

# Topical Issues and Current African Literature



Chisom Perpetua G. Egbufor

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## Abstract

Literature is concerned with man's social world, his adaptation to it and his desire to improve it. Literature is a social institution, which uses Language as its medium. Literature represents life and to a large extent, a social reality. An ideal literature therefore reflects the happenings in its society. Therefore, the topical in every society is a veritable muse for African writers, as they are able to swoop in on the news making nature of the current events for their thematic preoccupation. Every period in time in human society has its topical issues that can be and are addressed through literature. Topical issues reflect the economy, politics, religion, inventions, behavioural changes and practices, cultural shifts, changes in tradition, revolutions and so on of its society. African writers have a deepening susceptibility for social and political commitment as their texts depict socio-political events in their societies. Markedly, African writers have put out works that have become part of the larger universal literary space; a weapon for re-establishing the true African personality, and an effective slingshot against colonialism and post-colonialism situations. This paper will attempt an assessment of the relevance of topical issues in African writings and how African writers have harnessed the resources of topical occurrences to address pertinent issues of their society. Attention will be paid to selected poems of Niyi Osundare, Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* and Isidore Diala's *The Truce*, to show how African writings benefit from the topical in their society. The preoccupation of this paper is hinged on a combination of the sociological and postcolonial theory of literature. It will highlight how events in society impact literature, also how topical issues in African society are consequent of interaction between African leaderships and followership as postcolonial realities. Thus, African writers effectively harness the topical in the society, utilizing every aspect, pros and cons included, to produce interesting, insightful and captivating works for their audience as well as asking and answering relevant questions for the progress of society.

**Key words:** Topical issues, African writings, Literature, African writers, Preoccupation, Human society.



## Introduction

...the use of the topical in literature does not only locate a work in time and place, its gestures towards the timeless notwithstanding; it equally raises basic questions about the production of literature and its reception as it does about the literary forms, their powers, and their limits (Diala 210-211).

The topical is news that stays news, despite the probability of loss of context, when the time and space of the event elapses, qualifying it as history; that is, when the thematic predilections of the topical are read outside of the period the news took place. Consequently, the audience may grapple with understanding the situational context that birthed the text. Diala explains better: “It is perhaps ultimately unascertainable whether the most skilful historian or archivist can preserve the quick of the fire of actuality available to contemporary readers to guide later generations of readers hereafter” (227). Nonetheless, topical issues are like manure to the imagination of the African writer, an insightful muse that is irresistible. The prolific thematic resources available for the writer to address topical situations, the topical being that which is current and immediate requiring emergency attention, seem to have chosen the best genre of writing to address it. Prose and drama take protracted time to articulate through all stages of their production, leaving poetry, the short, pithy sibling to rise to the occasion of emergency attention that topical issues demand. Diala posits that “Recent pandemic poetry evidently demonstrates [...] poetry’s particular suitability for appropriating the topical” (226).

Since the era of colonialism is no more, there has been a shift in the focus of African writings and contemporary writers have concentrated on issues that emanated after independence in Africa. The colonies have started writing back to the Empire. Former colonies have produced renowned writers of the three genres of literature who address the open wound in the heart of Africa. The predilections of post-colonial writers in Africa is that of despair, disappointment, identity crisis, tyranny, betrayal of past and present administrations, corruption and lack of development. In his work, *Wretched of the Earth* Frantz Fanon emphasized that African Literature should restore the dented dignity of a colonized people. He writes:

Colonialism destroys national culture. It disrupts the Cultural life of a conquered people, cultural obliteration is enabled by negation of national reality, banishment of natives their customs and



systematically enslaving of men and women. These have powerful psychological effects on people (166-169).

African literature is no longer on how Europe underdeveloped Africa but how Africans are under-developing Africa. Thus, writers are no longer doing it as art for art sake; they are making their art matter by highlighting socio-economic issues that affect their various societies, at the same time calling for the decolonization of the African mind and spirit.

Contemporary writing in Africa is filled with many topical issues, and there are many highways one's vehicular research can take. Be it religion, politics, socio-economic experiences, feminism, equality and or gender concerns. The connection between contemporary African writing and post-colonialism cannot be separated easily, as most issues emanating from the discourse in Africa are termed postcolonial issues. These issues impact on society and are evidently themed in the literature of the time. Writers as purveyors of information heal their society through their writings in fulfillment of their pertinent roles as nation builders. Chinyere Nwahunanya in addressing post-colonial African writing notes that:

The issues raised in post colonial criticism includes the dilemmas of developing a national identity in the wake of colonial rule, the ways in which writers from colonized countries attempt to articulate and celebrate their cultural identities and reclaim them from colonizers; how knowledge of subordinate people is produced and used, and the way in which the literature of the colonial powers is used to justify colonialism through the perpetuation of the images of the colonized as inferior (41).

Postcolonialism is perceived by some as the official ending of colonialism, while to some such a statement is not agreeable. It is just the beginning of it. It has been said to evolve in other forms. In other words, post-colonialism is a mirage; an illusion created by the imperialists to satisfy the urging thirst of the colonies. Some scholars believe that colonialism in 'postcolonialism' has shape-shifted into 'neo-colonialism'. Another way post-colonialism can be viewed in African writing involve the issues raised by contemporary poets immediately after independence. Throughout the African continent, the experiences of each state on the continent are nearly the same. From bad leadership, civil wars, economic collapse, underdevelopment, famine, ethnic clashes, and very now, gender equality and gender role (same sex) concerns, Africans seem to



share the same veins of postcolonial troubles. The writings of Africans either from North, West, East or South, are echoes of the impact of the past on African society which is still ongoing yielding many sociological impacts presently.

As earlier highlighted that poetry is imbued with qualities for immediate response to topical issues enabled first generation African poets to write on the independence of their countries from colonialism immediately. Furthermore, second generation and contemporary poets, are also witnesses to the mishaps of post-independence; they are all scribes who codify the events of postcolonial Africa through the voice of poetry. The troubles encountered in early sixties when most African nations gained independence is unarguably the same in this 21st century, and in some cases, it is worse. For instance, the current wave of “fantastically corrupt” African leaders and same-sex relationships that is now happening in all African states shows the worsening constraints of the influence of the colonialist’s neocolonialism. Various writers from different regions of Africa have taken the bull of topicality by the horns and addressed social, economic, political and religious issues with the immediacy they require as topical trends. Particularly in Nigeria, a multiethnic entity amalgamated by the colonialists, with a great deal of social upheavals, writers have continued to deal with contemporary and topical issues with intentional aptitude that cannot be mistaken; the reawakening for a better society and the need to jettison and imbibe ideas that are not favourable or favourable, respectively for the development of Nigeria. There is unwritten code of brotherhood amongst African writers like we see in the writings of renowned poets such as Niyi Osundare, Kofi Anyidoho, Ben Okri, Bai T. Moore, Funso Aiyejina and P.O.C Umeh. They all raised similar issues in their poetry. The disillusionment of postcolonial Africa remained their thematic preoccupation for as long as it matters, and it has always mattered. Topical issues arise often and take a viral turn in the period of occurrence, causing anxiety, trauma, sickness, hatred, mayhem, looting and death more often than not. The chaotic turn of events is attributable to the more negative than positive occurrences that human society experience. It is agreeable that bad news spread like wildfire; therefore topical issues that make viral news and take precedence on the list of every kind of media are the more shocking and blood chilling news. This is not to say that there are no positive, uplifting topical issues, but these ones usually do not make viral news. They are taken for granted as natural and innate to humanity whereas the negative or bad occurrences are seen as aberration to human nature that needs to be checkmated and pruned. Presently in



Nigeria, while the post-colonial realities of bad leadership in all aspects are growing in leaps and bounds, with no hopes of retracting its diabolic proboscis, other forms of topical situations emerge. From feminist discourse to gender equality, gender roles, transgender rights and same-sex relationships, religious bigotry and fanaticism, religion leaders' exploitative gimmicks, ethnic wars, banditry, rebellions, human rights activism, there is an abundance of thematic resources for writers to explore. The topical is a reliable trope for the writer, either as a social critic or a book author, and they have made good use of it. Consequently, it will be seen how Osundare's poetry taps into the topical, sparing no sarcasm and satire, and Dibia's novel of 2005 takes on the very sensitive yet topical same-sex relationship discourse and Diala's *The Truce* bravely captures the evil leadership of Nigeria and how a particular ethnicity have become endangered species. Consequently, it will be understood that the topical is very relevant for the vibrancy, newsy, newness and longevity of African writing.

### **The Topical and African writings**

#### **Poetry: Selected Poems of Niyi Osundare**

Niyi Osundare is one African writer that has continued to address topical issues in his poems, and some of his writings turn out somewhat prophetic. His tabloid poetry addresses topical issues with the immediacy it requires with such apt and insightfulness that seems effortless. During the military regime of Late General Sani Abacha, Osundare's "Not My Business" one the poems in his *Songs of the Season: Poems* collection, addresses the despotic nature of General Abacha's rule from 1993-1998, a topical issue at the time. The poet under the guise of nonchalant attitude passed across his message:

They picked Akanni up one  
morning Beat him soft, like clay  
And stuffed him down the belly  
Of a waiting jeep

What business of mine is it  
So long they don't take the yam  
From my savouring mouth?



“Not My Business” is an eight stanza poem, a topical parody of the military rule experienced under then General Abacha. It treats the themes of tyranny, apathy and death, evoking emotions of fear and panic. Here, the poet commentator silently points out the evils being perpetrated by the Abacha’s regime that arrests people in a suspicious manner. It is a regime known for assassination of political opponents like M.K.O Abiola, Kudirat Abiola, Shehu Yar’adua, Pa Alfred Rewane etc. Also, there is a silent call for the masses to wake up from their slumber and not manifest the lackadaisical attitude of “so long they don’t take yam/from my savouring mouth” being shown by most Nigerians. The poem highlights the dangers of apathy and the consequences of turning a blind eye to the suffering of others as injustice impacts everyone. It may be Danladi’s turn today; perhaps it will be that of the poet tomorrow or anyone with the nonchalant feeling. The fear and anxiety that runs through the poem sets the mood for the reader on the impact of bad leadership on the people and the society. The poet-persona speaks about how tyranny grows if not checkmated, either by the revolt of the oppressed or the dialogue of intellectual stake holders. The last but one stanza of the poem tells about the fate of those often given to the “not my business” slogan. They are eventually caught in the web of their elfishness, as the evil acts of the nation’s leadership visits them. The setting of the story as already noted is postcolonial, post-independence Nigeria, but it is applicable to other countries of the world, especially African countries where tyranny is rife and postcolonial misrule thrives. Osundare is one African writer that has always paid heed to topical occurrences to advance his work’s thematic preoccupation, which in most cases addresses the ills of postcolonial African leadership, the pains of the masses and the rot in the society in general.

Recently in Nigeria, Osundare’s social criticism, especially with his tabloid poetry, of the happenings in Nigerian politics, such as the gamut of electoral malpractices and the dishonourable ruling of the judiciary, has become an apt road map of Nigeria’s social crises, post-independence. His poems addresses what happened, what is happening and what will happen if positive changes are not made in Nigeria polity. In “Remember Rwanda,” Osundare addresses the topical situation ongoing at the time of Nigeria 2023 election. The poet-speaker plainly refers to the devastating tragic experience of the Rwandan civil war which happened from October 1, 1990 – 18 July 1994 (Rwandan Civil [War-en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)), as a likely outcome in Nigeria in 2023 or the near future, if precautions are not taken to curb the ugly menace rearing its head. Some lines of the poem reads:



The poisonous correspondence  
Of region and religion

The journey from hate to holocaust  
Indeed is perilously short

Pogroms often begin  
With the first misbegotten word  
Ye flamethrowers of the current  
Nigerian war,  
Remember Rwanda.

In “Remember Rwanda,” the poet-speaker is raising alarm on the malicious impact of the post-colonial realities on the minds of the people and the society as a whole. The recent Nigeria elections fouled the society with cruel propaganda on religion and ethnicity as noted the second stanza of the poem; “the poisonous correspondence/of region and religion,” inciting skirmishes and wars amongst the polity and the less privileged masses. The speaker further addresses the situation where some ethnic groups are being pursued to leave their place of residence in other parts of the country; “war of words, words foretelling wars/about who owns the land/and who is owned by the land,” amidst threat to their lives and properties, just so that they do not vote for their preferred candidate. The speaker ends this first part of the poem with a reminder of the havoc hatred is capable of, and makes a wakeup call to the people about what such hatred has cost them before; “the nation’s memory is under assault/from marinated murmurs and slanderous slurs/ the journey from hate to holocaust /indeed is perilously short.”

In the second part of the poem, the speaker wonders how the citizen’s neighborliness and brotherhood disappeared in “how does a trusted neighbor/suddenly turn a neigh-bore.” In “Legatees of a hasty amalgamation/whose mongrel congregations have never learnt/To adult into a bonding whole,” the poet-speaker asks when the citizens of Nigeria, especially the manipulated masses who are brought together through an irrational and selfish amalgamation come together and unify against the manipulators, the colonialists and their African stooges, and wrench away from the chains holding them down. And finally the poet-persona notes that “pogroms often begin/with the first misbegotten word/Ye flamethrowers of the current Nigerian war/remember Rwanda,” cautioning every person involved in any action that spells doom for the nation to beware of the holocaust that took place in Rwanda between the Tutsi’s and Hutu’s, because such



decimation of human lives is precariously looming over Nigeria. “Remember Rwanda” is a poem that is apt, sad and goose-bumpy all at once. It clearly tells how human society is ruining itself through bigotry, hatred, selfishness, irrational words and decisions. It also highlights the post-colonial realities of Nigeria, the cruel machinations of the colonialists through their stooges of leaders despite independence. African leaders fail to realize that their sleeping minds are a fertile land for the seeds of underdevelopment and all of its qualities such as strife, suffering and lack in the nation. As colonialists’ henchmen, most African leaders remain at the mercy of diabolic crumbs from the tables of the Western world.

In “My Lord, Tell Me Where to Keep Your Bribe,” the poet-speaker is a social critic turned prophet because the poem, published in 2016, resonates loudly with the Nigerian populace because of the cacophony of injustice, misruling and bribery that occurred during the seating of the election tribunal of 2023. The judges brazenly took bribes and lied under oath during the ruling of the electoral cases brought before them, betraying Nigerians and their already fragile trust in the leadership of the country and the judiciary. The poet-speaker’s polite sarcasm and satirical description of the judges’ character is shocking yet insightful. The first lines read:

My Lord  
Please tell me where to keep your bribe  
Do I drop it in your venerable chambers  
Or carry the heavy booty to your immaculate mansion

The practice of using money to launder criminals’ image even before a high ranking officer of the law such as a judge is highlighted in the second stanza. This sad reality is ubiquitous in Nigeria, where vices are labeled virtues overnight at the mere sight and smell of cash money. And so the poet-speaker asks; “Shall I bury it in .../.../Since money can deodorize the smelliest crime” (Osundare “My Lord...”). The post-colonial writers are inextricable from political writings because of the stark reality of the government of their societies. The instability of the Nigerian government and volatile politics playing out every day, culminating in the underdevelopment of the society where the less privileged masses are the worst hit, hurts and inspires the writer. In an interview with Martijn Meijer, Osundare notes that the African writer and politics will be in a long lasting marriage. Here; “African poets have no choice but to be political in their work. You cannot keep quiet about the situation in the kind of countries we find ourselves in” (1). Going forward,



the poem satirizes the hypocritical behaviours of the Justices through all the stanzas, with a polite yet ridiculing refrain of the revered call name for Justices of Supreme courts-My Lord. The description of a sudden windmill of fortune that is not expected of a person of integrity as it were is seen in the following lines, “Or shall I conjure the walls to open up/And swallow this sudden bounty/from your honest labour”(My Lord..., 1). This is the sad reality in Nigeria today and is very visible amongst the elites, who were held in high esteem as persons of stoic character until they suddenly cease to be, betraying the trust of the masses after they have soiled their character. The domestic staffs of these sudden wealthy elites are representative of a handful of the proletariats who suffer the inhumanity and exploitation of their masters. They represent how the majority of the lower class suffers under the tyranny of Nigerian leaders and their enablers, like the judiciary that is supposed to be a safe haven of the poor masses. In the following lines, we are exposed to such exploitations:

Or shall I use the particulars  
Of your anonymous maidservants and manservants  
With their names on overflowing bank accounts  
While they famish like ownerless dogs

The last but one stanza of Osundare’s “ My Lord...”, continues to deprecate the character of the men and women of the judiciary who allow the political leaders manipulate them into ruling unjustly in their favour, as they share in the looted national bounty, perpetuating the impoverishment of the very society they are sworn to protect. Here:

Shall I haul it all to your village  
In the valley behind seven mountains  
Where potholes swallow up the hugest jeep  
And Penury leaves a scar on every house

The immediacy required to address topical occurrences as earlier cited is admirably met by poetry. Nonetheless, prose and drama do justice to the topical albeit it through a longer route, with run-on lines and enjambment. While the thematic predilections on the topical courted through poetry is often connotative and often uncovered through deep study and critical analysis, and sometimes that is not the case for persons whose imaginations are not very potent, it is denotative in prose and drama. This means that what prose and drama may have lost in the labyrinth of time, it gains



in clearer elucidation of topical events through prolific word use and dialogue among other literary devices available to the three genres of literature.

### **Prose: Dibia's *Walking with Shadows***

Jude Dibia is one of the new voices in Nigerian and African literary scene. According to Okpiliya, as one of the new voices they describe the world around them and the experiences of their ... fractured society (197). Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* (2005) has been credited as "the first Nigerian novel that has a gay man as its central character and that treats his experience with great insight, inviting a positive response to his situation" (*Walking...9*). The novel has also been credited as "an important gay advocacy fiction that has inspired many third generation Nigerian writers like Unoma Azuah, Chinelo Okparanta, Chimamanda Adichie etc to tackle homosexuality" (Chinenye Amonyeze, 3). Ifeyinwa Okolo also posits that Dibia's intention in this novel is "...to clearly acknowledge that homosexuality exists in Nigeria, to assign normalcy to gay people, to highlight the hostility of the Nigerian society for gay people, and finally to use his writing as a tool of advocacy for tolerance" (100-103). In Dibia's *Walking with Shadows*, the first African full-length literary work that explored the sensitive yet topical issue of same-sex relationship, we again come face to face with the fact of the invaluable nature of the topical to African writing. More than any other continent, as a developing continent going by 21<sup>st</sup> century standards, Africa is a fertile ground for novel situations and events, both those thrust on her by neo-colonists (postcolonialism) and those emanating from her bowels. One of such reality that is presently shaking the fabric of African continent to her core is the issue of same-sex relationship. In *Walking with Shadows*, Dibia addresses the novel kind of love and relationship, raising more questions than answering them. However, it helped to open the African mind to the frightening and now undeniable reality that same-sex relationship is at our doorstep despite the argument by most discussants that it is unAfrican. Homosexuality and other 'queer' sexual orientations are steadily gaining prominence in the Nigerian society. This affords many gay activists and sympathisers the impetus to openly challenge the un-Africanness ideology of homosexuality.

Within the African society, sex is a sacred reality, steeped in the culture and traditional norms of the people. Sex is understood or experienced within a heterosexual union and any other sexual preferences beyond this is seen as non-normative, queer and a disruption on the social order upon



which the society is sustained. Today many gay activists and sympathisers who have allowed themselves to be barraged by the Western ideas of sex, have come out to canvass for a place for homosexuality and other strange sexual preferences in the society. In their different polemics, they have vehemently, at every opportunity, challenged the sanctity and sacredness of sex and, citing some obscure and unfounded instances in the remote past, maintain the view that homosexuality from time, has been integral part of Africa's history. Through a re-reading of the text, the paper unequivocally maintains the fact that in Nigeria, contrary to Dibia's intention, there is no other experience of sex beyond that of a heterosexual union that is acceptable. Any other sexual preference is seen as queer, and corrosive to the cultural morals that define the people. This informs why the protagonist, Adrian suddenly becomes a fragmented personality, taken over by shame and hopelessness, immediately when the news that he is gay is made public. His sorry and pathetic state is heightened by the total denouncement, rebuke and rejection of his wife, Ada, his family members, co-staff and the general society. Thus, the narrative portrays a society going through pains and serious shock as it tries to come to terms with homosexuality.

The prologue of the narrative opens with the protagonist now known as Ebele going through baptism as a means of renouncing his former gay life in order to fit into the societal measurement of an ideal person. As a mark of this rebirth, he forsakes his old name Ebele and embraces Adrian symbolising a new individuality. However, the fact that he is no longer having sexual affairs with a man and is happily married with a daughter does not prevent the shock and betrayal that greet the revelation of his sexual identity. Ada asks in total shock and disbelief, "Are you gay, Adrian? Have you been gay all this while we've been married?... You were?... You knew this and still deceived me and still married me and still had the guts to make love to me and put your thing in me" (*Walking...*, 22-23). Even when Adrian puts up a defense that being gay was his past and that he left that part of his life when he met her, the shock and betrayal still remained. Ada's rhetorical questions underscore the level of disapproval associated homosexuality. "How would she face the world and hold her head up proudly? How will she face her family, his family? How will she tell her daughter that her father was a fraud? How could she continue to live with him? (*Walking...*, 24). Being homosexual in the society is not only detestable but tragic. This is because such relationship is not productive, thus undermining the continuity of the society. According to Grace Okereke:



Children are crucial in the continuity of a lineage, a clan, a society. Children are the base that hold up the structure and ensure the perpetuity of a family and the larger traditional society. A family and a society that has not many children are seen as heading for extinction. Thus, culturally, inability to procreate signals tragedy... (12).

Thus, when Abdul, Adrian's gay friend informs his family of his sexual identity, after the death of his father, his mother breaks into profuse weeping. "My mum cried. But I don't know if she was crying because she had lost her husband or that she was not to expect a grandchild from me" (31). Abdul's mother weeps because she knows that, with Adrian's sexual identity, the continuity of the family lineage is seriously threatened. Chiedu, Adrian's brother will not also conceal the shock when Adrian confesses of being gay: "Jesus Christ!... What will mum and dad say? (*Walking...*, 50). Thus, African homosexuals are regarded as not only bundles of shock, but individuals with fragmented personality, ignorant, tortured (Ashipu,79), always hopelessly and shamefully negotiating his existence in the society's schema. He is always on the defensive, struggling to be accepted as a normal person in the society. In this narrative, a voice keeps telling Adrian, "They know what you are! And he could not shake off a feeling of shame. He felt shame because he knew they were thinking he was sick, abnormal and surely a sinner already condemned to hell fire" (*Walking*, 137-8). At Adrian's place of work, the usual smile and cheerfulness that always herald his coming suddenly gives way to coldness and mere stolen glances:

Today as Adrian Walked into the office, people were stealing glances at him. There were muted whispers and even discreetly pointing fingers. The only difference was that Tayo was no longer there. But his damaging presence could be felt. After mumbling a few good mornings, Adrian shuffled into his office and locked the door behind him (*Walking*, 65).

In Nigeria, homosexual behaviour is seen as something close to an infectious disease and, coming in contact with a known homosexual appears to predispose one to being infected with the behaviour. In this narrative, Adrian's meeting with John buttresses the above assertion: "Though John acted as pleasantly as always, Adrian could detect uneasiness in his normally cool countenance. He offered Adrian a seat but quickly withdrew his hand after a brief handshake. It was as if John was afraid that by touching him, he would be infected" (69). The above scenario



echoes that in Nigeria, homosexuals are seen as object of pity. At Adrian's departure at the airport in South Africa enroute Nigeria, the airline officer, glancing at his passport critically intone that Adrian's sexual identity is "rather unusual for a Nigerian" (250). To avoid recriminations and reprimand from the society, many homosexuals have to put on the mantle of disguise by getting married and raising a family in order to gain positive valences within the society. Thus, in this narrative, Adrian remains an undercover gay, married to a beautiful and career driven woman Ada with a beautiful daughter Ego. His justification of getting married is that: "he had wanted to be accepted as a normal person. He wanted to fit in and not have people whispering about him behind his back, making assumptions" (*Walking*, 77). Even before he got married, "I had to make up girlfriends so people wouldn't think I was weird" (*Walking*, 54). Thus, Chinenye Amonyeze posits that "once Adrian's sexual orientation becomes public knowledge, the author depicts with great sympathy the crisis tearing Adrian's family apart on account of his secret sin" (6). Also, in his frantic effort to explain how he loves his family and how he left gay life after his marriage, Ada angrily hushes Adrian to "stop talking about love" (14). This is because in Nigerian society, one's sexual identity is more important than marital fidelity. The above assertion "reflects Ada's belief that Adrian's sexuality is a negative social valence outweighing his love and marital fidelity" (Amonyeze, 8).

Through the shock, reactions and apprehensions of some major characters in the novel, it goes to say that homosexuality as a topical issue is very sensitive and controversial. In Africa presently, it is still a bitter pill that is difficult to swallow, as many people argue that it is completely un-African and, seen as an attribute of the detrimental impact made on Africa by the West. Thus, throughout the novel, Ada seems to be in perpetual confusion as to how such queer sexual preference came into the Nigerian society. Her shock stems from the fact that:

The issue of homosexuality was a topic never discussed in any civil setting she knew of, and was taboo where she came from. It was abnormal as far as Ada was concerned, and now her life was entangled with it against her wish. She feared becoming one of the new 'outcasts' women rejected and scorned through no fault of theirs (*Walking*, 104).



In the main however, homosexuality as a topical issue is still untapped and in dare say it needs in depth exploration by writers. As they fillet the same-sex issue from different thematic angles, more light will be thrown on the harbinger and associative enablers of this postcolonial reality impacting heavily on the African continent.

### **Drama: Diala's *The Truce***

Isidore Diala is more renowned for his literary criticism for which he emerged the prize winner in The Nigeria Prize for Literature twice (2014 and 2018), than he is for his creative works; *The Pyre* (Drama), *The Lure of Ash* (Poetry) and now *The Truce*. Despite his acclaim as a literary critic, *The Pyre* and *The Truce*, his drama works are also joint winners of ANA Drama Prize for Literature 1992 and 2023 respectively, and his poetry volume *The Lure of Ash* won the ANA/Cadbury Poetry Prize in 1998. A professor of African literature, he is acutely aware of the resources available to African writers in the topical and has keyed into it. As one of the foremost African literary critic that has addressed topicality and its yields for text contents and contexts, he has carefully written an exciting new text *The Truce* (2023). It is a topical work that can be viewed in general context as well as the particular. Like Osundare, Diala addresses the ubiquitous tyrannical leadership taking place on the African continent and Nigeria in particular. Where there is incitement of pogrom, carnage and destruction against particular persons, groups, or ethnicities for no just cause other than they want a better society. *The Truce* reenacts the painful experiences of the majorly Igbo ethnicity of the south-eastern Nigeria in the year 2017 through 2019 in the wake of Operation Python Dance 1, 2 & 3.

The Nigerian Army has announced it will start another round of its Operation Python Dance II (Exercise Egwueke II) in the Southeast. Egwueke II which held last in 2017, was marred by controversy amid allegations of killings by the military of pro-Biafran agitators. ([premiumtimesng.com](http://premiumtimesng.com))

In the same vein, *Thisdaylive* correspondent Nwezeh writes that “The Nigerian Army yesterday launched “Operation Python Dance III” which it said was designed to checkmate violent groups and ethnic militia, to ensure a successful 2019 election (1). It is in the wake of these military activities in the Southeastern Nigeria, that *The Truce* is conceived.



The enigmatic protagonist of *The Truce* along with his admirers and antagonists take us through the three part drama. A gripping enactment of history and the present put in one. Alozie the protagonist is an embodiment of his people's history, their preferred way of life, norms and values as well as their Achilles heels. His camouflage of a limp, an emblem of experiences he is unable to tear himself away from. In the 'Dawn' of the play, Alozie hints of the imminent danger so close to him because of who he is (a war veteran) and what he stands for (human rights activist).

Alozie: (...) I feel it in my bones. Time, like a creature pregnant with ultimate monstrosity, prances in relentless steps towards me. [...] Time was when time was the healing was the healing arm of God. But now everything drifts down towards destruction. Fruits ripen and fall, all in the fullness of time. Let it come. [...] I say: Let it come (10).

The military operation, "Episode Python Dance" (*Truce* 10), is targeted at people demanding for equal rights and justice and often extra judicial killings are meted out to these persons, especially young men. The 1<sup>st</sup> woman speaks; "Adaku's only son was arrested yesterday..., he was apprehended as a member of the outlawed Marine Resistance Movement (MRM) and was tortured to death (12). In the same vein, illuminating the trauma and anguish brought upon the people by Episode Python Dance, 2<sup>nd</sup> Woman narrates an incident; "Ebere's own son joined the mother at her kiosk ..., all theyoung men were dragged out by soldiers of "Episode Python Dance" and mercilessly shot at (12). Also persons with certain pedigree and military experience in previous Nigerian civil war are marked out as agitators and rebel militia. Alozie, popularly called Old Soldier as a war veteran fits the description well, for not only did he fight in the war to help liberate his people from malignant amalgamation, he still fights for this freedom undercover in the present setting of the play.

Alozie: [...] But if you are right, then we all shall soon be suspects and accomplices. My limp marks me out, I believe, as a survivor of the war. [...] Anyway the problem with this kind of situation is that suspicion is already condemnation. You cannot punish one enough who is suspected to have fought for a rebel cause, no matter how long ago (*Truce*, 11).

In Nigeria today, "Operation Python Dance" is accurately renamed "Episode Python Dance" in *The Truce*. The dialogue expositions of the actors are quite similar to that of reality. In the Southeastern region during the military outing, the people wailed and mourned for the maiming and killing of their friends and family, for no justifiable reason. The majorly Igbo youths of the region were targeted for decimation and permanent gagging, more frightening is the targeting of



students, who at the time feared for their lives and stopped going to school. The killing of George, a protégée of Alozie and the protagonist of *Armistice* sets off an alarm in Alozie's mind, as he anticipates the worst and prepares, wearing a peculiar calm unexpected of him by some as Urenna notes; "Old soldier, you always mystify me! Is that your first utterance at the news of George's death" (42). Their youth is now dangerous to Nigeria, it seems. Alozie alerts the audience on this thus; "It is our extermination that they seek, those who carefully target our youths. The plantation, whose sap-laden suckers are condemned to early death imperceptibly withers from the face of the earth" (43). The part one acquaints us with the history of the struggle of the people of Biafra currently led by Maazi Nnamdi Kanu, who is currently being jailed on trumped up accusations in the custody of DSSS of Nigerian government.

The tempo of conflict and dialogue rises in the noon part of the play with the entrance of Senator Kaduru and Ukelele, both representatives of different arms of the government sponsoring the "Episode Python Dance." Ukelele with his irrational acts of killing and maiming innocents like the murder of George and monstrous attack of Ajuzie's right ankle has it hot for Alozie. But for the intervention of the three women admirers of Alozie, he will have shot Alozie on his first visit to "Alozie's Handmade Shoes" (9), shop. This part takes us through the unconcerned attitude of politicians and appointees of government with what is happening in their constituencies so far they have enough money to squander on their hedonistic fantasies. Kaduru is archetypal Nigerian politician who feigns ignorance of the devilry of the government, when asked by a friend what is amiss. His reply to Alozie's inquiry on when pythons began to dance is:

Buddy, are you kidding me? The army is having a routine annual exercise that should keep hoodlums scampering into their fucking dingy holes. ...But I am actually here for business as you can guess. Shoes for me and my baby girl (46).

*The Truce* touched topical issues of tyranny and military oppression around the globe that were happening during the period of the Operation Python Dance in Nigeria. The Black Lives Matter Movement that began in the USA and erupted like wild fire around the world is highlighted through George's murder by Nigerian soldiers. Alozie clarified Kaduru that George is not a cultist and was unjustly murdered, here:



...soldiers of “Episode Python Dance” found on him a few wooden guns meant to be used as props for staging their drama...the soldiers were unimpressed about their claims of being actors. The soldiers boasted of intelligence on a new cult group on campus that s using the wooden gun as its symbol! A hefty officer knelt on his neck, shouting on him to confess, in the process suffocating him until he passed away, his shrieks ignored (47).

Ukulele “scamper off ... screaming I go return, I go return” (65) to end the noon part leading into the Twilight of *The Truce* where the conflict reaches the climax. The interaction between Arugo, Alozie’s ex-military compatriot during the civil war, who envied Alozie very much to have wished him death, ushered in the first initial climactic discourse. Like Alozie’s shadow or sniffing dog, Arugo followed Alozie around, not out of love but because of his guilt. He eventually confessed to killing Alozie’s wife, Ekemma, in the heat of their arguments. Alozie mourned the death of Ekemma without any closure on how or what of her death until Arugo’s confession. “Her death was completely an accident. [...] It was altogether an accident that could have been avoided-if only she wasn’t so headstrong. Na devil work. (97). Alozie (Old Soldier) lived and died for what he believed in and who he knows he is, his foibles aside. He remained until the end a consistent fully developed protagonist who is admired for his formidable character and humanity all at once. A tragic death by cultural and social standards notwithstanding, Alozie’s choice is a difficult yet brave one. He took the high road, choosing to live and die on his own terms and made sure to take no prisoners.

## Conclusion

The topical is invaluable to the enterprise of writing in the world, and especially in Africa. As a developing continent, the bowels of the nations that make up Africa are regurgitating many stories, imagined and unimaginable. Through the exploration of these topical issues by African writers a new, working and healthy continent can be reconceived and reborn. In Nigeria, the works of the writers are cut for them as there is a gallimaufry of topical issues emanating often for adequate thematic predilection. Prose, Drama and Poetry are effective in addressing topical issues and it is understood through this text that poetry attends to the seeming emergency attention the topical requires, because of poetry’s brief, pithy and connotative qualities. It unravels the many meanings of its text through study and comprehension, since it is not elaborate. Drama and Prose on the other hand makes elaborate use of words for narration, description and dialogue, taking longer



production time. Osundare's topical poems were produced within the time he was inspired by topical situations in his country. Dibia and Diala's prose and Drama texts go through a labyrinth of time to emerge. Between Dibia and Diala's thematic concern in their respective works, the same-sex issue which seeped into Nigeria in the nineties is still a hotly debated and sensitive issue across Africa, while tyranny, oppression and corruption of African governments is a constant that however rears its head to emerge from one end of a social tunnel as holocaust or pogrom against a select group of citizens. The "Episode Python Dance" is the same devil with a different mask political power being flexed against particular ethnicity in Nigeria. Today it is not labeled "Operation Python Dance" in real time, but it is still subtly ongoing and called other names like "Ebubeagu" in the Southeast, "Amotekun" in the West and "Boko Haram" in the North or "Operation Search and Flush" as the case may be. In the main therefore, African writers as shown with the work of the three authors in focus, are not slumbering. They are putting their pens to work in the wake of any topical issue, steering their society away from the detrimental topical situations.

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