

Un-African? Representations of Homosexuality in Two Contemporary Nigerian Films

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Abstract

Criminalization of homosexuality in Africa has forced most gays and lesbians in Africa to live in the closet. Though invisible in day-to-day social life in Africa, homosexuality is increasingly gaining visibility in African films, for example in Nollywood – Africa’s largest movie industry. This paper analyses how two Nollywood films namely, ‘Men in Love’ and ‘Rag Tag’ represent homosexuality. Using the concepts of transnationality and stereotype as analytical frameworks, the paper brings out marked differences in how the two films represent homosexuality. The film ‘Men in Love’ reproduces predominant negative stereotypes on homosexuality by portraying homosexuality as a demonic or satanic influence that is tied to having a licentious lifestyle. The film ‘Rag Tag’, which is more transnational in orientation, radically challenges negative same-sex stereotyping, as it represents homosexuality on equal level with heterosexuality: that is, as a relationship that can be grounded on strong love and respect.

Keywords: Homosexual Representation, Nollywood, Stereotype, Transnationality

1. Introduction

Homosexual rights or acceptance of homosexuality is perhaps one of the most socially unwelcomed, touchy and politically thorny topics to broach in contemporary Africa. In 1995, the Zimbabwean president, Robert Mugabe stood out as the reference point for African homophobia when he proclaimed that “homosexuals were worse than pigs and dogs” and deserved no rights whatsoever (Reddy, 2002, p. 168). In 1997, the Namibian President, Sam Nujoma, with equal measure of intolerance as his Zimbabwean counterpart, described homosexuality as a gruesome inhuman perversion which should “be uprooted totally” from society (cited in Phillips, 2004, p. 157). More recently, in 2009, a Malawian court sentenced a gay couple to 14 years jail time for what it considered lewd sexual behaviour. This ruling made sensational news in Western media and elicited an outcry from human rights organizations. That same year anti-gay activists in Uganda tabled a bill before parliament proposing the death penalty for anyone convicted of homosexuality. In November 2011, a court in Cameroon slammed a five year jail sentence on three men convicted of homosexuality. Meanwhile in Ghana, one of Africa’s most celebrated democracies, President John Mills stated that homosexuality was against Ghanaian values and he would “never initiate or support any attempt to legalise [it]” (BBC News, 2011).

The ferocious backlash against homosexuality that is characteristic of many African politicians and the strong homophobia within African populations is grounded in the “notion that homosexuality is ‘unafican’” (Cock, 2003, p. 41). According to African stereotypes, homosexuality 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). Such anti-gay viewpoints have for a very long time been repeatedly espoused in African societies through Christian Church or Muslim doctrine, through strong political hate speech, and in day-to-day dialogue. The criminalization of homosexuality and the intense societal homophobia associated with it in the majority of African nations has forced most homosexuals in Africa to live closeted lives; hiding their sexuality from the society around them.

Despite its invisibility in day-to-day social life in many African nations, homosexuality is made visible through representation in cinema as there is a gradual emergence of sub-Saharan Africans films that portray homosexuality. Representation in cinema is sometimes ‘constitutive’, whereby it is neither seen as “outside reality [nor] signifying reality, but as a discursive force that is capable of constituting what some perceive as reality itself” (Lim, 2006, p. 44). Representations of social identities therefore have far reaching implications in society.

Representations reflect power asymmetries and socio-cultural stereotypes, and visual representations in particular “depend on and produce social inclusions and exclusions” (Gillian, 2001, p. 16). As Dyer (2002, p. 1) notes, “[h]ow we are seen determines in part how we are treated; how we treat others is based on how we see them; such seeing comes from representation.” Cinema is a product for entertainment which has the capacity to shape and reflect thoughts and feelings (Dyer, 1984), hence intentional changes of filmic representations can play a powerful role in breaking down structures of marginalization and discrimination within society.

This paper examines how two Nollywood films, namely; *Men in Love* (Ebere, 2010) and *Rag Tag* (Nwandu, 2006) represent homosexuality – defined broadly as same-sex erotic desire or intercourse. Taking advantage of the benefits of comparison in analysis, the paper examines whether and how the Nollywood films maintain or question societal stereotypes and conceptualizations of non-straight sexual practices. Nollywood ranks as the third largest movie industry worldwide after Hollywood and Bollywood (Haynes, 2007), and its films circulate within many sub-Saharan African nations and outside the African continent. Nollywood has become “the most successful [...] business in the history of visual arts in Africa [...] and has defined a new visual culture in Nigeria and indeed Africa” (Okome, 2007, p. 6). Films from the industry are mainly in video rather than celluloid format, so as to facilitate large scale and cheap production. The popularity of Nollywood in Africa and in the world at large necessitates an examination of how some of its films construct homosexuality, a highly contested issue in discussions around democratic rights in today’s Africa.

The next section briefly reviews previous literature on homosexuality in African films, and notes that the field has gained very little scholarly attention. In section three, the relevance of the concepts of transnationality and stereotype as analytical tools for comparing the two films is discussed. The concept of transnationality mainly characterizes the films as either national or cross-national, while the concept of stereotype reflects how fixed societal notions about homosexuality are reproduced or challenged in the films. Section four discusses the plot of the two films and delves into a comparative analysis of how both films represent homosexuality and the non-straight characters. After a critical reflection of the stereotypical depictions of homosexuality in the two films, the final section concludes that *Rag Tag* which is more transnational in orientation, radically challenges negative same-sex stereotyping. Meanwhile *Men in Love* instead constructs homosexuality from a heteronormative point of view and reproduces predominant negative stereotypes on homosexuality.

2. Male Homosexuality in Cinema: Africa as Late-comer

Until recently, films that focus on male homosexuality were rare in Nollywood. Representation of homosexuality in Nollywood cinema mainly centred on lesbians – a situation that provoked gendered arguments on the ‘objectification’ of women, and also raised questions about whether lesbianism, in comparison to male homosexuality, is considered less of a taboo in Nigerian culture (Azuah, 2008). The current rise in Nollywood films that represent male homosexuality signifies the emergence of new type of empirical material that demands analysis. The selected films stand out from among contemporary Nollywood films that dwell on male homosexuality. *Rag Tag* is the first Nollywood film on male homosexuality that was set both in Nigeria and in Europe and which included an interracial (multi-cultural) cast. The film premiered at the 2006 San Francisco International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) Film Festival. *Men in Love* on the other hand is one of the latest Nollywood films representing male homosexuality which upon release (in 2010) elicited an impressive number of online reviews and viewer discussions about its stance on same sex relationships in Africa.

Since African films representing male homosexuality have been relatively few in number, existing literature on cinematic representations of homosexuality has been Western-centric. Classic publications such as Dyer’s *Gays and Film* (1984) and *The Matter of Images* (2002), and Russo’s *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (1987), expound only on representations of homosexuality in Western films. With the exception of Maasilta’s “African Carmen” (2007), the few studies that have discussed representations of homosexuality in African films have done so in brief. Leung (2004) only fleetingly addresses the cases of: *Dakan* (Destiny) (Camara, 1997) – the first sub-Saharan African film that represented homosexuality – and the documentary film, *Woubi Chéri* (Brooks & Bocahut, 1998). She observes that *Dakan* provoked the question of where gay love or “outsider” relationships should belong, while *Woubi Chéri* critically addressed this question. The documentary, *Woubi Chéri*, portrayed ‘queer’ and transgender communities in West Africa, hence depicting that in reality non-straight sexual practices are *not ‘un-African’* [my italics] (ibid. pp. 159-160).

Like Leung, Epprecht (2011, p. 156) describes *Woubi Chéri* as “unashamedly didactic: to prove the existence of homosexual desire among blacks in the African past.” Epprecht further highlights that in the past, African literature and films often treated same-sex relationships in “schematic ways” (ibid. p. 153). In African novels for instance, Epprecht (2005) notes that a common trope had been to portray homosexuality as coming from outside to corrupt or trouble Africans. Homosexuals act as “foils that allow African protagonists to reflect on the dignity of African culture and struggles against cultural imperialism” (ibid. p. 140).

The issue of culture is further expounded in Maasilta’s *African Carmen*, which provides an in-depth analysis of a West African transnational film with lesbian representation – *Karmen Gei* (Ramaka, 2001). Maasilta mainly dwells on the ‘burden of representation’ faced by transnational filmmakers and journalists, and highlights some of the contradictions that transnational movies could create when viewed in different cultural contexts. Although she describes how this Senegalese movie portrays homosexuality, she places more focus on the reception of the film in Senegal and abroad. This paper follows Maasilta’s in-depth approach, but focuses more on how the two films portray homosexuality; with the concepts of ‘transnationality’ and ‘stereotype’ providing the reference for contextualization and comparative analysis.

3. Method: Transnationality and Stereotype as Analytical Concepts

In deconstructing the meanings behind the different representations of homosexuality in *Rag Tag* and *Men in Love*, analysis will focus on the ‘semantic’ and ‘material’ aspects of the films: the plot and the mise-en-scene (Maasilta, 2007, p. 66). Respectively, the concepts, transnationality and stereotype serve as the methodological tools for examining the empirical elements of the films at (i) the contextual level and (ii) interpretative level. As Bal (2002) notes, concepts are more useful methodological tools in a broad field like cultural analysis because they are more open and do not dwell on a specific formula. Concepts allow for “a meeting between several [methods], a meeting in which the object participates, so that, together, object and methods can become a new, not firmly delineated, field” (ibid. p. 4).

The term transnational is most often used as a signifier for an “international or supranational mode of film production whose impact and reach [goes beyond national boundaries]” (Higbee & Lim, 2010, p. 10). Per this general definition, the vast majority of films will be categorized as ‘transnational’ given the high circulation of films across national borders in this globalize and cyber-world. Hjort (2009, p. 13) argues that transnationality can be classified on a continuum from ‘weak’ to ‘strong’; where ‘strong transnationality’ would describe a film that exhibits several levels of transnationality, with respect to its production, distribution, reception and its diegesis. *Rag Tag* is a transnational film in all respects, from the filmmaker’s background to the diegesis of the film. The film’s director, Nwandu, is a “deterritorialized filmmaker” (Maasilta, 2007, p. 25), raised and educated in both the UK and Nigeria, and her film is also set in these two locations. Moreover, the film’s multicultural and interracial cast also gives it the ‘pluralistic’ and ‘hybrid’ features of what Naficy (2006, pp. 114-115) terms ‘diasporic’ cinema. In contrast, *Men in Love* lies on the ‘weak’ end of the transnationality continuum, because apart from its circulation internationally, the film is set exclusively in Nigeria with a purely black African cast.

One of the key features that differentiates transnational films from national ones is their cross-cultural aspect. Transnational films unlike national films depict ‘cultural hybridisation’ or a fluidity of boundaries. As Naficy (2003, p. 211) notes, “in transnationality, the boundaries between self and other, female and male, inside and outside, homeland and hostland are blurred and must continually be negotiated.” Since its diegesis does not depict spaces beyond national borders and beyond Africa, *Men in Love* can be labelled as more ‘national’ or purely African with respect to *Rag Tag*. While transnationality assesses the degree of cultural hybridization in films, stereotypes bring out fixities in films. Bhabha (1983, p. 18) defines stereotype as “forms of knowledge and identification that vacillate between what is always ‘in place’, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated [...]” The contrast between stereotype and transnationality in terms of ‘fixities’ and ‘non-fixities’ respectively, make them crucial for analysing whether homophobic stereotyping features more in *Men in Love* which is purely African in cast and setting when compared to *Rag Tag* which is more cross-cultural.

Dyer (1984, pp. 31-37) notes that stereotyping can be reproduced in films either through ‘iconography, structure and individuals’. He focuses on how several gay films maintain fixed representations through these aspects, in which case stereotypes serve as “short cut” for understanding gay sexuality in films (Dyer, 2002, p. 12). Dyer dwells on the role of stereotyping in films and their reinforcement of fixities about gay sexuality.

I focus on stereotypes more as 'fixity' (Bhabha, 1983, p. 18), and as an 'other' or a deviant from the norm (Klapp as cited in Dyer, 1984, p. 29) – to examine how some 'fixed' African notions about same-sex practices are reinforced or challenged in the films.

4. Stereotypical Depictions of Homosexuality in 'Men in Love' and 'Rag Tag'

Men in Love tells the story of a business man, Charles, who is married and has a son, but still cheats on his wife (Whitney) with other women. He coincidentally meets one of his childhood friends, Alex, who expresses interest in having a homosexual relationship with him. In spite of Charles's refusal, Alex drugs and rapes him, and following this 'initiation' into homosexuality, the two become lovers to Whitney's disappointment. In the end, a prayer of deliverance from Whitney's pastor leads Charles to reconcile with his wife. In *Rag Tag*, two childhood friends namely; Raymond (Rag) and Tagbo (Tag) share a strong bond of love but they are separated from each other at the age of twelve. They however reunite ten years later and become even closer, as they realized a more intimate and sexual affection for each other. Rag and Tag decide to be together, despite Tag's father's strong disapproval of their same-sex sexual relationship.

Traditionally, Nollywood films on homosexuality centre 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 homosexuality. In fact, the storyline and representation of homosexuality in *Men in Love* starkly contradicts its title. The film's title connotes a deep romantic bond between men, but its storyline principally centres on a 'heterosexual' character, Charles, whose marriage is almost ruined because he is unwittingly 'lured' into homosexuality by a gay character (Alex). The film maintains the stereotypical pattern of constructing homosexuality from a heteronormative point of view (Hernández & Perriam, 2000). The more transnational *Rag Tag*, on the contrary, deviates from mainstream Nollywood representations because its protagonists are the gay characters, Rag and Tag. Rag and Tag live in London, together with their families, but Rag is from a single-parent West Indian home while Tag is from a middle-class Nigerian home. In spite of their different cultural backgrounds, they played together as children and were fond of each other.

Unlike *Rag Tag* which portrays homosexuality as a love relationship between Rag and Tag that developed from childhood, *Men in Love* presents the relationship between Alex and Charles as based on selfish gain and deceit. Alex visits a company to solicit funding for a project and realizes that Charles, his childhood friend, is the manager of the company. Although Alex reveals his interest in having a relationship with Charles, he presents homosexuality as a practice that is adopted for its 'benefits' rather than as a form of sexuality that is based on attraction, desire, or love. This representation is reflected in the 'restaurant scene', where the terms 'homosexual' and 'gay' are mentioned for the first time. In that particular scene, Alex is given an opportunity to throw some light on homosexuality as Charles poses the question; "I find it surprising why anybody would [want to] be gay, I mean [...] what do you stand to gain?" In response to this, Alex states:

[a]ccording to the lesbians, there would be no unwanted pregnancy, and for a guy like you (referring to Charles), if you're a bisexual you wouldn't be having the kind of problem you have with Whitney now.

From Alex's statement, homosexuals and bisexuals are portrayed as selfish, and he a homosexual, is portrayed as a corruptor. Alex makes no mention of love or desire, but rather proceeds to identify homosexuality as the perfect cover which Charles could use to conceal his infidelity towards his wife.

Negativity is not only reflected in Alex's words, gestures, or the devious stare that accompanies his statement, but also in the change of sounds in the restaurant scene. When Alex reveals to Charles that he is gay, the soft musical sound suddenly switches into an eerie sound. This spooky sound which is common with Nollywood films when evil or danger is imminent, also accompanies the first sexual encounter between Alex and Charles. The circumstance itself under which Alex and Charles engage in sex, portrays the gay character as evil. Charles had shown disinterest and disgust in a homosexual relationship, but Alex invites him for his birthday party and when he attends, Alex secretly drugs his drink. Charles becomes drowsy from drinking, Alex carries him into his room where they have sex or to put it more accurately, where he rapes Charles. Charles' reaction when he wakes up and realizes what had transpired only adds to the negative portrayal of homosexuality. In the scene, Charles grimaces in pain, places his hands over his anus, and limps out of the room.

Men in Love thus stereotypically portrays homosexual lovemaking as painful and terrible. In addition, homosexual practices in the film mainly occur in what Naficy (2003, p. 213) refers to as “claustrophobic spaces,” that is; enclosed and confined spaces, or spaces that impede vision. The restaurant scene is actually a ‘closed-shot composition’ of Charles and Alex’s conversation. There is no portrayal of any other clients in the scene and even Larry (the cook and owner of the restaurant), another gay character whom they talk about, remains invisible. The sexual encounters between Alex and Charles are also shot in ways that ‘impede vision and access’ (ibid), whereas the heterosexual love-making between Charles and his wife as well as his other girlfriends are graphically represented.

In *Rag Tag* however, male homosexuality is portrayed as any other form of sexuality which is based on desire, attraction and love. Despite the disapproval of Tag’s father (Pa Tagbo) and his attempt to separate Tag from Rag, their childhood love continues when they meet as adults. In the film, the intimate exchange between the non-straight characters is imbued with passion, emotion and romantic background music. The scene portraying Rag and Tag’s love-making is clear and unconstricted. Apart from the lovemaking scene, another scene also portrays Rag and Tag’s romantic time in an open, natural environment surrounded by trees in Nigeria. This is a common mode of representing heterosexual romance in Nollywood films, and by using a similar pattern in the representation of Rag and Tag’s relationship, the stereotypical conceptualization of homosexuality as ‘abnormal’ is blurred. In that particular scene Rag and Tag even go to the extent of inscribing their names on a tree trunk “Rag Tag 4eva,” with the camera focusing on the inscription in a close-up or emphatic screenshot: what Deleuze (1986, p. 90) terms a “visage.” The close-up, in effect, brings Rag and Tag’s same-sex union to the “face,” and calls forth a “pure affect” or direct emotional impact from words that symbolize the wish for an everlasting relationship (ibid. pp. 88&96). *Rag Tag* therefore challenges the tendency of closeting homosexuality in African films, or of representing it as evil, and ‘abnormal’. To use Naficy’s (2003, p. 211) words in a sexual rather than a gendered context, *Rag Tag* “destabilize[s] the traditional [sexual] binarism of space,” whereby heterosexuality is represented in non-claustrophobic spaces and homosexuality or same-sex desire in claustrophobic spaces.

In *Men in Love*, the religious views on homosexuality triumph, as the film ends with the scene in which prayers deliver Charles from the ‘demonic bondage’ of homosexuality. The prayer scene actually portrays the main gay character (Alex) as demonic. Despite Charles’ signs of disapproval after their first sexual encounter, he continues in a sexual relationship with Alex until his wife, Whitney, finally finds out and decides to leave her marital home. In despair, she comes across a female Pastor who encourages her to pray for the restoration of her marriage. The prayer scene crosscuts with a scene that shows Charles in his office, and one again hears the standard danger or eerie background sound. As the prayers intensify, Charles reacts in a way that suggests a recovery from trance or a regain of his consciousness. After this, he immediately rushes into his car in search of his wife and finally locates the pastor’s house, meeting them still in prayers. There, he apologizes to Whitney and they reconcile. A key point to note about this representation at the end of the film is that no form of evil is attached to Charles’ promiscuous attitude with other girls before he met Alex. Rather than reflecting a deliverance from promiscuity and infidelity, the prayer scene shifts all the blame to the gay character. Charles is delivered from the spell of a demonic gay or better still, from the ‘bondage’ of homosexuality.

In this way, *Men in Love* on the one hand portrays heterosexual infidelity as normal and bearable in the African culture, since Charles’s wife stays with him despite the numerous extra-marital relationships he had with other women. Moreover, it portrays homosexuality not only as abnormal and intolerable in the African culture, but also as something against which the powerful intervention of the Divine should be sought. Christianity, as portrayed in the prayer scene, sends out a message of condemnation of homosexuality, and no room is given for homosexuality to put up a defence against the religious reproof. In *Rag Tag* however, space is given for the religious positions on same-sex practices to be challenged. The film portrays an engaging and balanced debate between the religious view espoused by Tag’s father and the pro-homosexuality view defended by Tag.

In a scene towards the end of the film, Tag’s father in an attempt to convince Tag not to move in with Rag, condemns homosexuality by quoting different Bible verses, especially from Leviticus, the Bible chapter that is popularly used to condemn same-sex sexuality. In anger and desperation, Pa Tagbo pontificates: “Leviticus chapter 20 verse 13 [states that] ‘if man also lie with mankind as with a woman, then both of them are committing an abomination and are condemned to death’.” Tag who is a trained lawyer, puts up a strong defence by quoting other verses from the same Bible chapter that tend to normalize homosexuality.

Tag retorts:

Leviticus chapter 25 verse 37: do not charge interest on a loan. Leviticus chapter 19 verse 19: do not wear [cloth] that makes fibre. Verse 23: do not eat fruit from a young tree. Verse 27: do not cut your hair – Leviticus says we're all going to hell daddy.

Furthermore, when Pa Tagbo quotes the Bible verse Genesis 19: "God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah for your sin," Tag clarifies that contrary to widespread stereotypical belief, the sin for which the biblical God supposedly destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah was not homosexuality. Tag brushes off his father's religious argument with several Bible quotations, in particular with Ezekiel 16: 49-50 which notes:

Now this was the sin of Sodom: they were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy; they were haughty and did detestable things before me, therefore I did away with them.¹

The pro-homosexuality view actually triumphs over Pa Tagbo's patriarchal stance on homosexuality in this particular scene. Pa Tagbo continues to criticize his son's relationship with Rag by stating that "sin is sin," but Ma Tagbo challenges him by adding more words to his statement: "... and love is love." She approves of Rag and Tag's love for each other and their union. As an ironical mockery of his father's Christianity-inspired homophobia, Tag uses a Bible quote to express his love for Rag and to legitimize his relationship with Rag. Metaphorically referring to Rag as his soul, Tag states: "I love him. What does it profit a man to gain the world but lose his own soul?" (Mathew 8: 36). The more transnational Nollywood film, *Rag Tag*, unlike the national film, *Men in Love*, clearly presents both sides of the homosexuality debate. Moreover, when Tag's father expresses unbelief that his wife supports Tag's homosexual relationship, Tag's mother responds: "Whether I agree or not, he is still my son," and Tag hugs his mother for this show of support. In this scene *Rag Tag*, hits hard on homophobia by depicting how a human relationship, in this case between mother and son, supersedes all personal or religious opinions on sexuality.

With respect to gender, *Rag Tag* also challenges the stereotypical perception of gay men as different from heterosexual men in terms of masculinity. Rag and Tag are portrayed as masculine rather than effeminate. Unlike *Rag Tag*, there is a marked difference in the gender representation between the actual gay characters in *Men in Love* and the character whom gayness is thrust upon – Charles. Charles maintains masculine traits throughout the film, while the other gay characters assume feminine roles. Even Charles' cheating with other girls tends to booster his manliness as one of Whitney's friends (Flora) consoles her with the statement, "it is in men's nature to cheat." In contrast, the attribute that most of the real gay characters are associated with is cooking, and cooking is more attached to femininity. This representation is reflected in the 'restaurant scene', in which Charles expresses surprise when he finds out that Larry – a man (the gay character whom we never see), could cook so well. As for Alex, he does not only cook delicious meals but actually assumes the role of a 'housewife' when he moves into Charles's apartment for a temporary stay. Throughout his stay, he cooks and does household chores and even picks up a quarrel with Whitney over who should serve Charles' meal, when she attempts to do this herself. In *Men in Love*, which is set entirely in an African context, the quality of 'good cooks' attributed to the actual gay characters stereotypically portrays them as 'sissies' (Russo, 1987, p. 4). Their very performance of roles traditionally attached to women reflects a sense of 'masculine-femininity'. Alex's ex-boyfriend, Bobby, is shown crying when Alex jilts him for Charles. In the African context, crying is considered more of a feminine than a masculine trait. As the stereotypical saying goes, "*real men don't cry.*"

5. Conclusion

In all, *Men in Love* drives home the view that male homosexuals are selfish, corrupt, deceitful, unclean, or demonic without which, they are sissies. Even other filmic subjects look upon the homosexual characters with disgust and rejection. Before Charles is 'lured' into same-sex sexuality, he had on several occasions shifted away from Alex's touch and dusted his hands whenever they had a handshake, in a way that suggests 'uncleanness'.

¹ Tagbo

It is rather ironical that he too becomes engaged into same-sex sexual practices. This irony could have had an impact in challenging homophobic and stereotypical feelings of homosexuals as unclean. But the attribution of Charles's bisexual practices to a demonic influence, rather than a wilful decision on his part, waters down the positive impact of the irony. The religious interference tends to reflect that in his rightful senses, Charles could not have engaged in the 'unclean' practice. *Rag Tag*, unlike the more 'national' or African film *Men in Love*, challenges the stereotypical portrayal of homosexuality on solely negative terms. But for Pa Tagbo's patriarchal and homophobic attitude, the other filmic subjects including Rag and Tag's ex-girlfriends finally come to terms with the fact that Rag and Tag are in love and would prefer to be in a same-sex union. *Rag Tag*, which is more transnational, drives home the view that homosexuality, like any other form of sexuality, can also be grounded on strong love and respect. It portrays non-straight persons as different from others, only in terms of sexual orientation and not in terms of a failed gender, or an evil or inhuman nature.

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