Women Oppressors and Male Queer Victims: An Analysis of Selected Fictional Narratives on Homosexuality

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Abstract
Internalised and institutionalised homophobia continues to militate against tolerance of people of non-heteronormative sexual identity in Africa. These are reinforced with religious, political and cultural scripts, used to validate the oppressive actions against people who practice same-sex sexual relations. The implication is that within the hierarchisation of sexual identities, there is inherent power imbalance which suffuses the representations within and visibilities of such narratives. This study repositions the debate on women's oppression in gender scholarship by examining how female characters in fictional narratives on male homosexuality victimise homosexual characters from a position of power in the society. This is realised through a close reading of Diriye Osman's "Shoga" in *Fairytales for Lost Children* and Tenda Huchu's *The Hairdresser of Harare.* The authors' powerful female characters and how their roles have implications on the lives of the homosexual male characters in the narratives are discussed. Queer theory's perspective to deconstruction serves as the study's theoretical framework. The study identifies the facets of positions from which these women navigate their authorities. The study reveals that women use their powers to oppress the homosexual male characters in the belief of upholding heteronormative practices, extant gender and sexual roles. The study concludes that the writers invest power in their female characters in a way that oppresses queer agency.

Keywords: Homosexuality, Heteronormativity, Sexual Oppression, Male Victimhood, Deconstruction.

Introduction
This article examines the representation of gender and sexuality and the perception of strong and independent women to the homosexual characters in Diriye Osman's "Shoga" in *Fairytales for Lost Children* and Tenda Huchu's *The Hairdresser of Harare.* It discusses how homophobia and heteronormativity continue to militate against homosexuals in African societies. The study generally aims to interrogate ways women characters have been fictionalised as having moved from the position of the subjugated and oppressed to become active agents in the oppression of homosexual men. In the African societies recreated in the two narratives, there is an 'emphasis on establishing, reinforcing and maintaining a binary organisation and conflation of gender and sexual orientation' (Rothmann, 53) and the 'manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body' (Foucault, 93) are narrated by the authors.

The treatment of homosexuality in African fiction have progressed from Daniel Vignal (1983) and Chris Dunton (1989)'s submissions on monolithic portrayal of homosexuality, silences and predictability in novels that discuss homosexuality to Desai's postulations that fictional narratives on homosexuality now treat the

problems of sexual normativity and transgression and Marc Epprecht's submission that African writers are now more open in their engagement of sexuality. According to Gibson Ncube, "monolithic conceptions of sexual identity and potentially incites readers to perceive differently a subject that has hitherto remained taboo in many parts of Africa" (Ncube,66). As a result, the shift in the treatment of the theme of homosexuality in African fiction illuminates the homophobia within various African societies and affords readers the opportunity to see how various factors like religion, African governments, heteronormativity, and patriarchy, among other issues, repress homosexuals.

Homosexuality is punishable in Zimbabwe and Harare and the homophobia that stems from religious abhorrence and moral policing will be studied in the reaction of heterosexual characters, especially the women characters in Osman's and Huchu's works to see how "identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalising categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression"(Butler, 308) and discuss how the "contestation (between domination and subordination) takes the form of the struggle for meaning, in which the dominant classes attempt to 'naturalise' the meanings that serve their interests into the common sense of society as a whole. (Fiske, 285).

Fictional works have been deployed as means of advocating gender and sexual fluidity, highlighting the human rights aspects of being oppressed on the basis of one's gender and sexual presentation. Several studies have investigated the gender and sexual oppression of queer people in African fictional narratives (Desai 2007; Hayes 2009; Onanuga 2022) and discussed the patterns of the victimhood of queer presenting people. Homophobia in contemporary Africa has been studied by different scholars and critics like Marc Epprecht have made comments on homophobia as a tool by leaders in Africa to distract the masses from the failures of the government. Other scholars (Rita Schafer and Eva Range, 2014) support this view when they aver that homophobia is a political tool. Epprecht however submits that there has been a noticeable shift in the resistance built against homophobia by gender and sexual minorities in some African societies, giving hope that queer agency is a possibility. Nevertheless, victimization against non-normative performances is still a problem militating against queer people and women who also belong to the group of minoritised and subjugated people, looking out for spaces of agency, have been identified as perpetrators of oppression towards other marginalized groups like other women (Nnaemeka, 1995); and queer presenting people (Onanuga, 2022). Women have made a drastic shift from being in the background to taking charge of their lives and home. They have been depicted in African fiction as strong and resilient, actors in socio-political issues (Chabwera, 2007; Omar, 2010) and challenging restricting spaces. Extending these studies, on homophobia and the portrayal of women's agency in African fiction, this paper identifies the characterisation of strong and powerful women as restrictive of queer performances in the selected texts.

Queer Theory

Queer theorists are of the opinion that sexual identity is not fixed but in a continuum. They deconstruct the notion that heterosexuality is the only form of sexuality that could be realised in the midst of many possibilities. The queer could be lesbian, gay,

transgender, bisexual and more. Michel Foucault's work on homosexuality and friendship 'promotes' homosexual culture and challenges the normalisation of heterosexual relationships. He sees sexuality as a site for contesting and exercising power, as a result, he calls for a subversion of norms and he agitates for a space of identity, agency and a change in how the society views same-sex relationships. Homosexuality has always been viewed in different societies as a deviation from the norm and it is so disconnected from these societies' cultures. However, for Foucault, "[h]omosexual culture is a space of greater freedom – where "freedom" means freedom from normalising effects of power and, consequently, the ability to create oneself" (14). Foucault asserts that homosexuality gives men the freedom to challenge tradition and be what the restricting society would otherwise not want them to be. This is a disruption of the norm and "Foucault welcomes the disruption of the social order because it is only through such disruption that we can rejuvenate the impoverished relational fabric of our society" (15).

It is important to note that Foucault does not want the homosexual culture to become totalising and normative, therefore becoming a replica of exactly what it set out to fight against. He rather advocates a relationship that will be far away "from the intricate and totalising systems of power relations that would otherwise normalise our relationships. In these marginal spaces, new systems of power relations and subjectivities can be constructed in a collaborative way, and these relations and subjectivities can remain negotiable and flexible" (15). He also advocates that homosexuals should stay true to their identities. Coming out, for Foucault, is seen as confessed truths, an initiation into pleasure which brings about a resistance to traditions and norms.

Foucault's work influenced other queer theorists like Butler and Sedgwick Kofosky. Judith Butler is a queer and gender theorist, who is known for the claim that gender is a social construction which relies on performativity. Butler challenges heteronormativity and differentiates between sex and gender. While sex is biological, gender is a cultural phenomenon. Gender, for Butler, should be performed and is "not a radical choice… imposed or inscribed upon the individual" (531). According to Sara Salih, "[a]gency is an important concept for Butler since it signifies the opportunities for subverting the law against itself to radical, political ends" (55).

Sedgwick is also against the norminalising discourses on gender and sexuality. She sees the binary opposition between heterosexuality and homosexuality as social constructs and limiting of other possibilities. She posits that "sexuality extends along so many dimensions that aren't well described in terms of the gender of object-choice at all" (35). For her, there are "multiple, unstable ways in which people may be like or different from each other" (23). Sedgwick is also against categorisation whether minoritising or universalising. She discusses the concept of "Homosexual panic", a type of violence that comes from the "hatred of homosexuals" (19) and this is so because homosexuals are viewed as a minority. She goes further to claim that homosexuality has been tied to "mappings of secrecy and disclosure, and of the private and the public, (and these) were and are critically problematic for the gender, sexual and economic structures of the heterosexist culture at large…" (70).

On the concept of the closet, Sedgwick states that the "space for simply existing as a gay person… is in fact bayoneted through, from both sides, by the vectors of a disclosure at once compulsory and forbidden" (70). She labels this as 'compulsory'

because the notion of coming out is essential to staying true to oneself but 'forbidden' because s/he has a lot to lose by going public. The closet is now a performance in silence and it is a problem associated with the practice of coming out. Sedgwick posits that homosexuality should be mainly a speech art as language is very important in understanding homosexuality in modern culture. Coming out is both a political and social act and Sedgwick regards speaking out as having an identity.

For Tamale, theoretical frameworks like Foucault's conceptualisation of sexuality in terms of power relations or Judith Butler's theory of heteronormativity and gender performativity "can be extremely useful in analyzing sexualities in Africa" (40) especially if the continent's "specificities" are put into consideration with "a view to improve on them" (40). Most African nation states' "specificities" on queer performances have been that of homophobia, violence and intolerance of gender and sexual differences. Queer theory will help the analysis of this study in its examination of how heteronormativity blindfolds the female characters in the selected fictional narratives to the fluidity of gender and sexual identities. The homophobic tendencies and actions of these women characters will be discussed as deeply seated in a scripted culture that dictates gender roles and sexual modalities.

Feminine Rage in *The Hairdresser of Harare*

Vimbai narrates the happenings in the novel and it is through her first person narrative voice Huchu shows how the women in the novel reject the same sex relationships of the men in their lives. Vimbai's power resides in her authority as the best hairdresser in Harare. She is "reputed to be the best hairdresser in Harare, which meant the best in the whole country" (Huchu, 1) and because of her expertise in making hair and satisfying her boss's customers, she is paid the highest wage. The realisation of her worth makes her go to work late, keeping customers and her co-workers waiting for her arrival. She says "[t]he salon was my personal fiefdom and I was a queen bee" (Huchu, 3). As a queen bee, she is the center of all the happenings in Mrs Khumalo's salon; she controls the affairs though she goes late to work, everybody defers to her superiority. Vimbai remarks that: "[e]verybody knew I was the goose that laid the golden eggs. If I left, half the customers would follow me. In any case, letting them wait made them realise how lucky they were to be served at all, so I was actually doing the business a favour" (Huchu, 3). Her powerful posturing is further substantiated in her assurance that her position is unchallenged when she boasts that "Mrs Khumalo understands this and that is why she would never fire me. The other girls don't understand it and that's why Patricia was fired" (Huchu, 3). Vimbai is the "she, who must be obeyed" and her play of power in the salon overshadows the only man available, Charlie Boy, the barber, who has little or no client but who Mrs Khumalo still keeps.

Vimbai's power as a career woman and as a professional is further affirmed by the fact that she owns her own house. This property gives her a material wealth that places her above her family members and most men in a society where financial constraints will make it almost impossible to own a house. Fungai, one of her brothers exclaims: "You look like a little madam sitting there having everything done for you" (Huchu, 66) in recognition of how highly placed his sister is. Vimbai's status becomes even more elevated when she is gifted her own hairdressing salon by the Ncubes' who want to make Dumisani's girlfriend as comfortable as she can be.

Vimbai's salon is situated in one of the most expensive parts of the country. Her first clients on opening the salon were VIPs like the president's wife who announced for all to hear that Vimbai is now her personal hairdresser. Her salon garnered the reputation of only serving "the cream of the elite" (Huchu, 185) and gets featured as an "over-priced and elitist" (Huchu, 185) salon in newspapers. This places Vimbai, at the age of twenty six, above other people practicing her profession and she becomes a force to reckon with. Within her context of existence, most other people of her age were still struggling to have a focus and to make ends meet.

The second powerful female figure in the narrative is Minister M_. As a member of President Mugabe's cabinet and as a political matriarch, she exudes commendable influence, wields significant power and has enough money to spend. On an occasion, she comes to Mrs Khumalo's salon with her husband to make her hair and on seeing Trina, a white woman who also came to make her hair, Minister M_ remarks: "[i]f I'd known that this salon catered for Rhodesians, I would have closed it down a long time ago. Zimbabwe will never be a colony again" (Huchu, 130). This incident reveals Minister M_ as a bigoted political matriarch and is a testament of the political power which she threatens to exercise in order to get back at perceived enemies. The threat to close down an establishment is simply to satisfy her racist cum nationalist views. Minister M_ threatens Trina: "[t]ell all your friends that we're going to take all the land back and we're coming for the houses you bought in the suburbs with your ill-gotten riches" (Huchu, 130). For Minister M_, the children of former colonialists should have no place or home in Zimbabwe. Because of the power she possesses, her political stance on how white people should be treated in Zimbabwe is unchallenged and she gets away with such unprovoked attacks until, in the case of Trina, Dumisani steps in to caution her about her treatment of Trina, the salon's client. It seems that Dumisani walked where angels feared to tread as Minister M'_s husband who within the African context is expected to be the head of the family and should have called his wife to order "was standing on the sidelines; his eyes drooped as though he had no interest in the exchange. His roughly shaven face told the story of a man who'd seen a lot in the world and of life" (Huchu, 131). It is clear to the readers that he is an example of husbands who dare not talk when their wives create scenes in the public. His lack of reaction is also indicative of the might of Minister M_. It is clear that Minister M_ flexes both political and familial power. When Minister M_ decides to stay, instead of leaving angrily, and then she later walks with her husband into the salon, readers are made to know that "Minister M_ walked inside in a huff and her husband followed her slowly with his hands in his pocket" (Huchu, 131). This depiction completes the image of a man who has little or no choice than to meekly follow his wife even when she is wrong.

Minister M_ entered the class of politically powerful and nationalists through her catalogue of achievements over the years. She had defended her country and had proven herself worthy of the membership of the elite group of Zimbabwean leaders. According to Vimbai, "Minister M_ had joined the liberation struggle when she was only fourteen. She had trained in Zambia with ZANLA and had fought bravely against the Rhodesian Army. After independence, she entered politics and continued with her schooling. In the late eighties, she became a deputy minister and later a full minister" (Huchu, 20-21). She is the type of woman every girl would want to model her life after as "she was loaded" (Huchu 22). After a visit to Mrs Khumalo's salon,

Vimbai notes that "we all felt special even as we stared after her shiny car that lay far beyond our wildest dreams" (22). Minister M_ thus epitomises a woman with power, wealth, clout and charisma. Added to this is that she has a good heterosexual marriage, a cherished necessity for any woman within the traditional communal setting. Such is the admiration attached to her life within their immediate community that it is deemed exemplary by parents who discuss it with their girls at home, with the hope that the children would be willing to emulate her.

Minister M_'s present political position and the need to consolidate her standing in anticipation for some future political ambition drive her to make definite decisions about her life and family. She wants nothing to bring her name into disrepute or stain her political clout and long-built reputation. Minister M_ exemplifies the crop of politicians who believe that they have sacrificed so much for their country and that the reward for this is to gain higher office and to hold revered positions. She sees herself as an institution and authority to reckon with. As a mover and shaker in the country's politics, Minister M_ easily fits into the crop of nationalists who promote the pan-Africanist's ideals of getting rid of all the relics of colonialism. This orientation will be strengthened in the course of this analysis as it also finds provenance in her perception of homosexuality and feeds her reactions to it.

From the foregoing, both Vimbai and Minister M_ do not fit into the stereotype of subjugated or marginalised women. They are depicted as women who are independent and successful in their careers. They are powerful women who have their own properties and access to financial freedom. It is from this position of agency that they actively act against the freedom of homosexual men who in their opinion lack the makings of a man. Vimbai and Minister M_ grow up in Zimbabwe and are grounded in cultures surrounding patriarchy, sexuality, gender and sexual roles. Apart from being financially secured and independent women, as heterosexuals, they believe in the patriarchal heteronormative structures of their society and agree that a man completes their space in the society. Consequently, it is evident that they do not come to terms with and are unable to deconstruct the changing terrain around gender roles as it could be seen in Vimbai's surprise at Dumisani, a man taking up a woman's job or of Minister M_'s husband's bisexuality. They are also unable to engage the possibility of how sexuality is becoming fluid, resulting in several possibilities. The heterosexual field where the two operate from and the expected dividends of patriarchy they enjoy in their heterosexual relationships will be discussed in order to understand what motivates their homophobic (re)actions.

Vimbai's world comes crashing after knowing of Dumisani's homosexuality. She has been suspecting Dumisani's movements and had wondered, even been jealous as "Dumi had often taken to going to his bedroom when his phone rang and speaking in a low voice" (186). She had also been troubled that he had been spending time out at night and going for weekends without taking her along. She had wondered "[s]urely Dumi wouldn't betray me! … Had I been taking him for granted?" (186). She had feared Dumisani cheating on her with another woman. Onanuga and Alade (2020) remark on the normalisation of heterosexual cheating as an escapist ideological conviction among women who found themselves in relationships with closeted homosexual men. Within this context, Vimbai's consideration was on the implications as well as shame which come with the realisation of Dumisani's homosexuality. This is because most women see themselves as unattractive and as

failures when their men are not heterosexual, particularly since male cheating within heterosexual relationships enjoys societal acceptance, even excused as men expressing their masculinity. In addition, Vimbai is concerned with what Dumisani's sexual orientation would mean to her as she had become so reliant on him and his family. She muses:

> My life and my daughter's future were tied to the magnanimity of the Ncube family. There could be no guarantee that their kindness would outlast my relationship with their son. These thoughts made me feel like a gold-digger" (Huchu, 197).

Vimbai fixatedly commoditises her relationship and comes across as being mostly selfish about her fears as she realises that the patriarchal dividends her relationship with Dumisani affords her will be no more. Mrs. Ncube already calls her "muroora" – daughter-in-law – and she understands that being in this position with this family of wealth and affluence will continue to open doors for her and her daughter. All these happen before she discovers Dumisani's sexuality. Her shock at the discovery is represented thus:

> DUMI IS A HOMOSEXUAL – *Ngochani*. If it wasn't written in his hand and before my eyes, I would have denied it. I could not have foreseen this. He spoke like a normal man, wore clothes like a normal man and even walked like a normal man. Everything about him was masculine. Didn't homosexuals walk about with handbags and speak with squeaky voices?

There is a noticeable "parallel between compulsory heterosexuality, patriarchy and social violence" (Primorac and Chan 720) in Huchu's work and he calls attention to how detestable Vimbai finds Dumisani's sexuality. Her realisation is put in capital letters to place emphasis on how shocked Vimbai is. According to Ncube, the capitalisation "serves not just as a typographical sign but more importantly as a psychological marker that immediately captures the attention of the reader" (70). The English word 'homosexuality' does not do justice to Vimbai's exclamation as well as to the societal connotation within the Zimbabwean setting, thus the use of the Shona word *Ngochani.* Ngochani is a synonym for 'homosexual' in Zimbabwe and its use "is meant to achieve maximum impact and to reinforce the point. It becomes clear to her that the man of her dreams is, in fact, a member of the detested class of people in Zimbabwe, namely homosexuals" (Chitando and Mangonganise, 566). Apart from this, Dumisani's performance of homosexuality confuses Vimbai as she follows the line of thought of most Africans that homosexuals dress, speak or generally act in a particular way. This restrictive view about the physical look of homosexuals limits heterosexuals' perception of who homosexuals really are. Through her choice of expressions, one is also provided clues to the framing of homosexual men as being abnormal. While Dumisani's outward behaviour do not reveal him as a homosexual, Vimbai's serendipitous realisation immediately 'others' and 'abnormalises' him. As a result of this, she feels deceived, betrayed and led on.

Huchu gives his readers insight into how wronged Vimbai felt and how the momentum builds up before she takes her next step. She goes through a long process of reasoning, rationalisation and guilt-tripping, and during this process, she substitutes one moral wrong for the other. She rationalises how a rapist is better than a homosexual when she states that "[i]n my mind Phillip the rapist was better than Dumi the homo" (Huchu, 209). Vimbai also falls into the trap which has consumed many antagonists of homosexuality; she looks beyond the admirability of Dumisani's total personality and reduces the basis of her judgment to his sexuality. She calls Dumisani a 'pervert' and christens his sexuality a 'satanic behaviour'. She felt like "a person who had been duped out of their life savings by a conman" (209) and she starts thinking of what people would say and how she would be blamed for being inadequate. The tendency to externalise their concerns when confronted with the realisation that their men are homosexuals is widespread among African women. Vimbai demands of herself: "[w]hat would I tell my parents when they ask of him? The whole world would laugh at my expense. 'She was so bad that she drove him into the arms of a man'" (Huchu, 209). This is the plight of women in African societies as they get to be blamed for the inadequacies of their children and/or husbands as well as for the challenges that emanate from their relationships. At the point where she decides she does not want Dumisani again, Huchu involves the readers and invites them to see how Vimbai decides to overlook the other aspects of Dumisani's life that she had admired or envied. In coming to her decision, Vimbai reduces Dumisani's worth to his sexuality as a homosexual. Acting from the field of experience which demonises homosexuality, she becomes bitter and vengeful. She fumes that:

> If it was another woman, I would fight to save my relationship, but another man! There is no response to that. It is the sort of thing that is so far outside of nature it can never happen. Even animals have sense enough to tell which one is female and which one is not. I opened my window to let the stale air out. There was a blast of cool air rushing in as if to cleanse my house. It was sweet and refreshing. If I hadn't a daughter to look after that day I should have ended my life. The shame of it was enough to kill me. I couldn't sleep a wink again that night (Huchu, 209).

Vimbai tells herself that Dumisani is not worth fighting for as his lover is not a woman but a man and this she finds detestable. One is therefore made to perceive that within the context of heterosexual marriage, it is commonplace for women to fight the other woman instead of attending to their stray men. Vimbai also likens Dumisani's sexuality to that of animals. She concedes that her current situation is absurd since even animals 'have sense enough' to discriminate between male and female and thus act accordingly. Vimbai therefore considers that Dumisani's sexual orientation is 'so far outside of nature' and thus is lower than theirs. Even nature, through the personification of 'cool air', is perceived as complicit in the antagonism of homosexuality. Thus, Vimbai's house which had been soiled by Dumisani and Mr M's illicit sexual engagements and had become stale required something 'sweet and refreshing'. As a result, she needed to get rid of the contaminated atmosphere by welcoming something new and different. Vimbai is so traumatised to the extent of contemplating suicide. In all, Huchu characterises Vimbai as an African woman who

has internalised the cultural codes that makes sexual oppression of homosexual men possible. To her, Dumisani and Mr M do not conform to their identities as men.

Upon realising that Vimbai has stumbled upon his secret, Dumisani is speechless and his inability to defend himself shows the extent of his fear. Instead of confronting his fears and expressing his true sexual identity, he runs off "into the dark night" (Huchu, 211). Of course, his (re)action is not surprising nor is it the first of its kind. Rather, it is symbolic of how homosexuals are deprived of a voice, expression, especially when they are forcibly outed and their privacy infiltrated and violated. It also points to the extent to which their sexuality is used against them to judge them. Running off into the darkness is metaphorical. It is a psychological marker for both the homosexual and heterosexual. The homosexual knows he has no safe place to run to but keeps running in panic because he feels lost and the darkness he runs into shows the state of his mind. The darkness also constitutes the only safe place for the homosexual who is not expected or allowed to perform in the same public space with heterosexuals, the darkness becomes "an ideational repository for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer individuals whose erotic desires or sexual identities remain hidden or undisclosed to other"' (Davis 2015: 960). In the darkness, he is an outcast who is not to be seen or heard. For the heterosexual however, religion and culture are seen as framing the perception of homosexuality as a sin, which in turn represents sinners as being in darkness. Dumisani's running into the dark night serves as a spiritual marker for the weight of his sin and his refusal to see the light for which heterosexuality stands as representation. Vimbai occupies a position of agency here. Her reactions thereafter are intentional and purposive. She knows her actions determine Dumisani's fate and when she goes ahead to report to Minister M_, she knows that Dumisani is exposed to danger, the kind homosexuals dread in a country like Zimbabwe. Vimbai's taking charge of the situation as well her vengeful reaction thus kick-starts Minister M_'s matriarchal interventions.

Minister M_ swings into action immediately she is told of her husband's extramarital affair. It is clear that she knows already of her husband's bisexuality as she mutters "not again to herself" (Huchu, 213) when she reads the pages of Dumisani's diary which Vimbai had given her. For Minister M_, people like her husband are the cause of the problem the country is in. She goes into a long speech and lectures Vimbai about the filth, the crime and vice in the country and she holds the war, mid-age crisis and the need to revive youthful vitality as responsible for her husband's present actions. She soliloquys that:

> '… . Have you ever been in a war? I saw one first-hand and it's not a pleasant thing. You see, men like my husband are funny creatures – when they reach a certain age they feel they need to revive the excitement that they once had in their younger days. They look at their wife and she has aged, even put on a little weight. They begin to experiment, first with younger girls, then they work their way back to the top until they are screwing their own grandmothers, but they still can't get that excitement. So they do something radical, they become beasts with their experimentation. That's why this country is in the mess it's in, because it's being run by stupid men.'

It is obvious that Minister M_, like Vimbai, would have reacted differently if her husband had engaged in sexual relations with another woman. One can note a tinge of shame in her explanations – she is not comfortable that Vimbai knows that her husband is a bisexual. She comes up with excuses for her husband's misbehavior. Minister M_ here does not see her husband's sexuality as more than mid age crisis. She reduces it to his passion to experiment, find thrill and be young again. She also rationalises his action to *Post-traumatic stress* disorder (*PTSD*) as a result of exposure to war. She further sees it as her responsibility to curb her husband's excesses. She adds some snippets on feminism in her argument in order to appeal to Vimbai's sense of career-building and success when she says "that's why this country is in the mess it's in, because it's being run by stupid men". Probably more because of her political ambition than for her distaste for her husband's activities, she decides to get rid of her husband's object of interest.

Vimbai repents of her homophobia after seeing the state Minister M_'s thugs left Dumisani, "[t]he guilt and magnitude of what I had done hit me hard" (Huchu, 226). Dumisani's situation invokes Vimbai's appreciation of his humanity and she realises that after-all, despite his homosexuality, he is still a human being capable of feeling pains. She apologises to him and realising that she still has the ability to change things and improve his situation, Vimbai goes back to Minister M_ to collect Dumisani's passport. Her request is hinged on the fact that Zimbabwe was no longer safe for him as a homosexual and that it had become expedient for him to relocate to the UK. Dumisani moves to the UK with Mr M_ who had also decided to fully express his orientation as a homosexual. Minister M_ who is the ultimate matriarch sees nothing wrong with how she handled the issue and is delighted to hear of Dumisani's decision to leave the country. "'It should suit him well there. Their government is full of gay gangsters. They walk the streets parading themselves. He will be happy in Sodom'" (Huchu, 233). Her stance is reflective of the pervasive ideology in many African countries that homosexuality is foreign and un-African (Vincent and Howell, 472) and that its practice constitutes 'moral depravity' and 'sociocultural abomination' (Onanuga and Alade, 21). Western countries are also depicted as being immoral and permissive of these 'unnatural' sexual practices and orientations. To Minister M_, these countries 'suit' homosexuals. She also opines that beyond the environment being stimulating for homosexuals, even government officials – who to Minister M_ should be exemplary and above board – are enmeshed in homosexuality. She mocks the situation and is judgmental in her labeling of Britain as Sodom, which in Christianity and Islam represents the height of sexual depravity.

Vimbai and Minister M_ are placed at a vantage point, and it is from there that they influence the happenings to their homosexual men. Vimbai is already a successful hairdresser with high hopes for an even more successful future. Dumisani's introduction to the plot becomes a way for her to achieve this future. Not only is he a conduit towards financial freedom, he also perfects her need for societal fulfilment – a male heterosexual complement for her and her daughter. Although her discovery of his closeted sexuality jars her, she resorts to blackmail, vengeance and snitching in order to ensure self-preservation. She also capitalises on Dumisani's fear of being outed, especially as he has tried to convince his family of his change in sexual orientation. By meeting with Minister M_, we see a merger of female hurts and feminist rage. Both of them do not consider unleashing violence on a male

homosexual as out of place, just as they have no problem with patching along in their relationships as long as their interests and privileges are not negatively affected. Their only consideration came out of the necessity for self-preservation – for Vimbai, the threat of financial security and presence of male figure in her life; and, for Minister M_, the threat of embarrassment by her political opponents and the loss of political capital. Through their actions, both women become powerful deciders of the lives and futures of their men. Dumisani and Minister M_'s husband have to flee Zimbabwe in order to escape the wrath of their women and in order to enjoy the possibility of sexual freedom.

Matriarchal Oppression in Diriye Osman's *Fairytales For Lost Children*

In Diriye Osman's *Fairytales For Lost Children*, Ayeeyo represents matriarchal authority and she imposes her power in the life of her grandson, Waryaa and her househelp, Boniface. Waryaa knows that his grandmother observes his relations with Boniface keenly but he underestimates the different times "Ayeeyo noticed but said nothing" (Osman, 38). He also does not take cognisance of the times he watches Boniface "admired his legs my grandmother watched me. She kept quiet" (Osman, 38). Ayeeyo is the typical mother who watches and patiently waits to gather her facts before punishing an errant child. Ayeeyo continues to be watchful while Boniface and Waryaa continue to believe that she does not suspect them.

Upon stumbling on Waryaa and Boniface's secret, Ayeeyo changes in her attitude. She had waited late into the night just to be sure. After spending another night in Boniface's room, Waryaa notes "… I noticed that Ayeeyo's light was switched on, her door slightly ajar. I went to bed, praying that she didn't know what happened" (Osman, 39). The trepidation Waryaa feels about his grandmother knowing of his sexuality stems from the facts that he is not ready to come out of the closet and because he knows that his coming out will not be received with acceptance and "the closet allows him to escape the reprobation of his family and community whilst not necessarily renouncing his sexual orientation and gender identity" (Ncube 9).

The morning after Ayeeyo confirmed that her grandson is a homosexual, Waryaa notes that "[her] voice dripped with contempt" (Osman, 39). Waryaa guessing the reason for his grandmother's change of behaviour becomes disturbed. According to him, "I couldn't concentrate at school that day. I was petrified that Ayeeyo had discovered my affair with Boniface. What would she do? Had she fired him? Would she kick me out of the house? By the time I returned home that afternoon I was a wreck" (Osman, 40). Opening up the crisis, Waryaa finds himself in Osman's way of showing his readers how homosexuals struggle and get troubled at the reality of being outed when they are not ready for the attendant consequences they know are attached to such, he had been struggling like other homosexuals on "which of their selves to reveal to others and which of their selves to keep hidden". (McDonald, 1).

His grandmother is evidently the one in power and will decide his fate. He knows that she would want to uphold what she regards as traditional values, the "historical contents that have been buried and disguised in a functionalist coherence or formal systematization" (Foucault, 81). Consequent upon her realisation, Ayeeyo sacks Boniface. This is ironical especially because Ayeeyo's engagement of Boniface

was hinged on her perception of the need to have a heterosexual male presence around, in view of Waryaa's orphaned state. However, her reaction is a way of being in control in line with her social status as well as being a matriarchal figure in Waryaa's life. She is clearly happy about her action and she refuses to tell Waryaa the reason why she did what she did. She lies that "'…the man is a thief and I don't tolerate thieves in my house. Or drug addicts for that matter'" (Osman, 40). When Waryaa shows that he is not satisfied with her answer, she lets him know that she has been monitoring them. She decides not to give a name to what she knows the two have been doing. Through Ayeeyo's behaviour, one sees her reluctance in acknowledging her grandson's sexual deviance. She has difficulty in accepting or mentioning to him why she had sacked Boniface. She therefore feels more comfortable to come up with excuses to justify her action. She however believes that sending Boniface away might reduce Waryaa's exposure to gay practices, or even encourage him to desist from such an orientation. Her difficulty in consenting to and accepting her grandson's sexuality is put thus:

> I was about to shit a brick but I kept my ass in check. 'Tell me, Ayeeyo, what *were* we doing in his room'?
> She steadied herself on the sink, as if literally gagging on the words. 'I will not let a fanya kai corrupt you. You will not become a…a -' (Osman, 40)

For Ayeeyo, Boniface is responsible for her grandson's wayward behaviour and she believes that by sending him away, she is rid of the problem. It is at this point that Waryaa decides to give voice to his suppressed feelings and let his grandmother know that he is a homosexual and correct her perception that Boniface is at fault. He knows the possible outcome of his decision but he decides to change the narrative and to come out to his grandmother. Through this, he expects that he can have some closure while also showing that being a homosexual is how he can stay true to himself. It is at this point that Waryaa decides he has had enough. His reaction is put thus:

> 'Go on, Ayeeyo, you can say it,' I snarled. 'I will not become a khaniis? A shoga? A faggot? Well, tough luck! My ass is a khaniis. I am a shoga, a faggot.'
> She smacked me so hard across the face that I lost balance and fell onto the ground. I got up and said, 'I will leave this house one day and you will die a lonely, embittered woman.'
> She looked like she had been punched. Her eyes welled up but she wouldn't allow me to see her tears. So she left the kitchen and went to her bedroom. She didn't come out for four days."

Waryaa is hurt that his grandmother sacked his lover. He becomes resentful of her evasive answers to a matter that he takes so seriously. He lashes out in anger not paying attention to the fact that he is hurting his grandmother. To him, he has had enough of the restrictive and choking space of expression within which he is permitted to be himself. He is also frustrated at the present deprivation of sexual expression that the absence of Boniface means. Osman portrays Waryaa as a young troubled teenager who is provoked by strong emotions. He becomes ungrateful to

his grandmother and Ayeeyo who had easily and quickly dismissed her efficient house help becomes hurt and enraged by Waryaa's attempt at agency and speaking back to the authority she represents. Although Ayeeyo retaliates by physically assaulting her grandson for daring her authority and for being expressive of his deviance as a last resort to continue to take charge of the situation, she is heartbroken, teary and unable to face her fears for four days. She feels all her attempts and struggles to groom Waryaa as a man, a proper representative of the society, has failed. She also deems herself a failure. Waryaa, on the other hand, experiences the rejection he had always feared and he transforms from a happy-go-lucky child to a melancholic and depressed youth at the face of rejection. He is unable to fix this situation and this leaves a huge vacuum in his life and in his pursuit of happiness. His grandmother too never recovered from the bad blood. He states that:

> My relationship with my grandmother was never the same again. She stopped speaking to me altogether and we became two strangers bound by blood and bad history. When I finished high school she didn't show up to my graduation ceremony. When I got a scholarship to Central Saint Martins in England she didn't wish me luck. She didn't whisper comforting words or urge me to come home soon. I got on that plane with a suitcase of painful memories and little else.
> I called Ayeeyo regularly from London but she never picked up the phone (Osman, 41)

Waryaa is nostalgic about the relationship he had with his grandmother before his forced outing and the altercation they had but Ayeeyo is rigid and sees Waryaa's sexuality as the defining aspect of his personality. His achievements and successes pales to his sexuality. There is no understanding from the grandmother of the peculiarities surrounding his age and sexuality. He is punished for naming the evil act and for revealing and accepting his sexual identity. Waryaa continues to battle physical displacement, self-exile, and as his grandmother has clearly disowned him, he also struggles with homelessness.

As a form of manifestation of Waryaa's prediction that his grandmother would die a 'lonely, embittered woman', Ayeeyo dies a lonely death. It was reported that "she passed away a week ago but we only found her body last night" (Osman, 41). In learning about this, Waryaa becomes guilt-ridden. He sees himself as responsible for her death and never forgives himself. He blames himself when he says: "I was the one who had hurt my grandmother. I was the one who had abandoned her. She had died alone and it broke my heart" (Osman, 42). Osman makes the readers sympathise with Waryaa at this point as it is clear to them that he had tried to bridge the communication gap between himself and his grandmother and he is not directly responsible for the death of the grandmother who cannot see beyond the norms of her society and who, as the only surviving elderly relative Waryaa has, believes she has failed in bringing him up as the society expects. The story could have changed if she had been successful in using her position to force Waryaa to conform but as Waryaa has decided not to conform, she punishes him by cutting off all family ties. This insistence on and fixation with societal norms affects both of them negatively. Waryaa continues to bear the burden of guilt and the

readers see the psychological motions Waryaa goes through as a result of this guilt. He testifies that "[t]he next few months were spent in a self-destructive haze of alcohol and weed. I skipped classes, missed assignments and almost got expelled" (Osman, 42).

Ayeeyo has a persistent urge to be in control of her grandson's life and this eventually leads to doom. When her suspicion that Waryaa and Boniface had more going between them was confirmed, she is unable to surrender control and not be in charge. She perceives herself as a gate-keeper, while wishing and willing her grandson to be an embodiment of masculine ideals. When it was obvious that this would not be realisable, she further attempts to take charge by expelling Boniface, the servant and Waryaa's homosexual partner. Not knowing that Waryaa had already decided to come to terms with his difference, Ayeeyo still persists in justifying her actions while being evasive of the reasons for her reaction. This ultimately leads to Waryaa's attempt at wresting control from her. He leaves the house, relocates, and makes significant strides in his personal life. Unfortunately however, they never mend fence till Ayeeyo's death and Waryaa feels the vacuum in his life too as he is exiled. Ayeeyo's defiance by severing all ties with Waryaa, her only remaining family member, leads to her estrangement and shows her resoluteness to maintain her matriarchal authority and to save her face in view of the judgemental remarks that might have visited her possible acceptance of her grandson's deviant sexuality in the homophobic society within which she exists. She sticks to her conviction as well as her sense of power, authority and control till her death.

Conclusion

The heterosexual women in the novels are depicted as "innately homophobic" (Hockenberry, 1) and it is seen that the"[i]nnate sexual orientations with indigenous ways of thinking about personhood and community" (McAllister, 47) inform the women's roles of sexual oppression. These women uphold "indigenous concepts of family and community obligations" (McAllister, 46) and these have "reactionary homophobic appeals to 'tradition' and 'African culture', [and are] oppressive and totalizing" (McAllister, 46). The need to uphold tradition and culture which this study has read as oppressive is one of the motivations behind the women's oppression of homosexual men in the narratives.

The women in the narratives studied are empowered as heterosexuals. Heteronormativity confers on them the possibility of agency as social subjects and actors who have the moral and religious power to oppress the performance of the 'Other' and anyone who fails to conform to the norm. More than these, the narratives have shown that female agency can be simultaneously oppressive and destructive. The implications of the women's oppressive agency are detailed in the narratives. The threat of physical violence by Ayeeyo, her later disownment causes emotional and psychological derangement for Waryaa. There is also the physical violence and near death experience in the case of Dumisani, as well as the imposition of self-exile on both Waryaa and Dumisani. Waryaa on his part lives his life "in a self-destructive haze of alcohol and weed" (Osman, 42) in London. These contrastive reactions to the realisation of conscious self-identities depict the amorphous realities of queer people: they suffer in- and out-group rejections, lose cherished relationships,

struggle to conform to societal expectations and often have to become diasporic in order to create a sense of self-discovery and self-love.

Apart from the ability of the heterosexual women to oppress the homosexuals because of the difference in their sexuality, these women occupy spaces of respect in the society. Minister M_ is a powerful politician; Ayeeyo is a grandmother in an African society where grandmothers are highly revered; Vimbai is an established career woman in a developing African country where many are without financial footing. Being moral agents as a result of sexual superiority, shows the womens' failure to realise that as women they are as much victims of patriarchy as the homosexual men. The inability of the women to deconstruct hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality, deconstruct social constructs surrounding gender roles and sexuality make them oppressors within a structure that also victimises them.

Huchu and Osman's narratives make use of the first person point of view and readers are made to understand Vimbai in Huchu's work and sympathise with Waryaa in Osman's short story. It is through the point of view of these characters that we see the lived experiences of women as sexual oppressors, enacted by Vimbai, Minister M_ and Ayeeyo, and the victims of their sexual oppressions, in the persons of Dumisani and Waryaa, both male homosexuals. The transitions Vimbai goes through to become sympathetic of the plight of homosexuals and to later help Dumisani shows the possibility of what could have happened to the other perpetrators of sexual oppression especially Ayeeyo if she had allowed the love she has for her grandson to overcome her disgust at his sexuality just like Vimbai's love for Dumisani helps her to reach a level of acceptance. However, these women are often inhibited or restricted in their reactions since they are also looking for self-preservation and to affirm the social norms and structures which they deem non-negotiable. In some cases, one encounters the psychological turbulence that these women go through in deciding on their stand. It is obvious that in many cases, taking the decision of excising and punishing their men is a particularly difficult decision to make for them.

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