THE SAME-SEX MARRIAGE (PROHIBITION) ACT AND MALE SAME-SEX DESIRE IN NIGERIAN LITERATURE

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INTRODUCTION

On January 7th 2014 Nigeria's former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan signed into law the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act of 2013 (SSMPA). Adebanjo (2015) recalls that the Nigerian government had already tried to pass a law prohibiting same-sex love and sexual relationships in 2006, but the bill had been abandoned due to international condemnation. (257) In addition to prohibiting same-sex marriage contracts or civil unions, the SSMPA prohibits "the public show of same sex amorous relationship directly or indirectly" (SSMPA) and the formation of clubs or associations supporting same-sex relationships. The act also specifies that "only a marriage contracted between a man and a woman shall be recognized in Nigeria". The law prescribes 14 years of imprisonment for people involved in a same-sex relationship or union and 10 years of imprisonment for people supporting same-sex marriages.

Although same-sex marriage was not explicitly prohibited before 2014, same-sex sexual relationships were already prohibited in the Criminal and Penal Codes and the Shariah law which has been instituted in 12 states of Northern Nigeria since 1999. Section 214 of the Penal Code indeed criminalises "carnal knowledge against the order of nature" with a penalty of fourteen years imprisonment.[1] As same-sex sexual relationships were already criminalised, it is legitimate to wonder why Nigerian government needed to pass the SSMPA. The SSMPA is the result of "religious beliefs, delayed political and economic development and resistance to globalization, political leadership strategies, and the legacy of colonialism" (Ireland 2013). Hoad (2007) also underscores the role of the Anglican Church in the homophobic feelings in Africa (50). Reuben Abati, the then President's spokesman, said that the SSMPA "is a law that is in line with the people's cultural and religious inclination. So it is a law that is a reflection of the beliefs and orientation of Nigerian people… Nigerians are pleased with it."[2] This declaration underlines the idea that same-sex love relationships are against Nigerian culture and it is indeed often believed that homosexuality is generally 'un-African', and against nature. Zimbabwe's then President Robert Mugabe indeed proclaimed in 1995 that homosexuality "degrades human dignity. It's unnatural, and there is no question ever of allowing these people to behave worse

[1] Information found on Human Dignity Trust website: https://www.humandignitytrust.org/countryprofile/nigeria/ Accessed 17/11/2020

[2] Owen Bowcott, "Nigeria arrests dozens as anti-gay law comes into force", The Guardian, January 14th, 2014 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/14/nigeria-arrests-dozens-anti-gay-law, accessed 17/11/2020

than dogs and pigs" (quoted in Ireland 2013: 48), and Angola's ambassador declared in 1984 that "the evil of homosexuality does not exist in our country" (quoted in Zabus 2013: 2).

It is then important to discuss the assumption of homosexuality as 'un-African' as it will enable us to clarify the terms used in the thesis. Homosexuality may indeed be considered as 'un-African' because, historically, the word -and then the concept itself- was invented by the psychiatrist Karl Westphal in the second part of the 19th century to refer to people suffering from a psychiatric disease making them sexually attracted to individuals of the same sex (Foucault 1976: 59-60). Katz (2007) argues that "human beings use words to create particular sexualities as specific kinds of phenomena, and that the reality of a particular sexuality is dependent on and inseparable from the different words we use to socially describe it." (viii) Thus, homosexuality is indeed 'un-African' because it was historically, socially and medically constructed in Europe. By extension, if homosexuality is alien to Africa, we can also argue that heterosexuality is equally 'un-African' as it is, according to Ned Katz, "one particular historical arrangement of the sexes and their pleasures" (14), this "arrangement" being constructed in the Western world. In the same way, the term 'gay' denotes a "political identity, which comes from Western struggles for civil rights in the 1960s" (Msibi 2011: 56) and does not necessarily fit the realities of Nigerian society. Subsequently, the terms 'homosexuality', 'homosexuals' and 'gay' will only be used in this study when they are used by the authors and the more general terms 'same-sex desire' and 'same-sex desiring individuals' will be privileged since they do not have historical and cultural connotations. Zabus (2013) defines desire as "a strong feeling, which may be sexual, and […] a driving force manifesting itself in the individual's will and agency" (4).

Although homosexuality is thus historically 'un-African', same-sex desire has always existed in Nigeria -and more generally in Africa; yet it is also condemned by the homophobic political discourse and more particularly in the SSMPA. As mentioned above, same-sex desire is not considered only as a Western import, but also as "evil" and "unnatural" and, according to Kenya's former President Daniel arap Moi, "homosexuality is against African norms and traditions and even in religion it is considered a great sin" (quoted in Msibi 2011: 57). These political declarations show that same-sex desire is not only reproved because it would come from the Western world, but also because it is disapproved of by the contemporary main religions in Africa -Christianity and Islam, and it is not part of African traditions. In short, the political statements aforementioned indicate that the political discourse against same-sex desire is built on three grounds: natural, cultural and religious. The identification of these three

grounds is useful not only to understand the reasons underlying the passing of the SSMPA, but also to grasp the substance of the literary texts under study since the authors provide us with their answers to the dominant political discourse against same-sex desire.

Moreover, while prohibiting same-sex marriages the SSMPA also insists on the fact that "only a marriage contracted between a man and a woman shall be recognized as valid in Nigeria", before defining marriage as "a legal union entered into between persons of opposite sex" (SSMPA). This insistence in the act shows the willingness of Nigerian government to define what a legitimate marriage or love relationship must be, and so the SSMPA can be described as heteronormative, promoting the binary opposition between man and woman. Contrary to what political leaders say, same-sex marriages and same-sex sexual relationships existed in pre-colonial Nigeria and gender was not conceived as a biological binary opposition. Zabus (2013) explains that, in Igbo culture, women can sometimes become male and have one or several female husbands. This happens for example when the woman is a widow or when she has no brother. Women can in this way enter a same-sex marriage and change their gender (43-51). Furthermore, among Hausa people some men called *yan daudu* are known for crossdressing and "have sex with men and frequently engage in activities specifically associated with women, yet are nevertheless often married to women and have children" (Msibi 2011:66). Since same-sex marriages and sexual relationships existed in pre-colonial Africa but are marginalized and negated by the Nigerian government, the thesis will have to explain the reasons why Nigeria, and more widely Africa, is today depicted by political leaders as a heterosexual place, before dwelling on how this idea affected Nigerian literature.

Besides, as the SSMPA prohibits any form of support for people involved in a same-sex relationship, the Nigerian government defines a legitimate and an illegitimate discourse about sexuality. Foucault (1976) indicates indeed that creating a prohibitive law to control people's sexuality is not efficient as a law cannot engender a unique sexuality (50-67). On the contrary, the prohibitive law creates a discursive field: the forbidden sexuality must be named and explained, giving the opportunity for opponents of the law to answer. Since the illegitimate discourse supporting same-sex relationships is forbidden and punished, it cannot be developed in mainstream media and literature. Thus, the Nigerian artists tackling the issue of same-sex desire had to find an alternative platform to express themselves and several writers published short stories and poems on websites such as *Pen/OutWrite, Brittle Paper* or *NigeriansTalk* or on the online magazine *Q-zine*. According to Olorunshola Adenekan (2012), the "virtual space enables the writer to address in fiction and poetry, themes such as homosexuality and

prostitution, which may have been considered taboo subjects in the physical space, especially by book publishers as well as by political and religious authorities."(11) In addition to providing a few elements about the obstacles to be overcome by writers to get published, the thesis will highlight the specificities of the texts published online, their content as well as their forms.

In the pioneering article "Wheyting Be Dat" (1989: 422-448) about same-sex desire in African literatures, Dunton explains that homosexuality is generally represented as un-African and is monothematically used to refer to exploitation. Dunton concludes his article noting "the abstention among African writers […] from a fully characterized and nonschematic depiction of a homosexual relationship between Africans," and adds that "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." (445) The corpus of literary texts under study has been chosen in contradistinction to the texts analysed by Dunton in 1989: thirty years after the publishing of Dunton's article, it is now possible to find novels and short stories which explore same-sex desire – or, to use Dunton words, "the practice of homosexuality within African society." (441) The primary sources have indeed been picked because they provide the reader with "a fully characterized and nonschematic depiction of a homosexual relationship between Africans." (Dunton 1989: 445) The thesis will indeed examine texts whose authors challenge the "outburst of silence" around same-sex desire which existed when Dunton wrote his article. Thus, in order to be selected as primary sources for this study of male same-sex desire in Nigerian literature, the texts required to display male same-sex desiring characters as main characters and male same-sex desire as part of the main themes of the narratives. This specificity of the texts will enable us to analyse the emergent discourse on male same-sex desire which stands out on – and contradicts – the dominant discourse on same-sex desire and Africanness. Green-Simms (2016) defines the notion of emergence as a process, in terms of relationship to the dominant, and not in terms of chronology. (142) The thesis will then not try to compare recent texts with older ones, but analyse how the primary sources respond to the dominant discourse on same-sex desire. This emergent discourse in literature is also symbolized by the creation of the online magazine *Q-Zine* – "a cooperative online magazine with a mission to be the most inclusive and accessible place on the internet for young African writers, photographers, artists and activists who reflect queer life and experience from an African perspective"[3] – because, as Journo (2016: 8) argues, magazines are the

[3] Quoted from *Q-Zine*, issue 1, 2011. Web June 10th 2018.

privileged area for new writers to express their difference from the other – and often older – writers.

In the online magazine *Publishing Perspectives*, the writer Tolu Ogunlesi (2009) expressed his concern about the fact that African literature is mostly published by European publishing houses that "seem to possess fixed ideas about what African literature should or should not be, and what 'authentic' African 'characters' can or cannot do." Thus, a same-sex desiring character may not fit the Western expectations of what an African character should be and both the novels under study – Dibia's *Walking With Shadows* (2011) and Ikpo's *Fimi Sile Forever* (2017) – were published by small publishing houses. In an interview, Jude Dibia explains that Nigerian main publishing houses refused to publish his novel because it tackled same-sex desire and eventually "when it was published copies were sent out to bookstores and libraries and again they all said they couldn't stock this book."[4]

In almost all the works under study the notion of African identity is questioned and negotiated by the writers, to contradict the idea of same-sex desire as 'un-African'. The use of the word 'un-African' implies the notion of an African identity or Africanness. The essentialist view of Africanness – generally advocated by heads of States – limits this identity to an "authentic pre-colonial African identity" (Dei 2012: 44), authentic traditions and conventional morals. Danaila (2020) explains that following Nigeria's independence, political leaders and intellectuals enhanced the precolonial cultural heritage as a way to resist British domination, globalization and Western modernity (3-4). This nationalist version of Africanness includes – as the SSMPA and the discourse around it indicate – a patriarchal and heteronormative view of what an African society should be. On the contrary, the anti-essentialists denounce the fixity of this essentialist Africanness (Dosekun 2007: 42) and consider that African identities must be redefined according to the modern world, challenging the current social conventions (Spronk 2009: 502). As same-sex desiring individuals are refused the legitimacy to claim their Africanness by the mainstream political discourse which constructs African identity as fixed, this thesis will question what being 'authentically African' may mean and spotlight the authors' views on Africanness and explore the strategies used to reconcile it with male same-sex desire.

The first part of the thesis will explore the historical and political context of homophobia in Nigeria, from colonisation to the passing of the SSMPA. This part will show the role of the West in today's heteronormativity in Nigeria. The dominant discourse about same-sex desire

[4] https://agentur.interkontinental.org/2017/08/30/in-conversation-with-jude-dibia/

produced during the post-independence period will also be broached. The publishing obstacles encountered by the Nigerian writers will also be mentioned, before identifying the digital space as a privileged literary space for Nigerian writers discussing same-sex desire. The literary analysis of the primary sourced will begin in the second part of the thesis which will evidence how the authors challenge heteronormativity in the body of texts under study. The authors indeed portray characters who do not fit traditional gender roles. Though heteronormativity is described as oppressive and violent system trying to silence same-sex desiring characters, the protagonists resist. The third part of the thesis will dwell on the questioning and deconstruction of the idealized and essentialist notion of African identity, arguing that the way of life of the heterosexual characters is not authentically African. This part will also question the traditions mentioned in the several texts and analyse the attitude of the same-sex desiring characters toward them. The political role of the artist will then be tackled, underscoring that art has always had a social function in Nigeria. The fourth part of the thesis will deconstruct the idea of identity as fixed. It will show that Nigerian identities are numerous and multifaceted. The diasporic stories also present a hybrid Nigerian identity negotiated between the home country and the West. Identities are also presented as unstable and deceptive, as they may be worn as a mask used to fit in the characters' environments. The last part of the thesis will analyse how the characters tend to reconcile male same-sex desire with their African identity. The texts portray characters that respect traditions and religions, they are respectable and ordinary. Some writers also use myths to assert the Africanness of the characters and same-sex desire. Finally, the thesis will postulate that the authentic African identity may not be a desirable goal. The characters may instead cultivate an authentic self.

I. THE HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF HOMOPHOBIA, ITS IMPACT ON NIGERIAN LITERATURE AND THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW DISCOURSE ON SAME-SEX DESIRE

A. The passing of the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act

On January 7th 2014 Nigeria's former President Goodluck Jonathan signed into law the SSMPA. The passing of the homophobic law may be explained by political and religious reasons, and it may be seen as a means to resist Western imperialism while asserting an identity.

First of all, Ireland (2013) insists on the idea that some African heads of state use "gays as useful scapegoats for drawing attention away from the poor performance and corruption of their regimes" (55). This may indeed be true in Nigeria since a law such as the SSMPA was not necessary: although same-sex marriage contracts were not explicitly prohibited, same-sex sexual relationships had already been prohibited in the Criminal and Penal Codes and the Shariah law also condemns homosexuality. Consequently, the SSMPA seems to be more of a political strategy than a necessary law. Nonetheless, Ekine (2013) expresses reservations about this diversionary argument: on the one hand, the bill didn't prevent demonstrations such as the Nigeria Occupy Movement that happened in 2012 and, on the other hand, the bill created "considerable criticism in the mainstream media and social media in Nigeria" (84). Thus, it is possible to imagine that the strategy of the Nigerian government completely failed, or there were other reasons inducing the SSMPA.

The passing of homophobic laws in several African states may also be understood as a reaction to South Africa's new constitution. In 1994, South Africa "became the first nation in the world to enshrine gay rights in its constitution" (Gaudio 275), which led other African leaders to distinguish themselves from the post-Apartheid regime with declarations condemning homosexuality as un-African. Neville Hoad (2007) explains that African leaders saw the opportunity to define themselves as "authentically African" (xiii) and differentiate themselves from a hybrid and westernized South Africa. For instance, Kenya's former President Daniel arap Moi declared in 1998 that "homosexuality is against African norms and traditions" (quoted in Msibi 2011: 62). Robert Mugabe claiming that "homosexuality is for whites only

and is an anathema to African culture" (quoted in Hoad: 14) in 1994 also exemplifies the strategy used by political leaders to alienate same-sex desire and to present themselves as guardians of a fantasized authentic African morality and identity.

In his article "Culture, morality and the law: Nigeria's anti-gay law in perspective", Adebanjo (2015) recalls that, although the withdrawal of the law was asked internationally, the Nigerian government justified its passing with the massive public support: a 2013 poll conducted by the Pew Research Centre[5] "reported that 98% of Nigerians were against homosexuality, the rationale being its incompatibility with cultural and moral values" (Adebanjo 2015: 260). This poll sheds light on the strong relationship between religiosity and rejection of homosexuality. It is indeed widely believed in Nigeria that same-sex love or sexual relationships are only an evil practice, and that "everyone was born 'straight'" (Adebanjo 259). Besides, Ireland explains that a "growth in fundamentalism in many parts of the continent" happened during the last decades and "conservative western evangelicals" are involved in the passing of homophobic laws (53). Hoad (2007) also underscores the role of the Anglican Church in widespread African homophobia and he uses the Anglican Conference of World Bishops held at Lambeth in 1998 as a key event which best exemplifies the attitude of the Church towards homosexuality and the tensions between Africa and the West about it. For the first time, bishops tackled the "question of ordaining non-celibate homosexual clergy and the legitimacy of clergy presiding at same-sex union" (51). With the help of European and North American "self-named traditionalists", African Bishops prevented the ordaining of "non-celibate homosexual clergy" and the "blessing of same-sex unions" (51-52). Their "literalist biblical understanding of sexual morality" and the "imperial 'civilized' sexual norms" are "defended as authentically African" (Hoad 48-67). Hoad also lays emphasis on the understanding of 'modernity' which varies according to the context. In Europe and North America, the "tolerance of homosexuality becomes a marker of civilized modernity" (57), whereas in a postcolonial context, "the nuclear family is seen as the proper intimate form of modernity" (57) defended by African nationalists because of the "congruence between what is Christian and what is African" in their discourses (16). In addition, the attitude of the Nigerian Anglican Church towards homosexuality has hardened since the holding of the conference: in 2003, after the consecration of a bishop living in a gay relationship in the US Episcopal Church, the Nigerian Church decided to break ties with this American Church and to refuse grants from

[5] "The Global Divide on Homosexuality", Pew Research Center, June 2013, available at : https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2013/06/04/the-global-divide-on-homosexuality/ (accessed march 2021)

them (55). Hoad finally indicates that the issue of homosexuality was first raised by some Western bishops to condemn homophobia in the Anglican Church and "the process of amending may be regarded as […] a refusal to submit to the dictates of a new Western position" (66).

Although the SSMPA received a massive public support, it brought about controversy both nationally and internationally. The SSMPA objectors underscored the fact that this law "contradict[s] national and international principles of fundamental human rights, such as the right to privacy, dignity, equality and non-discrimination, the right to health and the right to found a family" (Adebanjo 263). In addition, Nwazuoke and Igwe, in the article "Critical Review of the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act", demonstrate that the law is unconstitutional (179-184). The bill subsequently generated reactions from the United States and Britain, as Hilary Clinton and David Cameron threatened to "tie development aid to 'LGBT' rights" and give monies to "LGBTI-friendly" NGOs (Ekine 82). Ekine notes that, following Cameron's and Clinton's statements, the Nigerian government used a new rhetoric to justify the passing of the SSMPA: the law became a matter of national sovereignty and it is justified by the right to self-determination (82-83). Ireland (2013) underlines that "gay rights, according to some observers, have now become part of a universalizing assimilationist project to impose an Occidental human rights discourse on the non-Western world" (55). The resistance to this form of imperialism from the West is related to a resistance to neoliberalism, which has been linked with homosexuality since the 1990s: gay men are perceived as "the winners of globalization" and belonging to Western immoralism and they are seen as embodying the corruption of the elites (53-54).

Considering all of these, the passing of the SSMPA happened in a context of religious hostility towards same-sex desire, in which the African is equated with the Christian. The condemnation of same-sex desire is used to assert an African identity built in contradistinction with the West, its human rights discourse and neoliberalism. Political and religious discourses alienate same-sex desire and promote "the idea of a uniformly heterosexual African identity" (Epprecht 2008: 160). The following section will explain why heterosexuality and heteronormativity became equated with Africanness and how it affected the dominant discourse on male same-sex desire in Nigerian literature.

B. Heteronormativity and the dominant discourse on sexuality in Nigerian literature

Contrary to the vision of homosexuality as a Western import, it may be considered that it is homophobia and its criminalization which is actually an import resulting from British colonization. First, Ireland (2013) notices that "colonies that won their sovereignty from the British have in fact been more likely than others to forbid same-sex activity, as did the U.K. itself until the 1960s"(56). The Penal Code prohibiting same-sex sexual relationships was indeed introduced by the colonizers, and this criminalisation reinforced homophobia while strengthening heteronormativity. Without idealizing African precolonial societies, Epprecht notes that, in precolonial Africa, "some experienced cruelties and humiliations for failure to conform to gender and sexual ideals […] but, on the whole, the ways and means to explain and accommodate sexual differences appear to have been relatively humane and respectful of the dignity of the person s involved" (2008: 9). In order to preserve the family's dignity, the "nonnormative behaviour" could for example be not named, not presented as "an individual choice" and be hidden from the public sphere (Epprecht 9). Thus, even though same-sex desiring individuals would face prejudice or hostility, they would not be alienated or legally punished. The Penal Code imposed by the British helped create the heterosexual norm.

Secondly, Murray and Roscoe (1998) note that ''among the many myths Europeans have created about Africa, the myth that homosexuality is absent or incidental in African societies is one of the oldest and most enduring" (xi). The colonial ideology contributed to the heterosexual norm: Europeans used to consider that Africans were "uncivilised and close to nature", and that homosexuality was the product of a decadent civilisation (Epprecht 40). It could hence not be possible for Europeans to imagine that same-sex sexual activities occurred in Africa. Moreover, Epprecht explains that, since male-male sexual relationships were rarely publicly known and because of the euphemisms used to described same-sex sexual relationships, the ethnographers conveniently assumed that they did not exist (8). Nonetheless, when missionaries, administrators or ethnographers sometimes learnt about same-sex sexual activities, those practices were either hidden or "construed as a consequence of Africans' contact with decadent outsiders, Arabs above all" (42). Thus, the ethnographic works of the 18th and 19th centuries invisibilised 'deviant' behaviours, and they have been used to "give authority to contemporary claims about the narrowness of what is traditional, authentic on the one hand […] and what is deviant, modern or exotic on the other" (35). Epprecht also pinpoints the recent and "little awareness of the historical and ethnographic evidence of same-sex sexuality" among African intellectuals and scholars, which also explains the stereotype of a "heterosexual Africa"

(Epprecht 2008: 8). Heterosexuality then became – in political discourses – a "defining characteristic of Africanness" while homosexuality was construed as "an antithesis of African identity, dignity, and independence" (161). The same rhetoric of a "distinctive African sexuality" (161) has thus been used alternately by the colonizers to justify colonization and by the African political leaders to fight imperialism and build an African identity.

Consequently, the colonial influence generated the reinforcement of the heterosexual norm and the creation of the myth of exclusive heterosexuality in Africa. According to Judith Butler (1990: 55), the norms participate in the smoothing of behaviours, which become similar and normal, and so render other behaviours – like some forms of love relationships – abnormal or abject. The figure of the homosexual then emerged in political and literary discourses as abject and alien to Africa. The homosexual abject is often construed with "conflating homosexuality with rape, child abuse, bestiality, or prostitution" (Epprecht 2008: 16).

The dominant discourse on masculinity and sexuality in Nigerian literature may be illustrated with the works of the first generation of writers such as Chinua Achebe and Eleche Amadi. This discourse was built in response to the colonial discourse enhancing the bestiality and the hypersexualisation of the Africans while infantilizing and feminizing them. (Hoad 2007: 42). Epprecht (2008) observes that African writers used the myth of an exclusively heterosexual Africa to establish their "respectability in the eyes of both African and European audiences" (133) and "heavy-handed portrayals of men's heterosexual virility" were employed to "remasculinize" African men (136). Lopang (2014) highlights the ideal of masculinity as presented in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958): in the precolonial Igbo society represented by village of Umuofia, masculinity is "defined on a social and political level, by farming yams successfully and by accumulating titles" (79). The wrestling contests and the wars also played an important part of manhood, and Okonkwo's father is described as effeminate because he is more interested in music than in titles. In the novel, sexual relationships – only heterosexual – "form a functional rather than a sensual purpose"; desire is completely excluded from these relationships which are only meant to enable procreation (79). Amadi's *The Concubine* (1966) also exemplifies "this convenient yet narrow view of African sexuality" (Lopang 80) in pre-colonial societies: the writer indeed provides a depiction of an exclusively heterosexual society ruled by arranged marriages which create bonds between two families and not only between two people (80). In both novels, the heterosexual relationship is the only kind of sexual relationship existing in pre-colonial societies and same-sex desire cannot exist.

Dunton also (1989) sheds light on "the abstention among African writers […] from a fully characterized and nonschematic depiction of a homosexual relationship between Africans" (445). In the article "Wheyting Be Dat" (1989), Dunton emphasises the fact that homosexuality is most of the time represented as un-African and used to refer to exploitation and colonization. He illustrates his view with a quotation from Yulisa Amadu Pat Maddy's *Big Berrin* which inspired the title of his article: in the play, the character of the grandmother asks the question: "Homosexuality? Wheyting be dat?" The Sierra Leonean playwright indeed uses an old character to imply that same-sex relationships did not exist before the arrival of the colonizers. Furthermore, in Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, the Arab colonizer is portrayed as homosexual, laying the emphasis on the foreign character of homosexuality in West African literatures. In addition, discussing Omotoso's *The Edifice* (1971), Epprecht (2008) argues that the portrayal of European priests trying to "seduce or rape African protagonist" enabled "the African character to make speeches about the virtues of their own traditional cultures" (136). Same-sex desire is then foreign, morally blameworthy and used as a tool to underscore respectability in opposition with the West.

In *The Interpreters* (1965), Soyinka provides us with an ambivalent discourse on homosexuality. Dunton (1989) states that Joe Golder is portrayed in the novel as a "voracious Western homosexual", isolated from the other characters for several reasons: Golder is a mixed-race African-American, selfish, destructive and homosexual (440). Golder is also implicated in the death of Noah, which may metaphorically tally homosexuality with Western moral corruption (Hoad 2007: 42). Although Soyinka provides us with some of the stereotypes of the homosexual, *The Interpreters* is the first Nigerian novel to investigate and give complexity to homosexuality: the homosexual character is not used as a metaphor for sexual exploitation, but he is part of the development of the narrative of the novel. Similarly, Lopang (2014) explains that "*The Interpreters* is one of the first novels from West Africa to suggest that homosexuality was not a colonial burden that came across the Atlantic" (82). A discussion between Sagoe and Golder highlights the idea that Nigerian educated people know that same-sex relationships have always existed on the African continent, but they prefer ignoring it. It is nonetheless wort noticing that Soyinka "mitigates the assertion of the indigenous homosexuality": same-sex sexual acts are associated with Islamic influence and wealthy people in cities (Green-Simms 2016: 140). Besides, from the beginning of the novel Joe Golder reclaims his blackness and Africanness, and the novel suggests that, in spite of his homosexuality, the character gains this recognition by the Nigerian characters: Golder is indeed asked to model for the deity Erinle –

who is bisexual in Yoruba cosmology (Hoad 2007: 36) – and, at the end of the novel, Golder performing the song "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" enables him to be, "in Egbo's eyes, baptized into blackness" (36). Thus, Soyinka suggests that same-sex desire is not contradictory with an African identity.

As can be seen, the discourse of an essentially heterosexual Africa may be considered as a result of colonization. This discourse has been used by political leaders to distinguish the African identity from a Western one, contending that same-sex desire is un-African. This pervasive idea influenced the canonical literary works of Nigerian writers who also participated in the spreading of this heteronormative discourse which has become dominant. Thus, writers conveying a different view of same-sex desire tend to have difficulties to get published.

C. Publishing obstacles and internet as a new literary space

Since the illegitimate discourse supporting same-sex relationships is forbidden, homosexuality remains taboo in the mainstream media and literature. Thus, the Nigerian artists tackling same-sex desire must find alternative platforms to express themselves and several writers published online short stories and poems. During the debates on the SSMPA and after it was signed, the websites *Pen/OutWrite*, *Brittle Paper* and *NigeriansTalk* posted literary works by Nigerian writers about same-sex desire. Several short stories were also published in *Q-Zine*, "a cooperative online magazine with a mission to be the most inclusive and accessible place on the internet for young African writers, photographers, artists and activists who reflect queer life and experience from an African perspective."[6] *Pen/Out Write* is a platform "developed by PEN International, the worldwide association of writers, […] where LGBTQI writers worldwide can raise their voices, inform public debate, create dialogue and highlight the challenges that they face."[7] The website *Brittle Paper* "offer[s] a thorough coverage of the African literary scene" and publishes "original stories and poetry, [providing] opportunity for new and aspiring writers to share their work."[8] *NigeriansTalk "*is a one-stop site made up of a community of writers who focus on all things Nigerian."[9] The website "seeks to cover the wide spectrum of perspectives on various social, political, and personal issues – issues that affect Nigerians at home and abroad."[10]

[6] Quoted from *Q-Zine*, issue 1, 2011. Web June 10th 2018.
[7] Quoted from *Pen/OutWrite* website: http://www.pen-outwrite.org/about-penoutwrite , June 10th 2018.
[8] Quoted from *Brittle Paper* website: https://brittlepaper.com/about/ , June 10th 2018.
[9] Quoted from *NigeriansTalk* website: https://nigerianstalk.org/about/ , June 10th 2018.
[10] *Ibid.*

Moreover, the creation of a new literary magazine may be evidence of the emergence of a new trend in literature. Journo (2014) explains that the magazines give the authors the legitimacy necessary to be recognized and known in the literary sphere (51). The magazines replace the institutions which do not offer the necessary help for writers to get published. The national and international literary prizes also have little influence on the publishing of works (Chakava 1996); thus, the magazines are the privileged area for new writers to express their difference from the other -and often older- writers (Journo 2016: 52). Therefore, the creation of *Q-Zine* in 2011 may enhance the emergence of a queer movement in African literatures, not especially in Nigeria, but in the whole of Africa since the magazine is published in English and in French to widen its readership to the whole continent. Green-Simms (2016) defines the notion of emergence as a process, in terms of relationship to the dominant, and not in terms of chronology. Thus, the narratives deviating from the legitimate discourse of compulsory heterosexuality may be considered as emergent.

Lindsey Green-Simms (2016) explains that "queer African writers and allies have turned toward the Internet as an unfiltered way to reach both local and global audiences and to quickly respond to the changing political climate" (154). Nigerian writers addressing same-sex desire have to face the publishing difficulties which characterise the African continent. In the online magazine *Publishing Perspectives*, the writer Tolu Ogunlesi (2009) expressed his concern about the fact that African literature is mostly published by European publishing houses that "seem to possess fixed ideas about what African literature should or should not be, and what 'authentic' African characters can or cannot do"[11]. Thus, stories displaying characters whose gender or sexuality do not fit the heterosexual norm are very likely to be refused by the publishing houses – European or African. In addition, Chakava (1984) also underlines the fact that European institutions –the Goethe Institute, the Alliance Française, the British Council- and NGOs were delegated support to culture, which reinforces Western influence on the artistic creations. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie illustrates this reality in "Jumping Monkey Hill" (Adichie 2009: 95-114): the short story is set in Cape Town, where several writers from all over the African continent participate in a creative writing workshop during which some writers reject the idea that the story of a young woman telling her family that she is homosexual may be African. In the same vein, when another participant narrates her own story about quitting her job, the other writers do not find the story plausible. Subsequently, Nigerian writers whose

[11]Ogunlesi, Tolu. "Who controls African literature?", Publishing Perspectives, available at: https://publishingperspectives.com/2009/07/who-controls-african-literature/ (accessed Dec 17th 2020)

stories diverge from the heterosexual norm have to find alternative platforms on the internet to broadcast their works, avoiding at the same time the general difficulties encountered by many writers in Nigeria.

Sanyaolu (2019) explains that the economic decline in the 1980s and the military regimes led many publishing industries to leave Nigeria (250). Bgoya and Jay (2013) explain the preponderance of European publishing houses by the lack on investment by African governments which were "preoccupied mostly with economic development" after the respective independences and consequently gave "little or no support to modern cultural industries" (Bgoya 2013: 21-22). Despite an improvement in the 2000s and the return of democracy, the number of publishing houses is still low, new writers subsequently struggle to get their works published. However, Bgoya (2013) notes that "the digital age is empowering African publishers", with an easier access to literary works online. Ogunlesi (2009) also regrets that numerous books by African writers "win awards and establish their positions in the African literary canon in the West, but most Africans remain unaware of them" because these books are not published and sold in Africa. Yet Tolu Ogunlesi recognizes the progressive change in the publishing industry, with the opening of the publishing houses Cassava Republic and Kachifo in Nigeria.

The internet enables writers and readers to overcome these issues since the works published online are accessible for anyone having a cell phone connected to the internet. Writers can reach their audience without depending on the West and on publishing houses, wherever they are located. Adenakan (2012) argues that the digital space welcoming artistic works is more democratic than traditional books: the texts are easily accessible, cheaper than books and free from censorship. In addition, it often leads to political debates, as the readers are able to comment on the literary pieces, "in which fictional characters represent themes coming out of national politics" (69). Since the artist no longer depends on Western markets or on national publishing houses, the themes tackled are not limited to a narrow view of what Nigerian literature should be. Adenekan indeed notes that "the virtual space also enables the writer to address in fiction and poetry, themes such as homosexuality and prostitution, which may have been considered taboo subjects in the physical space." Discussing the writing of the third generation of Nigerian writers, Osofisan (2008) asserts that "the old notions of privacy, the consensual secretiveness and "holiness" that used to be attached to such matters as love and sex have long been axed and discarded as antiquated relic" (255). The authors publishing online are indeed not afraid of describing physical same-sex intimacies and the "figure of the homosexual

African" is presented "as being part of African history and as being vital to its future" (Adenekan 2012: 104). The freedom of expression and the poetic license in the digital space allow the writers to undermine the dominant heteronormative discourse. According to Adenekan, "online literature along with the rise of the middle class are now arguably the catalyst for the 'coming out' of African marginalised identities" (2012: 39)

II. CHALLENGING HETERONORMATIVITY

A. Challenging gender norms

The emergent discourse questions heteronormativity by highlighting the impossibility to fit the norm, even for 'normal' heterosexual characters. Several short stories provide representations of families which do not tally with the traditional and ideal representations of family and heterosexual relationships. Adichie and Ifeakandu display these relationships as dysfunctional because of the gender norms or functional thanks to the transgression of the traditional gender roles.

In "Apollo" (Adichie 2015), Adichie offers a feminist representation of a happy heterosexual marriage through Okenwa's parents. In the short story, the success of their relationship is first possible because they challenged the norms and their families while younger. Okenwa – the intradiegetic narrator – indeed explains that his parents got married "against their families' wishes – his thought her too educated, while hers preferred a wealthier suitor" (65). Their relationship challenged the traditional gender roles within the family. On the one hand, the marriage is based on equality between the two of them: Okenwa indeed underlines that his parents "spent their lives in an intense and intimate competition over who published more, who won at badminton, who had the last word in an argument" (65). Adichie gives the representation of a couple in which the wife did not "cater to the fragile egos of males" (Adichie 2014: 11). The equality between husband and wife is moreover enhanced with the erasure of their physical particularities: the narrator notes that his parents "look more and more alike, as though all the years spent together had made their features *blend and bleed* into one another. They even smell[-] alike" (64: my emphasis). The erasure of the physical distinctive traits, highlighted by the paronomasia of the verbs in italics, may correspond to the erasure of gender norms in the couple. Furthermore, Okenwa eventually explains that he was "born late in their lives" and his mother told him that "when [she] got pregnant, [she] thought it was menopause" (65). This piece of information enhances the failure of the traditional roles in their relationship: pregnancy and motherhood were not the main goals of Okenwa's mother. Nonetheless, the narrator underscores a change in his parents' behaviours and minds, since they have "become the kind of Nigerians who told anecdotes about diabetes cured by drinking holy water", whereas "fifteen years earlier [they] would have scoffed at these stories" (64). Okenwa defines this

change as a "new childhood of old age" (64) which leads his parents towards a more traditional view of the family. They indeed ask Okenwa when he will have a child and when he "will bring a girl to introduce to [them]" (65), whereas they did not follow the traditions while younger. This change in their mind is not presented as a positive evolution, but as a decrease in the mind of the parents since the narrator uses the term "childhood" to describe their behaviours. Thus, Adichie seems to value the transgression of the heterosexual norm which is not an ideal model, but a relationship preventing happiness and self-fulfilment.

In Adichie's "The Shivering" (2009), the heterosexual couple – embodied by Ukamaka and her ex-boyfriend Udenna- is represented in line with the homosexual relationship. Both Ukamaka's and Chinedu's ex-boyfriends are 'Big Men' – wealthy and influential men, who represent the patriarchal power. Although Ukamaka hardly gets over her dead relationship with Udenna, the reader nonetheless understands that she was not happy in this relationship. She indeed tells Chinedu that Udenna "used to make [her] feel that nothing [she] said was witty enough or sarcastic enough or smart enough" (153). Contrary to Okenwa's mother in "Apollo" (Adichie 2015), Ukamaka "cater[ed] to the fragile ego of males" (Adichie 2014: 11) and planed her life according to Udenna's wishes, as emphasized by the narrator while describing the end of the relationship:

> "Staid" was the word he had used. There was nobody else, but the relationship had become staid. *Staid, and yet* she had been arranging her life around his for three years. *Staid, and yet* she had begun to bother her uncle, a senator, about finding her a job in Abuja after she graduated because Udenna wanted to move back when he finished graduate […]. *Staid, and yet* she cooked her stews with hot peppers now, the way he liked. *Staid, and yet* they had spoken often about the children they would have, a boy and a girl whose conception she had taken for granted […]. (148: my emphasis)

The anaphoric "Staid, and yet" highlights the discrepancy between Ukamaka's and Udenna's feelings about their relationship and the compromises she had to make for her boyfriend. Ukamaka fitted the traditional view of a girlfriend: she cooked the way her boyfriend liked, she let him decide for both of them, and she expected to live and have children with him. Nonetheless, her sacrifices did not make the relationship work. Thus, Adichie may imply that, in addition to shrinking women, a traditional relationship does not guarantee a fruitful and happy marriage.

Similarly, in Ifeakandu's "God's Children Are Little Broken Things" (2016), the heterosexual marriage formed by Lotanna's parents is not a happy one. Dumebi indeed calls him twice because their parents are quarrelling and, while she is slipping away in hospital, the mother reveals to her son how unhappy she has been because her husband used to cheat on her. Moreover, as in "The Shivering" (Adichie 2009), the traditional relationship deprives the feminine character of her freedom. Dumebi indeed has to give up her wish to go to university because she has to get married. She explains that she cannot wait for being admitted into the university any longer since she "is a girl. [Her] time is short" (12). Social gender expectations urging her to find a husband and have a family contradict her education and self-fulfilment.

Butler (1990) notes indeed that "the institution of compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from the feminine term" (22). Adichie's "The Shivering" (2009) and Ifeakandu's "God's Children Are Little Broken Things" (2016) highlight this binary differentiation which is responsible for the failure of the heterosexual relationship. Patriarchy is challenged and the transgression of the heterosexual norm enables happiness as Adichie implies in "Apollo" (2015).

The heterosexual norm and patriarchy are also challenged by writers with the absence of fathers in the short stories. For instance, in Laone's short story "Dried Fish Curry" (2013), Thuso's family is marked by the absence of males. Thuso's father is not mentioned, and his grandfather is dead. Moreover, the family seems to be built on a series of unexpected events which made the family unconventional. Thuso was indeed brought up by his grandmother MaMpho. Thuso's mother Thulaganyo was born late in MaMpho's life, and she was only a teenager when she became pregnant. She died during the premature delivery. Laone's representation of the family participates in the representation of familial diversity.

Through the short stories, several authors question the notion of masculinity. The title of Adichie's short story "Apollo" obviously refers first to the eye disease which infects the characters, but it may also refer to the Greek deity Apollo who embodies both manliness and colonization[12]. Hence the double meaning of the title may imply that hegemonic masculinity in Nigeria is a toxic colonial import from European traditions, a disease for Nigerian society. The author then reverses the idea that male same-sex desire is a medical condition to underscore the danger of hegemonic masculinity and the falsity of the gender norms promoted as authentically

[12] See Shachar, Ilan. "Greek colonization and the eponymous apollo", *Mediterranean Historical Review*, Vol. 15(2), 2000, pp. 1-26. Web 15 Feb 2021.

African. In the same way, Ogunyemi's short story "Reflections" (2013) denounces the influence of Europe on the construction of masculinity in Nigerian society. After the young boy chose a doll as a birthday present for his seventh birthday, the mother argues with the father who bought the gift. She would have wanted her husband to buy his son "proper toys for boys". However, the narrator tells us that the "proper toys for boys" in the toy shop are "toy cars", "action figures" and "Star Wars toys" (73). The precision "Star Wars" sheds light on the European origin of the toys which influence the social construction of masculinity in Nigeria. While the mother wants her child to fit the masculinity standards, she unconsciously influences him to fit European standards of masculinity. Nonetheless, the author presents a different vision of masculinity through the seven-year-old child. The boy indeed admires his father who is depicted as a "hero, looking all manly with his moustache and Afro hair" (73). Here the vision of masculinity embodied by the father is not influenced by a European vision. The manliness of the father is yoked together with his Africanness. In similar fashion, the doll chosen by the boy does not reveal a proclivity to effeminacy, but the name of the doll –Nefertiti– reveals an interest in pre-colonial African cultures. The definition of masculinity is moreover questioned by Dibia in his short story "Falling" (Dibia 2015): the narrator indeed says that Sasha "exhibit[s] what many consider[-] as unmanly traits" without being more precise. The author underscores the idea that masculinity is not an objective concept that is understood and performed in the same way by everybody. Sasha then explains that he "wonder[s] about gender roles, and how it had been drummed into his younger self and other boys the manly way to act" (Dibia 2015). The construction of the sentence, with an extraposed subject, is indeed used by the author to lay emphasis on the real subject "the manly way to act": Dibia highlights the idea that masculinity and gender roles are not natural, but they are social constructs. The dental alliteration also imitates the sound of the drum, accentuating the process of repetition at stake in the formation of gender identity and shedding light on how young men are forced to learn and perform a specific kind of masculinity. Although Sasha fits some clichés of homosexual men – he likes taking care of his appearance, he is interested in fashion – which are supposed to deprive him of his masculinity, the character insists on the fact that he "love[s] to be a man and would change nothing about that." The author here suggests that male same-sex desire and Sasha's behaviour -seen as effeminate- cannot deprive him of his masculinity. In Ifeakandu's "God's Children Are Little Broken Things" (2016), after Lotanna says Kamsi that he does not "look gay", the latter answers with the rhetorical question: "How does one look gay, Lota?" (17) The lack of an answer from Lotanna indeed highlights the idea that appearances cannot define sexual inclinations and masculinity. Besides, the author tries to counter the clichés with the character

of Lotanna who practises football. The physical and athletic qualities are part of the social expectations for a man to be considered masculine, which is not depicted as contradictory with the same-sex love relationship between Lotanna and Kamsi. The short story moreover challenges typical masculine behaviour when Kamsi's assailants are described as "boys" (16). The word "boys" –used instead of the word "men"– reduces the masculinity of the aggressors which are seen as children, unworthy of being considered as real men. The masculinity of the assailants is also questioned with the threat of corrective rape. Kamsi reports that the aggressors would "have a little fun raping [the gay] out of [him]", and asks Lotanna if it "[didn't] sound gay to [him]" (16). Ifeakandu underscores the contradiction in the corrective rape since the rapists use a violent and non-consensual same-sex intercourse to prevent the spread of same-sex desire.

Corrective rapes are indeed a way used by homophobic men to delete and make non-normative behaviours invisible. Aggressions and lynching are also depicted in the literary texts as means to repress same-sex desire.

B. Social control silencing same-sex desire

Aggressions and lynching are examples in the literary texts of a violent form of social control through repression, as they are used to punish someone for not fitting the heterosexual norm. This violence is at the core of several short stories like "Witness" (Dibia 2013), "Falling" (Dibia 2015), or "The Enactment" (Oyebanji 2014). In these texts, the authors directly or indirectly refer to the SSMPA and describe the violent acts as the result of the homophobic and normative environment. In Dibia's "Falling" (2015), the narrator explains that Sasha "ha[s] to be careful" about the way he performs his gender identity because the passing of the SSMPA started a "witch-hunt for homosexuals" which leads the character to "tone down on how he present[s] himself to the world" (Dibia 2015). Thus, gender is compelled to adapt to society and cannot be performed freely. In "Witness" the intradiegetic narrator also explains that, even though "he ha[s] been invisible all [his] life" and "dared not be his true self in public", he would have to become "much more invisible" (Dibia 2013) because of the SSMPA. Nigerian society and its injunction to perform heterosexuality are indeed presented as making the characters' real gender and sexual identities become invisible. This invisibility is moreover accompanied with the silencing of the characters who are beaten and/or killed. "The Enactment" (Oyebanji 2014) is a second-person narrative in which the main character is never able to express himself: there are no dialogues or indirect speech in the short story and the character never addresses his

aggressors. The second-person narrator is nonetheless omniscient and provides an insight into the character's mind. For example, he notes: "you would not set your feet in any church again if you got out of your trouble alive, you thought" (Oyebanji 2014). The choice of this kind of narration accentuates the silencing of the character who cannot express himself with a first-person narrative. Scarry (1985: 19) argues that "pain is language-destroying" (quoted in Danaila 2020: 133). The aggression indeed prevents Oyebanji's character from speaking. Similarly, in Dibia's "Falling" (2015), Sasha explains that he "cried and begged until even crying was of great pain and effort" (Dibia 2015). The aggression is described with a series of nominal sentences: "Belts. Whips. Knives. Sticks. Pepper" (Dibia 2015). This laconic description underscores the speed of the events and the impossibility to react and describe them with complete sentences. The violence deprives the character of his capacity of expressing himself.

Moreover, in "Falling" (Dibia 2015) and "The Enactment" (Ayodele 2013), the aggressions are not presented as individual acts of violence, but they emanate from social, political and religious homophobia. Dibia indeed insists on the ordinariness of the place where Sasha is attacked, as it happens "in a regular neighbourhood", with "nothing fancy or out of the ordinary", which looks like "a typical Lagos community" (Dibia 2015). The use of the adjectives "regular", "ordinary" and "typical" underlines the widespread quality of homophobia in Nigerian society which is caused by "countless religious and traditional purists" (Dibia 2015). "The Enactment" also underscores violent social oppression when the narrator states that "the whole society was beating [the character]". This homophobic violence in the literary texts then seems to be normal in Nigeria and mirrors what actually happens to same-sex desiring individuals. Adebanjo (2015) explains that the passing of the SSMPA increased the violence against "suspected gay people who were routinely 'arrested' by the police and civilians alike and made to endure public shaming, such as being stripped naked, flogged and paraded round the community" (259). In addition, the short story "Witness" (Dibia 2013) presents two different versions of the aggression: the first one narrates what actually happened whereas the second one, displayed in italics, narrates an official version of the events given to a police officer. The different versions shed light on the impossibility to speak the truth to the authorities, exemplifying legitimate and illegitimate discourses, the latter being silenced.

Besides, in Ifeakandu's "God's Children Are Little Broken Things" (2016), the use of the second person narrative may also shed light on the absence of "I" as a narrative strategy to represent the difficulty to express oneself when on the margins of the norm. In the short story, the author might use the second-person narrative to make the reader experience the situation of

being deprived of one's agency. The reader loses his status of subject to become the object of Arinze Ifeakandu's narrative. Then, in the short story, Lotanna fails to tell what he had planned to say: he explains that, after a quarrel, he "wanted to tell [Kamsi] it's called transfer of aggression. […] And [he] did not tell him. The next time [they] quarrelled, [they] flung words at each other. Quietly, so that the neighbours wouldn't hear." (Ifeakandu 2016: 8). Lotanna's and Kamsi's freedom of speech is diminished by the secrecy of the situation. They cannot quarrel in an ordinary way: they are compelled to stay quiet. Furthermore, the narrator precising that the argument had to remain quiet because of the neighbours exemplifies the constant observation that all individuals must face in society. The resulting discretion also affects the characters' bodily attitude: it is indeed highlighted that, when Kamsi sat on a bench at the park, "he had his hand in [Lotanna's], hidden from view" (9). Despite Lotanna's sadness due to his mother being sick and the soothing effect of holding hands – highlighted by the alliteration in /h/ –, the lovers need to control their behaviour and be as discreet as possible. This constant observation is best exemplified in Ikpo's *Fimi Sile Forever* (2017), when the twins' father is at a party with his family and their friends Wale notes that:

> "Dad put his palm over Uncle Ola's hand and squeezed it, and rested his head on Uncle Ola's shoulder and closed his eyes. An elderly female guest who passed by us at that moment hissed so loud that Dad opened his eyes. He looked at her and she glared at him, and he took his head off Uncle Ola's shoulder and settled back into the chair instead" (84).

In this passage, the father is reminded of the illegitimacy of his behaviour by "an elderly female guest" (84). The use of the indefinite article indicates that she is a stranger for the narrator, she is not part of the family, and yet she seems to hold legitimacy to control the father's behaviour. This type of surveillance is explained by Foucault in *Surveiller et punir* (1975). Using the image of the panopticon, he contends that, in contemporary societies, one is made to believe that one may be observed at any time. Though this model of surveillance was imagined for prisons, Foucault argues that it has become a model for the whole social organization, including the management of schools. This observation also induces the internalisation of the norms, the uniformization of bodies and minds (166-182). *Fimi Sile Forever* (2017) offers a depiction of Wole and Wale's boarding school, in which "all students are made to buy similar-looking wares" including "black berets, blue short-sleeved shirts, black combat trousers and boots" (68). The school uniform, as a dress code, is a form of clothing norm which epitomises the uniformization of bodies and minds at school. The alliterations in /b/, /ʃ/ and /s/ pinpoint this

uniformization with the repetition of the same sounds, creating a sound uniformity. In addition, the articles of clothing mentioned, coming from the English school system, are reminiscent of a virile, military uniform, which underscores the similarity of the mechanisms of uniformization at work in the whole social body, especially the "hierarchical surveillance" in the army and at school, where the authorities regulate 'normal' and 'abnormal' behaviours (Foucault 1975: 201-202). Moreover, when transgressions happen, the punishment is meant to correct the 'abnormal' behaviour in order to normalize it (Foucault 1975: 210-216). In *Fimi Sile Forever* (2017), the narrator recounts the first time he witnessed the punishment of same-sex desire when he was at school: he recounts that, after being denounced as "homo", his classmate Tobi "was pushed out of the room wearing only his grey plaid boxers, the belts of the prefects slashing his shoulders and back as they followed him" (189). In addition, the flogging was followed by humiliation: over the next days "senior students came in at intervals to demand that Tobi Johnson jump to his feet, and when he wearily did so, they would look at him with so much disgust in their eyes it was painful" (192). The punishment does not only impact Tobi "who had not spoken to anyone [Wole] knew since he was taken out on Saturday morning" (192), but it also leads to the protagonist's silence: whereas he would have wanted to support his friend, Wole explains that "it was difficult for [him] to stand out. It was difficult for [him] to face all that ridicule and humiliation when [he] could just stay silent" (192). Thus, the punishment tends to normalize the behaviours of both the person who commits what is seen as an offence and the people who witness the punishment, as it becomes impossible, due to social pressure, to speak against this punishment without being marginalised. In this case, heteronormativity indeed induces the silence of the characters.

Dibia's *Walking With Shadows* (2011) sheds light on a particular form of religious corrective punishment carried out by the Nigerian Church in order to silence and eradicate same-sex desire. In an attempt to "sav[e] and cur[e]" Adrian from "the devil that tempts [him]" (174), Pastor Matthew operates a violent exorcism, which begins with prayers to end with the flogging of the protagonist. This passage indeed underscores the silencing of the character:

> "*Pastor…*"
>
> "Pray with me!" Pastor Matthew screamed, *cutting Adrian short*. "Close your eyes my brother and pray with me for God's mercy and strength."
>
> *Adrian tried to protest but* felt the strong hands of the two burly men behind the pastor seize and pin him to the floor. It happened so fast and so unexpectedly that *Adrian did not have a chance to react*. When he realized what was happening *he*

> *tried struggling, but his voice was already drowned out* by the fervent praying of the pastor and the accompanying "amen" coming from his brother and the two men that held him down […] (174: my emphasis).

The excerpt highlights both Adrian's willingness to speak his truth and defend himself and his incapacity to do so because of the overwhelming power of religion. The use of the three dots shows that Adrian's discourse is interrupted, which is reinforced when the narrator precises that Pastor Matthew "cu[t] Adrian short". Adrian's voice is ignored and covered by the shouting pastor, and Adrian is deprived of his agency by the "two burly men" who use physical force to prevent him from leaving. The prayers of all the characters filling the room epitomize the hegemonic power of religion. The repetition of the verb "try" followed by the conjunction "but" pinpoints the discrepancy between Adrian's efforts to express himself and the impossibility to act and be heard because of these obstacles. Moreover, whereas in the beginning of the passage Adrian's voice is silenced only by the voice of the pastor, in the end the protagonist's voice is "drowned out" by all the characters, which exemplifies the influence of the Church on Nigerian people. The verb "drown out" emphasises the omnipresence and the strength of Nigeria's religious conservatism which, according to Zabus (2013), is embodied by Pastor Matthew (97). The episode is also reminiscent of the baptismal ceremony in the prologue, which was supposed to suppress Ebele's identity described as "pathetic" and unmanly (15-16): when the pastor "lowered him into the water […] Ebele felt the hands of the men grip him to prevent a struggle" and he did not "resist the drowning sensation" (16-17). In both passages, clergymen and the image of drowning illustrate the silencing of the character and the attempt to correct his identity. Then, when the narrator notes that Adrian's "voice was already drowned out" (Dibia 2011: 174), the use of the adverb "already" reinforces the idea that Adrian could not succeed in expressing himself. At the same time, the use of this adverb may also imply that every discourse about same-sex desire is always produced in a heteronormative society which tries to silence these illegitimate discourses: Manzo (2020) indeed argues that, in *Walking With Shadows*, the protagonist is confronted to the fact that "'private' desires are, from their inception, subject to public speculation and control within an already constituted normative discourse field" (151). The symmetry between the two episodes previously mentioned suggests that the control of Adrian's desires began in his childhood with his baptism, which may represent, in a synecdochic relationship, the conversion of Nigeria's inhabitants to Christianism, triggering the silencing of non-normative sexualities. In addition, the flogging perpetrated by the pastor is a way to isolate the character from society in order to make same-sex desire disappear: Scarry

(1985: 31) argues that "pain is frequently used as a symbolic substitute for death" (quoted in Danaila 2020: 130). Pastor Matthew indeed aims to "banish the devil from [Adrian's] heart" (175) with a "long five-pronged whip" (174), eventually inducing his fainting, which may also be symbolically seen as death.

Besides, in "Witness" (Dibia 2013) the yelling of the word "homosexual" in the restaurant by the manager is a way to terminate the dialogue: whereas the main character and his doctor are trying to explain that they are not lovers, they are no more listened to because they are identified as "homosexual": the narrator indeed recounts that "the supervisor woman shut [the doctor] down" yelling "Homosexuals! Homosexuals! […] as though that word was on its own a litany of death." Eribon (2012) explains that the insult acts like a verdict, a life sentence: the insulted individual loses his status of subject and becomes the object of discourse (26). The protagonist indeed notices that he becomes "the focus of so much interest, hate—curiosity" (Dibia 2013): he becomes the crowd's object of discourse. The yelling of the insult "homosexual" suffices to prevent the characters from telling their stories, they are instantly found guilty and no longer able to define themselves because their identities have already been assigned by the crowd. The assigned identity seems to be engraved on the body of the protagonist who "cring[es] as if the word [homosexual] itself was hot coal that singed [his] skin." (Dibia 2013). The comparison exemplifies how the insult works in a peremptory way, leaving indelible marks on the body and preventing the character from defining his own identity.

Furthermore, the oppressiveness of heteronormativity can also be echoed in the atmosphere surrounding the characters who, though not completely silenced, experience communication difficulties. For example, in Umez's "A Night So Damp" (2005), the weather, described as suffocating, reflects the weight of patriarchy in Kamalu's family. The narrator indeed informs the reader that "no chilly touch of harmattan could be felt on the skin" (326), and Kamalu mentions that "it is damp' (330). After arguing with his mother about whether he should marry Daphne, he says that he "hate[s] this dampness, feeling uncomfortable with the sweat drenching his shirt" (341). The protagonist is oppressed by both the weather and the patriarchal and heteronormative traditions that pervade his mother's discourse, in which the father is mentioned six times. Despite the death of her husband, Mrs Ngozi wants to arrange her son's life according to her defunct husband's wishes: Kamalu must run his father's company and marry Daphne. Kamalu's traditional family seems to deprive him of his freedom of speech and his agency. When discussing his mother's plan for him to marry Daphne, he eventually tells

his mother that "it seems [he doesn't] have any say in this" (340). The phrase "any say" enhances the lack of freedom of the character and denotes his silencing. In her analysis of the short story, Zabus (2013) contends that "Kamalu's private unease reflects on the general stickiness of discomfort that hampers rather than lubricates same-sex relations in Nigeria" (107). In spite of Kamalu's efforts to explain to his mother that he did not want to marry Daphne because he prefers same-sex love relationships, the two characters never succeed in understanding each other; the weight of heteronormativity prevents language from being efficient. Furthermore, the difficult communication between the characters can also be exemplified with the protagonist's bodily reactions. When Kamalu's mother mentions that she plans to have him marry Daphne, the protagonist "back[s] away immediately, like a man struck by a chilling revelation […], his mouth f[alls] open […], his voice [is] jammed in his throat. He inche[s] backwards, dodging the table, and f[alls] into his chair" (335). The backward motion, performed and stated twice, illustrates the growing distance between the mother and her son concerning what they expect of Kamalu's future. The polyptoton – "back" and "backwards" – indeed puts the emphasis on the discrepancy between the two characters' expectations, especially since the backward motion happens just after a hug and in the context of the son's supposedly cheerful homecoming. The repetition of the verb form "fell" also draws attention onto Kamalu's lack of agency as he seems to gradually lose control of his whole body. Whereas in the first occurrence the verb "fall" relates only to his mouth – then his capacity of speaking –, in the second occurrence it applies to the character's whole body: Kamalu experiences a rough return to a reality in which heteronormativity prevails.

Nonetheless, although the characters in the novels and short stories aforementioned have to face difficulties linked to oppressive heteronormativity – such as their silencing or the assignment of an identity which does not fit them –, the writers also offer to their characters possibilities to resist heteronormativity and regain a voice, a status of subject.

C. Resisting silencing to become subject

Despite the obstacles preventing the expression of same-sex desire, this desire may be read through the body. For instance, in "A Night So Damp" (Umez 2005), when the voice fails to speak the body may replace it to convey a message. As most of the short story is told by an extradiegetic narrator giving little access to the characters' minds, the reader must decipher Kamalu's body language which replaces his voice. Umez makes his main character 'speak' his protest by describing his body language which becomes a form of resistance. For instance, after

Mrs Ngozi reprimands her son because he mock[s] Daphne, the narrator mentions that, when Kamalu "notice[s] Daphne [is] watching him, [he] narrow[s] his eyes at her" (338). The gaze of the protagonist is used as a silent way to resist his mother's plan for him to marry Daphne by pushing her away with his eyes. In addition, after having laughed at Daphne and being reprimanded by his mother, Kamulu "maintained [the] stiff posture" (336) that he had adopted as soon as the young woman had arrived. Thus, Kamalu's unwelcoming and spiteful body language replaces the dialogue and becomes a way to communicate his lack of interest in Daphne.

Besides, though unsaid, emotions are conveyed through taste in the short story, and especially thanks to the taste of the drinks. When Mrs Ngozi accepts to welcome Kay, Kamalu "reache[s] for his goblet and emptie[s] his drink in one swallow. He lick[s] his tongue, savouring the sweetness" (333). Later when he sees Daphne driving through the gate, the narrator indicates that, "as the sweet taste of the cream dribbled on to [Kamalu's] tongue, he felt it turn bitter in his mouth, or so he imagined" (335). Although Kamalu drinks Bailey's Irish Cream in both cases, the taste changes according to the protagonist's mood. In the first case, the protagonist's happiness is highlighted by the alliteration in /s/ of "savouring sweetness" which gives a sense of smoothness and harmony, whereas the hard alliteration in /t/ in the phrase "felt it turn bitter" sheds light on the unpleasantness of the situation. If Kamalu does not voice his dissatisfaction, it is nonetheless expressed through his sense of taste. Furthermore, the changing taste of the drink also triggers the telling of Kamalu's memories in London. Taste then enables the narrator to develop the character's former life in Europe; the analepsis indeed offers to the reader the possibility to know more about the protagonist. His memories, activated by his sense of taste, provide an insight into Kamalu's identity.

In Pedro's "Men at Work: Do Not Disturb" (2013), male same-sex desire does not need to be named or voiced to be experienced. In the short story, the narrator recounts the first time he felt same-sex desire, and he specifies that he had "never heard the word 'homosexuality' before" (84). Here male same-sex desire is conceived as a sensory experience implying touch, sight, smell and taste. For example, the thirteen-year-old boy "appreciate[s] the power of red underwear on a man with a brazen hard body", he likes the smell of the "sweat of a hardworking man" and he "lather[s] up [the ground diggers'] Canoe soap" (84). Though the boy's admiration of the workers is a secret for his family and cannot be voiced, the sensory description of his desire circumvents the inconvenience of the taboo to focus only on physical pleasure. The synaesthetic effect underlines the discovery of his desire, highlighting the pleasure felt by the

teenager, to whom male same-sex desire becomes “the sweetest of all taboos” (84). Thus, the power of the senses enables the character to overcome the harshness of taboo; the secrecy has been reclaimed to become a safe space for the expression of same-sex desire. The body of the character with his senses participate in the discovery and construction of identity. The body may also be the object of hate crime.

Several writers tackle the issue of violence against men involved in same-sex love relationship, relocating the guilt from same-sex desire to the inhumane violence of the Nigerian society. The violence of the aggressors indeed leads to their dehumanization. The violence of the aggressors and their dehumanization act as a foil for the same-sex desiring character’s humanity whose feelings are described and highlighted in the short stories. In “Falling” (Dibia 2015), the narrator tells us that one of the murderers has “an awkward grin on his face that reminded Sasha of a hyena.” The aggressor is portrayed as a bloodthirsty animal. The writer uses the same comparison in “Witness” (Dibia 2013): while speaking of the clients of the restaurant, the narrator says that they “had smelt blood and wanted their piece” (Dibia 2013). In Ifeakandu’s short story “God’s Children Are Little Broken Things” (2016), Kamsi tells Lotanna that the boys who threaten him “are just freaks”. Thus, the author reverses the idea that same-sex desire is abnormal: the abnormality is located in the violence of the people who threatens the narrator with beating and rape.

In addition, the title of the short story “The Enactment” (Oyebanji 2014) directly refers to the passing of the SSMPA and how it is actually enforced in Nigerian society. The narrator describes the law as an “insane one. A real, but insane enactment” (Oyebanji 2014). The repetition of the adjective “insane”, alongside the nominal sentence, highlight a lack a rationality discrediting the law. The absence of a verb also gives an impression of brusqueness echoing the violence of a law fostering mob lynching and necklacing. The violent scene is not represented as a single event triggered by some people who are particularly brutal. The aggressors are not individualized, they represent the Nigerian people since the narrator depicts them as the “crowd”, “the bulk of irate people”, “the mob” (Oyebanji 2014). The absence of individualization of the aggressors may be considered as a way of dehumanizing them. While speaking of the person who reported the sexual intercourse, the narrator tells that “he was a co-worker” whose “guilt would eat away at his heart” (Oyebanji 2014). Thus, the guilt is located on the side of the aggressors. Furthermore, as the aggressors are represented as the Nigerian people, and as the short story refers to the SSMPA, the writer implies that the whole Nigerian society, including its government, is found guilty of an abnormal inhumanity. Thus, the feeling

of guilt which is generally experienced by same-sex desiring individuals in a heteronormative society is displaced and located on the side of the oppressors. In a similar fashion, the displacement of guilt may be found in Dibia's "Falling" (2015): Sasha imagines that one of his "tormentors" who "did not join the frenzy of torture" (Dibia 2015) may feel guilty. Sasha indeed wonders whether the latter was looking for "forgiveness" while looking "so intently into [Sasha's] eyes" (Dibia 2015). Nonetheless, the "non-participation" (Dibia 2015) does not prevent either Sasha's death or the ordinary violence against men indulging in same-sex love relationships. Thus, the man who does not participate in "the frenzy of torture" (Dibia 2015) is equally guilty of this kind of murders. The author then condemns the passivity of Nigerian society in front of the aggressions which are represented as usual. The narrator explains that Sasha had been suffering abuse since he had been a teenager – he was indeed called a "wanker" (Dibia 2015) at school. Then, the violence increased when "the government [passed] into law a bill criminalizing same-sex marriage" (Dibia 2015). Thus, the guilt is located on the side of the Nigerian society and its government. "Reflections" (Ogunyemi 2013) also offers a displacement of guilt, this time within the family. In the end of the short story, the gay character is rejected by his mother because of his sexual orientation. The narrator states four times that she "should have known" (73-74) his sexuality. In this case the modal SHOULD contains a value of attenuated obligation: according to the narrator, it was the responsibility of the mother to be aware of her son's sexuality, and she failed, which "hurt and confused him. Thus, the responsibility of his pain is not held by the main character but by his mother. The narrator also addresses the reader and says: "maybe you think I should not have been surprised when I was kicked of the house" (74). Anticipating the reader's point of view enables the narrator to emphasise his disagreement with the widespread idea that kick[ing one's child] of the house" would be a normal and expected reaction in this situation. Thus, the narrator rejects the blame and displaces it on his mother who is guilty of her son's pain.

Displacing guilt and discrediting violence are part of the writers' strategies to legitimize their discourse on male same-sex desire. In addition, heteronormativity and its violence create the impetus to the act of writing and give rise to a story. For instance, the trigger incident in *Walking With Shadows* (Dibia 2011) is Adrian's outing by a co-worker. Whereas this action was supposed to ruin the life of the protagonist, it becomes an opportunity for him to reveal his true self and find back his identity. In addition, Adrian's wife and brothers ask him to confirm the rumours they heard: they then invite him to produce a discourse on his non-normative desire through confession whereas the protagonist wanted to remain silent. The confession and his

wife leaving him actually make it possible for Adrian to accept his desire. In “Falling” (Dibia 2015), the attack fosters Sasha’s memories which are “his anaesthetic”.

III. QUESTIONING AND DECONSTRUCTING TO CONSTRUCT ANOTHER AFRICAN IDENTITY

A. An inauthentic way of life

As the dominant discourse surrounding the SSMPA in Nigeria relies on the idea that same-sex desire is 'un-African' and a form of moral corruption by the West, the writers tackling this issue enhance the inauthentic way of life of Nigerian middle-class citizens to highlight the baselessness of their point. For instance, in *Fimi Sile Forever* (Ikpo 2017), the protagonist recalls a debate about "the propriety of African culture" (112) when he was a student, in which he

> discussed African culture in the light of its becoming lost beneath the ever-growing tidal wave of modernisation, in which a child is nurtured more by gadgets than by the community. [He] recalls saying that the parental love that would ordinarily be expressed through physical intimacy, sharing food and chores, supervision and conversation and story-telling, is now expressed in more remote styles, where the child is literally raised by his or her computer – and, of course, books, which were the beginning of the end of oral cultures. African culture, [he] concluded, was not really in existence anymore. (Ikpo 2017: 115)

In this excerpt Wale challenges the very idea of a still existing authentic African culture in Nigeria and identifies modernisation as responsible for its progressive erasure. Nonetheless, the attitude of elders and parents is also pinpointed in his speech, as they abandoned the traditional education of children to favour the use of books and computers. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1998) explains that

> the privileging of the written over the oral had roots in the relationship of power in society and history... The dominant social forces had become identified with the civilized and the written. With colonization, the same binary opposition was exported to Africa, with the written and civilized being identified with Europe as a whole, the oral, and the ahistorical being identified with Africa. The product of the oral no longer belonged to history because quite clearly, the colonizer did not want

> the colonized to have any claims to any history as the basis of his resistance and affirmation of his humanity. (108)

Thus, when Wale lays emphasis on the new "remote styles" (Ikpo 2017: 115) of education, he highlights the surrendering of the parents to a Western colonial ideology which despised oral traditions. Targeting the parents undermines the idea that traditions would be rejected or forgotten by the younger generations: in Wale's reasoning the elders are responsible for not transmitting traditions and relying only on modern Western tools such as computers and books. Wale being a student and then a teacher, it would be difficult to argue that he is against the use of books and computers in education: he provocatively pinpoints the cultural changes that recently occurred and identifies them as inauthentically African.

Besides, the transmission of a Westernised culture from parents to children blatantly emerges in *Walking With Shadows* (Dibia 2011) when Adrian and Ada's daughter Ego tells her mother that she played the nursery rhyme 'Mary Had a Little Lamb' on the piano (Dibia 2011: 37). The episode indicates that Ego is growing up in an environment filled with Western – American in this case – references. The nursery rhyme indeed symbolizes the transmission of a cultural heritage from parent to child through the singing of the song. The choice of this American nursery rhyme indeed exposes the replacement of the Igbo heritage by Western culture, which is valued by the parents, as the mother congratulates her daughter (37). Na'Allah (2018) contends that "the African global lords or new bourgeoisie, who are largely the products of new global capital and multinational corporations' socio-political and cultural influences, fashion their tastes after Western cultures" (vii). Adrian and Ada are indeed part of this "new bourgeoisie" as Adrian works for a multinational American company and Ada sells European-style furniture. Moreover, the narrator of *Fimi Sile Forever* (Ikpo 2017) mentions "immemorial and priceless academic bibles" used by old-school professors – called "academic aristocrats" – refusing to question their teaching methods and the content of their class (154). As the word "bibles" obviously refers to Christianity – one of the religions of the Book –, the narrator denounces the unchallenged "congruence between what is Christian and what is African" (Hoad 2007: 16) in academic education. The term "aristocrats" is a way to underscore the Westernization of the professors since it connotes British nobility. The huge influence of Christianity and Islam is also broached during Wale's first class about Human Rights: while discussing prayers and religion, he eventually notices that

"no one has talked about the prayers of the traditional religion" which is called "juju worship" by a student (137-138). The disdain of the student towards "the traditional religion" (137) illustrates the general attitude of some Nigerian citizens concerning ancient religions which are often despised and have been replaced by Islam or Christianity. This issue is regularly tackled by Nigerian writers and examples may be found in several works by Adichie, such as *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) in which the grandfather is outcast because he believes in the traditional Igbo cosmology. In *Fimi Sile Forever* (Ikpo 2017), Wole and Wale are refused the right to represent Kola University during an international debate because the vice-chancellor does not think they are "real Christians" (115). According to the university's administration, Christianity is the only respectable religion, which indicates how strong the Westernization of academic education is. African traditional religions and cultures are completely dismissed by the institution which should teach these traditions.

Furthermore, the prologue of *Walking With Shadows* (Dibia 2011) best exemplifies the Westernisation of Nigerian society. In the opening passage both Ebele's Africanness and non-normative gender expression are merged and abandoned during the baptismal ceremony. Baptism is a Christian ceremony symbolizing a burial and a resurrection. The narrator indeed states that "Ebele [is] going to die […] so that Adrian could be born" (13). What is at stake here is more than a change of name, it is the negation of Ebele's African identity through the rejection of his first name in order to adopt a new Christian identity. Ugochukwu (2011: 81-82) explains that, in Igbo culture, names are of paramount importance because it ties the individual to his community and beliefs. Thus, the rejection of the name 'Ebele' estranges the protagonist from his Igbo identity and ties him to Christianity. Estrangement from his community also happens spatially, for the ceremony takes place in the "town of Ifo in Ogun State" (13), which is a two-hour drive from Lagos. As Zabus (2013) notes that Ogun State is a state "where Yoruba are dominant", the character is then driven away from his community. Furthermore, while rejecting his name and African identity, Adrian also denies his non-normative gender expression and identity: he is indeed eager to "rid [him]self of the pathetic person [he] had always known as 'Ebele'", and who "was laughed at" because he played unmanly games that "he was not supposed to like" (15-16). The narrator indeed insists on the fact that Ebele's self-hate finds its roots in the heteronormative gaze of his community which forces him to abandon his authentic self to perform another one. The character *has to*

adopt a normative identity because, at this moment, he is only a "ten-year-old mind": as a child, he does not have the agency to express his identity freely. In addition, when Ebele enters the water, the narrator mentions that the protagonist "could not swim" (16): he cannot escape his immersion in the water, and, by extension, Christianity. Thus, Ebele cannot display his true self and has to feign a normative identity: as a response to his community which mocks him because he *likes* an unmanly game, Ebele says that he will "never *play* the game again" (16), but he will not stop liking it. The nuance foreshadows the impossibility for Ebele to actually get rid of his true identity, he can only pretend to be someone else, and perform an inauthentic but normative identity in a Westernised heteronormative society.

Umez (2005) also suggests that the Nigerian upper middle-class way of life is Westernized and artificial. In "A Night So Damp", the repetition of the adjective "perfect" and the adverb "perfectly" throughout the short story, almost always uttered by the mother, implies that she is only interested in appearances and social conformism. She indeed uses it five times to refer to her son's homecoming and the party accompanying it. Mrs Ngozi indeed needs to display the event to her friends and family without consulting her son on the matter (327). The use of this same adjective by the narrator to describe Daphne's appearance – her "perfect teeth" (331) – highlights her inclusion into the mother's plan to create a 'perfect' normative environment for Kamalu. She indeed portrays Daphne as "every man's dream bride" (331), adding that "she *fits perfectly* into [their] home" as she has a good "pedigree" and "she is from a highly *respectable* family" (336-337). The expression "fits perfectly" and the adjective "respectable" underscore the idea that Mrs Ngozi's main concern is to respect social conformism, even if it is only artificial. Besides, she conveys the idea that same-sex desire is a European import when she asks her son if it is "the kind of orientation one acquires from schooling in the UK?" Adenekan (2012) quotes the former politician Chief Olu Falae who explains that "the in-thing among the elite in Nigeria is to train their children abroad. Those in the middle class who are unable to afford training their children outside Nigeria don't usually take their children born in the city to their villages" (83). These words contradict the anti-Western feeling developed in political discourses and this inconsistency is represented in Mrs Ngozi, who values British schools but despises same-sex love relationships which are now more accepted in the West. Adichie's "The Shivering" (2009) also offers a representation of the Westernization of the Nigerian upper middle class through the

discrepancy between Chinedu's behaviour on one hand, and Ukamaka and Udenna's behaviours on the other hand. From the beginning of the short story, Chinedu behaves in line with Nigerian traditions when he comes "to [Ukamaka's] door unannounced" (142). Ukamaka indeed explains that in America "people call[-] before they visit[-]" (142). In the same vein, Chinedu eats the food he is used to: when Ukamaka offers to take away sushi, he answers that he does not eat sushi because he "[is] an African man. [He] eat[s] only cooked food" (157). Furthermore, Chinedu's concerns seem to be more similar to those of most Nigerians whereas Udenna's and Ukamaka's concerns appear to be those of the upper class: when Ukamaka buys "organic vegetables, Chinedu sh[akes] his head in wonder because he d[oes] not understand why anybody would pay more money for the same vegetables just because they [have] been grown without chemicals" (155). Adichie represents Udenna and Ukamaka as elitist and more Westernized than Chinedu – being the same-sex desiring character – to counter the idea of homosexuality as a foreign Western import related to a capitalist elite. Udenna indeed seems to be the most distant from traditional Nigerian cultures, and even spiteful towards people from villages since, when Chinedu asks for a spoon to eat his rice, Ukamaka explains that his ex-boyfriend Udenna would have found Chinedu "very bush" because of his way of "gripping [the spoon] with all the fingers" (149). The characterisation of Udenna allows the reader to notice that he despises the Nigerian lower class: in an analeptic episode, the narrator indeed mentions that Udenna "consistently snubbed" a student that, according to him, "had gone to a community secondary school in his village and learned English by reading a dictionary in candlelight" (151). Chinedu's characterisation makes him more 'authentically African' than the heterosexual characters who are largely influenced by Western culture.

Thus, the authors under study expose the Westernization of the Nigerian middle and upper classes in order to undermine the idea of same-sex desire as a Western import. If their ways of life are influenced by Western culture, and then 'unauthentically African', the rejection of same-sex desire because it would be imported becomes ungrounded and hypocritical. Alongside with exposing the artificiality of what is presented as an 'authentic African way of life', some writers also question the beliefs and habits of Nigerian people to redesign a new identity.

B. Undermining assumptions

In addition to undermining heteronormativity and exposing Nigerian people living an unauthentic African way of life, the texts under study encourage a broader reconsideration of individual habits or beliefs. The plot of "The Shivering" (Adichie 2009) indeed relies on the disruption of Ukamaka's habits, which leads the protagonist to question her daily life and her beliefs. The second sentence of the short story highlights how Ukamaka's life will be shaken by her friendship with Chinedu who knocks on her door. The narrator indicates that "the knock surprise[s] her because nobody ever c[omes] to her door unannounced – this after all [is] America, where people cal[l] before they visi[t] – except for the FedEx man, who never knock[s] so loudly" (142). The sentence shows that the protagonist is twice surprised: she is first surprised by the very existence of the knock on her door since she is not expecting anyone to come, and she is surprised by how loud the knock is. One can notice that, as soon as the unexpected knock happens, the narrator tries to look for an explanation fitting her habits: it may be the "FedEx man". This possibility is yet instantly rejected as the delivery man would not "knoc[k] so loudly" (142). Ukamaka's need to connect the knock with a usual situation underlines how deeply rooted in habits her life is, although these habits have not existed for long. Precising that no one "comes unannounced" in America implies that she was used to the contrary when she lived in Nigeria. Her habits have changed and she has adopted new ones. In addition, the analepses dwelling on the protagonist's life are indeed suffused with descriptions of a repetitive daily life. When recounting how Ukamaka and her ex-boyfriend broke up, the narrator notes that they "had been inside Thomas Sweet, drinking strawberry and banana smoothies, their Sunday ritual after grocery shopping, and […] he told her that their relationship had been over for a long time, that they were together only out of habit" (148). The context of the break up is described as a routine, a usual Sunday: the couple used to go to the same places every Sunday, the flavours of their smoothies were always the same. Thus, the end of the relationship also happens to be a rupture in Ukamaka's daily life, as her habits had to change. The relationship itself seemed to be only a succession of habits since, according to Udenna, "they were together only out of habit".

Besides, Ukamaka's demeanour in response to the plane crash and to the possibility of Udenna's death appears to be frenetic; it underscores how bewildered she is when her routine is unsettled. The narrator indeed indicates that "since morning she had been on the internet reading Nigerian news, refreshing pages too often, calling her parents and her friends in Nigeria, making cup after cup of Earl Grey that she allowed to get cold." (142). Thus, the unusual tragic

event that Ukamaka faces destabilises her and the disruption of her daily life is stressed by irrational actions. Though reading news, calling her relatives and making cups of tea undoubtedly constitute a common set of daily actions, the protagonist actually fails to execute them with rationality. Her frenetic behaviour is highlighted by the repetition of the same actions which do not give any result. The adverb "too" modifying "often" and the relative clause "that she allowed to get cold" referring to the "cup[s] of Earl Grey" (142) both elicit the feeling that these actions are deprived of rationality and unsuccessful in comforting the protagonist. Furthermore, the syntactic reduplication[13] in "cup after cup" lays emphasis on the iteration of the action while the zero determiners reveal the instantaneous quality of these actions which lack control[14] and logic; they are not thought about. In addition, the BE + V-ing form reinforces this iterative effect and it also denotes a comment from the narrator who seems to discredit Ukamaka's demeanour.

Chinedu's entrance in Ukamaka's life and flat is indeed yoked together with the disruption of her habits and the questioning of her preconceived ideas. From the beginning of the short story, she makes assumptions concerning Chinedu's identity and life. After he knocks on the door, the narrator says that Ukamaka "look[s] through the peephole" and sees "a dark-skinned man who look[s] vaguely familiar though she c[an]not remember where she ha[s] seen him before. Perhaps it was in the library or on the shuttle to the Princeton Campus." (143) While the protagonist immediately assumes that Chinedu is a student, the narrator emphasises the uncertainty of this assumption: in addition to mentioning that Ukamaka cannot "remember where she ha[s] seen him before" the narrator specifies that they may have seen each other "in the library or on the shuttle". The use of the "perhaps" as a sentence adverb in the first position indeed accentuates the uncertainty. In the same vein, Ukamaka does not only think of one place where she may have seen Chinedu, but she evokes two different possibilities coordinated by the conjunction "or", which actually draws attention to the precariousness of her assumptions. Furthermore, it may also be germane to examine the way Ukamaka looks at Chinedu: she "look[s] through the peephole" (143). The image of Chinedu received by Ukamaka is then distorted and limited, foreshadowing the erroneous assumptions made by the protagonist. The image of the peephole also warns the reader about the objectivity of the narrator. The third person narrative gives an impression of objectivity since, on the one hand, it seems to create

[13] The NPN structures are analysed by Tony Pi in Pi, Tony. "The structure of English iteratives". *Proceedings of Canadian Linguistics Association*, ed. P. Koskinen, Toronto Working Papers in Linguistics, 1995.
[14] See Lapaire and Rotgé. *Linguistique et Grammaire de l'Anglais.* Toulouse : Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2002, pp. 83-85.

some distance between the narrator and the character and, on the other hand, it is often associated with a zero focalisation. However, in "The Shivering" (Adichie 2009), as the focalisation is internal the narrator is not objective and suffers from the same cognitive biases as the protagonist. Readers are then expected to question the status of the narrator and get rid of their own assumptions. In addition, the implied author seems to mislead the reader as to the main plot of the short story. The first paragraph mainly focuses on the plane crash, Ukamaka's reaction to it and the possibility of Udenna's death. The short story begins with the following sentence: "On the day a plane crashed in Nigeria, the same day the Nigerian first lady died, someone knocked loudly on Ukamaka's door in Princeton." (142) The sentence presents three main pieces of information: the plane crash, the death of the first lady and a loud knock on the door. As they are tragic events, the first two pieces of information may appear to be the most important ones. One can indeed imagine that the crash might have a direct impact on Ukamaka's life, especially since the paragraph ends with Ukamaka worrying about Udenna's possible death in the plane crash. However, the crash's impact on Ukamaka's life happens to be only indirect: it only provokes the protagonist's meeting with Chinedu and this friendship is actually at the core of the story. Thus, the reader's assumption about the plot happens to be incorrect, like Ukamaka's assumptions about Chinedu which are false. She indeed assumes that he is a heterosexual chemistry student who is facing difficulties with a dissertation whereas, actually, he is not a student and he is out of status.

Moreover, Ukamaka and Chinedu get rid of their preconceived ideas thanks to their friendship, which positively impacts on their lives as they recover some peace at the end of the short story. This may be exemplified with their religious beliefs and practices. Contrary to Ukamaka, Chinedu's faith is unquestioned. She describes it as "uncritical, so forceful, so impatient" (165) because, when she talks critically about God and the Church, "Chinedu shrug[s], as if he did not have much patience for this decadence, this ambivalence of hers." (153) The first time Chinedu comes to visit Ukamaka the narrator notes that "he pray[s] in that particularly Nigerian Pentecostal way that ma[kes] her uneasy: he cover[s] things with the blood of Jesus, he b[inds] up demons and cast[s] them in the sea, he battle[s] evil spirits. She want[s] to interrupt and tell him how unnecessary it [is], this bloodying and binding, this turning faith into a pugilistic exercise" (143). Ukamaka feels uncomfortable with Chinedu's way of praying, as the determiner "that" evinces an affective distance between Ukamaka and the Nigerian Pentecostal Church – she goes to a Catholic Church. It may also connote some distance with Nigeria, as this way of praying is "particularly Nigerian". Chinedu also expresses some hostility

to the Catholic Church, declaring to his friend: “You know I don’t like the Catholic Church, all this unnecessary kneeling and standing and worshiping idols.” (164) It is interesting to notice that the two characters use the adjective “unnecessary” to comment on the other character’s religious practices. Though it may seem to oppose them, this repetition reveals a similarity between the characters. If religious rituals and practices are considered “unnecessary”, one should focus on what is hidden behind them, and which is necessary, essential: faith. Both characters believe in God, they are both Christians, this is indeed what connects them together. Before Ukamaka and Chinedu have an argument, she “had become used to driving him to his church in Lawrenceville before going to hers on Nassau Street” (162). On the Sunday they reconcile with each other Ukamaka goes to see Chinedu and offers to drive him to his church. Their religious practice then allows the reconciliation which is also the moment when both characters tell their secrets: Chinedu is out of status and Ukamaka tells him that she felt a shivering when they prayed together in the beginning of the short story. She shares this with him as “a gesture [to] show him that he is not alone” (164) and then Chinedu accepts to go to the Catholic Church with Ukamaka as he cannot be at his on time. Thus, they both take a step towards each other. When, in the church, they find out that their respective ex-boyfriends both look like Thomas Sankara, the narrator mentions that “at first they stifled their laughter and then they let it out” (166). The parallelism in the structure of the sentence underscores the antinomy of the clauses to put the emphasis on the evolution of both characters who, in the beginning, do not express themselves fully and finally cope with their differences, and focus on their similarities, among which their African and Nigerian identities. Firstly, referring to Thomas Sankara may evidence that they have common African political references; their individual lives are anchored in a broader history. Secondly, whereas in the beginning of the short story one can notice that Ukamaka appears to be distant from her Nigerian identity, the reconciliation with Chinedu and the moment they share at church also seem to be a moment of reconciliation with her Nigerian identity. The text indeed ends with a longing memory of Nigeria:

> It was one of those Sundays when the priest blessed the congregation with holy water at the beginning of the Mass, and Father Patrick was walking up and down, flicking water on the people with something that looked like a big saltshaker. Ukamaka watched him and thought how much more subdued Catholic Masses were in America; how in Nigeria it would have been a vibrant green branch from a mango tree that the priest would dip in a bucket of holy water held by a hurrying, sweating

> Mass-server; how he would have stridden up and down, splashing and swirling, holy water raining down; how the people would have been drenched; and how, smiling and making the sign of the cross, they would have felt blessed." (166)

While looking at the American priest Ukamaka turns to Nigeria through her nostalgic memories. She seems to become alien to American religious practices, as the description of the blessing by the American pastor is unprecise: instead of naming the tool for the blessing an aspergillum, the narrator uses the phrase "something that looked like a saltshaker", connoting an absence of knowledge about this ritual, as evidenced by the word "something". The tool indeed seems alien to her and, with humour, the narrator compares it with a saltshaker, a daily-life object that brings the character back to a familiar imaginative environment. In addition, despite her being in America, Ukamaka's reference point for the comparison is Nigeria: Masses are "more subdued" in America. Though the skeletons of the rituals are similar, the Nigerian blessing is more vivid, as denoted by the vocabulary: Father Patrick "walk[s] up and down, flicking water on the people", whereas the Nigerian pastor "would have stridden up and down, splashing and swirling" and "the people would have been drenched […], they would have felt blessed." (166) The neutrality of the words used to depict the American ritual serves as a foil for the lively description of the Nigerian ritual that closes the short story. This nostalgic episode illustrates that, independently of her habits and ways of life, Ukamaka remains close to her Nigerian identity. As she questions her life and gets rid of some of her habits and preconceived ideas, the protagonist can finally find herself and focus on what truly matters to her, without the blinders that prevented her from being her true self.

Self-questioning and understanding one's individual identity are a first step making possible a broader questioning of the collective identity, its traditions and the institutions that structure and maintain them. *Fimi Sile Forever* (Ikpo 2017) indeed tackles these issues: the narrator recounts Wole's intervention during the international student debate, in which he points out "the pointless persistence of baseless values and empty gestures of honour, and question[s] the rationale for prostrating to [the] elders" while precising that "disrespect was not his version of where Yoruba civilisation should go, but that mindless obeisance to tradition was not admirable either." (114) Wole contends that some traditional practices must be questioned, and should be ignored if they are no longer relevant in contemporary Nigerian society. Graburn (2000) argues that "a consciousness of tradition arose primarily only in those historical situations where people were aware of change. Tradition was the name given to those cultural features which, in situations of change, were to be continued to be handed on, thought about, preserved and not

lost." (6) Thus, Wole's view on the persistence of traditional practices seems to echo Graburn's definition of tradition, which does not include all the "cultural features" of a civilisation, but those which are to be preserved. As this implies that a choice has to be made, questioning "cultural features" is then necessary since, according to Wole, tradition might be "pointless", "baseless", "empty" and "mindless" (Ikpo 2017: 114). The use of these adjectives underscores Wole's view that tradition must be judged with reason and be relevant to be handed on. Danaila (2020) indeed explains that traditions must be critically thought and deconstructed so that one can willingly accept them and join traditional values (217). In *Fimi Sile Forever* (Ikpo 2017), this necessary deconstruction also happens in the undermining of academic habits in Kola University. On the first day he teaches International Human Rights, Wale enters a "dark" room whose "blinds were down" (134), and students are watching a documentary projected on the wall. Due to the darkness, the narrator's movements across the room are not fluent: it is indeed mentioned that he has to "ma[ke] [his] way to the back of the class" and later he needs to "grop[e] his way over to one of the blinds" (135). Wale does not feel comfortable in the typical "low light" (134) of the classroom and then decides to pull up the blinds, which illustrates his first disruptive action as a teacher. Furthermore, this episode is reminiscent of Plato's Allegory of the Cave[15]: the students are indeed in the dark, watching images projected on the wall, and the narrator notes that pulling up the blinds made "sunshine fir[e] across the hall and the students shiel[d] their faces" (135). The defensive reaction of the students stemming from the sunlight echoes the difficulty of Plato's freed prisoner who would discover the real word, at first blinded by the sunlight. When Wale distances himself from conventional pedagogical methods and almost truly enlightens his students, he actually rejects the dominant ideology maintaining heteropatriarchy. In the same vein, the new teacher consciously uses disruptive methods since the narrator mentions that "after breaking all the protocols [he] knew how to – asking them to remove their ties, instructing them not to take any notes – [he] t[akes] [his] seat in that great circle, a seat that [is], as [he] intended, no more important than any of the others." (135) The new circular layout of the room erases the hierarchy between teacher and student, creating an emulating atmosphere in which students can see and talk to each other. Wale also asks his students to break the dress code of the university when he "ask[s] them to remove their ties": the tie is a conventional piece of clothing which connotes a form of suffocation; taking it off may symbolize the freeing from the rules, conventions or conservative ideas that restrain critical thinking. At the end of the class Professor Afolabi enters the room and, shocked, tells

[15] In Plato's *Republic*, Book VII. Available online on The Project Gutenberg website: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1497/1497-h/1497-h.htm#link2H_4_0010 (accessed April 15th, 2022)

the students “to put the seats and desks in their ‘proper’ places, put their ties back on, lower the blinds and turn the lights back off” (142). Wale then notes that, at this moment, “the room relapse[s] into a morgue, and [his] lively students become as inert as dead bodies" (142). Professor Afolabi embodies a form of academic conservatism that prevents the students from thinking critically: the deadly vocabulary and the absence of light evidence the lack of innovation in the University which does not provide an environment that favours new and subversive ideas. Nevertheless, Wale does not only intend to shake his students’ habits, he also fights for hosting “Save the Colour”, an artistic event where non-normative sexualities and gender identities are discussed. Though many of the teachers are reluctant, the show is finally permitted, which enables students to express themselves and think about issues that were until then taboo in Kola University (164-165). The narrator notes that “students were enjoying taking part in something that was provocative and rebellious, but was supported by the institution, and happening on the comparatively safe terrain of the K.U. [Kola University] campus.” (177) University is then an institution that must be challenged so that it allows the students to develop challenging and bold ideas.

In *Fimi Sile Forever* (Ikpo 2017) discussions around same-sex desire in Kola University stem from the event “Save the Colour” which organises the screening of a movie and a theatrical performance, which underscore that the artists have an important political role to play in the debates about gender and sexual identities.

C. The political role of the artist

Osinubi (2018) notices that “emerging African fiction and life writing are increasingly turning to LGBTQ groups and activism as sites and mechanisms of emplotment” and wonders “why the university campus appears so frequently in LGBTQ short fiction when African universities have largely remained silent on the issue” (605). Ikpo (2018) provides an answer to this question, contending that

> “large-scale transformation and shifts begin from the grassroots, from the basic units that make up the society. Similarly, the journey towards important and necessary aspirations […] should, as well, move from the core and most important sources of socialisation: the learning spaces and the schools, and must be targeted at the children and young people in the spirit of inclusion and non-discrimination.” (265)

Fimi Sile Forever (Ikpo 2017) is partly set in a private University, of which the vice-chancellor, Brown Fatade, is a former student. He explains that, as a student, he had come in Kola University "with dreams of good mentorship, of being free to question, and to challenge" but he "was disappointed" because "so much was staid and stale" (117). The alliteration and the assonance create a repetitive effect that reinforces the idea that nothing original happened within university; the iteration of the same long vowel also enhances this continuity. Additionally, the hard /t/ sound stopping the sibilant sound imitates the barriers that prevent the renewal of the academic space. Through this character the implied author may express his view on Nigerian universities which lack innovative ideas and often prefer to avoid issues such as same-sex desire: in the novel, Professor Amarachi represents the conservative vision of education as she argu[es] that her Christian faith d[oes] not permit her, […] or anyone else, to even talk about the evil of homosexuality" since, according to this character, one should "flee all the appearances of evil" (166). On the contrary, the vice-chancellor wishes to undermine this conservatism which, according to him, does not benefit the students. He indeed explains that, while he was studying, he found his classmates more interesting than his teachers, as the youth developed critical thoughts and innovative ideas about Nigerian society (117). His position in Kola University offers him the possibility to defend his views: he makes it clear to Wale that after travelling and working "all around the world [he] decided that [he] wanted to turn things around at home", contending that "the academic space" must be "kept open, safe and liberal", otherwise "the development of Africa will remain only a vision" (117). The repetition of "around" may imply that Nigerian administrations should get inspiration from what happens abroad and make effort to fit in the new globalized world. Okanlawon (2021) points out several issues in Nigerian universities such as "homophobic rejection, bullying, extortion and blackmail, physical victimization, exclusion, and other forms of discrimination" which contradict "Nigeria's goal of achieving an inclusive, equitable, and socially just school environment for all learners as desired in the National policy on inclusive education in Nigeria" (2). A novel such as *Fimi Sile Forever* (Ikpo 2017) sheds light on the difficulties of same-sex loving individuals and provides the reader with some possible actions to address controversial issues in the academic space. The event "Save the Colour" is indeed a way to address non-normative identities with "empathy and compassion" (Okanlawon 2021: 26) through artistic means.

Danaila (2020) quotes Helon Habila to express the tight relations between art and reality in Nigeria. The writer declared that he is "from a tradition where there is no separation between

art and the public [...], art is created for a purpose"[16], it must try to have an impact on the described reality, transform it, and not only mimic it. In *Fimi Sile Forever*, the movie entitled *Eyimofe* screened during "Save the Colour" is inspired by the 'real-life' character Tani Cross who experiences bullying and discrimination, which tends to blur the frontier between fiction and reality. Fictional works indeed always address a reality. In addition, the account of the movie by the narrator is intertwined with details about the main actor, artistic choices and the audience's reactions to what is on screen. From the beginning of the movie, when the main character, Prince Haleem, appears, the narrator informs the reader about the actor playing this role. The character and the actor, James Konteh, seem to blend. Wale notes that he had been "something of a diva" during the shooting (178). The word "diva" is often used to describe some effeminate same-sex loving men, which draws a parallel between the actor and the character. While describing the character, Wale oddly specifies that "*in the movie* Haleem is white-blooded Nigerian royalty" (178: my emphasis), whereas Haleem is a character of the movie and then does not exist in his reality. Instead of highlighting a difference between the character and the actor, this precision actually creates a confusion between the two. In the same vein, when the movie is over, the narrator is watching "James Konteh – Prince Haleem – who [is] Lola's escort for the evening" (185): the mention of the name of the character again reinforces the blending of the actor with the character. Furthermore, his experience as an actor playing the role of a man in love with another man in Europe seems to have changed him: the narrator describes the performance of the actors and remarks that "the actors do these things in a way that f[eels] so real, that ma[kes] me believe they ha[ve] had some real-life experience of what they were doing […], perhaps being in Amsterdam […] freed something in them" (181). Besides, the movie seems to be less fictional because the reality of same-sex love experience is highlighted, as it is filmed in "real gay bars, and so ha[s] a documentary look and a sense of authenticity" (181). In addition, the entanglement of the artistic work and the reality is reinforced by the comment made by Wole when he introduces the movie. He indeed says that the movie is "another chapter in Nigeria's history book" (176): the implied author underscores the capacity of art to change the dominant heteronormative narrative. Writers indeed have potential for unsettling the hegemonic discourses that marginalises same-sex desire. As pointed

[16] Helon Habila, « One Brooklyn - B'klyn Book Festival - Movement of People: Modern Nomads & Migrants », *YouTube*, September 22, 2019, 14'50-15'15, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bj8uG1Hzszk, accessed May 1st, 2022)

out by Epprecht (2009), "there is room for optimism that currently hegemonic heteronormativity is being challenged in promising ways. People's dignity, creativity and complex sexuality can be freed up from the toxicity and limitations of the past" (vi).

In the same vein, Achebe (2012) explains that "there is a need to bring life back into art by bringing art into life, so that the two can hold a conversation" (56) In *Fimi Sile Forever* (Ikpo 2017), the theatrical presentation, *The Secrets of the Silhouettes,* performed during the "Save the Colour" festival, stages the real experiences of several young men discussing same-sex desire and the prejudices they have to face; their lives then become the content of the artistic performance. The audience also becomes part of the show since, "to heighten our involvement in a symbolic way, […] audience members [are] also issued masks at the entrance to the hall." (197) As the performers also wear masks and are anonymous, the frontier between the artists and the audience no longer exists, each person in the room can be a performer. The narrator further mentions that that "in the theatre people play[] along with the usher" (197): the verb "play" connotes a theatrical performance; all the people in the theatre are part of the artistic work. The atmosphere of "Save the Colour" echoes the Bakhtin's notion of carnivalesque, as the critic notes that "carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators.... Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people." (Bakhtin 1984: 7) During the event *The Secrets of the Silhouettes*, Ahmed remarks that "anyone could be anyone" (Ikpo 2017: 197): as teachers and students are not differentiated, a "suspension of all hierarchical precedence" (Bakhtin 1984: 10) occurs during the event. Bakhtin (1984) contends that the carnivalesque inverts the social order and engenders an axiological reversal (90). The carnivalesque enables same-sex desiring individuals to express themselves without the ordinary shame and fear. While the event is happening Wale specifies that "the police officer who [they] call [their] friend today is the same policeman in whose hands the anti-gay law catches fire, and whose brutality homophobia fuels." (Ikpo 2017: 197) With this event, Wale intends to create a debate around same-sex desire, no matter how criticised it might be. Achebe (1965) notes that "it is important to say […] that no self-respecting writer will take dictation from his audience. He must remain free to disagree with his society and go into rebellion against it if need be."[17] Wale may represent the figure of the artist in the novel since he executes a "task

[17] In "The Novelist as Teacher", First published in the New Statesman, London, January 29,1965; subsequently in Morning Yet on Creation Day, Doubleday Anchor Books, 1975. Available online at: http://mrhuman.weebly.com/uploads/2/1/5/1/21516316/thenovelistasteacher.pdf, accessed May 20th, 2022.

of re-education" (Achebe 1965)[18] and, according to the peritext of the book, he shares some similarities with the author who studied Human Rights, works for a Human Rights organisation and fled Nigeria after the passing of the SSMPA to live in South Africa. Many didactic elements indeed permeate Ikpo's novel: the reordering of the classroom, numerous militant discourses and actions, the creation of blogs; the writer/teacher shows possibilities for artists to develop a discourse on same-sex desire through different art forms such as theatrical performances or movies.

The reality suffused in art is also reflected by the many contextual, historical, artistic or commercial references that pervade the different texts under study; the narratives portraying non-normative lives and identities are then anchored in reality. The references interrupt the suspension of disbelief to highlight the reality of the experiences narrated. Numerous short stories refer to real life brands such as Lucozade Boost (Ifeakandu 2016: 11), Dunhill (Laone 2013: 8), Five Alive (Umez 2005: 338), Brut, Star Wars (Ogunyemi 2013: 73) or Canoe Soap (Kolade 2013): the daily-life objects mentioned are used by a large part of Nigerian people since they are very common; the implied reader may easily identify with the characters who acquire a realistic quality. The realism of the texts may also be illustrated with the precise locations and dates mentioned in the short stories. For example, in Dibia's "Witness" (2013), the protagonist is arrested in "Table Top restaurant on Adebayo Street on the 14th of February". In Adichie's "The Shivering" (2009), the narrator mentions the death of Stella Obasanjo (145), situating the story in 2005 and locates it in Princeton, with references to real places such as Thomas Sweet or Wild Oats on Nassau Street (155). When Ukamaka listens to Chinedu telling his love relationship, she notes that "he sp[eaks] slowly, revising details that she thought made no difference […] and she th[inks] that this [is] a story he ha[s] not told often in its entirety, perhaps ha[s] never told." (159) The details indeed give substance to the experiences of same-sex desiring Nigerians who are often erased from Nigerian cultures by the dominant political discourses: Bisi Alimi, the actor and LGBT activist who came out as gay on Nigerian television, explains that he had to do so because he "heard the Nigerian president say 'there are no gays in Nigeria'. [He] thought: 'This is not true. I will not be removed from the history of this country'."[19] Thus, the realism of the narratives denotes the need to portray the reality of the denied non-normative experiences.

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[18] *Ibid*

[19] Quoted in Charlie Bell's article "Is it 'un-African to be gay", *SkyNews*, available online at: https://news.sky.com/story/kenya-rejects-decriminalising-homosexuality-11727684, accessed May 25th 2022

Besides, the authors tackling male same-sex desire offer multiple views on how it may be experienced. As Adichie said in the Ted Conference "The Danger of a single story" (2009), "the single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story." The diversity of the stories published on same-sex desire participate in the deconstruction of clichés and present multiple possible identities for same-sex desiring individuals, as diverse as Nigerian people who cannot be reduced to one essentialist identity. Green-Simms (2016) indeed asserts that "African writers are not only allowing for the possibility of same-sex love and identity, they are also showing it to be multifaceted, tragic and hopeful, violent and nurturing, and undeniably real" (157)

IV. UNFIXED IDENTITIES

A. Diversity and prejudices

Today Nigeria comprises more than 200 ethnic groups and as many languages. The three major ethnic groups are Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo. The two main religions are Islam and Christianity, but around 10% of the population still believe in traditional cosmologies. There is then no homogeneous culture in the country. The texts under study show the diversity of Nigerian lives and loves and denounce ethnic and religious discriminations. The focus on diversity may be understood as a way to fight the hegemony of dominant identities, and as a result the rejection of same-sex desire and non-normative identities.

In "A Night So Damp" (Umez 2005), Kamalu comes back home after spending several years in England where he met his lover, Kay. He wishes to confess this to his mother, but he is confronted with several impediments that complicate the confession. His mother, Mrs Ngozi, wants him to marry Daphne. Then, when tries to explain that he prefers Kay over Daphne, she feigns at first not to understand. The same-sex love relationship is even more complicated because the characters are from two different ethnic groups. Zabus (2013) notes that "Kay's origins in Ondo […] are certainly not fortuitous" since this is "a largely Yoruba area" whereas Kamalu's family is Igbo and lives in Owerri, a city which used to be the last capital of the Republic of Biafra (105). Moreover, the interethnic relationship is exacerbated by Kay's Welsh origins: when Mrs Ngozi wants to know more about Kay, she asks: "Who is he? The one with a girl's name, or Quay or whatever he is called" (341). The mother does not properly remember Kay's name and mispronounces it, making the name sound exotic to her. Kamalu's answer is also interesting as he replies that "he's from Ondo; he's half Welsh" (341). The parallel structure and the parataxis underline the equal footing of the clauses, as if Ondo was as foreign as Wales. Furthermore, the narrator introduces Kay as a "*fair*, curly-haired man" before referring to him as "the *fair* man" (344: my emphasis): the repetition of the adjective puts the emphasis on his mixed origins through his light complexion. The use of this word may also be reminiscent of the word "fairy" which, in slang, refers to an effeminate man. Thus, Kay and his same-sex love relationship with Kamalu seem foreign in the mother's eyes.

In *Fimi Sile Forever* (Ikpo 2017), the narrator mentions the past discriminations against him and the Muslim community at university. In an analepsis he recounts that he was refused the

honour of representing Kola University at an international contest. The vice-chancellor of the time indeed wanted a "real Christians fit enough for this task." (115) Though Wale and Wole were actually Christians, he denigrated their religious identity because "[he] always s[aw] these boys sitting outside the mosque and parading themselves around with this crazy boy, Ali." (115-116) The narrator's account of this event highlights the divide between the different religious groups and how a community is sometimes ostracised. This episode shows that prejudices are obviously unfair, but also ridiculous and hypocritical: it seems indeed absurd to question the characters' Christianity only because they have a Muslim friend, and their religion should not even be an issue for the vice-chancellor as half of the Nigerian people is Muslim. The narrator indeed remarks that there is "a mosque on campus!" (116) This event also shows that, as long as there are prejudices, the policing of behaviours may affect anyone. One of Wale's students also conveys this idea while discussing the SSMPA: he worries that "today it's the homosexuals. Tomorrow, it could be Christians or traditionalists." (147) The narrator agrees with this student and adds that the SSMPA is "of a piece with the divisive tribalism that haunts our history and blights our lives." (147-148) Thus, prejudices against same-sex desire are entangled with religious discriminations; they must all be rejected. Besides, the student's statement is made possible thanks to Wale's educational methods: he encourages his students to express their views in blogs and online groups. The narrator indeed reports at length his students' diverse views on Human Rights, LGBTQ rights or gender identities. A student argues that the principles of equality and unity developed in Nigeria's Constitution "imply that the existence of diversity is accepted and highly regarded in [Nigerian] society" (151). Thus, Nigerian identity can only be reflected in a multiplicity of diverse stories and experiences.

The axiom that same-sex desire would be un-African and a Western import is at odds with the various stories under study and published online. They provide the reader with ways of experiencing male same-sex desire which do not fit Western gay identities. For example, some characters do not expect to live a love relationship as a couple with another male, and being married to a woman is important to them. Altman (1996) affirms indeed that "imagining same-sex relationships as the central part of one's life marks the real creation of a specific homosexual [Western] identity" (84). Moremi's "I have Loved You" (2013) portrays Deji and Jimi's love relationship. This relationship does not stop when Deji gets married, and the narrator mentions that "he was able to love two people completely at the same time." (26) The same-sex love relationship goes on after the wedding, and though "his marriage d[oes] not change anything between [them]" at first (26), they progressively see each other less often and their relationship

finally becomes platonic: the narrator notes that they "still cal[l] each other baby and shar[e] [their] lives, but no longer d[o] they share kisses or a bed." (28) The love relationship evolves with time but does not stop because, as Jimi points out, their "love transcend[s] all worldly barriers, even marriage." (26) Thus, there is no concurrence between the same-sex love relationship and Deji's marriage; they develop in parallel. Deji is indeed attached to his traditional marriage and wants to have a child; what concerns the lovers is the secrecy of their relationship, as they cannot tell the truth to Deji's wife. (26) Besides, Chinedu's relationship with his lover in "The Shivering" (Adichie 2009) does not stop because of Abidemi's marriage, it stops because Chinedu "wishes he had been conflicted" about the situation (161). Though both texts show a possibility to live a same-sex love relationship, this does not seem to be ideal as the relationships do not work and the surrounding lies create conflict. In Dibia's *Walking With Shadows* (2005), Ada discovers a group of wealthy women "all married to gay men" (129). They accept their husbands' sexualities and even find it convenient, as they are independent and can travel or have their own lovers (130).

Though Dibia's protagonist, Ebele, decides to live in England because "he would not be able to be himself in Nigeria" (202), the author nonetheless includes a working same-sex love relationship in the novel. Abdul and Femi are indeed the "longest-going gay couple [Ebele] kn[ows]"; they have been "together for about ten years." (30). When the main character walks to Abdul's front door for the first time in six years, he notes that "nothing had changed. The door was still a sickening milk colour. The cranky doorbell, a relic from the 80s, was intact. The same old foot mat welcoming home. It was like the entire place refused to succumb to change." (28) This description highlighting a lack of change in the building may echo the author's view about his homeland: as the environment is depicted as old-fashioned and not changing, this may represent Nigerian conservatism. The narrator indeed draws a parallel between the building and his country when he remarks that "the elevators ha[ve] not worked for as far back as he c[an] remember […], like almost everything in the country." (27) In contrast to the absence of change outside of Abdul's flat, Ebele notices that, inside,

> something ha[s] changed: the white walls and cane furniture ha[ve] been replaced by terracotta red and a deep blue, a sofa, a beautiful shade of pale red, on a mahogany frame, and a petit glass coffee table supported by a delicate, sculpted wrought-iron base. The windows [are] covered with a seemingly endless stream of peach-coloured voile. Dotting the walls [are] paintings from local artists. Knick-knacks from foreign trips st[and] on the display shelf in the corner. There [are]

> miniature masks from Ethiopia, snow-globes, carvings from South Africa and other odd little objects. (28-29)

Abdul and Femi's flat is in stark contrast to the pejorative depiction of the rest of the building, calling attention to the possibility of experiencing a same-sex love relationship despite the surrounding conservatism. The couple succeeded in creating a cosy home for themselves within a dysfunctional and old building. It is also germane to notice the discrepancy between the erstwhile decoration and the new one. The narrator concisely mentions "white walls and cane furniture" to express his memories about the flat, whereas his description of the new decoration is suffused with details, accentuating a pleasant atmosphere. The change from a blank setting to a colourful one with many objects may epitomize the fulfilment of the same-sex love relationship. Besides, the different decorative items mentioned aptly illustrate the couple's fondness for Nigerian and foreign cultures. The souvenirs from trips abroad denote the influence of cosmopolitan values on the construction of one's identity. Danaila (2020) explains that identities are constructed in a process of confrontation and negotiation (158). As the couple travelled and discovered several African and Western cultures, they confronted themselves with the world and were able to re-examine their identities from different perspectives. The couple itself exemplifies the confrontation and negotiation of Nigerian cultures as they must be living an interethnic love relationship: Femi is indeed a Yoruba name while Abdul connotes a Muslim heritage indicating that he may be Hausa-Fulani. In addition, Pidgin English appears in the novel only when Ebele goes to see Abdul. For example, the man selling cigarettes in the neighbourhood tells Ebele: *"Oga, welcome o! E don tey since you come hia"* (Dibia 2005: 27) and, when Abdul welcomes Ebele, he says: "*Na wa o! Na you be dis?* Adrian Njoko!" (28) Pidgin English may be considered as the linguistic symbol of the blending of several cultures that characterises Nigeria, thereby unsettling the view of a single Nigerian or African identity.

B. Identity and the diasporic experience

The essentialist view of African identity is also undermined in different texts discussing the experience of migration. First, Adichie demonstrates the pointlessness of cultural essentialism in "The Shivering" (2009). When Ukamaka and Chinedu meet for the first time, she informs him that she "thought [he] might be from Ghana" because he "looked too gentle to be Nigerian", making him laugh and answer: "Who says I am gentle?" (151) Chinedu's laugh

indicates that Ukamaka's assertion is absurd; subsequently he answers with irony and underlines that her preconceived ideas are superficial and groundless. It would indeed be preposterous – to say the least – to imagine that a whole people, such as the Nigerian people, could lack the quality of kindness. The narrator then recounts how Udenna used to judge and snub Nigerian people from the lower class, explaining that he could recognize them from their "lumpy and vein-scarred forehead[s]" (151). Assigning physical attributes to a group of people and reducing them to their social background is a form of essentializing that is condemned by the narrator as Udenna is indeed characterized as spiteful and obnoxious. Furthermore, Adichie uses food to unsettle the essentialist view of a fixed national identity: when Ukamaka asks Chinedu if he finds her "stew too peppery", he gives a negative answer and specifies that he "grew up in Lagos" (151). Chinedu yokes together pepper with Nigerianness whereas Ukamaka mentions that she does not like peppery food. Thus, the three characters utter essentialist ideas that are instantly eroded, spotlighting that these essentialist views pervade the doxa. The author further turns cultural essentialism into ridicule when Ukamaka says to Chinedu: "You really should try sushi sometime. How can you live in Princeton and not eat sashimi?" (157) The protagonist encouraging Chinedu to eat uncooked food may be understood as the author urging her implied readers to go beyond the fixed identities to which they may have been assigned. In addition, in her analysis of Adichie's diasporic short stories, Tunca (2010) contends that "while cultures may be different, they are by no means static and mutually exclusive entities around which artificial boundaries can be drawn." (304) In "The Shivering" (Adichie 2009), the assimilation of Japanese food to American culture shows that cultures are not fixed, but they evolve and are enriched thanks to their meeting.

Umez's "A Night So Damp" (2005) recounts Kamalu's coming back home after spending several years in England, whereas "he had always thought he would live in London" (331), as it would have been easier for him to live a same-sex love relationship in England. The narrator notes that his mother "might treat him as abnormal, an outcast perhaps, if she was to know his true *lifestyle*" (335). It is then implied that same-sex desire and love relationships are understood as Western and incongruent with Nigerian culture. About Kamalu's love relationship, Mrs Ngozi indeed asks if this is "the kind of orientation one acquires from schooling in the UK" (340). Mother and son seem to have become two antagonistic characters because of Kamalu's long stay in London. This antagonism is epitomized by their divergent view about the damp weather. In the beginning of the short story, Mrs Ngozi says that she tries "to associate it with happiness" (326). Though her son does not reply at this moment, he says

near the end of the text that he "hate[s] this dampness" (347). It seems relevant to pay attention to this detail since the adjective "damp" appears in the title of the short story and Zabus (2013) remarks that "the dampness […] is unusual for the cold and dry harmattan season" (107). Kamalu's discomfort with the weather reflects his discomfort with Nigerian conservative climate. The protagonist feels "dry and fresh" (339) only when he remembers his life in England, which underscores that England has become an important part of him, necessary for him to feel well. This influence, which the mother does not understand, also appears in the following passage:

> [Kamalu] murmured something, which [his mother] couldn't make out. […] His posture was the exact ponderous sculpture of Rodin's *The Thinker*.
>
> Then breathing out, he let his thoughts mix with the instrumental song wafting out of the sitting room, filling the balcony with soporific strains, and closed his eyes. Memories [of England] started to take shape in his mind. (339)

The several analepses in the short story inform the reader about episodes of the protagonist's life that participated in the construction of his identity. The whispers are not understood by the mother, enhancing the lack of comprehension between the two characters. The image of *The Thinker* conveys Kamalu's Western influences that shape his body and mind. The tension between Nigerian and English cultures seems to materialize in space, as the character's thoughts and the music "fil[l] the room with soporific strains", highlighting the influence of migration and globalisation on Nigerian society. Tunca (2010) indeed argues that "migration from Africa […] may have become an integral part of Nigerian identity, taken in its widest sense. […] Indeed, culture clashes in all their guises have long been an essential constituent of the nation's fiction." (293) The cultural tension in the short story under study revolves around male same-sex desire and heteronormativity. This "culture clash" is also emphasised by the different languages used by the characters: when Kamalu tries to explain that he does not want to marry a woman, he suddenly says in Latin: "*Nam optuma nulla potest eligi; Alia alia pejor est*." (340) The sentence, which is a quotation from Plautus' play *Aulularia,* is left untranslated in the short story[20]. Thus, the mother and the implied reader do not understand it – only a few learned people are able to decipher Latin today. The reader then shares the mother's puzzlement as the quotation actually obfuscates Kamalu's discourse. As for Mrs Ngozi, when she glances at her son kissing Kay, "the bottle [of Bailey's] drop[s] out of her hands" and she is "only able to cry

[20] Zabus (2013) translates it as: "For no best thing can be chosen, one will be rather than another" (106)

out, Kamalu! Nwanka egbue muo" (350). As the exclamation is translated by the narrator – "this child has killed me" (350) –, the reader understands the feelings of the mother who is shocked by this situation. The use of the third person denies Kamalu's subjectivity: the mother does not talk to his son; he is ignored by the mother[21]. The switch from English to Igbo and the bottle falling on the floor evidence a sudden rejection of Western culture, which nonetheless pervades Nigerian society. In the beginning of the short story, the narrator specifies that Mrs Ngozi is drinking a glass of Bailey's Irish Cream, and later she asks her maid to get "a pack of Five Alive" (331) for Daphne. These drinks, which are daily life products, actually are "incarnations of the unavoidable influences between civilizations" (Tunca 2010: 304). Western influence on African societies is also praised by Daphne when she recounts her trip in South Africa. She indeed claims that it is a "fabulous country, well-organized, a sort of Europe set in Africa", adding that Nigerian people "should be ashamed of the way [they] carry on in [their] country." (334) Though it could easily be argued that Europe shares a large responsibility in Nigeria's contemporary issues, Daphne does not seem to reject the influence of other cultures, African or European. She indeed bought a "Zulu bracelet" to Mrs Ngozi; she wants to offer a foreign object, from a foreign culture to Mrs Ngozi who will wear an imported piece of jewellery. Coulibaly (2015) contends that, in Nigerian diasporic literature,

> "characters, evolving no longer within a national sphere in which nation building and cultural decolonization take place, do on the contrary develop within a global geopolitical atmosphere in which diasporic experience is at stake. African contemporary short stories seek to represent new conflicts of values and the creation of new hybrid identities" (104)

In "The Shivering" (Adichie 2009), Chinedu and Ukamaka develop their new hybrid identities through their openness to others and difference. Ukamaka's relationship with Udenna prevented her from being her true self and, when he broke up, she found comfort thanks to Father Patrick and Chinedu. The narrator indeed mentions that, when Ukamaka first meets Father Patrick and eventually mentions "her Spanx body-shaper", she is "surprised that this plump white man with silver hair kn[ows] what Spanx [is]." (149) While the protagonist gets rid of her preconceived ideas about the "white man", this meeting enables her to reconcile with her faith, though it is not exactly the same as during

[21] Benveniste indeed calls the third person the « non-personne ». See Benveniste, Émile. *Problèmes de linguistique générale*. Paris: Gallimard, 1966, pp. 225-236.

her childhood in Nigeria. Siccardi (2017) contends that this openness to others is made possible by the protagonist's vulnerability: her daily life and plans for her future have just fallen apart. Likewise, Ukamaka goes to apologise to Chinedu because she is afraid of losing their friendship. Both the characters may be considered as vulnerable: Ukamaka feels lonely, and Chinedu is undocumented. Their situations indeed create special bonds as they need to support each other, which enables them to minimize their disagreement and overcome their differences: whereas Ukamaka is irritated by Chinedu's unquestioned faith when they meet for the first time, in the end she thinks that it is "a luxury to have a faith like this", though she does not tell him that she does not fully understand his point of view (165). The characters indeed find a middle ground when Ukamaka suggests to go to Chinedu's church the next week if he accepts to come with her this day (164). The episode at Church epitomises their hybrid identities: though the characters' laugh after holding it back suggest that they finally feel comfortable together in this American church, they are reminded that they are still seen as other because "the woman holding the baby watch[es]. (166). Coulibaly (2015) explains, about the Nigerian diasporic characters, that "the new represented self becomes a global subject wandering between the homeland and the newly adopted country." Siccardi (2017) argues that Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) does not resolve identity issues, but shows that it is possible to overcome binary oppositions through the narration of individual stories.

C. Unstable identities

As national identities are not permanent and fixed, individual identities of the characters are also portrayed as unstable. In "Apollo" (Adichie 2015), the narrator emphasizes how retirement and aging transformed his parents. He indeed mentions that "it puzzle[s] [him] that they ha[ve] shed those old selves, and become the kind of Nigerians who t[ell] anecdotes about diabetes cured by drinking holy water", whereas "fifteen years earlier, [his] parents would have scoffed at these stories" (64). The change of the parents is indeed quite radical as the parents have become what they used to despise. This transformation highlights the unstable quality of identity. In addition, Okenwa uses the expression "new childhood of old age" (65) to describe his parents' condition. Though this is a cliché expression, the antithesis nonetheless highlights that identity may develop in ways that are unexpected; individuals do not have constant and stable identities.

Besides, the identities displayed by the characters may also be deceptive: several characters indeed have to wear masks in order to fit in their environments. For instance, Okenwa recounts that, as a teenager, he

> "read books only enough to satisfy [his parents]. […] [He] sometimes felt like an interloper in [their] house. [His] bedroom had bookshelves, stacked with the overflow books that did not fit in the study and the corridor, and they made [his] stay feel transient, as though [he] w[as] not quite where [he] was supposed to be." (Adichie 2015: 66)

The quotation makes clear that Okenwa actually performs an identity that is truly his. This performance indeed aims at meeting his parents' expectations. The books in the protagonist's room materially represent the insistence of the parents who try to shape their son's individual identity. However, instead of bringing him closer to his parents, these books highlight Okenwa's feeling that he does not fit in his family As an adult, he keeps performing an identity to please his parents: the narrator indeed specifies that "twice a month, like a dutiful son, [he] visited [his] parents in Enugu" (64). The comparison underlines that the narrator and protagonist does not think of himself as a "dutiful son" (64), he only acts as one. Okenwa describes his visits as a way of "making amends." (65) The visits to his parents are his way to atone for not fitting the heteronormative mould. From childhood to adulthood, Okenwa performs an identity that is shaped to fit his parents' expectations, but this performance is never good enough to fully satisfy the parents. The incapacity for Okenwa to meet his parents' expectations highlight the fact that an identity cannot be force upon an individual.

In addition, the texts under study portray protagonists who perform a heteronormative identity. In *Fimi Sile Forever* (Ikpo 2017), Wale notes that "masks in the context of homosexuality […] are a shield, a shell, a façade." (202) The performance of heterosexuality is indeed a necessity to protect the hidden "world that [the same-sex desiring individual] is building for himself." (203) The performance of heterosexuality is then a way to counter heteronormativity. The narrator nonetheless nuances his words and remarks that "there is a danger that in wearing such a mask [the same-sex desiring individual] teaches himself to take on falsehood perfectly, and becomes comfortable enough with it to detest everything that is natural and genuine" (203). The mask is indeed a contradictory object. In the same way that the mask can hide and reveal at the same time, this object can protect and destroy non-normative identities. The narrator also reminds that "Chinua Achebe in his *Things Fall Apart* described masks as spirits of the ancestors […] and the men who were them were possessed by the

ancestors' spirits or even the ancestors themselves – or so the spectators believed." (202) The juxtaposition of different meanings of the mask and the beliefs surrounding it underscores that, more generally, beliefs and knowledge are not eternal and fixed in time; they are actually relative, they depend on a context. The epigraph of *Walking With Shadows* (Dibia 2011) also highlights the relativity of moral values with a quotation by Alfred North Whitehead: "What is morality in any given time or place? It is what the majority then and there happen to like, and immorality is what they dislike." Thus, a non-normative identity considered as abject today may be considered as a respectable in a different context. Identities are indeed unstable because they are relative, contextual.

Furthermore, gay identity is also undermined in Dibia's *Walking With Shadows* (2011) when Adrian Ebele tries to explain his gayness to Ada:

> I have come to learn […] that being gay has nothing to do with the physical action of sex nor a person's sexual preference, be it with the opposite sex or same sex. Sleeping with a man or a woman will always remain the individual's choice. I am gay because it is who I am. It is the way I see the world. It is the way I reason and live. It is waking up in the morning and going to bed at night. It is listening to music and loving it. It is watching a movie and wanting to see it over again. It is laughing when I am happy and crying when I am sad. (Dibia 191)

Green-Simms (2016) describes this passage as an "incoherent explanation of gay identity […] because it is quite difficult to discern precisely what Adrian is getting at when he describes gayness as waking up in the morning or listening to music". (150) With this obfuscated and unconvincing explanation of gayness, the author may imply that male same-sex desire does not constitute an identity. Green-Simms (2016) also argues that "what is discernable from this passage is an attempt on Dibia's part to counter the homophobic narratives in Nigeria that describe gayness as a perverse or foreign behavior that one simply chooses." (150)

Dibia's *Walking With Shadows* (2005) and other texts of the corpus indeed contradict the nationalist political discourse that describes same-sex desire as a perversion: by showing respect for religions and traditions, the texts reconcile male same-sex desire with Africanness.

V. RECONCILING MALE SAME-SEX DESIRE WITH AFRICANNESS

A. Respect for religions and traditions: a subversive conformism

Despite the essentialist claim pretending that same-sex desire is un-African, the writers show the possibility of experiencing male same-sex desire while respecting religious beliefs and traditions, as any heterosexual couple. The short stories "Barna and I" (John 2014) and "God's Children Are Little Broken Things" (Ifeakandu 2016) offer a representation of pious same-sex loving characters, which reinforces the compatibility between same-sex love relationship and Christianity. In Ifeakandu's "God's Children Are Little Broken Things", Kamsi's piety gives him the strength to accept his same-sex desire and to face the violence he endures. The first time Lotanna meets Kamsi, he describes the latter as "small" and "fragile" but, when Kamsi plays the organ at Church, Lotanna is surprised that "[Kamsi's] legs c[an] strike the pedals so strongly"; the narrator adds that "he d[oes] not look fragile on the organ." (2) Kamsi's religiosity and practising of the organ gives him strength. Ifeakandu also uses religion to legitimize the acceptance of same-sex desire, as Kamsi often says the following prayer:

> God, grant me the serenity
>
> to accept the things I cannot change;
>
> courage to change the things I can;
>
> and wisdom to know the difference. (Ifeakandu 2016: 8)

The author indeed quotes this prayer to challenge the idea that same-sex love is only a lifestyle, a choice. Thus, Christianity contains the elements enabling the protagonist to accept same-sex desire. Furthermore, the narrator mentions that "sometimes the sun dr[aws] fine lines on [Kamsi's] face, and his lips bec[ome] redder, his skin brighter, his aura more childlike." (8) The angel-like depiction of Kamsi is enhanced by the alliteration in /s/ which gives an impression of softness. In this way, Ifeakandu contradicts the widespread view of same-sex loving individuals as sinners. In the same vein, in John's "Barna and I" (2014), Dzukogi's mother accepts the same-sex love relationship of her son because it can lead him closer to God whereas the female character may divert him from God. The intradiegetic narrator indeed explains that

his mother is “glad that [he] is in the home of a Bible believing Christian and not endangering [his] life and spirituality with Thandiwe” who is considered as “promiscuous” by the mother. The narrator indeed implies that a heterosexual relationship does not prevent debauchery. Thandiwe is also a “mixed-race Zimbabwean girl” who does not speak Hausa. She represents foreignness in the mother’s eye, whereas her son’s same-sex love relationship with Barna represents the continuity of traditions and religious beliefs: the narrator indeed notes that Barna “love[s] church” and the Hausa language; the mother is “glad that perhaps [he] was learning good Christian things” while her son is actually experiencing a same-sex love relationship, which is generally condemned by the Church. Thus, the narrator humorously contradicts the idea that same-sex desire is un-Christian. In addition, Christianity is also used as a tool to fight the conservative views against same-sex desire. In Oyebanji’s “The Enactment” (2014), the mob lynching is also presented as contradictory to Christian values: the narrator explains that “this God [responsible for the mob lynching] must be far from what your pastor preached every Sunday.” In this way the author does not condemn the whole Christian religion, he condemns its fundamentalist interpretations, whose violence and hate do not fit with Christian values. The authors then appropriate Christianity in order to validate non-normative sexualities.

Besides, though Adichie portrays Chinedu as a very pious character in “The Shivering” (2009), his sexuality is never mentioned as an element that may conflict with his religious beliefs. The short story does not focus on Chinedu’s non-normative sexuality: the character’s main concern is actually that he is indeed an illegal immigrant in the United States. Thus, the same-sex loving character is represented as multifaceted; he is not reduced to his sexuality. As Ukamaka and Chinedu have similar love experiences with wealthy men who treated them poorly, the differences between the characters, in terms of gender or sexuality, are erased: the non-heteronormative relationship is similar to a heterosexual one. Thus, the parallelism between the two relationships impinges on the idea that same-sex desire is un-African. Then, the beginning of the short story “I Have Loved You” (Moremi 2013) evinces a form of universality of the love relationship. The narrator indeed says that “it is not a crime to love someone. To place your heart in the hands of the person you trust […]. It is not a sin to dream of a life of laughter and comfort with this beautiful soul” (22). Moremi’s use of the words “someone”, “person” and “soul” erases the question of gender in a love relationship. Moreover, the similitude between same-sex love relationships and different-sex love relationships is underscored by the choice of their pet names: after “trying several pet names”, they agree that “baby [is] the perfection. Millions of people have called millions of other people baby millions

of times for millions of years" (24). The choice of a very common nickname and the repetition of the word "millions" underline the ordinariness of their love, although it is a same-sex love relationship. The exaggerated phrase "for millions of years" also anchors their love in immemorial times, giving validity to a form of desire that is generally conceived as a recent import from the West. While portraying ordinary and pious characters, the writers under study delegitimise the marginalisation of non-heteronormative individuals.

Furthermore, in "Dried Fish Curry" (Laone 2013), the author uses food and cooking to convey the protagonist's attachment to traditions. The short story is reminiscent of a culinary memoir, a genre which connects cooking with a sense of belonging to a culture: Allen-Terry Sherman (2017) remarks that culinary memoirs celebrate traditions (2). The title echoes a recipe book, though the recipe of the dish is not provided. Cooking is a privileged moment between Thuso and his grandmother, a moment when family ties are strengthened through MaMpho's transmission of her culinary knowledge. Bigot (2021) indeed reminds us that "food is both a recognizable marker of ethnic identity and a strong component of family ties." (1) The narrator of "Dried Fish Curry" (Laone 2013) mentions that "Thuso ha[s] always loved cooking, spending endless hours in the kitchen with MaMpho." (10) Cooking is indeed MaMpho's legacy to her grandson who is careful to follow his grandmother's advice when he cooks: "he close[s] the door slowly, careful not to bang it, just as grandma ha[s] taught him." (8) Thuso repeats the movements of his grandmother, which denotes that traditional knowledge is also transmitted and preserved through the body. Freeman (2007) indeed argues that, "as a practice, kinship is resolutely corporeal", and "kinship 'matters' in the way that bodies 'matter': it may be produced or constructed" (298). Thus, kinship or the sense of belonging to a culture cannot be understood only in biological terms: Thuso's link with his culture is also highlighted by the physical practice of cooking. The connection between the protagonist and his grandmother is accentuated by the narration: the narrative time is indeed intertwined with analepses which link Thuso with his past, his family and traditions; the act of cooking and the protagonist's presence in MaMpho's kitchen trigger the memories that reveal the family's history. The recipe book and its creation seem to be a physical mise en abyme of Laone's short story since the book is an embodiment of MaMpho's family history revolving around cooking as a way of preserving kinship: the recipes are indeed surrounded by anecdotes and photographs of family members (12). The narrator moreover specifies that, "in the middle of the book, [Thuso] ha[s] placed a photo taken from MaMpho's wedding, as she and her husband cut into the wedding cake she had baked herself." (12) The centrality of this photograph denotes the importance of both family

and cooking and the connection between the two. A wedding is indeed a ritual that epitomizes the creation of familial bonds between two persons, and cooking is the "practice that cements [these] bonds" (Bigot 2021: 12), a practice which symbolizes family values. Thus, through the recipe book Thuso pays tribute to his grandmother and to the cultural heritage he was transmitted. The protagonist's cooking, like his grandmother's, will enable him to develop intimate bonds with his boyfriend. The narrator indeed says that

> Gerard ha[s] been more than just impressed with the dried fish curry, and as he scooped out one spoonful after the next, telling stories of visiting India with his parents as a young boy, Thuso wondered whether if it was the chili that watered his eyes, or the nostalgia that kept threatening to choke out his voice. That night, they slept together for the first time. (Laone 2013: 12)

Thanks to the dish prepared by Thuso, Gerard shares his childhood's memories; the meal then creates a form of intimacy which, in addition to being emotional, leads the characters to a sexual relationship. This sexual intercourse may indeed be understood as a way to develop bonds between the lovers. As Thuso prepares a dish that was cooked by his grandmother, he perpetuates family traditions. While they are eating, the protagonist also feels nostalgia for the time when MaMpho was alive: the grandmother, through Thuso's respect for his heritage and his feelings, seems to validate the same-sex love relationship which, like MaMpho's marriage, revolves around the transmission of love through cooking. The expression of male same-sex desire in the love relationships is anchored in traditional values; this cultural anchorage and conformism with traditional family values bestows respectability on the same-sex desiring individuals.

Green-Simms (2016) argues that Dibia's *Walking With Shadows* (2011) "is about the main character's desire for respectability" (Green-Simms 2016: 148). The baptismal scene in the prologue aptly illustrates this search for respectability and conformism since Adrian wants to "rid [him]self of the pathetic person [he] had always known as 'Ebele'", and who "was laughed at" because he played unmanly games that "he was not supposed to like" (Dibia 2011: 15-16). The protagonist later continues his pursuit of respectability with his marriage with Ada and the rejection of his non-heterosexual friends. After Adrian is outed by his colleague, he pays a visit to his old friends, Abdul and Femi, who "have crafted a life where they can live together in financial comfort, be out to their families, and surround themselves with gay friends. Abdul and Femi seem to possess what Adrian thought impossible: respectability without heterosexual marriage." (Green-Simms 2016: 148). This respectability also relies on living a

love relationship that is not different from a heteronormative relationship, which Green-Simms (2016) describes as "a queer act of resistance" (149) in the Nigerian context. Eribon (2012) indeed explains that the subversive power of an act can only be measured in relation to its context (194). In Nigerian society, where same-sex desiring individuals are marginalized and othered by nationalist and essentialist political discourses, claiming that non-heteronormative relationships are similar to heteronormative ones is subversive. Furthermore, Eribon (2012) contends that aspiration for conformism is more subversive than revolutionary claims that would marginalise same-sex loving individuals even more (194). The discourses highlighting the ordinariness of the characters and of their relationships, alongside their respect for religion and traditions, aim to thwart the discourses that tend to deprive same-sex desiring individuals of their Nigerian or African identity. In contrast, some texts under study rely on mythical figures to assert the legitimacy of same-sex desire in contemporary Nigerian society.

B. The use of myths

Pedro's "Men at Work: Do Not Disturb" (2013) refers to Greek mythology to assert the legitimacy of male same-sex desire. The narrator describes the gestures of the "ground diggers" as a "dance of the Adonises" (82). In Greek mythology, Adonis is characterised as a particularly attractive man. On the one hand, the author may use this reference to highlight the immemorial quality of same-sex desire and, on the second hand, referring to the beliefs of Ancient Greece may draw attention on a time, before the appearance of monotheist religions, when same-sex desire was not socially condemned. The condemnation of non-heteronormative sexualities is then historicised and contextualised, reduced to a construction that appeared with the Old Testament. The narrator repeating that "the earth has a way of returning some earth back to the earth, no matter how hard we dig" (82; 84) may also suggest the natural quality of same-sex desire, which cannot be erased "no matter how hard" conservative political and religious authorities try. The young male character cannot help but watch the digging men: the narrator recounts that "once the ground diggers arrive in the morning, everything else stops for [him]" (82) and he specifies that this desire occurs although he has "never heard the word 'homosexuality'" (84); this suggests that same-sex desire cannot be the specificity of a (Western) culture. The myth, then, may evoke a kind of universality of same-sex desire.

Besides, in "A Night So Damp" (Umez 2005), Kamalu is inscribed in Igbo and Christian myths at the same time. According to Kanu (2018), Kamalu is the name of a deity – also called Amadioha – associated with thunder, justice, revenge on behalf of the weak, and hope; he is

sometimes violent when provoked (7). Kanu's article highlight the similarities between the Igbo deity and Jesus Christ: for instance, as the son of Chukwu, he is an intermediary between Chukwu and people (10). In the short story, Kamalu refers to the episode of Samson and Delilah to make his mother understand male same-sex desire, comparing himself with the Biblical character. The deity Kamalu may also echo the figure of Samson in the Bible, as Samson takes revenge on the Philistines – the Igbo deity is indeed associated with revenge. In addition, Samson is a Christ-like figure because he was born to save his people – the Israelites – and dies in killing the Philistines, which links him with the ideal of Justice that the deity Kamalu incarnates. The character Kamalu compares himself to Samson in a failed attempt to explain his sexuality, implying that marrying Daphne may not be a good idea because, as Delilah betrayed Samson, Daphne would betray Kamalu and "ruin [his] happiness." (Umez 2005: 340) The choice of relying on a Biblical narrative to escape a heteronormative marriage may stem from the role of Christian missionaries in the imposition of the heterosexual norm in Nigeria. Kamalu indeed uses the tool of the oppressors to try and free himself from a Western heterosexual norm. Though the onomastics tends to highlight Kamalu's Igbo identity, his rhetoric sheds light on the Western influences of the character and his mother does not understand his point. The author may then imply that same-sex desire should not be legitimated with the help of a Western discourse, which would actually bolster the idea of same-sex desire as un-African.

In *Fimi Sile Forever* (Ikpo 2017), Wale and Wole both wear locks. Agwuele (2016) explains that, in Yoruba culture, men with dreadlocks are believed to have superpowers and are feared and marginalized (69-70). The characters' dreadlocks then emphasize the marginalization faced by same-sex desiring individuals due to the fear of the unknown. In addition, in Yoruba culture, dreadlocks are perceived as "untamed" and are "associated with unruliness" (74). Wale recounts that, as a child, he was called 'Dada' by his classmates and teachers, as "[h]e was born with [his] locks." (63) Agwuele (2016) mentions that, usually, children's hair is traditionally shaved "the eighth day after birth" during a "ritual that is meant to dissociate [the baby] from the spirit world, thereby marking its belongingness to its community and the Earth" (79). However, when the baby is born with dreaded hair, "it is considered the blessing of the gods, such hair is maintained and the wearer is called Dada." These children are believed to be closely linked with Yoruba deities, and they usually cut their hair before adulthood and keep it shaven, as a sign that they are integrated to their community (79-80). In *Fimi Sile Forever* (Ikpo 2017), Wole and Wale cut their dreadlocks when they are teenagers after their father's departure from

Nigeria. Since they feel resentment toward him, the shaving may be read as a rupture with their father who also has dreadlocks. The narrator recounts that when the twins see each other's shaven head, "[their] feet gr[o]w unsteady, […] and [they] fe[el] [them]selves fall to the ground as if lifeless." (97) The word "unsteady" suggests that the loss of their locks destabilizes their identity, their hair being what makes them original. In addition, the adjective "lifeless" underscores that their dreadlocks are almost vital to them, as if they could not be the same person without them. This is indeed reminiscent of the biblical character Samson, whose strength indeed lies in his hair. Consequently, contrary to the other Dadas who keep their hair shaven, the brothers let their hair grow to have dreadlocks again. Thus, Wale and Wole do not fully integrate their community; they still challenge the social order with their dreadlocks. The narrator indeed recounts that, while Wale attends church service, he "hope[s] to blend in, but [his] lateness and [his] locks would not have it" (132). This example illustrates that, though he knows that locks are disapproved of, he keeps them: dreadlocks then epitomize the brother's willingness to undermine cultural norms. Thus, the twin brothers are characterised as strongly connected to Yoruba cosmology. Though it anchors them in traditional Yoruba beliefs and strengthens their Nigerian identity, this characterisation also tends to marginalise them, as they cannot fully integrate their community: the mythical elements – whether positive or not – separate them from ordinary, mundane Nigerians. Hence, when same-sex desire and Africanness do not perfectly fit, characters may make them converge through their individual identities.

C. An authentically African male same-sex desire?

The first chapter of Dibia's *Walking With Shadows* (2011) paradoxically opens with the following sentence: "He was slowly coming awake" (19). Whereas the prologue focuses on the baptism during which Ebele gets rid of his Igbo name and becomes Adrian, his Christian name is not mentioned by the narrator when the protagonist "come[s] awake" (19) after a car accident. The use of the pronoun "he" by the narrator – who adopts the character's point view – reflects Adrian's confusion about his identity, which is made clear when he wonders: "What is my name? He ask[s] his inner being. Everything [is] confusing now. He search[es] his wallet for his driver's license. It [is] there. *Ebele Njoko. Adrian Njoko*. Yes, that [is] it, Adrian. Adrian ha[s] to get home." (20; emphasis in the original) The emphasis draws attention to the parallelism between the two names, as if the character had to make a choice between two irreconcilable identities that had always existed side by side but never merged into one another.

The anadiplosis makes it explicit that the character identifies as Adrian. It is germane to note that, as soon as he becomes aware of his identity, the first action of the protagonist is guided by constraint: "Adrian *ha[s] to* get home." (20; my emphasis) Thus, his life as Adrian, which includes his home, seems to be the result of social constraints: the narrator further indicates that "he ha[s] gone straight, suppressed a lot of feelings and ha[s] even denied himself" (20). The author plays with the polysemy of the expression "go straight": the proposition can mean that the character has stopped being a criminal, or that he has become heterosexual. As the second meaning actually comes from the first[22], it evinces the fact that Adrian rejects his sexuality because it is not socially acceptable. The verbs "deny" and "suppress" imply that a part of Adrian's identity has been ignored and, subsequently, that this part of the character is still there, asking to be acknowledged. When Adrian visits Abdul after being outed by his colleague, Abdul advises the protagonist to "be true to [him]self, for once in [his] life" (33), and this is indeed what drives Adrian throughout the novel, until he comes to the conclusion that, though "he had found some peace with Ada and Ego, […] there had always been the nagging feeling that something in his life remained incomplete." (199) In the epilogue, the protagonist finally feels complete while he is about to leave Nigeria: when the flight attendant calls him Njoko Ebele Adrian, the main character corrects her and explains that his name is "simply Ebele" (201). The narrator then adds that the protagonist "c[annot] help but feel content with finally accepting himself for who he [is]. He had allowed Ebele to lie dormant for far too long, and now it [is] like a resurrection being addressed as Ebele by everyone once again." (201) Thus, Ebele no longer accepts to be called by his Christian name; he finally fully embraces his Igbo identity, an identity that he had rejected as a child in the prologue of the novel. There is then a reversed baptism that is operated: Ebele's "resurrection" reconciles his Africanness and his male same-sex desire. Furthermore, the epilogue echoes the prologue when Ebele hears a young boy sing the nursery rhyme that he used to sing when he was a child (204) and thought of himself as "the pathetic person [he] had always known as 'Ebele'." (15) The song is indeed connected with his non-normative identity and, as grown Ebele "recite[s] the nursery rhyme in his head" (204), he actually reconnects with his younger self, before he rejected his Africanness and non-normative identity during the Christian baptism. Thus, using his Igbo name and accepting his sexual identity enable him to access his African identity. The same-sex desiring character needs to flee Nigeria because he cannot find the freedom to be himself in his country. Exile is yet not an

[22] The term "straight" was first coined by G. W. Henry to refer to people who have stopped indulging in same-sex sexual relationships, in Henry, G. W. *Sex Variants: A Study of Homosexual Patterns*. New York: Paul B. Hoeber. 1941.

abandonment of the possibility of an authentic African male same-sex desire, but a contextual and personal necessity which is accompanied with the hope of a better future for same-sex desiring individuals: Ebele indeed hopes that, when his child Ego grows up, "Nigeria w[ill] be a different place and its people w[ill] be more receptive and less judgmental." (203) (Green Simms 2016) indeed notes that "Dibia makes it clear that there are many people choosing different paths" (149): exile is not the only possibility; other same-sex desiring characters, such as Abdul and Femi, succeed in living a happy life in Nigeria.

In Ikpo's *Fimi Sile Forever*, Wale tries to reconcile same-sex desire and Africanness by influencing, transforming the space around him. When he decides to accept to teach at Kola University, he plans to organize "Save the Colour", a festival celebrating non-normative identities. Wale also explains that he wants to explore his individuality, since he had spent his whole life with his twin brother (99). When the protagonist arrives on New Year's Eve at Kola University, he notes that "from the gate house to the faculty buildings, the hostels, event halls, the Catholic and Pentecostal chapels and the mosque, everything [is] blue and silent" (97-98), adding that the whole campus is "deserted" because it is the Christmas holidays (98). The date of his arrival indeed emphasises an idea of renewal in the character's life: he arrives at Kola University in a liminal moment, the evening between to different years. Andrews (2018) reminds us that "liminality, a concept employed in anthropology, psychology and literary theory, among other fields, refers broadly to in-between moments, spaces, states or peoples." (53) The liminality of Wale's arrival is accentuated by the description of the university, where "everything is blue and silent" (98): the silence, like the emptiness also mentioned, represent for Wale the possibility of having an impact on the institution. The empty and silent university becomes a place that he can reshape. The organisation of "Save the Colour" indeed gives him the opportunity to address issues that are generally ignored or rejected by Nigerian official institutions. Andrews (2018) uses the notion of liminality to refer to "queer people's state of in-between within society, both present and excluded, as well as the abstract spaces outside of space where queer individuals can find a sense of freedom and demonstrate their queer desires which, based on cultural attitudes and mores, ought not to exist." (53) In *Fimi Sile Forever* (Ikpo 2017), "Save the Colour" is a liminal space since it stages same-sex desire and same-sex desiring individuals wearing masks, and it happens in a society where they are criminalised. The masks indeed epitomize the liminality of the episode, as the same-sex desiring characters are "both present and excluded" (Andrews 2018: 53): though they can express themselves, they also have to hide for their safety. Furthermore, Wale and Wole are both engaged and about to

marry their fiancées, respectively Tega and Lola. They are then in a liminal situation; they hide their same-sex desires and they are about to reject them to get married. Wale claims that, contrary to Wole, it would be easy for him to stop having sexual intercourses with men (126-127). However, throughout the novel, Wale has several sexual relationships with men and regrets them. For example, when Danjuma and Wale have sex, it happens during a power failure, as if the absence of light, the invisibility of the sexual act and the silence around it, made it inexistent. The power failure seems to make of the scene a liminal moment, as it actually happens, but in an invisible manner. The power failure does not only draw attention to the fact that the sexual intercourse has to remain invisible in the eyes of Nigerian society, it also highlights the fact that Wale does not fully accept his same-sex desire. He indeed struggles to find his way in this liminal situation, in which he actually wears the mask of heterosexuality. Besides, after the twins leave Nigeria, Wole seems to have overcome the liminal situation that kept him in a space between same-sex desire and a heteronormative marriage: the narrator indeed mentions that Wole "has abandoned delusions of heterosexual marriage, and has bounced back, delving into his roots, finding himself and coming out, working on ways to rebuild [their] lives and preparing the Nigeria [they] left for [their] eventual return." (300) Wole keeps wanting to have an impact on Nigeria: the affirmation of same-sex desire, alongside his cultural identity, are the tools that he now wants to use to redesign Nigerian society. As in Dibia's *Walking With Shadows* (2011), same-sex desire seems to find a legitimate place only if the character reconnects with and proudly asserts an authentic cultural identity. This trope may find its explanation in what Ndijo (2013) calls the "'nationalization' of the sexuality of its citizens" (128), referring to the fact that, "in many African countries, the post-colonial state has managed to draw boundaries between Africans and Westerners, citizens and strangers, authentic and deracinated Africans, good and bad citizens, loyal and disloyal subjects." (128) Thus, the authors of the corpus emphasise the possibility of experiencing male same-sex desire in a way that does not marginalise them from their national identity. The assertion of an authentic Africanness is nonetheless questionable because the discourse does not avoid the pitfalls of essentialism.

Mbembe (2001) notes that "the desire for authenticity […] is currently gaining in strength" (33), especially in the communitarian cultural identity movement that seeks to find Africa's uniqueness (26), but "there is no African identity that could be designated by a single term, or that could be named by a single word; or that could be subsumed under a single category." (33) Mbembe indeed debunks the idea of an authentic African identity relying on tradition, a project

that he calls the “re-enchantment of tradition” (25), because traditions and customs are “constantly being reinvented.” (33) Laone’s “Dried Fish Curry” (2013) represents this constant evolution of traditions: though the art of cooking is a family heritage, it is nonetheless not conceived as a simple reproduction of a recipe. The narrators explains that, when Thuso and his grandmother used to cook a dish with the help of a recipe, “the two of them would make alterations as they went along, brewing their own recipes along the way.” (12) Thus, the phrase “the two of them” lays emphasis on the idea that the grandmother, who passes on the tradition of cooking, has never considered recipes as fixed; they may indeed be adjusted so as to fit their personal tastes. The original recipe is indeed used as a basis, a general outline. Similarly, traditions may be understood differently, adapted depending on specific situation. In the recipe book he has created, Thuso has explained “where the original recipe ha[s] come from, and often noting the number of trials it ha[s] taken to perfect each of their adjusted versions.” Cooking then seems to be a process of re-appropriation of the recipes that takes into account the characters’ history, but which also adapts them so as to be part of their family and heritage. Hall (1996) argues that “identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’, or ‘where we come from’ so much as what we might become, [...] how we might represent ourselves.” (4) Thus, the recipes used by Thuso and his grandmother are traditional resources that they use to build their own identity and heritage. Cooking, like writing, has creative power that may shape the future. What matters here is more the construction of their future identity rather than the reproduction of a past identity. The idea of authenticity may thus be connected to a personal act of creation, the achievement of one’s individuality while respecting one’s community.

CONCLUSION

The thesis tried to highlight that Europe constructed the heteronormativity that is described as authentically African by the nationalist discourses promoting an essentialist view of the African identity. Though postcolonial writers often portrayed same-sex desire as a colonial import, an emergent discourse tries to debunk this myth. The digital space is a literary space that enables authors to publish their texts online without being censored by Nigerian authorities. The textual analyses underscored that the authors are attached to undermine heteronormativity and its gender norms. The texts under study highlight the multiplicity of Nigerian identities. Finally, instead of trying to reach an illusory and idealized African identity, some writers promote the development of one's own authentic individual identity resulting from a negotiation from experiences, traditions and beliefs.

The thesis did not dwell on the analysis of Western terms such as "gay" or "homosexual" in the different texts. It might be interesting to question their occurrence, and try to see whether the author using them have a different view about male same-sex desire, or if these words are used because they are convenient. As this thesis discussed male same-sex desire, female same-sex desire was not mentioned. It might be germane to examine how female same-sex desire is explored in Nigerian literature. Then, in addition to all the difficulties interfering with male same-sex desire that were discussed in the thesis, it may be interesting to pay attention to the class issue which is evoked in Adichie's "Apollo" (2015). Lastly, this study did not question the genres of the texts under study.

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ANNEXE I

SUMMARIES OF THE PRIMARY SOURCES

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. "Apollo"

When Okenwa visits his parents, they tell him that their former houseboy, Raphael, has just been arrested by the police for robbery. The narrator then remembers his childhood and recounts that he never felt he truly belonged to his family. As a teenager, Okenwa was really fond of Raphael who eventually caught apollo and transmitted it to Okenwa when the latter came in the houseboy's room to take care of him. The narrator finally mentions that he is responsible for Raphael being fired: he had falsely accused the houseboy of having pushed him.

-------. "The Shivering"

Ukamaka meets Chinedu the day a plane crashes in Abuja and they quicky become friends. Whereas Ukamaka easily tells Chinedu all about her love relationship, Chinedu cannot speak about his same-sex love relationship with the same ease. Their past relationships shared similarities as they were both poorly treated by their boyfriends. Chinedu eventually explain to Ukamaka that he is undocumented and may be deported at any time.

Dibia, Jude. "Sasha"

Sasha talks to a man called Mr. X on a dating website. While the main character dresses before going to his date with Mr. X, he worries about the SSMPA and the consequences it could have on him. The date turns out to be a bait and Sasha is beaten to death by a group of men.

-------. *Walking with Shadows*

Adrian Ebele Njoko has to face his past when his colleague outs him to his friends and family. As the protagonist does not want to lie to his relatives anymore, he decides to accept his sexuality and, in the end, he moves to England where he thinks he can live as an openly gay man; he hopes that, in the future, Nigeria would become a more tolerant country.

-------. "Witness"

The unnamed main character is at the police station and has to recount how he was attacked a few hours before because people he was identified as a homosexual. The short story alternatively develops two different accounts of the event: one which is suitable for the police, omitting to mention the real reasons of his presence in the restaurant, and another one in which the narrator recounts that he came to see his doctor to get his medicine.

Ifeakandu, Arinze. "God's Children Are Little Broken Things"

Lotanna and Kamsi meet during a football match at university. They begin a love relationship while Lotanna already has a girlfriend. Lotanna's parents often quarrel because the husband is unfaithful, and the mother eventually dies. Kamsi tells Lotanna that he was raped and threatened by other students. In the end, Lotanna is informed that Kamsi committed suicide.

Ikpo, Nnanna. *Fimi Sile Forever*

Wale and Wole are human right activists fighting for LGBTQIA+ rights. Though they both are engaged, they also have same-sex sexual relationships. Wale is offered a position of teacher in Kola University where he organises an artistic event intending to discuss non-normative sexualities. Through analepsis, the novel also focuses on key moments of the protagonist's childhood. When the same-sex relationships of the twin brothers are publicly revealed, they have to leave Nigeria.

John, Elnathan. "Barna and I"

The main character's mother does not like her son's girlfriend, Thandiwe, because she would be promiscuous. The protagonist then understands that his mother approves of his love relationship with Barna because he is a good Christian.

Kolade, Pedro. "Men At Work: Do Not Disturb"

A teenager discovers his desire for men while he is secretly watching ground diggers working in his backyard instead of studying for his Junior Examination.

Laone, Aobakwe. "Dried Fish Curry"

When Thuso comes back home and cooks in the kitchen that used to his grandmother's, he remembers his childhood and describes his relationship with MaMpho who raised him after his mother died. They were very close and both of them were passionate about cooking. Thuso indeed offered his grandmother a recipe book he constituted with recipes and family pictures. When Thuso invites his boyfriend for dinner, they sleep together for the first time.

Moremi, Kevin. "I Have Loved You"

Jimi and Deji fall in love while they attend the National Youth Service Corps. When they are finished, Deji finds a job in Port Harcourt while Jimi remains in Lagos. Though their love does not fade away, their relationship becomes platonic a few years after Deji's wedding. When Jimi is eventually informed of Deji's death, Jimi finally confesses his feelings for Deji to Bimpe.

Ogunyemi, Kayode. "Reflections"

The narrator recounts his relationship with his father who accepts that his son plays with dolls. After the father dies and the protagonist tells his mother that he has a boyfriend, he is surprised to hear his mother summon him to leave the house.

Oyebanji, Ayodele. "The Enactment"

The narrator recounts the mob lynching of a man surprised in the office toilet with his boyfriend. The man is beaten and immolated while his wife and co-workers are watching.

Umez, Uche Peter. "A Night So Damp"

When Kamalu come back to Nigeria after spending several years in England, he tries to tell his mother about his love relationship with Kay. Mrs. Ngozi does not understand; she had made plans to marry her son to Daphne. In the end, she faints when she sees her son kissing Kay.