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*Clement C. Idegun Ph.D.*  
*12th December, 2022*

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## African Short Story Writers and Homosexuality: A Critical Perspective on Selected Short Stories

Clement Chukwuka Idegwu Ph.D  
idegwucc@yahoo.com  
idegwuc2@gmail.com  
Department of Languages,  
Faculty of Arts,  
Delta State University  
Agbor, Delta State.

### Abstract

*Homosexuality as a thematic construct is a recent development in African literature, especially in the short story genre. It is worthy of academic scrutiny or intentness now, because if the younger generation is left in the dark, it will portend great evil for the continent. Though Wole Soyinka (1992) in *The Interpreters* talks about gayness while Jude Dibia (2005) in *Walking with Shadows* more than three decades after, discusses same, the theme of homosexuality is uncommon in African literature. The short story, a popular genre, is yet to explore homosexuality in African short stories. The focus is on its emergence, rape of the victims, the mindsets of the victims, its effects, the African would view and how to redeem the society from the cankerworm that is gradually eating deep into the fabric of the society. The researcher carries out a queer theory analysis of characters of the selected short stories in order to appreciate their thought process and communities' perception of the topic. The concept will be analysed using Ernest Emenyonu's "What the Babysitter Had in common with My Bishop," Halima Aliyu's "Solid" and Chimamanda Ngozi Adiechie's "On Monday Last Week," "The Shivering" and "Jumping Monkey Hills." The paper recommends that though writers of homosexuality exist, their arts should be geared towards condemning the act in its entirety, sensitizing the people on the need for victims to report their abusers to the law enforcement agencies and civil right agencies who will fight their cause. The abused or victims should also be made to know that gifts from their abusers are to silent them and make them victims forever, hence, they should not be fooled. Novelist should take a firm stand on the abnormality of homosexuality, its being a taboo, and the beauty of the victims reporting to the appropriate quarters in order to nip the act in the bud, receiving the desired counseling and be reintegrated into normal life.*

**Keywords:** Homosexuality, rape of victims, desired counseling, reintegrated, normal life and cankerworm.



## Introduction

Though the concept of homosexuality in African literature is not all that a new development as it has been sparsely treated, it has not been a topical issue in the African short story. This is due to the people's perception of the term. Everyone seems to shy away from the subject due to its controversial nature. Though African novelists such as Wole Soyinka in *The Interpreters*, Kofi Awonor in *This Earth My Brothers*, Yambo Owologuem in *Bound to Violence*, and Ayi Kwei Armahn in *Two Thousand Seasons* talk about homosexuality, examining its negativity, African short story writers have not seen this as an object of exploration.

In the works mentioned above, attempts have been made to show how the colonial masters and a host of other foreigners initiated, practised and promoted homosexuality in the continent. But not much have been said about African involvement, in spite of the act gaining currency underground. The function of the short stories writers may not be fully appreciated if they fail to discuss this matter in their social domain. This is why Chinweizu et al posit that:

...in Africa we recognize that art is in the public domain, in a sense of social commitment demands that the writer pays attention to his craft, that he does not burden his public with unfinished or indecipherable works. It also demands that his theme be germane to the concerns of his community. (259)

The purpose is to explicate that homosexuality in whatever name it takes is unhealthy and an act of bestiality, which should not be practiced and encouraged, and where the act is on, something tangible must be done to stop it because of its devastating effects on the society. Every committed writer has an obligation to himself and society, whose interest must be protected. He uses his works to fight against social ills, re-directing and repositioning his society for good. A writer's art is a response to the socio-political, economic and religious issues of his time which create vibrations in his consciousness and compels him to create and recreate realities of life as they are in his society. His intention is to arouse the consciousness of his people to the unmistakable realities of their existence. He ensures that he does not remain indifferent to the things that run counter to their individual and collective well-being. His utmost quest is the realisation of his dream world, where the ideal is not only practiced but sustained.

This is why the thrust of this article is to enhance the people's awareness of the evils of homosexuality no matter the shape it takes. This article will direct the people on the path to follow, and give vision to the future generation. The paper focuses on how people are lured into homosexuality and how not to get involved.



### Literature Review

This study focuses on the analysis of selected short stories aimed at educating the readers on what homosexuality is, divine injunctions against it, how people get involved, why victims are silent and how to speak out among other things.

Chambers 21st Century Dictionary (1999) defines homosexual as "a person who is sexually attracted to people of the same sex, having a sexual attraction to people of the same sex" (645). A critical explication of the definition above shows that the act is a deviation from the norm; male/female sexual relationship 'Homosexuality' which is coined in 1869 by a Swiss doctor became widely spread in English from the 1890s. It was however replaced in the 1960s by the term 'gay'.

This done, not much of the term homosexuality is know in Africa. Stephen O. Murray (2013) affirms that:

Indeed very little has been published about female or male homosexuality in post colonial Africa. Absence of evidence, particularly an absence proclaimed in official ideology, should not be taken as evidence of absence, but rather as absence of research in contemporary, urban Africa. The literature that can be reviewed is out of date, but still of interest in showing that various homosexuality exist at the time of European colonization. Especially where Western influences (notably Christian Marxist) have been pervasive, there is now a decadent, bourgeois Western innovation forced upon colonial Africa by White men or, alternatively by Islamic slave traders.

The above quotation explicates that homosexuality existed at the time when the West colonized Africa. It also states that it was a project on Africans. Zahrah Nesbitt - Ahmed (2012) avers to Murrays postulation that "In many African societies homosexual is seen as "Un African" and a Western import"

Ernest Emenyonu (2015) in "What the Babysitter and My Bishop Had in Common" stressed how Africans were raped by the West:

Very late that night I woke up when I felt a hand creep up my thigh and second person was in bed with me. I was frightened to death when I realised it was the white man, the Assistant Bishop ... the Bishop shivered and left something slimy on my thigh. Some nights he would visit twice, some once, and on a few occasions thrice ... there was an unspoken agreement that imposed a rigid code of silence. But by age thirteen, ... My Bishop had ... several times, disvirgined me! And no one knew. No one knew. And no one knew! (67).



The above explains how Thomas the narrator in Emenyonu's story was raped by the Assistant Bishop, a supposed man of God. This is tragic indeed. The works of fiction captures how victims are daily betrayed by those they feel are men of integrity, and live eternally with the burden of being mute. Short story writers give ingenious insights of true life reports. This is in consonant with responsible literature which mirrors the society giving readers all experiences.

Joseph Carroll (2014) corroborates this assertion by stating that: "Functional stories create virtual worlds and enable people explore possible exceptional insights into the sources of human behaviour and the qualities of experience. Usually, readers are invited to share vicariously in the experience of characters and to respond emotionally to the characters. ("Violence in Literature" 3).

### **Theoretical Frame Work**

This paper adopts queer theory as its analytical approach. This theory studies the social construct of specie of deviant sexual behaviour. It is a critique that falls into a normal and deviant groups, most especially sexual actions and identities.

Ann. B. Dobie (2009) states that "the term queer theory reflects an evolving alliance between gay men and lesbians, as opposed to the usual male studies and female studies that characterized earlier gay and lesbian movements" (III). She further sees it as "a more inclusive term that might first be assumed, as it takes as its subject matter all sexual topics that are considered unusual or odd - in other words, "queer" - by the mainstream" (III). Queer theory rejects the idea of sexuality being seen as something which should be judged by extraneous standards of truth and morality by biology on categorization of men/women, male/female.

Boris Bertolt (2019) argues that "homosexuality is not a conceptual category everywhere ... it connotes symmetry between male - male and female - female relationships ... when used to characterize individuals, it implies that erotic attraction originates in a relatively stable, more or less exclusive attribute of the individual. The thrust of the matter here is that this kind of relationship is abnormal a deviate from the norm. Hence literary artist are poised to ensure that it is brought to an end.

Emenyonu, Aliyu and Adichie are in a society where sexual immorality, poverty and crime are on the increase daily. The Bandits and terrorists have not help matters. The political class also has not help matters due to self-aggrandizement, hence injustice is the order. This accounts for Emenyonu, Aliyu and Adichie's desire to write on homosexuality a vice that is gaining currently in the society.



### Acts of Homosexuality in the society

Over time, it has been on record that some people get involved in homosexuality unintentionally. In Ernest Emenyomu's *"What the Babysitter and My Bishop Had in common"*, in Princess Mmaeyen and other stories, Thomas, the narrator explains:

I believe my elder sister that white men could do no wrong. So, I held my peace about what that white man, the missionary Assistant Bishop did with me. No, did to me that was how I saw it then. But before I tell this story I have to first tell what someone else had done with me or to me eight years earlier when I was five maybe four, and she was the girl my mother had brought from another village to babysit me. (60)

Here, it is glaring that whatever the Bishop and the babysitter did was without his consent. The narrative persona talks about "did with me. No did to me, had done with me or to me." These are clear indications that he did not give his consent. The statement above also explains his innocence. Sarah Bereford states that:

Current understanding suggests that the term "age of consent" presents a twofold approach; it is firstly generally understood to be the age at which individuals can legally engage in sexual intercourse and sexual activity. Secondly, it is also the age at which the law deems those individuals to be capable of giving genuinely informed consent. It thus demands "a requisite level of cognitive and emotional understanding" (761)

It is pertinent to stress that the law stipulates an age at which an individual is capable of giving genuinely informed consent. It is a moment when the individual is deemed to have an appreciable level of cognitive and emotional level of comprehension of the issues at stake. At five or thirteen years of age, is indeed far from it. So, it is instructive to say that Thomas, the narrative persona in Emenyomu's story was abused. Whatever was done to him at that age had nothing to do with his consent. He explained that:

The babysitter removed her clothes and place you (that is *Thomas* italise mine) on top of her bare body as she lay on her back, opened her legs and moved her body left and right, up and down till she cried out and you felt sorry for her because you thought you had wounded her. You did not know what she was doing till she puts you down, put on her dress again, sweep the floor and gave you one or two peppermint sweets or chewing gum. (61)

Above is how Thomas was abused at the age of four or five. But at thirteen, the act of homosexuality, this papers' main thrust, was done. The Bishop raped him: "I spent



a number of weekends at the Bishop's house after that initial one. I had an open invitation visit after visit, and the pattern was the same... The first night of the visit, I joyfully went to bed early, contented" (66-67). This was because he felt secured in the Bishop's house. He never thought the Bishop would betray such trust. The narrative persona further states that:

Very late that night I woke up when I felt a hand creep up my thigh and a second person was in bed with me. I was frightened to death when I realised it was the white man, the Assistant Bishop. He was doing the same thing Maria had done to me eight years or so ago but in a different fashion. Where Maria cried out, the Bishop shivered and left something slimy on my thigh. Some nights he would visit twice, some once, and on a few occasions thrice. Like Maria there was an unspoken agreement that imposed a rigid code of silence. But by age thirteen, my babysitter and my Bishop had in turns, several times, disvirgined me! And no one knew. No one knew. And no one knew!  
(67)

Thomas, became a victim of homosexuality at age thirteen. The abuser has a way of making victims maintain a code of silence which makes them susceptible to further abuse. According to the narrative persona: "I had an open invitation visit after visit", and the pattern was the same - a hired cyclist took me there and the Bishop's driver accompanied by the steward took me home Sunday evening in the old van used for local runs" (67). This a device usually employed by homosexual to entice their prey. This paper, therefore explicates the devices daily employed by these homosexuals not only to lure their victims to getting involved, but to fall in love with the act. Making sure that he "ate foo-foo, drank fanta, and took home cabin biscuits to share with" his "siblings in the family and friends at school" (67) are deceptive devices used to achieve their purpose.

The truth remains that the narrator being abused and compensated fell in love with the act that he willingly visits the Bishop on weekends for further encounters. At thirteen he has become a gay and may not only live the rest of his life as one but lead others into this abnormality.

Emenyonu's text done with, it is imperative to analyse Aliyu's "Solid," a story in her collection: *Five on The Tip of Ice*. The thrust of the story is homosexuality. The setting, "Lighter International School in Katur, a Missionary School" where Rev. Silas Manarakis is the principal is a breeding ground for homosexuals. The fact that some Bishops or Reverend Fathers in Missionary schools, engage their students in homosexual acts, accounts for students so initiated raping and forcing others into



homosexuality. Aliyu in "Solid" also explicates how homosexuals prey on their victims. Richard a victim explains his pains thus:

He knew they would come for him and he shivered in the darkness, peering through his blurred vision as shadows clawed at him. He breathed through his mouth, as suddenly, the air shied from his bulbous nose. He sat, paralysed by the knowledge that there was nothing he could do to stop what was to come.

Then they arrived. He knew them as the "Wandering Hands." They clutched at his arms and legs, pinning him face down on the bed. Another hand clamped over his mouth. No need. Richard was always too terrified to cry out. A fourth pair of hands pulled down his pijamas. (55)

These are the predicaments of victims of homosexuality, the world over. They are regularly abused. Things are done without their consent. Unfortunately for Richard, and his likes, he waits every night to be molested "thinking there is nothing he can do" (55). Unfortunately for Richard, no one will believe him and if the principal is like The Bishop in Emenyonu's short story, another homosexual, then he would be finished forever. If Richard was to tell the truth, he could never recount how many times he was illicitly penetrated or how many visitors he received at night. It was as if he always passed out and it was the pain bidding him a good morning that was obvious testimony to his humiliation (55-56).

This is an act of man's wickedness, Pelikan Jaroslav (1968) cites Martin Luther stating that: 'same sex conduct "suppresses nature." In as much as they depart from the natural passion and longing of the male for female, which is implanted into nature by God, and desired what is altogether contrary to nature. Whence comes the Perversity? Undoubtedly from Satan' (255).

Aliyu's "Solid" done with, it is patient to x-ray Adichie's short stories for this paper's analysis. In "On Monday Last Week," the reader is presented with Kamara's traits of homosexuality:

She turned thinking it was Josh, but Trace appeared, curvy in leggings and a tight sweater, smiling, quilting, pushing away long dread locks from her face with paint-stained fingers. It was a strange moment. Their eyes held and suddenly Kamara wanted to lose weight and wear make up again. A fellow woman who had the same thing that you have? Her friend Chinwe would say if she ever told her. Tufia! What kind of foolishness is that? (79-80)

Kamara is presented here as a homosexual. Her behaviour towards Tracy is strange. That she acknowledges this shows her acceptance that there was a departure from



the norm. Even when she says "Tufia! What kind of foolishness is that," readers still find her engaging in it. James Richels and Stuart Rechels (2012) in advancing the cause of homosexuality argue that if one says "the purpose of our genitals is to procreate: sex is for making babies... gay sex is unnatural because it is sexual activity divorced from its natural purpose," (45). It, therefore, implies that being exceedingly kind, being left-handed, being tall are unnatural in every sense of the word. Seth Millstein (2014) corroborating the Rachels' proposal argues that childless couples enjoy "hospital visitation rights, joint tax return, welfare benefits for spouse and estate inheritance" which homosexuals should also be entitled to as childless couples. It should be stressed that the arguments above do not make same sex marriage tenable. Leviticus 18:22 GNB reads: "No man is to have sexual relationship with another man; God hates that" (119). King James says "it is an abomination," (137). Kamara, before this stage of the story, did not demonstrate traits of homosexuality, though her marriage has been facing challenges. When did she become a lesbian? What she cabbages into her soul must have been responsible, hence she got choked. She is disillusioned about her marriage and cannot define herself as an autonomous person. She moves to shed her idea about heterosexuality and become a lesbian as shown by her behaviour since on Monday last week, hence, when she call Josh to have his dinner, and "thought about the curve of his lips being like that of Tracy's," she hits her toe against the edge of the counter. She began to bump into things too often" (80). She even feels "please that Tracy did not kiss Neil *her husband* (italise mine), that they said "Hi, you" to each other as though they were brother and sister. Femi Eromosele (2013) stresses that "Kamara fantasizing about a relationship with Tracy, reacts in her presence as she would in the presence of an attractive man; "Tracy's hand was still on her chin, slightly titting her head up, and Kamara felt at first like an adored little girl and then like a bride." (108). The author further states that "she smiled again. She was extremely aware of her body, of Tracy's eyes, of the space between them being so small, so very small" 108.

Later in the story, Neil introduced Maren, Josh's French teacher to Tracy, his mother. The dialogue that followed and Maren's giggling infuriated Kamara. "You have the most unusual eyes. Violet," (94) Tracy said "still holding Maren's hand." (94). Adichie, the seasoned writer makes Kamara to take a cookie from Josh's plate in order to stress that heterosexuality is a divine injunction. It means that sexual relationship must be between a man and a woman and not between two men or two women. The author stressed it thus: "she raised the apple to her lips and took a slow bite, her gaze never wavering from Maren's face. Neil was watching them with an indulgent smile, and kamara looked away. She sat down next to Josh and took a cookie from his plate" (94). It signifies the need for her to retrace her steps and be fulfilled.



In "The Shivering", Adichie furthers her discourse on homosexuality. She leads her readers into the world of homosexuality through Ukamaka and Chinedu's discussion: "You know, it really isn't as simple as you think it is. You don't know what it is to love an asshole" "I do." ...You have never said anything about it," she said (158).

This dialogue brings to fore Ukamaka's perception that Udanna is a homosexual and not being stupid for she does not speak slag. Chinedu's acceptance of his homosexuality advances the discourse:

"You never said anything about it" she said

"You never asked."

She placed her sandwich on a plate and sat down to her tiny dining table, "I didn't know there was anything to ask. I thought you would just tell me," (158 - 159).

Chinedu in his discussion with Unamaka further explains his involvement. He talks about his relationship with Abidemi, a barker and a big man's son. He also explains how he had been a homosexual from his secondary school days. He spoke of how Abidemi came into Lagos office of the mobile phone company where he works in customer's service. "He had been almost rude, asking if there wasn't somebody senior he could talk to, but Chinedu did not miss the look they exchanged, the heady thrill he had not felt since his first relationship with a sports prefect in secondary school. Abidemi gave his card and said, curtly, "call me." It was the way" (160). And he did, and that was how they ran the relationship "for the next two years"

"Jumping Monkey Hill," is Adichie's further attempt to discuss homosexuality. In this story, the Senegalese woman boldly talks about her being a lesbian when Ujunwa seeks to know her feelings towards Edward's suggestive remark about "her naked naval (III). Her answer is instructive. According to her, "she would still remain a lesbian and there was no need to say anything to him" (112). Her audacity is very suggestive of her commitment to homosexuality. Hence, short story writers in Africa are poised to conscientise the people on the evils of homosexuality. Iyoiwese Hagher (1994) urges literary writers to be committed. To him "while politician and soldier appear to change the world through their actions, the real lasting change comes through the art which changes the world, the change of human consciousness" (145). In furtherance of his commitment to art and changes it brings about, Hagher stresses that the changes art bring about are "truly lasting, for when consciousness changes, no force an earth is strong enough to resist it." (145).

Homosexual victims as well as victims of rape all over the world, find it difficult to find justice. Barriers that hinder them from fighting for justice complicate their problems hence no respite. In the stories for this analyses, the writer tries to explicate



the victims pains, helplessness and hopelessness. Marjorie Suble, Fran Danis, Denise L. Mauzy and Sarah K Gallagher (2006) in their article posit that: The author's finding indicate that barriers prevalent 30 years ago, prior to efforts by the rape reform movement, continued to be considered important among college men and women. The barriers rated as the most important were (1) shame, guilt, embarrassment, not wanting friends and family to know. (2) concern about confidentiality; and (3) fear of not being believed (157).

The postulation above is very relevant to this discourse. In Aliyu's "Solid," the reader is presented with Richard's inability to report his being abused to appropriate quarters. The author puts it thus:

It is true that the level of discipline in the school had not diminished. If anything, the principal, Rev. Manarakis, had ensured that next to the high academic standard, the students were properly disciplined. Ideals such as honesty and obedience were right next to pious arts of worship. Richard did not need to be told that he needed more evidence before reporting his predicament to any authority in the school. Every night, he tried to glimpse the faces of his assailants but with fear, the pain and his penchant for passing out, he had not been able to give them an identity (56).

Richard, a victim of rape and homosexuality in Aliyu's "Solid" could neither report to the school authorities nor discuss it with any of his friends for shame and the fact that no one would believe him. He also has to contend with "patch of wetness staining his chair every time he stood up" (56) after sitting down for a while anywhere, any time. This happens inspite of "the gray coloured cardigan round his waist" (56) which he employs to cover his shame.

The fact that nobody believes these victims makes them commit suicide, remain victims eternally, and sometimes create opportunities for others to become victims. In Aliyu's "Solid", Richard in an attempt to escape being abused deliberately made Joel, the bully a victim. While Joel was being abused, that night, Richard waited "until Joel's gasps of struggle turned into the moans he was accustomed to and then with a manical grin pasted across his face... reached up and press the light switch" (61). This is meant to expose the predators. However, the author seems to have ended the story the moment the light was switched on without any sign of the culprits being apprehended. The author seems to be saying that even when they may be arrested, justice will still be very far away, as nothing positive will come out of it. This is the state of the nation.

In Emenyonu's "What the Babysitter and My Bishop Had in Common," Thomas, the victim finds himself in a web. Neither his sister nor his friends listened to him. His sister told him that Reverends do not make mistakes while his friends at school -



Peter, James and Paul, eyed him "ferociously," and stuffed their ears with two fingers in each ear and shunned" (57) him "for weeks" (57). According to him "I gave up. Things were bad enough for me as they were. Unlike the other twelve- year old kids the year before, I did not cherish my baptismal name - Thomas (57). At the end Thomas become homosexual as he begins to long for further encounters with The Assistant Bishop.

In Adichie's "The Shivering" Chinedu becomes a homosexual due to the barriers that hinder the victim from reporting, and the gifts and financial inducements he received from predators:

Abidemi would run the relationship for two years, wanting to know where Chinedu went and what he did, buying him a car without consulting him, so that he was left in the awkward position of explaining to his family and friends how he had suddenly bought a Honda, asking him to come on a trip to Calabar and Kaduna with only a day's notice... Still, Chinedu had liked the possessiveness, the vitality of a relationship that consumed them both. (160).

The above explains that homosexuality has eaten deep into the life of the people in the sub-region. The analysis shows that financial inducement among others are the weapons which the violators employ to rape and put their victims in perpetual slavery. Their victims who are educated such as Chinedu in Adiche's story are lured with Honda, financial gifts and trips to "Calabar and Kaduna" (160), the likes of Thomas, in Emenyonu's story, a village setting, settles for blissful weekends in the house of their predators. This is the dilemma of Africa a continent, that is greatly ravaged by financial and mental poverty.

The above scenario shows how much needs to be done. As Aloysins Ohaegbu (2000) puts it "events which affect the human condition in the society produce in the writer vibrations which push him to create or recreate the realities of life in the society," (169). This act of the writer is to "arouse the consciousness of his people to the realities of their existence" (169) as Ohaegbu states further. The truth remains that it is only when the people are aware of the realities of their existence - the existence of homosexuals in their society and how much evil it has done, that they can begin to denounce the evil and prick the conscience of both the predators and the victims in order to put an end to it.

## Conclusion

The researcher, through the selected short stories have shown the emergence of homosexuality in the sub-region, its negative effects on the victims and society, and the way forward.

It is very glaring from the analysis that some people become victims of homosexuality simply because they are too trusting. There is no need for one to build so much trust on a fellow human being. The analysis also shows that the violators use gifts of various kinds to blindfold their victims and make them remain mute forever. Hence, there is need for the violated to report their transgressors to the law enforcement agencies for prosecution. This will help for their reintegration into the society and put an end to such inhuman treatment.

In conclusion therefore, it suffices to say that Emenyonu, Aliyu and Adichie as committed writers employ their stories to fight against social ills in the society hoping that very soon, the society will be free from these abnormalities, and the ideal state enshrined.

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