

Representing Otherness: Contemporary Nigerian Literature and Emerging Cultural Identities

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Abstract

The politics of religion, ethnicity, race, gender and sexuality have been prominent concerns conjoined with the politics of identity in multicultural societies. In turn, the struggle around identity through which people are interpolated and positioned within society raises fundamental questions about subjectivity and agency within cultural and literary discourses. This essay discusses the ways contemporary Nigerian fiction is engaging the growing diverse and multiple identities being constructed within the Nigerian polity. The discussion is premised on the assumption that identities are culturally, socially and politically constructed, and only exist within cultural representations (Hall, 1997, Baker 2012). The essay scrambles Poststructuralism and Cultural Studies' theorization of Subjectivity, Identity and Otherness, to investigate the representation of religious, racial, gender and sexual identities in E.E Sule's *Sterile Sky*, Kaine Agary's *Yello-Yellow* and Razinat Mohammed's *Habiba*. The essay contends that in all three novels, identities are formed via the discursive regime of 'the self' and 'the other'. The binary pairs used to construct identities such as male/female, indigenes/settlers, etcetera, privilege some subject categories and also involve cultural expectations that are detrimental to others. The essay, therefore, concludes that the social, cultural and political discourse and practice of otherness

lie at the heart of segregation and oppression of minority groups in multicultural settings.

Introduction

In thinking about ourselves, we are almost always impelled to think of our other. In trying to recognise who we are, we often fall back precisely to distinguishing what we assume we are from what we are not. This in a nutshell describes the concept of subjectivity, identity and otherness which this essay hopes to explore in relation to representation of identities in three Nigerian novels. In the first part, the essay attempts to explicate the notions of subjectivity, identity and otherness within the schemes of poststructuralism and cultural studies. In the second part, it examines how the selected novels depict identities within Nigeria's multicultural space. Finally, it concludes that forms of representation such as the novel, re-enact subjectivity and identity through what Michel Foucault calls "discursive practices and discursive formation" (*The Archeology of Knowledge* 72). This entails that subjectivity is a product of discourse, a regulated way of speaking and knowing which offers the characters' subject positions through which they become interpolated in to a category that defines who they are and how they make sense of the world around them. Consequently, their actions and utterances emanate from pre-existent subject positions which are subjected to the regulatory power of discourse. By this formulation, subjects are inevitably products of power (*Discipline and Punishment* 63). As such, it is the proliferating discourses of ethnicity, gender and sexuality, among others, that bring the subjects in to view. We shall return to these in the later part of the essay, but will first turn attention to

brief explications of notions of subjectivity, identity and otherness.

Subjectivity and Identity

The concepts of subjectivity and identity are closely connected, if not contingent. (Barker 11). While subjectivity can be explained as the condition of being a person, as well as the process by which we become knowing subjects, identity can be said to be some sets of assumptions that we hold about ourselves as persons, and the expectations of others about us (Baker 12). Luis Althusser (17) theorises the process of identification through which individuals become knowing subjects by illustrating with a simple act of hailing. Althusser explains that hailing calls forth the social identity of the one been hailed. It positions the individual whose recognition of being hailed, and whose response, constitute the construction of the subject position. For Althusser, the process of recognition by the individual of herself as the one addressed by the call to recognition interpolates her as a subject within ideology. This process of identification, Althusser argues, inserts individuals into ideological practices that are lived as if they were natural. A range of what he terms 'Ideological State Apparatuses' such as religion, education, the family, the law, politics, culture and the media, produce the ideologies within which we become subjects and assume identities.

In *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, Chris Baker explains that there are two contending views on subjectivity and identity formation in Western epistemology: essentialism and anti-essentialism. The essentialist view holds that "identity exists as a universal and timeless core of the self" (221). Meaning that identity

is innate, and there is a fixed essence to identities. By this token, identity forms such as masculinity, femininity and Africans, are embedded in the essence of those who bear them. But, contrary to this, the anti-essentialist view conceptualises identity as socially and culturally constituted via the mechanism of language and discourse. On this purview, there is nothing at the core of identity which is essential or innate to the self.

In furtherance of this argument, Anthony Giddens (19) stresses that identity is constituted by sustaining a narrative about the self. For Giddens, the narrative involves an ability to maintain a consistent feeling of factual continuity as the individual continuously act in a particular prescribed way. Thus, identity is a 'self-project' which allows us to make sense of the world around us according to the composition of that world. Indeed, Stuart Hall complicates this further by arguing that the sustained narrative of our identity is dynamic and can be changed at any point. Stressing that identity is never whole nor stable but fragmented and shifting, Hall explains that "the subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent 'self.'" (277). Both Giddens, Hall and other cultural critics follow in the footsteps of the Poststructuralists who had early on rejected the essentialist claim of a stable unified and universal selfhood by subordinating the human subject to the effect of language and discourse (see Derrida 1972, Foucault, 1977). Put together, these views throw up the concept of subjectivity and identity as constructs, either linguistically or historically, and existing only within language and representation.

In light of this, identities may be socially, culturally or institutionally assigned. For instance, in the case of

citizenship, state institutions produce the discourses within which citizenry is constructed. The same is applicable to gendered subjectivity where cultural norms define masculine or feminine identities. In each case, they often relay on active identification on the part of the subject so defined. For example, citizenship relays on an individual taking up a subject position from a government agency which allocates the markers of citizenship such as birth certificates, indigene certificates or passports. In the case of gendered identity, forms of dress, manner of speaking, walking and other social etiquettes are branded as gender specific and “encourage normative gender identification and behaviour” (Butler 8). For ethnic and religious identities, cultural signs, symbols and practices, often marked by dress code, pattern of consumption and socialisation define such identities. These markers qualify the subjects to certain rights and privileges which may not be open others.

Identity and Otherness

At the centre of all claims to identity is the question of difference. Many philosophers have argued that we become conscious of who we are through a medium of identification which is alien to us. Consequently, mutual recognition between self and other has been a feature of theories of subjectivity. Fredrick Hegel, in *The Phenomenology of Mind* (1908), argued that the other is essential to the realisation of self-consciousness (Qtd in Weedon 17). In addition to this, the wide range of identities available in a society and the modes of subjectivity that go with them are not always open to all people. They are often restricted to specific groups, usually on the basis of discourses of class, gender, race or sexuality. Non-recognition and non-identification

leaves the individual in a state of non-subjectivity and lack of agency. In which case the individual concerned must fall back on subject positions other than the ones to which they are denied access. Invariably, every identification looks up to the other and work towards the identity it identifies.

On the whole, like the human subjectivities that they seek to represent, identities are inevitably constituted and determined by their relations to otherness. The identification process is therefore fluid, ever-shifting and open-ended. Always being constructed by the shifting power of language and discourse. They are also sustained by the different forms of narratives and practices-historical, political, fictional and visual- that re-enact them. (Hall, 19 and Baker, 12).

The Nigerian Space and Emerging Identities

Nigeria is a country of over 197 million people (United Nations 2018 report) administered through a federal structure comprising the federal, states and local governments. The states are structured, largely, along ethnic affiliation such that people belonging to the same ethnic group are indigenous to a particular state. Individual identity, thus, largely relays on ethnic relationship. And the Nigerian state relays on state indigene-ship for identification of its citizens. In line with this, the Southern part of the country, due to the early influence of Christianity is predominantly Christian and people from the south are easily presumed to be Christians. The same goes for Islam and the north(erners). However, work and trade has led to massive migration of people across the states. This cross-migration has produced inter-ethnic alliances in both business and private lives. At another level, the country

is open to influx of people from other countries that have also formed alliances with the citizens. The inter-mingling of diverse cultures gives rise to multiplicity of culture and newer forms of identities, each negotiating its space within the nation. How are writers grappling with this phenomenon? The article explores this in Sule's *Sterile Sky*, Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* and Mohammed's *Habiba*.

Ethnic and Religious Identities in *Sterile Sky*

Sterile Sky is E. E. Sule's debut novel. It is a biographical narration which events coincide with the author's childhood. The novel which won the Commonwealth Writer's Prize for Africa in 2013 fictionalises the religious crisis precipitated by the visit of the Christian Evangelist Reinhard Bonnke to Kano in October 1991. The narrative reveals polarization along religious divides in Nigeria's multicultural settings, pointing to the devastating effects of the struggle for space, power and dominance among followers of Christianity and Islam. Narrated through the experience and perception of the teenage Murtala, the novel partly indicts religion, bad governance and the structural inequalities between developed and developing nations for the suffering experienced by many Nigerians. However, at its core, Sule attempts to unravel the scourge of religious conflicts which often lead to death and destruction in many Nigerian cosmopolitan centres.

Kano, the novel's setting, is a veritable metropolis inhabited by people from various sections of the country as well as foreign nationals, mostly Lebanese, Nigeriens, Sudanese and Chinese. Kano is one of Nigeria's commercial hub. From the pre-colonial days, trading in hide and skin, groundnuts and cotton attracted people from many parts of Africa and the Arabia to the ancient

city. At the advent of colonialism, the construction of a major railway line from Lagos to Kano and the establishment of multinational companies like Leventist, Bata and UAC opened up the city to an influx of workers from all over the African continent (Osaghae 14). Many of these people made Kano their home, living together with the predominantly Muslim indigenous Hausa ethnic group.

Sterile Sky reflects how the struggle for religious supremacy between Christians and Muslims leads to horrendous acts of violence against one other. Sule denounces this, advocating for a society where a common humanity supersedes religious affiliation. He achieves this through characterization. Two types of characters are identifiable in the narrative. First, those whose sense and actions are mediated by the discursive practice of their constructed identity and second, those characters that break the binary divide in pursuit of mobility towards harmonious coexistence. This, perhaps, is Sule's ideal human being- one who sees beyond constructed identities, and the barriers they create, in their dealing with others.

As point in fact, Christians and Muslims in Kano have had a fairly long history of conflict over issues such as citing of places of worship, open –air preaching and accusations of blasphemous and insightful comments by followers of both religions. (Mukhtar 23, Balogun 12). This is the scenario Sule portrays in *Sterile Sky*. Muslims and Christian characters are locked in a battle of spiritual supremacy grounded on the narrative of eternal salvation and exclusion. The novel shows the aggressive conversion campaigns by the Christians, and the intolerance displayed by the Muslims as sites of identity struggle. While the Christian ‘settlers’ contend the right

to their crusades, the Muslim ‘indigenes’ maintain it is an affront on their faith and an attempt to undermine their ownership of the city. (Sule 1). As such, the visit by Reinhard Bonnke sparked the first bout of killings, as Murtala narrates:

I sighted the chanting mob. Some had their fists in the air. Others wielded swords, spears and cutlasses... I turned and saw thick smoke surging from upwards behind the mob. A kiosk with Reinhard Bonnke’s posters pasted on it caught flame... ‘They are burning houses! They are killing people! Two terrified women stood by me near the station entrance. They carried on their heads trays they hawked. One of them said ‘Dem say dey no wan Bonnke to come to Kano. I no know why the man come by all means sef’ (2).

In this incident, the irate Muslim mob, on a killing rampage, slay supposed Christian men, women, children and fetuses. (6-8). The Christian mob also burn down Mosques and kill Muslims in their own quarters (42).

As the novel narrates gory tales of inter- religious violence it also shows that the identity markers which the subjects relay upon to carry out these acts are never whole nor consistent. They are fluid and ever shifting. For instance, Baba Murtala, supposedly a Christian by virtue of his ethnicity, is in speech and conduct, wary of religious doctrines. He voices disdain for the Christian practice of offering collection and mocks his wife’s ardent belief in miracles to overcome their poverty. Mama Murtala, in spite of her fervent prayer turns to her

ancestral belief in dire times. Baba Fatima converts to Islam to preserve his life and plans to revert to Christianity once he returns to his home in the south (Sule 47). In another instance, Baba Murtala is treated unfavourably by his superior, a Christian Igbo, who harbours a deep hatred for Hausa people. Baba Murtala, though from the north, is not Hausa nor Muslim (149). Madam well-well, a Christian from the north, is killed by the Christian mob on the same narrative that align the identity of northern subjects with Islam and southerners with Christianity. Tony and Omodiale, self-acclaimed Atheists, are lumped together with the Christians and suffer the wrath of the Muslims. These instances points to the fragmented and ever-shifting nature of the human identity, as Dana Haraway explains that “the knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and therefore able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another.” (193)

As the novel calls attention to identity’s fluidity, it also creates characters that break the binary divide, such as Imatum, the protagonist’s younger sister, the Barber who rescues the protagonist’s family from the killers, Ola, the protagonists friend and benefactor and the children of the neighborhood. Imatum is cast as a dissident character. She builds relationships across religious and ethnic lines, and marries a Hausa/Muslim in spite of her mother (Sule 117,225). The Barber sticks-out his neck to save his Christian neighbours based on the conviction that the ‘host’ has the responsibility to take care of his ‘quest’ (Sule 71). Ola’s parents belong to the two antagonistic faiths and live peacefully in love and harmony. The children of the neighbourhood play, eat and

watch out for one another, unmindful of the raging hostility among their parents. The children's actions, most importantly, validates the view that identities are not essential but constructed, hence, at childhood they are oblivious of their ethnic or religious identities and differences.

Sule's response to the construction of social identities, the struggle for supremacy and the menace it creates, offers profound insights in to the workings of identity in multicultural settings. More so, *Sterile Sky* exposes the looseness of identity strands, suggesting that people can break the barriers that set them apart. If only we think of identity as, in the words of Stuart Hall, "a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation..." (222). This posits that we can reverse our discursively constructed identities using the same mechanism of language which constitutes it for us. Thus, we can equally interrogate those discursive practices that perpetuate the marginalization, exploitation and suppression of people with different identity markers from ours. Such a view will enable us attain mobility towards a harmonious and better life.

Gendered and Racialized Identities in *Yellow-Yellow*

A better life in Port Harcourt is what Zilayefa goes in search of after her family losses its means of sustenance to oil spillage in Kaine Agary's *Yello –Yellow*. Published in 2006, *Yello-Yellow* depicts environmental degradation, poverty and women exploitation. Indeed, critics have reviewed the novel as a reflection of the impact of oil production on the environment and women of Nigeria's Niger Delta, (Egya 3, Ude 111). This analysis shifts

attention to the author's concern with racial, in addition to gender, difference and exploitation.

Zilayefa, the novel's heroine is a mix-race child born of a fling between a young Nigerian girl and a Greek sailor whose ship had briefly docked in Port Harcourt. Port Harcourt, like Kano, is one of Nigeria's cosmopolitan cities with a long history of trade with Europe, dating back to the 1800s. Historians have documented that trade in palm oil had open up the port to British conglomerate, the Royal Niger Company later known as the United African Company, which maximised British interest in the palm oil trade (Flint 62). This was heightened by the discovery of crude oil in the 1960s. Oil companies like the Dutch Shell, the American Chevron established their presence in the city. The interaction between the foreign nationals' and local women produced bi-racial children.

Bibi, Zilayefa's mother, was a naïve eighteen-year-old who goes to work as a secretary in one of the shipping companies in Port Hcourt. There she gets enamored by the Greek sailor and dreams of living happily ever after (Agary 7). However, this is short-lived, as his ship sailed, leaving her pregnant. Disillusioned, she returns to the village determined to raise her 'yellow' child.

In a community of Black people, mixed-race children are regarded as the other. In the classical discourse of otherness, the other is at once an object of desire and derision (Said 18). Mixed-race women, because of the deference in complexion, hair, eyes and colour, are often greatly admired and desired by the opposite sex. At the same time, for circumstances of their birth, mostly out of wedlock, they are considered of lesser moral character. Even in instances where the parents are married, they are discriminated against on the bases of

lineage. This passage from the novel is very revealing about the perception of mixed-race women:

In Port Harcourt, being yellow defined my interactions with the people I meet. Most people did not just ask where I am from; they asked where my father was from. I came to understand that people had preconceived notions about others of mixed-race – they thought we are conceited, promiscuous, undisciplined, and confused. A mixed-race woman in a position of power must have gotten there because of her looks. She was not there because she was intelligent. There was even much less regard for *born-troways* (illegitimate children) such as me. We were products of women of easy virtue who did not have morals to pass on to their children (74).

In the case of Zilayefa, she suffers a triple tragedy of being mixed-race, a girl child and an illegitimate one. First, she suffers the absence of a father, even though it is a realisation that dawns on her later when she meets a 'white' man for the first time. Meeting Sergios, a Spanish antique dealer who visits her village, sets her thinking about her father and spurs a desire for emotional bond with this stranger. On meeting him, she realises, for the first time that she is really different from other people in the village, for she notices that:

[H]is complexion stood out just as mine did in that room...I wonder if he was Greek. The similarities in our physical attributes

reminded me how different I was from everyone else in the village...I cannot say that I have ever really longed for my father; in fact, I barely thought of him at all...I did not care for him one way or another, but seeing this man brought me thoughts of my father. Where was he? Would I know him if I saw him? (20)

Her attraction to Sergio, born out of the desire to connect with her father, as we see later in the narration, leads to a sexual relationship that could have resulted in a pregnancy.

Secondly, being a girl, Zilefaye, like all the women in the novel, lives under a patriarchal culture that exploits women. The novel narrates that in the traditional setting, the Ijaw women are expected to work and feed the family. Apart from the physical hardship to which the women are exposed to, they are excluded from decisions that concern their families and are often physically and psychologically abused. Bibi tells Zilayefa that back in the days of her youth, a young man needed only carve a canoe for his new wife which she would use to fish and plant food crops to feed her family. But those were days when the rivers and farms were not polluted, and the women could work and provide healthy meals for their families. With the contamination of land and water, Bibi laments that

...the men where even more oppressive than the women alive could remember. They demanded a healthy meal when they were hungry, disregarding the fact that the women had to walk extra kilometers to get

fire wood or cultivate and harvest the food
now fertilized by their sweat and blood (40).

Following the discovery of oil, environmental degradation caused by oil production, render many without means of sustenance. Many young women move to Warri, Bonny or Port Harcourt to prostitute, exposing their bodies to the risk of diseases and other occupational hazards like the white men who insert bottles into their vagina or the black men who beat them up and collect their money. (39). This is the life Zilayefa contemplates before she got lucky to be adopted by Sisi, an elderly, rich mixed-race woman who offer to sponsor her university education. Education, however did not guarantee her freedom from exploitation. Rich men like the Admiral, exploit the innocence of naïve girls. At only seventeen, he lures Zilefaye, possibly, impregnates and abandon her.

The story which Kaine Agary weaves around her characters is an unfortunate tale of discrimination and exploitation. The way that people respond to the phenomenon of cross-racial relationships and the products of such unions reveal the discursive practice around such identities as negative. The perception of the society about mixed-race women, their treatment as trophies by rich men who later abandon them, and the denial of lineage places them in a marginal position. While Agary's *Yello-Yellow* throws up these concerns, unlike *Sterile Sky*, the novel does not raise hope for these category of subjects. Sisi, though successful in the business front, lives a lonely life because the parents of her 'man', the father of her child, forbids him from marrying her because she is an "oyibo's (white man) child. She tells Zilafaye that in the past some parents even kill their half-caste babies because it was a

shameful thing to have them (101). Those who survive live with the burden of shame and rejection on account of their lineage. The novel ends on a sad note with young Zilayefa drenched in her blood in the process of terminating the pregnancy that may have been the Admiral's or Sergio's.

Gendered and Sexualised Identities in *Habiba*

Just as the protagonist of *Yellow-Yellow* portrays a contradictory racial identity, for Habiba, the protagonist of Mohammed's *Habiba*, it is the experience of an unstable childhood that constructs her subjectivity. For the thirteen years of her life, she lives with either of her divorced parents at different moments. Then she is married off to the randy 64-year-old Alhaji Hamisu, then to early motherhood and the discovery of a new sexuality. Mohammed engages the cultural and religious discourses on the identity of a girl-child in northern Nigeria, as well as sexuality and sexual orientation in *Habiba*.

In traditional Nigerian settings sexual activities tend to be private, thus sexual orientations are not easily discerned. Most Nigerian writers portray sexual relations in subtle ways. However, new themes emerging in contemporary Nigerian fiction tend to unabashedly reflect sex and sexuality. Chimamanda Adichie in *The Thing Around Your Neck*, Abani's *Grace Land*, Uzodima Iweala's *Beast of No Nation*, Tess Onwueme's play, *Tell It to Women*, as well as Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Tree* deal with homosexual characters. All of these writers, however, write from abroad. Commenting on the depiction of homosexual/lesbian relationships by Nigerian writers, Nigerian poet-scholar, Tanure Ojaide, opines that globalisation and the standardisation of Western culture as the norm has prompted this

development. He states that “obsession with sex in a rather lurid form, uncommon in African cultural norms, are exhibited in African fictional works that are seen as successful in the western world” (4). However, Ojaide is not unmindful of the fact that the lesbian/gay phenomenon is real, indicative where he comments that although American based writers portray homosexual relationships, those writing from home shy away from it. For Ojaide, its either those at home are suppressing truth or those outside in the West are pandering to Western tastes (5).

Homosexual relationships have come to the fore front in the Nigerian polity. In 2013, an association of lesbians, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) presented a bill to the Nigerian Parliament demanding recognition and the right to same sex marriage, among others. The bill was rejected, and on January, 7 2014, the then President Goodluck Jonathan signed in to law a bill criminalizing same sex relationships and the support of such relationship, making these offences punishable by up to fourteen years in prison. However, more people are “coming out” bolstered by the social media, discussing these issues.

In *Habiba*, Razinat Mohammed draws attention to lesbian relationship that happens between co-wives deprived of a husband’s affection in a polygamous marriage. While this situation does occur, it is still taboo and rarely discussed, much less written on. Consequently, the affair is not the centre of the narrative, in fact, it only occupies a few pages towards the tail end of the novel. However, its significance lays in the resolution of the crisis in the narrative. Mohammed depicts homosexuality as a response to men domination of women in *Habiba*. Homosexuality is thus portrayed as

an act of defiance and a liberating force in a male dominated society.

Published in 2013, the novel revolves around a young girl whose dream is cut short by a greedy grandmother, a wimpy father and a randy old rich husband. Growing up in the north-eastern city of Maiduguri, Habibi, the heroine, loves going to school and nurses a dream of becoming a very educated woman before she was married off to Alhaji Hamisu at the tender age of thirteen. Habiba's experience is not uncommon in northern Nigeria where young girls are married off without their consent. They are usually left with the choice of living in a miserable marriage or fleeing to bigger cities to live off prostitution. Thus the dilemma of the girl-child is the major theme of this novel. Habiba the protagonist is betrothed to Malam Zubairu, a man of over sixty years who loves to collect women as he collects treasures (*Habiba* 33). The lecherous Zubairu takes the young girl in exchange for debt owned him by her father.

After the violation, the young bride feels immense hatred for the father who abandons her and the husband who continually rapes her. She contemplates killing herself or running off to prostitution, but the early morning lethargy completely disorients her. The birth of a child halts her plans. Trapped, she strikes companionship with Rabi, Zubairu's barren wife, who offerd to help Habiba nurse the child. Rabi:

... lend the young mother a helping hand with the new born. That led to a new experience for both when the elder woman "offered to help squeeze the excess milk...the warm milk had spurted on to the face of the older woman and had flowed

between her breast and down through her navel to her cleavage. The warm feeling of liquid flowing in to that part of her body had an aphrodisiac sensation in her brains. It was a rustic original sin in the life of mankind... (173).

Discovering this pleasure opens a new possibility for Habiba. She realises that she could have the safety of a home, material provision and emotional as well as sexual satisfaction. This makes her abandon the options of committing suicide or running off to prostitution. The anger she feels towards her father and the resentment for Malam Zubairu all fade away as she finds new happiness in the arms of Rabi.

At the surface, Razinat Mohammed seem to suggest that the two women engage in the relationship out of spite for the husband. However, the resolution of the novel shows that the women find comfort in each other's arms as the relationship heals the wound in their hearts. For Rabi, her childlessness, and for Habiba, the forced marriage, the husband's cruelty and the dream cut-short.

The novel ends at this point. No one knows about the relationship, as such readers do not get to know how the society respond to it. Nonetheless, the novel's engagement with the issue is a bold step by Mohammed in representing an inevitable aspect of a multicultural society which is rather kept taboo. Such endeavour will lead to the understanding of differences in sexuality, capable of reversing the discourse which constructs heterosexuality as the norm, and other forms of sexual orientations as the silent other (Foucault 101). Mohammed's engagement with homosexuality in *Habiba*

throws up the possibility of reversing the discourse of lesbian relationship.

Conclusion

The Poststructuralists have argued that the identities and subject positions we claim are nothing essential or innately inherent in us, but are constructed out of several and contradictory discourses through a process of differences. Cultural critics added a historical dimension to contend that our identities survive only through consistently living it. Following this, the role of representation in re-enacting identities becomes very crucial. Against this backdrop, our preceding discussion of the representation of religious, racial, gender and sexual identifies in three Nigerian novels show that contemporary writers are aware of the manifestations of diverse identities in the polity. The growth of Christianity and Islam as dominant religions ushered in new forms of identities. Cross-racial marriages produce different race of indigenous people, while the influence of globalisation spurs awareness on sexuality. All of these give rise to complexities in levels of relationship within society, as seen in the three novels.

The essay calls attention to the ways that literature engages these developments and opens up the space for discussion that drives understanding of our society. Such discussion is geared towards recognising those markers of differences that engender disharmony. It also shows that discourses of differences that have placed some subjects at the negative side of the dividing line can be reversed for a better and harmonious existence.

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