



The Portrayal of Homosexuality in Selected Nollywood Movies: A Literary Perspective

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ABSTRACT

*This paper examines basically the portrayal of homosexuality in selected Nollywood movies and also its entrenchment in Nigerian literature. Most African nations have criminalized homosexuality which has coerced most gays and lesbians to be secretive in their dealings. Though largely invisible in day-to-day social life in Africa, homosexuality is gradually becoming more visible in Nollywood – Africa's largest movie industry. Existing studies on homosexuality have focused on its exploration in literature and have paid less attention to its representation in films. Connell's theory of Masculinity is adopted as theoretical framework. Two Nollywood films: *Men in Lov'* and *Hell or High Water* are selected and subjected to critical analysis. Findings reveal homosexuals as religious transgressors, immoral, effeminate, and also as sociocultural abomination. These are four dominant identities constructed for homosexuals in the film. However, it also highlights the role of religion in the identity construction of the homosexuals. In conclusion, the perception of homosexuality in the films is generally negative and oppositional which suggests that the Nigerian socio-sexuality landscape is strictly in support of heterosexuality and strictly against homosexuality while drawing from religion and morality*

Keywords: Homosexuality, Sexuality, Heterosexuality, Masculinity, Identification, Nollywood Movies, Hegemonic.

1.0. Introduction

Homosexuality is a common phenomenon evident in the chronically heterosexual and patriarchal Nigerian society. The idea of 'otherness' stems from its absolute difference from the norms and ideals people are conversant with. Commonly, being heterosexual or sexually straight is widely recognised and acceptable spiritually, socially and culturally within most human societies. Seventy-four (74) countries, mostly African, consider being homosexual a crime (*The Independent News*, 2016). In fact, in most nations, homosexuality is tagged constitutionally illegal and punishable by law. It becomes questionable in such society when a totally different sexuality is popularized and embraced. Hence, criticisms and oppositions by culture, religion and the society is highly rampant through derogatory remarks, abuses and negative gestures from people to those who belong to the community and who are popularly referred to as LGBT (Abbreviation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) people (Fenton, 2016). The reality of homosexuality is not only controversial in the Nigerian society; it is a global pandemic. This stems from its absolute difference from the fossilised hetero-normative perspective of sexuality. Through thematic contents, Nollywood has accounted and represented events and situations predominant in the Nigerian society. The increase in the number of gays and lesbians within the country

is also another issue Nollywood has taken interest in dramatising lately, considering the fact that its openness has been restrained by the Nigerian constitution (Hoad, 2013). Homosexuality has, therefore, been portrayed in diverse ways through such movies causing it to also yield different reactions from researchers and the Nigerian audience. This is because homosexuality can be tagged as being to the African mentality and orientation of the people. It is also mostly regarded as culturally, morally and spiritually absurd or negative. Some of the works existing in this area have represented how homosexuality is portrayed has been culturally defiant, some have criticised and justified its representation in Nollywood movies, some even reacted to it by illustrating its implications on the society and some have juxtaposed between heterosexuality and homosexuality through such movies. The Nigerian movie industry is popularly called Nollywood, a neologism from the American equivalent, Hollywood. The industry is huge producing about fifty (50) films weekly and two thousand (2000) films per annum recently making it the second biggest film producer in the world and contributing immensely to the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Nigerian movies are not only popular and widely watched; they also constitute a platform for the enactment of contemporary happenings and events. All these are, therefore, seen in Nollywood movies which feature what goes on in the society. Recently, Nollywood movie productions have explored the theme of homosexuality, with the representations varying from the coming out of the closet of homosexuals and the societal perception of homosexuality. The motivation for the present focus is on the identity construction of homosexuality as a sexual order in Nollywood movies. This involves a juxtaposition of the (re)presentations of the sexualities in selected homosexuality movies. (Sahara Reporters, 2015)

Scholars and researchers have studied queer sexualities, paying attention to the contextual analyses of the concept -reactions and attitudes from the society, how the idea is represented and the understanding of it. In addition, while contentions still exist on the 'Africanness' of queer sexuality-public discourse of such sexualities have been open to public debate in Nigeria. In fact, much of the debate was as a result of the 2015 criminalization of homosexuality by the government of Goodluck Jonathan which prescribed 14years in jail for homosexuals and people who encourage homosexuality. Some northern parts of the country even put those found as homosexuals to death by stoning. While jungle justice and violence are commonplace public punishments for subjects of homosexual acts, the role of movie productions as extending beyond providing entertainment cannot be discountenanced. This is because popular culture, to which movies belong, exists as a window through which happenings in the society are documented and it constitutes a repository through which public opinion is shaped. The present study therefore considers Identity construction of the (re)presentation of homosexuality as a sexual order in Nigerian movies as apposite and timely. One of the closest research projects done in this area is the work of Frida Lyonga who worked on Un-African, representation of Homosexuality. In this work, the author uses two Nollywood movies named *Men in Love* and *Rag Tag* to illustrate the different ways in which homosexuality is represented in Africa using concepts of trans-nationality and stereotype as analytical frameworks. The portrayal of the different representations of homosexuality is evident in the two movies. *Men in Love* represents homosexuality as a cultural taboo and an abominable act while *Rag Tag* illustrates indifference in the act by portraying the concept as equal to heterosexuality. While Lyonga's work was literary in approach, the present study focuses on the identity construction of the presentation of homosexuality.

Situating the research problem, discourses and studies on queer sexual orientations have witnessed an upsurge globally. Some of these studies have focused on literary depictions whether in texts or in movie productions. Within the Nigerian environment, scholarly enquiries of the representations of queer sexualities are substantial. Bethany (2012) advocates for an open discussion of homosexuality and its encouragement in the Nigerian society through liberalism. Hoad (2013) identifies that homosexuality is negatively portrayed in Nigerian movies and that homosexual orientations are adjudged as offshoots of poor mental health, witchcraft, etc. The derogatory representation and ostracization of non-hetero-normative sexuality span the Nigerian social, cultural, moral and religious contexts and these form the crux of Lyonga (2014) and Akande (2016). The present study extends existing studies.

2.0. Connell's Theory of Masculinity

Masculinity is a term often used to refer to manhood or manliness. It is a set of attributes, behaviours, and roles associated with boys and men. It deals with the qualities that are evident in male folks that make them qualified or easily identified as men. Connell in her book *Masculinities* (2005) highlights the different types of masculinities that exist within the society, and they include hegemonic masculinity, subordinated masculinity, marginalized and complicit masculinity.

Hegemony, Connell's first category of masculinity, refers to a cultural dynamic by which a male group holds a leading position in social life. This group is generally exalted and built on cultural ideals and institutional power. Paraphrasing Connell, she says that hegemonic masculinity is the totality of gender practice that legitimizes patriarchy, and is considered the ultimate form of masculinity. It is also seen as the form of practice that allows for the dominance of men over women. Connell maintains that hegemonic masculinity embodies the most honoured way of being a man, and it requires all other men to emulate or position themselves in relation to it, even if they cannot exhibit traits of hegemonic masculinity. Several expectations and obligations are associated to men based on their gender and in the African society, particularly a cultured group of people like Nigeria, men have roles they are expected to play and behaviours expected from them. Naturally, masculinity is biologically defined, that is, through sex after birth. Nowadays, masculinity is also culturally and socially defined, at the same time influenced. Cultural and environmental stipulations on who a man should be and what he should be like has both shaped people's orientation and also affected it- positively and negatively. Men who exhibit otherwise qualities are referred to as effeminate. Qualities expected of real men include: violence, aggression, stoicism or emotional restraint, courage, toughness and physical strength, athleticism, risk-taking, adventurous spirit, competitive nature, thrill and excitement-seeking, achievement and success. (Connell, 2005:103)

The second type of masculinity identified by Connell is subordinated masculinity. Connell maintains that subordinated masculinity comprises men whose behaviours are considered feminine of which gay masculinity is the most prominent. Beynon (2002) explains that the influence of feminism and the gay movement has exploded the concept of a uniform masculinity, and even sexuality is no longer held to be fixed or innate. This means that hegemonic masculinity has been demystified by these influences. According to Connell (1992:736) "erotic contact between men was expelled from the legitimate repertoire of dominant groups of men, and hegemonic masculinity was thus redefined as explicitly and exclusively heterosexual". Connell further maintains that:

To many people, homosexuality is a negation of hegemonic masculinity, and homosexual men must be effeminate. Given that assumption, antagonism toward homosexual men is used to define masculinity", a stance Herek (1986:563) summed up in the proposition that "to be 'a man' in contemporary American society is to be homophobic - that is, to be hostile toward homosexual persons in general and gay men in particular. (1992:736)

Another type of men that falls within this category is androgynous men, who exhibit the mixture of masculine and feminine features in a vague form. These men express their identity with regard to gender identity, sexual identity, or sexual lifestyle. Based on the test of relevance, the other types of masculinity which are marginalized and complicit masculinity, will not be analysed in this study. However, the homosexuals to be analysed in the films will be perceived from the angle of subordinated masculinity.

2.1. Homosexuality in Nigeria

It is no news that homosexuality or same sex partnerships are practiced in many parts of the world today. It may be fair to suggest that most parts of the Western world have reasonably embraced homosexuality and enabling frameworks been endorsed to support their activities. In America for example, there are enabling laws that protect the rights of these people. However, that is not the case in Nigeria. The act of homosexuality has been met with stiff opposition by proponents of both religious and cultural ideologies here in Nigeria (Ukah, 2018). This resistance has led to the creation of stringent laws with severe punishments for homosexuals in Nigeria (Amnesty International, 2015/16). The laws in Nigeria prescribe that offenders risk a 14-year jail term for homosexual acts or 10 years jail term for those who promote it. All these laws are stated in the Nigerian Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act of

2013. In view of this development, it is imperative to understand that implication of this scenario in a formal study. A number of studies have been conducted as it relates to the ethical, legal, health, religious or cultural implications of homosexual in Nigeria.

However, there is very little on the psychological dimensions of homosexuality, especially the perceptions and experiences of these homosexuals towards the laws that have been put in place. This study also aims to fill that gap. The current study explores some of these aspects of homosexual experience and what it really means to them in the Nigerian context. We explore the perspectives of these homosexuals from the varying media intrusions on homosexuality and seek to understand how they feel about the media responses to same sex relationships in Nigeria. This is in view of the fact that in the Western world, rights and privileges of homosexuals are well protected by the law. In the United States or United Kingdom, for example, there are laws that protect homosexuals from being fired for their sexual orientation.

2.2. Homosexuality in Nigerian Literature

In Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*, the African American professor Joe Golder, perhaps one of the most well-known gay characters in African literature, says to the Nigerian journalist Sagoe. "Do you think I know nothing of your Emirs and their little boys? You forget history is my subject. And what about those exclusive coteries in Lagos?" ... Though the two men are in Nigeria, where Golder is teaching African history, Sagoe claims ignorance: "You seem better informed than I am. But if you don't mind, I'll persist in my delusion" (Soyinka, 1965:199) What prompts Golder's history lesson on the existence of homosexuality in Nigeria is Sagoe's assertion that while America might be full of perversions, Nigeria is a comparatively healthy society. Golder's response to Sagoe has been discussed in many of the key studies of African literature and homosexuality such as Chris Dunton's *Pioneering Wheyting Be Dat? The Treatment of Homosexuality in African Literature*, which was published in 1989 and remains one of the most comprehensive essays on the subject; Neville Hoad's *African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality, and Globalization*, one of the first book-length engagements with African discourses of homosexuality; and Gaurav Desai's influential essay "Out in Africa". On the one hand, these critics agree that Joe Golder is typical of many of the homosexual characters that appear in African literature. He is lecherous and predatory, he's implicated in the death of the young boy Noah who jumps off a balcony and he's a Western character whose outsider status seems to confirm the idea that homosexuality comes from a foreign source.

One must admit, then, that even in his complexity Golder obscures the details and evidence of same-sex practices and relationships among Africans. Soyinka, like Chinua Achebe, gestures toward the presence of queer love but does not actually bring it into discourse. Dunton, at the end of his essay that surveys *The Interpreters* alongside dozens of African literary texts, concludes the following:

Nonetheless, 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. Whether this has been carried out within or beyond the limits of the stereotype, the identification of homosexuality with the West has helped defend that silence. An official history has concealed the reluctance of African writers to admit homosexuality into the bounds of a different kind of discussion (p, 445).

In this time a new cohort of writers, often referred to in Nigeria as the third generation, or those born after independence, has emerged and begun to tackle themes that are previously seen as taboos in African literature. An international gay rights movement has spread across the globe, while the Internet has facilitated dialogue as well as intellectual and romantic exchange within Africa and across the diaspora. And, at the same time, new laws have been enacted that have criminalized homosexuality and, consequently, pushed it into the centre of popular discourse. In the wake of these laws, authors like Binyavanga Wainaina, Chimamanda Adichie, Ogaga Ifowodo, Helon Habila, and even Soyinka himself have felt compelled to speak out against the criminalization of homosexuality. In the twenty-first century, characters like the light-skinned, predatory Joe Golder have been replaced by those like Chris Abani's Elvis Oke, a young Nigerian who impersonates Elvis Presley in heavily caked on white-face makeup, likes to dress in women's clothes, and has both heterosexual and homoerotic desires. There is

such an array of queer characters in contemporary Nigerian fiction that Nnedi Okorafor's science fiction novel *Lagoon* even imagines a future Lagos, inhabited by both humans and aliens, where LGBT Nigerians no longer need to live in secrecy. And yet there has been relatively little critical attention to these queer emergences in African writing. It is time, then, to re-examine the treatment of homosexuality in African literature, to take stock of what is being said about same-sex love and desire in the twenty-first century. I focus here on Nigerian literature because Nigeria provides a useful gauge to measure the rest of the continent. To be sure, Africa is an extremely diverse continent and the writing that emerges there is as multifaceted and varied as any writing anywhere.

Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that African states are also diverse and several countries have indeed revised previous laws against homophobia. But in many ways, homophobia and various literary responses to it in Nigeria are quite typical of an overall trend in much of Anglophone sub-Saharan Africa where anti-gay legislation and rhetoric is on the rise. In this context, an impressively critical mass of novels and short stories from across the continent now contain gay characters or same-sex desires, so much so that Jackie Kay, chair of the Caine Prize judging committee in 2014, felt compelled to note in her press release that judges were heartened by how many entrants were drawn to explorations of a gay narrative (2014 Caine Prize Press Release). Examining the body of literature produced in Nigeria, the country with some of the most draconian laws against homosexuality on the continent as well as some of its most noted literary voices, sheds light on how the literary community critiques discourses of homophobia and explores the everyday fears, desires, pleasures, and anxieties of those who experience same-sex attraction.

3.0. The Synopsis of *Hell or High Water*

Hell or High Water tells the story of a young pastor loved and adored by the people around him. Things change for him when he has to confront a hidden truth about himself a truth that could make or break him psychologically. But whatever decision he makes, he is still going to crash and burn, for life as he once knew it would never be the same again. The movie explores the reality of sexuality amidst spirituality, exorcism, blackmail and family life. *Hell or High Water* challenges stereotypical narratives about sexuality and spirituality.

3.1. The Synopsis of *Men in Love*

In *Men in Love*, Charles, an accomplished businessman with a wife, a son, gets involved in philandering. He goes to a hotel with his female secretary who was recommended to him by Whitney. The wife who gets to know, goes to the hotel and catches them red handed as the secretary is in her panties trying to take off Charles clothes. Out of jealousy and anger, Whitney beats up the secretary, breaks the bottle of wine, and stabs her on the back and storms out. That same evening, Charles returns with a bloodstained shirt, and makes straight to the bedroom. He accuses Whitney of almost committing murder and another brawl ensues. Charles asks for forgiveness soon after and they make love.

The following day, Charles leaves his house for his office, when he sees his long-lost friend, Alex (Muna Obiekwe). They exchange pleasantries and Alex mentions his purpose of coming to Charles' company and he also insists they take a stroll. At the same time, back in Charles' house, his wife narrates his husband's ordeal to her friends, Flora and Zina. She however, tells them that Charles is very good in bed and they laugh over it. The following day in a hotel, Charles introduces Whitney to Alex. From then onwards, Alex becomes a close friend of the family. One day, Alex asks Charles' opinion on homosexuality and he realizes that the latter is neutral about it. At this juncture, Alex reveals that he is a gay and that he wants Charles to be his partner. Out of shock and anger, Charles storms out of Alex's house. A few days later, Alex apologises for his proposal to Charles and invites him to his birthday party. With Whitney's support, Charles attends the birthday that night.

He soon falls asleep and wakes up the following morning to see himself in Alex's bed, with only his shorts on. He realizes that he had been raped, raped by his fellow man. Charles slaps Alex and promises to arrest him. After days of pondering, he returns to Alex to seek his forgiveness. He accepts Alex's proposal and buys a car for him. After some time, he packs into Charles' house on the pretext that his (Alex's) house is being renovated. Whitney, believing that Alex is a calming influence on Charles, allows

him to move into their home. One day, Flora and Tasha are in a restaurant when they see Charles and Alex enter the restaurant laughing and holding each other. They even go to the extent of kissing in public. They refuse to tell Whitney because she will not believe them. During Charles' birthday celebration, he refuses to sew the same outfit with his wife, but he does so with Charles. Whitney storms out of the birthday party. It is at this juncture that Flora and Tasha tell Whitney what they saw the previous day. Realising that Alex and Charles are gay partners, Whitney goes to her house dazed. There is a cold war between Whitney and Alex. She tells Alex to leave her house but he refuses. Charles is neutral since he does not make any comment whenever they (Alex and Whitney) quarrel. One afternoon, Whitney who has been trying to call Charles on the phone without success barges into his office and catches him with Alex naked, making love. This being the crescendo of her patience, Whitney resorts to seeing a pastor who prays for her and Charles returns to her asking for forgiveness.

4.0. Identity Constructions of Homosexuals in the Selected Movies

The movie *Men in Love* portrays, predominantly, negative stereotypes on homosexuality by portraying homosexuality as a demonic or satanic influence that is tied to having a licentious lifestyle. *Hell or High Water*, which is more transnational in orientation, radically challenges negative same-sex stereotyping, as it represents homosexuality on equal level with heterosexuality: that is, as a relationship that can be grounded on strong love and respect. The following are the identities constructed in the Nigerian public space as portrayed in the movies: Homosexuals as Religious Transgressors, Homosexuals as Immoral, Homosexuals as Effeminate, and Homosexuals as Sociocultural Abomination.

4.1. Homosexuals as Religious Transgressors:

Most times, in the Nigerian society, homosexuals are regarded as terrible sinners. Upon mentioning homosexuality, the mind of an average Nigerian is tuned to its sinful nature. It is at this point biblical allusions are made to identify how God established sexual intercourse for a man and a woman and not between men, or how God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because of such similar actions. All these are religious ideologies already rooted in the minds of people, thereby, leading to an instinctive and immediate rejection of homosexuality. Such instance is portrayed in *Hell or High Water*. Relatively, it is generally believed that homosexuality is a terrible religious transgression because it is tagged as a sin against God, one's rightful partner, and one's body as evident in *Hell or High Water*. After Gbolahan is caught, he laments how much he feels sorry from transgressions made against himself. This is more reason why Pastor Gbolahan's sexuality is more shocking because his religious title paints a picture of holiness to people while homosexuality is generally regarded as the opposite.

In *Men in Love*, the religious views on homosexuality triumph, as the film ends with the scene in which prayers deliver Charles from the 'demonic bondage' of homosexuality. The prayer scene actually portrays the main gay character (Alex) as demonic. Despite Charles' signs of disapproval after their first sexual encounter, he continues in a sexual relationship with Alex until his wife, Whitney, finally finds out and decides to leave her marital home. In despair, she comes across a female pastor who encourages her to pray for the restoration of her marriage. The prayer scene crosscuts with a scene that shows Charles in his office, and once again hears the standard danger or eerie background sound. As the prayers intensify, Charles reacts in a way that suggests a recovery from trance or a regain of his consciousness. After this, he immediately rushes into his car in search of his wife and finally locates the pastor's house, meeting them still in prayers. There, he apologizes to Whitney and they reconcile. A key point to note about this representation at the end of the film is that no form of evil is attached to Charles' promiscuous attitude with other girls before he met Alex. Rather than reflecting a deliverance from promiscuity and infidelity, the prayer scene shifts all the blame to the gay character. Charles is delivered from the spell of a demonic gay or better still, from the 'bondage' of homosexuality. In this way, *Men in Love* on the one hand portrays heterosexual infidelity as normal and bearable in the African culture, since Charles's wife stays with him despite the numerous extra-marital relationships he had with other women. Moreover, it portrays homosexuality not only as abnormal and intolerable in the African culture, but also as something against which the powerful intervention of the Divine should be sought. Christianity, as portrayed in the prayer scene, sends out a message of condemnation of homosexuality,

and no room is given for homosexuality to put up a defence against the religious reproof. In hell or high water however, space is given for the religious positions on same-sex practices to be challenged.

In a scene towards the end of the film, one of the members, a mentee, condemns homosexuality by quoting different Bible verses, especially from Leviticus, the Bible chapter that is popularly used to condemn same-sex sexuality: Leviticus chapter 20 verse 13 says that 'if man also lie with mankind as with a woman, then both of them are committing an abomination and are condemned to death'.

4.2. Homosexuals as Immoral:

Homosexuality is also regarded as pollution, defilement and contamination of what is right in the Nigerian public space. People who are not religiously inclined still regard it as wrong and below the standard of what is right. There seems to be a natural ideological construct formed in the human mind that makes an identity construction about sexuality to be seen as unnatural and morally wrong. More reason why homosexuals refuse to publicise their sexuality is because it is considered as a moral decadence that should not spread or be encouraged among the people at the most possible way. This is evident in *Hell or High Water* as Gbolahan finds it difficult to open up to his wife about his sexuality because he understands that it will be questioned and he would be discouraged from such behaviour.

4.3. Homosexuals as Effeminate:

In an average African society like Nigeria where the structure of the society is patriarchal, men are accorded more importance and respect. At such, men try as much as possible to meet up to the demands, responsibilities and expectations attached to their gender. The subject of sexuality is a major area where men tend to express their prowess. Gay men are subsequently faced with people challenging or questioning their masculinity. The ideology behind this is that real men go after women. A reversed situation where a man is like a woman to a fellow man in a homosexual relationship presents the opportunity of effeminizing such a man. His ability to relate with women physically and sexually becomes a debatable subject matter. At such, de-masculinizing and effeminizing gay men are major reasons why they prefer to keep up the pretense in their everyday life. As much as possible, they try not to behave or act in any way that will raise people's curiosity.

4.4. Homosexuals as Sociocultural Abomination:

Homosexuality is regarded as a despicable and shameful act in the society and its cultural practices. It is a taboo capable of stigmatizing homosexuals in the worst possible and most shameful way. Homosexuality is therefore considered as a disorder in the normal society, contrary to the norm that the people within the society are accustomed to. Cultural beliefs and practices only support heterosexuality and at such, deviant sexual acts are considered abominable. Even the marital rites in the sociocultural setting make provision for only heterosexual unions and marriages. Even legalities guiding the society mark homosexuality as a punishable offence. In the movies considered, after homosexuals are tagged 'outcast', their relatives try as much as possible to keep it a secret rather than spreading it because they know how shameful and 'implicative' it can be for the individual and their entire family, a blemish to the family name and integrity.

From the above, the identified representations discussed in this paper imply homosexuality to be a deviation from societal definitions of masculinity and a demonic act which should be battled spiritually. Expectation from the society is that a man should be straight. In Kelechi's case in *Hell or High Water*, he is homosexual and therefore an abomination to the society. He confirms to his wife after he is discovered that he and his gay partner are the only ones aware of his sexuality. This fact confirms how abominable the act is in the eyes of the society:

Pastor Gbolahan: Knocks Kelechi's door

Kelechi: Hi, what are you doing here?

Pastor Gbolahan: I came to see you, I was hoping maybe we could pick up things from where we left off

Kelechi: We never left anything, we are done

Pastor Gbolahan: That was not the vibe I got the endless text messages, emails begging us to work things out.

Kelechi: Messages you never responded to, I'm glad you remember

Pastor Gbolahan: What did you expect me to do Kelechi? Your wife played off everything the moment she sent that video to my parents, my life has been a living hell. There were just no where I could fit you in

Kelechi: Is that why you married her?

Pastor Gbolahan: They made me to do it Kelechi
My heart belongs to you



Figure 1. Taken from *Hell or High Water*



Figure 2. Taken from *Hell or High Water*.



Figure 3. Taken from *Men in Love*



Figure 4. Taken from *Men in Love*

It is discovered at the end of the movies that homosexuality is condemned and invariably demonized. The movies treated, therefore, confirm the general belief about homosexuality in the country. This consistent recurrence in Nollywood movies shows the perception of homosexuality as a religious and social aberration and differs from the way Westerners view it as a medical or psychological issue. This can be blamed on the impact of culture in Africans' way of life since it patterns their sense of behaviour and judgment, while it opposes the way Westerners are allowed to think freely and make choices at will without subjection to societal and religious critique. This implies that homosexuality is deeper and wider than it is portrayed in Nollywood movies. Allowing religious and societal dictates cloud one's sense of scripting is too shallow as there are other sides to the act that can be explored.

4.5. Stereotypical Depictions of Homosexuality in the Selected Movies

Men in Love tells the story of a business man, Charles, who is married and has a son, but still cheats on his wife (Whitney) with other women. He coincidentally meets one of his childhood friends, Alex, who expresses interest in having a homosexual relationship with him. In spite of Charles's refusal, Alex drugs and rapes him, and following this 'initiation' into homosexuality, the two become lovers to Whitney's disappointment. In the end, a prayer of deliverance from Whitney's pastor leads Charles to reconcile with his wife, in *Hell or High Water*, the film tells the story of a young pastor loved and adored by the people around him. Things change for him when he has to confront a hidden truth about himself—a truth that could make or break him psychologically. But whatever decision he makes, he is still going to crash and burn, for life as he once knew it would never be the same again.

Traditionally, Nollywood films on homosexuality centre on heterosexual couples, with the non-straight persons assigned backseat roles as secondary characters, who attempt to ruin heterosexual relationships but fail in the end. Like films such as *Emotional Crack* (Oduwa, 2009), *Last Wedding* (Iroegbu, 2004) and *End Time* (Nnebue, 1999), *Men in Love* tows this Nollywood mainstream representation of homosexuality. In fact, the storyline and representation of homosexuality in *Men in Love* starkly contradicts its title. The film's title connotes a deep romantic bond between men, but its storyline principally centres on a 'heterosexual' character, Charles, whose marriage is almost ruined because he is unwittingly 'lured' into homosexuality by a gay character (Alex). The film maintains the stereotypical pattern of constructing homosexuality from a heteronormative point of view (Hernández & Perriam, 2000). In the same view *Hell or High Water* share the same relationship as of that of men in love in terms of homosexuality and spirituality. *Hell or High Water* portrays homosexuality as a love relationship between pastor Gbalahun Jinadu and kelechi that developed from childhood, friends to guy partners, *Men in Love* presents the relationship between Alex and Charles as based on selfish gain and deceit. Alex visits a company to solicit funding for a project and realizes that Charles, his childhood friend, is the manager of the company. Although Alex reveals his interest in having a relationship with Charles, he presents homosexuality as a practice that is adopted for its 'benefits' rather than as a form of sexuality that is based on attraction, desire, or love. This representation is reflected in the 'restaurant scene', where the terms 'homosexual' and 'gay' are mentioned for the first time. In that particular scene, Alex is given an opportunity to throw some light on homosexuality as Charles poses the question;

“I find it surprising why anybody would [want to] be gay, I mean [...] what do you stand to gain?” In response to this, Alex states: according to the lesbians, there would be no unwanted pregnancy, and for a guy like you (referring to Charles), if you’re a bisexual you wouldn’t be having the kind of problem you have with Whitney now. From Alex’s statement, homosexuals and bisexuals are portrayed as selfish, and he a homosexual, is portrayed as a corruptor. Alex makes no mention of love or desire, but rather proceeds to identify homosexuality as the perfect cover which Charles could use to conceal his infidelity towards his wife. Negativity is not only reflected in Alex’s words, gestures, or the devious stare that accompanies his statement, but also in the change of sounds in the restaurant scene.

When Alex reveals to Charles that he is gay, the soft musical sound suddenly switches into an eerie sound. This spooky sound which is common with Nollywood films when evil or danger is imminent, also accompanies the first sexual encounter between Alex and Charles. The circumstance itself under which Alex and Charles engage in sex, portrays the gay character as evil. Charles had shown disinterest and disgust in a homosexual relationship, but Alex invites him for his birthday party and when he attends, Alex secretly drugs his drink. Charles becomes drowsy from drinking, Alex carries him into his room where they have sex or to put it more accurately, where he rapes Charles. Charles’ reaction when he wakes up and realizes what had transpired only adds to the negative portrayal of homosexuality. In the scene, Charles grimaces in pain, places his hands over his anus, and limps out of the room.

Men in Love thus stereotypically portrays homosexual lovemaking as painful and terrible. In addition, homosexual practices in the film mainly occur in what Naficy (2003, p. 213) refers to as “claustrophobic spaces,” that is; enclosed and confined spaces, or spaces that impede vision. The restaurant scene is actually a ‘closed-shot composition’ of Charles and Alex’s conversation. There is no portrayal of any other clients in the scene and even Larry (the cook and owner of the restaurant), another gay character whom they talk about, remains invisible. The sexual encounters between Alex and Charles are also shot in ways that ‘impede vision and access’ (ibid), whereas the heterosexual love-making between Charles and his wife as well as his other girlfriends are graphically represented. In hell or high water, male homosexuality is portrayed as any other form of sexuality which is based on desire, attraction and love. Despite the disapproval of the people surrounding pastor Gbolahun Jinadu in which most of his member sees him as a mentor.

In the film, the intimate exchange between the non straight characters is imbued with passion, emotion and romantic background music. *Hell or high water* therefore challenges the tendency of closeting homosexuality in African films, or of representing it as evil, and ‘abnormal’. To use Naficy’s (2003, p. 211) words in a sexual rather than a gendered context, hell or high water “destabilize[s] the traditional [sexual] binarism of space,” whereby heterosexuality is represented in non-claustrophobic spaces and homosexuality or same-sex desire in claustrophobic spaces.

With respect to gender, *Rag Tag* also challenges the stereotypical perception of gay men as different from heterosexual men in terms of masculinity. *Rag and Tag* are portrayed as masculine rather than effeminate. Unlike *Hell or water*, there is a marked difference in the gender representation between the actual gay characters in *Men in Love* and the character whom gayness is thrust upon – Charles. Charles maintains masculine traits throughout the film, while the other gay characters assume feminine roles. Even Charles’ cheating with other girls tends to booster his manliness as one of Whitney’s friends (Flora) consoles her with the statement, “it is in men’s nature to cheat.” In contrast, the attribute that most of the real gay characters are associated with is cooking, and cooking is more attached to femininity. This representation is reflected in the ‘restaurant scene’, in which Charles expresses surprise when he finds out that Larry – a man (the gay character whom we never see), could cook so well. As for Alex, he does not only cook delicious meals but actually assumes the role of a ‘housewife’ when he moves into Charles’s apartment for a temporary stay. Throughout his stay, he cooks and does household chores and even picks up a quarrel with Whitney over who should serve Charles’ meal, when she attempts to do this herself. In *Men in Love*, which is set entirely in an African context, the quality of ‘good cooks’ attributed to the actual gay characters stereotypically portrays them as ‘sissies’ (Russo, 1987, p. 4). Their very performance of roles traditionally attached to women reflects a sense of ‘masculine-femininity’. Alex’s ex-boyfriend, Bobby, is shown crying when Alex jilts him for Charles. In the African context, crying is considered more of a feminine than a masculine trait. As the stereotypical saying goes, “real men don’t cry.”

5.0. Conclusion

Identification is essential in the portrayal of homosexuality. As much as possible, it explicates the innate feelings of people about the sexual act. At such, this premise has been the thrust of this study. Identity construction used in actors discourses were identified, analysed and found to determine that the Nigerian socio-sexuality landscape is strictly in support of heterosexuality and strictly against homosexuality while drawing from religion and morality. Findings in this research therefore indicate the perception of homosexuality is generally negative and oppositional. Hence, movie producers try to achieve a portrayal of this same perception in their movies. In conclusion, we submit that identity construction is the major tool for the portrayal of homosexuality in these movies.

6.0. Recommendation

People's sexuality is a private, individual, delicate and yet critical subject matter. Consequently, the privacy and individuality of sexual orientations should be respected. However, more studies on the representations and portrayal of alternative sexualities are encouraged. This is expected to provide fresh insight to long-denied and largely ignored marginal sexual orientations. In addition, these studies should explore other explanations for engagement in these queer sexualities. While the present study identifies cultural ethos and religious beliefs as central to the demonisation and deprecation of homosexuality, we believe that there are other causatives which should be explored. This is because the repetitive review of homosexuality in the religious sense is too narrow, shallow and streamlined. There are several reasons people go into homosexuality which could range from psychological to environmental factors. Further studies are also encouraged in the study of language use among homosexuals in line with the pursuit of Lavender Linguistics. Through this, it is expected that more knowledge of queer sexualities will be diffused.

Finally, the Nigerian policy on the media which forbids a display of homosexual acts on screen and allows only heterosexual ones should be reviewed. As expected, recent movies have challenged this by enacting homosexual and erotic scenes on screen, as identifiable in *Hell or high water*. Therefore, it is necessary to consider banning both heterosexual and homosexual sexual actions from the screen. Since the decision is based on the questionable morality of homosexuality, it suffices to say that both are still immoral if the diverse age-groups of their audience or viewers are put into consideration.

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