



Queering the Racial Other: Towards a Queer Africa

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore recent developments in queer representation in 21st century African literature. Africa's history with the legitimization of homosexuality is complicit with politics of invisibility, silencing, erasure and rigid cultural ideologies. The Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act (SSMPA) of Nigeria which was enacted in 2014 saw a furore among both old and new generation African writers who were embittered by the systemic erasure of LGBTQIA+ lives. Wole Soyinka's portrayal of the mulatto Joe Golder in *The Interpreters* was the closest that an African writer had come to representing a non-straight, non-heterosexual character in the panorama of African literature. While the only accomplishment of Soyinka's character remains a sympathetic portrayal of a homosexual, it also suggests the possibility of closeted queer presence in Africa. The beginning of the 21st century witnessed a bold flourish of queer literature - Chris Abani's *GraceLand* (2004) and Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* (2005) present queer protagonists who struggle to come to terms with their queerness and radicalize anachronistic notions of gender and sexuality. Later works by new generation African writers have effectively succeeded in debunking the premise that 'homosexuality is un-African' on which the draconian SSMPA had been built. Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees* (2015) reinvents the bildungsroman by placing a queer African girl as the hero of her story. Akwaeke Emezi's *The Death of Vivek Oji* (2020) explores the liminalities of gender and sexuality, the rites of passage that presages the fate of self-identified queer people within a social context that is hostile to sexual difference. This paper will analyze how all these works re-write the history of African queer people into the nation's body politic by strategically applying pertinent theoretical frameworks like race, gender and sexuality, biopolitics, politics of heteronormativity, and queer necropolitics.

Keywords: Nigeria, SSMPA, Representation, Gender, Sexuality.