

**HOMOSEXUALITY: THE AFTERMATH OF CHILD NEGLECT IN
DIBIA'S *WALKING WITH SHADOWS***

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Abstract

The same sex unions have over the years witnessed a lot of positive and negative reactions across the globe. This is made possible by the religious and cultural orientations of the countries involved. In Africa, many countries prescribe strict ban to its practice and as a result, persons who have this kind of orientation experience homophobia that often lead to trauma and depression. As a result, researchers have ventured into studying the causes of this social anomaly with the view to ameliorating the depression and psychological disorders it causes on the persons with such sexuality and by extension lessen the negative effects it has on the society. This research uses psychoanalysis as its theoretical framework. Psychoanalysis explores the mind of the author in relation to the reality projected in his literary text. With this in mind, this study investigates the parental role in the sexual development of their children using Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* and finds out that absence of parental guidance, love and care in the early stage of Adrian's life leads him into homosexuality. The novel is set in Nigeria where cultural and religious orientation arrogates the practice of homosexuality; hence, Adrian's society frustrates, depresses and drives him to neurosis.

Keywords: Homosexuality, Child Neglect, Psychoanalysis, Cultural Orientation

Introduction

Children are always vulnerable with regards to the choices they make and sadly most of these choices make or mar them later in life. This necessitates parental and adults' guidance in the shaping of the lives of the children to something socially acceptable but unfortunately because of some perceived uncertainties and a refocus in priorities by some parents, some of these children are left at their detriment. Neglect and lack of parental guidance in the child's early stage of life have led to untold consequences like armed robbery, drug abuse, prostitution and sometimes sexual non conformity (homosexuality) in his adult life. This to a great extent shows erosion of values and ideals on the part of the parents that consequently model the individual into a social misfit. This research throws its searchlight on Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* with the view to determining the role of the parents in shaping their children's sexual orientation.

In Nigeria and most Africa countries, sexual orientation is patterned alongside cultural and religious lines. Different societies of the world have peculiar orientations and cultures that underline their perception to realities and the acceptance of a practice. This becomes evident when a particular society rejects a practice that is accepted by another. From the above ideology therefore, it becomes pertinent to see that some practices especially sex and sexual related issues receive a different appraisal and acceptance in African society different from the perceived sexual liberty obtainable in some western countries. Culturally, Africa is heteronormative (favours heterosexual union) because of the high significance it places on child bearing. African culture and orientation place high value to heterosexual marriage which is aimed at biological procreation. One of the apologists of this ideology, Mwalimuavers that

the “homosexuals cannot procreate. No male can have “sex” with another male and produce a child through that act. No female can have “sex” with another female and produce a child through that act” and that “bearing and rearing children in the perpetual circle of the living, the ancestors and the unborn are a fundamental element of Afrikan culture”(290). Mwalimu is of the view that African culture arrogates homosexuality because of its non-reproductive results. Biological reproduction and childbirth give validation to heterosexual union in African perception.

Religion is another tool that reinforces the condemnation of the practice of homosexuality in Africa. In the words of Senayon Olaoluwa, “the framing of same sex sexualities and gender variances as ‘unAfrican’ is related to the purchase of Christianity and Islam, two Abrahamic religions that have domain influence on contemporary Africans” (21). In Olaoluwa’s view, the influence of religion (Christianity and Moslem) gives rise to the conception that the practice of homosexuality is outside African culture. African society is predominately Christian and Islamic religion adherent who are guided by the principle stipulated by the Holy Bible and the Qur’an. The Bible provides the tenets for a Christian living and outlines its principles which run contrary to the same sex union. It says in Leviticus 18:22 that, “you shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination.” The book of Qur’an also outlaws this practice in these words, “indeed you approach men with desire instead of women...you are a transgressing people” (97:80-81, 26:165).

Many countries in Africa ban the practice of homosexuality with stringent measure ranging from imprisonment, lynching to death. Undoubtedly, Nigeria is an African country and shares this unique ideology with Africa. In the Nigerian cultural setting, sex and sexual unions must happen between a man and a woman; any sexual behaviour that goes contrary to this patterned structure is viewed as taboo and abomination and consequently frowned at. This becomes the underlining factor to Nigeria’s prohibition of the practice of homosexuality. In 2014, Nigeria’s former president, GoodLuck Jonathan signed the Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Bill into law. The law enshrined in Section 214 of the Nigerian Penal Code (Third Edition 1967) prescribes that, “any person who has carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature or permits a male person to have carnal knowledge of him or her against the order of nature is guilty of a felony and liable to imprisonment for 14 years”. Section 217 also surmises that:

Any male person who, whether in public or private, commits any act of gross indecency with another male person, or procures another male person to commit any act of gross indecency with him or attempts to procure the commission of any such act by any male person, whether in public or private, is guilty of a felony and is liable to imprisonment for three years. (Nigerian Penal Code, Third Edition, 1967)

The law also prescribes the same penalty to rape and consensual intimacies on persons of the same sex. The law also prescribes 10 years jail term for those who encourage or convince the victims into such unions. The Nigerian legal stand on homosexuality reinforces her firm belief on Christianity and Islamic tenets on one hand and her cultural orientation of heterosexual union on the other. With Nigeria’s ideological belief on the concept of homosexuality, persons who practice same sex sexuality are driven to depression, trauma and alienation. Since this is the case, this research goes to reassert the indispensable role of the parents and by contrast shows the untold consequences of lack of parental guidance in the child’s sexual development.

Methodology

This is a qualitative research. It will employ the use of Dibia’s literary text, *Walking with Shadows* and other related materials as a means of gathering its information.

Conceptual Framework

Many authorities have defined the term 'homosexuality'. Martin M.W. defines homosexuality as "the sexual orientation in which one's primary attraction is to a member of one's own sex" (245). In the view of Jennings, homosexuality is "the orientation of sexual need, desire, or responsiveness towards other persons of the same gender (529). Bullough Vern posits that, "Homosexuality,' a philologically awkward hybrid of Greek and Latin elements ... applied to people who love those of the same sex, while "heterosexuality," equally philologically impure ... applied to those who gained pleasure from the opposite sex" (9). From the above submissions therefore, homosexuality refers to romantic, sexual attraction or intimacy between people of the same sex. It embraces all sexual orientations and identities which run contrary to heterosexuality.

Child Neglect

Child neglect "is frequently defined as the failure of a parent or other person with responsibility for the child to provide needed food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or supervision to the degree that the child's health, safety, and well-being are threatened with harm" (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2). Child neglect also comes in forms of lack of care, love, emotional support on the part of the parents or those responsible for a child to a point that the child's social development is impaired. When this is the case, the child may seek these needs from wrong sources which sometimes results to sexual non conformity.

Theoretical Framework

This research employs the psychoanalytic literary theory as the premise most appropriate for it. Psychoanalytical theory studies the mind's disposition to reality. In applying this theory to literary works, the reader investigates the inner workings of the characters to really discover the motives behind their actions and by so doing elicit the perception of the author to the reality projected in his text. Sigmund Freud, an Austrian neurologist and physician, is acclaimed the foremost proponent of this theory. The theory was developed in the early 20th century for the treatment of his neurotical patients.

Freud's *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* (1949) provides a clearer understanding of how the theory works. According to the theorist, the human mind is made up of the conscious, the preconscious and the unconscious. Freud speculates that, the 'Unconscious Human Mind' comprises three functional components known as the id, the ego and the superego. In the view of the theorist, "the id has the quality of being unconscious and contains everything that is present at birth and the instinct" (Freud,14). Every human being is born with the id and it accounts for obsessions at food, sexual instincts and lack of consideration or moral implications. When this is left unchecked the individual will be controlled by the libido. The id contains two basic instincts called eros (desire for survival) and thanatos (drive for destructive or death). The ego on the other hand is another component of the conscious mind which controls man's actions in a sophisticated environment. The ego reconciles the id (inordinate desires and lust) and the superego (the refined life) through some psychic apparatus called 'defenses'. Defenses in Freudal perspective includes, 'Repression, Denial, Sublimation, Regression and many others.

The theorist also asserts that most of the conflicts encountered by the human mind take its origin from the early stages of life, what Freud calls 'the psychosexual stage.' He theorizes that human psychological development takes its root from predesigned successive psychosexual stages which comprises; the oral (birth-1year), anal (1-3years), phallic (3-6), latency (6-puberty) and genital (puberty-adult). The scholar proposes that the first five years of life is very

essential to the formation of adult behaviour. During these periods, Mcleod suggests that “the id must be controlled in order to satisfy social demands; this sets up a conflict between frustrated wishes and social norms” (1). As the individual grows, these psychosexual stages pose challenges that must be resolved before the individual will advance to the next stage. If these issues are successfully resolved, the result is a healthy personality; on the contrary the individual will be fixated. Specifically, “psychoanalysis as a theory seeks to explain the complex relationships between a particular character and others by giving insights to the role of traumatic experiences in heightening emotion (fear or anxiety)” (Odinye, 43).

A Psychoanalytical exploration of Homosexuality as a Consequence of Child Neglect in Dibia’s *Walking with Shadows*

A cursory look at the back page of the literary text *Walking with Shadows*, shows that the author, Jude Dibia’s is a prolific writer of Nigerian origin. He is described as ‘daring and controversial’ by his readers and critics. His literary text, *Unbridled* won the Ken Saro-Wiwa Prize for prose fiction in 2017. In most works with psychoanalytical perspective, writers expose difference in gender binaries. These gender differences are mostly couched in their language and expressions which help transform their characters into balanced or fragmented characters. The male writers demonstrate the inherent dominating mindset in the male characters over their societies; an ideology best described as patriarchy. The male character in a patriarchal society is according to Haleem Shamaila portrayed “... as a brave, courageous, bold, reserved, confident and rational being” (56) but Dibia swiftly uses a twist of this patriarchal ideology by subjecting his protagonist Adrian to the position of a pathetic, withdrawn, neglected and unloved character; the fate that stereotypically aligns to the females characters in a male dominated society. Dibia reveals that “...*their parents have pointedly ignored him. And his brothers too. They had made him invincible and he had become so. He was a sissy! And everyone hated a sissy*” (*WwS*, 115).

His family forces him to feel and act in a particular manner, all in his bid to get some love and acceptance by his family. This by implication is the lot of the female characters in a patriarchal society. As these patterns continue, Adrian’s character remains distorted and fragmented. His family therefore becomes a symbolic factor that drives him into psychological disorder and trauma. Judith Herman highlights this distorted personality as a constituent of eroded structures. In her words “repeated trauma in adult life erodes the structure of personality already formed but repeated trauma in childhood forms and deforms personality” (96). Just like the female character in a patriarchal system, he seeks for liberation and freedom. This freedom gets realised in the practice of same sex affair; an act deemed as abhorrent in the society.

Through his literary text, Dibia reveals that religious and cultural orientation of Nigeria favour heterosexuality. With the above stance therefore persons who engage in sexual none conformity mostly represses these sexual diversities to appear ideal and be accepted in the society. With the mechanism of repression, the individual personality gets fixated in his sexual development. As these continue over time, the individual’s psychological development further gets inhibited and in severe cases, becomes fragmented. This is clearly seen in the case of Adrian, the protagonist of the text, *Walking with Shadows*. In the novel, Dibia creates a protagonist whose unpleasant childhood memories of hatred, discrimination and neglect leads to his taking on a sexual orientation frowned at by his society. According to Freud, “the id has the quality of being unconscious and contains everything that is present at birth and the instinct” (14). The id is a reservoir for sexual desires and passions that are crude and unsophisticated. The id is also responsible for Adrian’s unabated cravings for his family’s love and acceptance. The narrator says that “*his parents’ love and approval were two things he had coveted all his life. He had*

wanted to be the ideal son that they could be proud of and show off to their friends”(123). Adrian wants to be the perfect son. All his life his craving was for his family’s love and recognition but no matter how hard he tries he realizes that he could not possibly attain that height. Owing to this, Adrian’s character did not develop as a normal heterosexual man as his childhood craving for love was doused by his parents’ ill treatment of him against what his parents feel for his brothers. His two brothers got all the love in their childhood. The narrator says:

Their mother treated Chiedu like a king. He never had to do any kind of house chores and was also shown off to her friends like the heir apparent. Chika enjoyed being lifted up in the air and shrieked with glee as he pretended to be an airplane in his father’s strong arm...all Adrian could do was watch from his little corner with an uneasy smile on his face...but wanting some recognition and acceptance. When he was lucky, he got a smile but sometimes he wasn’t even noticed. (WwS,46)

He tried to get some love from his father by trying to go under his father’s shade after his father takes his bath so that the drizzle from his hair falls on him. Dibia reveals that:

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 out his thick afro with a wooden fork-like comb. Light drops of water still trapped in the hair would drizzle down. In his young mind, Adrian had believed that these were showers of love. It was the closest he ever felt with his father. The ritual had become so important to him then, as he realized rather earlier that he was not the favourite of either of his parents. They loved him to some degree...Chiedu was his mother’s favourite and Chika who was his father’s champion. (WwS,45)

His brothers also taunted him during their childhood years. At one time, his brothers had played an unhealthy prank on him by putting him in a carton and throwing him down the staircase. His moaning and pains did not elicit pity from them. Adrian also gets bullied at school and at one time in the house was accused of the money he did not steal. Adrian continues to seek love and acceptance from his family but was constantly rejected. His childhood experience was a case of total neglect and outright disregard. He had continually craved for this parental attention but was constantly neglected. “...their parents have pointedly ignored him. And his brothers too. They had made him invincible and he had become so. He was a sissy! And everyone hated a sissy” (115). He had at once won a prize for sports at school and hoping this will win him that parental love from his parents but he rather gets an uncomfortable comparison from his father, “next time, try to aspire to be the most intelligent pupil in your class like Chika was” and so year after year he had tried to be the best at something academic, but hard as he tried, he could never be the perfect son” (124). Finally he says “...and I have to admit, I’ve spent my entire life waiting for my parents’ approval” (124). The id shows itself in these excessive longings which are not met. The above harsh experience and many similar ones and more importantly the fact that Adrian was punished innocently as a result of the money Chika stole makes the family to despise and hate Adrian. As a result Adrian gets isolated, withdrawn and secluded from his family and society. These experiences caused him to shield himself from the human environment and into recluse. He was seen as different, reserved and a loner. His family has made him a recluse. He gets bottled up and stunted in his growth as a heterosexual person as against his brothers who enjoyed all the love and had their sexuality patterned differently.

As Adrian grows up he continues to seek this parental love denied him in his childhood. This lack of parental love and guidance which Adrian experiences paves way for the type of choice he made as pertaining to his sexuality. To fill this gap Adrian engages in something socially unacceptable. Even though he didn't know initially how to describe the act he had been engaged in but he knew that right from his childhood he had been sexually attracted to boys and then to men. This explains how Adrian satisfies the longings of the id sexually but as he grows up and comes to terms with the ethical voice of the superego which shows itself in his society's ideals and values, Adrian learns that his society abhors the practice of homosexuality. Dibia notes that "being gay was certainly not in African culture. The whole idea was so foreign, so unnatural" (WwS,35). From Nigeria's religious perspective, Pastor Matthew tells Adrian that "it is the devil that tempts you my brother" and as a result, he needs "...to pray for God's mercy and strength" (WwS,174).

Adrian also realizes that his family conceives homosexuals as 'faggots' and the practice of it abominable. This realization plunges him into fear; fear of homophobic attacks that lead him to deny his sexuality and get married; fear that leads him to repress his childhood incidents and appear idealistic. All through Adrian's life, the reader notices that Adrian is controlled by fear; fear that prevents him from telling his family about his sexual choice because of their indifference to him during his childhood, he lacks the courage. Out of fear, he denies any incident that tries to probe his sexuality. Denial here comes from this repressed fear; fear of homophobic attacks from a social structure whose sexual orientation is in opposition to the internal conflict in his mind. Adrian's internal sexual disposition and the cultural and religious background of his society are in opposition. This is responsible for the internal conflict Adrian suffers throughout the texts that models his character into a robotic and superficial personality. He lives by his society's prescriptions and by extension an alienated personality. To bring a balance and avert the worries that come from fear and to forestall the mind's degeneration into the neurotic state, the ego employs the mechanisms of repression, denial and sublimation.

It is also pertinent to note that Adrian's sexual development gets inhibited at the level of the libido. His childhood craving for love and acceptance which he suppresses in his unconscious mind constantly surge out and this is responsible for his unabated craving for love and acceptance, this by implication results to his inability to grow to the next stage of his sexual development. This affirms Freud's assertion that most of the conflicts encountered by the human mind take its origin from the early stages of life, what Freud calls 'the psychosexual stage.' He theorizes that human psychological development takes its root from predesigned successive psychosexual stages. These predesigned successive psychosexual stages take effect from the first five years of life and is very essential to the formation of adult behaviour. As the individual grows, these psychosexual stages pose challenges that must be resolved before the individual will advance to the next stage. If these issues are successfully resolved, the result is a healthy personality. On the contrary the individual will be fixated. From Freud's analogy therefore, it becomes evident that Adrian's fixation on sexual growth draws from the unresolved conflicts repressed in his childhood.

Conclusion

Dibia shows that some institutionalized structures in the family and the society many a times are issues that mold peoples' lives in different dimensions. In his view, parental roles are indispensable tool that pattern a child into an asset or a social misfit. Through an authorial intrusion, Dibia asks the society a soul searching question. In his words, "have you ever wondered how many homosexuals there are out there? If we as parents don't monitor our

children and guide them in the right path, they could make the wrong choices later in life” (WwS,101).

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