

Onyekachi Eni, BA. MA. PhD. (English), LLB, LL.M, Ph.D (Law), MA. (Mass Com), Aciarb (UK) Chukwu Romanus Nwoma, BA. MA. Ph.D (English) Human Rights and the Prohibition of Same-Sex Relations in Nigeria: Mapping the Contours of Homophobia in Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* and Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows*

## Interdisciplinary

### **Human Rights and the Prohibition of Same-Sex Relations in Nigeria: Mapping the Contours of Homophobia in Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* and Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows*.**

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#### **Abstract**

A combination of socio-cultural and religious factors have led to the entrenchment of heteronormativity as the primary index of sexual expression in Nigeria and most parts of Africa. The deployment of legislation to protect and promote heterosexual sexuality is implicated in the enactment of Nigeria's Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act (2013) which tends to legitimize the violation of the human rights of LGBT persons in the country. The situation reflects in the predominant monothematic construction of homosexuality as a ringing abnormality in most African literary works that explore the subject of human sexuality. Using Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (1965), Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* (2005), the Constitution of Nigeria (1999) and other domestic and international human rights instruments ratified in Nigeria as its analytical touchstones, this paper contextualizes the violation of the human rights of LGBT persons in Nigeria as a breach of the law. With the Queer as its theoretical canvass, the paper exposes the weaponization of legislation in the sustenance of prejudice. The paper recommends the dismantling of the institutional structures upon which homophobia is constructed in order to extend the cause of human freedom, individual self-actualization and collective advancement.

**Keywords:** Human rights, Homophobia, Same-Sex, Homosexuality, Heteronormativity, Heterosexuality.

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## 1. Introduction

In spite of the global signature of homophobia, Africa is often emblemized as the “front runner” in the deployment of legislation to further the frontiers of repression and the weaponization of state machinery in social relations<sup>1</sup>. Discourses involving human sexuality frequently frame homosexuality as a threat to public morality and national integrity<sup>2</sup>. The demonization of homosexuality in most African societies is implicated in the pervasive culture of silence and denial surrounding the subject in mainstream African literature<sup>3</sup>. Where the subject of homosexuality is explored in African literature, its rendition has largely been monothematically constructed as an abnormality<sup>4</sup>.

This paper understakes an interdisciplinary examination of the homophobic tropes in Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (1965)<sup>5</sup> and Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows*(2005)<sup>6</sup> in the context of extant human rights instruments in Nigeria. Using the selected texts as our analytical canvass within the framework of queer theory, we argue that the human rights of LGBT persons in Nigeria are respected in the breach. The paper is divided into five parts with the introduction as the first segment. The second part deals with the culture of denial and silence which have denominated the phenomenon of homosexuality in Nigeria and much of Africa while the third part grapples

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<sup>1</sup> Siri Gloppen & Lise Rakner, “The Perfect Enemy: From Migrants to Sexual Minorities”, *Chr. Michelsen Institute, CMI Brief*, No 2019:05, p. 2. [www.static.squarespace.com](http://www.static.squarespace.com)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid* p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Gusarav Desai, “Out in Africa”, *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*. (Eds) Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007. PP. 736-745.

<sup>4</sup> Chris Dunton, “Wheyting be dat?: The Treatment of Homosexuality in African Literature”, *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*. (Eds) Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007. PP. 727-735.

<sup>5</sup> Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreters*. Suffolk: Richard Clay (The Chaucer Press, 1965)

<sup>6</sup> Jude Dibia, *Walking with Shadows*. Lagos: BlackSands Books, 2005.

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with the domains of homophobic manifestation and the people's perception of the causal factors of homosexuality. The fourth part contextualizes homophobia in Nigeria's constitution and other human rights instruments to which the country is a signatory while the fifth part is the conclusion. Without discounting their conceptual peculiarities, the term "homosexuality" shall be used interchangeably with gayness and other non-heterosexual preferences except where the context demands otherwise.

The criminalization of same-sex relations in Nigeria following the enactment of the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act (SSMPA)<sup>7</sup>, was greeted with cross-currents of condemnation and commendation in the country and the international human rights community. The enactment of the law polarized stakeholders and inspired incendiary homophilic and homophobic rhetoric respectively, from the two sides<sup>8</sup>. In the wake of the enactment of the SSMPA, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights<sup>9</sup> set the tone for the denunciatory vitrols against the instrument by describing it as a "draconian new law [that] makes an already bad situation worse" adding that: "rarely have I seen a piece of legislation that in so few paragraphs directly violates so many basic universal human rights...."

Similarly, the Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, International Gay and Lesbian Alliance and the Human Rights Commission of Nigeria submitted a joint memorandum to Nigeria's Senate describing the instrument as a violation of the constitutional rights of LGBT persons in Nigeria<sup>10</sup>. Consistent with the posture of many western nations on the subject, the

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<sup>7</sup>Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act (SSMPA), 2013

<sup>8</sup>Benjamin Igwenyi, Onyekachi Eni and Eseni Azu Udu. "Same -Sex Marriage, Constitutionalism and the Imperative of Public Morality", *International Journal of Comparative Law and Legal Philosophy*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (2020):130-139. <https://www.nigerianjournalsonline.com>

<sup>9</sup>Navanethem Pillay, "UN human rights Chief denounces new anti-homosexuality law in Nigeria". 14 January 2014  
[http://www.ohchr.org/FR/NewsEvent/Pages/Displaynews.aspx?NewsSID=14169&LangID=E#sthash.Vwy5ccu\(.dpuf](http://www.ohchr.org/FR/NewsEvent/Pages/Displaynews.aspx?NewsSID=14169&LangID=E#sthash.Vwy5ccu(.dpuf)

<sup>10</sup>Joseph Onuche, "Same-Sex Marriage in Nigeria: A Philosophical Analysis", *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol. 3, No. 12: (2013):93-98.

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United Kingdom<sup>11</sup> categorically threatened to cut aid to African countries “that violate the rights of gay and lesbian citizens”. The Obama administration in the US similarly issued a memorandum to administration officials directing them to “consider how countries treat their gay and lesbian populations when making decisions about allocating foreign aid”<sup>12</sup>.

On the other side of the ideological divide, Nigerians overwhelmingly supported the legislation on the ground that it is immoral and contrary to African values<sup>13</sup>. At the public hearing on the legislation in Nigeria's Senate, its sponsor, Senator Domingo Obende, said same-sex relationships could lead to a breakdown of the Nigerian society for their lack of moral or religious justification<sup>14</sup>. The former president of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan, who gave assent to the law subsequently rationalized that “98 percent of Nigerians did not think that same-sex marriage should be accepted by our society”<sup>15</sup>.

Generally, the representation of homosexuality in African literature mirrors the pervasive homophobia in the social spaces which find expression in the violation of the human rights of LGBT persons. In this paper, the choice of Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (1965)<sup>16</sup> is informed by the fact that it is the first Nigerian (and arguably the first African) literary text to explore the phenomenon of homosexuality<sup>17</sup>. On the other hand, the choice of Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* is informed by the fact that it is the first and most recent Nigerian novel to fully track the psychological growth of a

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<sup>11</sup>Kaven McVeigh, “Gay Rights Must be Criteria for US Aid Allocation, instructs Obama”, *The Guardian*, 6 December 2011. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/dec/07/gay-rights-us-aid-criteria>

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup>Tosin Omole, “Obama Fights Nigerian Anti-Gay Bill, Threatens to Cut off Aid”, 9 December 2011. <https://www.forbes.com>

<sup>14</sup>Joseph Onuche (n 10)

<sup>15</sup>Colin Stewart, “Nigeria: Ex-leader seeks redo of anti-LGBT law he signed”, 6 June, 2016. <https://www.76crimes.com/2016/06/06/nigeria-ex-leader-seeks-redo-of-anti-lgbt-law-he-signed>

<sup>16</sup>Wole Soyinka (n 5)

<sup>17</sup>Ignatius Chukwuma, “Walking with Shadows and the Critique of the Evolutionary Character of Nigerian Narratives”, *Forum for World Literature Studies*, Vol. 7 (No. 4), 2015:604-623. <https://www.researchgate.net>

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homosexual protagonist while executing an “audacious exploration of sexuality” from a sympathetic and “blasphemous tangent<sup>18</sup>”. Through a contrapuntal juxtaposition of the “ancient, and modern” in Nigeria's sexuality aesthetics, it becomes possible to gauge whether anything has changed in the entrenched heteronormative attitude of the people, forty years down the road.

## **2. Homosexuality and the Culture of Denial and Silence**

In this study, we consider the queer theory as a suitable framework to contextualize the contestation between the established conceptions of good versus bad, normal versus abnormal, sexualities<sup>19</sup>. Coined by Lauretis<sup>20</sup>, the queer theory embodies an ideological refusal to recognize heterosexuality as the benchmark for sexual formation. In spite of the interdisciplinary and multipurpose adaptation of queer theory by scholars such as Foucault, Rubin, Sedgwick and Butler among others, one of the key concerns of queer theory is the challenge of the social and institutional structures which privilege heteronormativity<sup>21</sup>. In this intervention, we subscribe to Sedgwick's<sup>22</sup> argument that the homo-hetero differentiation in modern sexual discourse is vitally disjointed, and untenable because it frames homosexuality as part of a minority group. Sedgwick also faults the gendering of sexuality within the binary of masculinity or femininity which tends to ignore the definitions of sexuality as dependent on the romantic partner to which one is attracted. The importance of the queer theory, from the Sedgwick schema, is the recognition that there are sexual variations which cannot be strictly located in the binary construct of heterosexuality and homosexuality. It is such recognition that makes queer theory an

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<sup>18</sup> Allwell Abalogu Onukaogu and Ezechi Onyerionwu, *21<sup>st</sup> Century Nigerian Literature: An Introductory Text*. Ibadan: Kraft, 2009, p. 131.

<sup>19</sup>University of Illinois. “Queer Theory: A Rough Introduction”, *Illinois Library Guides* 10 March, 2020. <https://www.guides.library.illinois.edu/queertheory>.

<sup>20</sup>Teresa De Laurentis, “Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities”, *Differences*, Vol. 3. No 2. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

<sup>21</sup>University of Illinois, (n 19)

<sup>22</sup>Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1990.

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influential modality for rethinking human sexuality as well as constituting a framework for the interrogation of sex-gender identities<sup>23</sup>.

In Africa, the entrenchment of heteronormativity in social and religious thought has foisted and sustained the culture of denial of the existence of homosexuality in discourses of human sexuality<sup>24</sup>. According to Murray and Roscoe<sup>25</sup>, "historians, anthropologists, and many contemporary Africans alike have denied or overlooked African same-sex patterns or claimed that such patterns were introduced by Europeans". The consequence of such denial is that manyscholars have bought into the notion that homosexuality is a western malady which has no basis in African sexual patterns<sup>26</sup>. Based on a survey of African sexuality, Hrdy<sup>27</sup>, for instance, categorically states that "homosexuality is not part of traditional societies in Africa". In the African literary scene, majority of literary works on the subject revolve around the stereotypes of gayness as taboo, abnormal, unAfrican and a western import. In a survey of the construction of homosexuality among African writers, Dunton<sup>28</sup> gives the following verdict:

...the practice of homosexuality within African society remains an area of experience that has not been granted a history by African writers, but has been greeted, rather, with a sustained outburst of silence.

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<sup>23</sup>*Ibid*

<sup>24</sup>Peter Nardi, "Anything for a Sis, Mary: An introduction to Gay Masculinities", *Gay Masculinities*. Ed. Peter Nardi. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage publications, Inc. 2000, p. 1-11.

<sup>25</sup>Stephen Murray and Will Roscoe, *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands: Studies in African Homosexuality*. Ed. Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe. New York: St. Martin's Press, (1998:xi),.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid*. p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Hrdy, "Cultural Practices Contributing to the Transmission of Human Immunodeficiency Virus in Africa", *Reviews of Infectious Diseases*, volume 9, issue 6, November (1987): 1109 - 1119. <https://doi.org/10.1093/clinids/9.6.1109>.

<sup>28</sup>Chris Dunton, (n 4) 737

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The culture of denial and the “outbursts of silence” about homosexuality explains why Macharia<sup>29</sup> has categorized it as an “African single story” which conceives homosexuality as uniquely horrible and essentially alien. Lamb<sup>30</sup> states that “it is curious by western standards that homosexuality in Africa is virtually unknown... Africa’s tradition is rigidly heterosexual” while Winnie Mandella<sup>31</sup> describes same-sex as “utter filth [and] alien to our [African] culture”. Under such culture of silence and denial, it is not surprising that the Nigerian government in a 2009 report to the United Nations claimed that: “We went out of our way to look for gay, lesbian and transgender groups but we could not come across Nigerians with such sexuality”<sup>32</sup>.

However, in spite of the majoritarian story of denial of African homosexuality, several reports and real-life accounts indicate otherwise. For instance, flowing from a survey of the African landscape<sup>33</sup>, it is noted that in highly sex-segregated societies of Africa, homosexuality is not only common but deep rooted. Echoing the view of several writers and researchers on the subject, it has been noted that “the presence of homosexuality in Africa today is beyond denial; what seems to be an issue is its antecedents, the evidence of history, of culture, and of language”<sup>34</sup>. With copious examples from various parts of Africa, Tamales<sup>35</sup> concludes that same-sex relations are part of African social realities as well as acts of spiritual rearmament in some territories.

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<sup>29</sup>Keguro Macharia, “Homophobia in Africa is not a Single Story”, *The Guardian*, News and Media Ltd. 26 May, 2010. <https://www.theguardian.com>may>>

<sup>30</sup>David Lamb, *The Africans*. New York: Random House, 1982.

<sup>31</sup>Stephen Murray and Will Roscoe, (n 25) p. 24.

<sup>32</sup>Rudolf Gaudio, “Dire Straights in Nigeria”, *Transition* 114 (2014): 60 - 68.

<sup>33</sup>Stephen Murray and Will Roscoe, (n 25) p. 23.

<sup>34</sup>Taiwo Oloruntoba- Oju, “A Name My Mother Did Not Call Me: Queer Contestations in African Sexualities” 2013. P. 1. <http://www.arscr.org|downloads/oloruntoba-oju.Pdf>.

<sup>35</sup>Sylvia Tamale, “Homosexuality Is Not Un-African”, *Heinrich Boll Stiftung: The Green Political Foundation*, 20 March, 2015. P. 1-3. <https://www.america.aljazeera.com>

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In Nigeria, for instance, any claim as to the absence of homosexuality flies in the face of reality because as Green-Simms<sup>36</sup> has pointed out, “the irony [of such claim] of course, is that the enactment of legislation prohibiting same-sex practices presupposes its existence”. In Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* and Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows*, we find the thematization of the contours of homophobia in Nigeria and the attendant human rights violations, which, to a large extent, mirrors the prevailing condition in the continent. The situation proceeds from the trajectory of near valorization of heteronormativity and the construction of homosexuality as alien, un-African, western import<sup>37</sup>.

*The Interpreters* is an exploratory narrative in which the action shifts between two Nigerian cities: Lagos and Ibadan, and their surrounding areas. The main characters: Egbo, Sagoe, Bandele, Sekoni and Lasunwon, are university graduates who studied at British and American universities and have returned to the country to take up various positions being vacated by the Europeans. The novel focuses on this group of intellectuals who meet occasionally to discuss the country's fortunes and interpret the reality of the young nation<sup>38</sup>. This “group of artists and intellectuals act as a collective protagonist”<sup>39</sup> through whom the novelist explores “the excesses and growing disillusionment of the elite in post-colonial Nigeria”<sup>40</sup>. The novel also features the vicissitudes of an American Professor of African history

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<sup>36</sup>Lindsey Green-Simms, “The Emergent Queer: Homosexuality and Nigerian Fiction in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”, *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 47, No. 2, Summer (2016):139-161. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/reseafrite.47.2.09>.

<sup>37</sup>Nesbitt - Ahmed Zahrah, “A Look at LGBT Literature in Sub-Saharan Africa”, 2012. [www.genderacrossborders.com](http://www.genderacrossborders.com).

<sup>38</sup>Sola Adeyemi, “Interpreting the Interpreters: The Narrative of the Postcolony in Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*”, *African Literatures and Beyond: A Florileguim*. Ed. Bernth Lindfors and Geoffer V. Davies 2013; pp 29-38. <https://www.researchgate.net>2976...> DOI.10.116319789401209892-003.

<sup>39</sup>Biodun Jeyifo, *Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics and Postcolonialism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup>Sola Adeyemi (n 38) p. 31.



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and homosexual, Joe Golder, through whom the encrustations of homophobia in Nigeria's social spaces are ventilated<sup>41</sup>.

Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* centres on the protagonist-homosexual, Adrian Ebele Njoko, a successful businessman who is forced to face his past when a work-colleague outs him to his friends and family in an act of revenge. The novel follows Adrian on his path to awareness and self-discovery as he confronts his wife, his brothers, the gay friends he rejected after his marriage, and his co-workers. When Adrian comes to terms with his sexual orientation, he appeals to family and friends for understanding. As the novel ends, Adrian decides to move to London where he can live a normal life as a homosexual with the assurance of career security and social acceptance<sup>42</sup>. Until his vengeful outing as a homosexual by a co-worker, Adrian has spent the greater part of his life suppressing his true sexual status in his search for acceptance and conformity in a society whose tenets are steeped in homophobia.

From both *The Interpreters* and *Walking with Shadows*, we find ample dramatization of the pervasive culture of denial which constructs homosexuality as un-African western import. In *The Interpreters*, Sagoe's encounter with Joe Golder enables him to ventilate his deprecation of homosexuality describing its variegated manifestations as "sickening" (193) and a "pervasion" (199) which have no place in the Nigerian society.

In *Walking with Shadows*, the heroine's revulsion to gayness is indexed by herfear that she may have contracted HIV from her husband (34,107,121) – and anger that her reputation and social standing has been tarnished by her husband's gayness. The portraiture of Sagoe, and Ada in *The Interpreters* and *Walking with Shadows* respectively, lend credence to Dunton's<sup>43</sup> findings that gayness is constructed as unAfrican and a malady originating from the west. It is instructive that in *The Interpreters*, Joe Golder as a

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<sup>41</sup>Chris Dunton (N 4), p. 737-738.

<sup>42</sup>Lindsey Green-Simms (n 36) p. 148.

<sup>43</sup>Chris Dunton (N 4).

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professor of African history, knows enough about the prevalence of homosexuality in the continent on account of which he rebuts Sagoe's claim that gayness is unAfrican (WS, 199).

Furthermore, in the texts under focus, we find the thematization of the entrenched heteronormative perception that gayness is linked with psychosis. For instance, in *The Interpreters*, Joe Golder recalls that occasionally, he broached the issue of same-sex attraction to his students to gauge their reaction by telling them that: "with some people it [same-sex attraction] makes no difference" (WS, 216). To such statement, the students react as follows: "what sort of lunatics are those" (WS, 216). This is not only an index of denial of the existence of homosexuality but also the perception that it has a psychiatric dimension. Correspondingly, in *Walking with Shadows*, the heroine constructs her husband's gayness as an index of madness (JD, 13).

It is to be noted that Sagoe's claim that gayness is "unhealthy" and a "pervasion" along with Ada's claim, that it is "unnatural", "a taboo", and HIV prone, cumulatively evince the medicalization of homosexuality which is regarded as one of the earliest models of heteronormativity in which gayness is framed as a failure of morality and a modality of physiological imbalance<sup>44</sup>. It is remarkable that even when Sagoe, for instance, is furnished with credible information as to the nature of homosexuality in Nigeria, he elects to persist in his misguided misconception (WS, 199). This represents the perpetuation of the unfounded claim on the absence of an indigenous queer agency which finds expression in the persistent denial of an African homosexuality<sup>45</sup>.

In *Walking with Shadows*, the author creatively employs a self-reconciled homosexual character, Abdul, to exhort the society to quit living in denial as

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<sup>44</sup>Michael Haberlandt, "Contrare Sexual- Erscheinungen beider Neger-Berolkerung Zanzibaris", *Zeitschrift for Ethnologie* 31(6), 1899: 668-70

<sup>45</sup>TaiwoOloruntoba- Oju (n 34).

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the necessary first step towards the resolution of the contentious issue of African homosexuality and its attendant homophobia.

### **3. Homosexuality and the Perceptions of Causality**

The question as to the origin of homosexuality has frequently given rise to two main opposing frameworks of causal attributions: life style behavioural choices, and genetic factors, respectively<sup>46</sup>. In spite of the profusion of perspectives as to homosexual causation, there is no comprehensive or logical explanation as to what specifically causes someone to become gay, straight or something in-between<sup>47</sup>. In the ordinary course of events, individuals try to determine whether a particular behavior stems from internal dispositions or emerges from less stable situational forces<sup>48</sup>.

Locating the casual roots of homosexuality is necessary because of the correlation between beliefs about the origins of sexual orientation and tolerance of non-heterosexuality<sup>49</sup>. The interrogation of the divergence between internal and situational causes of behavior has inspired a dimension of causality known as controllability<sup>50</sup>. This concerns whether or not a person is believed to control their own behavior, and the attitudinal implications of such belief<sup>51</sup>. In the study of attitudes to stigmatized individuals and groups (such as homosexuals), controllability has become a significant extension of the theory of attribution. Its importance lies in the fact that people who are observed to have caused their own stigma will be evaluated more negatively than those who are stigmatized as a result of their misfortune or actions of other people. The implication is that asserting that

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<sup>46</sup>Haider- Markel and Mark Joslyn, "Beliefs about the Origins of Homosexuality and Support for Gay Rights: An Empirical Test of Attribution Theory", *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 72, No. 2(Summer) 2008:291- 310. <https://www.researchgate.net>2281...> D01:10.1093/poq/nfn015

<sup>47</sup>Olga Khazan, "How Older Brothers Influence Homosexuality", *TheAtlantic*, 27 April, 2016. P. 2. <https://www.theatlantic.com >2016/04>.

<sup>48</sup>Fritz Heider, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations*. New York: Wiley, 1958..

<sup>49</sup>Olga Khazan (n 47) p. 2.

<sup>50</sup>Bernard Weiner, "An Attribution Theory of Achievement, Motivation, and Emotion", *Psychological Review*, 1985. 92: 548-73.

<sup>51</sup>Haider- Markel and Mark Joslyn(n 44) p. 292.

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homosexuality is biological in origin suggests that a person's sexual orientation cannot be controlled. Conversely, a belief that homosexuality is acquired, by way of personal choice suggests that homosexuals can control, and therefore are responsible for, their sexuality<sup>52</sup>.

The corollary is that people who view homosexuality as a choice, controllable state exhibit more negative attitudes towards homosexuals than those who view homosexuality as biological, genetical and therefore, uncontrollable<sup>53</sup>. This resonates with the finding of Haider-Markel & Joslyn<sup>54</sup> that "the probability of support for same-sex and equal rights for married couples [of whatever sexual orientation] was highest for the genetic attribution variable". The consequence is that homophobia in any society is largely dependent on its construction as a biological reality or as a situational or choice-driven phenomenon.

From *The Interpreters* and *Walking with Shadows*, we find that in addition to the religious antipathy to homosexuality founded on heteronormativity, it is also socially framed in Nigeria as a matter of choice on account of which there exists overt antagonism to homosexuals. In *The Interpreters*, we notice that in defence of the character, Lasunwon, Sagoe says: "you leave him alone. The man can't help what he is" (WS, 13). This constitutes a powerful dramatic foreshadowing of the ironic twist during Sagoe's encounter with Joe Golder- whose homosexuality Sagoe describes as "sickening" and a "perversion" (WS, 193, 199). Dunton's<sup>55</sup> assertion that: "Sagoe's firm distancing of himself from Golder after learning he is homosexual is not deflected by Soyinka but is projected as an appropriate critical response" is instructive. It is also noteworthy that Sagoe's homophobia is shared by other

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid p. 293.

<sup>53</sup>C.E. Tygart, "Genetic Causation Attribution and Public Support of Gay Rights", *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*. 2000, 12(3): 259- 75; Clyde Wilcox and Barbara Norrander, "Of Moods and Morals: The Dynamics of Opinion on Abortion and Gay Rights". In *Understanding Public Opinion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed; ed's. Barbara Norrander, and Cycle Wilcox. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2002.

<sup>54</sup>Haider- Markel and Mark Joslyn (n 44) p.301.

<sup>55</sup>Chris Dunton (N 4) p. 440.

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characters in the novel (including Noah and Egbo) about which Golder is a butt of serial gossip.

Similarly, in *Walking with Shadows*, Adrian's homosexuality (and the homophobia that attends it) is believed to be a product of his personal choice. For instance, in Ada's outrage following her awareness that her husband is a homosexual, she asks: "so does that mean that you choose to be gay when it suits you?" (JD, 13). In her belief that Adrian is responsible for his sexual orientation, Ada queries: "why me... why did you make this happen to me... to us?" to which Adrian answers: "you make it sound like I planned all this. I had no choice, Ada" (JD, 106). It is important to stress that like Sagoe in *The Interpreters*, Ada is not alone in believing that Adrian chose his sexual orientation and therefore, controls it. For instance, upon learning of Adrian's gayness, his mother confronts him with the question, "Ebele, why are you doing this to us?"(227) adding: "we didn't bring any of you up like this. We instilled in you all strong Christian values. What do you want people to think about our family?" (JD, 228). Not done yet, his mother adds: "your father's health is failing and this will surely kill him [...]. For once, stop thinking of yourself only" (JD, 228).

Apart from Adrian's wife, mother and family members, others also believe that he chose his sexual orientation. For instance, like Adrian's brothers who could not understand how Adrian alone out of 3 brothers from the same parents could be gay (224), a co-worker, Nkechi also expresses her disappointment about Adrian's choice of sexual orientation. She asks: "Adrian, how can you be gay?... But you are married... to my cousin... you have a child" (JD, 84). Nkechi is convinced that a person's choice of sexual orientation is a product of that person's upbringing. That explains her anxiety that her son, Junior, is showing signs of gayness:

And if we don't correct it now, he will carry on till he is in his teens and young adulthood and one day he will be confused about whom to love sexually (JD, 117).

It seems clear, therefore, that the homophobia Adrian faces arises from the belief that he is responsible for his sexuality. This situation resonates with the Pew Research Centre<sup>56</sup> finding which was echoed by a Gallup National Survey<sup>57</sup> indicating that “respondents who believed that homosexuality can be attributed to the environment were less supportive of gay civil rights and were less likely to believe homosexuality was moral and acceptable”.

In the context of the people's antipathy to homosexuality based on their belief that gayness is choice-driven, it is not surprising that Adrian as the emblem of Jude Dibia's artistic mission in *Walking with Shadows*, is at pains to explain his choicelessness in his sexuality. In this regard, Adrian is at a loss as to his role in his travails: “what was he really being punished for? Being gay? Betraying his sexuality? Going straight? Being a committed husband and father? Exposing a fraud at his workplace” (JD, 15). However, in spite of the social construction of homosexuality as abnormal, Adrian remains convinced that he did not choose his sexual orientation:

He had also somehow bought into the heterosexual idea that he was not normal and should be ashamed of his feeling. But this was not a habit like picking your nose in public or farting indiscriminately. He knew it was biological somehow. He had always been this way (JD, 52).

In order to wean Adrian away from his sense of shame and personal responsibility for his sexuality, Abdul exhorts him: “you sound like you are ashamed of your past. You sound like you had a choice in determining your sexuality... You sound like it is a curse to be homosexual and you should be punished for your crimes” (JD, 24). Consequently upon his self

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<sup>56</sup>Pew Research Centre for the People and the Press. *Republicans Unified, Democrats Split on Gay Marriage: Religious Beliefs Underpin Opposition to Homosexuality*. Washington, DC: The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2003.

<sup>57</sup>Haider- Markel and Mark Joslyn (n 44).

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reconciliation about his sexuality, Adrian firmly asserts: "No. this is who I am. I had no choice in choosing that aspect of my life. I'm not ashamed of it" (JD, 108).

By framing homosexuality as a biological reality, the novelist indicates that antagonizing a homosexual person for his sexual orientation is coterminous with inflicting punishment on a person who is not responsible for his/her action. This point is parabolically driven home in the episode in which Adrian is punished for a crime he did not commit, namely: being mercilessly whipped by his father because someone stole his father's money. Although it is Chika that stole the money, Adrian elects to take responsibility for the crime in order to preserve the family equilibrium which would have been destabilized were it discovered that Chika, who is dearly beloved of their parents, (unlike Adrian), was responsible for the infraction. By that act, therefore, Adrian accepts his constructed position as an unloved child and a scapegoat who bears the burden for offences he did not commit. However, even as Adrian bears the punishment for another's crime, the real culprit, Chika, confesses that: "he [Chika] had to live with the guilt knowing Ebele had not deserved the beating he got that day" (JD, 136). The message is that the society is guilty of inflicting punishment on innocent homosexual persons for a biological state they did not choose.

The schematic construction of homosexuality as abnormal and choice-driven is accentuated by the prevailing religious temper: Christianity, Islam and traditional religions, which often have zero tolerance for homosexuality on grounds of its alleged immorality. It is for this reason that a proper understanding of the representation of homosexuality within the corpus of African literature must take cognizance of the cultural, religious, legal and political conditions within which the works are crafted<sup>58</sup>. For instance, frequent references are made to the Bible book of Leviticus (18:22) which

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<sup>58</sup>Kellian Clink, *Glbtc: An Encyclopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Culture*. Clande – Summer ed, Publication Glbtq, Inc. Chicago. IL. 2013, p. 11. Do:10.1108/RR-03-2013-0055. [www.glbtc.com](http://www.glbtc.com)

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exhorts that “you shall not lie with a male as with a woman... It is an abomination” and similar provisions in such books as Timothy (1:9-10) and Romans (1:26-27) among others, all of which frame homosexuality as a condign abomination. Similarly, references are often made to the Islamic Qur'an (11:80-81) with such provision as: “Do you commit lewdness such as no people in creation committed before you? For you practice your lusts on men in preference to women, you are indeed a people of transgression beyond bounds”. Other provisions such as (Quran 7:84, 97:80-81) are also usually cited to support Islamic prohibition of homosexuality which prescribes death penalty on conviction.

Furthermore, we notice the religious currents that undergird heteronormativity in the various reactions of family and friends to the news of Adrian's homosexuality. For instance, upon Adrian admitting to his brothers that he is gay, Chiedu fires back:

Ebele, how can you say this? You know what the Bible says about homosexuals... God forbids it! The law says it's a felony for a man to practice sodomy (JD, 50).

The same belief that homosexuality is a sin against God informs the invitation of the clergyman, Pastor Matthew, to perform the cleansing of the tainted Adrian. Admonishing Adrian for his sexual perversion, Pastor Matthew says:

Sometimes we let the devil come into our lives and rule our hearts. And it's the evil deeds of Sodom and Gomorrah that made the Lord destroy the city and people of that place. When brother Chiedu told me about you, I immediately got on my knees and prayed for you, and God told me you would be saved and cured. It is the devil that tempts you my brother (JD, 217).



Following such exhortation, Pastor Matthew conducts a prayer session for Adrian and thereafter proceeds to exorcise him by whipping him so hard that “stroke after stroke, Adrian felt himself drifting in and out of consciousness” (JD, 219). It is worthy of emphasis that Adrian’s brothers are not alone in the belief that his gayness is a sin against God. For instance, like Adrian’s mother, his wife, Ada exhorts him: “You need to read your Bible, Adrian. Even God forbids the act” (108) to which Adrian passionately pleads: “I was born this way. I wish you could only see that” (JD, 108). The aversion of mainstream religious thought to gayness explains the powerful role of the clergy in influencing the causal explanations about homosexuality through negative references to homosexuals<sup>59</sup>.

By establishing a causal link between homosexuality and sinfulness, religion becomes an agency of heteronormativity which removes gayness from the domain of biological determinism thereby framing it as choice-driven and therefore controllable<sup>60</sup>. As indicated earlier, the more the people believe that homosexuality is situational and choice-driven, the more they believe that it is controllable, and the less sympathetic they are to homosexuals, thereby giving traction to homophobia and its attendant human rights violations. The former president of Zimbabwe captures the heteronormative impulse that undergirds homophobia in Africa when he charged that “homosexuality degrades human dignity. It is unnatural and there is no question of allowing these people to behave worse than dogs and pigs...”<sup>61</sup>

#### **4. Homophobia in the Age of Human Rights**

In spite of the geo-political and environmental factors which often nuance the conception of human rights, consensus seems to exist that humanrights

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<sup>59</sup>Peter Wood, and John Bartkowski, “Attribution Style and Public Policy Attitudes Towards Gay Rights”. *Social Science Quarterly*, 2004,85(1):58-74.

<sup>60</sup>Haider- Markel and Mark Joslyn (n 44) p. 295.

<sup>61</sup> Siri Gloppen and Lise Rakner (n 1) p. 5

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are the benefits that inure to individuals on account of their humanity<sup>62</sup>. The importance of human rights explains its linkage with the rule of law as crucial indices for the measurement of the march of civilization in a given society<sup>63</sup>. With the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)<sup>64</sup>, the internationalization and entrenchment of human rights values received a shot in the arm. In Nigeria, the cause of human rights as the immutable principle of civilized conduct has been enacted in the country's constitution and buoyed by other domestic, regional and international human rights instruments ratified by the country. Such instruments include: National Human Rights Commission Act, 1995 (amended 2010); Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015; African Charter on Human and People' Rights (ACHPR), 1981; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), 1966; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) among other human rights protocols. However, notwithstanding the existence of these instruments, the human rights of LGBT persons in Nigeria have suffered serial violations owing to entrenched heteronormative structures which tend to promote homophobia<sup>65</sup>.

Conceptually, homophobia refers to “a form of social prejudice in the lives of people who have a different sexual orientation from heterosexuality”<sup>66</sup>. In Africa, the legitimation of prejudice against non-heterosexual persons is constructed as a message that deviation from traditional notions of masculinity and femininity is neither tolerable nor acceptable<sup>67</sup>. Notwithstanding the diversity of channels through which homophobia may find expression, five main issues which arise from the homophobic fear of

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<sup>62</sup>F. E. Dowrick, (ed). *Human Rights Problems, Prospects and Texts*. Westmead, UK: Saxon House, 1979, p. 8-9.

<sup>63</sup>M. Cranston, “Human Rights: Real and Supposed”. In *Political Theory and The Rights of Man* (ed) Raphael. Bloomington, 1967, p. 52.

<sup>64</sup>The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights was Issued in 1948 in San Francisco, USA.

<sup>65</sup>Lindsey Green-Simms (n 36) p. 143

<sup>66</sup>Vasu Raddy, “Homophobia, human rights and gay and lesbian equality in Africa”. *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equality*, 2001(50):83-87. [www.jstor.org/stable/4066409](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4066409).

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

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the "other "are prominent<sup>68</sup>. The first and the commonest is the fear of difference, or change and variation. The second is the framing of homosexuality as a disorder which leads to obsessive hatred, and the consequential acts of exclusion. Another is a form of internalized homophobia which occurs when many people nurse same-sex desires thereby engendering a double fear: of one's self and of the other, about which homophobic violence may embody a cathartic self-expurgation and expiation. Homophobia may also find expression in the construction of the homosexual as an outcast thereby legitimizing repressive mechanisms of control and harassment against the deviant. Additionally, homophobia may be expressed as a form of gender violence.

In Nigeria, the enactment of the SSMPA is regarded by the mainstream human rights community as an "expansion of the long standing colonial-era sodomy laws"<sup>69</sup>. Such laws which criminalize homosexuality as "sexual expression against the order of nature" include the Criminal Code<sup>70</sup> and the Penal Code<sup>71</sup>. The Human Rights Watch (HRW)<sup>72</sup> avers that the effect of the enactment of the SSMPA is that "it has created opportunities for people to act out their homophobia without fear of legal consequences". Some stakeholders also charge that the legislation constitutes a wanton violation of the Constitution of Nigeria as well as other municipal, regional and international human rights treaties which the country has ratified<sup>73</sup>.

In *The Interpreters*, we find several examples of homophobia directed at the homosexual, Joe Golder, finding expression in the violation of his human rights. For instance, Joe Golder is a victim of discrimination in the society to

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid

<sup>69</sup> Lindsey Green-Simms (n 36) p. 142

<sup>70</sup> Section 214 (1-3) of the Criminal Code (which operates in the Southern part of Nigeria) criminalizes homosexuality with a sanction of 7 years imprisonment while section 352 prohibits unnatural sexual intercourse whether consensually or otherwise.

<sup>71</sup> Section 284 of the Penal Code (which is in force in the Northern Part of Nigeria) prohibits homosexuality.

<sup>72</sup> Human Rights Watch (HRW), "Tell Me Where I can be Safe: The Impact of Nigeria's Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act" 20 October, 2016. [www.hrw.org/un-matters](http://www.hrw.org/un-matters).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid

the extent that he internalizes his exclusion. Sagoe recognizes Golder's internalized social exclusion by acknowledging "his [Golder's] love of solitude [and] his deliberate self-isolation which was marked all over the room, and yet repellent..." (WS, 195). On account of his social exclusion, it is not difficult to understand the source of Golder's loneliness about which Bandele reminds us that "Joe always sings 'sometimes I feel like a motherless child...'" (WS, 122). It is clear, therefore, that Golder's social exclusion arises from the heteronormative denial of his right to express his homosexual sexuality. Similarly, in *Walking with Shadows*, we also find copious examples of discrimination against Adrian and other homosexuals on account of their sexual orientation. In this regard, Adrian notes that there is "a double standard [in the society]" (JD, 20). Abdul expresses it as follows:

Every day in a gay man's life, he is constantly hurt by the people he loves most. His family. His friends. And even society. We have to live with the rejection every day and that hurts. We have to grin and bear it constantly so that other people are comfortable at our expense (JD, 25).

It is stress worthy that like Joe Golder who adopts the survival mechanism of "deliberate self-isolation", Adrian is forced to embark on self-effacement, to abnegate his gayness in order to conform to the social precepts of normalcy for which he approaches his baptism as an occasion for spiritual rebirth and transformation. We hear that the occasion of his baptism "was a good enough day to be reborn..." (JD, 3).

The adoption of a new (baptismal) name as "Adrian" riding himself of his old name "Ebele" coupled with his decision to eschew his gayness, marry a woman and raise a family are all dictated by the existential imperative of conformity as a survival mechanism in a society in which a homosexual person "lives with rejection every day" (JD, 25). We are, therefore, not

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surprised that upon being outed and following his radical decision to embrace his true sexuality as a homosexual, Adrian is, once again, invested with the burden of rejection on account of which we are told that:

He [Adrian] was feeling so naked and lonely.  
Though he had been a loner all his life, he had  
never felt lonely. He was so lonely now (JD,  
87).

Like Joe Golder in *The Interpreters*, who feels so lonely like a “motherless child” (122), Adrian's rejection and social exclusion forces him to moan about the unfairness of life of a gay person (JD, 142).

It is to be noted that the rejection and exclusion of Joe Golder in *The Interpreters* which forces him into “deliberate self-isolation”, just like the rejection of Adrian in *Walking with Shadows* which forces him to moan about the unfairness of life constitute naked violations of their right to freedom from discrimination as enshrined in section 42 of the Constitution of Nigeria<sup>74</sup> and reinforced by Articles 2 and 7 (UDHR) and Article 2 (ICCPR) which obligate state parties: “to respect and ensure to all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction, the rights recognized in the present covenant without distinction of any kind such as race, colour, sex, language, religion... or other status”. The Human Rights Committee of the UN in determining the case of *Tooner Vs Austria*<sup>75</sup> states that the reference to “sex” in articles 2 paragraph 1 and 26 (ICCPR) includes sexual orientation. Consequent upon the burden of discrimination foisted on Adrian (and indeed other homosexuals in Nigeria), Green-Simms' (2016:144) contention that *Walking with Shadows* “deals with the politics of respectability” finds ample resonance in international human rights discourse.

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<sup>74</sup>The right to freedom from discrimination in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended) has been repeated in all the Constitutions of Nigeria since independence in 1960.

<sup>75</sup>Human Rights Committee, 50<sup>th</sup> Session; Communication No. 488/1992 UN.DOC.CCPR/C/50/488/1992 (1994).

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Furthermore, the homophobic onslaught against LGBT persons in Nigeria is not limited to rejection and exclusion in the social spaces as their rights to privacy is equally not spared. In *The Interpreters*, for instance, we learn that Joe Golder was given “a savage beating in his flat from the incredulous mortally insulted thug and [Golder] dared not call the police” [WS, 216]. As though to complete the invasion of his private space, we also learn that on occasion, Golder’s “houseboy blackmailed him once, so that in desperation he ran to a lawyer who told him to ignore the threats...” (WS, 216). In response to his ordeals, Golder cautiously refers to the Wolfenden report, to gauge the reaction of his students:

Joe knew the torment of edging conversation in tutorial classes towards his craving, trying to find cult members, casually discussing the Wolfenden report and watching hawk-like for a reaction...(WS, 215).

The significance of the Wolfenden report should not be lost on the reader because of its historic impact in loosening the strictures of the criminal law on private sexuality in England. Tagged "Report on Homosexuality and Prostitution"<sup>76</sup>, the authors of the report headed by Sir Wolfenden sought to map the boundaries beyond which the criminal law of England should not interfere with the sexual life of the citizens. The report which led to the decriminalization of sexual intercourse between two consenting adults in private, eloquently states that: "it is not the function of the law to intervene in the private lives of citizens or to seek to enforce any particular pattern of behaviour further than is necessary to carry out the purpose we have outlined". By broaching the Wolfenden report to his students, Joe Golder seeks to draw attention to the right of a homosexual person to privately express any sexual orientation of his preference.

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<sup>76</sup>Wolfenden Committee (of the British Parliament) Report on Homosexuality and Prostitution, 1957

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Correspondingly, in *Walking with Shadows*, we also find copious examples of violation of the privacy of gay persons. For instance, in reaction to the management's decision that he embarks on "forced leave", Adrian laments that: "my personal life has nothing to do with my work" (JD, 171). However, Adrian proceeds on forced leave because, like Joe Golder who "dared not call the police" when he was beaten up in his flat, Adrian realizes that: "if there was indeed anything like a sexual harassment law in the country, it was not meant to favour homosexuals" (JD, 174). Adrian further recalls similar dehumanizing treatment of other homosexuals:

He vividly remembered reading in one of the Sunday newspapers some years back how a homosexual couple were paraded in their nakedness on the front cover. They were beaten out of their flat and marched to the nearby police station in their nakedness (JD, 174).

It is essential to stress that the ordeal of the disgraced homosexual couple like Adrian's and Joe Golder's constitute a flagrant violation of, among others, their right to private and family life as provided in section 37 of the Constitution of Nigeria that: "The privacy of citizens, their homes, correspondence, telephone conversations and telegraphic communications is hereby guaranteed and protected". The right to privacy is further reinforced by Article 17 (ICCPR) and other human rights instruments to which Nigeria is a signatory. However, for gay persons, these rights are observed in the breach on account of their sexual orientation.

Similarly, in the two texts under reference, we also notice that homosexuals are subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment. In *The Interpreters*, Joe Golder is savagely beaten up in his flat but he "dared not call the police." Furthermore, on occasion, when it is not convenient to Joe Golder to sit for Kola's painting of the pantheon of the gods, Kola threatens him as follows: "All right. But I dare you to go into any night club in town after this. Your last experience will be nothing compared to what you will get" (WS, 103).

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This threat is potent not only because of Golder's past experience but also because he is mortally averse to violence: "I hate violence... I hate violence: any form of violence upsets me" (WS, 194). It is not surprising, therefore, that intimidated with threat of violence, Golder does Kola's bidding and sits for a session of the painting (WS, 103). Correspondingly, in *Walking with Shadows*, we notice that in addition to sundry indignities meted out to Adrian because he is gay, he is also subjected to excruciating torture in the hands of Pastor Matthew and his assistants wherein "he drifted in and out of consciousness" (JD, 219). The dehumanizing, degrading and violent torture meted out to Adrian, constitutes a violation of his right to dignity of human person as provided by Articles 4 and 5 of the African Charter on Human and People rights, and section 34(1) (a) of the Constitution of Nigeria:

Every individual is entitled to respect for the dignity of his person and accordingly no person shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment.

As noted previously, these constitutional guarantees which are reinforced by other human rights instruments subscribed to by Nigeria are not extended to homosexuals based on their sexual orientation.

In the light of the foregoing, the enactment of the SSMPA in a socio-cultural and religious climate already steeped in homophobia is regarded as a wholesale erosion of any remaining vestiges of protection available to homosexuals in Nigeria (HRW, 20 October 2016). For instance, prior to its enactment, there was no specific law which prohibited homosexual persons from publicly associating or expressing themselves. However, it is now provided in section 4(2) SSSMPA, that "the public show of same sex amorous relationship directly or indirectly is prohibited". In *Walking with Shadows*, Adrian's friend and fellow homosexual, Abdul, seems to refer to this particular provision of the law when he states that: "if I were to hold hands with Femi in public *na another story be that one...*" (JD, 21). This is



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his recognition that public display of amorous same sex relationship is not allowed in Nigeria.

Furthermore, while section 5 (1) SSMPA criminalizes outright same-sex marriage or civil union with a penal sanction of 14 years imprisonment, all other offenses under this law such as registration, operation and sustenance of gay clubs (section 4(1)); making public show of amorous same sex relationship (section 5(2)); administration, abetting, witnessing or howsoever aiding the solemnization of same sex marriage(section 5(3)) etc, carry a penal sanction of 10 years imprisonment on conviction. Remarkably, the SSMPA goes beyond the criminalization of same-sex union and other amorous relationships performed in Nigeria. It also invalidates any same-sex marriage contracted outside Nigeria. To this end, section 2(2) (SSMPA) provides that:“No certificate issued to persons of same-sex in a marriage or civil union shall be valid in Nigeria”.

In *Walking with Shadows*, we notice that in spite of the confessed homesickness of George who had to relocate to Germany in order to contract marriage with his homosexual partner Johan, he (George), however, declines the invitation to come back and settle down in Nigeria. The reason for his refusal is the absence of “religious tolerance and a sense of equality despite one’s sexual orientation or sex...” (JD, 196). The implication is that the legal regime in Nigeria and the prevailing homophobic climate in the country make it impossible for people like George to thrive. This recognition informs Adrian’s decision to escape from Nigeria and relocate to England where his private sexual orientation will not cause his persecution. His decision to move to England is because “he would not be able to be himself if he remained in Nigeria. The majority of the people here still viewed his sexuality as abnormal” (JD, 251).

By the escape of the protagonist to England just like the relocation of George to Germany, we are parabolically confronted with the sad reality of the crushing homophobia which denominates Nigeria’s social spaces making

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the emigration of homosexuals inevitable and robbing the country of their contributions to nation building. This point finds resonance in the assertion of the leader of the gay community in Nigeria, Dr. Otibho Obiowu, who, at the public hearing on the SSMPA in Nigeria's Senate lamented that discriminatory practices against LGBT persons have forced many of them to emigrate from their homeland thereby robbing the country of the developmental contributions of many of its talented citizens<sup>77</sup>. This is exactly the point Adrian makes in *Walking with Shadows* in his parting encounter with his estranged wife when he says: "I am a realist Ada. Nigeria is not tolerant of my kind and I want to work and live in a place where I won't have to deny my sexuality" (JD, 240).

It bears emphasis that it is mainly through the homosexual protagonist, Adrian Ebele Njoko, that the thematic project of *Walking with Shadows* is artistically implemented. According to Green-Simms<sup>78</sup>, that thematic project is to make Nigerians rethink and change their prejudice against homosexuals. The attention devoted to Ada (Adrian's wife) throughout the work, her progressive metamorphosis as events unfold, eloquently testify to the novelist's thematic mission. Thus, we notice that at the beginning of the story, upon receiving the news about Adrian's gayness, Ada is shocked, outraged, feels betrayed, worries about Adrian's HIV status and how his sexuality will affect her reputation, and repeats the stock homophobic charges that homosexuality is unnatural, unAfrican and against the Bible. However, her encounter with the wives of other gay men, and the impact of Adrian's relentless enlightenment efforts make her begin to change her perspective on gayness leading to her eventual acknowledgment of the imperative of tolerance in social relations. She realizes that her wholesale aversion to gayness contradicts her subscription to the advantages of globalization which sustains her line of business involving the use of imported western interior decoration materials but ironically she is

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<sup>77</sup>Joseph Onuche (n 10) p. 93-98.

<sup>78</sup>Lindsey Green-Simms (n 36) p. 149.

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“unwilling to accept certain aspects of these [western] cultures that challenged what she held dear as traditional African values” (JD, 165).

Ada's transformation is so profound that Adrian could not help but ask her: “so what has changed now” (241) to which she replies that it is a combination of what Adrian told her about the subject of homosexuality and the fact of Nkechi's fears about her son becoming a homosexual but that she would not love him any less (JD, 241). The metamorphosis of Ada and her new outlook of tolerance lend credence to the contention that in *Walking with Shadows*, Dibia set out to counter the homophobic narratives in Nigeria that describe gayness as a perverse or foreign behavior, and that the novelist “appeals to the compassion of his audience by asking them to be sympathetic to the psychological dilemmas gay people face in Nigeria”<sup>79</sup>. Dibia offers support to this assertion in an interview where he states that part of his motivation in *Walking with Shadows* is to change Nigerians' opinions about homosexuality<sup>80</sup>.

In *The Interpreters*, as we have seen, the ordeals of Joe Golder mirror Adrian's and other homosexuals in *Walking with Shadows*. In Golder's vicissitudes as a homosexual, the contours of homophobia in Nigeria's social spaces are brought to bold relief. The result is that between 1965 when *The Interpreters*' Joe Golder was created and 2005 when *Walking with Shadows*' Adrian Ebele Njoko was created, nothing has really changed in terms of the heteronormative construction of gayness. Indeed, with the enactment of the SSMIPA in 2013, it may even be argued, as some stakeholders have done, that the largely unwritten prejudice against gayness has graduated to official legitimization of homophobia finding expression in the violation of the human rights of LGBT persons. However, the difference we must acknowledge in the two works under reference is that while Soyinka's portrayal of homosexuality is largely unsympathetic, Dibia's is unapologetically

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p. 150.

<sup>80</sup>Grame Reid and Sarojini Nadar, “Africa Writing Queer Identity”, 16<sup>th</sup> *Time of the Writer*, South Africa, 2013. <https://www.Youtube.com/watch?V=wuLri1BGJY>.

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sympathetic. Beyond the tone of the two writers, the attitude of the people to homosexuality is the same as Adrian's homosexual burden is not different from Joe Golder's who is a victim of rejection and exclusion in a society "where bigotry and social intolerance" hold sway<sup>81</sup>. In order to obviate the burden which homosexuals bear in Nigeria, it is recommended that Nigeria and Nigerians should pull down the socio-cultural and institutional structures of homophobia upon which the violation of the human rights of LGBT persons is constructed. This is crucial not only to extend the frontiers of human freedom but also to strengthen the cause of individual self-actualization and nation-building.

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<sup>81</sup>Sola Adeyemi (n 38) p. 29.

## 5. Conclusion

While the province of homophobia is global in scope, the existence of certain socio-cultural and institutional structures in Africa has made the continent the “front runner” in the violation of the human rights of LGBT persons. Using Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* and Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* as the analytical touchstones, we have shown that anti-gay prejudice is nurtured by the structures of heteronormativity which frame homosexuality as abnormal, alien and immoral. The heteronormative construction of gayness as a vista of individual choice leads to the perception that it is acquired rather than biological and that homosexuality is an index of refusal to control a deviant tendency. The result is the alignment of forces against LGBT persons resulting in the official deployment of state machinery to promote legislation that victimize homosexuals and undermine their entitlement to dignity and respectability. In Nigeria, the enactment of the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, (SSMPA), (2013) is seen by many stakeholders as a calculated onslaught against LGBT persons having regard to its sheer breath and potency. Being a product of the environment that spurred it, African (and Nigerian) literature has found itself as a mirror and chronicler of the attitudinal pulsations of the people. In the two texts that constitute our frames of reference, we find ample evidence of the rejection and exclusion of homosexuals from the social spaces leading to their self-censorship and alienation. It is paradoxical that in victimizing LGBT persons based on their sexual orientation, the society also harms itself in the process. This is so because in their forced emigration from their homelands to foreign lands where they live as “sexual refugees”, the country is also robbed of their contributions to nation building. In this regard, therefore, the recommendation that the country should dismantle the structures that sustain homophobia constitutes a blueprint for the promotion of human freedom, individual self-actualization and collective advancement.