

## Homosexuality, Molestation and Murder in Kunle Afolayan's *October 1*

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### Abstract

This paper looks at the issues of homosexuality, molestation and murder in the film *October 1* produced and directed by Kunle Afolayan in 2014. It will argue that, though, homosexuality does not have an overbearing presence as a theme in the film, it is significant to the whole narrative. Also, it will attempt to provide answers to the following questions and more.

1. How are homosexuality, molestation and murder constructed in the film?
2. Who are the practitioners of homosexuality, molestation and murder in the film?
3. What is the significance of homosexuality, molestation and murder narrative in the film?
4. What is the relationship between homosexuality, molestation and murder in the film?

In this paper we adopt queer narrative and socio-political realism as theoretical frameworks in the analysis of *October 1*. We argue that though, homosexuality is regarded by the Nigerian government as a criminal act and

those involved risk a jail term of at least 14 years, the practice is no longer a closeted affair but one that has assumed a vantage position in Nigerian popular narrative. The twenty-first century has seen more resourcefulness and engagements in the clamour for rights of marriage and social acceptance by the group known as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) in United State of America (USA) and Europe. These volatile domestic and political engagement in the West, find representation in Nigeria and other parts of Africa by bringing to the fore right groups who are canvassing for legislation supporting LGBT rights in the continent.

### Introduction

There has been a major shift in the narrative style of Nigerian video film since year 2000. This shift become noticeable, especially with the emergence of new breeds of young filmmakers who studied the art in various film schools across the United State of America (USA) and Europe. These new filmmakers are determined to make a change in the quality of works meant for audience consumption, especially from year 2010. Their concern is not to produce for African audience alone but for non-African audience as well. It should be noted however that some better made feature films like Kunle Afolayan's *Irapada* (2006), *The Figurine: Araromire* (2009), Izu Ojukwu's *Across the Niger* (2004), and Jeta Amata's *The Amazing Grace* (2006) which became the first Nigerian film to be screened at the prestigious Cannes film festival, were produced earlier. Earlier in 2004, Jeta Amata screened his short film *Alexa Affair* at the Berlin Film Festival. Stories in Nigerian films have moved from the early stage when the supernatural, spirits and unrealistic phenomena were major components employed

in driving forward the plotlines and resolving the conflict.

Filmmakers like Tunde Kelani, Tade Ogidan, Teco Benson, Kunle Afolayan, Izu Ojukwu, Bayo Alawiye, Niji Akani, Tony Abulu, Jeta Amata, and Biyi Bandele have not only distinguished themselves by making films with good narratives, but also with good technical qualities. There are many other Nigerian filmmakers who have distinguished themselves by making good films, and who “do not care about quantity but quality” (Ihunwo, 2015: 8). Though this is yet to change the viewpoint of some critics who argue that Nigerian film rise on the pedestal of “its chaotic emergence and lack of coherence, both as a commercial industry and in its aesthetic and social objectives” (Geiger 2013: 62). However the criticism, Nigerian,

... video films are in their very nature both postcolonial and commercial, having not only created a market niche for themselves, but having displaced domination by Hollywood, Bollywood, and Hong Kong films in Nigerian film markets and amongst the Nigerian diaspora (Geiger, 2013:68).

Motion picture otherwise referred to as film belongs to the classification of popular art which renders itself to interpretation using different theories. The Nigerian filmmaker like his contemporaries in the Europe or US is not limited in his want of narrative technique in expressing and commenting on prevailing socio-cultural and socio-political demand of his/her environment. The Nigerian filmmakers, attempt in localizing global debate, looks within their immediate society and animate salient issues that warrant national debate.

Based on many of the events in *October 1*, one can argue that the film characters are better analyzed using psychoanalytical theory,

however, we are focusing on the same-sex scenes and the negotiators of the act in the work. Having in mind gay rights, its perception and acceptance issues that have become a major discussion in popular culture -literature, television and cinema in particular - it is expedient we adopt both socio-political realism and Queer theories as has been stated earlier.

### Theoretical Framework

Queer theory develops from the social construction of categories of normative and deviant sexual behavior that are linked to gay and lesbian studies. The theory expands the focus relating to the question of homosexuality. According to Klages (2012:1) “Queer theory looks at, and studies, and has a political critique of, anything that falls into normative and deviant categories, particularly sexual activities and identities.”

There are diverse positions on homosexuality. Mabokela (2015:1) reports on the two dominant views on homosexuality:

Society has two views of homosexuality. The traditional view holds that homosexuality is abnormal that the orientation is a disorder, and the behaviour is pathological. The opposing view is that homosexuality is a normal variant in the human condition which is determined before birth, and that homosexual behaviour is natural for those oriented. Gays and lesbians are minority group and as a result, the way homosexual community is portrayed is affected.

Whereas one can argue for or against these two views above, there is also a third position- that of the neutralists. The neutralists are not in the habit of rocking the boat, they do not concern themselves with the sexual

orientation and preference of an adult male or female. However, in most societies of sub-Saharan Africa, the perception and treatment of homosexuality is from the traditional viewpoint. Makobela (2015) writes further that:

Human sexuality is complex and there is no explanation that accounts for all human behaviours and attractions. It is not black and white. Some influences begin before a child is old enough to walk and talk. That may explain why certain people believe that they were born with their sexuality, since they cannot remember a time during which they were any different (7).

In many countries of sub-Saharan Africa, the above quotation does not explain anything that interests the society, same sex relationship is a negative choice and so, those who practice it, must be removed from the community for indulging in unnatural sexual desire, expression and negotiation. According to Lyonga (2014:783):

In more than two-thirds of African countries, homosexuality is a grave cultural taboo which is subject to a penalty that may range from fines, to public flogging, to imprisonment or death, depending on the specific country. This criminalization of homosexuality and the intense societal homophobia associated with it has forced most gays and lesbians in Africa to live in the closet.

Legislation in many sub-Saharan African countries including Nigeria prescribes long jail term for anyone caught in the act of homosexuality. In Uganda, the Parliament modified a Bill in 2013, which was proposed to carry death sentence for homosexuals in 2009, to

life imprisonment for what it considered as “aggravated homosexuality” (Bond, 2016: 111-112). In Nigeria, the National Assembly passed Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act (SSMPA) in May 2013, and in January 7, it was signed into law by President Goodluck Jonathan. The Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act stipulates 14 years jail term for couples in same-sex marriage, and practitioners of homosexual relationships risk imprisonment of at least 10 years. According to Human Right Watch (HRW) report, criminalization of Act,

...build on existing legislation in Nigeria, but go much further: while the colonial-era criminal and penal codes outlawed sexual acts between members of the same sex, the SSMPA effectively criminalizes lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons based on sexual orientation and gender identity (2016:1).

The fact that Christianity and Islam -the two dominant religions on the continent frown at what they consider “un-natural” sexual desire and negotiation (natural sexual negotiation in this case, refers to sexual act between man and woman), and those who nurture the thought are demon possessed, does not help matters. However, this does not mean that homosexuality is not visible in Africa, and particularly in Nigeria. The truth is that homosexuality has moved from the periphery position of pre-independent Nigeria to the center of discussion in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. This is thanks to media portrayal of gays and lesbians as part of the dominant discussion within the subject of globalization. For example, as attention shifts from traditional perception and acceptance of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) group in United State of America and Europe to granting of rights to marriage and adoption of

children, African countries are pressured to extend the same right to the group too.

Based on the perception of heterosexual community and the moralist institutions that define sexuality from the traditionalists' lens, homosexuality and rape are deviant acts of sexual engagement. According to World Book Encyclopedia (2001), homosexuality is defined as "a sexual attraction chiefly to individuals of same sex." Homosexuality is expressed in this paper as an expression, negotiation and intercourse between characters of the same gender as contained in Kunle Afolayan's narrative film *October 1*.

Julius-Adeoye (2013: 4) looks at socio-political realism as the representation of current social and political issues of a given society in the work of arts. Socio-political realism is an attempt to look at two distinct areas of human relations together as a composite whole in defining their effect on the society as represented work of art. The politics and dynamics of every society is orchestrated by some particular set of people who either by popular or group selection attained the position of leading others. These people determine the structure, arrangement and the use of the human, cultural and material resources available within the society for its continuous existence. In modern society, the people put together a set of societal guiding codes as constitution or decrees that everyone must follow.

The manipulation of power in the hands of the leading group of the society to advance the living condition or otherwise of the citizens coupled with the interaction of the people in the society, determines the socio-political situation of that society. Based on this, it will be appropriate to state that human activities function around social and political contexts. The structure, form and shape of these contexts, are determined by specific societies whether real or imagined.

In reality, social and political contexts are not static. This is because time, historical condition, human activities and interaction will lead to change in the order of things. However, the imaginary society of narrative film or art in general does not follow the same logic of reality. Rather, it represents a slice of the society's social and political reality as determined by the filmmaker or the creator of the work. As Seino (2010:2), argues that realism has always been the concern of cinema since the invention of the medium.

In this work, we focus on the use of homosexuality, molestation and murder as the kernel of the narration of *October 1* - a film from a "moralistic" society. It is not the concern of this paper to moralize on peoples' sexual orientation; therefore, we do not hold a position affirming or condemning same-sex relationship. The Nigerian society criminalizes homosexual practices as anti-social and immoral sexual desire and expression. Of course, sexual molestation and murder are abhorred in all the culture and religion that exist in the country.

It is important to state that the act of homogeneity of culture that powerful Western society is encouraging the rest of the world to follow, is harmful and will rubbish the belief in diversity and plurality. According to the Article 2 of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Declaration on Cultural Diversity:

In our increasingly diverse societies, it is essential to ensure harmonious interaction among people and groups with plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities as well as their willingness to live together. Policies for the inclusion and participation of all citizens are guarantees of social cohesion, the vitality of civil society and peace. Thus defined, cultural pluralism gives policy expression to the reality of cultural

diversity. Indissociable from a democratic framework, cultural pluralism is conducive to cultural exchange and to the flourishing of creative capacities that sustain public life (2002: n.p).

Therefore, “each society must go through its own intelligent processes to figure out what is best for their interest. Europe has always been free to find its own path, and so to(o) must Africa” ([www.africanholocaust.net](http://www.africanholocaust.net)).

One can now ask, is homosexuality alien to Africa? The answer might be ambivalent in the sense that, it was not a recorded event in known oral literature or narrative from the continent. In spite of this, findings by colonial anthropologists have unearthed many supposed male-male and female-female relationships. However, there are known male prostitute in some part of Africa, like Northern Nigeria. There are cross-dressers in almost every part of Nigeria from the ancient time to date. A good example is Sango, the Yoruba legendary king, whose narrative includes the plaiting or braiding of his hair in a female fashion and wearing of a form of skirt and *buba*. Among the Igbo of Nigeria, is the known culture of woman, marrying woman. Although, these does not validate any argument of the existence of homosexuality in pre-colonial Nigeria, but it opens room for knowledge of what can be referred to as queer lifestyle.

Afolayan’s *October 1*, is a bold attempt at removing cover on such a salient and topical issue that some Africans consider as Euro-American ways of further debasing and undermining Africa’s sovereignty by again raising the “uncivilized” card in order for the government of the continent to acknowledge and legislate homosexuality as right of individual sexual expression. Under queer theory, the scope of its analysis involves “all kinds of behaviors,

including those which are gender-bending as well as those which involves "queer" non-normative forms of sexuality” (Klages, 2012:1).

### Narrative of Kunle Afolayan’s *October 1*

Narrative deals with story, how it is told, and what the story contains. Bennett and Royle (2004: 53), writes that, “The simplest way to define narrative is as a series of events in a specific order – with a beginning, a middle and an end.” What this means is that narrative follows a sequence of cause, action and effect. Although, like in the case of *October 1*, the order of events in the narrative does not have to follow a linear sequence in exposition, yet whether through the technique of flashback or linear exposition, we must be able to decipher what actually triggers up the action that we are following. This explains Bennett and Royle (2004) summation that “Narrative, however, is characterized by its foregrounding of series of events or actions which are connected in time” (53). For example, the stories in *October 1*, is supposed to be of Nigeria’s independence from Great Britain, yet, the series of events leading to the d-day are loosely linked to the celebration. October 1, 1960- the date of Nigeria’s independence is not really the focus of the film, whereas, the title suggests it to be the overriding idea of the plot. Afolayan uses the narrative technique of flashback to reveal the events in *October 1*. On the independence day, Inspector Danladi Waziri narrates the happenings in the little town of Akote where he was posted by the British Police Commissioner in-Charge of the Western Region of Nigeria to resolve the mystery surrounding the rapes and deaths of some young female virgins.

The film narrative begins on September 1, 1960 with a shot of moon laced with dark cloud. The shot moves to a girl being pursued by a young man wearing white shirt and trouser. The girl is running for her life in the wood. The

pursuer meets the girl and rapes and strangles her, and slices the cross sign across her body with a jackknife. Immediately after the rape and murder scene, we see the shot of independent party scene in the premises of the British Police Commissioner in-Charge of Nigeria Western Region. Detective Inspector of Police Danladi Waziri arrives to submit his report of what happened in Akote to the Commissioner before departing for his new duty post of Benin. The young Police Commissioner invites Danladi inside to meet with two other British police officers to verbally narrates the report contain in his file of Akote. Danladi looks intently without admiration at the giant photograph of Queen Elizabeth II on the wall before beginning his narration as the Queen's photo gradually reveals images of characters in Akote.

The story is based on the rape and murder of young female virgins in a little and remote Yoruba town of Akote in South West region of Nigeria. In order to solve the case before Nigeria's independence on October 1, 1960, the British Commissioner of Police in charge of the territory transfers Danladi Waziri (Sadiq Daba), a Police Inspector from Northern Nigeria to the town. The arrival of Waziri coincides with the arrival of Prince of the town who had just graduated from the University College Ibadan. Under the watch of Danladi Waziri and his assistants more rape and murder of virgins still occur. In the course of his investigation, he discovers that Agbekoya (Kunle Afolayan)- the supposed illiterate farmer who will not send his children to school because of his disdain for western education is actually a very brilliant person who can speak impeccable English language. Agbekoya reveals to Waziri is reason for abandoning Western education being the sexual molestation himself and Prince Aderopo suffered as young boys in the hand of the revered Father Dowling (Colin David Reese) - British Clergy, that once served as the

community vicar, and one who facilitated their admission into King's College in Lagos. While Koya (Short for Agbekoya) abandoned his education after a while, as he could not tolerate the rape and molestation that Father Dowling - who is now the school Principal - is subjecting him to every night. On the other hand, Prince Aderopo continued his education, graduated from the college and subsequently went on to University of Ibadan, for a degree, thereby becoming the first graduate from Akote.

The encounter between Inspector Danladi Waziri and Koya leads to the psychological healing of the latter, while Prince Aderopo refuses to extricate himself of the pain and humiliation suffered.

The narrative of *October 1*, places both the female body and the male body as objects of sexual desire. It is different from that which Mulvey (1989) observes in traditional Western cinema:

The narrative structure of traditional cinema establishes the male character as active and powerful: he is the agent around whom the dramatic action unfolds and the look gets organized. The female character is passive and powerless: she is the object of desire for the male character(s). In this respect, cinema has perfected visual machinery suitable for male desire such as already structured and canonized in the tradition of Western art and aesthetics.

In *October 1*, the bodies are passive because they are victims of rape. Violation carried out by a superior force. Whereas, the "Revered Priest" violates the young Prince Aderopo and Koya- the village well-known

cocoa farmer; the Prince elects to extricate himself of the pain suffered by violating the town's female virgins and killing them.

### **Construction of Homosexuality, Molestation and Murder in *October 1***

The construction of homosexuality, molestation and murder in Afolayan's *October 1* can be seen from two narrative perspectives- Overt and Sublime. The overt narrative is visible and easy to comprehend. For example, the action of Father Dowling leads to Prince Aderopo's raping the girls and murdering them afterwards. It also leads to Agbekoya hatred for Western education, English language, and the society that entrusted him to the care of the Reverend Father – a stranger. Dowling's molestation and violation of Aderopo and Agbekoya - two village boys that were placed under his guardianship altered their vision of life. As a Clergy, Dowling, supposed to be the representation of morality. Instead, he took advantage of his position by molesting the innocent children under his care. By his action, he introduced them not only to the practice of homosexuality, but also the violence. As a way to avenge himself, Prince Aderopo feels that he has to punish his father (the King) and the whole town who abandoned him to the care of a molester and a violent man. To carry out his plan, he resorted to rape and murder of the town's female virgin. In this case, female virgin, represents the spirit of innocence and height of morality. The film portrays two young men that are suffering from psychological breakdown and how both related with the situation. While Aderopo resulted to act of rape and murder, Agbekoya becomes hateful and withdrawn to himself. This is the overt narrative.

The sublime perspective of the film, is the symbolic representation of Africa and European form of colonialism. It is both a political statement and postcolonial narrative.

The sublime, presents the narrative of the rape of the virgin land of Africa (represented in Prince and the farmer) by Europe (Christian Priest) with its pretentious religiosity, and the continuous rape of mother Africa (the female virgins) by the new African elites (Prince Aderopo). The new African elites are schooled in the ways of the colonialists. Therefore, they continue the rape and molestation of the land as they have learnt from their masters. The former rape victims now introduced neo-colonialism – raping and murdering along the way.

Neo-colonial Africa is peopled by political elites who not only rape the innocents, the weak, and the killing of those who pose as future challenge, especially when they become aware of what they possess. The victims of Prince Aderopo's atrocities are potential challengers to his supremacy because they are beautiful, virgins and have a level of education. By killing his victims, the Prince believes that he has silenced his possible oppositions- one who can reveal his pervert and monstrous identity.

The point of view of *October 1* is as political, as it is African. Afolayan did not mask his position in the film, rather, he reveals his viewpoint from Inspector Waziri's statements in the closing shot of the film as he challenges the Commissioner for the first time:

**Inspector Danladi Waziri:** Is this about protecting Nigeria? Or the fact that one of your own, a man of clergy was busy molesting boys?

**Commissioner:** How dare you?

**Inspector Danladi Waziri:** How dare you, sir? Is the case in Enugu not bad enough? Or do you intend to cover all the crimes of your white man in Nigeria?

Starting from the moment Danladi Waziri measures up to the Commissioner on the level of morality, with the statement “But that his not right”, and the latter defends himself with “It is not about right and wrong, it is about reality”, there emerges a change in status of the two characters. While the British Commissioner diminishes in status and how he views Inspector Danladi Waziri, he on the other hand rises, becomes more assertive and assumes a superior stance. He went ahead to demand for apology from the Commissioner for calling him a boy, receives the apology with the head of the former superior bowing to the subordinate, a native once looked down on.

### Conclusion

This paper interrogates the construction of homosexuality in *October 1* by looking at how the director (Kunle Afolayan) meaningfully points out the complicity of the Western world in the decay that Africa is confronting. We critically examine the position of homosexuality within the sub-Saharan African society bearing in mind the various legislation passed by the different government to discourage the practice in the continent. We argue that homosexuality is the kernel of the narrative of *October 1*. The significant plus in the film as a political commentary is the focus on the three dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria (Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba) and how they mingle with one another.

It is important to state that in the course of critical analysis of any work of art, two subjective minds are at play: the subjective mind of the creator of the work of art in question, and the subjective mind of the analyst. No matter our focus on objectivity- it is necessary to note that our analysis is our subjective thought of the work using a laydown hypothesis or theory. How an artist or creator of a work of art decides to create is dependent on his perspective and not based on our own criteria or procedure,

therefore, no critical work on the work can claim to be 100% objective. Our objectivity as critics is simply based on the subjectivity of the theorists who’s guidelines we have employed in carrying out the analysis.

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