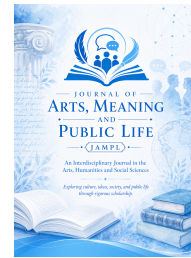
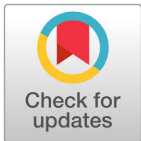


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Journal of Arts, Meaning and Public Life

Arts • Social Sciences • Public Life

<https://flayoophl.com/journals/index.php/jampl>



Representations of Homosexuality in Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* and Uzodinma Iweala's *Speak No Evil*

Karen Sewuese Dogoh 

Department of English and Literary Studies, Federal University of Lafia, Nasarawa State, Nigeria

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 22 August 2026

Received in revised form: 12 September 2026

Accepted: 16 September 2026

Available online: 25 September 2026

Keywords: Postmodernism, Homosexuality, African fiction, Queer theory, Nigeria

DOI: [10.61298/jampl.2026.1.2.426](https://doi.org/10.61298/jampl.2026.1.2.426)

ABSTRACT

Critical discourse surrounding contemporary African literature often navigates a tension between traditional cultural preservation and the realities of postmodern, globalised identities. In their ongoing engagement with colonialism and neocolonialism, some thinkers argue that African culture must guard against Western-inspired globalised influences that appear to fragment and de-emphasise sacred aspects of life such as humanity, sexuality, God, and other primordial values. However, studies of sexual identities and sexuality are steadily increasing within the African novel and African-centred criticism. This paper therefore investigates representations of homosexuality in Nigeria as captured in Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* and Uzodinma Iweala's *Speak No Evil*. Using queer theory and Freud's psycho-analytic theory, the study observes that, since the representation of homosexuality and homosexuals in contemporary African fictional narrative is brazen and bold, its analysis in the new corpus of literature is equally legitimised as the new normal. The paper concludes that rigid heteronormative sexualities and religious rhetoric are deeply ingrained in the socio-cultural fabric, yet non-conforming identities persist within a postmodern culture that increasingly reflects the complex realities of a globalised world.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Within dominant traditional discourses in the African milieu, the idea of sexuality has historically been constructed as strictly heterosexual. In fact, according to Akujobi (2017) "any discourse on sexuality before now was unimaginable in Africa because anything outside the heterosexual nature of man and woman would have been seen as abnormal in spite of de Behaviour's theory of "becoming" the gender one chooses" (Akujobi, 2017, p. 271). An individual's sexuality, like gender, is believed to be a natural

attribute and is understood as neither determined by what a person wants nor by how he or she feels they should be addressed. Thus, within the African context, sexuality, in a very strict sense, is understood as a biological makeup that is inherent at birth and not subject to change. Within many traditional African worldviews, sexuality is frequently understood not as a social construct; thus, any other view on sexuality besides what is deemed normal is considered an aberration or an abnormality. Any form of sexuality that does not conform to heteronormativity can be said to be foreign and perhaps lifted straight out of the books, movies, or even borne out of the relationship such an African could have had with the West.

*Corresponding Author Tel. No.: +234-703-718-6236.

e-mail: Karentor08@gmail.com (Karen Sewuese Dogoh 

In Africa, the argument has been that homosexuality is a foreign culture, one that is considered a crime against African law, culture, and religion. [Akujobi \(2017\)](#) stated that “culturally, homosexuality is an abomination in Nigeria; no one readily talks about it as it is assumed that it does not exist” ([Akujobi, 2017](#), p. 273). [Tamale \(2003\)](#), however offers a contrary view; she avers that homosexuality is not un-African [Tamale \(2003\)](#). She argues that the origins of homosexuality can be traced to Africa itself. Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, one of Africa’s longest-serving presidents, once referred to homosexuals as worse than pigs and dogs ([Lyonga, 2014](#), p. 97). According to [Lyonga \(2014\)](#), homosexual rights or the acceptance of homosexuality is perhaps one of the most socially unwelcome, sensitive, and politically contentious topics to broach in Africa ([Lyonga, 2014](#), p. 98). Lyonga stated that “the criminalization of homosexuality in Africa has forced most gays and lesbians in Africa to live in the closet” ([Lyonga, 2014](#), p. 98). Generally speaking, homosexuality does not appear to be widely accepted in Africa, even though views differ. While some African countries like Angola, Gabon, and Madagascar have no law criminalising the act, most African countries have a law against the practice of homosexuality. In Nigeria for instance, the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013 [Federal Republic of Nigeria \(2014\)](#) specifically criminalises entering into a same-sex marriage contract or civil union, carrying a penalty of 14 years imprisonment ([Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014](#), p. B3). [de Souza \(2016\)](#) posits that “in literature and popular culture, homosexuality has been received with mixed reactions. Some artists tend to ally with homosexuals while others tend to condone homophobia” ([de Souza, 2016](#), p. 2). Homophobia is the fear or dislike of homosexuals and has been a major challenge for homosexuals in contemporary Africa. African writers such as Jude Dibia, Chinelo Okparanta, and Chimamanda Adichie have continued to criticise homophobia in their fiction.

Thus, in spite of the earlier notion in Africa, and particularly Nigeria, that homosexuality is ignominious and therefore too sensitive to discuss ([Daudu, 2021](#), p. 22), the reality of its existence has continued to stare us in the face in the wake of the 21st century. In recent times therefore, the concept of homosexuality has witnessed a large support, growth, hatred and condemnation in different parts of the world, including in Africa, and the representation of same has become very visible in contemporary African writings.

In an attempt to explore the characteristics of postmodernism, [Azizi and Isaqzai \(2022\)](#) argue that “postmodernism should be considered a rejection of a philosophy that values morality, rationality and clarity of thought” ([Azizi and Isaqzai, 2022](#), p. 57). Morals and values are therefore in jeopardy as a result of the postmodernist movement. In this postmodern era, some Nigerians have imbibed the practice of same-sex relationships even though some writers still project it negatively. This paper argues that since the representation of homosexuality and homosexuals in contemporary African fictional narrative is brazen and bold, its analysis in the new corpus of literature is equally legitimised as the new normal.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The origins of queer theory, as noted in a publication by the University of Illinois Library, are difficult to define because the

theory emerged from multiple critical and cultural contexts, including feminism [University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Library \(2022\)](#). As an academic tool, however, queer theory is said to come “about in part from gender and sexuality studies that in turn had origins from lesbians and gay studies and feminist theory” [University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Library \(2022\)](#).

The term ‘queer’ has been used to suggest a wide range of sexual orientations other than the male–female binary. One of the core concepts of queer according to Omotetobore is that gender manifestation is fluid, meaning that gender is not fixed and binary but instead embraces the idea that individuals can express themselves in a variety of ways that may not conform to traditional norms or expectations. Thus, within the concept of identity, there is an understanding that a person’s gender expression or identity can change and evolve over time.

Whether or not queerness existed and thrived before external influences on the African continent remains a matter of debate among African writers; however, Africans are widely known to be heterosexuals and queer individuals are stigmatised. The depiction of queer is steadily mounting in the body of the Nigerian novel in the wake of the 21st century, with the emergence of more daring contemporary Nigerian writers also referred to as third-generation writers. In the words of [Omotetobore \(2021, p. 1\)](#), this generation of writers “dared to break the silence on the queer practice that takes place in the secret closet of the bedroom and have been generally considered to be un-African” ([Omotetobore, 2021, p. 1](#)). This generation of writers draws on the reality that humans are moving towards a global civilisation characterised by the rapid exchange of information; thus, they seem to represent queer characters in a positive light in their writings rather than in accordance with traditional African norms.

[Aiyedun et al. \(2024\)](#) posit that the exploration of queerness in African literature serves as a dynamic lens through which authors challenge traditional narratives, providing a platform for marginalised voices and fostering a nuanced understanding of diverse sexual identities ([Aiyedun et al., 2024](#), pp. 126–127). According to the authors, the significance of queer representation in African literature lies in the fact that it focuses on how the practice of African literary cogitations contributes to the broader struggle for freedom and acceptance among queer practitioners ([Aiyedun et al., 2024, p. 127](#)). In spite of the argument that African societies are often queerphobic, contemporary writers have had a significant impact in redefining the representation of queerness in African literature by breaking stereotypes and providing more varied depictions of queer characters, thereby contributing to a more inclusive and diverse literary scene. Queer theory thus becomes a lens through which to explore how scholars, activists, artistic texts, and the media perpetuate gender- and sex-based binaries, with the aim of dismantling hierarchies and challenging social inequalities ([Aiyedun et al., 2024, p. 125](#)).

Sigmund Freud, the founding figure of psychoanalysis, laid a foundation for new models of how the mind operates, beginning with the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900 – the dynamic model, the economic model, the topographic model and the tripartite model. Hidden from the workings of the conscious mind, the unconscious, he believes, plays a large part in how we act, think and feel. For Freud, as observed by Bressler, the unconscious is the storehouse of disguised truths and desires that

want to be revealed in and through the conscious. These disguised truths and desires inevitably make themselves known through our dreams, art, literature, play and accidental slips of the tongue known as Freudian slips (Bressler, 1999, p. 149).

The most famous model of the human psyche developed by Freud is the tripartite model. This model divides the psyche into three parts: the id, the ego and the superego. The irrational, instinctual, unknown and unconscious part of the psyche Freud calls the id. Containing our secret desires, our darkest wishes and our most intense fears, the id wishes only to fulfil the pleasure principle. The id houses the libido, the source of all our psychosexual desires. The ego is the rational, logical waking part of the mind. It is the ego's job to regulate the instinctual desires of the id and to allow these desires to be released in some nondestructive way. The third part of the psyche is the superego. It acts as an internal censor causing us to make moral judgments in light of social pressures.

A work of literature, Freud believes, is the external expression of the author's unconscious mind. Accordingly, literary works like the texts under study must be treated like a dream, applying psychoanalytic techniques to the text to uncover the author's hidden motivations and repressed desires.

Bressler summarises Freud's position as follows: An author's chief motivation for writing any story is to gratify some secret desire, some forbidden wish that probably developed during the author's infancy and was immediately suppressed and dumped in the unconscious. The outward manifestation of this suppressed wish becomes the literary work itself... the literary work is therefore the author's dream or fantasy (Bressler, 1999, pp. 159–160).

By using Freud's psychoanalytic techniques as they are used in dream therapy, psychoanalytic critics believe that we can unlock the hidden meanings contained within the story and housed in symbols. Only then can we arrive at an accurate interpretation of the text, like the ones under study.

3. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Writing on the subject "Receptive Subjects: Gender and Sexuality in Novels by Igbo Authors", Umezurike (2021), analysing Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* and Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees* writes that, prior to the present epoch "African masculinities" was "grounded mainly in ethnographic, anthropological, or psychological analysis" whose goals were mainly "health and policy development programs" (Umezurike, 2021, p. ii). His research, he stated, is a "literary critique of Nigerian men and women that extends our understanding beyond the gender binary" (Umezurike, 2021, p. ii). It explores how Nigerian novelists redefine what it means to be a man or a woman by articulating new ways of doing masculinity and femininity and challenging a culture that discriminates against its citizens based on sex, gender or sexual orientation. Motivated by questions of shared human vulnerability, he emphasises how these Igbo writers (re)imagine what it means to be human while contesting the valorisation of gender and sexual identities. The writers create characters whose receptiveness, he argues, defines their relations to the other, affirming an affinity with the other rather than the norm. Dibia's *Walking with Shadows*, in particular, he writes, is a dramatisation of the reality of sexual minorities in Nigeria. His analysis of the text is an examination of receptivity and homosexuality.

In Akujobi's view (Akujobi, 2017), two of Jude Dibia's texts *Unbridled* and *Walking with Shadows* are an exposé of "the politics of silence and out-rights (sic) denial of the existence of certain behaviours in" (Akujobi, 2017, p. 273) Nigerian society. In her words, Dibia's portrayal of the African 'other' in the novels as seen in "the main characters of his novels show what it means to be ... a gay man in Nigerian society" and "how sexuality can sometimes be the only way by which femininity/masculinity is described or achieved" (Akujobi, 2017, p. 273). With *Walking with Shadows*, Dibia (2011), she says, expounds on the culture of silence that society maintains when it comes to issues bordering on "sexual abuse and exclusionary practices", she continues, because society considers them 'too graphic' for discussion. Quoting directly from an interview Dibia had with the BBC about having a sexual orientation other than the norm in Nigeria she writes, "being gay in Nigeria is so funny because you cannot admit to it. You have to pass as something else and create a different persona and live that persona. And, sometimes for some people, they end up being married and they have families and they try to suppress who they are" (Akujobi, 2017, p. 273).

It is important to state here that this paper does not undermine the importance of the issues Akujobi (2017) has raised in her study, this however, is not the primary concern of this study.

In *Speak No Evil*, Iweala (2018) offers his readers insight into the chaos and imbalance that the so-called queer people of African descent experience before their final assimilation into the queer family. Azar (2020) opts to use Bachelard's version of topoanalysis in her reading of Iweala's fiction. Bachelard (1994) defines topoanalysis as, "the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives" (Bachelard, 1994, p. 10) which, simply put, means that "memories of the home, as previously stated, are not merely recollections of the past that only exist in the past, but also represent the body of images that construct the home, i.e. emerging from the subconscious to move into the conscious memory and imagination" (Azar, 2020, p. 11).

Azar (2020) argues that the discomfort and alienation Niru experiences in his new place of residence; America, is a resultant effect of his perception of the spaces around him. It is this same perception that Niru has of his new location that brings to the fore "the chaos and imbalance that occurs once an African identity like Niru's is socialized into the more liberal values of the American culture, while balancing the more conservative and religious values his parents want him to live by" (Azar, 2020, p. 25). It is that "concept of the instability subjected on queer identities caused by the globalization of Western queer theory creating a sense of anti-universalism" that Iweala expresses through his protagonist Niru, a Nigerian. Niru's "Nigerian roots play a crucial role in intensifying this anti-universalistic sense ignited by the clash that results from Niru's residence in America and his family's Nigerian background" (Azar, 2020, p. 25).

4. NAVIGATING HOMOSEXUAL IDENTITY IN *WALKING WITH SHADOWS* AND *SPEAK NO EVIL*

Homosexuality in Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows*, as represented by his protagonist, Ebele (later christened Adrian at baptism) is traced to his childhood days. Scattered all over the text are events in Adrian's childhood that indicate he was exposed to homosexuality from childhood, as Dibia (2011) portrays. One

such instance as Adrian reminisces occurred at a time he was a boy of about seven or eight years old; As a boy, at about seven or eight years old, he adored his father. When his father came out of the bathroom, he would move to the balcony to comb his thick afro with a wooden fork-like comb. Light drops of water still trapped in the hair will drizzle down. In his young mind, Adrian had believed these showers of love so was always sure to sneak out to the balcony and sit directly underneath his father (Dibia, 2011, p. 45). Whether or not Dibia (2011) is a student of Freud's psychoanalytical theory especially as it affects human development, this paper cannot determine. However, the text can be read as tracing Adrian's struggles through the lens of early childhood experiences. When viewed through a psychoanalytic framework, the scene quoted above invites a reading that aligns with Freud's assertions that events in a child's life can affect the person later in life if fixation at any of the psychosexual stages is not successfully resolved (Freud, 1964, p. 126). Scattered throughout the text in the form of recollections are developmental processes in the life of Adrian that align with Freud's psychosexual principle: This was a good-enough day to be reborn, and Ebele could not have chosen a better location himself. His ten year-old mind was in a hurry to rid itself of the pathetic person it had always known as 'Ebele.' He looked again at the long chain of people ahead of him and found himself reciting in his heart: Ringa-Ringa-Roses: APocket- Full-of Posies... (Dibia, 2011, p. 15).

It is interesting to note that Ebele loved the game, he loved "running around in circles, chasing his shadows," this in spite of having been told several times that it was not manly for him to play and laugh around like ladies. The passage shows how early Adrian, as he would later be identified, notices the strangeness in himself.

In a continued effort to show that Adrian's sexuality did not come about accidentally in adulthood or through contact with foreigners, Dibia (2011) relates in his narrative some of the things that happened before his baptism and change of name. While going for baptism with the hope that it "was a good enough-day to be reborn", Ebele still has "his eyes on one of the vendors" that came to advertise their wares before his family. "He was a young man, probably in his early twenties, dressed in a simply off-white singlet and torn jeans." "Ebele was drawn to the fine line of his silhouette" (Dibia, 2011, p. 15). It is interesting that Ebele, as he was then known, only takes note of the young man several years older than him and is vivid in his description of the young man. When his time for baptism finally comes, the reader only reads of Ebele's promises that all of that would end today as he becomes a new person after his baptism. To the pastor's demand and bewilderment, he picks the name Saint Adrian. Though he closes his eyes tightly and hopes that "Ebele would fade away and Adrian would emerge" (Dibia, 2011, p. 16), the reader cannot help but notice, rather than Ebele fade and drown with the rushing flow of the stream, the feeling he gets was more of "falling asleep at the bottom of the sea..." (Dibia, 2011, p. 17), this to the consternation of the reader. This paper therefore opines that the message Dibia (2011) wants to leave with his reader is, change, when it comes to sexuality is beyond wishes. So much as Adrian does everything in his power to steer clear of his homosexual inclination as evidenced in the baptismal scene painted in the prologue, what the reader notices is, in place of the change he

desperately clamours for, he ends up sleeping. Little wonder that what had fallen asleep would in the latter part of his life be awakened.

The dominant motif of Iweala's *Speak No Evil* as with Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* is Niru's growing awareness of his sexuality and how he tries to navigate same in a society that is fundamentally conventional. Though the first time Niru opens up on his sexuality in the text is when he gives reasons to Meredith's questions "is it my face ...? You don't like my body ...? I'm not cool enough for you ...? I'm not black enough ...? Is it my lack of booty ...? Well what the fuck is wrong with me then?" (Iweala, 2018, p. 19). One can already sense in answers to her that he could already tell long before now that his passion was for men and not women; I've asked myself the very same question since that first time something felt different when I wrestled with Zhou, my next-door neighbor, until his father got a job with an aerospace company in San Diego. We threw each other to the carpets and lay down on each other. I felt Zhou's breath against my face and neck. His chest moved against my chest and it felt nice with our legs tangled together (Iweala, 2018, p. 19).

Niru, after the awkward nature of his experience with Meredith in her house and the ensuing explanations kind of remembers that even as a young lad, his mother had warned him about his infatuation with boys at a very young age. "Boys aren't supposed to like other boys" (Iweala, 2018, p. 19), he recalls his mother had told him on that particular occasion. This she did in answer to his question on "what the pastor had meant when he said America was living under the shadow of that abomination, homosexuality" (Iweala, 2018, p. 19). As he reminisces, he also recollects his mother had also admonished: God said man is for woman and woman is for man. That's how it's supposed to be. And God was always right; so I decided I would only like girls even if I could feel that I liked looking at them less than I should. I didn't watch the porn my classmates shared on their phones in the hallways before class or sitting on the lawn in front of the Cathedral (Iweala, 2018, p. 19).

Though Niru decides to love girls at the tender age, he discovers he did not in actual sense feel anything for them. He finds himself being more interested in same-sex relationships. As he concedes,

at home, I would watch women with women and men with women on my phone, trying only to focus on the women as I touched myself. But those men, their bodies, their sounds. I wanted to gouge out my eyes. Sometimes I asked God for deliverance. Sometimes I held my own breath and circled my hands

(Iweala, 2018, p. 19).

Read through a psychoanalytic lens, it can be argued that Dibia (2011) explores the roots of Ebele or Adrian's (as he would later come to be known) psychological conflicts within his family dynamics. How else would one explain the horrible dream he keeps having of his parents trying to introduce him to a "couple that bore a vague resemblance to his parents" (Dibia, 2011, p. 122) as his real parents when they were there? This is a dream he had borne all his years as a child and as an adult.

However, as Shija (2021) puts it, "one of such channels Freud wrote extensively about is the dream we have while we sleep... Freud explains that our dreams are mostly distorted or

disguised from the true wishes drawn from the unconscious because of the effect of the conflict between the unconscious and the conscious process of the mind” (Shija, 2021, p. 104). Interestingly, all his friends, without being told, once they saw him having nightmares knew he was having the same dream; “How do you feel today?” Abdul asked, pouring him a cup. “Fine,” Adrian took a sip from the mug handed over to him. “I had a horrible dream last night.” “The one where your parents introduced you to your real parents?” Abdul asked. “Yes,” Adrian paused before realizing he had told Abdul this dream in the past (Dibia, 2011, pp. 122–123).

This may be one of the reasons why Abdul chides him for being “scared of your parents and desperately” wanting their approval. An accusation Adrian wants to deny but realises is true as it “sends a chill down his spine” (Dibia, 2011, p. 123). Adrian suddenly realises “his parents’ love and approval were two things he had secretly coveted all his life” (Dibia, 2011, p. 123). His dream had been for them to be proud of him as a son. He again falls into that period of reflection and recalls how his parents despite reprimanding him for not winning a prize at school while his brothers kept winning prizes year after year refused to celebrate or acknowledge him when he finally won a prize; He eventually won a prize in his fifth year of primary education for being the smartest pupil, and it was so big a surprise to him that he thought it was a mistake. So surprising was his win that even his parents did not know how to react. Ironically that year neither of his brothers won a prize. But in spite of this his success was not celebrated. . . . There was no lifting up in the air, no promise of new toys, no special dinner. . . with his favourite dish and soft drink. Nothing! That hurt him so badly (Dibia, 2011, p. 124).

The author in *Walking with Shadows* makes no effort at concealing the fact that he was out to debunk the assertion that queer sexuality is foreign to the African society. To continue what he started with Ebele who has now been christened Adrian in his thoughtful periods, he moves on to Chika who evidently is straight and has been his mother’s favourite from childhood as he ponders over some of Adrian’s childhood experiences. Chika, as if he was in agreement with proponents of psychoanalytic thought that suggests human personality is mostly established by the age of five and that any disruption in the child’s development could result in homosexuality among other outcomes (Freud, 1964, p. 126), embarks on a soul-searching journey to see why his elder brother, Adrian, ended up a homosexual as noted below: He needed to do some serious soul searching. And there was no selfish reason involved. The truth is he was not too happy with the way [...] things were going. . . His sense of guilt stemmed from the memories of their childhood. Ebele had always seemed to be the outcast. He was a lonely child even at a young age, Chika had felt his loneliness and understood his pain. There were many times he could have spoken up for Ebele, but he hadn’t. He was afraid of being laughed at or, worse still, being treated the same way as his brother: ignored and forgotten. As a child he had asked himself time after time why his elder brother was different. Why he did sneak off to their father’s balcony every morning after their father had just taken a bath? Why was he so timid when asked a question? Chika had observed him on more than one occasion stealing away to cry. There was a whole mystery surrounding Ebele when they were children (Dibia, 2011, p. 110).

At his recollection of how Ebele/Adrian had sacrificed himself for him, Chika who at this point sounds more like the author’s postmodernist voice, is quick to give reasons from his recollection of past events why he feels Ebele/Adrian is who he is today. Chika evidently had lived with the guilt of knowing that Ebele had not deserved the beating his parents, particularly his father, gave him the day he sacrificed himself for him. In his thoughts he could vividly tell how Ebele/Adrian had become more of a recluse after that day. He could see how from then on Ebele/Adrian had pretty much kept to himself as a child and his parents and elder brother for whatever reasons refused to notice or pay any attention to his brother. Chika knew even then that Ebele/Adrian was different “but you don’t hate people because they are different, do you? Chika asked himself”. He could now tell how “Ebele’s difference as a child had been the source of major concern and fear for their family” (Dibia, 2011, pp. 114–115). This for Chika was the only explanation he could give himself for Ebele’s present predicament. He could now tell that the rejection Ebele/Adrian suffered at the hands of both his parents and brothers must have led him to seek love elsewhere. They were the people who had made him invisible and caused him to “become so. He was a sissy! And everyone hated a sissy” (Dibia, 2011, p. 115).

5. HOMOSEXUALITY AND SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSTRAINTS IN *WALKING WITH SHADOWS AND SPEAK NO EVIL*

In Dibia’s *Walking with Shadows* (Dibia, 2011), the cultural and traditional pressures exerted against the non-heteronormative community—particularly the homosexual group to which Adrian belongs—are brought to the fore. For instance, Adrian’s wife, Ada, processes her marital crisis through the lens of traditional morality. Shaped by the conservative worldview instilled by her mother, Ada views homosexuality as incompatible with the traditional values she was raised to uphold. This internal conflict surfaces in her deep thoughts after realising she had been sitting in the same place for over an hour after Adrian “had left her in a trancelike haze” (Dibia, 2011, p. 35). In the one and a half hours that she had been transfixed, so many thoughts played out in her mind. She recalled how her mother would tell her that “in times of deep personal crises, your entire lifespan runs through your mind in a split second” (Dibia, 2011, p. 35). She could literally see her life beginning from when she was a toddler, a budding teenager, and her wedding day “merged in one swift motion”. Ada began thinking: Adrian, was a Nigerian, an African man. Being gay was certainly not in African culture. The whole idea was so foreign, so unnatural. But while everyone knew it existed, the probability it would be so close to home was one she would never have imagined. There had been people in school she suspected of being gay, and she had always believed she was tolerant of their lifestyle and sexual choices. She could hardly call herself tolerant now. Now that it was her reality (Dibia, 2011, p. 35).

It is the same records of society’s aversion to queer sexuality that Dibia (2011) captures in his narrative in his portrayal of the reception party scene. This is a reception party organised by “Modupe Ajala-Osagie, the rich socialite wife of Chief Ibinabor Osagie, the oil magnate” but attended also by ladies the writer describes as “either social climbers or minor society ladies” (Dibia, 2011, p. 95), supposedly some of the high and mighty in the society who would soon turn the reception into a

gossip session as Iheoma would soon find out. It was from these women Iheoma learnt “Adrian Njoko!” ... “You know, that Ada’s husband... She owns that very fashionable interior décor business. They did my kitchen for me last year. Can you imagine her husband is gay! Poor woman, do you know her?” (Dibia, 2011, p. 95).

Like Dibia’s *Walking with Shadows* Dibia (2011), in Iweala’s *Speak No Evil* Iweala (2018), one of the principal complexities the reader notices surrounding Niru’s sexuality is the African and particularly the Nigerian component of his ancestry. Niru for long has lived at peace with his conservative Nigerian immigrant parents in Washington D.C. His revelation of his sexuality to a female friend Meredith however signals the catalyst that triggers the events that follow in the text. Infatuated by her craving for Niru, she becomes apprehensive when he would not have sex with her even after she had completely undressed, kissed and frolicked him. It is during this tense moment that follows that Niru, thoroughly embarrassed at his inability to move himself to have sex with her in spite of his desire, blurts out he is gay. This revelation and Meredith’s effort at helping him fulfill his desires as a homosexual sets Niru on a collision course with his Nigerian parents. In an attempt to help Niru explore his sexuality, Meredith installs a dating application for gay people on Niru’s phone. Niru’s father, Obi discovers Ryan’s messages requesting Niru meets him so they could bond during one of those rare moments when he leaves his phone unguarded.

Though presently resident in the West, the reader would soon discover that Obi is typically an African at heart when it comes to the issues of sexuality. Obi vents his anger by subjecting Niru to terrible verbal and physical attacks. He blames his wife Ify for Niru’s erratic sexuality: “Does your mother know?” he asks, “I have to tell your mother. I have to tell her that this is what her son has been doing. I never should have let your mother name you. I told her, we don’t give men that kind of name, but she insisted that it had to be this name. The disgrace” (Iweala, 2018, p. 28). Part of Obi’s apprehension is borne out of this belief that it is un-African for a male child to bear what he perceives as a feminine name, coupled with his observation that Ify treats Niru like a woman. From Obi’s subjective perspective, the name Gwamniru carries feminine connotations, and as stated above, Obi believes his son’s confusing sexuality is a product, first of all of his misnaming. It is secondarily a product of his erratic upbringing by the mother who should have known you do not raise a male child as if he is of the feminine gender. Dibia (2011) in keeping faith with his postmodernist tradition debunking the claim of the non-existence of persons of differing sexual orientations from heteronormativity in Nigeria by rewriting the history of its existence, introduces the reader to the trio of Carol, Hajiya, and Temi who are all married to homosexuals. Interestingly, none of the husbands mentioned in his narrative are men of little means; Carol is married to Major Obosi who had been a minister during the military era and still remained one of the wealthiest, controversial, figures now. Hajiya’s husband was in the current government as a special adviser to the minister of petroleum, and Temi’s husband, Adebayo George, was a high-ranking judge in the Supreme Court (Dibia, 2011, p. 127). The reader cannot help but notice how Dibia (2011) strategically highlights the presence of non-heteronormative identities within powerful socio-political spheres. By placing gay husbands across

the ruling class—specifically within the military, the executive branch and the judiciary- the narrative maps the presence of these identities across key arms of the state, suggesting that homosexuality also cuts across elite institutions.

Ada, though alarmed at the fact that the women knew of her husband’s homosexual status would soon come to realize as Carol emphatically stated, “Ada, please do not be alarmed,” ... “We are all here because we have a common issue. With the exception of Iheoma, we are all married to gay men”. The reader cannot help but notice the calmness in the women’s demeanour as Temi smilingly and knowingly says Bayo is gay, and Hajiya quietly chips in “so is my Awwal” (Dibia, 2011, p. 128), to Ada’s amazement. The most striking thing about these women is they came to know about their husbands’ sexualities and how they reacted. Carol laughed infectiously as she relayed the story of how she discovered her husband was into it and his reaction. “I came home early one day and there he was on the couch with a young man. I should have suspected something was wrong when his bodyguard almost stopped me from entering the compound” (Dibia, 2011, p. 129). Hajiya on the other hand claimed to have known before she married her husband. In her words, “I was betrothed to Awwal when I was quite young” ... , even before I moved to his house as wife I had heard about him and the boys. My first night with him, he invited one of his boys to our bed and he promptly told me what he liked ... I could not argue or complain” (Dibia, 2011, p. 129). Temi also claimed to have known before she married Bayo. She confidently said that was one of the reasons why she married him. To Ada’s bewilderment, Temi admitted to being a lesbian herself.

The most striking part of these conversations is the fact that, with the exception of Ada, none of these women seemed to have issues with their husbands’ sexualities so long as, in Carol’s words “my husband provides me with all the comfort I deserve without complaint or compromise, then he can do whatever. I have a very influential husband who cares about his public image as much as I care about my luxuries” (Dibia, 2011, p. 130). Staying married to him was contingent on his satisfaction of her “social and political needs” (Dibia, 2011, p. 130). Hajiya too had no issues with her husband’s sexuality provided her needs were well taken care of and she had her separate account and continued travelling around the globe as she wanted. Temi on the other hand is already rich and does not need Bayo’s riches. She just wants a safe haven to practice her lesbianism while Bayo also practices his homosexuality.

For the African in Ada, she cannot bring herself to understand what the world was turning into. She just cannot understand how these women made little of her predicament. Here she was fuming about her husband’s sexuality when these women could openly “admit their lesbianism and marry bisexual men” (Dibia, 2011, p. 131) just for comfort and money. As Dibia (2011) aptly captures it, “by the time Ada left that evening, it seemed scales had been scrapped from her eyes. It was like she began to see things in true, stark colours: not simply black or white, but all the grey as well” (Dibia, 2011, p. 133). Dibia (2011) in his effort to drum the notion of acceptability for persons of queer sexuality the more causes Ada to rummage over her beliefs the next day when she gets to her interior office: Sitting down at her desk, Ada realized the irony of the services she provided and the cultural

values she so desperately wanted to hold on to. She was selling modernity and globalization through all the exotic pieces she used in her clients' houses. Most of her best pieces were imports from the West, from Europe and America. Yet while embracing the aesthetics of these places, she was not willing to adopt the culture that challenged that which she held dear as traditional African values. She still strongly believed that the concept of homosexuality was very much contrary to African culture (Dibia, 2011, p. 135).

In Iweala's *Speak No Evil* (Iweala (2018)), though Niru himself has had issues with his sexuality, it is as a teenager that the father Obi discovers the otherness of his sexuality. This the reader finds interesting. This paper posits this is the author's way of highlighting the powerful clash of cultures when it comes to the issues of sexuality. Africans generally believe homosexuality is foreign to them and negates their cultural values one of which is the family structure. Being a homosexual in Africa is not only detestable but is considered a tragedy. This, as Okereke (2005) notes is because such relationships are not productive and the only purpose they serve is to undermine the continuity of the family structure and by extension the society. According to Okereke (2005); In Africa, as in all cultures, children are crucial in the continuity of a lineage, a clan, a society. Children are the base that hold up the structure and ensure the perpetuity of a family and the larger traditional society. A family and a society that has not many children are seen as heading for extinction. Thus, culturally, inability to procreate signals tragedy (Okereke, 2005, p. 5).

This, the paper argues, summarises Obi's agitation at the discovery of his son's sexuality. He blames his son's sexuality and contends that they are a contributory factors to his son's homosexuality and threatens to call the headmaster at Niru's school and confront him about the issue. He blames himself for not sending Niru to a school in Nigeria as he yells at his son: You want to go and do gay marriage, is that what you want, you want to go and carry man, put your thing for his nyash? Abomination. A BOMI NATION. He pushes my face down into the kitchen table. A salty warmth fills my cheek. My tongue burns. Daddy let me tell you—Tell me what. Tell me how you want to go and collect shame and disgrace for this family. Tell me how you want to go and do all sorts of despicable, filthy, unnatural and unclean things. How can—no. You want to kill me? (Iweala, 2018, p. 29).

The African nature in Obi which would never let him accept homosexuality, especially from his son actually cost him in the end. Niru who later realizes himself and sees himself as "not a child, I'm eighteen. This is my life" (Iweala, 2018, p. 40), decides to run away from whoever and whatever will not let him be himself. "Niru, my father shouts, please come back, talk to me. But there is nothing left to say" (Iweala, 2018, p. 97). One's choice remains a determinant factor in a postmodernist age.

6. RELIGIOUS RHETORIC AND HOMOSEXUALITY IN *WALKING WITH SHADOWS* AND *SPEAK NO EVIL*

Within the framework of the literary texts under scrutiny, both Dibia (2011) and Iweala (2018) foreground how religious rhetoric is frequently weaponised against homosexuality. Characters in *Walking with Shadows* and *Speak No Evil* who subscribe to conventional religious frameworks often view homosexuality not merely as a moral transgression, but as a spiritual affliction. Con-

sequently, families and religious figures within the narratives resort to spiritual warfare and deliverance practices- such as exorcisms of different kinds- to rid homosexuals of that evil spirit. For the Christian faithful like the families highlighted in Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* and Iweala's *Speak No Evil*, this spiritual warfare is directed against the devil resident in the homosexuals.

It is important to note here that some of these acts of exorcism or deliverance, as some adherents of the Christian religion prefer to call them could at times become violent and were not necessarily borne out of love for the gay person as Adrian would soon find out in *Walking with Shadows*. Right before he is compelled to go through the rites of exorcism or deliverance so he could have the spirit of homosexuality extricated from him, Adrian recollects an incident in his adolescent days when Chiedu had referred to a gay character in a romantic comedy he was watching before he came in with his friends as a faggot. When Chiedu had asked they vote to see who wanted to watch the movie, Adrian could still remember no one raised their hands as all of Chiedu's friends rather laughed at him. Adrian vividly recalls the disdain on Chiedu's face as he referred to that character as a faggot. The thought therefore of following Chiedu to see a pastor for exorcism so he could be set free of his homosexuality or same-sex desire was alarming.

Generally, among Africans, there is that deep-seated belief that homosexuality is foreign and the spirit behind queer sexualities of whatever nature is resident in the West. It is in this sense that Dibia (2011) explores with the notion that non-heterosexuals can be delivered from queer sexualities if acts of interventions such as the exorcism and spiritual cleansing Chiedu wanted to be desperately conducted on Adrian could be helpful. It is interesting to note that Adrian is not given the opportunity to say if he would rather continue life as a homosexual or go through with Chiedu's desire for him to be delivered of his sexuality. When confronted by the pastor about the evil deeds of Sodom and Gomorrah he was about to be delivered from, the reader notices, "Adrian didn't know what to say. A part of him felt like laughing loud, another part was angry and disappointed with his brother for making him suffer this indignity" (Dibia, 2011, p. 174). Notice Adrian even tried to protest his supposed deliverance from homosexuality but was held down by "the strong hands of the two burly men behind the pastor" who seized and pinned him to the floor (Dibia, 2011, p. 174). The reader cannot help but notice the strange nature of the session of exorcism Adrian had to go through. To buttress this, Adrian displays his disapproval of all that was happening to him by cringing in horror at the pastor's prayer and the actions of the two men who were with him as captured in the following scene: He felt his shirt ripped off his body, rendering the upper part of his body naked. He watched in disbelief as the pastor withdrew a long five-pronged whip from behind one of the chairs and headed for him. Adrian struggled with more force and almost succeeded in freeing himself, but the two men pushed him down and tackled his arms in such a way they almost dislocated his shoulder. "Chiedu," Adrian screamed, "make them stop this madness... Chiedu...!" (Dibia, 2011, p. 175).

The same scenario is what this paper finds depicted in Iweala's *Speak No Evil* (Iweala (2018)). In *Speak No Evil*, Niru's father Obi, upon discovering the complexities of his son's sexuality, wastes no time in declaring that he would be taken back to Nigeria to undergo the same deliverance process. Obi knows the laws in

Washington where his family is resident are such that his son's homosexuality is not criminalised as sodomy. It is important to note that it is even a female friend of his, Meredith, who introduces him to the homosexual site that has landed him into trouble with the father. As evidenced in the scenes leading to his father's declaration that he would be taken to Nigeria for deliverance, Obi though presently resident in the United States of America, is a traditional African Christian with little or no regard for Western practices. This much the reader sees in his reactions upon finding out his son's sexuality: My father says nothing for a long time. He grinds his teeth and drums his fingers on the table. This man that usually has so much to say about everything in his deep, imposing voice and gravelly Nigerian accent is silent. ... Who is Ryan, he asks as he removes his glasses. I have not seen him like this before, angry, yes, confused, only once, but never both together. My father's hands shake as he tries to control himself. [...] Gwamniru, I'm asking you to tell me what is this, he shouts and his voice rises an octave with each word that leaves his mouth. His eyes narrow until they are colored only by red veins. His eyes are like that because he grew up in the dust he says, even America can't change that (Iweala, 2018, p. 27).

Secondly, Obi, obviously a very religious African begins his assessment of Niru's failure from a religious standpoint. "In my house. In this house ... You want to bring this kind of sinful, satanic rubbish into my house. Tufiakwa. It can never happen" (Iweala, 2018, p. 28). Besides the satanic forces, Obi also believes Niru's present homosexual status is a fallout of his continued stay to study in America as he stated, "I told that woman that we should have sent you to school in Nigeria, not this useless place" (Iweala, 2018, p. 28) and also pledges with a threatening voice

you stupid child. You are going back to Nigeria pronto. Immediately! Sharp! ... See this boy with the audacity to open his filthy mouth and say word to me. No, you are going back to Nigeria. I will personally escort you to Holy Spirit Chapel or Mountain of Fire or whichever one so we can burn this sinful nonsense from your body

(Iweala, 2018, p. 29).

He follows through on his threats as Niru is not only taken back to Nigeria as recommended by Reverend Olumide, a pastor, a Nigerian, and an anti-homosexual like him who is also resident in America. Reverend Olumide recommends Bishop Okereke, a pastor resident in Nigeria to help with the deliverance of Niru from the

... demon of homosexuality that has become so entrenched in America that you can't really fight it there, some churches are preaching that love of any kind is good while some of them have lost their way and are appointing gays as clergy. You are right to bring him here, this is a place where the faith is strong and hasn't been infiltrated by the devil

(Iweala, 2018, p. 54).

From the postmodernist perspective, it is beliefs such as those held by Obi, Pastor Rotimi, and Bishop Okereke, and by other Africans like them, that make it difficult for Africans to undo their undue allegiance to heteronormativity so they could accept gender and sexual presentations outside this binary. The reader cannot

help but notice Niru's defiance in spite of Obi, Pastor Rotimi and Bishop Okereke's homophobia. Niru demonstrates this defiance in his response to Bishop Okereke's charge, "young man, if what your father says is true, confess your sins and rededicate yourself to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." He refuses to confess his homosexuality saying, "I don't know you, so why would I confess anything to you" (Iweala, 2018, p. 54).

Niru like Adrian wants to run away from this deliverance or exorcism session "but Bishop Okereke's imposing form and his fleshly outstretched palm" like Pastor Matthew's goons did Adrian, in his words, "blocks my path to the door. It feels like they expect people to run. I look around the chamber; there are no whips or shackles, just five other bodies also laboring to breathe in this mix of stale air and body salt" (Iweala, 2018, p. 58). Like Adrian in Dibia's *Walking with Shadows*,

Niru in Iweala's *Speak No Evil* does not fully submit to the deliverance exercise conducted on him. Unlike Adrian who fainted from the lashes he received from Pastor Matthew's whip, Niru's senses are very active. He hears every utterance made in prayer by Okereke's crew for his deliverance but lacks the will to be delivered from a sexuality he has come to accept as his. This is fittingly captured in the following scene, I stop trying to stand and instead will my heart to a steady beat. We pray that the evil demonic spirit that seeks to harm this boy's life should leave him and return to the pit of hellfire where it came, Bishop Okereke shouts. ... We ask you to banish the spirit of homosexuality and perversity from this young man, bind it and cast it [...] reorient this your child to the pure teachings of our Savior Jesus the Bishop shouts. I pray for anything to free me from this room and these hands holding me down, dripping their sweat on me as they try to cleanse me. ... I want to be clean. I want to be rid of everything that brought me here. I want more than anything to be normal, for my father to say my name with the pride ... I feel his words cut into me and I think if only I had seen what Meredith was doing to me (Iweala, 2018, pp. 58–59).

In Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* like Iweala's *Speak No Evil* this paper finds, the lead characters both have two significant women in their lives. While Adrian is married to Ada and has a child with her, Meredith has a crush on Niru and would have loved it if their relationship had grown beyond the platonic. It is the contrast painted of these two women in the texts that this paper finds interesting. Meredith may not be a bad person as Niru thinks, yet when evaluated through the conservative religious and cultural frameworks operating within the narrative, her relationship with him is interpreted as having more of a negative influence on him. She discovers very early in their relationship that her love for him cannot be reciprocated and thus installs the app on his phone and encourages him to go on homosexual dates. Ada on the other hand is a Christian and has been raised to strongly believe in the values her faith teaches. She loves Adrian and believes her marriage to be perfect until she learns her husband is a homosexual. She chides him and reminds him "you need to read your Bible, Adrian. Even God forbids the act" a charge to which Adrian replies, "then let God be the one to judge me" (Dibia, 2011, pp. 94–95). The scene may be interpreted this scene as an instance where Dibia (2011), adopting a postmodern narrative lens complicates Ada's strict adherence to her Christian upbringing by juxtaposing her religious conditioning with an intimate moment of self-discovery

as seen in this scene below: In the bathroom, Ada decided against having a bath and settled for a long shower instead. As the warm water beat down on her, she grabbed a bar of soap and worked it on her body till she was covered in soapsuds. When she touched the outline of her breasts, she felt a tingle, a longing. She closed her eyes and, throwing out all the doctrines of her strict Christian upbringing, slowly but tenderly caressed herself, following the trail of the warm water until she was cradling the essence of her womanhood. Touching, feeling, probing until a quiet sigh escaped her hungering lips. She had never felt such intense release before and she was overcome by shame (Dibia, 2011, p. 126).

Though Ada would do everything to block what she considers “her shame from the shower” (Dibia, 2011, p. 126) considering what she was going through having discovered her husband’s sexuality, that she is commended by Iheoma for her wonderful looks that day after her shower leaves much to the reader’s imagination.

7. CONCLUSION

This study explores the representations of homosexuality in contemporary African fiction through an analysis of Jude Dibia’s *Walking with Shadows* and Uzodinma Iweala’s *Speak No Evil*. By deploying Queer theory and Freud’s psychoanalytic theories, the paper illuminates how characters navigate the constraints of identity under heavy socio-cultural and religious constraints. The analysis reveals that while rigid heteronormative values and religious rhetoric continue to police non-conforming sexualities in African societies, contemporary literature refuses to remain silent. Instead, these texts demonstrate that homosexual identities are an undeniable reality in postmodern African culture. Ultimately, this paper underscores that as African literature embraces bolder and more diverse narratives, the critique of human sexuality must evolve beyond essentialist boundaries to reflect a rapidly changing globalised world.

DATA AVAILABILITY

No new data were generated or analysed in this study.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that the content of this paper is unaffected by any financial or personal conflicts of interest.

FUNDING

The authors did not receive any specific financial assistance or funding to carry out this study.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study did not involve human participants, animals, confidential personal information, or sensitive data. Therefore, ethical approval and informed consent were not required.

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