of a "good

[18] Flora Nwapa's active literary years are arguably from the mid-1960s up until 1995 when her last novel was published posthumously. Nwapa died in 1993.
[19] Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees* is the focus of Chapter Two.

man", as Nwapa would have it. Pucherova argues, in this regard, that queer Nigerian fiction "makes the bold step to propose that "everything could be otherwise," rejecting the prescriptive notions of "feminine normality" (108).

Contemporary queer Nigerian literature has been a major focus in terms of both general modern queer Western discourse and queer African discourse for the stark contrast it offers between the country's extreme queerphobic stance and the consistent outpouring of queer art. My current study is one among numerous theses and dissertations focussing on queer Nigerian literature.[20] Matthew Durkin's dissertation on queer gender and sexuality representations in literature and film in Africa focuses strongly on Nigeria. Amber Frateur's dissertation delves into the representation of Nigerian queer Christian women in Okparanta's work. Mariette Azar's thesis on space and globalisation in queer African texts also includes a significant focus on Nigeria.

Jenny du Preez's dissertation on intersectionality in representations of queer African women's short fiction also covers queer Nigerian short stories. Asante Mtenje's dissertation explores a range of African literatures, including that of Nigeria, in contemporary literary representations of sexualities. Finally, Shola Adenekan's thesis on the digital age of sexuality and contemporary writing in Africa also pays important attention to Nigeria. I also use the works of notable scholars on contemporary queer Nigerian literature throughout this thesis, including the already mentioned Dlamini, Osinubi and Green-Simms.

Cédric Courtois is also an important scholarly source I use, specifically his paper on Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees*, which offers excellent insight into the extent of same-sex women's representation in Nigerian literature and the significance of queerness in Nigeria's history. Dlamini's paper on straight-acting queer men vitally contributes to exposing the Nigerian heteropatriarchal society and its impact in the conflicting identities for queer men it forces them to create. Finally, Green-Simms's work on 21st century Nigerian literature's depictions of queer characters provides invaluable research on queer literature and online publishing platforms following the passing of the SSMP Act.

I would like to clarify certain terms in this study. I use 'digital' as the appropriate term to refer to online literary publishing and platforms; the scholars I cite on the topic use the term in this context as well. I use 'social media' when referring to websites and applications used to create connections online, such as Instagram, Facebook and Whatsapp. I use the term 'virtual' to refer to online presence, for example, a person's social media

[20] I engaged most of these scholar's writings in this thesis and reference them in the bibliography.

account and communication through social media applications.

The title of my thesis is inspired by an online interview with five 'queer' Nigerian writers, "Un-Silencing Queer Nigeria: The Language of Emotional Truth", Obi-Young, Njoku, Romeo Oriogun, Arinze Ifeakandu and Laura Ahmed. This discussion was hosted and published by Brittle Paper, a digital platform.[21] In a queerphobic society such as Nigeria, online publishing has created a virtual space for representation of queer people and communities that are otherwise silenced and oppressed in almost all other spaces of the country. Notable Nigerian artists, either queer and/or who write about queerness, include Obi-Young, Oriogun and Ifeakandu, mentioned above, as well as Chike Frankie Edozien, Ainehi Edoro, Cisi Eze and Erhu Amreyan.

Most of the above writers are featured in *14*'s anthologies and all use online publishing to share their queer Nigerian writings, and I engage some of their works in this thesis.[22] Shola Adenekan observes the transition from print to online publishing as also "about the way this new generation is using the digital space to project itself, the postcolonial state, and Africa in the twenty-first century (134). Adenekan asserts transition of the contemporary writers to online publishing and via multiple digital forms as inspired by new digital representation opportunities available to this new generation of artists. I, however, maintain their motivation is mainly a need to escape the queerphobic torment they experience in their country, rather than this being about just the general technology opportunities available to them as a generation.

Queer writers in Nigeria face enormous backlash from the queerphobic public and receive no support or protection from the state and police. Before online publishing became commonplace in Nigerian literature, queer writers had to deal with censorship and discrimination by publishing houses; writers who did manage to publish had to face public wrath. This reflects the need to continually develop newer and safer spaces for queer material and lives, especially in hostile environments such as Nigeria. However, it is also true that online spaces, although possibly a safer option to express views and experiences, are still not entirely free from discrimination, and threats against queer bodies and artists are constant occurrences.

Ifeakandu comments on the abuse directed at queer writers:

> [N]obody hears of violence against a straight person carried out with so much public display and impunity. This is because the law does not protect queer people. On

[21] Brittle Paper, online publishing platform in Nigeria is explored further in Chapter Four.
[22] *14,* as previously mentioned, will be discussed and explored further in Chapter Four.

> asking literary outlets to protect their writers: What utter crap. Who thinks up these things? We should pressure our government to do its duty. This is not to say that literary outlets would remain indifferent when their writer gets into trouble, but these outlets face so many odds already, the odd of sparse funding, and someone is saying, "Protect the writer." How? With which guns and which police force? A country is made up of institutions. The magazines do their bit by refusing to stifle or shrink the voices of LGBT writing, by insisting on multiplicity of stories. The government must then do its job of protecting the freedom of expression of its artists. ("Un-Silencing" para 69)

Nigeria's queer community is faced with the challenge of speaking out for themselves whilst others also openly advocating for queer people also face hatred and condemnation. I draw on Rapum Kambili's statement of the 2017 "violent attacks on artists of queer expression […] and widespread backlash in the literary community to the emergence–or rather, *flourishing*– of gifted queer voices in the literary space" (Kambili 9) as an example of Ifeakandu's above remark about the violence queer artists face. Ifeakandu is adamant that it is the Nigerian state's responsibility to ensure the safety of queer artists and not the publishers; blaming the publisher diverts focus from the government that is the main culprit in rendering its citizens and artists vulnerable via its queerphobic laws.

I agree that online publishing circumvents to some degree the hate and abuse faced by queer artists; however, I am cognisant of the fact that social media platforms do not completely protect them. For example, Richard Akuson, a queer Nigerian and founder of *A Nasty Boy*, an online queer magazine that posted gender fluid photographs, blogs by queer writers, articles on Nigeria's queer and queerphobic landscape was violently targeted in 2018. The website was taken down and its founder disappeared from public view. It emerged that Akuson was publicly labelled as queer and accused of "spreading a gay agenda" (Carr para. 22), he became the victim of a brutal attack and was forced to leave Nigeria as neither his safety nor support from his family were guaranteed once his sexuality was exposed.[23] The magazine's chief editor role has since been passed to Vincent Desmond and the magazine is once again up and running.

In 2017, Brittle Paper published online an anthology, *14: An Anthology of Queer Art: We Are Flowers*, a celebration of Nigerian queer creativity, including short stories, photography, poetry and biographical short narratives. However, following the online launch, there was an outburst of blame directed at the artists who were condemned for being queer and a surge in public queerphobia. In response, the editors released a second volume, titled

[23] Akuson is now currently seeking asylum in the United States. The magazine's website, since mid-2019 until Desmond took over, featured posts about mattresses and Nigerian fashion blogs; however, at the top of the webpage, was also included the same email address for forward submissions to Akuson.

14: An Anthology of Queer Art No. 2: Inward Gaze. This publication was a brave and unapologetic assertion of the existence of queer bodies in Nigeria; however, in order to protect their identities, some of the contributing artists adopted pseudonyms.

In this chapter, I have undertaken a general survey of the literary and socio-political terrain and outline the central focus of this study on Nigerian queer literature. I thus defined and discussed some of the key developments in queer theory from both a Western and African perspective, including mapping historical records of different forms of queerness on the African continent, this to lead to my main study focus on Nigerian queerness and queer representation in its literature. I have emphasised the precarious existence of Nigerian queer writers who are truly remarkable and commendable for continuing with creating works that further a public conversation about queerness in their country, which places them at constant risk from the Nigerian state and society. In their determined pursuit to promote queer literary representations, queer Nigerian artists are also finding alternative strategies to circulate their works, hence the prominence of online publishing in the country.

Given the outline I have presented about this study, which I will further develop in the forthcoming chapters, I find it necessary to explain the selection of my primary texts. The two novels I analyse are Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees* and Nnanna Ikpo's *Fimí Sílẹ̀ Forever: Heaven gave it to me*. I also analyse a number of short stories from the online literary publications, *14: An Anthology of Queer Art: We Are Flowers* and *14: An Anthology of Queer Art No. 2: Inward Gaze.* Okparanta's novel is significant to this study because of its representation of queer women in Nigeria engaging their religion and experiences of same-sex women love and relationships. It offers me the opportunity to highlight the importance of Nigerian queer women's representation and to offer a critical appreciation of queer Nigerian women in fiction.

Ikpo's novel and the short stories all centre on queer men protagonists and form the bulk of my thesis's focus. This particular selection of texts may seem to contradict my earlier statement about the need to challenge the silences surrounding queer women's representation in Nigerian queer literature. However, it is important to note Ikpo's novel enables my critiquing of the damage caused by heteropatriarchal societies, in which queer men are positioned as both victims and perpetrators. Ikpo's novel also enables my delving into the topic of queer advocacy and activism, especially in relation to the SSMP Act in Nigeria. The stories from the two volumes of *14*'s anthologies enable my discussing the digital publishing platform, Brittle Paper, as well as mixed media queer representation. The short stories

selected to enable me exploring the range of intimacy in Nigerian queer fiction that *14* provides and happen to all feature men protagonists.

I chose not to extend my text selection of *14* beyond the short story form. According to du Preez, the arrival of the internet in Africa brought with it "a new means of publishing which actually favoured the short story" (25), the short story form "offers certain possibilities for the emergence of queer narratives" (26). Du Preez reinforces the importance of online publishing for the short story form, which in turn plays a vital role in promoting queer African representation. Thus, my text selection also enables my exploring and analysing representations of queerness in Nigerian contemporary fiction in keeping with the four areas I have singled out to focus on in this study: religion, the law, intimacy and online publishing platforms.

In Chapter Two, I will provide an in-depth analysis of Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees*, exploring Okparanta's use of religion to portray the difficulties that queer Nigerians face asserting both their religious values and their queerness. I examine in particular the use of queer theology and the protagonist's own interpretations of the Bible. I also explore same-sex women's desire in the novel and rejection of heteropatriarchy.

Chapter Three will examine Ikpo's portrayal of contemporary Nigeria's celebration as well as persecution of queer bodies in *Fimí Sílẹ̀ Forever: Heaven gave it to me*. I will focus on how the novel problematises shortcomings in the law, the impact of queer advocacy and activism and strategies used by queer men to embrace and challenge patriarchy.

In Chapter Four, I will explore how digital publishing platforms, such as Brittle Paper, serve as both a new publishing mode for a new generation of Nigerian writers and a safer space for 'controversial' queer artists to gather. I will also focus on short stories from *14: An Anthology of Queer Art: We Are Flowers* and *14: An Anthology of Queer Art No. 2: Inward Gaze*. These short stories cover various types of queer intimacies, including online relationships, intimate labour, and intercontinental romances. Chapter Five offers a brief summary of the main arguments and content of this thesis and offers some concluding remarks on this study.

Chapter Two: Reconciling Sexuality and Religious Faith in Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees*

> This is who I am, this is how I was born. So I asked myself, because I know that, and God knows that, what then is my purpose, what is my significance on this earth? (Adriaan van Klinken 47)

2.1 Literary and Analytical Introduction

In the previous chapter, I introduced queerness and queer theory in both the Western and African contexts, as well as queer Nigerian literature. In this chapter, I explore the theme of same-sex women's sexuality and religion in Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees* (hereafter *Under*) by examining the four key relationships in the protagonist's life: familial, romantic, and spiritual. Okparanta's novel, published in 2015 following the notorious SSMP Act was passed in Nigeria, offers a representation of queer subjectivities under particularly queer repressive conditions in Nigeria.

In *Under,* Okparanta problematises the Christian patriarchal upbringing of the protagonist, a queer Christian woman, who is marginalised because of her gender and sexuality and is oppressed by her family and religion. Okparanta opens up an expansive space in Nigerian literary history to explore these parameters of gender, sexuality, family and religious oppression. The novel's wide temporal setting, that begins with the Biafran war and ends post SSMP Act, creates this sense of expansiveness. Unlearning traditional and learning anew religious teachings towards reconciling one's sexual and religious identities is shown in the novel as a lengthy, trying and ongoing journey. In this chapter, I discuss three main aspects of the novel. The first is an exploration of the mother-daughter dynamic which includes opposing takes on religious interpretation. The second aspect looks at each of the protagonist's three romantic and sexual relationships–her first love, her marriage to a man and her life partner. The third is her spiritual relationship with God and herself. Via these relationships, I explore how the protagonist resolves and reconciles the conflict between her religious and queer identities.

Born in Nigeria and having moved to the United States where she currently resides, Okparanta counts among contemporary African women diasporic writers, such as Chika Unigwe, Maaza Mengiste, NoViolet Bulawayo, Helen Oyeyemi, Sefi Atta, Leila Aboulela, and Chimamanda Adichie. Okparanta, like Unigwe, Oyeyemi, Atta and Adichie, who follow in the footsteps of Nigeria's women writer pioneers, to name a few, Flora Nwapa, Amina Mama and Buchi Emecheta. Living in the United States allows Okparanta a space to write

candidly about queer issues in Nigeria as well as her adopted country. For example, her 2013 short story collection, *Happiness like Water*, includes the story "America," which is about a young queer Nigerian woman, Nnenna Etoniru, who plans to leave Nigeria for the United States to work there but also to reunite with her same-sex lover, Gloria.

Osinubi observes that "[w]hen women's same-sex desire is found, it is inevitably roomed in the short story" ("The Promise" 675).[24] It is interesting to note that the depiction of same-sex desire for women (and for men too, as will later be discussed) begins in the short story form before it is explored in the bigger novel format. In my view, this movement towards the more expansive textual narrative form lies in the inability of short fiction's format, its brevity to fully explore, develop and represent queer identities, experiences, relationships and characters. Okparanta's debut novel, *Under the Udala Trees,* written in 2015, requires the novel's more expansive narrative form for her to explore women's same-sex desire fiction. In an interview with Bernie Lombardi, Okparanta explains that the short stories in the collection, *Happiness like Water*, led to her realisation as a writer of fiction that *queer narratives* "was a theme that [she] wanted to expand upon in a larger context than the stories allowed [her] to" (22).

Rather than tracing her writing trajectory centrally to perceived limitations about the short story form to represent women's same-sex desire, it is my view that her approaching the narrative as not just a form but a theme in relating the same sex desire experiences of her women characters that prompts Okparanta towards the novel format. "America" sees her protagonist leave Nigeria to find her true happiness; Okparanta returns to Nigeria in *Under*, as she informs Lombardi, for "Nigerians to have this conversation on our own" (19). This conversation among Nigerians about same sex Nigerian women's desire thus requires not only the setting of the narrative solely in Nigeria among Nigerian characters but also the novel format; by implication it is the *Nigerian* novel that Okparanta is claiming to tell this story.

Okparanta is clear that the choice of narrative form is distinctly political and not just aesthetic because, according to her, for too long external influences, especially Western ones, have had a say in African conversations. However, Okparanta also clarifies that she is not suggesting with her narrative choice that Nigeria is a kind of idealistic paradise land for queer love (Lombardi 21); the Nigeria in *Under* is the Nigeria of the country itself. Thus, she provides a balanced representation of Nigeria as a space in which the main character can find

[24] Notable papers published on Okparanta's "America" include Asante Mtenje and Jenny du Preez's respective dissertations on queer African women's literature, referenced in this study's bibliography.

her love, truth and faith while still encountering and dealing with the difficulties of being queer within a queerphobic culture, society, religion and state. While "America" does not allow the narrative space for Okparanta as a writer to explore a fuller journey for its protagonist, *Under*'s novel narrative form carries the protagonist's growth as a character throughout the novel's development as queer bildungsroman. In the "Author's Note", Okparanta informs the reader of her own distinctive goal as the writer: "[t]his novel attempts to give Nigeria's marginalized LGBTQ citizens a more powerful voice, and a place in our nation's history" (325).

As mentioned above, *Under* is set in Nigeria, and is narrated in the first-person by its queer woman protagonist, Ijeoma. Ijeoma's account begins at the start of the Biafran war in 1967 and ends in 2014 shortly after the passing of the SSMP Act. The title of the novel refers to the Udala tree of the same name, which is discussed briefly in chapter 77 of the novel.[25] The Udala tree, in Igbo legend, tells of spirit children who sit atop its branches and bestow fertility on any woman who spends time beneath its cover; the tree's spirit children "cause her to bear sons and daughters, as many as her heart desires" (*Under* 309). The novel's title and the legend surrounding the tree reinforce the women centric narrative of the work. *Under* consists of six parts and an epilogue.

Part I focusses on Ijeoma's childhood in Ojoto during the Biafran war, her friendship with a young boy called Chibundu, the death of her father (Uzo, referred to as Papa) and her mother (Adaora, referred to as Mama). After Papa's death, Mama sends Ijeoma to live in Nnewi with the unnamed grammar school teacher and his wife. Part II sees Ijeoma reunited with Mama in their new home in Aba, where she undergoes intensive Bible tutelage under Mama. Part III takes us back to Ijeoma's time at the grammar school teacher's home, where she meets Amina, a Hausa Muslim girl of similar age who becomes Ijeoma's first love; the relationship ceases when it is discovered by the grammar teacher and Ijeoma is returned to her mother while Amina is left behind.

In Part IV Ijeoma is presented as a teenager at secondary school where she reunites with Amina. Still, the relationship is fraught with uncertainties that leave Ijeoma heartbroken at graduation when Amina announces her engagement to a man. In Part V Ijeoma has completed her schooling and is working in her mother's shop where she meets Ndidi, a customer who becomes her second girlfriend; at this time Ijeoma is also reunited with her childhood friend, Chibundu, whom she soon after marries. Part VI recounts Ijeoma's

[25] The Udala tree is more commonly referred to as the African Star Apple, Agbalumo or Chrysophyllum albidum; it is commonly found in West and Central Africa.

marriage to Chibundu, the birth of her daughter, Chidinma, and the demise of the marriage, with Ijeoma leaving her husband and returning to Mama's house. The Epilogue concludes these life events of the protagonist with Mama's welcoming and acceptance of Ijeoma when she returns home, and the later reunion of Ijeoma and Ndidi's amidst the growing hostility of queerphobic Nigeria.

Among the academic studies of *Under*, Stephen Temitope David's dissertation on the politics of belonging in Biafran war literature offers an analysis of the novel's brief war setting at the beginning of the narrative. Dora Cassano's thesis on cultural memory in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Under* also centres on the Biafran war. Amber Frateur's dissertation, on the other hand, focusses on the reconciliation of sexuality and religion in *Under,* exploring in depth the novel's ideas about queer Christian theology. Matthew Durkin's dissertation, ""Unorthodox Conduct": Re-membering Queer Africa in Literature and Film", contextualises the socio-cultural background of *Under*, including more recent socio-cultural developments in Nigeria.[26] This brief survey shows the scope and range of postgraduate works already published on *Under*.

The earlier discussion of Okparanta's aesthetic choice to set the narrative of her queer same sex woman protagonist in both Nigeria and the novel format recalls Okparanta's stated goal in the "Author's Note" to give a more powerful voice to Nigeria's marginalised queer citizens and a place in the country's history, which Cassano and David respectively note. However, my own focus in this chapter is similar to Frateur's and Durkin's. While Durkin's focus is contextualising the novel against a fuller history of Nigerian socio-history, my own aim is to provide a more analytical approach to the fiction, which aligns more with Frateur's work, which I draw on. I extend on Frateur's discussion of the prophetic and Christian ideals by focussing on the ways in which Ijeoma situates herself and her relationships within her religion in an attempt to find and claim room for herself in it as a queer woman.

Several critics have similarly written about *Under* with regard to its reclaiming of literary space for queer same sex women's desire. Taiwo Osinubi read the novel vis-à-vis the emergence of literary representation of queer females in African texts, the contemporary Igbo writer and women's same-sex desire. Cédric Courtois's paper, "'Thou Shalt not Lie with Mankind as with Womankind: It Is Abomination!': Lesbian (Body-)Bildung in Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees* (2015)", discusses the novel as a queer woman's bildungsroman. Courtois tracks Ijeoma's life's journey from childhood to past the point

[26] David, Cassano, Frateur, and Durkin's respective dissertations are referenced in the bibliography.

where the conventional bildungsroman normally ends to its queer novel conclusion where the protagonist leaves her heteronormative marriage to be with a woman.[27] Audrey Heffers's exploration of bisexuality in literature attempts a bisexual interpretation of Ijeoma's relationships, and Dobrota Pucherova writes about *Under* in accordance with her focus on the redefining of African feminism within contemporary African lesbian fiction and its predominant focus on the sexual pleasure that is achieved in relationships barring patriarchy and heterosexuality.

My own focus on religion and queer sexuality in Nigeria draws on a rich range of available research. For example, the queer Christian theology presented by Adriaan van Klinken, which emerges from his 'informants' perspectives who are mostly queer Zambian men; I refer to this work as well as those following to explicate the negotiation of sexual and religious identities in queer Nigerian writing.[28] Thus, even though van Klinken centres on queer Zambian men in non-fictional texts and his work is not Nigerian based, he nonetheless provides a valuable understanding of African people in their own voices speaking about reconciling their queer and religious identities in similar queerphobic settings.

Building on the discourse of African queer theology, Megan Robertson problematises the role played by patriarchal religious African societies in manufacturing queerphobia as well as the counter role claimed by religious queer Africans to reconcile their faith and sexuality through their own engagement in order to problematise or trouble the church space. Daniel Ude Asue offers a rich discussion of various aspects in the relationship between religion and sexuality in Nigeria, ranging from the conventional to the non-heteronormative, and provides a reinterpretation of the Bible from a queer perspective. Gerald West, Charlene Van der Walt, and Kaoma Kapya collectively argue that the focus of queer theology must importantly challenge churches to cease from being alienating institutions and to decisively move to adopting inclusionary ethics.

Moving away from religious interpretations, Otutubikey Izugbara explores the dictates of the patriarchal ideology of Nigerian society that imposes its ideas on acceptable

[27] The conventional bildungsroman often ends with a marriage because, as Courtois terms it, it indicates the "pact sealed with society" (126). Okparanta, however, debunks the conventional in multiple ways, including the rare woman as the bildungsroman protagonist and making her a queer woman who does not find success in her heterosexual marriage. Okparanta further subverts the bildungsroman by making her protagonist continue on with her journey post-marriage and finding completion instead in her freedom outside of heteronormative social standards with another queer woman. Okparanta secures her protagonist's journey's success in terms of her complete agency.

[28] I use three papers by van Klinken in this chapter: "Autobiographical Storytelling and African Narrative Queer Theology"; "Queer Love in a "Christian Nation": Zambian Gay Men Negotiating Sexual and Religious Identities"; and alongside Lilly Phiri, "'In the Image of God': Reconstructing and Developing a Grassroots African Queer Theology from Urban Zambia".

sexuality and gender norms, particularly via instilling these in youth. Joseph Onuche dissects Nigerian morals and ethics regarding marriage to offer arguments for same-sex marriage being accepted in Nigeria. Lorretta Ntoimo and Uche Isiugo-Abanihe's focus on the social stigma and dynamics attached to unmarried and childless young women in Nigeria. Stepping outside of Nigerian-based scholarship but remaining within the realm of heteropatriarchy, I also draw on Adrienne Rich's work on compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence. The ideas about religion and sexuality offered by these scholars inform the analysis I next present regarding Ijeoma's reconciling of her queer and religious identities in *Under*.

2.2 Navigating the Mother-Daughter Relationship

The novel begins with Ijeoma and her parents, and their close knit but anxiety-ridden experience as a family relating to the Biafran war. Papa's deep exhaustion with the war results in his eventual demise when he refuses to join Mama and Ijeoma in the bunker during an airstrike that destroys their house. His death does not remove him from the story entirely, though; his influence on Ijeoma is evident throughout the novel. In the wake of their mourning period, Mama sends Ijeoma to Nnewi to live with friends of Papa's, the grammar school teacher and his wife. Ijeoma leaves behind her home and childhood friend, Chibundu, while Mama journeys to Aba to secure a new home for them. In Nnewi, Ijeoma begins a relationship with Amina; the grammar schoolteacher discovers the two girls and calls Mama to immediately fetch Ijeoma in the hope that "Mama would do her part in straightening" (129) out Ijeoma.

When Ijeoma moves to Aba, the mother and daughter engage in a six-month-long intensive study of the Bible, no doubt in fulfilment of the grammar school teacher's suggestion for Mama to deter Ijeoma from her deviant, un-Christian desire for the same sex. These lessons in religion haunt Ijeoma throughout the novel. After finishing secondary school, Ijeoma is working in Mama's shop and meets and falls in love with Ndidi and reconnects with Chibundu whom she marries soon after. Having pressured Ijeoma into pursuing the relationship with Chibundu, Mama helps her through her depression, pregnancy, motherhood and eventual divorce, finally welcoming Ijeoma home with acceptance. I now focus on their mother-daughter relationship, specifically in relations to the two women's respective interpretations of the Bible, and by extension, God.

Mama attempts to instil heteronormative ideals to turn her daughter into a dutiful Christian Nigerian woman.[29] In texts depicting a strong socio-patriarchal setting, for example, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions,* the death of a prominent male figure signals the end or lessening of patriarchal ideals in the household. The death of Ijeoma's father early in the novel, however, does not signify the end of patriarchal ideals in the household as Mama persists in maintaining heteropatriarchal norms in Ijeoma. These norms are initially about gender concerns predating Mama's awareness of Ijeoma's queer sexuality. Izugbara observes that gender is not determined in the womb but rather "in specific social and cultural context. In Nigeria, the social production of masculinity and femininity is often begun at home" (7).

Mama's intensive tutelage on womanhood and the Bible instil in Ijeoma a strong sense of patriarchal obligations to her mother, God and society, but she herself does not readily embrace these expectations and spends her life challenging them. Mama's religious and heteronormative teachings rest on the extreme importance of marriage, prompted in large part by the early end of her own marriage. Becoming a widow sees Mama losing control of herself, with her momentarily unable to function. Mama turns almost infantile during her mourning period, depending on the young Ijeoma to feed her, ensure that she sleeps, calm her nightmares of Papa's death and keep the household running amidst the civil war going on around them. Growing increasingly frustrated with their situation, Mama begins to regain control of herself and the household, and begins to teach Ijeoma about the realities of womanhood, which include sending the girl to Nnewi and later beginning to 'cure' Ijeoma of her supposed waywardness.

Mama concentrates her energy on educating her daughter about securing a marriage and her survival in the event that her future husband dies before her, as had happened to Mama. Mama's anxiety throughout, though, is about Ijeoma's sexuality, later discussed, and her marriageability. Nigeria's heteropatriarchal society is maintained via its socially induced expectation that everyone must enter into marriage with the opposite sex. Mama accepts these heteropatriarchal norms, but also out of desperate fear of Ijeoma becoming a social outcast by not meeting the social expectations. Thus, according to Mama:

> Marriage has a shape. Its shape is that of a bicycle […] The man is one wheel […] the woman the other […] What is certain, though, is that neither wheel is able to function fully without the other. And what use is it to exist in the world as a partially

[29] In this chapter, God will also be referred to as "Him" or "His" in accordance with the pronouns used in *Under*.

> functioning human being? […] A woman without a man is hardly a woman at all. (182)

Above is an example of Mama's lessons throughout the novel where all advice centres on the heteronormative obligation of marriage that a man and woman must expect and seek to enter into with each other. Izugbara observes that such notions prevail amongst Christian Nigerians, as Christian discourse only celebrates sexual relations resulting from heteronormative marriage. Mama's concern about Ijeoma's marriage possibilities extends to incredulity; she is astounded that Ijeoma, despite her beauty, could be "almost twenty, and yet no young man has so much as come for [her]" (182). Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe inform that "[r]emaining unmarried by constraint or choice, beyond the age considered conventional in the Nigerian society (late teens and twenties) places women on the fringe of life" (1981).

Mama's oppressive views on unmarried women are not just meant as a warning to Ijeoma; it also reflects her knowledge and fears about society's views and treatment of women. Mama knows that "[w]omen derive their status basically from their dyadic roles of wife and mother" (Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe 1990). Given Mama's staunch Christian values, it also follows that her beliefs about what completes a woman's personhood stem from the Biblical verse she often quotes: "[*s*]*he shall be called Woman / Because she was taken out of Man […] and they shall become one flesh*" (67). When Mama quotes this verse, she repeats and underscores the final section in Igbo, "*N'ihi nka ka nwoke garapu nna-ya nan ne-ya, rapara n'aru nwu-nye-ya: ha ewe gho out anu-aru*" (67), Frateur notes that this use of code-switching between Igbo and English is to emphasise the importance Mama sees in this verse (44).

This argument can be extended; not only does code-switching denote Mama's acceptance of the importance placed on gender roles and heterosexuality in the biblical verse, but also serves as being a product of heteropatriarchal Igbo society; Mama can only comprehend marriage or union as occurring between men and women. Osinubi points out that it is common in African women's literature to use the concept of family metaphorically (or literally) to represent the national attitude or the nation ("The Promise" 679). Thus, Mama's repetition of the verse in Igbo and English is not only about promoting the heteropatriarchal views of their Igbo culture, but also the views of the Nigerian nation. Mama requires that Ijeoma realise and accept that culture, religion and country dictate that to remain a part of all three requires Ijeoma's marriage to a man.

Pucherova argues that "Ijeoma's mother is a Christian zealot who uses the *Old Testament* to teach her daughter the difference between right and wrong" (116), However, I

contend that Mama's intent seems more directed at correcting her daughter's sexual ways; her biblical messages are not only lessons teaching her good over bad, but serve to remind without direct mention to Ijeoma about the latter's past 'abominable' indiscretions; the reminders are framed in terms of providing her daughter with the correct information she requires to undertake a thorough, well-informed and, from Mama's point of view, necessary repentance. The reminders are thus regular and constant. For example, when Mama and Ijeoma move from Nnewi to Aba, Mama explains that she "must make a schedule for [Ijeoma]. There's nothing more important now than for [mother and daughter] to begin working on cleansing [Ijeoma's] soul" (65). Mama never speaks to Ijeoma about her relationship with Amina, or about what happened during their time apart when she had sent her daughter to live with the grammar school teacher; Mama seems firmly decided that Ijeoma has corrupted her soul and requires salvation, she is in no need of any explanation from Ijeoma about the incident.

Mama does not allow the coexistence of queerness and religion, but appears obsessed with not just proving the heterosexual expectation of Christianity, but also of Christianity in general, of religion as the way forward; thus she reminds Ijeoma to wear her prayer scarf, her reminder a sort of ready assumption that her daughter lacks any religious values of her own, and that her sexual indiscretion having wiped out any that she might have possessed. Frateur observes that "[i]n mainstream Christian theological discourses, queer love and religious faith are perceived as irreconcilable" (18). This view more often than not results in queer religious people being forced into feeling a fragmented sense of self, the belief that these two vital identities are irreconcilable (Frateur 27).

Queer people faced with this sense of identity fragmentation often feel the need to remove a part of themselves, extinguish one of these 'incompatible' identities; often the pressure exerted by external forces, such as family and society, pushes them to 'remove' or relinquish their queer identity, instead of their religious one. In *Under*, we see it is Mama who seeks to resolve the incompatibility relating to her daughter's religious and sexual identities. It is Mama who feels a sense of fragmentation and not her daughter, it is she, the mother, who must act 'maternally' to shoulder the social pressure exerted on the daughter and remove the queerness from her daughter, and replace it with a sense of righteous devotion to God. It is here that we can see more clearly that Mama is both a victim and agent of her heteropatriarchal society, one that makes her feel immense pressure to engage her daughter to become accustomed to the hypermasculine and heteronormative world in which they exist. To see Mama as a Christian zealot only is to place all the blame of Ijeoma's trauma on Mama

as opposed to acknowledging that Mama is but a conduit of their heteropatriarchal Christian society, and that regardless of Mama's resolve in it, she is merely a product of her environment and not just acting to vilify her daughter.

Mama makes her case strongly against Ijeoma's same-sex desire via two key Bible lessons; the first is the Genesis story about Sodom and Gomorrah, and the second, the story of the Levite in the Book of Judges.[30] In relating the first story, Mama insists that "[t]he point is that Lot protected his guests from being handled in that terrible way that the Bible warns against" (73). In the second story, Mama places emphasis on this point; if "the men had offered themselves, it would have been an abomination. They offered up the girls so that things would be as God intended: man and woman instead of man and man" (80). In her bid to resolve Ijeoma's contradictory religious-sexual identity by explaining and proving to her daughter God's supposed heteronormative divine plan, Mama is willing to justify God's approval of heteronormativity against queerness, even if the means to maintain the heterosexual-heteronormative balance is through brutal injustices such as the rape of women, such as happens to Lot's own daughters and the Levite's concubine. Mama's implied teaching here is also the heteronormative responsibility that women must take on that includes sacrificing their own wellbeing, willingly or unwillingly, to ensure the righteousness of men, biblical men and Nigerian men.

Ironically, in wanting Ijeoma to 'protect' her sexual innocence from the corruption of illicit sexual acts or queer sexuality, Mama offers no suggestion of any real protection for her daughter. She teaches her daughter to still choose to engage in an act of self-violation for the sake of performing a woman's duty, namely, offering up her sexual virtue for the protection of a man; in other words protecting a man to the extent of self-violation by sacrificing oneself to his heterosexual demand so he would not have to gain sin himself by performing acts of same sex relations with other men. The biblical proof of the righteousness of heteronormativity for the salvation of man is quite literal here in Mama's example of Lot. She offers Ijeoma the motherly wisdom that her daughter's body and sexual desire is not

[30] Mama's telling of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah is essentially the homosexual interpretation of the story. God, having decided to destroy the corrupt cities, sends two angels to find righteous people worthy of being saved. After entering Lot's home as his guests, the angels are accosted by a mob of men who demand that Lot bring out the guests to meet them so that they can 'know' them. The sexual connotations of the word 'know' is what prompts the interpretation of homosexuality in this story. In an attempt to save his guests, Lot offers his two daughters to be raped instead. The common reading of the story, therefore, as God having destroyed the cities after the mob showed their desire for the angels, presents homosexuality as a grave sin that God sees fit to punish and 'cleanse' with destruction.
The Book of Judges includes the biblical story of the Levite and his concubine who while traveling through the city of Gibeah are violently met by a mob who want to sodomise the Levite. Instead of giving himself to the mob, the Levite offers his concubine who is raped by the mob and consequently dies.

permissible unless it is employed in aid of men, insinuating that queerness is unforgivable but heterosexual rape can be rationalised as good or goodwill. This good or goodwill, given Mama's interpretation of the stories, includes the 'solution' to prevent men engaging in homosexuality, consensual or not, which is to instead have women raped in their place. This is the horrific and ghastly crux of the matter, the violence that is linked to the social demands of heteronormativity and heterosexuality.

I draw at this point on Adrienne Rich's famous essay, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence", in which she points out the forced norm of heterosexuality in a heteropatriarchal society. Rich terms this 'compulsory heterosexuality', viewing it in relation to the lesbian experience and existence. Because the very existence of the lesbian is a powerful denial of the power of total supremacy and power claimed by heterosexuality/heteronormativity, it is received as threatening. Thus, the role of heteropatriarchy is to respond with violence; and it is at its extreme capability of and willingness to enact such violence that heterosexual desire then becomes a compulsory and inherent symbol of sexualised violence. Rich thus argues that forced submission and cruelty are deemed normal in heterosexual pairing, while "sensuality between women, including erotic mutuality and respect, is […] 'sick'" (641).

Rich's argument can be read vis-à-vis Mama's biblical lesson about Lot, that any type of heterosexual coupling, even if abusive, is God's will or is divinely sanctioned, and that any form of same-sex coupling is deviant and displeasing to God. Ijeoma, on her part, is unable to comprehend Mama's interpretation about sexuality in terms of religion; she instead interprets the story of Lot to mean the Bibles' conveying the dangers of incurring God's wrath if one behaves violently, inhospitably and endangers one's loved ones. Ijeoma reaches this alternative biblical understanding through a symbolic lens with which to view the stories, which is inspired by her late Papa's teachings of the importance of allegories.

Thus, Ijeoma is seen to reclaim and re-experience the Bible and God through the influence of her father, which allows her to think outside socio-religious hetero-patriarchal confines. She recalls, "[h]e used to harp on how there were infinite possibilities for the way anything in life could turn out. Even with a limited number of building blocks, he said, the possibilities were endless" (121). The introduction of the concept of allegories and Papa open Ijeoma's mind. Okparanta's use of a patriarchal figure as instigator of Ijeoma's exploration beyond hetero-patriarchal confines is a powerful and subversive technique. Asante Mtenje offers a similar analysis in "America", pointing to Okparanta's technique of employing a patriarchal figure in unexpected ways. In "America", Nnenna's father is observed to disobey

the norm and expectation that he should "admonish and correct the wayward daughter, as society requires" (250).

Both father figures are seen to instil positive character traits in their daughters, allowing them—the fathers--to act as sources of inspiration for their daughters to live beyond the narrow norms of Nigerian society and what it deems acceptable for them. Ijeoma adopts her father's way of thinking to assess situations with which she is faced, examining them from more than one perspective. This becomes an important coping mechanism for her. West et al. argue that by "reclaiming the biblical basis of our struggles, we re-experience God in new and diverse ways. We learn to re-experience God anew in the context of the cries of those oppressed because of their particular sexuality" (4). Van Klinken makes a similar argument that to recapture one's faith, one must redefine it ("Queer Love").

In attempting to find a more balanced view about the education Mama gives her, Ijeoma extends her thinking to beyond the story of Lot to the entire Bible, and by implication the entire Christian tradition; she thinks "why should other stories in the Bible […] not be conducive to allegorical treatment" (83). Mama's own view on heteropatriarchal Christian authority is that "[t]he Bible is the Bible and not to be questioned. What we read in it is what we are to take out of it" (81). Mama's acceptance of this authority, as we have seen, extends to even validating biblical accounts of rape, all to prove to Ijeoma the importance of maintaining the status quo of heterosexuality. However, this argument only serves to emphasise for Ijeoma that sex with a man can only occur through force.

It is Mama's religious education that creates difficulties for Ijeoma, who feels a strong sense of the obligation to adhere to her mother's divine heterosexual plan. Ijeoma's dilemma is evident in her thoughts, presented below:

> It felt preordained, as if there were no way out even if I tried. How would I face Mama when it got back to her that Chibundu had proposed and I had declined? She would be devastated, would mostly be heartbroken at the fact that I had passed up the life she wanted for me–and perhaps the only opportunity that I was likely to have with a man. (220)

Ijeoma finds it more stressful to make Mama happy than to please God; she has more confidence in God accepting her than Mama. Living at home with Mama after finishing her schooling, Ijeoma feels compromised: "closeness intensifies one's sense of duty. Now that I was living with Mama, I felt […] a strong obligation to meet her expectations of me" (189). While Ijeoma feels frustration that God does not 'speak' to her, which I explore in greater depth further on, she does not feel as restrictive in her divine relationship as in her relationship with Mama. Ijeoma is aware of the limitations regarding pleasing her mother.

Throughout the novel, we are fully cognisant of Ijeoma's understanding and acceptance of her queer sexuality; she does not show any clear denial or rejection of her queerness. She is keenly aware that marrying a man will not lead to her being complete in her womanhood or her Christianity as Mama and Nigerian society expect of her; thus, there is little room to develop other facets of their mother-daughter connection. This limitation in their relationship, in turn, limits Ijeoma's perception about happiness; filtered through her oppressively demanding mother, she is unable to grow to a fuller awareness and comprehension of the meaning of happiness for herself. Thus, her life and happiness seem 'predestined' to escape from her own grasp. Even her marriage, that includes rape and abuse, and which is still acceptable within Mama's heterosexual-heteropatriarchal framework, is misguidedly undertaken in the hopes it will make Mama content. Depressingly, Mama's advice to Ijeoma on her wedding day is "good men are rare these days. Now that you've found one, you must do what you can to keep him" (223).

Okparanta reinforces with Mama's chilling words that if the price of heteronormativity is violence, then Ijeoma has an obligation to accept and make do with the heteropatriarchal conventions of country and Christianity, including providing her husband her body for sex. Mama is a microcosm of Nigeria's Christian heteropatriarchal society and, in the name of her happiness as Ijeoma's mother and by extension Nigeria, Ijeoma must accept the violence that heteronormativity represents to her queer identity and body.

2.3 Romantic Relationships

As a girl of twelve, while living with the grammar school teacher following her father's death and Mama's breakdown, Ijeoma meets Amina, a Muslim Hausa girl. The two girls become fast friends and later fall in love. Their relationship grows in affection, desire and love, and is presented as the first romantic stirrings in Ijeoma; however, the grammar school teacher's discovery of their relationship interrupts and taints its innocence. The girls are separated when Mama is called and fetches Ijeoma; the girls do not see each other until secondary school. This time, though, the relationship is disrupted when Amina informs Ijeoma that she is to marry a Muslim Hausa man. Thus, the girl's romantic relationship again ends in their separation, again because of the demands of heterosexuality and heteronormativity on their bodies and relationships.

After completing her secondary schooling, Ijeoma helps Mama in her shop; here she meets Ndidi, a beautiful schoolteacher who introduces Ijeoma to the 'underground' Nigerian queer life; Ndidi takes her to a church transformed by night into a lesbian club. The two

women soon start dating but the harsh reality of their same sex women love confronts them via queerphobic violence, incidents of queer men beaten to death, their lesbian club-church being attacked and a queer woman burned alive. While still in her relationship with Ndidi, Ijeoma's childhood friend, Chibundu reappears. The intense queerphobic violence happening at the time and Ndidi and Mama's urging leads to Ijeoma marrying Chibundu. Ijeoma is never able to find pleasure or happiness with Chibundu, but she does find joy in the birth of her daughter, Chidinma. The marriage soon becomes abusive and Ijeoma is subjected to marital rape and Chibundu's manipulativeness, for example, his concealing Ndidi's love letters to Ijeoma. It is only when she sees the effect the abusive marriage has on her little daughter that Ijeoma takes Chidinma and leaves Chibundu. She returns to Mama's house, and is later reunited with Ndidi.

In the next section I analyse the three main lovers in Ijeoma's life. My exploration shows the range of intimacy that Ijeoma experiences, from the innocence and heartache of her first girlhood love with Amina to the brutal marriage to Chibundu and the final liberating joy of her reunion and shared love with Ndidi.

2.3.1 First Love is Queer Love

The first of Ijeoma's 'romantic' relationships is her relationship with Amina, with whom she experiences first same-sex romantic and sexual love. The two girls explore companionship, a romantic relationship, and discover their emotional and sexual intimacies. Via these exploratory aspects of their relationship, I analyse how Ijeoma and Amina explore their sexual and romantic desire as well as the innocence they try to hold onto.

Both girls find each other far from their respective homes, without their parents and having to deal with the impact of the war alone. Ijeoma describes herself at this stage of her life as "a castaway: no more the security of Papa or Mama. [She] might as well embrace and play the part of a derelict child" (55). This morbid setting in which their relationship originates is the reason Osinubi argues that "the relationship with Amina is marked by trauma and prohibition" ("The Promise" 680). Their unfortunate circumstances prompt mutual yearning in them for support, empathy and affection. Clearly isolated in relation to the grammar school teacher and his wife, the girls create their own home in the servant's quarters which becomes a space for them share intimate moments. This is a safe space too, a haven in which to also explore their queerness; a similar sense of refuge for exploring queer intimacy is later created in the refuge of the church to which Ndidi introduces Ijeoma, which will be

discussed later. These intimacies include sharing meals, bathing together and doing each other's hair.

The slow build-up of intimacy between the girls throws into relief their innocence and naivety. There is an almost playful joy in the young women creating their bond and figuring out their relationship dynamics. The first time they kiss, Ijeoma refers to the moment as "the beginning, [their] bodies being touched by the fire that was each other's flesh" (117). Reference to their flesh as fire signals the awakening of sexual desire that their physical connection sparks. Their physical intimacy increases and develops more quickly one night in which the two girls take their relationship to a new level:

> We'd never gone farther than the chest […] She cupped her hands around my breasts, took turns with them, fondling and stroking and caressing them with her tongue. I felt the soft tug of her teeth on the peaks of my chest. Euphoria washed over me.
>
> She continued along, leaving a trail of kisses on her way down to my belly. She travelled farther […] 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 had never imagined a mouth to belong. (123-124)

There is innocence to their lovemaking that is not just associated with their mutual discovery of more intense sexual pleasure. Ijeoma's innocence relates to her uncertainty that Amina could feel pleasure from her sexual actions; neither had she known and is surprised at her own feelings of sexual pleasure that she could experience in her body. This is also Amina's first same sex experience as a girl and she discovers her ability to touch and elicit sexual pleasure in Ijeoma, through sheer sexual desire for each other; their drawing together in sex is presented as a spontaneous and natural response by each of them. Their exploration of each other's bodies reveals their own respective responses, pleasures and desires that they were each unaware of possessing until they show it to each other. Their physical intimacies break through the mental limitations and understanding of sexual pleasure. The girls' innocent experiencing of first time same sex is interrupted by the grammar school teacher. The teacher's intrusion into their living space taints their sexual experience and understanding:

> Amina and I began to cry, deep cries that made our shoulders heave. Our clothes lay scattered on the floor, dispersed like discarded seeds. We were naked, and we felt our nakedness as Adam and Eve must have felt it in the garden, at the time of that evening breeze. Our eyes had become open, and we too sought to hide ourselves. But first we had to endure the grammar school teacher's lecturing. There he went, pacing back and forth in our little hovel, going on and on about our shame, his eyes furious […] He lectured and he lectured, and he lectured. As God must have lectured Eve. (125)

For Ijeoma, their discomfort at being looked at by the grammar school teacher is the taint of the heterosexual-heteronormative-heteropatriarchal gaze he turns on them, their

having to "endure the misfortune of being forced to see [themselves] through his eyes" (125). In my view, Ijeoma's reference to their scattered clothes on the floor as discarded seeds has about it the biblical censure of Mama's prohibitions of partaking in sexual acts purely for self-pleasure.[31] She also describes herself and Amina as Adam and Eve who having their sin made known, become conscious for the first time about their nakedness. It is not so much that Ijeoma sees the grammar school teacher as a God-like figure who finds the couple in their 'Eden', but that she sees him consciously taking on the role of God, a censuring and wrathful God who punishes the first couple for the sin of sexual relations. As she sees it, in his eyes they are cast into the role of a girl Adam and Eve. It is he–the heterosexual he–who makes them aware of their 'sin'; it is he who exposes their same sex women's desire to censure, it is he who imposes on them a realisation of their nakedness–their women's bodies together as sin and shame, and finally it is he who berates them with the wrath of an avenging God who chastises Eve for tainting Adam with the sin of temptation of her flesh.

This is the biblical end that marks the demise too of their innocent love; they begin to see that their society expects them to view themselves as shameful and sinful. The grammar school teacher grabs the bible, yelling at them "abomination" (125), reminding Amina that the Qur'an also prohibits this type of coupling. Prior to this night, the girls have never experienced such sexual pleasure and mere minutes later this is replaced with the newer knowledge of the concept of 'abomination', immediately condemning the pleasure they previously discovered. And Ijeoma tells that "he lectured, and he lectured. As God must have lectured Eve" (125). Her reference to Eve signifies the original sin, reinforcing the idea of their innocence that is lost; yet the idea that their actions are sinful had never crossed their minds until it is relayed to them through the heteronormative gaze and knowledge of sinful shame. Their relationship, gone from feeling natural and normal to becoming 'anti-Christian', 'anti-Islamic' and 'anti-social' in terms of what is permissible.

Separated, Ijeoma receives her bible lessons from Mama about how she is shameful and sinful as a queer woman. Amina's fate, alone in the grammar school teacher's home, is never revealed to the reader. It is in my view, however, that Amina has been similarly subjected to an intensive religious period in her life during which she is forced to recognise her actions as a grave indecency that requires a lifetime of shame and repentance. Amina's thoughts and behaviour when she is reunited with Ijeoma are proofs of this; she constantly

[31] A Genesis story in which Onan, having been ordered to sleep and conceive with his newly widowed sister-in-law, does not want to follow orders. Instead of impregnating her, Onan ejaculates onto the floor, and incurs the wrath of God who kills Onan for his actions.

battles with herself and with Ijeoma's more liberal view of religion in general. Reunited at secondary school, Amina and Ijeoma slowly rekindle their romance, yet it is a romance that is constantly interrupted and disrupted by Amina's fears, which often take the form of biblical themed nightmares. For example, she awakens up next to Ijeoma one night in a state of panic having dreamed of hailstones, an image often associated with biblical forms of punishments for sinning, to which Ijeoma playfully responds as Amina having read too much of the Bible. Amina becomes distant and cold towards Ijeoma via her religious inspired fear, or as Ijeoma metaphorically describes it, as "a secondary-school-aged, Nigerian Margaret Thatcher, iron lady through and through" (159). The soft and innocent flesh that Ijeoma feels when she and Amina first have sex is now replaced with a cold and hard exterior.

As previously discussed, Ijeoma herself is capable of introspective faith that allows her to see the possibilities for adapting the religion to include her as a queer woman. Amina, however, sees no possibility of being accepted in a religious capacity other than as a heteronormative woman. Intent to rekindle both their friendship and romantic relationship, Ijeoma muses:

> We were in love, or at least I believed myself completely to be. I craved Amina's presence for no other reason than to have it. It was certainly friendship too, this intimate companionship with someone who knew me in a way that no one else did: it was a heightened state of friendship. Maybe it was also a bit of infatuation. But what I knew for sure was that it was also love. Maybe love was some combination of friendship and infatuation. A deeply felt affection accompanied by a certain sort of awe. And by gratitude. And by a desire for a lifetime of togetherness. (150)

Ijeoma is certain that their intimacy extends beyond the conventions of friendship; Amina knows her as no one else does because of the shared trauma of losing family members to the war as well as their humiliation by the grammar school teacher. Despite their being older and more grown up since their initial romance at the grammar school teacher's house, Amina and Ijeoma maintain, nonetheless, an air of innocence in their continued relationship at secondary school. The girls are now more aware of the heteropatriarchal gaze, though introduced directly to them by the grammar school teacher, through which broader society's sees as well. Despite this awareness, the girls still have a youthful innocence that often accompanies first love and its small joys. One such joy is shared by Amina and repeated by Ijeoma at the start of their reunion at secondary school where a hesitant Amina takes Ijeoma's hands and hopefully suggests that "[m]aybe just holding hands will be enough" (144).

This episode of Ijeoma's stream of consciousness is markedly different than when she and Amina first have sex; Ijeoma has a more mature and complex need to define their

attraction beyond mere physical erotic attraction; she attempts to make sense of their emotional connection. She has some notion that their relationship is on a level higher than friendship, but she is unable to describe it accurately. She feels a sense of certainty, however, when she names it unconditional love, love that is there despite the dynamic between them. While Ijeoma feels a desire to share an eternity together with Amina, this is not their mutual mindset; Ijeoma realises this when she catches a glimpse of Amina socialising with a boy. Ijeoma responds to this heartache in a letter to Amina, which is a simple declaration of her feelings: "[a]ll the things the boy will do, I promise to do better. In all the ways he can love you, I promise to love you better" (166). The original innocence that defined their relationship at the beginning at the grammar school teacher's house is still evident in Ijeoma's letter; the simplicity of her words, though, is weighed down with the desperate promises she makes; her feelings, we see are the despairing realisation of losing one's first love, accompanied by an equal realisation that *she* is capable of losing her first love.

Amina marries and goes to live in the North of Nigeria. Thus, Okparanta writes Amina out of the narrative, with the life of this character after secondary school left unknown to the reader. However, Ijeoma's dreams about Amina in the novel's Epilogue hints that Amina's marriage, like Ijeoma's lacks joy or pleasure. In one such dream, Amina is presented wearing a veil, through which Ijeoma can still see guilt, shame and fear weighing down Amina. This image can be read metaphorically; Amina, having merely immersed herself in her religion, had not found safety or comfort, the very things she was shown to have been lacking in her secondary school days that were filled with fears and insecurities. Ijeoma, we see, makes attempts to observe her Christian faith as a queer woman; Amina though has pursued her Islamic faith as a straight-seeming woman.

There is no evident closure for either of them because the relationship does not end with mutual understanding; Amina does not appear again to provide an actual account of her life. Thus, there is a kind of eternal sense of this first love relationship marked by dissatisfaction. It is almost as if Ijeoma was being prophetic when she wrote to Amina that the 'boy' could never love her the way Ijeoma would be able to. Amina's husband, in Ijeoma's prophecy would not meet her expectations as a husband; Ijeoma herself becomes absolutely certain of the doomed relationship Amina enters into when she herself is married to a man.

2.3.2 Muteness, Marriage and Manhandling

In Ijeoma's second intimate relationship, I show that her marriage to Chibundu is the antithesis of a romantic relationship for Ijeoma. Her dreaded marriage to Chibundu is not surprisingly a failure, with no hint of success or happiness for Ijeoma as his wife; this is clearly indicated in her hesitancy and unease right from the beginning. In my view, Ijeoma's marriage is symbolic of her heteronormative obligation; as Pucherova notes, the "[m]arriage to Chibundu, orchestrated by her mother, turns out to be everything that Ijeoma's previous lesbian relationships were not: oppressive, violent, and unequal" (117).

Frateur observes that male same-sex desire in literary works is explored more within the contexts of Christianity than is female same-sex desire (8). In my view, this is because the Bible places more emphasises on its sex sinning stories, such as that of Sodom and Gomorrah, that sodomy is a sin. Thus, it is more apparent why queer males are usually the first to be singled out and chastised within the faith. Faith-based discrimination of queer women stems from their not observing the biblical procreation command for women to be "be fruitful and multiply" It is true that this biblical command is also used to discriminate against queer men, however, given the heteropatriarchal Nigerian society in which Ijeoma lives, it is harder for a woman to escape the procreation obligation placed on her as a woman; the above biblical command merely adds to the already existing heteronormative notion that women undertake the simple roles of domesticity and procreation in the family and society. A woman refusing to marry a man is simply seen as unable to religiously comply and reproduce. As Frateur puts it, "[b]eing fully woman, or living a sacred life, is assumed as only possible in reproduction of heirs" (23).

However, van Klinken draws on Mercy Oduyoye, a Ghanaian theologist, to show it is possible to reinterpret the biblical injunction for women to be 'fruitful' and for 'multiplying'. Oduyoye's point emerges from analysis of a non-fictional text, however, it is still applicable, as at its core is the argument that the conventional and conservative religious beliefs about a woman's role is not fixed as there are multiple and continually advancing theological approaches, including feminist and queer-centred ones. Thus, "Oduyoye proposes an alternative, broader notion of procreation as fruitlessness, that is, as enriching and contributing to humanity" ("Autobiographical" 22). In other words, a reinterpreting of the 'be fruitful' notion that includes woman, like her, who cannot biologically have children and are shut out from the injunction of procreation as it is normally read. Such a reinterpretation also includes queer people in the religious discourse as they too suffer oppression in terms of

heteronormative cultural and religious obligation, including relating to procreation ("Autobiographical" 21). Oduyoye's approach promotes the idea of human sharing, that just sharing the individual gifts and talents God has bestowed on each of creation is an intended meaning of procreating or contributing to humanity; such gifts for sharing oneself would include happiness, laughter, love, pleasure and knowledge.

Transformative attitudes to traditional interpretations of religious beliefs, as portrayed in Ijeoma too, are reinforced by Chibundu:

> [A]ll these doctrines that are set up, and we are told that God is the reason for all of them […] you begin to see that the Church just wants to do whatever it can to get as many followers as possible and to keep them under control […] Church tells us […] 'Be fruitful and multiply' […] And they continue to have more children for fear of using contraceptives and angering God. And really, it's not even God who's making them do it. It's the Church that has interpreted God's words to its own benefit […] it knows […] how to control them with things like doctrines and words like 'abomination.' Bottom line is, take your abomination with a grain of salt […] some things are called abominations that really aren't […] your mama is praying over you […] you are, praying for yourself. If I were God, and if it turned out that you were actually committing an abomination, then I'd forgive you. (232)

Chibundu offers this 'speech' in a church in which he and Ijeoma are sitting; he questions the authority of Christian institutions from within the church, strongly symbolic of the value of and need for subverting the power of religion that is dominating and harmful to its followers.

Chibundu's approach to Christianity is clearly progressive, indicating his own willingness to see beyond the conventional preaching and interpretations of the Bible. He emphasises that Ijeoma must separate God from those who claim to speak on His behalf. The most noteworthy point Chibundu makes in this speech is his advice to Ijeoma to question the severity attached to the word 'abomination', which to him is used as a means of controlling others by those claiming to act in God's name. Chibundu does not directly say it, but in the scene above he is presented as understanding, realising that Ijeoma dwells on the concept of abomination because she is queer. However, even while he indicates his acceptance of her queerness, he nonetheless fails to grasp the importance of her need to verbalise it herself. Ijeoma attempts to speak in response to Chibundu's advice to explain the reasons she cannot simply ignore the power of the word 'abomination': "[t]here are punishments for people who've done what I've done […] Stoning and dro–" He placed a finger over my lips, and just like that, he hushed me, cancelled all the words that had been getting ready to make their way out of my mouth" (233).

It is clear Chibundu has good intentions in stopping her saying what he assumes would be further self-recriminations. Yet, ironically, he prevents Ijeoma from uttering her

own truth in her own words and via her own immense courage to speak it. Thus, his action, done out of kindness, ultimately results in silencing her. This is especially significant in light of his later violence towards her. This episode marks the first time Chibundu's actions suffocate Ijeoma's true self from being expressed and lived. He–as a heterosexual and heteronormative man–is thus metaphorically portrayed as being an obstruction to her existence as a queer woman and in her journey to healing.

Ijeoma's resistance to Chibundu worsens the longer they remain married. Heffers argues that while "Ijeoma seems certain in her narration that she is a monosexual lesbian. Still, she is swept up in the courtship with the man" and that even though "she is fairly certain that she is gay and not bisexual, she is open to different possibilities for her sexuality" (7). This is a view with which I strongly disagree. Firstly, the use of the phrase 'swept up' is grossly inappropriate as it carries connotations of being 'charmed' or willingly participating in a courtship. Yet, Ijeoma is presented as engaged in neither of these, made clear in her noting the sense of claustrophobia she experiences as well as the fact that she never indicates, in her thoughts or verbally, being flattered by Chibundu's attention. The image introduced in this scene of being 'swept up' creates the illusion for the reader that Ijeoma is acting on her own free will and beginning to accept the idea of marriage; the truth, however, is that Ijeoma enters the marriage through a combination of the pressures exerted on her by Mama, Ndidi, Chibundu as well as their queerphobic society. Ijeoma could not even verbalise her agreement to the proposal, she had merely nodded as her form of response.

Secondly, contrary to Heffer's argument, Ijeoma is not portrayed as attracted to different genders. At no point in the novel does she note any feeling or attempt to explore beyond her same-sex woman's desire. For example, Ndidi asks Ijeoma at one point if she has tried being with a man, which enrages Ijeoma who responds in her thoughts as how "could she imply that [Ijeoma] even had a choice in the matter? How could she imply that it was that simple–that [Ijeoma] should just go on and order [herself] to try things out with a boy?" (215). Ijeoma is clearly not open to the idea of a sexual or romantic relationship with a man. Rather she is cognisant of her position, one which Mama has often reminded her, as predestined to marry a man whether or not she gives her consent. Saying she is open to the idea of sex with a man would make her complicit in the relationship with Chibundu, which she is compelled into and trapped by its violence and force against her.

The first time Chibundu and Ijeoma have sex, it is not because she wants to but because she is attempting to find a way out of what is already clear to her–that marriage is a trap. Motherhood appears as the only viable option for herself to escape the meaningless

relationship with her husband. There is also the pressure she feels to consummate the marriage, a build-up from her mother, Ndidi, Chibundu, and the heteronormative queerphobic society she is living in. She already feels her suffocation in the marriage, and the possibility of motherhood feels like her only chance of surviving and escaping the prison in which she finds herself. As already mentioned, even Ijeoma's acceptance of Chibundu's marriage proposal has been merely the obligation she felt to her mother. Even then, she had not been capable of vocally accepting her 'predestiny', because, just as she is unable to say 'amen' to prayers about her 'sins', she cannot voice agreement to things she knows deeply are not true, that is, being an abomination and her being with a man.

Ijeoma is filled with dread the entire wedding day. Courtois argues that her sense of dread is a subversion of the conventional joy associated with weddings. I agree with this argument and extend the theme of subversion to the duration of Ijeoma's marriage to Chibundu, indeed most of the events usually considered significant in a person's life are marred by the presence and unhappiness that accompanies Chibundu being in her life. Their wedding night ends without sex; their first home together makes them both miserable; the conception of their child is undertaken with reluctance, and the events following the first child serve as markers of the complete drain of any remnants of joy and safety Ijeoma feels in the marriage.

Chibundu develops in range, from the unconventional, irreligious and non-traditional Nigerian husband, to domesticated husband and swift transformation into the patriotic man who realises the socio-cultural privileges and power awarded to him via his gender and sexuality. The latter includes having sex with his wife whenever he wants it, whether or not she wants to, and demanding to have a son; all these are the normal desires and demands of the heterosexual man within the heteropatriarchal culture. Moreover, these have been normalised to the extent that a man can demand them of his wife, regardless of her consent or feelings.

Immediately after the birth of his daughter, Chibundu wants nothing to do with the child, except for his expectation to be met that her name reflects his own so that he can still stake a claim to her. Izugbara argues, "[u]ntil the arrival of the male child, the names of female children before him will also boldly declare the crisis of anticipation in the family" (8). Ijeoma names her daughter Chidinma, meaning "God is good"; the name is symbolic as she makes her happiness known while at the same time asserting the claim that God intended for them to have a daughter; she does this consciously too in order to prevent her daughter ever feeling like she was a placeholder for the joy meant for a son. In my view, the novel

strongly suggests that the Nigerian patriarchal society in which Ijeoma lives is constantly longing for and anticipating the arrival and success of its boys and men; the girls and women are in contrast simply dismissed and related to as below subpar citizens.

The interpretation I offer about Ijeoma's Nigerian society could also extend Izugbara's argument regarding the contrasting reactions in families to the birth of boy and girl children; the deep similarity between this fictional family and broader society resides in Ijeoma's family presented as a microcosmic representation of Nigerian society. Moreover, in my view, the norms and demands placed on its members are not just a facet of patriarchy but also relates to the means of preserving the patriarchal system and power of men. This means hetero preservation goes beyond the welcome with which children are received and included in the family, but also extends to all other forms of violence apart from emotional violence. Chibundu's desire for a boy child begins a period of extreme emotional, physical and sexual violence against his wife, aligning with the religious duties of a woman Mama claims as presented in the Bible. Izugbara argues that "[a] woman's pleasure will then be in giving the man what and how he wanted. This means she has to curb her own desire […] Women who fail to align to this patriarchal order are cast aside as […] whores" (12).

Ijeoma is met with verbal abuse and force when she refuses Chibundu's advances. He resorts to throwing money at her and becoming increasingly angry at her reluctance, which he sees as the cause and provocation for his stooping so low as to offer his wife money in exchange for sex. Chibundu begins to insist on his right as a husband to sex in order to conceive a son. This is "'procreative rape'–a form of rape primarily inspired by the socio-cultural norm that one is to procreate, if not voluntarily then by force" ("Autobiographical" 21). This type of rape echoes that of "corrective rape" which, "whether of gay men or lesbian women, is a sign of patriarchy's pathology, as it battles (literally) to bring 'unruly' African bodies back into their normative place within patriarchy, disciplining them" (West et al. 5).

This sheer act of violence that produces shock and trauma to the body, leads to what Courtois refers to as the "m[isc]arriage" (127), the signifier of Ijeoma's failed pregnancy and marriage. The miscarriage is not surprising, Ijeoma notes towards the end of her marriage how limp and exhausted her body is as well as her mental, emotional and physical decline, which she attributes to Chibundu's "misuse and manhandling" (284). Ijeoma's acknowledgment of the tax on her body is significant; Chibundu's ill use and forcible treatment of her, his literal manhandling, results in her body's temporary but rapid decline.

I return to Rich once again to discuss Ijeoma's mental, emotional and physical decline as being the direct result of what Rich refers to as the enhancement of male power. Rich

refers to Kathleen Gough to demonstrate and explain how male power is enhanced through characteristics that in turn diminish women's power. These include denying women their own sexuality, forcing heterosexuality on them through rape, enforcing institutions of marriage and motherhood on them, and "*[using] them as objects in male transactions*" (638-639). The final characteristic, in my view, can be interpreted as the using of one's daughter as a placeholder and the superstitious means of bringing a son. All these characteristics can be applied to and are indicative of Chibundu's controlling actions to maintain hold over Ijeoma through diminishing her will and increasing his power.

Ijeoma, for her part in this terrible marriage, is seen to have forced into her life the biblical interpretations of a woman's life with which Mama had raised her, that a woman must suffer without complaint rape, dishonour and other ill treatments so a man can achieve joy or satisfaction. However, realising the extent of her situation and also noticing its impact on her daughter, Ijeoma removes herself from Chibundu's life, thus forbidding him any further abuse of her body, mind and spirit. As Ijeoma notes, "[m]an and wife, the Bible said. It was a nice thought, but only in the limited way that theoretical things often are" (258). This is Ijeoma's realisation that while 'man and woman' was a decent enough idea but when practiced in a limited way and through forceful means, it impacts every other aspect of a woman's life–her life. This idea of 'man and woman' is the allegorical lesson of Papa's which allows her to contemplate the infinite possibilities that every situation and experience can bring.

Ijeoma is unable to see anything other than dread and limitations for herself in a heterosexual and heteronormative relationship. On the last night of her marriage in Chibundu's house, Ijeoma awakes with a start and realises the daunting reality that she *and* her daughter "were choking under the weight of something larger than [them], something heavy and weighty, the weight of tradition and superstition and of all [their] legends" (312). This, in my interpretation, cannot simply be understood to mean that Ijeoma finally acknowledges the futility of abiding with tradition and customs which is suffocating her and Chidinma. It is the acknowledgment that there are no possible alternatives or possibilities for her in a heterosexual marriage; thus, there is no possible reason for her and Chidinma to remain under the oppressive weight of her marriage. Indeed, when Ijeoma embraces queer love freely, without the weight of the old obligations to traditions she did not believe in, Ijeoma begins to see and experience the many more possibilities for happiness.

2.3.3 Reclaiming and Reimagining Queer Love

In the final romantic relationship, I will explore the "reparative re-education and affection" (Osinubi, "The Promise" 680) that Niddi inspires in Ijeoma. The first is recognising women's sexual agency and the sexual satisfaction that can exist without a man's presence. The second is the re-evaluation and reaffirming of one's own religious beliefs. The third is the reimagining of the queer possibilities or possibilities for queerness in spaces that are predominantly queerphobic.

Pucherova argues that "[w]omen's experience of sexual pleasure in woman-to-woman sexual acts is figured as an expression of freedom, power, and agency that heterosexual relationships, corrupted by patriarchy, do not provide" (105). Ijeoma's relationship with Ndidi stands as proof that sexual desire and pleasure can both exist and be liberating:

> I pressed her wet flesh firmly with the tips of my fingers, 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. I rubbed gently in small circles, slow at first and then faster, the way I had done with Amina and myself.
>
> Her hips moved along […] She let out a cry, and I found myself overcome by emotion – warm feelings, feelings of affection, of happiness, of something like love; feelings of elation at being able to connect so intimately with her, at being able to elicit such an intense reaction from her. It was as if her pleasure was in that moment my own, ours, a shared fulfilment. (200)

This intimate scene shows Ijeoma achieving pleasure in a different way than she had done with Amina and in the extreme polar opposite kind of sex with Chibundu. With Chibundu, Ijeoma does not note any form of pleasure or enjoyment from their sexual interactions. Ijeoma describes sex with Chibundu in awkward and uneasy language: "he moved to enter me, I made sure not to turn away" (242) and "holding me in place as he lowered himself, as he writhed himself into me" (274). Her descriptions are nothing like the above narration that cannot help but detail and revel in the intimate acts in her lovemaking with Ndidi. With Amina the descriptions are tentative, conveying more their mutual discovery of sex and erotic desire than the personal satisfaction of the sexual experience for its joys and pleasures. With Chibundu, Ijeoma's only narration accompanying sex, are about her fears, dread, discomfort and shame. The very first line above is the complete opposite; without a man's presence, Ijeoma's sexual activities elicit no force and are merely natural.

Describing Chibundu having sex with her, Ijeoma notes that "he writhed himself into [her]" (274); this contrasts with the ease with which her fingers enter into the warmth of

Ndidi who welcomes her touch. With Amina there is pleasure and joy, but it was the surprising pleasure of the new; with Ndidi, it is pleasure at a heightened level. Ijeoma is not the one being touched but the "shared fulfilment" (200) conveys the sexual satisfaction she attains through the connection she can and does feel with Ndidi. We are witnessing Ijeoma feeling sexual satisfaction, the first deep and intense connection with a person who is her lover, and she is overwhelmed in a positive way, fully open to and accepting it.

The collection *14: An Anthology of Queer Art,* discussed in depth in Chapter Four, includes Cisi Eze's short story, "Tangled Ends", which deals with the sexual and romantic relationship between Adanna and Kachi, the protagonist.[32] After having sex with Adanna for the first time, Kachi comes to the realisation that it made sense that Nigeria passed the anti-gay law because what she "felt with 'Danna was too good, too good that if discovered by all women, men would be relegated to the sole purpose of procreation, not pleasure. Would women being sexually independent be a threat to masculinity?" (*Inward Gaze* 31). This echoes Courtois's pointed observation that "[w]omen in the novel do not need men in order to reach orgasm. They define pleasure outside of the masculine law" (125).

The absence of a man in Ijeoma's same-sex erotic experience above reinforces Riche's that lesbian existence is "as a form of nay-saying to patriarchy, an act of resistance" (649). Ijeoma is spurred on by the desire to satisfy Ndidi, using the experience she has from her time with Amina and from self-pleasure. Ijeoma making love to Ndidi with expertise garnered through other women-only erotically intimate experiences completely removes any possibility for a man by any means being responsible for the sexual pleasure being enjoyed by the two women. Ndidi achieves sexual pleasure and satisfaction completely through Ijeoma's doing. Thus, according to Chantal Zabus, it is about: "debunking the widely accepted notion that penile coitus is solely responsible for women's sexual pleasure" (104). This sexual interaction leads to Ijeoma also realising that she can receive pleasure through her partner's pleasure. This reinforces both women's connection with each other and the extent of their mutual satisfaction, lacking in Ijeoma's marriage to Chibundu.

Another vital aspect of Ijeoma's life that is absent in her marriage is religious and spiritual fulfilment, which Ndidi helps Ijeoma reconcile. Ndidi welcomes Ijeoma into a reclaimed church space that is occupied at night by queer women, a reimagined space of

[32] "Tangled Ends" is a short story that appears in the second volume of *14,* and tells about Kachi, the protagonist, who meets Adanna at a hair salon. The two women begin a relationship of mutual sexual and emotional gratification. Kachi is depicted as having only been with men prior to her same-sex lover, Adanna, and has always been frustrated by the lack of satisfaction from them. She realises after just one kiss with Adanna that she is never going back to men. Both women state in the story their decision to never rely on a man for their sexual needs.

queer possibilities. The church previously, used as a positive space for queer women to experience love and freedom under the guise of God's home, is Okparanta's metaphor for what religion is meant to be for everyone at all times. The Church, with its signs outside reading, "FRIEND IN JESUS CHURCH OF GOD" (190) and "FOUNTAIN OF LOVE" (190), is a religious sanctuary to those who have been cast away by society as unworthy of God or His love. This use of the church is thus an act of subversion relating to a religious space conventionally used in Ijeoma's Nigerian society to preach queerphobia; now, it becomes what the signs promise and Ijeoma is able to fully be herself in a church and be part of a 'congregation', which is new to her, which I discuss at more length next.

This safe space is temporary, though; it is raided and vandalised by a murderous queerphobic mob, resulting in the burning and death of one of the women. In this heinous act, queer people are neither the perpetrators of religious besmirchment nor the threat to society. These queer women have used the Church as a haven, one of the functions of a church; those claiming to be acting in God's favour burn alive one of His creations, perpetuating sacrilege. Ijeoma, in her relationship with Ndidi, tries to ignore the religious guilt Mama has instilled in her, but the incident in the Church the night of the burning forces Ijeoma's realisation, with Ndidi's persuasion, that it is not her religious beliefs that cause her fear but those who claim to be acting on God's behalf.

Her relationship with Ndidi enables her to begin to think of herself as a spiritual person and also a queer person, to see that the two can co-exist harmoniously. During her marriage, Ijeoma writes many letters to Ndidi, some which she sends and others not, which she writes purely for cathartic reasons. These letters indicate that Ijeoma had never moved on from Ndidi. For example, she writes: "*you are the one I love"* (278); however, the most notable are the letters that rival the Biblical verses regarding the creation of man and woman as counterparts. Ijeoma writes: "*[y]ou were merging into me and I was merging into you. There were no clothes between us, nothing but our flesh*" (280). Okparanta's use of italics presents the letter as resembling the Bible verses that have trapped Ijeoma. The writing too sounds like the verse "*flesh of my flesh […] and they shall become one flesh*" (67). The reference to merging to create one flesh and the absence of clothing serves as a subversion of the Adam and Eve pair; it is also a constructive reproduction of nakedness, of recouping the incident of first sex in which Amina's and Ijeoma's nakedness are exposed to the censuring heteronormative gaze of the grammar school teacher. These love letters to Ndidi are a narrative means of reclaiming biblical motifs.

Another way Ndidi reimagines queer possibilities is the future she envisions:

> a town where love is allowed to be love, between men and women, and men and men, and women and women, just as between Yoruba and Igbo and Hausa and Fulani. Ndidi describes the town, all its trees and all the colors of its sand. She tells me in great detail about the roads, the directions in which they run, from where and to where they lead […] One night, she mumbles that it is Aba. The next night it is Umuahia. With each passing night she names more towns: Ojoto and Nnewi, Onitsha and Nsukka, Port Harcourt and Lagos, Uyo and Oba, Kaduna and Sokoto. She names and names […] All of them are here in Nigeria. You see, this place will be all of Nigeria. (321)

Reimagining Nigeria as an all-encompassing, tolerant and accepting nation of different types of love enables more realistic the possibility of existing openly and proudly as queer appear.

Ndidi is not creating an unattainable utopian nation. Rather she is presenting the vision of a future Nigeria, powerful in its embracing of diversity in religion, culture, ethnicity and sexuality. This is Okparanta's reimagining of *Under*'s effect; it is her assertion that she is not representing a perfect, impossible to achieve fictional depiction of Nigeria, but what the country can be if it opens itself up and throws off the narrowness of its current lack of imagination. According to Lombardi, Okparanta aims to provide "realist fiction" (21) which can be seen in Ndidi's reimagining of Nigeria. The final reimagining is presented in the Epilogue, succeeding Ijeoma's reuniting with Ndidi in a scene in which Ijeoma constructively reminisces about Mama's lessons focusing on marriage. Ijeoma's trust and faith in her relationship with Ndidi makes it possible for her to acknowledge "that a bicycle has two wheels. And, of course, it does. Ndidi is one, and [she is] the other" (320).

2.4 Journey to Selflove, Queer Love and God's Love

Ijeoma's relationship with her mother and her three lovers inevitably lead her to discover a way of reconciling her sexuality and her faith in God. In this final section, I discuss Ijeoma's reconciliation of her sexuality and religion, analysing Ijeoma's relationship with self and with God which is in constant flux. The epigraph to this chapter presents an excerpt from an interview with one of van Klinken's informants, who exclaims: "[t]his is who I am, this is how I was born. So I asked myself, because I know that, and God knows that, what then is my purpose, what is my significance on this earth?" ("In the Image" 47). This is the quandry Ijeoma faces throughout the novel; she, as with the informant, does not know what their existence means since God accepts them but their religious society does not.

Ijeoma's constant attempt to reconcile her relationship with God and her desperate need to make room for herself within her faith is presented as her queerness not diminishing her religious zeal but, in fact strengthening her resolve in Christianity. Van Klinken writes

that his informants are subjected to queerphobic societies that treat them as if their very existence is an insult to God and the religion. Similarly, Ijeoma arrives at the conclusion that God created her the way she is that those insulted by her queerness misunderstand the religion. As an informant of van Klinken's argues, "[y]ou see people raising the Bible to say, 'God hates fags'–but the word 'hate' has never come out of the Lord's mouth. So they are the ones […] who are involved in blasphemy" ("Queer Love" 958).

However, religious queers are relentlessly taught that God hates them and that their natural desires are abominations; thus, they feel hesitant before God. For example, Ijeoma attempts to speak to God at church one day, but "somehow the words of prayer would not come. It was as if they had become stuck in [her] throat" (72). Later, Mama concludes their Bible lesson with a prayer and asks God to cleanse and protect Ijeoma's soul; Ijeoma, still struggling to speak to God, forces herself to utter "Amen" (72). These two events reveal it is not because she no longer wants to speak to God, but rather that she does not know how to speak to him. How does someone who is told God hates them begin to talk to Him? How do you say 'Amen' to a prayer that refers to you as an abomination and embodiment of sin? These are the underlying questions to Ijeoma's hesitation before God, and why, we realise, her conversation with Chibundu in the church had been so impactful on her. As discussed previously, while Chibundu tries to subvert and change her understanding of sin and abomination within the church space, the space itself instigates the fear she feels.

It is also worth noting that Ijeoma does not attend any church gatherings when she is older, and only goes when she can be alone. She sits in church spaces, trying to make sense of herself and attempting to summon answers from God without the disruption that church goers and its leaders create. Ijeoma is seen to distance herself from conventional ideas about Church attendance by creating a safe space just for herself in the absence of the congregation. Robertson refers to this type of distancing as the "postmodern move" (132) in which queer Christians choose to move away from the religious community towards "a personal, internal connection with the divine/spiritual, which is not arbitrated by an institution" (132). This strategy enables Ijeoma to grow and struggle with her religion while still entering the Church. She is able to problematise and constantly re-evaluate her thoughts about the meaning of religion for herself through Papa's teachings about seeking allegories to recognise the infinite possibilities available to one.

Her need to mentally and physically separate the Church and the congregation echoes van Klinken's earlier point about the religion and not God being anti-queer. Ijeoma's constant battle to find her place in the world is not uncommon amongst queer Christians. Ijeoma is

able to find inner peace and reconcile with God partly because she is able to introduce the allegorical Bible readings into her Church re-education: "I'd had the feeling of a person wandering lost and aimless and thirsty in the desert. But now I had stumbled upon a tap of water. The joy of discovery washed over me" (84). The joy she speaks about is not merely about discovering something new but that of self-realisation and self-discovery. These arrival points will allow her to embark on a journey with religion in which she is confident will end far better than she had otherwise thought.

Courtois notes in the traditional bildungsroman, marriage would be the possible means to end the novel, but for Ijeoma it is instead a huge obstacle to her reaching her actual ending (126). While her relationship with God is important to her religious reconciliation with her queer self, she may not ignore the relationship with herself; for Ijeoma, the two go hand-in-hand. Her faith is part of her. Okparanta reinforces Ijeoma's agency; even with her traumatic marriage she is allowed to have a life after it. This technique remakes her bildungsroman; her end is not the conventional bildungsroman end mentioned by Courtois. According to Courtois, it is rare for a woman's bildungsroman, not to mention a queer one as well, to present the growth and independence of the protagonist; these are usually reserved as the sacred ends of men protagonists alone.

Thus, enabling a woman protagonist who is queer and situated within the violently patriarchal world to grow beyond her marriage to a man, motherhood and mental hardships, is to show the writer's intent of great agency for her character. All Ijeoma's relationships are configured by lack because she herself is lacking in fully integrating vitally with herself. In her relationships with Mama and Chibundu, Ijeoma is made to feel less of a person and is forced to sacrifice much of herself to try and secure the happiness of each. In her respective relationships with Amina and Ndidi, the attraction she feels for both of them is mutual, but there is a decided imbalance in each when it comes to the emotional aspects of these relationships. Ijeoma notes the difficulty in determining happiness; moreover, she is unsure she can "even presume to think happiness was a thing within [her] reach" (195). When unhappily married to Chibundu, she thinks having a child will make her feel complete, but it is only when she is divorced, accepted by Mama and back with Ndidi that Ijeoma feels happiness because she has achieved it on her own terms.

This characterisation aligns with Pucherova's argument that "the woman's right to decide about her body […] determines female emancipation" (111). Thus, Ijeoma is mistaken in thinking a child, specifically a son, will liberate her from Chibundu's sexual advances; she realises to gain her 'freedom' through a man's permission or enabling is impossible. It is why

she describes her married self as feeling trapped within her body. She emancipates herself, or takes a step closer to it only when she leaves Chibundu and she takes back control of her body and life; by doing so she actively takes away the right he has had to oppress her in accordance to the heteropatriarchal system that allows him this right to oppress her as her husband.

Upon Ijeoma's return to Mama's house with Chidinma, Mama says that "God, who created [Ijeoma] must have known what He did" (323). This reveals that Mama, who has been the only consistent person in Ijeoma's life and therefore, has witnessed her journey, has also had a reconciliation with faith and her daughter's sexuality, thus further confirming to Ijeoma that she has achieved acceptance and liberation. Having successfully achieved reconciliation with both God and herself, Ijeoma is able to clearly determine how to maintain her happiness. She realises and accepts the Bible's key emphasis and teaching, that is, the "affirmation of the importance of reflection, and of revision, enough revision to do away with tired, old, even faulty laws" (321). Ijeoma's realisation is that she does not have to walk away from God or change herself, but instead constantly re-evaluate and update the rules and the context of her religion, which will more ably guide its followers to peace and love instead of punishing and banishing them from their faith in God.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the mother-daughter relationship between Mama and Ijeoma as the foundation of Ijeoma's religious conflict and the beginning of her journey towards self-acceptance. Next, I looked at Ijeoma's first love and sexual awakening with Amina which enabled her beginning towards her self-discovery. My analysis of Ijeoma's marriage to Chibundu showed the effects on her of the physical, emotional and sexual oppressions related to heteropatriarchal marriage, her outright rejection of heterosexuality for its overbearing domination of men over women, the latter also not an option for her own life and happiness. Building on her rejection of heterosexuality, I discussed in some detail Ijeoma's sexually fulfilling and emotionally reparative relationship with Ndidi that helps her heal and find happiness. Finally, I explore Ijeoma's final self-discovery in her reconciling her relationship with God and her queerness through acceptance of herself with no need of having to compromise any aspect of herself.

This chapter has shown that *Under* has the potential to influence "reshaping or reinforcing cultural expectations" (Heffers 9) and religious norms. West et al. make the powerful argument that "[q]ueer sexuality becomes a matter a social justice not personal

morality" (5). My own interpretation of the novel's intention is that queerness should no longer be looked at as a threat to an individual's morality and thus in need of removal if viewed to be immoral; instead, queerness is treated as a social justice issue that has been grossly neglected in the African novel, in particular in the Nigerian novel. This literature can also achieve in transforming the literary landscape of those who have suffered under other social injustices, thus building solidarity and constructive relations with queer citizens. Further, such literature can present queerness as a social justice issue that requires social commitment and support. Asue quotes from Corinthians to argue that queer people deserve and have the divine right to find acceptance and care within their society: "God has arranged the body… so that each part may be equally concerned for all the others. If one part is hurt, all parts are hurt with it" (406). Nigeria itself will suffer from a lack of justice until it stops hurting its own people with its queerphobic violence.

Okparanta, through her novel and Ndidi's vision, shows acceptance of queerness as hardly the threat but the solution to a problem Nigeria has not yet owned up to having. This is its problem of socio-political division amongst its numerous groups and different cultures, religions and sexualities, to name a few. The novel exposes the tragedy of these groups' separation by boundaries of ignorance and non-acceptance. I argue that Okparanta's novel offers Nigeria an alternative with which to reimagine its space as one of inclusivity and acceptance, it will thrive with true and transformative socio-religious morals taking root in its society and its institutions. Beyond this, Okparanta seems to suggest with her novel's conclusion in particular that religion and queerness have stood the test of time and both are permanent fixtures in Nigerian society. Thus, I find that the expectation to accept one and ignore another is impractical and will only hinder the country and its citizens moving forwards towards a constructive future.

Chapter Three: Masking and Unmasking Queer Masculinities in Nnanna Ikpo's *Fimí Sílẹ̀ Forever: Heaven gave it to me*

> Complicit masculinities over perform heterosexuality in ways that are psychologically harmful to themselves and other queer sexualities (Nonhlanhla Dlamini 12)

3.1 Literary and Analytical Introduction

In Chapter Two, I discussed Okparanta's exploration of the Christian faith and queerness, with a particular focus on queer women's sexuality and same sex desire. In this chapter, I focus on the interplay of sexuality and gender in Nnanna Ikpo's *Fimí Sílẹ̀ Forever: Heaven gave it to me* (hereafter *Fimí Sílẹ̀*). I analyse the ways in which Ikpo in *Fimí Sílẹ̀* challenges and interrogates the issue of hypermasculinity and queer men socially, legally and professionally obliged to disguise their sexuality behind heterosexual masks. I use the concept of masks and complicit masculinities to analyse how the protagonists use heterosexual façades to survive as queer men in Nigeria.

This chapter is discussed in two significant sections. The first focusses on the queer protagonists creating 'straight' masks for themselves and the ways in which they embody these masks. The second looks at queer advocacy and activism, specifically precautionary and restorative methods to counter heterosexual and heteronormative domination. Precautionary advocacy methods include educating youth and encouraging progressive thinking to countering queerphobia. Restorative activism methods have arisen specifically in response to the passing of the SSMP Act and includes queer networks, legal efforts to tackle the law and dealing with queerphobia as they arise.

The discussion throughout focusses on the main protagonist, Wale, who is also the narrator, and to a lesser extent on the secondary protagonist, Wole, both who Ikpo portray as flawed characters. I focus on the development of their toxic and complicit masculinities and the complexities that lie behind the crafting of their heteronormative personas. In this regard, I discuss their appropriation of the dominant heterosexual masculinities employed to control and maintain the heteronormative Nigerian society, and the conflicting nature of their queer sexualities. Focussing on their careful crafting of their heteronormative-seeming masculinities, I consider the unexpected conflation of the two personas with the passing of the SSMP Act. *Fimí Sílẹ̀* depicts the challenges of the queer community, mainly queer men, in contemporary Nigeria.

Raised in Southern Nigeria, David Nnanna Ikpo is a lawyer and academic who is currently based in South Africa while completing his LLD studies at the University of Pretoria. Ikpo counts among the trend of emerging Nigerian men writers writing about queerness and tackling queerphobia in their country such as Chris Abani and Jude Dibia.[33] Ikpo's expertise in the legal world and his focus on Human Rights and Democratisation in Africa in his own postgraduate studies are reflected in this debut novel, *Fimí Sílẹ̀*, published in 2017, which was shortlisted for the Lambda Literary Award in Gay Fiction in 2018. Ikpo is also a poet whose work is included in *14: An Anthology of Queer Art: We Are Flowers*, and a blogger who curates a blog called *Letters to My Africa*. His work focuses on recognising, humanising and honouring queerness in Africa.

Fimí Sílẹ̀ tells the story of queer twin brothers, Olawale and Oluwole Damian (hereafter Wale and Wole), who work as Yoruba human rights activists and lawyers and are both in heteronormative relationships with women. Wale, the primary protagonist and narrator, is bisexual and engaged to Tega; Wole is gay and engaged to Lola. Tega and Lola are unaware of their respective fiancés' queer sexualities. The novel is set in 2013 and carries into the aftermath of the passing of the SSMP Act in 2014. The significance of this temporal setting is heightened by the twins' human rights organisation called Afrospark where their fiancées also work.

The novel uses intermittent flashbacks, delving into the twins' past which sheds light on other prominent characters, such as their grandparents, Baba and Maami, their uncle, Brother Gbenro, their father Aderopo Toluwani and their mother Titilayo Ajayi. Wale was raised by Baba, Maami and Brother Gbenro in a town called Ilaro. At age eleven, he met his mother for the first time when she takes him to live with her in Port Harcourt; he leaves behind the only home he had known and Seun, his best friend and first love. Living with his mother in Port Harcourt had been a huge adjustment for both mother and son, they were each faced with the task of getting to know each other and creating a mother-son bond. Wale had been constantly told by his mother that he would get along with the mysterious "he". On his first day at the Nigerian Navy boarding school, Wale is introduced to his twin brother, and the two become inseparable. A few months later, the twins find out about their father; he is serving time in prison. Later in the novel, they discover he is also queer.

It is at boarding school, Wale and Wole first encounter the harsh complexities relating to masculinity and sexuality. After high school, the brothers attend Kola University to study

[33] Chris Abani, as mentioned earlier, wrote the contemporary queer novel, *Graceland;* Jude Dibia is credited with writing the first Nigerian novel, *Walking with Shadows,* with a central gay protagonist.

law, and after completing their degrees, start Afrospark, an organisation that fights for the rights of queer people victimised by the queerphobic Nigerian society. The twins also join Rainbow Talk, an online and underground network of queer men. Later on, Wale returns to his alma mater, Kola University, to lecture in the law department; it is at this time that the President of Nigeria signs into existence the SSMP Act that criminalises same-sex relations and singles queer people out for punishment in prison.

The climax of the novel is set in a week of events that the twins plan, including the premiere of a queer men's film, pro-queer men's theatrical performances, and a party set to culminate in the twins' wedding day and the students' graduation. The week, however, ends with the twins' queer sexualities being revealed and the wedding called off. Police raids and students arrests occur and the newly 'outed' twins take on legal and advocacy work in defence of the persecuted queer community, this time as openly queer men. With their personal and professional lives under severe threat from the state as a result, the brothers and their father seek asylum in South Africa.

Fimí Sílẹ̀ was published in 2017, as mentioned; however, there is not any published critical analysis on the novel.[34] Nonetheless, there are reviews from prominent academics and queer African commentators included in the novel's preliminary pages. Sokari Ekine, a Nigerian writer and activist, praises the novel as a "brave work that seeks to counter the narrative of victim homosexuals in Nigeria's state-sanctioned homophobia" (i). Frans Viljoen, an activist and human rights professor, credits Ikpo as an author who "succeeds in vernacularizing and humanising LGBT, mixing personal and political deftly." Pierre Brouard affirms that Ikpo "makes a compelling case for Africans to celebrate sexual and gender diversity, without necessarily rejecting the traditions and ways which root citizens in their homelands" (i-ii). Epprecht contributes that the novel sheds light on the challenges queer citizens face by merely existing in Nigeria. Professor John McAllister remarks that the novel differs from the usual trope "seen in black-and-white terms: as a heroic struggle against unrelenting hate […] African modernity in all its rich and contradictory exuberance" (Ikpo ii-iii). Finally, Reverend Jide Macaulay, founder of the House of Rainbow, applauds Ikpo for being a "Nigerian in Nigeria writing about LGBT life there" (ii).

While these critics are mainly interested in the novel's contribution to queer African discourse, I focus specifically on Ikpo's contribution to the representation of queer men and their challenges regarding queer masculinities in Nigeria. I refer to of R. W. Connell's vital

[34] There were no academic journal articles published on the novel at the time of writing this thesis (2019-2021).

work on the complexities of straight-acting queer, even though his research mainly centres on white non-African men. I also draw on Nonhlanhla Dlamini's research on queer masculinities in Nigeria and Nigerian literature. Dlamini's analysis of fictional depictions of masculinities, such as Chimamanda Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck,* deal with the notions of 'complicit masculinities' and "'gay straight man' syndrome", which I borrow and apply to the protagonists in Ikpo's novel.

Msibi's research which problematises African masculinity and heteronormativity in the South African context is also an important resource for the aims of my discussion. With regard to Msibi, the socio-patriarchal setting, the core focus on masculinity, and the role of educational institutions in progressively promoting queer understanding, renders his work easily applicable to the queer Nigerian context and Ikpo's novel. Sadie Hale and Tomas Ojeda's paper, "Acceptable Femininity? Gay Male Misogyny and the Policing of Queer Femininities", focuses on debunking the "myth that *the oppressed cannot oppress*" (310), which I present as an important argument about queer men who through performative and inauthentic personas, become complicit in accepting and using the privilege awarded heterosexual men in patriarchal societies. Hale and Ojeda's work supports my argument that Wale and Wole's heteronormative-acting selves are detrimental to them and others in their community.

My discussion of masculinities also takes into account Kopano Ratele's research on interrogating masculinities in and outside of the heteronormative tradition. To contextualise my argument about Nigeria's patriarchal society and the ways by which its heteronormative values are instilled through education, I again draw on Msibi and Izugbara, as well as the respective works of Egodi Uchendu, Epprecht and Sule Egya and Sefinatu Dogo. Their respective works focus on the different ways in which Nigeria's youth are exposed to the country's heteropatriarchal norms and expectations, which lead to the exclusionary queerphobic mindset. I explore the role played in the events of the novel by the SSMP Act via Joseph Onuche's research on the law and its socio-cultural impact and influence.

3.2 Understanding Masks, Straight-Acting and Complicit Masculinities

The crux of my argument is centred on Ikpo's use of masks which function as a symbol of duality, in particular in the protagonists' use of masks in their dual personas. Wale and Wole's dual personas are constituted as what I refer to as the brother's 'private' and 'public' selves. The private persona is the unguarded version of Wale and Wole which enables their feeling freer to be their queer selves. Living in a queerphobic heteropatriarchal society, the

two men are unable to be openly queer. Thus, Wale and Wole manufacture public personas for themselves in order to appear or pass as heteronormative citizens. Wale refers to these masks as the selves they have to portray in public. These masks need to be worn for the twins to occupy space within their society, as Wale explains:

> Masks are an important part of our lives, as a people. Chinua Achebe in his *Things Fall Apart* described masks as spirits of the ancestors, and, as such, superior to mere human beings who led human lives–and that the men who wore them were possessed by the ancestors' spirits or even the ancestors themselves […] But masks in the context of homosexuality are not claiming superiority: they are a shield, a shell, a façade. Masks in the context of homosexuality in Nigeria are not just worn against the glare and beliefs of hostile spectators, but also for the bearer to shield his heart, and to help the survival of his plastic peace and the world that he is building for himself – a place that does not yet, and perhaps will never exist. This is necessary. But there is a danger that in wearing such a mask he teaches himself to take on falsehood perfectly, and becomes comfortable enough with it to detest everything that is natural and genuine, in both others and himself.
>
> We all wore masks, and in a few days those worn by Wole and me would, we believed, permanently become us. (202-203)

Wale considers above the importance of wearing a mask in Nigeria to hide any suggestion of queerness to the public. He is clear that the masks he and Wole wear are not related to spirituality. They are different from the masks Chinua Achebe describes in *Things Fall Apart*, in which masks are presented and related to by those who don them as superior objects with significant ties to the ancestral spirits by those wearing them. Instead, the masks the twins wear help them to achieve social status that keeps them at a level on par with heterosexual citizens, raising them from the discriminatorily inferior status their queer sexuality accords them in Nigeria. The masks also create a barrier between their real selves and those who detest queer people; acting as a king of shield against them absorbing and feeling the harmful effects of the hate directed against queer people.

The main point Wale raises about the masks is the danger it brings; these are two-fold and will be explored throughout this chapter. The first danger is accidental and is related to the risk of the wearer becoming so accustomed to wearing the mask that they forget the adopted version of oneself is false, resulting in the false persona merging with the real self. The second relates to wearing the mask as an act of self-preservation, in particular, making the difficult conscious decision to permanently wear the mask, such as getting married and reinforcing the façade of heterosexuality. On the one hand, Wole is portrayed as wearing the second mask; he forces himself to choose wearing the suffocating mask for the rest of his life by marrying Lola. Wale, on the other hand, is portrayed as wearing both the masks. He is

presented as having forgotten he is wearing a mask, thus he is anti-effeminate queer men but also chooses to wear the mask permanently by marrying Tega; tragically, marriage will ultimately succeed in alienating his queer self from his masked self.

This is how the mask is conceptualised for the role it is employed to play in the twins' lives, yet it is vital to emphasise that Wale and Wole pass as heterosexual men. In other words, the conventional components of heterosexual life, such as crafting a non-effeminate nature and their respective engagement to women, lend the twins the appearance of heteronormativity and heterosexuality. Effeminate men are men who cannot hide their masculine 'otherness'; thus, they cannot escape societies' scrutiny of them and have no barrier between their private and public selves.

The traits of effeminate men stereotypically include a flamboyant walk, womanly mannerisms and soft facial features. Wale and Wole respectively engage in a constant and strenuous relationship or battle between their sexuality and their gender. In this respect, I find useful Connell's conceptual idea of the 'straight gay' man, which stems from the perception of queerness as a "negation of masculinity" (736). Connell argues that while "men who have sex with men are generally oppressed [by society] they are not definitively excluded from masculinity. Rather, they face structurally-induced conflicts about masculinity–conflicts between their sexuality and their social presence as men" (737).

That queer men are not excluded from their gender is not to say they do not experience oppression under heteropatriarchy, rather the attempt is at understanding why the oppression exists in this form and the potential of queer men themselves enacting oppression within their gender. Taking into consideration Connell's earlier point about straight-acting queer men, I situate and build on this argument within the African context with equal reference to Dlamini regarding the fragility of masculinity. Dlamini argues that queer men who take on straight-seeming façades and complicit masculinities:

> do not critique or challenge dominant masculinities but make up for the perceived 'failure' to attain the unattainable hegemonic goals through a make-believe performance of hegemony. The make-believe performances allow them to pass as 'real' men who espouse the ideals of dominant masculinities in order to reap the dividends of dominant masculinities. Their access of patriarchal dividends renders them complicit in the subordination of queer men, women and children. Complicit men are sometimes homophobic and their homophobia is induced by fear of being found out that they are not 'real' men, for dominant masculinities confers 'real' masculinity status to all heterosexual men […] Complicit masculinities over perform heterosexuality in ways that are psychologically harmful to themselves and other queer sexualities. (11-12)

The concept of complicit masculinities is observed with regard to a masculinity that is considered to be lacking in the attributes necessary to form part of the dominant group of heterosexual-heteropatriarchal men; it takes on the appearance of a dominant masculinity by performing as such. The attributes performed include the ability to protect, control, lead, show strength and accomplish these through violence if necessary.

Drawing on Dlamini's explanation, I use the term 'subordinate masculinity' to refer to masculinity that is considered lacking the attributes of the dominant group and thus relying on the adoption of a straight-seeming persona. If the subordinate masculinity succeeds in giving a realistic performance worthy of faking itself into the dominant masculine group, the reward is society's payment of patriarchal dividends which can range anywhere from financial gain to social status and respect. To accept these dividends is to further implicate oneself in being complicit with the masculinity that functions in problematic ways in society. Furthermore, the divides between genders and between masculinities deepen.

Dlamini's argument, although not referring specifically to Ikpo's novel, speaks to Wale's warning, stated above, that masks are dangerous to both the wearer and others. Wale's warning echoes Dlamini's regarding complicit masculinity producing harm in society and in the man performing it.

3.3 Masquerading in and Out of the Straight Man's Mask

I begin my discussion about why Wale and Wole live behind masks in public and inhabit complicit masculinities that betray their authentic queer selves by analysing Wale's childhood.

3.3.1 Crafting the Man behind the Mask

The dual personas of Wale and Wole, or their public and private selves, I categorise as: unmasked (private) and masked (public). There are numerous examples in the novel of the twins living both in and out of their masks. I first examine these to lay the foundation of the twins' mask wearing vis-à-vis the core concept of straight-acting and complicit masculinities and then move on to analysing the twins' masks. In this regard, I look at Wale and Wole prior to their having created and donned their masks.

Wale's masculinity is more fragile and volatile than Wole's; since the twins drew extremely close only after meeting sometime in their late childhood, the clues that can explain Wale's particular volatile masculinity can be found in his early childhood before he meets Wole. The early instilling of gender norms and expectations in children by their

parents, other adults they come into contact with and society in general have deeply entrenched effects, as is demonstrated in Wale's character portrayal.

For example, as a child Wale is exposed to heteronormative gender roles by Brother Gbenro in the following incident when they are tie-dying shirts with Baba one day:

> 'You know, men's lives are like tall, strong trees that make the wind bearable, and useful for plants, animals and humans, which is why it is our job to bind the material in the raffia. On the other hand, women's lives are the beautiful wind that needs to be cared for and directed where to go and where not to. This is why it is their part to mix the dye and colour the material.'
>
> 'What about when the wind is too strong and the tree breaks?' […] 'Disaster!'. (13-14)

According to Brother Gbenro's metaphor, men's personas and behaviours develop in accordance to their general physical attributes of being tall and strong. However, while it is meant to be an empowering example to the boy, this description places emphasis on men being compelled never to be weak or appear weak because men will destroy and let down the 'natural' order of things.

The novel suggests that instilling beliefs such as these in young minds creates the perception that men and women are designed differently, specifically as polar opposites, and within certain confines because nature has decreed it so; the argument is that culture and society must not oppose nature. As a young child, Wale would have likely taken on the values and beliefs of those around him, especially the adult men, which would have created a long-lasting mindset in him. Ratele explains that traditional forms of masculinity are upheld by traditions that include "inherited stories which we live by; discursive constructions handed down from one generation to the next and used to represent the world and ourselves" (135).

Thus, when Brother Gbenro explains gender roles and the traditional expectations of Wale as a man, this lesson is ingrained in him. Wale would have from this point on begun to believe that society is relying on him to fulfil his role as a man; thus, the process via which traditional masculinity is created is observed in Brother Gbenro's oral depiction of gender dynamics and roles in society. Furthermore, Sefinatu Dogo argues that children are categorised in terms of gender at birth; they are immediately given initial identities based on the socially determined gender roles that in the preferred Nigerian context, would include heterosexual-heteronormative ideals. Dogo's point also helps contextualise the impact of Brother Gbenro's words on Wale, especially his later view about his societal role within a very specific heteropatriarchal confine despite his knowledge about his true sexuality.

Similarly, Izugbara argues that children are socialised to see themselves within certain categories; boy children envision they will grow up to be in charge of their household, in particular, in control over the women of the family. Girl children are taught they should be obedient and domesticated, and willing to follow the lead of the men in their life (Izugbara 9). Growing up in a hetero-patriarchal society and culture makes it difficult for children to escape the pressures and influences of hetero-patriarchy, especially when it is replicated in many other ways such as via social interactions and institutions. If the patriarchal indoctrination of Wale during his childhood is what contributed to his later negative masculine persona, the development of traditional masculinities into toxic masculinities and queerphobia over time needs to be understood as well.

The novel offers some important insights into this via specific descriptions of Wale and Wole's time at school in which their sense of their respective masculine selves is further developed and challenged. When the twins are fourteen, Wale is introduced to homosexuality via a traumatic incident; Tobi, a boy living in his hostel, is physically and verbally abused by senior prefects who suspect Tobi of being homosexual.[35] Both the school faculty and students treat Tobi's alleged sexuality as if it is a disease that makes him contagious. Tosin, a senior student and Wole's mentor is the only person who treats Tobi decently. Wale is amazed that the manly Tosin comes to Tobi's aid by showing kindness and eschewing the hatred and disgust everyone else shows the abused boy.

However, Wale remains confused, especially when he learns the hypocrisy involved in the determining of men's social identities and reputations. He is unable to understand "why […] the SS3 boys who sneaked into the senior girls' hostels at midnight to 'visit' their girlfriends on the eve of their passing-out parade [are] celebrated as heroes and big men on their return" (192). On the other hand, Tobi's alleged sexual actions are met with violence. Wale's confusion reinforces the conventional attitude of the heteropatriarchal society in which men show off their sexual prowess in numerous ways, granted that their sexual behaviour is in relation to a woman and not another man. Wale realises that this is the reason for Tobi's abuse and the celebration or affirmation of the SS3 boys' actions. Uchendu argues that boys "aspire to project an ideal masculine identity as they grow older" (279) and that they use the school platform to develop their preferred version of masculinity.

A vital way of portraying masculinity is via physical appearance, this being the 'macho' aesthetic. Uchendu describes the macho aesthetic as "broad shoulders, muscular

[35] The novel itself uses the terms 'homosexual' and 'homosexuality' more often than it does 'queer'. Wale notes in this regard that "everything sexually different is assumed homosexual" (196).

body, physical prowess, bravery, above-average height […] and an intimidating facial expression" (287). It seems this type of 'acceptable' appearance has already made an impression on Wale too. We note that when Wale meets his father's friend, Biodun, he privately condemns the man for being effeminate; this is clear from his shock that the man appears manlier than he had initially thought. The features that lead to Wale's change of mind about Biodun's manliness are indicated as "[h]is body was skinny but his arms were toned, and thick with soft-looking hair, some of which spread across his chest. His hair was cut low, and he had a neatly trimmed and sharply-outlined moustache" (86). The evidence of muscles and visibility of hair portrays manliness for Wale, and it is clear that these stereotypical masculine features are associated with Biodun's manlier appearance, and counter some of the femininity Wale has previously associated with him.

However, this newly recognised manliness and quasi acceptance is not enough to completely redeem Biodun in Wale's eyes, the latter who still feels intense unease around him:

> In my head I had stamped on his feet and plucked out his eyes a hundred times already […] he looked at me like he knew that I understood the crap he was saying. Like he had stripped me naked a thousand times before our first introduction. Like he knew me in a way I was ashamed of being known. I didn't know how he managed all that, or how I knew that we were more similar to each other than was convenient, though I did know that I hated this similarity to the core of my being. Yet I stayed, because a more decisive part of me wanted to be seen by Biodun, the part that was curious, that wanted to be led, to be surprised. (86)

Wale's reaction in the company of Biodun elicits intense feelings of violence towards the other man, prompted consequence of Biodun simply being himself. The onslaught of violent thoughts, in Wale's view, is prompted by Biodun's ability to see Wale as a queer man, something that the young man has not yet fully recognised in himself. Thus, we note in the process of developing his masculinity and coming to terms with his sexuality, Wale is still uncomfortable with Biodun's ability of seeing him for who he is–a queer young man, which carries the risk that this could be revealed to other people.

Wale's confusion arises from the contradiction of being caught between wanting to escape Biodun's gaze and at the same time for Biodun to recognise him for who he is. Despite not fully comprehending his sexuality at this stage, Wale notes he already knows he ought to feel ashamed of it. This also instils a greater need to distance himself from Biodun and men like him. His anxiety and detest of Biodun and effeminate men in general stems from the social threat they pose to Wale's public persona. Wale possibly entertains fears that effeminate men have nothing to lose and would out him or discredit his masculine status

because “men’s masculine credentials are constantly policed by their peers” (Hale and Ojeda 314).

For Wale to secure believability in his performance and reap its dividends he must become complicit with hiding his authentic masculinity; he is socially pressured into himself taking away power from those masculinities that society deems to be subordinate. Ironically, given his sexuality, Wale himself possesses a ‘subordinate’ masculinity, in that he is not a heterosexual man, rather his ability to hide it and pass as heteronormative renders him and his masculinity complicit with his disempowerment. To secure ‘passing’ as a heteronormative man, he must distance himself from other queer men and not publicly show any sign of acceptance of queerness.

However, there are risks associated with complicit masculinities. One of the most serious risks is participating in generating queerphobic acts and thoughts, seen in Wale’s passing judgement on effeminate queer men and thinking about behaving with violence towards them. Although Wale does not act on this violence physically, he thinks about such acts, as noted in the above example with Biodun; moreover, he often makes discriminatory statements about effeminate men. According to Msibi, hate speech is violent and it sustains queerphobia (“Not Crossing” 52). Another crucial risk of complicit masculinity is the damage it does to one’s own psyche, which is seen above in Wale’s inability to fully comprehend the hatred burning in him as he looks at Biodun as well as the hate he directs at the reflection of himself in Biodun. According to Hale and Ojeda, “feminine boys and men are ‘a considerable source of anxiety’ for society” (314). Since the majority of individuals inevitably absorb the values and ideals of their society, it is my view that this accounts for Wale’s feelings of anxiety about feminine boys and men. Wale, at that young stage of his life, has not yet adopted a ‘mask’ of complicity in public; neither has he yet fully realised and come to terms with his masculinity. The encounter with Biodun, is in fact a marker in his realising both his sexuality and need to pretend in public that he is not affiliated to queer men in any way.

As mentioned earlier, the fostering and socialisation of gender norms have a monumental impact on children. In their late adolescence, the twins are introduced to their father who serves to challenge the dominant heteropatriarchal masculinities surrounding them, and prevent these being replicated in them. However, their father’s intermittent appearance in their lives means his influence is not strong enough to help them contend with the dominant masculinities that the twins feel they have to embody to survive in society. Their father’s constant verbal affirmations, his unyielding love and support, his physical showing of affection toward them and reminders to them about showing self-love serve to

show Wale and Wole the tender and non-macho type of interactions possible between men.

However, while their father's love impacts both the brothers, Wale's early upbringing with its strong enforcement of the notion that men must be strong results in Wale only being able to show affection to men in his family or to other men in private. This careful or cautious attitude in his display of affection to other men arguably stems from childhood influences, such as Brother Gbenro whose lesson that it is vital to the world that men remain strong and steadfast appears to linger in Wale.

Wole, on the other hand, was not raised with the kind of experiences that Wale had in his early childhood years. Wole is portrayed as more in touch with his affectionate side; this possibly explains why he does not harbour any form of intolerance towards effeminate men as does Wale. However, Wole too dons a mask with Wale and the only viable reason for this is that, since Wole has always been more open to sexuality and non-conforming than Wale, he is able to clearly see the difficulties that engulf queerness in Nigeria and the need to hide his queerness, not out of shame but for survival and physical security. Msibi observes that "masculinities that are framed to regulate, silence, subvert, and police other forms of masculinity; to hold hegemonic masculinities in place, deviance is punished" ("The Lies" 71). In other words, to maintain patriarchal hegemony compulsory heterosexuality is enforced.

The narrating of the boys' encounters with queer masculinities serve to demonstrate Wale's growing understanding in childhood and adolescence of the ways in which boys and men are policed to be what they are 'supposed' to be–heterosexual-heteropatriarchal bodies and minds. Wale as a deeply flawed individual is both a man constantly feeling conflicted about his own and other men's masculinities and a product of his environment. He perceives quite early in his life the need to adopt a mask to fit in and to shield his unmasked self.

3.3.2 Donning the Straight Man's Mask

Having looked at the twins' engagements with their own and others masculinities prior to donning their masks, I now analyse in more depth the twins' own masculinities, in particular Wale's, as well as the masks they are forced to wear. Wale's early high school experiences, namely, the abuse of Tobi, Tosin's kindness, the affection of their father and his hatred of Biodun create in him a contradictory and conflicting understanding of queer masculinity. Thus, it becomes difficult for Wale to feel any sense of security in himself. In his senior year of high school, Wole grows close to a younger student, Peter, to whom Wale admits that he

"put up a façade of toughness" (239). Wale recalls that "Peter visited [their] room too often, [he] thought–even after [he had] warned [Peter] to never mistake [him] for Wole. He was slight in build, somewhat effeminate, and spoke delicately" (239).

Wale's description of Peter reflects nothing about Peter's own personality or attitude; instead, it is entirely about the other boy's effeminate attributes, which immediately puts Wale on the defensive. Wale's description of Tosin, however, is as "light-skinned, tall and hairy, and ranked amongst the most 'fly' guys in school. Tidy, sophisticated and spiritual" (193), which indicates his respect for the senior boy. Tosin is also known to discipline students with swift authoritative violence. Wale gets to know Tosin, who shares a room with his brother, and does not object to Tosin in the way he does Peter. This is possibly because Tosin lacks the effeminate looks and nature of Peter. Tosin is described with the macho features expected and hoped for in Nigerian men, features that Wale is raised to revere. Msibi argues that there are:

> [M]any overt and covert ways in which men were regulated and policed–by themselves and other men–in maintaining traditional and normative masculinities. Men were expected to dress, talk, walk and speak in specific ways that proved their manhood. What was particularly clear among the participants was that there was a line which could not be crossed. This line separated 'straight' men from those who were considered gay [and] that men are scared of their own deviation from the norm, and try to manoeuvre themselves within that norm. Deviance from normative constructions of masculinity may result in homophobia or homophobic violence directed at those who do not conform. ("Not Crossing" 53)

These subtle and blatant ways in which men are policed are important to note as they indicate the impact of different forms of policing on all types of men. For example, in the depiction of Wale, he is constantly seen encountering overt policing, such as the abuse of Tobi; on the other hand, there are the covert experiences with Brother Gbenro's early teachings about men needing to be strong and leaders of women, for example. Both overt and covert forms of policing influence his mindset and attitude towards other men and also how he sees himself.

Msibi's argument may be applied directly to the novel; there is seen a direct link between violence and the heteronormative performance in Wale as a queer protagonist. Steyn and van Zyl's writing about the violence of heteronormativity observe "[u]nderlying values around […] femininities and masculinities […] continue to permeate the social regulation and exploitation of certain sexual subjectivities through structural and actual violence" (12). This is seen in the incident with Tobi; the boys who mete out his punishment use brute force to remind Tobi, and possibly other possible queer boys at the school, that straying from the masculine norm is unacceptable. Msibi further notes that in addition to the expectations

required of them, men are socially compelled to act in a manner that does not implicate them as queer or queer-seeming. The burden of having to appear heterosexual leads to aggravated fears of failing this social test, because those who fail are seen to be dealt with violently.

To be hyper-conscious of one's 'straight' appearance is to be the antithesis of effeminate. This disregard for and detestation of effeminate men, as noted earlier, Wale develops in his teenage years–the hatred of Biodun and Peter, for example. His unease develops alongside his realisation about his queer sexuality. In adulthood, he is still simultaneously more self-aware of his sexuality and the dangers of venturing into society without a mask. The twin's engagement to their respective fiancées reflects their more nuanced masking in adulthood. Tega and Lola are presented as the personifications of the 'masks' Wale and Wole use to navigate life in Nigeria as closeted queer men and public advocates of queer men's rights. Although Wale and Wole genuinely care for Tega and Lola, their relationships with the women are inauthentic.

The desire to mask their sexualities in order to gain societal acceptance is motivated more by marriage and the cover it will provide them than it is by any love they might feel for the women. In their work regarding queer men's use of women, Hale and Ojeda argue that men, regardless of sexuality, see "the role of women as *conduits,* and their function in mediating men's sexual desire" (313). Wale and Wole similarly relate to Tega and Lola as conduits to connect and communicate with the heteronormative Nigerian society under the cover of heterosexual relationships. Furthermore, although unbeknownst to the women, Lola and Tega are crucial in keeping the adult twins' sexualities hidden; the women also serve as a means to prevent Wale and Wole from fully giving in to their queer desires.

Nevertheless, Wale and Wole's infidelities regarding their respective engagements cannot ultimately be viewed as immoral per se, because as is commonly seen in queerphobic societies, queerness can sometimes only be explored after the individual has entered into a heterosexual relationship as a façade. Thus, Wale tells:

> All the while I could not shake off the weight lying on my chest […] Why were we doing this to ourselves, to Lola and Tega? It seemed to me then as if we were being controlled by some power outside ourselves. I wondered if it was God, or tradition, or fear; or a mixture of the three. It was like we were actors in a play, saying lines that had somehow somewhere been written for us. I had felt that at the dinner earlier, and I felt it more strongly now. If the Devil is the Prince of Lies, what were we doing?
>
> But this was the right thing, I thought. This would expel the rumours of our homosexuality. This would make everything okay. The mask would become the truth, all divisions collapsed together (218-219).

Wale acknowledges the possible heartache these engagements could cause all those involved. He is also strongly aware of the deceit involved in their engagements, but he also admits that thse feel out of their control. Wale's concern over who is controlling their fates is starkly similar to Ijeoma's concern in *Under*.

Wale, like Ijeoma, spends much of his life in conflict with the obligation placed by society on gender conforming and sexuality that his agency, happiness and fate all seem out of reach and not in his control, which deeply impacts his intimate relationships. Both Ijeoma and Wale, to an extent, feel they cannot fight the pressures that surrounded them, because their lives feel preordained. Wale, like Wole, is extremely self-aware of the harm they are causing their fiancées by being dishonest about their sexualities, but it is clear they feel trapped. Wale begrudgingly admits pursuing marriage as the right thing to do in his and Wole's circumstances. Wale is under the illusion that once they are married, and the divisions between their public and private selves collapsed, the pressures of society will lessen. However, in his desperate need to expunge rumours of his and Wole's sexuality, he is seen to have neglected fully comprehending the dire consequences of committing to the queer 'straight man' performance.

Onuche argues that the importance of marriage, heterosexual marriage to be precise, "is a duty, a requirement from the corporate society, and a rhythm of life in which everyone must participate. Otherwise […] he is not only abnormal but 'under human'. Failure to get married under normal circumstances means that the person concerned has rejected society and society rejects him in return" (92). This highlights that it is not just sufficient being heterosexual; one's dedication to the societal norm must be proved via marriage; as Onuche argues, "Nigerians are very sensitive to any departure from the accepted norm" (93). It is thus paramount for the twins to have heterosexual-seeming relationships that also show intent to fulfil the social obligation of marriage to reinforce the public 'masked' personas they have spent years crafting.

After returning to Nigeria at the beginning of the novel, Wale says a quick prayer of gratitude to God for keeping him faithful to Tega:

> On the way to the airport I thanked God that I had been strong enough to resist cheating on my woman. I had proved to myself that my sexuality was mine to control and define – this time. I had not been so successful in the past, especially when distance and opportunity were in sync. Often I would blame it on the excitement of suddenly having so many men available to me and willing, and too little time to do other than plunge into that hot, sweaty, sensual world of male desire. I would blame it on the little man, 'ifentinye' [referring to his penis], down south, who wants what he wants. (56-57)

In a safer space where Wale can finally give into and fulfil his desires that are usually kept repressed, or which are accompanied by the possible threat of violence, shunning and even death, Wale provides some insight into the reason behind his infidelities, which are arguably substantiated. Wale's relief at remaining faithful on this particular trip, referred to above, brings the conversation back to my earlier point that the twins' fiancées act as or are employed as conduits and mediators of Wale and Wole's sexualities. If not for this reminder of his commitment to Tega, Wale would surrender to the "sensual world of male desire" (57) more often which would increase his risk of being exposed as queer.

Wole and Wale never share the truth about their sexuality with their fiancées until it is revealed against their will. Their hesitation to never confide in Tega and Lola can be possibly ascribed to two reasons. The first relates to the danger this knowledge places all of them in, because if the brothers' queerness is revealed, the legal and social threat will be aimed at the brothers and those who have been aware of their unacceptable sexualities and have yet continued to associate with them. Knowing and not turning them in to the authorities could be seen as aiding and abetting Wale and Wole's crimes of queerness. The second is perhaps related to Lola and Tega themselves never indicating any pro-queer stance but rather indicating they would not accept the men's queerness; the work of both the women at Afrospark is undertaken purely out of career ambitions than any human rights motivation. For example, Tega tells Wale that after dreaming about kissing a woman, she followed the advice of her pastor and fasted for three days to cleanse herself.

Another example is Lola and Tega's shared cry, "God forbid", (74) when the conversation one night turns to the possibility of either of them giving birth to a queer child. This cry invoking God's mercy that this should never happen to either of them and their future children echoes the earlier attitude towards Tobi's homosexuality as a disease. We also see Wole one day sending Wale a message in which he complains about Lola: "[*o*]*ne would have expected that her support for the fight against gender discrimination would endear her to LGBT issues, but it hasn't*" (156). While Wole's complaint is about Lola in this example, it can nonetheless easily also apply to Tega. Tega and Lola are typical products of Nigeria's heteropatriarchal norms and biases and ironically are quite similar to Wale and Wole in this sense–all of them show caution in adhering to the heteronormative expectations of young people in that society.

The passing into law of the SSMP Act creates a spike in social paranoia about queer citizens, which in turn increases the brothers' anxieties about drawing unwanted attention to themselves and social scrutiny of their masculinities. Wale's hatred for effeminate men

becomes more problematic; he becomes blatantly unsupportive and hostile to queer men facing more significant threats from the police than he is and who seek legal help from the brothers at Afrospark. However, it can be argued that his burgeoning hatred can also be understood as his dislike of these effeminate men for attracting more of the unwanted attention he is trying to escape. For example, when Wale goes to a hotel to find Seun, he is overcome with annoyance because "[m]en–the effeminate ones who [he] suspected had attracted the attention of the police to Omore Street in the first place–catwalked their way in and out of the hotel's front entrance" (256). He blames these obviously effeminate men for attracting the attention of the police, which brings everyone else under scrutiny as well.

However, it is unclear whether Wale's anxiety and annoyance are because he is envious at these queer men openly expressing their queer sexuality and/or effeminate nature or if he is merely being hateful. It is possible that Wale's anger towards effeminate men stems from his exhaustion at always having to wear his 'public' mask and act the heteronormative part while observing these queer men naturally, openly being their queer selves in public. These effeminate men face a much greater threat for not hiding their masculinities even if they wanted to and are free of the social obligation to constantly hide and police themselves. Wale's anger towards them is thus likely a sign of deep-rooted envy at their freedom and annoyance and hatred towards *himself*.

Wale, contemplating Wole's attitude to the dangers they face, states the following: "Wole had gotten used to this terrain: living in the face of the cold fact that some people somewhere do not think you deserve the right to stay alive. It had become part of him" (27). Recognising Wole's acceptance but careful not to include himself in this, Wale reveals his refusal or difficulty to accept the reality of his own queerness, even if he might want to. This is because, we see, he cannot accept or face the hatred that is directed at queer people, in particular, that same hatred that will be directed straight at him; it is too threatening and overwhelming for him to face. This is quite a sobering realisation for the reader, the revelation of his intense fear and fragility; rather than feel criticism towards him, one begins to feel the serious tragedy that his mask wearing causes him.

With the removal of their masks and the merging of their public and private personas, Wale and Wole are inevitably placed in a precarious position within Nigerian society and with the state. Wale notes that since their 'coming out', "[w]hen Wole is not on his laptop, he is with his men. And his men, they never stop coming […] I can't blame or judge him. In fact, I applaud him for his strength. Challenging everything a man should be" (300). Wale's affirmation of his brother for going against the grain of masculine norms may seem

hypocritical seeing that throughout the novel and his life up until the point of exposure, Wale has shown significant dislike of men who challenge masculine norms. I attribute Wale's appreciation of Wole as a positive sign of change happening in him, a newfound ability to openly advocate for queer men and his moving towards accepting that queer men should behave as they choose. It is an important indication of his growth towards his own self-acceptance, especially that he no longer fears him or Wole's sexuality being exposed now that that exposure has happened.

My interpretation is influenced by Msibi's argument that "[i]f homosexuality is discredited, then heterosexuality–and thus patriarchy–remains intact. When men's status and heteronormativity are threatened, women and "gay" men become targets" ("The Lies" 71). Applying Msibi's argument to the novel, it may be seen that throughout the novel, since Wole is more confident about and accepting of his sexuality and masculinity, it is possible that Wale intentionally performs the role of a hypermasculine man to protect both of them. Wale subconsciously behaves as hypermasculine as a means of self-preservation; his actions denote his coping mechanism to deal with queer men being the target of heteronormative violence. It is my view that this is how Wale "rationalises" his hypermasculinity in his mind: if he comes across in society as a 'manly' man, no one will suspect him of being queer and also none of the men around him will come under scrutiny either, especially Wole. It is also possible that, subconsciously, Wale has been trying hard to appear hypermasculine so that in the event that someone mistakes him for Wole, Wale will do no harm to his twin brother's reputation.

3.4 Restorative and Precautionary Approaches to Queer Advocacy and Activism

I now focus on Wale and Wole's activism and advocacy methods, which may be respectively described as 'precautionary' and 'restorative'. The precautionary activism method is what I refer to as the work the twins do to prevent the destructive cycle of queerphobia among Nigerian youth. As seen earlier, how children are raised and influenced from a young age significantly impacts their mindset as they grow to sexual maturity. Thus, the brothers' precautionary activism shows their understanding of both the need to reflect on and make positive impressions on susceptible growing boys. It is also a means via which the twins attempt to intervene themselves to positively influence youth of different ages and at educational stages so the latter learn the importance of preventing queerphobia and gender discrimination. Precautionary approaches have long-term effects; but as deep socialisation

processes their impact take time to show positive results; and this is where restorative activism methods come into play.

Restorative methods of activism and advocacy, to my understanding, involve dealing with problems as they arise. For the twins, restorative approaches include the legal cases they undertake and the pro-queer events they arrange. This is not to say that their legal work and these events do not have long-term impacts, but rather that they are more impactful in the moment and are not nearly as much in the long run as is education. In the novel, Wale and Wole's legal work involves their helping arrested and/or oppressed queer citizens--men. As their legal work fails to counter the dreadful SSMP Act itself, it can only function as a restorative approach. Taken together, however, precautionary and restorative activism methods are essential in achieving a queer loving, liberated and accepting society.

3.4.1 Precautionary Tactics against Effects of State and Social Queerphobia

I now focus more in-depth on precautionary methods, such as education, that Wale and Wole use to counter the effects of the Nigerian state's and society's queerphobia, as depicted in the novel. The novel's Kola University provides an example of the influential role education and educational institutions can play in instigating and pushing change in Nigeria. The university is not focussed on as a setting of any significance when the twins study there in their early adulthood, but it does become a crucial space for the novel's counter queerphobia aims when Wale returns as a lecturer. Kola University is depicted and serves as a microcosm of Nigeria with regard to discussions about queerness and the law, especially when these rage around the SMMP Act.

The novel promotes the idea that queer and gender issues must, importantly, be raised in spaces that youth occupy, and for this to be informed by factual information and total acceptance of marginalised students. The message is clear: the senior management and those in positions of authority need to step up to this transformation task if the university is to play a critical role in driving social progress in Nigerian society and politics.

Wale comments:

> The Same Sex (Marriage) Prohibition Act and its implications were, of course, hot topics, and the students stood at various spectrum frets of the conversation. Some of them wrote that the Nigerian government was finally doing something that all citizens agreed with, and as such should be applauded by the people – and people *were* applauding, after all. Others pointed out that blanket majority rule could never pass for democracy; that it was no more legitimate than mob rule […] Still others wrote that the law was God-sent, to prevent Nigeria from incurring more of His curses. Someone internationally-minded pointed out that countries that tolerated LGBT

> people were in the main prosperous and orderly, and didn't seem 'cursed'. Some students wrote that it was not a human rights topic at all, but was simply a consolidation of the state's already-established stance. This argument was 'blog-lashed' by another student, who argued that not only this, but also the previous law that criminalized same-sex relations, were in error, and that the state had no mandate to decide what was allowed to happen in people's bedrooms or private lives. (147)

With the passing of the SSMP Act, the topic of queerness and the extent of the state's involvement in citizen's private lives consume Kola University. Conversations on campus and raised opinions in the aftermath of the passing of the SSMP Act into law are either uttered with more urgency by queer advocates or with more confidence by those preaching hate. The novel, in this way, presents the voice of those who believe in equality and inclusivity, and feel the urgency to speak against the harsh law.

The novel's depiction of the conservatives, who feel the government is protecting Nigeria from the 'threat' of queerness as more confident in their beliefs now that the state agrees with them, is also significant. As seen above, the self-appointed social role to community members to police one another is heightened in a concentrated social area, such as within the confines of a university campus. The university is presented as a much-needed and important space that sparks debates and free-thinking; it is also a powerful space in which discussion about the role of the state in people's private lives is debated.

Professor Ibinabo, Wale's colleague at Kola University, remarks that it is obvious that the Nigerian government had carefully discussed queerness and the Bill before passing it into law, and that even "our religious leaders have said a great deal about it. The cat is out of the bag […] it is better to discuss these things responsibly than leave our students to discuss them, as they are surely doing already, without guidance" (167). In other words, the topic of queerness and the draconian laws to contain it have been discussed by politicians, religious leaders and everyone who has heard about it, thus there is no need for coyness and ignorance in tertiary institutions when it comes to these institutions themselves discussing such critically important topics. The issue exists and the university should be weighing in on such topics that directly affect the lives of the students and society in general.

Msibi argues it is the responsibility of tertiary academic institutions to introduce conversations and educational resources that teach students, particularly male students, about gendered violence ("Not Crossing" 53). I agree and suggest these resources should include discourses on sexuality. Epprecht and Egya's work show the majority of Nigerian students believe open discussions about sexuality will have negative consequences in society. They seem to think that open discussion on sexuality and freedom to self-identify according to

one's sexual orientation will promote incorrect choices, that is, any identity other than heterosexuality (Epprecht and Egya 376). It is dangerous to deny open discussion about queerness in society and allowing only prominent leaders in Nigeria to discuss and make decisions that affect all of society. It is also dolefully ignorant to assume that the Nigerian youth are not discussing sexuality anyway and via various forms and platforms, even if the evidence provided by such scholars as Epprecht and Egya did not exist. It is simply human nature to discuss what exists and is part of one's reality; sexuality–diverse sexuality--is a fact of human nature.

In his research on Nigerian queerness, Osinubi finds it fascinating that campuses frequently feature in queer fiction, especially when in reality African universities are infamous for their silence regarding queerness ("Introduction" 608). While Osinubi refers to the real attitudes of African universities vis-à-vis their employment in queer fiction, my own view is that conversations about any topic, taboo or not, inevitably occur among growing and curious minds, including in that of the youth at Nigerian universities, albeit perhaps not the university staff or governing body. It is highly likely these students know the dangers of speaking out in public; hence I believe these conversations are taking place but not necessarily in public spaces, thus there is a possible misconstruing of silence—or perhaps the degree of and type of silence--about queerness at Nigerian universities.

Wale is surprised that many of the students who do not talk in class suddenly become loud and passionate online, preaching their views in the relative safety of digital social media platforms and not directly in the public sphere where they run the danger of being physically seen and heard. Online forums the students use provide an alternative space, away from the authoritarian gaze of senior staff at Kola University and where topics such as queerness can be openly discussed without censure.[36] Until university administrations create a safe space for these discussions to happen, no one will feel safe speaking up. The same can be said about the Nigerian government and the hushed voices of the queer community. It is also important that diverse spaces such as universities hold these discussions about queerness in multiple ways, given the vast number of languages and cultures that exist in Nigeria.

The same night that Wale meets Biodun, he is reunited with Seun who tries to help him understand the nature of Biodun and the latter's friends. Seun refers to them as 'ti bii', meaning "of that kind", or "like that" […] guys who like guys like that" (89). Wale finds it difficult to grasp that a Yoruba word meaning something completely unrelated to anything

[36] The online world and the alternative space it creates for discussions about queerness will be explored in more detail in Chapter Four.

sexual is being used in the context of sexuality. Wale does not initially believe Seun; he knows the word's Yoruba origin and its direct translated meaning, and is thus surprised that the word could mean something so different. The discussion in the novel between these two characters regarding the adoption and normalisation of this word by the queer community is thought-provoking.

As explained in Chapter One of this thesis, dispute over the meaning of terms in the LGBTIQA+ abbreviated acronym results from these words simply not existing or having a correlation in many African languages.[37] Thus, a term that has undergone transformation to denote what had previously not existed in the language vocabulary may be seen as progressive. This also draws attention to the rich cultural and linguistic diversity of Nigeria; additionally, it is positive that despite socialisation, it is clear that people constantly share their languages in conversations as much as they do their ideas, including words and ideas that focus on raising awareness and understanding; in this case in the novel, the example of a Yoruba word adopted by the queer community.

3.4.2 Restorative Means of Protecting Queerness

I now turn to exploring in greater depth the restorative method of activism and advocacy, which includes queer community organisations such as Rainbow Talk and legal work undertaken by the twin such as the Tani Cross Case. The restorative method that Wale and Wole employ in their activism infuses their work prior to and following the passing of the SSMP Act. Even though they do not self-identify openly as queer, they support queerness through allyship. Allyship entails supporting and promoting social justice for marginalised and/or oppressed communities and individuals; for example, the work the twins do and their affiliations with other allyship groups.[38] In the novel, the author seems to suggest that before the passing of the SSMP legislation, other forms of advocacy had in fact existed more openly in Nigeria, such as Rainbow Talk.

Rainbow Talk is an underground queer men's organisation that was established when two men in a same sex relationship broke up but still kept in contact with each other over the telephone about issues that were mutually important to them.

[37] Mojubaolu Okome, in her analysis of Nigerian women's rights, argues that maleness had not been a sole or primary concern when it came to social status amongst pre-colonial Yoruba societies, and that the patriarchal nature of men in contemporary times reveals the effects and impact of socio-political and economic factors in the creation of male privilege (39).

[38] Allyship can refer to those enacting social justice within or outside of the marginalised and/or oppressed group; however, given Wale and Wole's inability to partake in the allyship from within their queer community, I felt it necessary to stipulate this.

One of them married a woman and the other entered into relationships with other men, partners who if they were in the room with him, sometimes joined the separated couple's Friday night phone calls. This expanded into multi-user conference calls among interconnected queer men, who used the call for support, dating, hook ups and friendship. Rainbow Talk is similar to the church in *Under* to which Ndidi takes Ijeoma. It is a space for those who need support from the queer community, where a sense of acceptance and belonging is freely shared by those who never feel at home in the broader Nigerian society.

Rainbow Talk is described by Wale as a network with extensive outreach, also attracting non-Nigerian African men to attend physical gatherings that the men also arrange. The queer men participants in such Rainbow Talk events use 'ti bii code names', fake names to signify their queer selves, to maintain privacy and to protect each other from any possible information leaks that could expose them to the social hatred directed at them. This form of security for identity protection and physical safety is commonly used by queer communities in Nigeria, both in reality and in the novel. The extent of the fear and sense of non-safety experienced by queer people even within an openly queer space is reflected in the primacy concern for anonymity by those attending Rainbow Talk events. It is at one of these gatherings that Wale and Wole are approached about the Tani Cross case.

This is the first case the twins take on concerning queer rights; it involves a young male student called Tani Cross who is accused of sexually assaulting another boy. After allegedly being found engaging in sexual acts with another boy, Tani had been viciously assaulted and almost lynched by his schoolmates. Tani's injuries from the attack are serious and put him in hospital; the twins and Tani's uncle, Danjuma, bring a lawsuit against the school, undertake petitions to assert Tani's rights and compile a list of demands against the school. This is also the first time the twins don their professional heterosexual masks to advocate for the rights of a queer boy.

Wale and Wole are forced to assume their heterosexual masks because they cannot reveal their own queer sexualities as a motivation behind their championing of queer rights; they know only too well that their compatriots and colleagues in the legal profession respect straight men and censure and shun the 'other'. Although it is not stated as such in the novel, the case is a definitive marker for the twins who realise that to continue fighting the cause for queer Nigerians they will have to pretend they themselves are straight.

As James Fela, a blogger in the novel states, "[i]t's important for minority rights that those advocating for them aren't always members of that minority" (167). By taking on the case, Wale and Wole can be seen publicly as queer allies through their profession as opposed

to via personal affiliation to the queer community. They thus handle the case clinically and professionally, steering clear of any pro-queer rights arguments and focus instead on the issue of abuse as opposed to the attack being a hate crime. Using the argument of abuse perpetrated against Tani, the twins win the case. Even though victorious in all their demands from the school, the twins are immediately fired from the law firm in which they had worked, prompting their professional move from law to human rights activism. They found Afrospark, their human rights organisation which they run and within which they work.

The twins' work at Afrospark is done under the banner of 'human rights' but, as seen in the descriptions of their clients, it is primarily concerned with queer men; no mention is made of support being extended to queer women. Even though their focus is supporting queer men, Wale's discriminatory attitude toward effeminate men proves to be a challenge. Wole, unlike Wale, is far more accepting of "the increasing number of effeminate men who sashayed in and out of the office, and would not be attended to by anyone except [Wole]– mostly men from the Rainbow Talk" (125).

The connection between Rainbow Talk and Afrospark reflects the strong ties shared by members of the queer community. However, while Wole is patient, understanding and kind to the men seeking support from Afrospark, Wale, as discussed earlier, is rejecting, impatient and aggressive towards them. He describes how they "sashayed in and out of the office" (125), emphasising with scorn their effeminate nature as he had done with Peter at high school. Wale notes that these men "would not dare come anywhere near" (125) him as they do with Wole. Despite their important legal advice and support as well as powerful advocacy for queer Nigerians, Wale remains hostile to them. Wole, on the other hand, sees "his being gay, and his natural inclination to advance LGBTI rights by using the general pursuit of human rights as his mask" (127). He does not engage in self-denial about his sexuality but is not about to openly announce it in public. Their advocacy work, primarily connecting queer organisations to form a strong queer network in Nigeria and general optimism to make a difference in advancing queer rights, however, is threatened with the passing of the SSMP Act.

The Act is a defining moment marking serious change in the country regarding queer sexuality; from a society policing each other, the country slides into use of the law and official state intervention to disenfranchise the queer community. Thus, Wale narrates that "[t]he newly-passed anti-gay law was fast raging through Nigeria: numerous arrests had been made of individuals, and members of groups that were alleged to be homosexual or

supporters of homosexual rights" and in the midst of chaos, all of the Rainbow Talk lines were also not available "and they would not be for the rest of 2014" (129).

The closing down of Rainbow Talk is most probably a reference to Section 5 of the SSMP Act that effectively criminalises all queer people and activism organisations, taking away their rights.[39] Nevertheless, Wale and Wole decide to keep Afrospark publicly neutral as a human rights organisation while still working behind the scenes to support the queer community. This is their strategic decision:

> Wole and I had agreed that Afrospark would not publicly take sides on the bill; that we would not be directly campaigning against it. Our stated position was that we were only interested in having, as we put it, 'a great conversation' with Nigeria, with Africa, with the world about what exactly being lesbian, gay or bisexual, transgender, intersex or a concerned ally might mean in the African context. How shocked Nigeria would be to learn who actually were the homosexuals amongst us! There was a joke I heard that if every homosexual or bisexual person's head turned blue, the rest of us would be frozen with shock and fear at finding that homosexuality is far more widespread and integrated than it seems in Africa; and that LGB individuals–especially if we add in those who have one or twice flirted with the idea in practice, or even just in their imaginations–may possibly even be the sexual majority, and not the minority they are often labelled as. What would the straight people do? (195)

Advocating under the banner of Afrospark provides the twins with a professional mask to conceal their queer identities. Portraying Afrospark as neutral in the midst of the powerfully political queerphobia stance officially taken by the state reflects the suppression Wale and Wole endure in order to continue using the organisation to make a difference to queer rights, even if this only occurs in the long term. In the above quote, Wale observes that Nigeria has failed to realise the prevalence of queerness in its society; they predict the law would affect a larger portion of citizens than the state had thought; the reason for this is simply the queer community is adept concealment, with the law actually driving it deeper underground.

Wale pays heed to this at the beginning of the novel when he introduces Lagos as a queer hub in Nigeria, one that is so discreet that its queer individuals "blended in like chameleons" (34). Wale's comment reminds of Gaudio's argument about queer Nigerians and their perceptions about masculinity, especially the claim made by the majority citizens to have never met an openly queer person, "[a]lthough there are sizeable sexual-minority communities throughout the country, these operate almost entirely under the radar" (61). Gaudio does not dispute the existence of queer Nigerians but rather draws attention to the

[39] The relevant part of Section 5 (Offenses and Penalties) of the SSMP Act, subsection 2, reads: "A person who registers, operates or participates in gay clubs, societies and organisation, or directly or indirectly makes public show of same sex amorous relationship in Nigeria commits an offense and is liable on conviction to a term of 10 years imprisonment" (2).

incredibly precarious existence of queer Nigerians who are unable to live a publicly open queer life. Gaudio's point reinforces the argument of this chapter that the donning of a mask is paramount for Wale and Wole's survival in Nigeria.

During his time as a lecturer at Kola University, Wale's students make use of online discussions for class via a Facebook group called "Gani 14". The group is named after Gani Fawehinmi, a well-known deceased Nigerian human rights lawyer and the year in which the class is being taken, 2014. This online discussion forum enables the students to engage in interactive debate, with streams of opinions being expressed without interruption. Given the backlash to publicly discuss queerness, the online space creates a refuge for the students to dissect and criticise the role of the law and state with regard to protecting and preserving the privacy and dignity of its citizens.[40]

This forum is an example of opening up spaces within educational institutions as a powerful avenue to promote change. While the forum can be viewed as a method of precautionary activism and advocacy, I see it, however, as ultimately a method of restorative activism, given the role the students play in critiquing the SSMP Act. Also, among the restorative approaches presented in the novel is the weeklong string of queer events that Wale and Wole arrange through AfroSpark and their 'Save the Colours' campaign at Kola University.

The events include the premiere of the film, *Eyimofe,* which the students had helped create, "*the Secrets of the Silhouette*s" (196), and the bachelor parties for the twins which coincide with the graduation parties for the students.[41] The aim of these events is providing a platform for queer rights and voices while also quelling suspicion about the twins' own sexuality; to achieve this the week's events are scheduled to end with their joint wedding to women, their fiancées Lola and Tega. However, the week-long campaign is beset with numerous challenges. For example, at the personal level of the protagonists, it is clear that despite the film screening's aim to provide positive representation of queer men, Wale's non-acceptance of effeminate men gets in the way. He is portrayed at *Eyimofe*'s premiere undermining the very queer rights the twins are promoting; he scoffs at the masculinity of the

[40] The role of the online space in Nigeria's discussions on queerness will be discussed in depth in Chapter 4.
[41] *Eyimofe* is a film about a young boy, Prince Haleem, who feels same-sex attraction to other boys while at boarding school and suffers abuse similar to that experienced by Tani Cross. Prince Haleem falls in love with another boy, Dele, but after completing school takes over his father's business, gets married and has children. However, he reunites with Dele and passion, desire and heartbreak take over the men's lives. The movie is described to us by Wale as he watches the premiere, but at the point at which Dele and Prince Haleem begin a public altercation, Wale is called away from the movie theatre and the ending is thus not revealed to the reader.

lead actor, James Konteh, who "though full-bloodedly heterosexual, had been something of a diva, going on and on on the final day of the filming" (178).

Wale's surprise at a clearly heterosexual man behaving like a 'diva', the problematic nature of the term 'diva' aside, stems from his misguided notion that only women and queer men can hold such melodramatic attitudes. I suggest two plausible reasons for his surprise and annoyance towards James Konteh. The first relates to his idea that all men should behave in a hypermasculine or macho way. The second is that since James Konteh is straight, he can act as he pleases without feeling insecure or threatened in any way, something Wale cannot do.

Wale's struggle to comprehend James Konteh reinforces the argument, previously made, regarding his policing of masculinities vis-à-vis his non-acceptance of effeminate men as based on envy. We are once again presented with Wale's confusing approach to different masculinities; he scoffs at James Konteh's masculinity but is at the same time incredibly proud of the queer men taking part in *the Secrets of the Silhouettes,* a staged oral performance by queer male students.

It is during this oral performance that Wale as narrator sheds light on the masks he and many fellow queer Nigerian men wear. Every performer on stage wears a mask to conceal their identity and all members of the audience also wear masks in solidarity with the performers and also to shield their identities as queer allies. The performance is presented as a stark and powerful reflection of Nigeria's extreme oppression of its queer citizens. These queer men performers and their queer allies gather in a space that is supposed to celebrate and affirm them; yet even here in a safe space they may not reveal to each other their faces and identities as individuals. One of the masked men performers states that "[y]ou can't just wake up and decide to rewrite your sexual programme because the world doesn't like it" (199), reinforcing the point that queerness is something you are born with and no matter how much Nigeria ignores or oppresses non-heterosexuality, queerness cannot just disappear.

However, the most standout performance is by a student of Wale's, Emenike, who requests that the lights be turned up brightly in order that he can be more clearly seen. Emenike's speech includes thanking God for gifting him with his beautiful strength and sexuality and evokes the novel's subtitle, *Heaven gave it to me*, as well as influencing Wale's eventual realisation of the naturalness of his sexuality. The full title of the novel, *Fimí Sílẹ̀ Forever: Heaven gave it to me,* includes the Yoruba phrase "leave me alone" as the main title.

In the context of the novel depicting Wale's long and pain-filled struggle with his 'taboo' sexuality, I suggest the novel's title refers to the primacy of accepting oneself completely, including that which God, or heaven, has bestowed on you. This gift, associated with the divine, is identified by Emenike, and later Wale as their sexuality–their queer men's sexuality. Emenike's performance draws joy and celebration into the gathering, yet his request for the lights to be made brighter is a stark reminder that this powerful performance is taking place in the highly queerphobic space of Nigeria, which treats its citizens and their sexuality as a curse and problem to be punished.

The significance of the need for light to expose the terrible situation facing queer Nigerians is especially stark when it is understood that the brightening of the stage will also make the audience members more visible; everyone who does not adhere to the queerphobic state decree risks exposure and is vulnerable to the state's and society's brutality. Just witnessing a performance that affirms queerness transforms the entire audience into a radical group of citizens defying their state and the queerness it strongly forbids and criminalises. It is at this moment that the masks are presented as both heavy literal and metaphorical burdens to be carried through life by queer Nigerian citizens and their allies.

After a powerful performance by Nigeria's queer men, a gigantean reminder of the hostile socio-political environment hangs over the remaining events of the week. This is the twins' bachelor party and the Kola University students' graduation party which are raided by the police, tipped off about a queer men's gathering. This gathering, as with Rainbow Talk, is viewed by the authorities as a violation of the SSMP Act that forbids any club or social organisation of queer men.[42] Students' arrests, police brutality and the killing of allegedly queer individuals are frequent occurrences in Nigeria post the SSMP Act, and the raid presents this reality in the novel. The twins' wedding is set to have taken place the morning after the arrests at the queer cultural gathering. However, moments before it is scheduled to begin their heteronormative masks are forcibly removed when their fiancées anonymously receive photographs of the twins engaging in sexual acts with other men. With the removal of the masks, their public and private personas are suddenly thrust into each other, exposing their true sexualities and selves in full view of the public.

The chaos and heartache that ensue are disastrous but also liberate the twins. They begin to experience life free from having to live under the weight of the mask. They find new

[42] The relevant part of Section 5 (Offenses and Penalties) of the SSMP Act, subsection 3, reads: "A person or group of persons who administers, witnesses, abets or aids the solemnization of a same sex marriage or civil union, or supports the registration, operation and sustenance of gay clubs, societies, organisations, processions or meetings in Nigeria commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a term of 10 years imprisonment" (2).

strength in their activism as their voices carry unrestrained expression of their being personally linked to their queer rights cause via their own sexualities. Wale remarks that "[i]t had always been this same story: the law for the people–and, more often than not, the law against them. Now it concerned [him], and they will have to listen" (2). The raid prompts Wale to take the decisive step to view queerphobic incidents not just from a professional capacity but primarily as a personal attack on him that merits powerful action. Having remained silent and secretive about their sexualities during their work on the Tani Cross Case, the twins find themselves in an unapologetic position of authenticity and power along with other outraged queer men.

The twins go on the offensive against the state openly. This is accomplished with the help of the new and younger members of Rainbow Talk who inform Wale of their intimate relationships with men in high positions in the Nigerian government, military, state and society. Among these 'respected' powerful men are a member of the House of Representatives, a Commissioner, a government minister, a governor's son, and a naval officer who is also the cousin of the Vice-President. For the longest time in Nigeria, the only way for the voice of the queer community to exist was through adopting a straight (heterosexual) or straight-seeming man persona. In a subversive manoeuvre, the 'discreet' information about the same sex relationships of the men in power possessed by the underground queer community is used to tip the power in queer men's favour.

Inclusion of these 'scandalous' secret same sex men relationships in the novel is Ikpo's way of making a powerful and compelling critique of the fictional society he presents. He shows it is not uncommon for politicians, particularly men in this case, who take a public anti-queer stance to have queer relationships or same sex experiences behind closed doors. This development of their being 'outed' in the novel is testimony against such hypocritical men's reign of power, labelling certain sexualities criminal and deviant, which they themselves know to be a falsehood. Reminding these powerful and closeted men about the power queer people actually hold, the queer men are proved victorious when the students are released from custody following this public scandal. The twins' provocative challenge to heterosexual and heteropatriarchal dominance which leads to the release of the arrested youth presents subordinate-seeming masculinities taking back power from dominant-seeming masculinities. The victory is a great furthering of the queer rights cause and a reminder to Nigeria that their queer community refuses to be silenced or ignored.

However, the victory comes with other dangers for Wale and Wole. With death threats that the twins receive, an attempted assassination on Wole and increasing anxiety and

fear for both the brothers and their family, Wale, Wole and their father leave Nigeria and relocate to South Africa. The novel ends by showing that despite the immense hatred that Nigeria shows the twins and their queer community and the hardships they suffer, the decision to leave is not an easy one.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed four aspects of Ikpo's Nigerian queer men's novel. The first relates to the protagonists' development of complicit queer masculinities and the influence of their familial, social and education on them regarding the construction of their masculinities. Secondly, I have focussed on Ikpo's use of masks in the novel, how they both help and hinder the protagonists' navigation of their private, public and professional lives. The third aspect relates to the twins' use of precautionary advocacy in their activism, which includes the utilising of education as a means of re-educating society about queerness, especially youth. Finally, I have explored the method of restorative activism the twins engage in, such as legal work, development of queer community networks to challenge queerphobic social views and support of queer individuals.

In my above explorations, I am led to conclude that Ikpo's novel is of considerable significance to queer Nigerian literary discourse. Ikpo delivers a realistic representation of contemporary Nigerian life for queer citizens by fictionally recreating the challenges they daily face–police raids on their private parties, university lecturers' ambivalence as to whether students should be exposed to queerness via open discussion of the topic and the almost suffocating masks that queer bodies have to don just to get through an ordinary day. Ikpo not only provides an excellent representation of the plight of queer Nigerians but also the sometimes imperfect minds that embody queerness via giving the literary world two Nigerian queer men who struggle for their own and other queer people's survival, including wrestling with their own conflicting masculinities.

Ikpo portrays multiple queer masculinities problematically engaged within the personal, professional and activist lives of the queer men protagonists. In the process, he opens up the space for critique of queer Nigeria. His creation of the flawed characters, Wale and Wole, provides us with queer representations that are developed and nuanced but also humanised, such as a queer male who is also discriminatory towards effeminate straight and queer men. This representation and flawed character depiction are likely to be related to by some if not many queer Nigerian men. The ultimate triumph of the novel is its

acknowledgment of the flawed queer protagonists as recognisably human–its point that queer people are human too.

Wale is keenly aware of the Nigerian state's flaws even while overlooking his own. Still, in trying to change Nigerian society, those forced to hide their sexualities and long marginalised in cruel ways can find liberation and acceptance. Wale, arguably, ironically, wants Nigeria to focus openly and honestly on topics of sexuality and gender and to acknowledge that these social concepts are easily manipulated (196). Yet, he does not place the same ethical demand on himself. Despite this, his core desire is for progress to happen, especially conversations about queerness and movements created towards an open and diverse country, aims to which Ikpo's novel consciously contributes.

In this chapter, I focussed on the interactions and feelings of Wale and Wole to show their masculinities reflect society's heteropatriarchal norms; their dual personas, publicly heterosexual and privately queer, though deceptive are coping mechanisms to literally aid their survival in queerphobic Nigeria. I suggest that Ikpo's novel enables such a critical reading of these characters vis-à-vis his fictional depiction of Nigeria, the impacts of the SSMP Act, and the advocacy and activism work that is constantly brewing underground and in seemingly silent public spaces. Ikpo's contribution to contemporary queer Nigerian literature and his deep and thoughtful analysis of the queer men he represents achieve in highlighting the range of fictional queer representation in Nigeria, which my thesis is concerned with. In the next chapter, I look at representation on online platforms of different forms of queer same-sex men's intimacies in Nigerian society.

Chapter Four: Coming Out Online: Queer Fictional Intimacy and Online Publishing

> Being queer is not a new world order. It is truly the old world coming back to reclaim its place (Ifedimma Osakwe 115)

4.1 Literary and Analytical Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I explored heteropatriarchal culture in Nigeria and looked at an example each of queer women's and queer men's novels. I discussed the ways in which the respective novelists represent the impact of the dominant heterosexuality on queer people. In *Under* the focus is the pressure placed on queer women to conform to heteronormative norms; in *Fimí Sílẹ̀* the focus is the pressure on queer men to craft masks so as to appear heterosexual in public; in both the impact of the passing of the SSMP Act are presented by the respected authors. In this chapter, I again focus on the oppression of queer people by the draconian SSMP Act and its spurring of the Nigerian queer community and artistic allies to create online literary platforms to publish their work. I also discuss in depth the two volumes of *14: An Anthology of Queer Art* (hereafter *14*), including as a new form of storytelling that provides space for diverse representation of sexualities. In this chapter, I continue the discussion of queer Nigerian men in terms of the different types of intimacies the short fiction in *14* depict.

I have selected and focus on five short fiction stories in the two volumes of *14*. These stories provide representation of queer men in terms of three primary forms of intimacy involving them. I discuss this in two main sections. The first looks at the phenomenon of online publishing and the creation of *14* to circulate queer art. The second centres on the short story form and content, within which I look at each of the three forms of intimacy I identify: the ephemeral nature of intimacy relating to virtual dating, the intricacies of intimate labour and the complications that arise when sex and power are involved with money, and the sexual intimacy of queer men under omnipresent national gazes.

4.2 "Looking Inward": A New Generation of Queer Writing

Brittle Paper is a digital platform that was established in 2010 by Ainehi Edoro; it is but one monumental name in an ever-growing list of digital platforms available to queer African artists, particularly from countries on the continent that refuse them their rights as queer citizens. According to Brittle Paper's website, the platform's mission is to create, inspire and provide a diverse and entertaining literary experience ("About" para. 2). In 2016, Rapum

Kambili, a Nigerian writer and the chief editor of *14*, made the call for submissions for a curated anthology, which Brittle Paper digitally published and promoted as *14*. Both volumes of *14* include carefully selected poetry, photography, essays, fiction and non-fiction short stories and paintings that are intended to depict, represent and honour queer African lives, particularly Nigerian but also of other African nationalities.

The "Un-Silencing Queer Nigeria" online event hosted by the digital platform, Brittle Paper, and introduced in Chapter One of this thesis, states its disagreement with the African literary status quo at the time. This pertains to the limitations of the few literary fictional works in the past in which queerness is acknowledged: "it was merely as a plot device, a strategy to make political points about rebellion and difference. A harsh focus that perhaps derived from, and allowed itself become another basis for, the fallacy that queerness is un-African" (para. 1). Thus, the publishing of texts such as the *14* anthologies was aimed at challenging norms and notions that queerness is un-African by providing authentic self-representation of queer Africans and queer Africa.

Ifedimma Osakwe's non-fiction essay in *We Are Flowers,* "A Straight Boy's Manifesto: Queer Folk Are the New Africans", presents queerness as the new African identity; however, he makes clear that queer Africans have always been a part of the continent; in other words, asserting queer identity in the contemporary is a reclaiming of African queer history. Osakwe writes that queer people "are the ancestors whom our grandparents poured libations to and our parents denounced as pagans" (*We Are Flowers* 115). By situating queerness into his African lineage, Osakwe is able to argue that youth in Africa need to reclaim their history, with which indeed contemporary Nigerian artists are occupied. Every generation has its own significant socio-political movements, but it is particularly poignant that the queer movement in Africa is focussed on liberating bodies and identities that were once free and even praised and cherished on the continent.

This may directly be attributed to youth in the literary world, represented in anthologies that can be written and published from scratch; in other words, not beholden to the limitations of an established predominantly Western heteronormative publishing industry. In the first volume of *14*, Binyavanga Wainaina writes that "[t]here is youth in queerness in Africa" (10), due to the generational development that has taken place in African literature. Osakwe, like Wainaina, points out that queer people have existed throughout Africa's history and at a certain time in this history were considered spiritual beings who were sacred to the material world; this refers to the ones Osakwe claims as "our grandparents [we] poured libations to" (*We Are Flowers* 115). The 'new' and 'youth' aspects that both Wainaina and

Osakwe refer to are the new generation of queer artists and advocates fighting to gain their recognition and rights as queer people. For their part, many of the African countries see queerness in the contemporary as a threat to their social control, a lot of which is tied to the religious beliefs that the generation before them adopted, the same generation that Osakwe noted as comprising "ancestors whom our grandparents poured libations to and our parents denounced as pagans" (115).

The online publishing world in Nigeria has enabled an inclusive space for queerness, in particular to circumvent the state sanctioned threat to queer people that the passing into law of the SSMP Act has resulted in that country since 2014. Austin Bryan argues that it is "[s]exual and gender minorities, whom are often deemed "deviant" arguably have always carved out specific spaces in the social geography to legitimize their being" (2). This is not to claim that the virtual space is completely safe and free of any repercussions relating to its use, but rather that it is less of a direct or physical threat to queer artists than is the public space. Elsewhere Green-Simms points out that "writing published on the Internet is almost always ephemeral–communities dissipate and, after a while, websites are taken down" (155). While this is indeed true, Adenekan argues, the power of the digital age is that:

> [W]hile the broadcast and the print media in most African countries are owned by the government and the rich, the digital media of internet and the mobile phone are now accessible to many Africans in a way that the old media can only imagine. And as more and more Africans gain access to digital space, the new media, unlike the old, are enabling literature to reach more Africans than ever before. (149)

African literature's online presence, Adenekan highlights, utilises a powerful means to revolutionise and democratise the literature of the various African countries and the continent as a whole. Online literature gains a wider range of readers, revolutionises traditional forms and means of publishing and all but removes the power that is associated with ownership of media and publishing possessed formally by governments and the wealthy.

African online literary platforms provide a closer and more direct connection between the writer, the publisher and readers, this despite the expansiveness of the online space or cyberspace. The digital platform, Brittle Paper, for example, published *14* free of charge, which allows readers to easily download it to read without having to constantly access its website each time they wished to read the anthologies. The convenience of access is significant as it, intentionally or not, addresses the issue of internet data and connectivity, especially a challenge in Africa with is mass of economically strained peoples. After downloading or receiving the anthologies, readers are not limited by internet connection, data or monetary restrictions. Reviews, articles and interviews relating to the anthologies also are

easily available with download links included in the web pages posting the anthology. This also lessens the impact if, as had occurred with the online publication, *A Nasty Boy*, the website is ever legally or socially strong-armed into shutting down. Allowing and enabling readers to download and themselves circulate the anthologies freely in their own social media networks prevents a user from being shut off from access to these queer publications, thus maintaining the works' permanent presence in African literary history.

Communities forced to survive underground or in close-knit circles find it difficult to form mutual alliances amongst themselves and their allies who support their cause. However, as Green-Simms reminds, "the Internet has become a space for queer writers and allies to create transnational alliances and forums to tell stories about their fears, desires, loves, and struggles" (144). These enabling features on the internet make online published work such as *14* and platforms such as Brittle Paper important within national, continental and regional bodies of literature. Osakwe's essay serves as an example of online writing that have promoted understanding about the queer cause and enabled support from allies for the queer community. His essay takes the reader through a carefully thought through process of creating understanding for a heterosexual man to learn, unlearn and relearn knowledge about queer sexualities. Such literature serves as powerful awareness-raising tools to fight against ignorance and create empowerment with new affirmative knowledge about queerness and acceptance of queerness.

Osakwe's essay in the anthology is a brutally honest look at himself and his difficult journey to becoming an ally of the queer community, primarily because of the pressures exerted on him by his fellow queerphobic Nigerian citizens. Allies are vital part for the survival of any movement as well as social media platforms; online news articles and online chat rooms enable contact between the underground queer community and its allies. Social media platforms allow people to meet and establish relationships, difficult and dangerous to attempt in public and other social spaces in Nigeria. Online literary platforms are therefore vital in the fight to provide safe spaces and freedom for queer Nigerians. Osinubi offers the argument that "[r]edefinitions of intimacy and cohabitation are the center" ("Queer Prolepsis" xvi) of contemporary literature, which I myself support in my exploration of *14* as well as the short stories selected for analysis, as will be discussed later.

The first volume, *14 An Anthology of Queer Art: We Are Flowers* (hereafter *We are Flowers*), includes a dedication that reads: "For the victims of the February 2014 Gishiri (Abuja) homophobic attacks. And for all those who have suffered homophobic violence" (5). This refers to a spate of brutal queerphobic attacks perpetrated by an estimated fifty vigilante

men on the night of 13 February 2014. The mob undertook displays of social shaming, engaged in brutal beatings and numerous home invasions of queer men in Gishiri, and dragging their victims to the police station. It is reported that one of the victims was in the midst of performing his prayers when the queerphobic mob arrived with shouts that they were cleansing the community in the name of President Goodluck Jonathan. Green-Simms writes:

> over the past several years, especially as the "jail the gays" law became more and more of a threat, queer African writers and allies have turned toward the Internet as an unfiltered way to reach both local and global audiences and to quickly respond to the changing political climate. (154)

The draconian SSMP Act and the mob mentality it inspires, such as the Gishiri attacks that took place on the very same day that the Act was passed into law, has meant that the Nigerian queer community *had* and must continue to reclaim its space via creative and innovative means.

Kambili is one of the Nigerian writers who saw an opportunity to respond powerfully and thus (re)branded the anniversary of the SSMP Act as Nigerian Pride Day, a potent way of reclaiming the space for the queer community. To commemorate this day, the digital platform, Brittle Paper, published Kambili's edited collection of queer Nigerian art, *14: An Anthology of Queer Art: We Are Flowers*. Kambili dubs *14* as a "middle finger to our homophobic society, but more importantly as a coup" (*We are Flowers* 9). His reference to the anthology as a "coup", reflects Kambili's accurate understanding of the severity of the contemporary situation for queer people; just the sheer existence and presence of queer people translate in the view of the Nigerian state and society into acts of political radicalism and treason. Queer literature, as one of its key roles, endeavours to humanise and reflect the humanness of queer people. The importance of this intervention by queer literature cannot be enough emphasised as queerphobic laws and societal norms collude to criminalise queer citizens, turning them into national threats and people unworthy of the fundamental human rights of protection and freedom.

Green-Simms observes that contemporary queer Nigerian literature "sheds light on […] homophobia and explores the everyday fears, desires, pleasures, and anxieties of those who experience the same-sex attraction" (141). The response to the publication of *We are Flowers* proves Green-Simms's point; the anthology's arrival and representation of queer existence were met with severe queerphobic outcries.

Many of the featured artists in *We are Flowers* received various kinds of threats and were promised abuses of different kinds. This violent backlash to the contributors' art

inspired a second volume to remind the country's queerphobic community that queerness could not and would not be shunned or silenced. Thus, *14: An Anthology of Queer Art No 2: Inward Gaze* (hereafter *Inward Gaze*) was published. Its Introduction states:

> The LGBTQ community in Nigeria has experienced so much since the publication of our first issue, *We Are Flowers*, a year ago. 2017 saw the violent attacks on artists of queer expression […] and wide spread backlash in the literary community to the emergence–or, rather *flourishing*–of gifted queer voices in the literary space […] And yet, here we are, with pieces that look inward, unconcerned by the Outside Gaze. Our artists are speaking a language they have spoken in safe spaces, in rooms full of queer people, and they are speaking it fluently, in works that are sometimes 'loud' and sometimes tender […] Yet, by looking inward, we have all been seen, fully and in perfect light, by one another. (9)

The introduction clearly states the mission to keep going, even in the face of constant threats and danger. Like its predecessor, the second volume includes artists who use their real names and those who make use of pseudonyms to protect their real identities.

The anthology's dedication reads: "to every LGBTQ Nigerian who has shown courage and humanity, refusing to shrink in the face of violence and homophobia. And to our communities all over Africa" (5). The fact is online publishing platforms such as Brittle Paper enable queer African voices to emerge and speak out with confidence and authority across borders. This alternative form of publishing also enables the circumvention of censorship laws and patriarchal heteronormative gate keeping rife in the mainstream publishing world. It enables the inclusion of various conversations relating to queerness and is not limited to single-focus narratives as is the wont of traditional forms of literature. For example, although *Under* depicts same sex women relations, its representation and arguments relating to queerness is by no means limited to Nigeria. Brittle Paper's online publication of the queer anthologies, *14,* includes contributors and accesses readers from all over Africa.

I now move on to analysing some of the content of the two anthologies.

4.3 Ephemeral, Laboured and Fleeting Queer Intimacies

In Chapter Two, I focussed on same-sex women's desire and religious-sexuality coexistence, and in Chapter Three, queer men's navigation and performance of heteropatriarchy, both in the novel form. I now explore the short story as a conducive form for representing queer men's intimacy. I have selected five short stories from the two volumes of *14* through which I explore different types of intimacy they depict. My analysis of these different types of intimacy covers online dating and ephemeral intimacy, the complexities of intimate labour, specifically domestic work and sex work, and queer sexual intimacies beyond national

borders. I include in this exploration the ways in which hostile environments can also be claimed as havens for queer people in Nigeria, South Africa and Kenya.

At the time of writing, there were no academic journal articles or any analytical responses about either volume of *14* available. There is, however, mention of the anthologies in two journal articles. In Unoma Azuah's "Poetry, Religion, and Empowerment in Nigerian Lesbian Self-Writing", both volumes of *14* are mentioned but merely to catalogue the publications as queer African texts. In Brenna Munro's "Pleasure in Queer African Studies: Screenshots of the Present", brief references are made to queer pleasure depicted in various African texts; listed, among these is a piece from *We are Flowers*. Nonetheless, there exists written responses to the two anthologies in online postings; these are mainly reviews, blog posts, news articles and singly published parts of the anthologies, such as the editor's notes. *Brittle Paper*, the online publication that published both anthologies, had posted articles announcing the release of the volumes along with links to the download of *14*. *Africa in Dialogue*, an online magazine about African storytelling had conducted an interview about the anthologies with Kambili.

On *Naijalez*, a Nigerian lesbian forum, a member called 'Althena' posted a copy of *We are Flowers* along with a rave review by her about the powerful representations of queerness in *14*. The responses to Althena's post are also appreciative and supportive of *14*'s accomplishments. The *Kito Diaries* includes on its website an article about the anthologies; it highlights the pieces in *Inward Gaze* that directly speaks about kito movements, which I expand on later. The editor's notes in both volumes, that is, by Kambili, provide insights into the creation of *14* as well as harsh and positive responses to its publication. None of the works cited above, however, provide analytical responses to the anthology.

As I have mentioned, the analysis of queer intimacies in the short stories is organised into three sections in which I draw on key scholars for discussion. For the first section on online dating, I make use of Austin Bryan's paper on how virtual reality is used by the queer community in Uganda, referred to as 'Kuchu'. Much of Bryan's paper is applicable to the queer Nigerian context and navigation of online spaces with similar social media applications as well as the similar challenges they face. In the second section on intimate labour, I employ the work of Eileen Borris and Rhacel Parreñas, especially regarding the misuse of power in the employer-employee dynamic. Building on the theme of intimate sexual labour, research done by Population Council, a research platform that addresses the social issues and development of select countries, presents valuable findings relating to the experiences of Nigerian men engaging in transactional sex. I also use the works of Sylvia Adebajo, George

Eluwa, Jack Tocco, Babatunde Ahonsi, Lolade Abiodun, Oliver Anene, Dennia Akpona, Andrew Karlyn and Scott Kellerman, all which provide insights into male sex work in Nigeria. My third section constitutes my own close reading and interpretation of the stories, and does not rely on secondary material as have the two sections before.

4.3.1 Searching for "Intimacy" in the Online Dating World

In this section, I explore the depiction of emotional intimacy in Arinze Ifeakandu's "Pretty Young Thing". The relationship between Obinna, the protagonist, and Essien, the "pretty young thing", reveals the emotional stresses relating to virtual dating. I also focus on the ways the virtual space can play both revolutionary and retrogressive roles in the queer Nigerian dating world. "Pretty Young Thing" is the first short story presented in *Inward Gaze*; it provides an understanding of intimacy in the virtual world and refers to many features pertaining to the online generation. These include the extensive use of social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp as well as use of memes, that is, images that are usually accompanied by text; memes are used in online communication to convey a feeling or response, often with the intended purpose of humour.[43]

"Pretty Young Thing" includes reference to both social networks and memes; however, its main focus is on online relationships. Bryan writes that the "[i]ncreased access to the internet has also increased the use of the internet to seek and access sexual partners in methods such as "gay cruising"" (9). 'Gay cruising' is a term associated with queer men who meet with strangers in public places to perform sexual acts; this queer social activity has since mainly relocated online where dating applications (apps) make the process easier and safer in some regards. However, Judith Stacey claims that gay cruising is not just about the sexual acts but also includes opportunities for queer men to fulfil desires of intimacy and closeness that cannot always be attained in their everyday life. Bryan and Stacey's respective arguments sum up the main challenge that Ifeakandu's protagonist, Obinna, faces in the virtual world.

Having stumbled across Essien's picture on Facebook, Obinna reads the caption which is a quote from Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. Downloading and reading the book before conversing with Essien, Obinna is able to familiarise himself with something he knows Essien appreciates, thus skipping the awkward getting-to-know each other stage that

[43] Some of the memes Ifeakandu uses in "Pretty Young Thing" are also included in my discussion to reinforce my analysis of its use in the story. These memes are taken from the anthology itself, thus some might appear of poor quality; but the memes are as they appear in *14*.

would usually take place in a physical meeting. It is the first step Obinna takes in creating a type of intimacy between him and this stranger, especially since the men live in a world where queer men are not about to casually meet and date as for heterosexual people. Obinna's newfound literary knowledge leads to the two men immediately conversing with each other with ease. The reader is able to keep up with Obinna's moods and the stages of their relationship via the memes used during significant moments in the story. This mode of illustration is vital in providing the contemporary context of their interactions and helps reflect Obinna's emotions and moods without written description.

Limor Shifman observes that the word 'meme' is derived from the Greek 'mimema', meaning 'imitated'; the biologist Richard Dawkins coined the term 'meme' in 1976 in order to refer to "small cultural units of transmission, analogous to genes, which are spread from person to person by copying or imitation" (363). Thus, in the parallel sense, an image shared amongst multiple people online, reused, altered and reshared becomes an iconic visual representation in modern-day culture, and is referred to as a 'meme'. There are two ways in which memes are significant in this story. First is the universal digital means of using this textual strategy to overstep the heteronormative limitations placed on queerness in every social aspect, specifically that of communication. Obinna, as later shown, struggles with voicing certain desires and emotions, mainly because of his conservative upbringing. The memes, therefore, help convey these desires and emotions to the reader when Obinna finds himself struggling to do so himself.

Secondly, Ifeakandu's use of memes with the short story form is a creative formatting of the narrative to depict an online conversation between the narrator and the reader. The memes used in this story are what can be referred to as 'mainstream' in that they are popular and commonly used.[44] This includes the first the meme of the story, seen in Figure 1 below, which reads, "Everything is beautiful"; the background contains a bright rainbow.[45]

[44] The memes depicted in this chapter are from the story itself and will be referenced as *Inward Gaze* in the bibliography.

[45] It is my understanding from online popular culture that this meme commonly trends on social media, online users tend to employ it to convey digitally their emotional response to a message, post or issue that they are in conversation about; in Figure 1the image conveys an exaggerated sense of joy, which is both humorous and sincere.

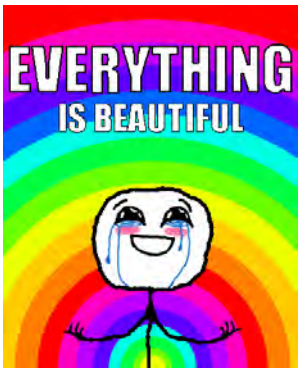

Figure 1

"Pretty Young Thing" is the first piece in *Inward Gaze*, thus this meme is also the first meme in the anthology. The rainbow, a symbol of queer pride, accentuates, proclaims and reaffirms queerness. The two subsequent memes in the story are similar in mood to the first to aid Ifeakandu's portrayal of Obinna's happiness in his initial connection with Essien.

Figure 2

Figure 3

The joyful dance of Rochas Okorocha is a local Nigerian meme, shown above in Figure 2.[46] The more common meme of Patrick Star is shown in Figure 3; this is a cartoon character from the children's animated television series, *Spongebob Squarepants*; in it he is shown wide-eyed and smiling, often used to denote giddiness and to convey this as aimed at someone special.[47] Obinna feels this way at the beginning of the relationship.

Thus, we read: "[s]oon they are texting on WhatsApp and having long calls that stretch into the night. Obinna who, at thirty-two, has had years of loving and losing, lies on his bed, smiling into his phone, a teenager newly in love" (13). Obinna's manner of communicating with the much younger Essien is interesting because, even though both men know how to navigate the online world, Obinna seems to lack understanding of the online nuances queer Nigerians use and have to familiarise themselves with in order to do so. One example of this is having to seduce each other from a distance, which involves sending provocative pictures such as 'nudes' and sexual messages, colloquially referred to as 'sexts'. When Essien sends Obinna a picture of his penis, Obinna struggles to overcome his awkwardness and naivety, so much so that he is unable to come up with a suitable response. "Wow, he types, not, Nudes make me uncomfortable, which is what he really wants to say" (Inward Gaze 15).

According to "Digital Boundaries", an article offering guidelines to the new generation about online relationships, "[i]f your partner sexts you and demands that you send sexts back, you should feel comfortable telling them your boundaries without them getting angry" (para. 10). Obinna wants to be honest about his awkwardness around sexting but he hesitates not because Essien might be upset. Obinna recalls the many social media users who leave flattering comments about Essien's appearance; thus, with the realisation that a simple "wow" is neither creative nor flattering enough to stand out among Essien's other admirers, Obinna forces himself to try and type out a more erotically charged message so that Essien would not "realise [Obinna's] ordinariness and disappear" (Inward Gaze 15).

Conducting a relationship online, especially since social media platforms allow for users to send messages or view anyone's profile creates insecurity for Obinna; he feels he is competing with everyone else in Essien's social media life. Thus, he has to overcompensate

[46] Images and cartoons of Rochas Okorocha, the Nigerian politician, circulate within Nigeria as a local meme. As seen on *Tori.ng*'s website, memes of Okorocha are common in social, it is used to soften and create humour of his political mishaps.

[47] The immense popularity of the *Spongebob Squarepants* animated television series featuring on children's television networks has developed into an internet craze; according to *Time,* the popularity of the show is reflected in the growing amount of show themed memes trending on social media globally, including that of Patrick Star, Spongebob's best friend.

because the online world makes intimacy difficult since he cannot physically present or act on his affections and emotions as he would in a conversation in which he was physically present with Essien. Moreover, Obinna is not only self-conscious about participating in sexual chatting, but he is also trying to maintain Essien's interest in him because this relationship is a long distance one. Until Essien responds to a message or is on the phone with him, Obinna is not 'with' him. Thus, even when the two men are 'virtually dating' Obinna is still starkly reminded that "his bed has not yet known the sweat of any other man but [himself]" (20); his life is devoid of intimacy because he cannot physically go out to meet and date men in public because of the restrictions placed on queer people in Nigeria.

According to "Digital Boundaries", both parties in the relationship need to be able to openly communicate about specific needs to ensure mutual understanding and respect. Obinna follows this advice and decides to take the initiative and ask for the intimacy he is craving. He messages Essien, bluntly stating: "I don't want to be your fuck buddy […] I want to be your lover, someone you can lean on when in need […] I really, really care about you, Essien" (Inward Gaze 15). However, Essien does not respond to this message and months of silence pass between the men. We are informed that it "would surprise Obinna how easily he [Obinna] moved on, how shallow the roots are when we've never seen a person's face in the flesh" (Inward Gaze 16). The long bouts of silence between them, and the absence of any memory of physical engagement with Essien, allows Obinna to move on with ease from the absence of Essien's virtual intimacy. This easy and quick recovery speaks to the ephemeral nature of the online world, as earlier argued by Green-Simms. The occasional thoughts about Essien that Obinna does have do not invoke any emotional yearning; the only thing that his memories evoke is erotic desires, as Obinna is only left with what Essien used to make him feel--sexual arousal. Obinna notes that when he does think about Essien, he fulfils his desires and carries on as usual.

Figure 4

In Figure 4, Ifeakandu's choice of meme is a refurbished image of the 1980s TV sitcom, *Married… with Children*.[48] Al Bundy, featured above, is a misanthrope heterosexual husband who approaches life, fatherhood, work and his marriage sex life with nonchalance and apathy. The latter is one of Al's most common traits, and he is known for reacting to his wife's sexual needs and desires with little to no interest. Ifeakandu employs this meme to depict the 'nonchalance' with which Obinna masturbates when Essien does cross his mind. The use of Al and his well-known lacklustre approach to sex, helps reinforce that Obinna's masturbation is purely out of necessity and not him consciously harbouring romantic desires for Essien at this point.

Ifeakandu's use of the meme in place of a written description reinforces visually and with humour how inconsequential the act of masturbation is for him vis-à-vis Essien. Online relationships do not always fulfil the craving for intimacy, especially since the intimacy that Obinna needs requires a more tangible form of contact. The relationship between the men only existed online; without Obinna's active online participation, there is no other indicator of Essien's presence. Obinna continues with his life as usual until Essien reappears online.

According to Vincent Desmond, a "kito is a person who pretends they are queer on social media and dating apps. After building an online rapport with someone, they make plans to hook up or go on a date. But this is just a ruse to extort or physically harm their date" (para. 7). This is one of the main dangers that the queer community faces, specifically queer men, in the online dating world; this reinforces the point that queerphobia is not easy to escape as it too can access the virtual space. When Essien first tells Obinna that he would like to meet, Obinna "lies on his bed, his heart swelling and swelling. His throat perched, the fire in his body doused by an irrational fear" (14). The irrational fear that Obinna feels is never addressed, but it can be surmised that the rush of fear is due to Essien desire to meet and his growing need to become more intimate with Essien or a man partner in general. Engaging with another man online and sharing quite personal things with them make Obinna feel vulnerable for having opened up to Essien; in his mind, the meeting could lead to sexual pleasure, but also at the same time it could be incredibly life-threatening.

According to Osinachi, in *Inward Gaze*, "[k]ito situations always leave victims ashamed and withdrawn" (49) which would explain Essien's retreat from Obinna for a long

[48] It is my understanding from online popular culture that this meme commonly trends on social media, often used for humour created by the slapstick sexual connotations in it.

while. It also makes Essien's apology even more believable: "I was set up months ago. I was brutalized […] Totally traumatized. Didn't feel like I was healthy enough emotionally to talk to you" (17).[49] It does cross Obinna's mind that Essien might be lying about his actions during their hiatus; he thinks: "a week did not pass when [he] did not upload a shirtless pic on Instagram" (18). However, given Osinachi's above remark, it makes sense for Essien though having retreated from his queer 'social' interactions to still have carried on with his more 'heterosexual' online presence. On the other hand, Obinna may think it is possible that Essien is telling the truth and dealt with the humiliation set-up, attack and loss of his phone by pretending on social media that everything was still fine and not that he had been set-up because he is queer.

His initial need for intimacy, having gone unreciprocated, Obinna uses the second attempt at a relationship to shift the power dynamic from acting like the love-struck teenager to assuming the role of the older man in the relationship. To keep his emotions in check and the relationship in his control, Obinna refers to Essien as "the boy" and "pretty, young Essien" (13, 15). When Essien admits he is broke and provides this as another excuse for his absence, Obinna ignores his gut feeling that arises from the inaccuracies in Essien's explanations about his disappearance. Instead, he coolly asks: "[h]ow much do you need, young man?" (18). Obinna sends Essien double the amount he asks for, which gives Obinna the dominant position in the relationship through financial control. Just saying he will send Essien money, "fills Obinna with a sense of power, that he can cause such reaction in Essien with a mere promise of power" (18).

Now that a financial element has been added to their relationship and the power dynamics shifted in Obinna's favour, their coupling is turned into a transactional relationship. This is a sort of guarantee so that Essien does not disappear again; now that there are financial incentives for him to remain in the relationship. Tragically, however, this only succeeds in creating a false sense of security in Obinna; he becomes careless and in a "moment of unchecked mushiness" (19), he lets his emotions take over and posts a public birthday message on Facebook to Essien. The message reads:

> I met you at a time when Silence was the only voice I ever heard, when loneliness was my bed-mate, and you became more than a friend. I was afraid to approach you, seeing how much of a celebrity you are but you made it easier, opening yourself to a person you did not know and healing me in the process. In a world where beauty and

[49] In a non-fiction piece in *Inward Gaze* titled, "After the Law Was Passed", the narrator, who is very similar to Obinna, is attracted to a handsome man in an online profile. As with Obinna, the narrator begins casually chatting with the man, flirting and then sexting. However, the narrator soon discovers the man he is chatting to is a policeman who infiltrates online dating spaces to trap queer men into arrest.

> youth are associated with fickleness, you show that both are not necessary, but can also exist alongside intelligence and responsibility. You are a gem and I am fortunate to know you. Happy birthday, man. (*Inward Gaze* 19)

The message clearly states the intimate nature of their relationship, at least from Obinna's perspective. It confesses the lonely life he had lived before meeting Essien and that the latter's online popularity had been intimidating to him initially but that their strong connection now has eased his life and loneliness. The message is intensely affectionate and caring, indicative of a birthday message to a loved one. Nonetheless, the final word of the message reveals Obinna's weak attempt to undercut the emotional tribute paid by one man to another; he refers to Essien as "man" instead of a term of endearment like 'dear' which Obinna had once used before. Referring to Essien in this informal manner, Obinna is seen to be creating a distraction from his phrase just before, that is, "more than a friend". All the power Obinna has accumulated is now placed in jeopardy, because as Digital Boundaries cautions, "[o]nce you've sent or posted a photo or message, you lose control over what happens next" (para. 9). The reaction from the virtual public is overwhelming, but while Obinna considers the feedback as positive, Essien reacts negatively.

Bryan informs that "[s]everal of [his] informants told [him] stories about waking up to hundreds of messages on their phones from friends notifying them that they had been outed" (13). This is a fear that queer Nigerian men live with as there is always the possibility of being outed. This is also why "virtual publics become a safe(r) space in which users can generate heteronormative coping mechanisms to essentially "play-it-straight" in daily life, while also maintaining the queer identity that they have also so carefully crafted" (Bryan 12). Obinna and Essien have both crafted their public heterosexual personas, much like Wale and Wole in the previous chapter. Obinna posts the birthday message because he feels the deep need to express his feelings about his 'friend', but in doing so he jeopardises their carefully crafted straight personas. Despite Obinna's pure intentions, Essien is placed in an unfortunate position when he receives numerous messages asking if he is involved with Obinna.

To restore his act of 'playing it straight', Essien demands that Obinna take down the post. The term 'crafted' I have used above to describe their queerness might imply a sense of falsehood if the assumption is that the 'queer' is their true selves. In my view, Obinna, though queer, has forced himself to live internally (privately) as himself and externally (socially) as a made-up heterosexual version of himself, similar to Wale and Wole's masks in the previous chapter. It is difficult for Obinna's true self to emerge and grow naturally and organically, especially when it is forced to grow in the restricted and oppressive space of queerphobic

Nigeria. Both men had crafted unique spaces for themselves prior to meeting each other. Under such circumstances, it is difficult to accommodate another person's way of maintaining the carefully crafted space. It is no surprise then that Essien breaks contact with Obinna. This leaves Obinna distraught and broken as he had never intended his post to cause any harm.

Figure 5

Ifeakandu's use at this point a meme in which a young boy sits dejectedly on the floor, looking forlornly at his phone, seen in Figure 5, reinvokes the earlier image of Obinna feeling like a teenager who is out of his depth in trying to navigating the relationship with Essien.[50] While it seems understandable for Essien to cut ties so drastically with Obinna, the latter is shown as lacking insight to make sense of Essien's cold and rash decision.

Figure 6

The meme, shown in Figure 6, is used to convey both the final words and final meme of the story; the meme depicts the inner dialogue or thoughts of Obinna with the popular image of

[50] It is my understanding from online popular culture that this meme trends quite commonly on social media with the purpose of conveying anxiety, dejection and melancholy; the above, as well as other similar images, are possibly sourced from stock images available in online image banks.

Spiderman in a 'face palm' pose, a gesture commonly used to indicate exasperation or embarrassment at one's own actions or someone else's.[51]

The ever-growing need for the queer community in Nigeria to move underground and online as a way of circumventing hostile public spaces in which the SSMP Act can be enforced, shows that vigilance relating to safety precautions is vital. The Nigerian queer community therefore created the "Kito Diaries", an online platform that exposes perpetrators of queerphobic incidents; it also makes efforts to keep the online space and queer existence in Nigeria safe. Furthermore, articles such as "Digital Boundaries", although not specifically aimed at Nigeria, helps to provide guidance to users of online dating sites who engage in experimenting with virtual dating.

As Ifeakandu shows in "Pretty Young Thing", it is difficult to navigate the online dating world. Obinna is sure of the type of intimacy he wants, yet the intimacy that Essien is willing to provide fails to align with his own idea. Besides the ephemeral nature of online relationships, there are also challenges regarding the kind of information that can be posted online without implicating the real lives of the queer men engaging in virtual relationships. Obinna and Essien show the delicate and fragile nature of virtual relationships. A few accusations or murmurs can suddenly throw the whole relationship into turmoil. The harsh reality is that even relocated underground and online, an intimate queer relationship in Nigeria is impossible to sustain in the absence of queer people being able to access their right to conduct their personal lives in privacy. The story is clear, in order to love, queer people should not have to fear or contend with external or third parties such as the state or society knowing about, interfering in or threatening their relationships and lives.

4.3.2 The Intimate Labour of (Queer) Love

I now focus on intimate labour and its representation in Louis' "The Man" and Otosirieze's "A Sheltered Life." Intimate labour refers to the paid profession of providing services that require close physical and emotional proximity to others. Parreñas and Boris inform that this "encompasses a range of activities, including bodily and household upkeep, personal and family maintenance, and sexual contact and liaison" (2). Given these parameters of what can also be termed 'intimate labour', Louis' short story, "The Man" and that of Otosirieze, "A

[51] Spiderman, created by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, is one the most famous comic book superheroes from American popular culture; according to Brian Hall, Spiderman appeared in comic books since the 1960s as well as television shows, cartoons, and movies; Spiderman has also made the transition to social media as a meme that commonly trends online.

Sheltered Life", are fictional representations of this form of profession. "The Man" is told from a sex worker's perspective. "A Sheltered Life" is about the employer of a domestic worker, told from the employer's perspective. I intend to show how these short stories depict the challenges and intricacies relating to intimate labour and its power dynamic imbalance that more often than not positions queer men in vulnerable positions.

The challenge relating to intimate labour centres on the imbalance in power relations that favours the paying or employing party over the worker. This creates a transactional relationship, similar in nature to the relationship between Obinna and Essien in which Obinna takes on the role of the older man to Essien's younger role of dependency on Obinna. Depending on the type of work expected or the expectations of the employer, intimate labour may or may not involve sex. However, this kind of work always comes with a blurring of lines between the professional and the personal due to the close proximity of employer vis-à-vis the employee, at both physical and emotional levels.

Thus, Parreñas and Boris state: "[v]arious intimate laborers do emotional labor […] prostitutes who must display emotions of joy and love to heighten feelings of specialness among customers, and domestic workers who must suppress their emotions so as not to make their employers uncomfortable" (6). There is an interesting emotional contrast in the two types of labour that fall under the rubric of intimate labour; in sex work the employee must contend with the heightening of feelings; in domestic work, they must suppress their emotions to enable the employer's sense of comfort and feelings. This emotional contrast is but one reason why the two types of intimate labour, although sharing some similarities, require separate focuses. The first to be discussed is sex work.

The events and actions in Louis' "The Man" take place over the course of a single night, beginning with Quasi Boy eyeing his prospective man for the night and ending after Damien rapes him. It is not directly stated that Quasi Boy is a sex worker but the story provides enough information to make that assumption. His familiarity with the bartender indicates the club serves as a frequent pick-up spot for men. He is also careful to present his body language and appearance as approachable. For example, Quasi Boy notes:

> The man is taking longer than you'd expected and you worry he might be somewhat apprehensive to walk up to you in a club full of people. Men don't just walk up to other men and buy them drinks, not when the other man is wearing bright shorts and a chiffon shirt tied at the base to form a crop-top. You have been around enough men to know how to make yourself approachable, so you loosen the bow and let the fabric fly. (111)

In the company of the man, whose name is later given as Damien, Quasi Boy is excited by Damien's hints about his frequent trips abroad and his status as a family man; these are all indications that Damien is not looking for anything other than sex. Furthermore, Quasi Boy notes that men like Damien are the reason he can afford his home; and when he later experiences Damien's assault on him, he remarks that others in his "line of business encounter things like this from time to time" (114). This information aligns with the findings of a research study on men sex workers in Nigeria by Adebajo et al. Firstly, Adebajo et al. find that "[l]ocations where men meet other men to arrange transactional sex were mapped and […] included bars [and] clubs" (84). Second, they inform that "verbal, body language and other social cues were used to indicate intent to engage in transactional sex" (Adebajo et al. 85). Last, they note that men sex workers' clients are usually men who do not self-identify as queer and who are solely interested in non-committal sex. In his above descriptions, Quasi Boy meets all of the criteria that entail men's sex work, as identified by Adebajo et al. Thus, one can confidently assume that Quasi Boy is a sex worker in the intimate labour profession.

It is also clear that Quasi Boy is experienced in his profession, reflected in his confidence, his ability to acquire a client and the trauma he has learned to suppress in order to perform his job. He informs that places like the club "make it easy to unwind and suppress forlorn memories" (110). According to research conducted by Population Council, "[s]ome men say that being high on alcohol made their sexual encounters more fun […] Some men were aware that using alcohol was likely to change their behaviours and make them more likely to do things they might not otherwise do" (43). For Quasi Boy, alcohol helps him get through the night, starting with enabling him to begin the night with a sort of basic ritual involving looking at his reflection in the mirror, which otherwise nauseates him.

He also remarks that the more interested in him Damien seems, the more he finds himself drinking. He can allow himself to drink because he has secured his client, had successfully evaluated Damien to be wealthy enough to afford him. As Quasi Boy says, "[t]his business has taught [him] to analyze men, the worth of their shoes, their wrist watches, their keycards" (112). Quasi Boy has made calculated decisions tonight, decisions that reflect his experience in conducting business and the ability to be in control of this transaction. Despite Quasi Boy's experienced knowledge about his profession, his body is an essential part of work. Still, in the case of his client Damien, paying for Quasi Boy's time as a sex worker amounts to paying for control over Quasi Boy's body.

All the knowledge about his line of business that Quasi Boy details throughout the story is nonetheless insufficient to protect him from violence, the occupational hazard of sex

work. The sexual encounter with Damien begins as consensual sex and Quasi Boy describes finding it enjoyable; however, Damien soon becomes forceful. It is at this point that the second-person narration becomes significant. While the beginning of the story is the unknown narrator providing an account of Quasi Boy's night, the narration of the now forceful sexual encounter provides the illusion that this narration is a representation of Quasi Boy's thoughts as he is being raped, making it seem that Quasi Boy is speaking to himself; it is almost as though he is reminding himself of the night that he was raped, in other words he is talking about a past experience:

> You have heard stories about it: where to go if something breaks, what to take, how to fix a mess that you get yourself into, what to do when you are assaulted.
>
> But nobody teaches you that your lungs would close up and your limbs wouldn't even rise to smack him. That you would will yourself to move away from him, to evade his hands as they rip apart your shirt and press against your nipples, but they would remain still. That the fear would leech across your skin, creep into your bones and make them docile. So you sit there and wait until the memories return. You allow yourself to feel, once again, the familiar feeling of a man's hand pressing through your body against your will. (114)

The fear and realisation that he is being raped is so shocking for Quasi Boy that he is incapacitated both in mind and body, causing him to dissociate. The dissociation Quasi Boy experiences, which cause him to speak to himself, that is, using the word "you", explains Louis' use of second-person narration. Quasi Boy's mind cannot access the tips or knowledge with which his profession has armed him for surviving forced intimacy; his body has lost its very ability of muscle memory for him to use his limbs even; when his mind returns him to himself, all he can do is to wait for his rape to be over.

According to Population Council's research, very few of the research study respondents interviewed spoke about rape or assault; the reason could be that "men who are assaulted may not wish to recall such occurrences because the memory carries a residual emotional pain" (40). This would explain why none of Quasi Boy's fellow 'colleagues' volunteer any information about assault they have experienced. It also explains why Quasi Boy's narration is presented as him speaking to himself rather than to the reader; he *needs* to talk himself through the emotionally and physically painful memory. He discloses the feeling of being taken against his will as familiar; this explains, perhaps, the title of the story as not "Damien", but rather the vague placeholder, "The Man", implying there is not just one man responsible for perpetrating sexual assaults against Quasi Boy.

The sex work section of intimate labour is extremely challenging for those engaged in it, especially regarding the occupational hazard of violence, especially in queerphobic

countries such as Nigeria. As Okanlawon et al. argue, “Sex between men is criminalised while there are also laws criminalising sex work in the Nigerian Criminal Code. Male sex workers are therefore faced with double difficulties” (30). This means, for Quasi Boy, there is no one to report the violence he has experienced even if he were to summon the courage to do so. His work and his existence are both viewed as social and legal violations in the eyes of his country, thus rendering him unprotected and vulnerable socially and professionally. Okanlawon et al. also find that Nigerian men sex workers in real life face immense difficulties in navigating the medical, legal, social and professional discriminations and biases they experience, both as queer men and as sex workers. Quasi Boy’s life is a vicious cycle of not being able to survive without the income and amenities his work provides him with; but it is also the same work that constantly puts his very life at risk.

The trauma inflicted by Damien is heightened even more because Quasi Boy had earlier felt and displayed pleasure and enjoyment in his work that provides him opportunities to fulfil his same-sex men desires. His sex work also enables him assuming control over his sexual activities that the Nigerian government regulate and prohibit with the SSMP Act. It is suggested that, in the foreseeable future, Quasi Boy will still be forced to frequent the club; this is given as “temporary solutions, numbing the pain that accompanies reliving” (110), referring to the traumatic experiences associated with the intimate labour he provides. The structure and flow of the story is thus also that of an endless cycle, in that the reader might begin the story again after ending it to the end, reliving the events much like Quasi Boy will have to. There is no visible end in sight to Quasi Boy’s work or the hardships that it entails for him.

While “The Man” focusses on sexual violence related to intimate labour, Otosirieze’s “A Sheltered Life” centres on the emotional pain and more complex power dynamics at play in domestic work. When Mr Ekeh first meets Suleiman, he is drawn to the young man. He keeps going to Suleiman’s place of work, trying to “be sure of what it was that now propelled him: a much younger man not particularly good-looking but so full of life, of graceful energy, of a promise of profundity” (117). Mr Ekeh offers Suleiman a job as his gatekeeper and housekeeper which the young man, after much deliberation, accepts. Their thinking and actions reveal a big difference in the two men’s approaches to decision-making. Mr Ekeh is controlled by his emotions and desires which often prompt him to act impulsively, such as the ill-thought-out job offer which stemmed from his need to continue their time together and keep Suleiman closer to him.

Suleiman, on the other hand, thinks things through carefully before making decisions, never wavering in his discomfort of Mr Ekeh's unwanted attention and always reminding his boss that they both have families to consider. This stance also reflects a challenge faced by those employed in intimate labour, that is, the employer who is in charge of the money can afford to behave as they wish; the employee must always remain professional and level headed. Unlike "The Man", in which Quasi Boy is the protagonist and we are given the narrative perspective of the subordinate in the intimate labour relationship, the narrative perspective of intimate labour in the latter story differs starkly from that of "A Sheltered Life," in which Mr Ekeh is the focal character and superior, the employer, and fully aware of his privilege. This is also conveyed via use of their titles and names. On the one hand, Suleiman is referred to by the narrator as 'Suleiman', yet in his communications with him, Mr Ekeh never addresses Suleiman by name. On the other hand, Mr Ekeh is referred to by Suleiman as 'sir' and 'Oga' the latter which is a Nigerian pidgin term synonymous with 'boss' or 'master'.

I want to make clear that while I refer to the relationship between Mr Ekeh and Suleiman as a 'relationship', I do so because they have a form of interpersonal relationship; I am not using the word in terms of its common association with romance, love or sex. The relationship between the two men is a professional one as well as of a friendship. Any romantic association made in their relationship is one-sided and is initiated by Mr Ekeh, including the unprofessional intimacy that takes place between the latter and Suleiman. While the story is subtle about the details, it is evident that there is an attempt on Mr Ekeh's part to push the boundaries of the work relationship and friendship toward something more akin to lovers in a mutual romantic relationship. We read in this regard:

> Before that first Sunday morning, his family out at Mass, he walked into Suleiman's room, the man jerking out of bed in surprise. Before he sat on that bed, felt the unclad mattress between his fingers, Suleiman standing at the door in surprise. Before he said, "You can sit," and, because there was only one seating space in that room, the bed, his gateman stared at him as though he had gone out of his mind. Before the second Sunday when Suleiman said quietly, "But you are married and I am married and I can't do this kind of thing to Madam." (115)

The act of entering Suleiman's room is Mr Ekeh assertion of control over Suleiman's only private space, which enforces his dominant position as an employer in the relationship.

Furthermore, he sits on the bed while Suleiman stands respectfully by the door; Mr Ekeh tells the younger man to sit down again. What might seem to Mr Ekeh to be an open invitation being extended by him could easily be construed as a command, given their power

dynamic as employer and employee; since Mr Ekeh has the upperhand, Suleiman cannot refuse him. More importantly, what happens after that between the two men that first Sunday is not revealed to the reader; however, it in all likelihood had involved intimate words or acts that lie outside the conventional work relationship. Hence, on the second Sunday, Suleiman's apprehension is clear–it, whatever *it* is, is going to happen again. Suleiman's reminder to Mr Ekeh about their respective marriages also suggests a repeat of whatever had taken place the Sunday before as being misaligned to their marriages.

Suleiman's trepidation also conveys the discomfort he feels at Mr Ekeh's advances as well as the change in their relationship. The scenario painted speaks to Parreñas and Boris's earlier point that domestic workers often have to suppress their own emotions so as not to offend their employers. The need to not offend your employer is a notion that provides rare insight into Suleiman's perspective of the relationship; it importantly provides the actions, stance and words of the young man, unusual because the story is told in the third-person and its focus is on Mr Ekeh. Moreover, its third-person narration's use of "he" to refer to both men further reduces any possibility for Suleiman to have a distinct voice in the relationship. To be sure, the reader might be excused for being unaware of Suleiman's emotions and thoughts; however, any claim by Mr Ekeh of similar ignorance is less forgiving.

Despite being aware of the possibility that Suleiman's affection exists because he is paying for it, Mr Ekeh's desire for Suleiman blinds him to the full extent of his superior position over his worker. Suleiman is clearly afraid to pronounce his apprehensions, yet Mr Ekeh shows no interested in comprehending Suleiman's actions or words. He describes moments when they talk or spend time together; yet we are told Mr Ekeh still "could not stop wondering how Suleiman felt, how Suleiman *felt* things, what was going on in his head" (119). Mr Ekeh's supposed wish to know Suleiman's mind and heart, indicating a sort of complete muteness on Suleiman's part, is a claim that is entirely superficial as he never makes any real effort to find out these things about the young man he is supposedly constantly wondering about. Suleiman, on the other hand, is constantly aware of Mr Ekeh's feelings because the older man speaks to him often in a "confessional nature" (118).

These confessions enable Mr Ekeh to further his inappropriate advances to Suleiman from the physical to the emotional level. It is impossible to view the relationship between them as equal; Mr Ekeh holds the power while Suleiman is marginalised but still available for the older man to gaze at and touch. Suleiman's positioning echoes that of Quasi Boy, a mere body that is taken when needed, treated and spoken to only in terms of the paying party's wishes, with no *real* control over the situation by the worker. The major difference between

Damien and Mr Ekeh in such a scenario as this is that Mr Ekeh's authority is not exerted through physical force, but through emotional and financial manipulation.

At their first meeting, Mr Ekeh learns about Suleiman's desire to go to school, hindered by his lacking of funds to do so. Having employed the young man and begun an intimate relationship with him, Mr Ekeh is faced with a difficult realisation:

> He had done all these knowing it was Madness, that it was not what he ought to, and yet he knew too well that only a few unbearable urges do not demand this unconditional relief. He continued doing them, never stopping to ponder if it was anything more than it appeared, if it was what he sought, Affection, convinced as he was that it could never be realised equally on both sides: We either loved more or were loved more, or we loved only for reasons, circumstances without which our love would fall away. He did not want a subordinating affection, one that would convert reciprocation into duty, an insulating affection that would keep him safe from Suleiman's realities, keep him unruffled. He did not want him to love him as his benefactor, with only that loyalty we give they who have given us new lives. He wanted to be loved with bareness, rawness, with all the lack of comfort that a relationship between equals had. He wanted to be immersed in this man's existence, to be loved intoxicatingly and excruciatingly, unconditionally. Sheltered by his fear, he knew that if at all he felt anything more, it would never be returned. And still he continued. (118)

Throughout Mr Ekeh's worried thoughts, he claims to want Suleiman to also feel loved, feel safe and that they should be equals; but Mr Ekeh's intentions are focussed on manipulating Suleiman into submission rather than on creating anything endearing. He wants the relationship to align with his specifications. Mr Ekeh admits he had never paused to consider the ramifications of their actions because he is too caught up in sating his urges. While it is clear is Mr Ekeh craves a deep and intense intimacy from Suleiman, which is presented ultimately as a very superficial desire. An example of this superficiality relating to Mr Ekeh's desire is his above claim to want a relationship free of professional duty on Suleiman's part, and to no longer be "safe from Suleiman's realities" (118), which we can interpret as a desire for the deepest of intimacy to be shared between them.

Mr Ekeh believes he wants Suleiman to be on equal footing with him, yet he shows neither any real inclination nor need to remove the barriers between their realities. His obsession with poetic descriptions of their relationship, with it flowery vocabulary, merely emphasises his penchant for romanticising the unwanted attention he gives Suleiman who receives it with reluctance and muteness. Mr Ekeh wants the affection to be reciprocated but not for Suleiman's benefit; reciprocation would serve only to intensify Mr Ekeh's own satisfaction further, hence the above internal struggle ending with "still he continued" (118).

When Suleiman ends the relationship, the young man once again thinks carefully before speaking, citing their familial obligations as the reason behind his decision. Mr Ekeh once again tries to win Suleiman's affection the only way he knows how, which is by offering him a lucrative option. He tries to manipulate Suleiman via the latter's wish to study, and dangles the opportunity before the young man; he offers to pay and even provide accommodation for Suleiman's family if they remained tethered together. Parreñas and Boris argue that "[i]ntimate labor involves tending to the intimate needs of individuals inside and outside their home. Our intimate needs would include not just sexual gratification but also our bodily upkeep, care for loved ones, creating and sustaining social and emotional ties" (5). Suleiman is critically aware of these requirements as an intimate labourer, even when at the verge of ending his employment. He urges Mr Ekeh to remember that both of them have families for which to care. Suleiman says this, knowing that Mr Ekeh would only adhere to that if he, Suleiman, terminates his employment and gives up the security that Mr Ekeh offers.

"The Man" and "A Sheltered Life" provide two different portrayals of intimate labour, yet both show the dangerous nature of queer men's relationships within unregulated work power dynamics. Intimate labour under such conditions makes for fragile relationships that can easily slip into abuse and manipulation. Quasi Boy is sexually assaulted and abused by Damien in a blatant way; Suleiman's oppression is far subtler but also abusive. Mr Ekeh admits to not knowing how Suleiman feels and that he is aware of the one-sided affection, however, he is adamant about fulfilling his desire and continues to push for intimacy between them. Given Suleiman's muteness and Mr Ekeh's perseverance, the relationship is anything but consensual. Relationships that are sexual or emotionally based are unsustainable in situations of intimate labour; mutuality will always be uncertain.

4.3.3 Queer Intimacies across National Borders

I now look at sexual intimacy in same-sex men's relationships in Erhu Amreyan's "The One I am Not" and Karanja Nzisa "Rebellion's Rebirth". In the previous chapter, the discussion on queer men in Ikpo's novel focussed on the extreme lengths Wale and Wole go to in order to conceal their sexuality; the discussion did not look at queer intimacies between men as I did between queer women in Okparanta's novel discussed in Chapter Two. In my analysis of the sexual relationships in the stories in this chapter, I compare how each protagonist is affected by the conservative gaze of their respective countries, namely, Nigeria and Kenya. These

national gazes share similarities as well as differences in terms of how they respond to same-sex issues. I therefore also look at how escaping these gazes by leaving for other African countries can be controversially liberating if the country in question politically endorses queerphobia, such as Nigeria, or legislatively accepting of queerness, such as South Africa.

Amreyan's short story, "The One I'm Not", centres on Erin, a young man who grows up under the harsh reign of a conservative Christian father who abuses both Erin and his mother. This heteropatriarchal, religious household makes it difficult for Erin to pursue the mutual attraction he feels for his friend, Remy. Years later, as an adult, after the death of his father and having married a woman, Erin travels to South Africa for purposes of work and reunites with Remy; the two men share a sexually charged reunion. Set in 1997 and elsewhere on the continent, Nzisa's short story, "Rebellion's Rebirth", sees a stifled KJ leave a socio-politically exhausted Kenya and go in search of his own self-revival. KJ heads to Nigeria to meet his pen pal, Enajide. The two men quickly realise the intense desire between them and enjoy a short-lived but intense erotic and romantic relationship.

On the one hand, Erin grows up with a religious, conservative and oppressive father, who creates many difficulties in his household, which symbolises the broader Nigeria. On the other hand, "Rebellion's Rebirth" sees KJ grow up in a religious, conservative and oppressive Kenya, the negativity of which seeps into his household and leaves him feeling suffocated. For Erin, his father is a symbol of the patriarchy that is Nigeria; KJ's household is the symbol of the stagnating Kenya from which he desperately wants to break away. When Erin reunites with Remy, it is in the queer capital of Africa, Cape Town, where he achieves the intimacy with Remy he has craved for years; this intimacy is only possible after he escapes the patriarchal gaze that polices him in Nigeria. Ironically, however, Nigeria is the space in which KJ realises the intimacy he needs, and which liberates him from oppressive Kenya. All three countries mentioned in both these stories show varying degrees of hostility towards queer people. Nigeria and Kenya are both state declared anti-queer countries, while South Africa is constitutionally a tolerant or accepting nation. However, despite South Africa's progressive legislation, it too shares to in large degree the other two countries' heteropatriarchy and queerphobia traits.

"The One I am Not" begins with Erin explaining that "[t]hey are making [his] father a deacon. They do not know his true nature, his hatred for women. And even if they do, they will not acknowledge it as a sin" (*Inward Gaze* 76). Erin makes it abundantly clear that misogyny is not viewed a sin in the eyes of his community. In his research on Nigerian masculinity, Gaudio informs that "[h]eterosexual marriage may be sacred in Nigeria, but

infidelity is tolerated and even laughed at" (63). Gaudio further notes that Nigerian society looks down on queer people but tends to praise heteronormative couplings in spite of its many imperfections. As Erin points out, his negative view of his father stems from more than just the cruelty shown to his wife (Erin's mother), it also comes from the physical and mental strain Erin has had to endure under his father's reign. He finds himself incapable of standing up against his father; "[h]is fists have done enough damage to [Erin's] psyche" (76). Erin is not damaged by his father's fists alone but rather the collective impact of the toxic masculinities that surrounded him.

The toxicity he feels first emerges from his father's teaching that "boys do not belong in the kitchen–only women" (75), with which his mother reluctantly agrees. It is also seen to have emerged from amongst the other boys at school, whom Erin notes "like to talk about girls all the time and how they would exert their sexual prowess on them" (76). Erin does not mourn his father's death; rather, he feels the weight of his father's heavy-handed patriarchal rule fall away from his mother's shoulders as well as his own. Now that he can finally breathe, his immediate focus is Remy; there is nothing standing between him and Remy now. Referring once again to Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, specifically the line, "I was not sorry when my brother died" (1), which is very similar to Erin's clear thought: "[m]y father is dead. I do not shed a single tear" (*Inward Gaze* 78).

The respective protagonists in Dangaremba's novel and Amreyan's short story feel neither mournful nor guilty for being devoid of feelings; the respective deaths of these male figures seem to emerge from the hidden joy they feel in the place of sadness; it is a joy for the death of more than just these men but for what they represent--a patriarchal stronghold on their freedom that has long prevented the growth, confidence and entitlement they rightfully deserve. However, by becoming a doctor and marrying a woman after his father's death, Erin is seen to still falter under the patriarchal obligation he had initially thought himself free of with his father's death. There is no easy means of escaping the stronghold of heteropatriarchy, as Erin shows. Merely removing the patriarchal head of a household does not mean all enforcers of heteropatriarchy disappear too. Nonetheless, Erin does experience some reprieve in his life now with the absence of his father.

The shared intimacy between Erin and Remy starts to grow due to the refreshing non-toxic masculinity Remy brings in to Erin's world. This attraction is sparked by Remy's simple affirmation of Erin's art and the brief physical contact from touching Erin's head in a friendly gesture. Erin is drawn to Remy with the realisation that intimacy with another man can exist without verbal or physical violence, the kind he had been exposed to at home and

school. Erin, having been subjected to oppressive and domineering masculinities all his life, is hesitant to take charge of his desire. The first time that they had acted on their desires as boys, Remy initiates their intimacy by asking if Erin has feelings for him and then kissing him. In that moment, Erin recalls: "He lifts my chin so I can see his eyes. His lips meet mine, and all reasoning escapes me. He holds me tighter as he deepens his kiss" (*Inward Gaze* 78).

Erin describes the kiss as "his kiss", referring to Remy instead of 'ours'; this indicates the dominant position Remy occupies at the moment intimacy is initiated between them. Erin is seen to lack confidence in his queer desires, specifically, his desire for Remy. Their first kiss in Erin's bedroom also allows Remy to help Erin subvert and reclaim the space of desire from his father's oppressive heteropatriarchal household. Remy's impact on Erin in this intimate encounter paradoxically later leads to him to inserting their queer experience into the heteronormative in order to help him cope; he carries this experience into his marriage.

Years after that first same sex kiss and married, Erin continues to think about Remy when he is having sex with his wife; he fantasises that it is Remy touching him. When Erin has a work trip to Cape Town and is coincidentally reunited with Remy, he cannot believe the physical presence, Remy, of his fantasy before him; their sexual dynamic is reignited and develops further. Now with more confidence and less fear regarding his desires, it is Erin who takes control and becomes more dominant. Erin describes the scene:

> We are in his hotel room. Remy is telling me he is in town for business. I want to ask why he left me years ago. I want to tell him to go to hell but I listen when he explains. He stops. He is vexed. He orders me to say that something, I do not. I feel a wave of emotions take over my senses like a psychedelic drug. I rush over to him and begin to take off his clothes. His hands encircle my face as he kisses me fiercely. He tells me he has missed me. He tells me he loves me, and always will. He lets me do whatever I want to him until I am satisfied. He holds me in his arms and kisses my forehead. I am happy again, but for how long? (79)

Remy giving himself to Erin for the latter to satisfy his desire reflects the control Erin possesses in this moment. In Cape Town, away from the heteropatriarchal gaze of Nigeria that has always intimidated Erin, and when he is temporarily away from his wife, he is able to take charge of his desires and claim Remy the way he has been craving all these years. Finally, Erin is able to express the emotions he has long felt while focussing on the physical desire he is satisfying as Remy verbally declares his feelings.

The two men share an intense moment of intimacy that has been building up for years. However, Erin ponders at the end of their time together how there is no guarantee that this reunion and the happiness it creates is for the long-term. This reminds the reader and Erin that he has a family life awaiting him outside the hotel room. The reader is left in the dark

about where the men's relationship will lead after this closing scene; it seems Erin is also not aware, instilling in the story's ending a non-confident or uncertain tone. Du Preez argues that short stories have a tendency to "end ambiguously or on a moment filled with potential that has not yet crystalized" (27). Erin finds himself with such an ending that hints at an unsustainable relationship. Nonetheless, this type of ambiguous ending does not seem to be a major concern for KJ in "Rebellion's Rebirth".

As already mentioned, prior to his escape to Lagos, KJ feels trapped and stifled in Kenya. He remarks on the post-election Kenyan attitude: "[t]he country was shrouded in an atmosphere of general apathy coloured slightly in some places with despondence. It was as if those who voted for and against both knew they were fucked" (*Flowers* 92). He fails to understand the audacity of the president, the government and the voters who continue to support the political system. He does not find much comfort in turning his attention to his parents; they too have become stagnant, having ceded going to church every Sunday to laziness and remaining seated on the couch instead to watch televangelists preach a sect of Christianity they do not even seem to follow. KJ grows completely apathetic at his country's politics, his family's religion and his own future. Leaving a country in which he has he has no faith, low expectations for his future there and a sense of ever-growing claustrophobia at Kenya, KJ makes his way to Lagos.

According to Laura Begley Bloom's *Forbes* article aptly titled, "20 Most Dangerous Places for Gay Travelers (And the 5 Safest)", Nigeria is ranked at number one while Kenya is ranked at number sixteen. This is not to imply that *Forbes* is an expert and reliable source on such issues as security ratings of African countries; however, the magazine's rankings are founded on the known experiences and laws of each country so as to warn queer travellers about the extent of queerphobia they can expect in each country 'surveyed'. The article also states that from "47 of the 70 countries that have illegal same-sex relationships were part of the British Empire. That is 67%" (para. 6). KJ is from Kenya which, like Nigeria, has a staunch anti-queer reputation, one that is backed by anti-gay laws, a queerphobic society and intolerant religious views regarding non-heteronormative sexualities and people. This is no surprise given the information provided in Chapter One of this thesis that Christianity in Kenya, like in Nigeria, is a major factor in the establishment and maintenance of these conservative laws, which KJ's parents reflect via their religious staunchness.

KJ's liberating experience of Nigeria is not based on any view he holds of Nigeria being free from oppressive norms. Instead KJ's liberation stems from Nigeria being a space other than his home country, allowing him to feel less restricted because it offers him a

different space to explore himself. For KJ, leaving Kenya is a break from the mundane confines with which he is expected to live daily, such as his family's notion and expectations that KJ should be religious and attending university. By being somewhere different, somewhere he no longer feels numb, he experiences coming alive again; it is in this space that he is able to have his same sex sexual awakening as a man.

Having broken away from Kenya, KJ wants to experience Lagos, and after finally meeting up with Enajide, he is whisked away to a strip club to party. The club, as KJ describes it, is a "meat market where orgasms–however duplicitous–and coitus were traded" (98). Up until the moment he experiences discomfort at having multiple women dance for him, the reader is not aware that KJ is not sexually interested in women. KJ remarks while throwing up in the bathroom that among the contents to leave his stomach is 'confusion', proving that he too did not know women can cause this reaction in him. After helping him clean up, Enajide comments off-handedly that KJ cannot appreciate the dancers because he is a "[f]ruitcake" (99). KJ immediately and unthinkingly punches Enajide for insulting him thus but just as quickly apologises for his violent actions; he cowers, anticipating a counter punch from Enajide. Instead, Enajide kisses him, subverting KJ's expectation of the reaction of a hypermasculine man, that is, that violence will be met with an equally violent reaction.

As with Erin's inability to successfully find intimacy with a woman as he does with Remy, KJ is surprised that Enajide can elicit desires in him that none of the women KJ had been with could. KJ describes Enajide kissing him for the first time as the latter feeding his body its desires; this speaks of his body having hungered for this type of intimacy–same sex men's intimacy–despite previously having had sex with women. KJ seems only to experience sexual fulfilment now that Enajide is feeding or giving it to him. He silently admits not having known his mouth had places hidden away that only Enajide thus far, has been able to discover. This moment opens up a whole new world for KJ:

> I had moved into his apartment soon after that night and we had loved without limit for two months. One day, Jide was arrested for peddling crack cocaine. I never saw him again. The charges were not offered to neither him nor myself and they didn't need to be. I had never asked how he got by. Where he earned his meals and mine. It did not matter. To be desired so wholly by someone you desire intensely is a suspension of your sensibilities. The part of my guard that shielded my heart, my mind, my bodily safety, gone and replaced with just pure maddening desire. (99)

When KJ left Kenya, he had not fully understood the reasons for his leaving, only experiencing a desperate need to feel something that could bring enjoyment in to his life again. One sensual moment with Enajide gives him this, which turns into a whirlwind

romance, with them cohabitating soon after that initial moment of intimacy in the club's bathroom. The illegal nature of Enajide's work does not even bother KJ when he finds out about it, nor does he reveal any sadness or anger when the relationship ends. For KJ, the ability to desire someone so deeply and to have that desire reciprocated are enough for him. This is not a testament to the level of care KJ has for Enajide but rather how an intensely sexual and loving two months enables KJ to start life afresh; his sexual self-discovery as a queer man is what he needed to return to Kenya a new man.

Even though he is able to smell the decay of his country upon returning, KJ feels renewed, which shows that despite the queerphobic cruelty Nigeria shows its queer citizens, it is also, like most things, a matter of one's perspective. Nigeria is a country riddled with social, political, religious and legislative biases, discriminations and restrictions for its queer citizens, and majority of the queer characters featured in this thesis, Ijeoma, Ndidi, Amina, Wale, Wole and Erin have all suffered under the queerphobia and policing attitude of their country. Yet this same space offers KJ a reprieve from his own nation's stifling gaze. KJ is seen not have been escaping Kenya for its queerphobia, but rather for its political and social stagnation that had resulted in him feeling disillusioned with life. KJ finds rebirth and rejuvenation in the queer Nigeria to which Enajide introduces him. This is a Nigeria that can be home to a steamy romance between two men who for a few months need only each other in the privacy of their home.

For Erin, who is unable to find the intimacy he craves in Nigeria, South Africa becomes the space for him to explore his queer sexuality that needed to be reawakened because he too, like KJ, needed to remove himself from the stagnant, oppressive atmosphere that both men had for too long respectively become accustomed to. Erin dominates the South African space he shares with Remy by letting himself and his desires free for the first time. Erin is no longer, in that moment, restrained by his father, religion, state or family, and he is able to be intimate with Remy in the way they had tried to be before and failed. Experiencing life elsewhere renews KJ and Erin's zest for something more than the conventional and dreary lives they have in their respective countries, and this via their respective self-discovery, self-acceptance, experiences and embracing of their same sex men's sexualities.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has addressed one of this thesis' central focuses, which is the promotion of contemporary queer literature in Nigeria and the alternative digital publishing means of queer representation the writers employ in creating and circulating their queer literary works. I have

explored the emergence and need for online publishing platforms, such as *Brittle Paper,* and analysed the range of intimacy depicted in selected stories, from *We are Flowers* and *Inward Gaze.* I have shown the ways in which the online platform offers authors an outlet to express their ideas and depictions of queer existence. I have also shown that the online space allows queerness and queer individuals to be seen living with their sexuality and that they can exist virtually and publicly without the heightened precarity related to the heteropatriarchal public space that manufactures queerphobia to abuse its queer citizens. It might seem far-reaching to draw positives from the stories discussed that depict characters losing ties with their loved ones or facing great pain; however, it is necessary to acknowledge the good publishing these queer stories achieve in inserting queerness, the rights of queer people and the fact of their existence as real and deserving of respect into the fraught problematically dominant heterosexual-heteronormative and queerphobic Nigerian space.

Including "The Man" and "A Sheltered Life" in the *14* anthologies is recognition of the need to provide representation of intimate labourers and highlighting the dangers and intricacies that comes with the profession. "The One I'm Not" and "Rebellion's Rebirth" explore masculine sexual intimacy that can exist when queer men no longer feel trapped by the heteropatriarchal gaze of their countries. KJ finds solutions in Nigeria that every other protagonist analysed in this thesis fought many challenges in the hopes of achieving. Finally, "Pretty Young Thing" shows the fragile nature of emotional intimacy and how online queer relationships require a deeper understanding about communication and vulnerability. By providing these representations, *14* and by extension the Brittle Paper online platform provide humane and human queer representation to Nigerians as well as other international citizens. The inclusion of more than just a Nigerian perspective and the capacity of relating to the virtual dating and intimate labour scenarios allow for a far-reaching readership and queer representation.

As "The One I am Not" and "Rebellion's Rebirth" have shown, there are many spaces that are toxic and problematic, especially with regards to queerness, but there are individuals too who are able to find liberation and positivity for themselves through unique experiences. In spite of queerphobia, such as that found in Nigeria and South Africa, Erin and KJ are show to each having found their respective loves; regardless of the stifling conditions under which it is vilified, queerness will prevail. A message of hope within a space of hate is not a utopian idealistic notion but a realistic idea that inspires others to expect more of the space in which they live. After all, Nigeria after the passing of the SSMP Act inspired Kambili to create *We*

are Flowers in order to show the world the "beautifully delicate: bruised, red flowers that we [queer people] are" (9).

Chapter Five: Concluding the Un-Silencing of Queer Nigeria

> We love and hate in ignorance yet unhate and unlove with the coming of awareness, of knowledge (Ifedimma Osakwe 112)

In this thesis, I have interrogated the representations of queerness in contemporary Nigerian fiction through focus on religious, legal and cultural dynamics in that country. I have investigated the ways by which these narratives show queer bodies navigating various issues such as marriage, family relationships, intimacy and violence. In my exploration, I have also shown how queerphobia in the country has spurred the growth in new-generation publishing and digital spaces. I have examined how contemporary queer novelists, namely Chinelo Okparanta, Nnanna Ikpo and some of the contributors to *14,* Arinze Ifeakandu, Louis, Otosirieze, Erhu Amreyan and Karanja Nzisa, use alternative digital literary platforms to promote the presence, realities and rights of non-conforming genders and sexualities within the heteropatriarchal Nigerian society that is intensely queerphobic, both institutionally and socially.

In Chapter One, I discussed the key Western scholars who have contributed to providing a foundational understanding of queer theory; I focussed on the origins of queer theory and the problematising of the field from within the West and externally from Africa. I also discussed the definitions and critical terminologies used to show the progression of my understanding of sexuality and gender and my own interpretation reached about the term 'queer'. Thereafter, I focussed on African and literary scholars writing about queerness, more especially, Nigerian scholars from whose work I have drawn on a great deal in this thesis. The theoretical concepts presented in this chapter helped pave the way for the arguments I have made throughout this thesis. These concepts include queer theory and its multifaceted dimensions as well as queer African theory that excavate from the historical accounts of Africa the existence of African queer people and queer communities throughout the continent and its history, which cannot be denied but instead reclaimed and developed in the contemporary African queer rights agenda.

In Chapter Two, I discussed Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees*, specifically her representation via the novel of queerness and same sex women's desire within Nigeria's religious heteropatriarchal society. Her assertion of the queer woman protagonist, Ijeoma, who triumphs over family and social pressures to live with both her queerness and Christianity presents a bold vision for a future Nigeria that though imagined in Okparanta's

fiction can be achieved in reality in that society if there is the political will and determination of the queer community to remain steadfast in keeping hope alive for their rights as queer people as well as for a more human country. Queerness is presented as a Western concept; Okparanta situating her fictional account of same-sex women's queerness within Nigeria's history speaks directly to and challenges the current queerphobic and oppressive political landscape, in particular the draconian SSMP Act.

In my exploration of *Under*, I have shown Christianity in the novel, as it is practiced and preached in heteronormative terms, as complicit with the state's retrogressive attempts to eradicate queerness which it regards as a threat to Nigerian Christian beliefs. Using Christian theology, mainly Adriaan van Klinken's work on queer Christian practise in Uganda in my analysis of Ijeoma's religious struggle, I have shown that a keen perception and acceptance of love as the drive towards her realisation that it is possible for her as a queer woman to harmonise her religion and sexuality.

Chapter Three has delved into Nnanna Ikpo's depiction of complicit masculinities and the queer men protagonists' masking their queerness in *Fimí Sílẹ̀ Forever: Heaven gave it to me.* I examined the creation of toxic masculinities, focussing on Wale and the influence of his upbringing and social interactions that lead to his problematic views about and attitude towards effeminate and queer men. This analytical approach has helped highlight the complexities relating to the particular challenges masculinity poses for boys and men in heteropatriarchal societies. I have also offered a critique of these heteronormative threats being upheld by the very same sex men who are oppressed by queerphobia. I have also argued that the SSMP Act contributes greatly to the anxieties of the queer men characters in Ikpo's fictional Nigerian socio-political climate that mimics that of the country's queerphobic society.

Wale was shown to be a product of his surroundings, but this is not to imply he, and other such queer Nigerian men, lack agency but that their negative and oppressive views are reflective of their society's beliefs. My intention with this chapter was also to highlight the constructive role of advocacy and activism in countering the oppressive effects of heteropatriarchal societies, mainly through education and social reform. Progressive education and promoting awareness were shown to create a greater chance to eradicate non-acceptance and ignorance of queerness.

In the first half of Chapter Four, I focussed on digital or online publishing, exploring how online publishing platforms, namely in the case of the focus of my thesis, *Brittle Paper*, are enabling the emergence of contemporary queer literature through its ability to circumvent

traditional publishing houses and their accompanying limitations as well as the queerphobic censorship laws of the country. I also discussed the artistic evolution of online publishing that emerged with social media, particularly the significant use of this opportunity within the queerphobic climate of Nigeria; this has led to queer Nigerian artists' publishing groundbreaking work on these platforms. Online publishing has enabled queer artists to find revolutionary ways to subvert the norms and restrictions placed on them by their country in order to advocate for the queer community and liberate their literary craft from heteronormative dominance. The power wielded by *Brittle Paper* and the anthologies in this regard was shown as related to the ability of these digital platforms to attract queer readership communities and writers from all over Africa, African allies and non-African allies toward supporting the Nigerian queer community.

I dedicated the second half of the chapter to analysis of representations of queer intimacies in selected short stories in *14: An Anthology of Queer Art: We Are Flowers* and *14: An Anthology of Queer Art No. 2: Inward Gaze.* The examination of both anthologies of *14* and the platform that published them, *Brittle Paper,* was shown as essential to the understanding of Nigerian queer literature this thesis also intended to create, that is, that online publishing and the works they publish as vital to the contemporary queer literary scene in Nigeria. My study of the different types of intimacies among queer men in these short stories, showed the existence of intimacy outside romanticised portrayals. I offered analysis on depictions of intimacy in abusive work environments, across national and political borders and in the digital age of online dating.

In the current socio-political climate of Nigeria that I have referred to throughout this thesis, I believe that contributing to the discussions sparked by Nigeria's queer communities is vital. I have shown that contributing to platforms promoting queerness significantly advocates for the decriminalisation of queerness in countries such as Nigeria. My intention with this thesis is to meaningfully contribute to these discussions through highlighting contemporary queer literature published traditionally and online. In discussing contemporary queer Nigerian literature, this thesis has contributed to the already present discourse, which I have referred to in my analysis of Okparanta's *Under* and its depiction in the novel of the reuniting and coexistence of religion and sexuality in Africa. Moreover, I am proud that this thesis is currently the first close study of Ikpo's *Fimí Sílẹ̀* and the two volumes of *14*.[52]

Although I feel I have successfully set out to do what I intended to in this thesis and

[52] At the time of writing this thesis, there were no other published papers on Ikpo's novel or the volumes of *14.*

have drawn on numerous scholars who have written about contemporary Nigerian literature in this regard, there is still much in this research field for future research to explore. Beginning with my primary texts, *Under* has been written about extensively but there are still many facets of the novel that have not enough been focussed on, such as the motif of allegories and reading the novel as an allegory too. With regards to Ikpo's novel, while my chapter engaged with Nigeria's SSMP Act, there is still room for a thorough exploration of the legislation and queer advocacy groups in Nigeria, both in the novel and in reality. There is also room to explore as a single focus the interesting aspect of Wale and his queer bildungsroman.

Finally, with *14*, I only focussed on five selected short stories. However, there are different forms of queer art depicted in the anthologies in fiction and non-fictional genres as well as in multi-media form, which also deserve close study. Then there is a big facet of queer contemporary fiction in Nigeria that this thesis has not included, that is, queer cinema. While there are papers published on queer Nigerian film, such as the well-known *Emotional Crack,* I think an extremely important research opportunity is updating the more recent prominence of Nigerian films on YouTube and the impact of this online form on queer Nigerian films. Censorship in Nigerian media, such as the recent controversy regarding the banning of the queer women's film, *Ìfé*, shows there is still a great need for continuing this conversation.[53]

As I draw this thesis to a close, I would like to finally attend to the epigraphs I have used, all of which have been engaged within the five chapters. Pumla Dineo Gqola states strongly that to be queer in Africa is a unique experience to each and every queer African; I add that this critical point is a key reason why queerness should also be supported and celebrated. This uniqueness relating to sexuality and queerness should also be promoted in terms of religious acceptance, that is, queer people are an intended part of God's creation, as Adriaan van Klinken claims, and that religion and queer sexuality are not mutually exclusive but co-exist quite powerfully and should be so pinpointed for awareness-raising. Persistence in condemning the co-existence of queerness and religion will only succeed in hurting African citizens who, as Nonhlanhla Dlamini critically observes, are forced to alter themselves in order to fit into their heteropatriarchal societies.

[53] *Ìfé* is a 2020 Nollywood movie about two queer women, Ife and Adaora, who fall in love and have their same-sex relationship tested by their country's queerphobia. The movie is produced by Pamela Adie and directed by Uyaiedu Ikpe-Etim, both of whom are currently facing the threat of fourteen years in prison for promoting queerness.

For all these reasons and perhaps many more not covered in this thesis, it is vital to heed Ifedimma Osakwe's argument that queerness is not new and is firmly a part of Africa's old world, and that recognising and accepting queerness begins with awareness of this fact.

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