THESIS - Vol. 9, No. 1, Spring 2020

International Research Journal

Kolegji AAB
CILËSI. LIDERSHIP. SUKSES!

ISSN: 1848-4298 (Print) **ISSN: 2623-8381**(Online)

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How to cite this article:
Okpadah, S. O. (2020). Queer Pedagogy and Engaging Cinema in LGBTQIA+ Discourse in Africa. *Thesis*. Vol. 9, No. 1. (137-162).

Published online: June 30, 2020

Article received on the 29th of February, 2020.
Article accepted on the 16th of May, 2020.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interests.

Review Article

Queer Pedagogy and Engaging Cinema in LGBTQIA+ Discourse in Africa

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Abstract

Postmodernism ignited a rapid growth in oppositional cultures in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Among these oppositions are feminism, animal right movements and queer culture. The oppositional forces, silenced by the power, discourse, and knowledge of dominant cultures, countercultures strive to speak for themselves and resist all forms of subjugation and marginalization. In the West, oppositional cultures have been able to create a queer cinema of resistance. African queer cinematic engagement came late with Mohammed Camara's 1997 film-*Dakan*, believed to be the first film to focus primarily on LGBTQIA+ themes from West Africa. Ever since the above film pushed the queer sexual orientation into the center of discourse in Africa, film industries such as Nigeria's Nollywood and Ghana's Ghollywood and the South African film enterprise have followed suit. The questions that emanate in this study are, do these narratives on new sexual identities-LGBTQIA truly reflect indigenous African ethos? Is queer cinema germane in creating spaces for new sexual identities in Africa? Against this backdrop, this study examines African queer cinema as a struggle against heteronormative and oppressive tendencies. Employing Michel Foucault's perspective on knowledge, power and discourse as theory, this study uses content analysis to interrogate selected African

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queer cinematic narratives. Among other findings, I argue that African queer cinema resists heteronormativity and other sexually oppressive categories and that this enterprise is geared towards creating a voice for the LGBTQIA+ community across the African continent.

Keywords: *LGBTQIA+, Film, Africa, Nollywood, Queer.*

Introduction

The struggle to decriminalize LGBTQIA+ individuals and practices is gaining traction throughout the world due to several counter-discourses, movements, and the adoption of oppositional cultures. Although these sexual identities and communities have received less criticism in the West (in fact, they have been given the right to life with the legalization of all identities in some Western nations), numerous countries (especially those on the African continent) have been a home for discrimination against members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Criminalization of LGBTQIA+ individuals and practices in countries such as Nigeria, Uganda, Cameroun, Liberia, Libya, Senegal, Somalia, and others is often a product of religion, morality, and a biased justice system. The belief that non-heterosexual relationships and identities are un-African is predominant in cases of LGBTQIA+ marginalization. Same-sex practices are often considered violations of the moral ethos of the African society, and in some cases, as demonic in nature. Against this backdrop, Vasu Reddy claims that "according to African stereotypes, anti-straight sexuality is a disease/sickness; a possession by evil or demonic spirits; an occult practice; or simply a despicable influence from the 'morally decadent' West" (Reddy, 2002, p. 1). Same-sex individuals and practices are seen as queer in Africa. According to Nowlan, "queers are outraged gays, lesbians, bisexuals,

transgendered people, and allied misfits and outsiders who seek to move from expression of rage toward demanding satisfaction in response to what outrage them, including by seizing and appropriating what they can when this is not given them in response to their demands" (2010, p. 3). Nowlan's definition of the term 'queer' implies that to be queer is to be a member of the African LGBTQIA+ community.

Presidents Sam Nujoma of Namibia and Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe once opined that LGBTQIA+ were social misfits and not fit to live. In the words of Mugabe as cited by Chikura-Mtwazi (2018), having a non-straight sexual orientation "degrades human dignity. It is unnatural, and there is no question ever of allowing these people to behave worse than dogs and pigs. If dogs and pigs do not do it, why must human beings? If you see such people parading themselves arrest them and hand them over to the police" (p.1). In furtherance of his hate for the LGBTQIA+ culture, Mugbe also criticizes all allies of the LGBTQIA+ club. He articulates that he "find it extremely outrageous and repugnant to "his human conscience that such immoral and repulsive organizations, like those of queers, who offend both against the law of nature and cultural norms espoused by our society, should have any advocate in our midst and elsewhere in the world" (BBC, 1999, p.1).

In light of several African cultures that openly reject anything connected to LGBTQIA+ identities and culture, there has been a dearth of critical works on LGBTQIA+, cinema pedagogy, and their intersection in Africa. In the face of the oppression that the LGBTQIA+ community goes through, cinema has brought these identities into the center of discourse to deconstruct homophobia and decriminalize queer identities in Africa. Since these films present LGBTQIA+ identities and experiences in a positive light, they hold tremendous educational promise. Thus, African queer cinema can be used

as pedagogy to orientate audiences on the need to accept, embrace and celebrate sexual cultures. Presenting students films created to give voice to members of the LGBTQIA+ community and empower their ranks can help students understand several key tensions in play within many African cultures today. For instance, whether African film LGBTQIA+ narratives truly reflect an indigenous African ethos; whether queer cinema can create space(s) for LGBTQIA+ identities in Africa; and whether films about the LGBTQIA+ community are pedagogical. This chapter explores these issues along with the politics of sexuality and LGBTQIA+ identities in Africa. Furthermore, this analysis examines African queer cinema as a struggle against heteronormative and oppressive tendencies. Employing Michel Foucault's (year) perspective on knowledge, power, and discourse as theory, this chapter uses content analysis to investigate African queer films such as Mohammed Camara's *Dakan* (1997), Moses Ebere's *Men In Love* (2010) and Adaora Nwandu's *Ragtag* (2006), among other selected African queer cinema narratives as pedagogical mediums that exemplify queer identities.

Pedagogy and the Politics of Sexuality and LGBTQIA+ Identities in Africa

It is imperative for educational institutions (especially in Africa) to adopt critical methodologies and examine the current state of LGBTQIA+ discourse since the continent has failed to keep pace with their Western counterparts regarding LGBTQIA+ issues. While it is true that the hesitation on Africa's part could be attributed to hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity, that is not an acceptable excuse. Africa must rethink its monolithic approach to addressing LGBTQIA+ issues. In fact, educators in the secondary and tertiary settings should strive to

enlighten African students how to transcend heteronormativity and engage in investigative methodological approaches to LGBTQIA+ issues.

The colonial experience, globalization, and postmodernism have placed African same-sex discourse into the international discussion about implementing social justice. However, there are still lingering issues with granting LGBTQIA+ individuals in Africa the same rights and liberties as elsewhere in the world. These issues may stem from blatantly false assertions that LGBTQIA+ identities in Africa are Western constructions and the idea that the LGBTQIA+ community was not present in Africa prior to the transatlantic slave trade and colonial experience. In short, some Africans believe that the LGBTQIA+ community is due to Western interference. The socio-political response to these false claims has been varied and has led to differing perspectives about inclusion and acceptance for LGBTQIA+ populations. "Politicians, religious leaders and traditional spokesmen, [have] insisted ever more strongly that the very idea of same-sex practices was foreign to Africa, and that it had been imported from the West" (Awondo, Geschiere, & Reid, 2012, p. 148). However, numerous literary, descriptive, and quantitative methodological studies conducted by scholars in the social sciences and humanities confirm that "there is evidence showing not only that same-sex intimacy was tolerated in ancient Egypt, but that at certain periods same-sex relationships were legally recognized" (Dowson, 2006, p. 96). According to Evans-Pritchard, "among the Azande, in precolonial Sudan, male same-sex marriage was legally recognized where dowry was paid to boy-wives and damages were awarded for infidelity" (1970, p. 72). The Meru people of Kenya, the Bantu of Angola, and the Zulu of South Africa also tolerated transgender men and allowed them to marry other men. Gay prostitution is

also reported among the Hausa of Nigeria (Greenberg, 1988, p. 60). We must not forget that indigenous Hausas were pagans and non-Muslims. The indigenous Hausa customs created space(s) for the culture of gay prostitution. It was in the wake of the 19th century that the Fulani Jihad, led by Uthman Dan Fodio, displaced traditional practices, and imposed Islamic religious belief systems on the Hausa states. This dislocation and imposition included the oppression of the LGBTQIA+ community and the introduction of Islamic marriage traditions, rooted in the framework of heteronormativity. These findings suggest that at least some people of precolonial Africa expressed queer identities.

While religious "conservative voices see the queer practice as a Western imposition" (Schoonover & Galt, 2015, p. 90), one must not forget that queer sexual exploration has been part of the historical African experience. According to Aljazeera, in precolonial times, there were traces of same-sex marriage in some ethnic nationalities in Uganda (2014, p. 1). In fact, "among the Langi people of Uganda, effeminate males were allowed to marry men" (Al Jazeera, 2014, p. 1). The incursion of the West, which ushered in Christianity, brought about the change in this status quo. It also may have changed how queer was socially constructed to take on a more sinister definition. Historically, what are now considered queer practices in African societies were not considered queer. It is, therefore, wrong to "state that same-sex positioning is unAfrican" (Reddy, 2002, p. 5). Even after gaining independence from imperialist nations like Great Britain and Spain, residual control over African states remained visible. Transculturality and transnationality made possible via this lingering control helped popularize queer culture in Africa. Western ideals have been the springboard on which Africa has saddled many of its traditions. Pickett asserts that "in the 20th

century sexual roles were redefined once again. With the decline of prohibitions against pre-marital sex for the sake of pleasure, even sex outside of marriage, it became more difficult to argue against gay sex. It was in this context that the gay liberation movement took off" (2015, p. 1). The debate over the decriminalization and legitimization of same-sex marriage in Africa continues to gain momentum, though many Africans still exhibit actions and express statements fueled by homophobia. To some Africans, to be queer is to be a child of the devil, and non-heterosexual identities are shown disdain. For example, in 1995, Mugabe, stood out as a reference point for African homophobia when he proclaimed that "non-heterosexuals were worse than pigs and dogs and deserved no rights whatsoever" (BBC, 1999, p.1). In 1997, the Namibian president, Sam Nujoma, with equal measure of intolerance as his Zimbabwean counterpart, described same-sex engagement as a gruesome inhuman perversion which should be uprooted totally from society" (Lyonga, 2014, p. 97). Moreover, the support of the West sought for by the LGBTQIA+ community in Africa have yielded little to no results. Adamu Ibrahim (2015) states that, "with the role of European colonial legislation, Christianity, Islam and Western/American conservatism, and global LGBT rights activists and organizations, it appears as if the debate on LGBT rights in Africa is far from being solely African. It is a universal debate that is simultaneously taking place in other parts of the world, sometimes with the same actors involved in the West and Africa. To the extent that the homophobic discourse is transcontinental, LGBT rights activism is becoming inevitably multi-local as well" (p. 266).

While the LGBTQIA+ community in Africa has begun seeking support globally, some Africans have greeted Western aid with anger. For instance, when former United States President Barrack Obama visited Kenya, the chants of "Adam

and Eve, not Adam and Steve, we do not want Obama and Obama; we do not want Michelle and Michelle. We want Obama and Michelle and we want a child!" (Liang, 2015), rang through the air. This was a warning to President Obama to desist from promoting queer activism in Kenya. The globalization of queer discourse has supplied the motivational force behind the legalization of LGBTQIA+ practices. In other words, South Africa's integration of the LGBTQIA+ community into society and the legalization of same-sex marriage stems from the assimilation of ideals of the West's paradigm of transcontinentality.

The criticism leveled upon gays, lesbians, transgenders, bisexuals, and other queer identities charted a new course in the history of LGBTQIA+ in Africa. "Perhaps the most significant recent social change involving queerity is the emergence of the gay liberation movement in the West. In philosophical circles, this movement is, in part, represented through a rather diverse group of thinkers who are grouped under the label of queer theory" (Pickett, 2015, p. 1). LGBTQIA+ liberation movements counter existing anti-LGBTQIA+ efforts. Desmond Tutu, a South African Anglican priest of international repute, fully articulates this by saying, "I cannot but be as God has made me. And so, I spoke against the injustices of apartheid, about racism, where people were penalized for something about which they could do nothing, their ethnicity. I, therefore, could not keep quiet when people were hounded for something they did not choose, their sexual orientation (Tutu, 2008, p. 1).

Tutu fought relentlessly to end apartheid in South Africa. It should be noted that Tutu's sympathy for marginalized LGBTQIA+ community members should not be construed as advocacy for the LGBTQIA+ cause. One assumes he is only concerned about the right to life and the existence of people

with non-heterosexual orientations. Tutu has been instrumental to South Africa's sympathy for the LGBTQIA+ cause. "In November 2006, South Africa passed the Civil Union Act, becoming the fifth country in the world and the first in Africa to legalize same-sex marriage" (Awondo, Geschiere, & Reid, 2012, p. 157). Apart from Tutu, Imam Muhsin Hendricks has also supported the oppressed LGBTQIA+ community. He emphasizes the biological construction of sexual positioning. According to Hendricks, "when I was five years old, my mannerisms were very effeminate. When I reached puberty, my first attraction was to a boy in my class. Although I later got married to a woman, due to social pressure, we must understand that similar gender placement is not *haram.* Islam gives us leeway to think" (Qantara, 2014, p.1). Despite the religious inclinations of Tutu and Hendricks, they are aware of the need for the inclusivity of diverse identities in society.

In Nigeria, Wole Soyinka, Charles Oputa, and Chimamanda Adichie have advocated for a sexually liberal Africa (Nigeria especially). Nigeria had been critical of the LGBTQIA+ community. President Goodluck Jonathan's administration addressed this with the formal signing of *The Same-sex Marriage Prohibition Law of 2014.* The law endorses "punishment of a sentence of up to 14 years imprisonment and also criminalizes the formation, operation, and supports for gay clubs, societies, and organizations with sentences of up to 10 years imprisonment" Onuche, 2015, pp.91-98). Passage of this law was met by an outcry from Nigerian pro-gay activists such as Adichie. Her manifesto against this anti-LGBTQIA+ law reads that "the new law that criminalizes homosexuality is popular among Nigerians. But it shows a failure of our democracy, because the mark of a true democracy is not in the rule of its majority but in the protection of its minority…holy books of different religions do not have equal significance for

all Nigerians but also because the holy books are read differently by different people. The Bible, for example, also condemns fornication and adultery and divorce, but they are not crimes" (Adichie, 2014, p. 1).

It is pertinent to note that "Christian (and Islamic) leaders are often a driving force behind attacks on queer culture" (Awondo, Geschiere, & Reid, 2012, p. 148). In the Christian and Islamic creed, fornication and adultery, just like same-sex practices, are crimes and considered sinful. In most traditional African societies, such as in the Hausa, Igbo, Zulu, Akan, and Urhobo ethnic groups, fornication and adultery are also anathema. It becomes flawed to criminalize same-sex marriage yet exclude fornication and adultery.

In Cameroon, Alice Nkom, attorney, and founder of the Cameroonian gay rights organization ADEFHO (Association for the Defense of Homosexuals in Cameroon), has been at the forefront of advocating for the decriminalization LGBTQIA+. Nkom's advocacy stems from the rise of homophobia in Cameroon (Ndjio, 2012, p.120). Her human rights defense of gays in Cameroon has received positive appraisal from the international community.

Western governments have also criticized anti-LGBTQIA+ sentiments in Africa. According to Amnesty international, "same-sex orientation is illegal in 38 of 54 African countries" (n.d, p.3) This contrasts most countries in the West, where same-sex marriage has been legalized. At the genesis of the criminalization of same-sex relations in Nigeria, the United States, Canada, Britain, the United Nations, and European Union called for a repeal of the decision of the Nigerian government. Nwokolo (2014, p. 1) claims that "John Kerry, the US Secretary of States called the Act a dangerous restriction on freedoms. William Hague, the UK Foreign Secretary opined that 'the Act is a disappointment'. Ms. Linda Thomas-

Greenfield, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Africa hinted on the need 'to mount pressures on the President to change the law and respect human rights for all Nigerians despite sexual orientations' and lastly the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay said that the same-sex marriage prohibition law is "draconian and illegal."

The multitude of international opinions do not merely make the LGBTQIA+ debate transnational; they also broaden the horizons of LGBTQIA+ discourse. A scrutiny of the United States' perspective on the LGBTQIA+ debate suggest that the legitimization of queer identities does not necessarily promote LGBTQIA+, but instead is geared toward protecting the rights of queer individuals to live in a society where the stigmatization of the LGBTQIA+ community has reached its crescendo.

African academics have historically been critical of queer culture. Paradigmatically, Obasola Kehinde posits that "non-normative sexual positioning is unethical and unnatural. Therefore, it should be condemned in strong terms" (Kehinde, 2013, p. 77) Kehinde seems to forget that societies are subject to change when he goes further, stating that "though there has been a few dissenting voices, the general consensus in Africa is that monosexuality should not be allowed to take root. It is foreign to African culture. Its manifestation should be treated as an aberration rather than a socially acceptable behavioral pattern" (Kehinde, 2013, p. 92). Kehinde's position stems from his cultural and religious beliefs. This reveals that one cannot separate the African academia from the African cultural and religious spaces. Academics are products of cultures and religions. In fact, while scholarship influences culture, it also has been influenced by culture.

The LGBTQIA+ debate has been a subject of discourse in African cinemas that includes numerous cinematic cultures

such as Nollywood in Nigeria, Senegal, Cameroon, Ghana, and South African film industries. Of the three important films that serve as case studies in this chapter, first is *Dakan* which "is commonly understood as the first gay film in sub-Saharan Africa" (Schoonover & Galt, 2015, p.90). Additionally, Nwandu's *Ragtag* and Ebere's *Men in Love* (2010) are also a reference point to African queer cinema. The above narratives show that African queer cinema can create inclusive spaces for LGBTQIA+ identities in Africa. These narratives can be used pedagogically to galvanize support for the oppressed LGBTQIA+ community and also show educators and students how to combat hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity, which motivate undue harm to LGBTQIA+ individuals.

African LGBTQIA+ Cinema as Pedagogy

African queer cinema is a response to the criminalization of LGBTQIA+ practices and unfair treatment meted on community members. Epprecht observes that "African gays and lesbians have written their own memoirs, fiction, and poetry to add crucial insider insights to the discussion" (2018, p. 140). These memoirs have often been translated and adapted onscreen. Moreover, queer cinema has become a medium of perspective and advocacy for the marginalized LGBTQIA+ community. The African queer filmmaking enterprise was heavily influenced by the American New Queer Cinema (ANQC), which is "a kind of independent film-making which shares some of the main principles of Queer Theory, which is also against the idea of heteronormativity" (Maria, 2015, p. 16). ANQC's social justice and activist agenda emphasizes full integration of LGBTQIA+ communities into a world dominated by hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity. The narration of queer lives by African cinema can be used

pedagogically to teach students about queer individuals and why they should not be oppressed. Queer cinema breaks the barriers created by heteronormative cultures by centering on the lives of LGBTQIA+ culture and characters. In *Queer Images: A history of gay and lesbian film in America*, Benshoff and Griffin (2006) propose five characteristics of queer cinema. They articulate that "a movie might be considered queer if it deals with characters that are queer… Films might be considered queer when they are written, directed, or produced by queer people or perhaps when they star lesbian, gay, or otherwise queer actors… A queer film is a film that is viewed by lesbian, gay, or otherwise queer spectators… Queer films include any and all kinds of films that invite and encourage spectators to identify with characters who are considerably different from who spectators normally conceive themselves to be, and who they normally identify as. This can include films that encourage straight audiences to identify with gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender characters, but it can also include many other kinds of identifications with 'the other' as well, including identification across lines of race and class" (pp.10-12).

One must remain critical of Benshoff and Griffin's claim that a film could be considered queer simply by the fact that it was written, directed, or produced by individuals who identify as queer. To be clear, Benshoff and Griffin erroneously claim that individuals who identify as queer who are filmmakers could write, produce, and direct a film with heteronormative themes, with no elements that challenge that heteronormativity, and the film would still be considered to land in the genre of queer cinema. The issue with their assertion is that a primary feature of queer cinema is the presentation of non-heteronormative characters and themes. Since it is possible for queer allies who do not identify as queer to also produce films that call challenge hegemonic masculinity and

heteronormativity, then Benshoff and Griffin's classification of queer cinema fails to be exhaustive.

The students must understand that African queer films involve a struggle between straight and non-straight individuals. While some films some are critical of LGBTQIA+, some other films others are advocacies for the non-straight sexual orientations. In Mohamad Camara's *Dakan*, the characters of Destiny, Sori, and Manga fall in love. However, they are separated by their families. While Sori gets married and has a child, Manga's mother sends Manga to an herbalist to seek a gay "cure". He eventually enters into a relationship with Oumou, a white woman. Many years later, "when the men see each other again in a bar, they immediately recognize their mutual desire. Despite their love for their families and genuine relationships with women, Manga and Sori ultimately leave everything behind to be together" (Schoonover & Galt, 2015, p. 89). In *Dakan,* world of tolerance is created. Although Manga's mother sees counter-normative identities as abnormal, she does not consider heterosexuality as a do or die affair. She sees norms as societal constructs and as such, are liable to change. The name 'Dakan' means destiny, and as the title of the queer *Dakan* connotes, one could be born gay. Here, the filmmaker puts the African concept of predestination to play. Although in some traditional African societies (such as among the Yoruba people of Nigeria), there is the belief that destiny can be subjected to change, in most societies, the reverse is the case. This, therefore, becomes complex as *Dakan* defines monosexuality as a biological construction.

In Nwandu's *Ragtag,* a transnational Nigerian film, two non-heteronormative characters, Raymond and Tagbo are presented. They are separated from each other like Sori and Manga at the age of twelve. They reunite many years later, and their love for each other resurfaces as they continue their

intimate and sexual exploration of each other. They continue to stick to each other despite Tagbo father's disapproval of their gay relationship. *Ragtag* and *Dakan* share the feature of displacement and reunion of the gay characters. Despite being displaced by the society, Sori and Manga finally reunite at the end of the narrative. This affirms that no matter how discriminatory members of the LGBTQIA+ community are treated, the global movement for the inclusion and acceptance of LGBTQIA+ identities will pay off. The filmmaker reassures the queer community that liberation from oppression at the hands of the larger society is a task that must be done. Sori and Manga's unity and Rag (Raymond) and Tag's (Tagbo) attitude teaches the imperative of harmony and togetherness of all queer categories to achieving acceptance.

Rag Tag is the ideal use of the film narrative to educate viewers against discriminating and criminalizing LGBTQIA+ identities. The film "challenges the tendency of closeting queerity in African films, or of representing it as evil, and abnormal. To use Naficy's words in a gendered context, *Rag Tag* destabilize[s] the traditional binarism of space" (Lyonga, 2014, p. 101).

African societies adhere to religious precepts and commandments than the West. Islam and Christianity, two dominant religions in Africa are anti-LGBTQIA+. This lends credence to the destructive appraisal of LGBTQIA+ in Africa. Unlike *Dakan,* Ebere's *Men in Love* places same-sex orientation in the domain of social construction. In this film, equivalent sex alignment is frowned at. Although he aligned with Alex sexually, Charles later becomes critical of non-straight sexual orientation. Alex, his friend and gay partner is also looked at in disdain and hate by Whitney, Charles' wife on her realization that the latter engaged/engages in same-sex relationship with her husband, she frowns at it. The film even ends with a *Deus*

Ex Machina whereby, prayers deliver Charles from the servitude of same-sex inclination. Films such as this would appeal to an anti-LGBTQIA+ Nigerian audience. This film advocates the transcendental approach at "unqueering" queer characters. *Men in Love*, therefore does not portray the pedagogy of LGBTQIA+, a shift in power and knowledge of sexual reorientation like *Dakan* and *Rag Tag* do. *Men in Love* is an expression of the Nigerian filmmaker's ideology, unlike Nwandu (the director of *Tag Tag*), who has been influenced by Western ideals.

Most African filmmakers that have interrogated the LGBTQIA+ condition have made the non-LGBTQ sexual inclination dominate heteronormativity. In fact, most of them align with the LGBTQIA+ minority and use their films to speak against the social injustice met on them (LGBTQIA+). *Dakan* deviates from the mainstream Nigerian film narratives that depend on the *Deus Ex Machina* for conflict resolution. This film "fits into some of the universal narratives favored by the queer" (Schoonover & Galt, 2018, p. 123). With the failure of the herbalist to cure Manga of his same-sex intimacy with Sori, the filmmaker, Camara seems to posit that same-sex is not a spiritual possession and dysfunction as popularly believed in Africa. It has nothing to do with the fetish and the transcendental. The Anti-gay community made *Dakan* "controversial precisely for its *direct* representation of non-heterosexuality, perceived by many African critics as un-African, sinful, or an unwanted relic of European colonialism" (Epprecht, 2008, p. 132). The destructive critique of LGBTQIA+ cultures in Nollywood has led to these narratives as being secondary to the plot. *Men in Love* fully explicates that "traditionally, Nollywood films on non-heterosexuality center on heterosexual couples, with the non-straight persons assigned backseat roles as secondary characters, who attempt to ruin

heterosexual relationships but fail in the end. Like films such as *Emotional Crack* (Oduwa, 2009), *Last Wedding* (Iroegbu, 2004) and *End Time* (Nnebue, 1999), *Men in Love* tows this Nollywood mainstream representation of non-heterosexuality" (Lyonga, 2014, p. 101).

Conversely, the opening scene of *Dakan* displaces the heteronormative film culture and brings the gay from the closet to the public. This scene reveals a close shot of Sori and Manga kissing passionately inside a car. While the anti-LGBTQIA+ audience is held spellbound with disgust as the sight of two kissing young men, the pro-LGBTQIA+ spectator – especially the queer categories – sees this as a "meaningful resistance to the power of the straight majority as explicated by Foucault" (Pickett, 2015, p. 5). Politics of power play is replete of the subject matter of every queer film. In films of this repertoire, there is a power tussle between the hetero and non-hetero cultures. The outcome of this scrimmage is determined by the filmmaker or the society in which the film is produced. Educators and students must understand that in the Nigerian queer cinema has been critical of the non-hetero position. Films that valorize gay rights and advocacy for social justice are frowned upon in Nigeria. This stems from the country's cultural background where the two dominant religions-Christianity and Islam perceive same-sex relations as demonic. To compound this challenge, the Nigerian Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) a body responsible for regulating the content of what is churned out of the Nigerian screen has always influenced the content of every film narrative. The NFVCB are well known to suppress narratives that oppose perceived moral ethos and norms of the Nigerian society.

Most Nollywood films are economically driven. The Nigerian filmmaker who is conscious of the capital which he has spent in the filmmaking process examines what he is to

churn into the market to facilitate box office success in a morally conscious society. Conversely, transnational Nigerian films such as *Rag Tag* have gone beyond the frontiers of religion and African cultural beliefs to explore the question of sexual identity within the domain of the materialistic and the profane. Hence, this binarism is clear of *Men in Love* and *Rag Tag*. While the latter, a product of the Nigerian Diasporic filmmaker breaks the border of cultural beliefs, the former is subtle in its subject matter as it disapproves of same-sex desire.

Dakan, as a cinema of commitment, is a challenge to the hetero-culture "for it demands to speak and to educate in public in the traditions of African political cinema, and yet it also proposes a queer mode of publicity. The film refuses to place queer lives in opposition to postcolonial politics: it demands to be seen both as postcolonial and as gay" (Schoonover & Galt, 2015, p. 91). The queer film audience is sensitized on the creation of identities with the medium of film. While this form of pedagogy is contextualized in a particular scheme, it is also imperative to note that simply viewing a film is not enough. Observing a Film can be sometimes passive for some audiences. Hence, dialogue among the teacher and students in the African classroom setting must take place for there to be any hope that the message of acceptance and inclusion to sink into their perspectives is achieved. This is "an intentional attempt to influence how identities are created within certain social relations that do not support marginalized groups. When educators are aware of positionality, power and their own backgrounds as well as their students' backgrounds, meaningful learning can take place" (Lagomarsino, 2015, p. 9). The audience is the student who understands what it means and takes to be identified with a particular identity and the need to depoliticize the *hetero* and *homo* binary. At this point, the *homo* is not a distortion of sexual identity. Rather, it is a

regeneration of past identities. *Dakan* aligns with this full acceptance model of LGBTQIA+ identities which supposes that "same-sex culture and heterosexuality are two aspects of sexuality, neither being the counterfeit nor the other, both being right or wrong depending on the context of their expression (Pierson, 1990, p. 257). Advocates of the model believe that those who identify with LGBQTIA perspectives are born with the trait in them just like albinos, blacks and heterosexuals are created the way they are. As such, members of the LGBTQIA+ community should neither be forced to renounce their identity, nor be marginalized by the heteronormative majority. Addressing "the question of subjugation and silencing of the oppressed and marginalized" (Binebai, 2015, p. 206) sexual minorities in homophobic Africa is therefore the thrust of *Rag Tag* and *Dakan*. *Dakan* and *Rag Tag* are produced for the purpose of "breaking discriminatory labels which have led to ill treatment and oppression of the LGBT community" (Maria, 2015, p. 18). This "cinematic visions of queerness, whether through queer characters and narratives or through representations of queer desire, have the capacity to make the global legible" (Schoonover & Galt, 2015, p. 89).

This recent proliferation of LGBTQIA+ films in Africa reveals that filmmakers have begun to utilize the medium of the queer film narrative for pedagogical activism. While the filmmakers have succeeded in this, Educators must also play their role. The awareness on the persuasive power of film is not new. Shehu (1992) posits that "film has the power to change the orientation of its viewers and influence their thought pattern" (p.78). To this end, in the classroom, the Educator could integrate the cinema in his/her teaching process by exhibiting films that are critical of domination of a sexual orientation by another. After exhibiting these films in the classroom, the tutor would ask the students to narrate their experiences and how

they intersect or differs to the situation in the films. With this, students would come out of their shell to express themselves on their perceived fears and strengths on issues that bother on sexuality. With this, the Educator could be termed a social worker who uses the medium of film to guide the student on identity construction and protection. This is a way of protecting the student from perceived molestation and sometimes, depression. The Educator at this time, has been able to utilize the cine medium to impact positively into the life of the student.

Other African films that explore the LGBTQIA+ motif include Shamim Sarif's *The World Unseen* (2007), *Catherine Stewart's While You Weren't Looking* (2015) and John Tengrove's *The Wound* (2017). Arif's *The World Unseen* (2007), makes the student understand that same-sex disposition is apt in a homophobic continent such as Africa. In this narrative, Mariam and Amina's love and affection for one another grows and they get entangled even in the core of oppression. Stewart's *While You Weren't Looking* (2015) is a South African film with a multicultural setting which does a comparative survey of the experiences of lesbians in urban and rural settings.

Schoonover and Galt (2015, p. 92) reveal that "queer cinema could easily be considered activist films, insisting through their fictional worlds that the spectator reconfigure their assumptions about their worlds outside the cinema." Renowned African queer films such as *Dakan* and *Rag Tag* are mostly box office hits among gay communities. Paradigmatically, *Rag Tag*, the first Nigerian film about LGBTQIA+ experiences, was premiered at the 2006 San Francisco International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) Film Festival.

LGBTQIA+ praxis gave rise to queer theory which aligns with Foucauldian aesthetics. Foucault's approach to power

discourse and knowledge reveals that "a discourse is an institutionalized way of speaking or writing about reality that defines what can be intelligibly thought and said about the world and what cannot. For example, a new discourse of *sexuality* had fundamentally changed the way we think about desire, pleasure, and our innermost selves" (Foucault, 2016, p. 1). He goes further to submit that "discourses about sexuality did not discover some pre-existing, core truth about human identity, but rather created it through particular practices of power/knowledge" (Foucault, 2016, p. 1). Creative works within the queer genre break this power/knowledge held by the heterosexual community. *Dakan* and *Rag Tag* epitomize Foucault's aesthetics of power. Knowledge shifts from the majority (hetero) to the minority (LGBTQIA+ community). *Dakan* and other queer films dislodge the power of heteronormativity. There is a transformation from ignorance to awareness. Sori, Rat, Tag and Manga's sexual engagements are placed before the audience without the filmmaker concealing them. Their gasp for breath when they caress with their eyes closed and mouths open, and the sound they emit in the course of caressing and kissing, makes one realize the pleasure the duo of Manga and Sori derive from it. The bond they have in the film and how the filmmaker portrays these characters is similar to James Cameron's portrayal of Jack and Rose in the classic, *Titanic* (1998). This pedagogical exercise is a struggle against heteronormative, homophobia, and oppressive tendencies. Educators could use films such as *Rag Tag* and *Dakan* that push against oppression of LGBTQIA+ to make students understand that they can stand firm in the light of oppression. Students actually comprehend what they see easily than what they are being told. Hence, since the medium of film a visual one, it would be easier to convince students that they do not need to be intimidated by draconian laws that forbid their sexual

orientation. In the same vein, Educators must be selective in the type of films they exhibit in classrooms on sexual education. Films that balance the sexual divide-LGBTQIA+ and straight sexual orientation are what the students must see so that they will not in turn become oppressors of straight sexual culture. With this, the Educator would realize that queer films "would bring the self out of the closet, annexing whole new genres, revise histories in their own image, and seemingly most impressive of all, rapidly become the in thing such that you don't even have to be queer to get the picture" (Rich, 1992, p. 49).

Conclusion

Queer cinemas in Africa are a pedagogical alliance that is geared towards speaking for the LGBTQIA+ minority that has been marginalized by the non-gay community. This creative enterprise creates space(s) for the exploration of sexual identities and the deconstructing of the notion of LGBTQIA+ as unAfrican. Politics, religion, and justice have been the major drivers of the LGBTQIA+ debate which graduated into the criminalization of LGBTQIA+ identities in countries such as Nigeria, Cameroon, Uganda, Zimbabwe among others. The decriminalization agenda of African queer films led to the production of *Dakan* and *Rag Tag*. These films are a paradigm shift from the anti-queer film in which same-sex marriage had always been demonized and portrayed in a bad light. *Men in Love*, though also explore the LGBTQIA+ genre contrasts the ideology portrayed in *Dakan* and *Rag Tag.* It advocates for a LGBTQIA+ free world where heterosexuality must thrive, while other sexual identities must be oppressed. Queer films affirm that inclusivity of the LGBTQIA+ community can be a primary duty of cinema. African queer cinema resists

heteronormativity and other sexually oppressive categories and this enterprise is geared towards creating praxis for the LGBTQIA+ community across the African continent.

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