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**Illustrations, figures, graphics and tables** should appear in the body of the manuscript where the author wants them. Tables and figures should have short descriptive titles. The journal would prefer tables and figures rather than artworks.



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## **The Politics of Representations in Nigerian Homosexuality-focused Tweets**

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### **Abstract**

In discourses of discrimination and stereotype, existing studies have privileged the constructs instituted by powerful groups over those of the minority groups. In this study however, I pay attention to how subaltern in-group (pro-homosexuality) tweets challenge the constructs that stifle or inhibit homosexual self-expression. The data for the study is 114,000 corpus collected from ‘Nigerian’ Twitter. The corpus was subsequently processed with Anthony’s AntConc (2019) software. The quantitative analysis was complemented by the application of the tenets of Critical Discourse Analysis. Within the Queer-focused narratives, I identify ‘progressivism’ and ‘primitivism’ as oppositional identities used in shaping perspectives to advocacy for the acceptance or rejection of homosexuality in the Nigerian society. Through them, there is an engagement of the dialectics of otherness in homosexual discourse in Nigerian digital media. The framings bring into perspective the negotiation of power and dominance between the pro-heteronormative and pro-homosexuality groups. While the pro-homosexuality’s viewpoint is asserted through advocacy on legalisation, human rights and appeal to Westernisation as validation, the anti-homosexual narrative rebut the ‘primitivism’ framing through reference to diversity of cultural and moral codes, anti-neo-colonialism, and nationalist/independence verve.

**Key words:** homosexuality, queer narratives, politics of representation, tweets

### **Introduction**

Okanlawon (2015: 104) contends that, within the African context, the opposition to people of non-heterosexual orientation is often motivated by an ‘anti-neo-colonialist disgust for homosexuality’. Advocacies for the acknowledgement and acceptance of same-sex relationships however continue to gain ground globally (Karsten and Wetzel, 2018; Umberson

et al., 2015). Framed within the context of the recognition of human rights, more countries are encouraged to stem the tides of homophobia through the promotion of wholesome, equitable environment and provision of necessary legislation to temper discriminatory practices (Reddy, 2001; Maietta, 2019). While these activities are yielding fruits within some societies, many other societies for differing reasons maintain their stance against the proliferation of same-sex practices. One of the most democratised platforms where people express their views on this discourse is the social media (Carlsson and Weibull, 2018; Nahon, 2015; Picard, 2015). Unsurprisingly, representations of and contentions over viewpoints on the topic of queer sexuality are also found there. For this study, Twitter is used as a data collection resource. Twitter is a microblogging social networking media which allows people to post and interact with messages which are shared among registered users (Kwak *et al.*, 2010). The tweets by users can be engaged with via likes, retweets and responses. Through these, threads of a topic can be generated. Tweets can also be strengthened through the use of hashtags, which are textual markers to signal topics and to stimulate trends. Initially restricted to 140 characters per message, tweets can now be as lengthy as 240 characters, thus encouraging extended engagements on topical issues.

In exploring the politics of the representations of homosexuality in queer-focused Tweets from Nigeria, I focus on the ideological narratives that are embedded within purposively collected tweets. In many critical studies that explore language use for ideology- and identity-formation, focus is usually on the articulation of intolerance of minority groups and their practices, values, civil rights, etc. and how this is negotiated (Carroll and Mendos, 2017; Oosterhoff and Sweetman, 2018). This is because the dominant groups often defend the status-quo; assert their powers over less-dominant groups by means of intolerant frames that position the less powerful group as inferior or 'bad'; while also attempting to force their perception on others. In these performances, language is a crucial resource. According to Woolard and Schieffelin (1994), language use is never neutral; instead it is used to encode strategies for maintaining social power and domination. Thus, different contending forces foist their viewpoints on their narratives in order to gain an advantage over alternative ideas or perceived opposition. The assumption in this study is that a striking bipolarity exists within homosexuality-themed discourse and is represented in the portrayal of progressivism and

primitivism as ideological frames within which opinions are couched. The oppositional rendition of identities within these ideologies and their implications constitute the focus of this study. However, in the study, the portrayals from the in-group (pro-homosexuality) tweets are privileged over the dominant pro-heteronormative tweets because the identity as 'progressive' is framed as a power ideology to challenge the constructs that stifle or inhibit homosexual self-expression.

### **Ideological Constructs and Social Media Engagement**

Discourse analysis critically engages how language use betrays and is complicit in the reproduction of dominant ideologies in textual and verbal communications. These ideas or patterned way of thinking eventually percolate into and influence wider social structures. This analytical perspective to language in use also affords the researcher the chance to study 'real, and often extended, instances of social interaction which take (partially) linguistic form. The critical approach is distinctive in its view of (a) the relationship between language and society, and (b) the relationship between analysis and the practices analysed' (Wodak 1997: 173). Embedded within these enquiries into the intersections of language, society and social practices is the concept of ideology. Verscheuren (2015) describes ideology as commonly held normative beliefs pertaining to areas of social reality. To van Dijk (2006: 115), 'ideologies are sociocognitively defined as shared representations of social groups ... organize its identity, actions, aims, norms and values, and resources as well as its relations to other social groups.' This implies that ideologies are central to identity formation and help in distinguishing perspectives to events and issues. Fairclough (1989: 2) further perceives ideologies as 'means of legitimising existing relations and differences of power' while to (Eagleton, 1991: 194), an ideology is a 'discursive or semiotic phenomenon'. Ideologies are formidable constructs which are influential in how people perceive themselves and how they relate to others since ideologies are 'the basis of social group's self-image, ideologies organize its identity, actions, aims, norms and values, and resources as well as its relations to other social groups' (Van Dijk, 2006: 115).

A frontline platform where ideological tussles are enacted and asserted is digital media. To Mahloully (2013: 2), digital communication avails a potpourri of ideas and opinions and 'the digital era affects the quality of public discourses by empowering amateurs with the same legitimacy as traditional leaders, professionals, and experts. This will

underline a major distinction between the normative public sphere and today's connective culture, which lies in the fact that everyone is now likely to contribute to public discourses.' It is therefore unsurprising that there is a frantic level of civic engagements of public issues and concerns. According to Sharma *et al* (2017), Twitter, alongside other popular social media, contains discussions around controversial topics and these are usually geared towards stimulating social change and public policy development. Within the context of social media engagement, scholars have paid attention to diverse controversial social issues like climate change (Seegerberg and Bennett, 2011), abortion (Zhang and Counts, 2016; Sharma *et al*, 2017), gun control (Benton, *et al*, 2016) and the human rights of the homosexual community (Pullen and Cooper, 2010). By providing access for people to come together to freely discuss and identify contentious problems, social media platforms enable users to reach a common judgment, form public opinion, and influence collective action, policy, and decision-making. These platforms also facilitate open and democratic exchanges around many controversial topics and stimulate the display of diverse perspectives, culminating often in vocal denunciations of contrary opinions.

In the digital expression of viewpoints, language remains a vital resource since it is the tool of communication and critical to gaining support for one's viewpoint. Ideologies are 'pervasively present in language' (Fairclough (1989: 3) and are remarkable constituents in the enactment of 'ideologically polarized opposition between 'Our' and 'Their'' (Pasitselska, 2017: 591). Lacerda (2015) also attests to the crucial role language plays in the ideological clashes, social struggles and structural contradictions which are often realised when people seek to justify and assert their perceptions and beliefs. van Dijk (1998: 8) accentuate this when he avers that 'ideologies allow people, as group members, to organize the multitude of social beliefs about what is the case, good or bad, right or wrong, for them, and to act accordingly'. In other words, discourses do ideological work (Fairclough *et al.*, 2011). This is present in the exploration of the negotiation of ideologies in queer studies where 'the significance of words and the power of language' (Giffney, 2009: 7) is integral. According to Motschenbacher and Stegu (2013), [l]anguage is involved, in different ways, in the discursive construction of sexual identities and desire'

### **Methodological Details**

The data for the study were manually collected from Twitter between May 2019 and November 2019. This involved the use of keyword searches (Nigeria (+Gay) (+homosexual(ity) (+LGBT – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender))). The researcher further manually scanned the tweets and their sources (through location and users' identity checks) to ensure that they were really Nigerian tweets (composed by Nigerians) and in order to clean out non-focus materials like web links and news reports. Summing up to 114,000 corpus which is being used for a larger study on the narratives on homosexuality on Nigerian Twitter, the corpus was subsequently processed with Anthony's AntConc (2019) software. The quantitative analysis was complemented by the application of the tenets of Critical Discourse Analysis (subsequently CDA).

More generally, CDA specifies that discourses are intrinsically suffused with value/meaning and these are enunciated in hegemonic structures (Omrow, 2018). Within these structures, one encounters the construction of social hierarchies which themselves contribute to the projection of a specific perspective of social reality and ideological leaning (Shuter and Turner, 1997). To interrogate the complicity of language in the framing of such realities, Bloomaert and Bulcaen (2000) aver that discourse analysis provides a linguistic approach to the understanding of the relationship between language and ideology. To achieve this, it explores the way in which 'theories of reality and relations of power are encoded in such aspects as the syntax, style and rhetorical devices used in texts' (Lupton, 1992: 145). Wodak (2002: 11) also asserts that CDA draws attention to the 'opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language'. While there are different approaches in the application CDA to data, I lean on the Fairclough perspective. According to Fairclough, CDA follows a three-dimensional integrative framework which involves an intersection of analyses involving spoken/written language texts, discourse practice, and discursive events as social practice. Fairclough (1995: 97) clarifies thus:

Discourse, and any specific instance of discursive practice, is seen as simultaneously (i) a language text, spoken or written, (ii) discourse practice (text production and text interpretation), (iii) sociocultural practice at a number of

levels; in the immediate situation, in the wider institution or organization, and at a societal level.

When one utilizes these methodological guidelines, one is able to describe and explain the complex relationship existent in the interpretative task of texts leaning on the influences of discursive processes and social processes. This aligns with Foucault's (1970) theorization of discourse as social practice, where attention is paid to the exploration of the place of language in documenting social realities as well as in creating, sustaining and challenging unequal social orders. More specifically though, as applied to this study, I interrogate the manipulation of linguistic choices (collocation, lexicalisation and lexical range, polarization, narrativity, and socio-political allusion) in the proliferation of ideological and identity issues within Nigerian homosexuality narratives. These foci necessitate the adoption of the theory in the analysis of the present data.

#### **Progressivism vs. Primitivism in Homosexual Digital Discourse: Exemplifications and Implications**

In many African nations, opposition to non-heterosexual orientations persists (Hoad, 2007) and religion, culture and biological explanations form the dominant perspectives shaping the narratives. These have contributed to the significant strains of homophobia which continues to spread across several societies and to which political office holders often cling on to steer public emotions. In Nigeria, which constitutes the research location of the present study, same-sex relations were criminalised by the Goodluck Jonathan government which prescribed 14 years in jail for homosexuals and people who encourage homosexuality (Amusan, Luqman and Adekeye, 2019). This has validated the spate of homophobic attacks and emboldened aggressors – members of the public as well as state agents – who foment jungle justice and violence, sometimes resulting in death (Onanuga and Alade, 2020). Non-heterosexuals – confirmed and suspected – are also subjected to undocumented traumatic psychological debasements, as well as extortion and forced outings. Interestingly however, more people with homosexual orientation continue to come out and assert themselves particularly on digital media. Since the issue continues to be a combustible one in the country, it is unsurprising that two major groups battle to foist their perspectives and attitudes over the opposition. These groups are those in support of the criminalisation of

homosexuality and those who clamour for the decriminalisation and legalisation of homosexuality, hinged on human right discourse led by pro-queer activists who profess universal respect and love for people of non-heterosexual orientation. In their textual engagements online, these groups orchestrate discourses which remark and label homosexuality as positive or negative. From the in-group and allyship narratives – homosexuals and homo-partisans – however, there is the recognition of a framing which portrays the acceptance and support of homosexuality as progressive whereas non-support is regarded as exhibitiv of backwardness.

According to Gbadegesin and Onanuga (2019), progressivism is regarded as an ideology which encodes and represents advancement towards better conditions and policies. Trohler (2017:2) also defines it ‘as a collective term used in historiography to characterise historical phases in which particular ways to think about progress are detectable’. As an ideological construct, a progressivist rendition of homosexuality indicates a viewpoint which frames a positive disposition to and acceptance of non-heteronormative sexualities as welcoming and integrating. In the data for this study, the progressivist idea is represented with selected lexical choices such as ‘progressive’, ‘developed’, ‘western’, and ‘advanced’.



**Figure 1: ‘Progressive’ in the data**

The screenshot shows the AntConc 3.5.8 interface. The main window displays 'Concordance Hits: 9'. The concordance table is as follows:

Hit	KWIC	File
1	and believe an intersex male who naturally developed boobs. Uchenna Nigene @UchennaNigene1 v87 Jan 18 T	more tweets
2	gets affected when you marry in a developed civilized part of the world. In Nigeria	even more q
3	is done intentionally to make western (and developed) countries exceptionalist. Frustrating. Patrick B	even more q
4	is such a big topic in more developed countries is because of the various legal	even more q
5	me. It's same everywhere, including in developed countries. Its like a meat market. Even	outing and g
6	think he needs to live in a developed country. Where nobody will judge him. He	outing and g
7	coz we are in wicked time. In developed nations these guys 'll be punished tired @	even more q
8	ountries that legalize homosexuality are far developed. So why exactly do you hate homosexuals?	Tweets.txt
9	ountries that legalize homosexuality are far developed. So why exactly do you hate homosexuals? 11:59	Tweets.txt

**Figure 2: ‘Developed’ in the data**

The lexical choices present a narrative which relates societal progress, productivity and success to the legalisation and acceptance of the homosexual community. Hit 1 in Figure 1 instantiates how progressivism is tied to the making of pro-homosexuality ‘laws’ and remarks perceived hypocrisy in the realisation that homophobic Nigerians delight in enjoying the facilities available in foreign countries which do not have sexually discriminatory practices. On the other hand, ‘developed’ has collocates like ‘countries’, ‘nations’ and ‘world’, therefore accentuating the lexical range which is being polarized, especially since these paradigms are also nominal terms that can be applied to Nigeria. The non-consolidation on the advances achieved in ‘progressive’ societies and contexts are thus remarked as indicative of retardation within the Nigerian context. Thus, while the persisting and prevalent public frames reflect anti-homosexuality sentiments and these are encouraged as ‘something to be proud of and actively encouraged’ (Butler, Alpaslan, Strumpher and Astbury, 2003: 6), pro-homosexuality advocates however challenge these frames by availing counter-discourses, which ‘reframe and counter-frame anti-LGBT-equality arguments by providing an alternative perspective of same-sex attraction’ (Mongie, 2016: 23). Within this dimension, progressivism also suggests that western nations and their regulations are models which Nigeria, nay other African countries, has to imitate or adopt. Betraying a neo-colonial leaning, western nations and their attitudes thus constitute yardsticks through which opinions towards



homosexuality are framed among Nigerian users on Twitter. This is despite the fact that many of these developed countries indeed still battle homophobia (Sullivan, 2004) and face considerable opposition to the legalisation of non-heterosexual sexual orientations using similar platforms like religion and morality. What many of these narratives also fail to acknowledge is that homophobia and the legislations that fuel it were colonial hangovers which persist in many African countries as well as in other nations with colonial experience (Murray and Roscoe, 1998).

In addition, beyond the graphic summaries in Figures 1 and 2, within these narratives, contextualised discussions for the instantiations are provided thus:

**Tweet 1:** I'm not even homosexual, I'm a liberal person and I believe homosexuals should have same right like every other humans. Nigeria is backward, the countries that legalize homosexuality are far developed.

**Tweet 2:** Legal rights for homosexuals, I believe, is done intentionally to make western (and developed) countries exceptionalist.

In Tweets 1 and 2, the representation of being progressive in the issue of homosexuality is framed within the contexts of liberalism and legalisation. The tweep in Tweet 1 is a homosexual ally who advocates the legalisation of homosexuality in Nigeria. This is premised on an acknowledgement of the fundamental human rights of people of non-heteronormative sexuality. The user surmises that 'Nigeria is backward' while 'countries that legalize homosexuality are far developed' on this basis. Tweet 2 builds on the narrative that considers the legalisation of homosexuality as being positively significant to the realisation of development. The 'intentional' lack of acceptance and legalisation of homosexuality is thus presented as contributory to the 'non-exceptional' growth and development in Nigeria.

In Tweets 3 and 4, the excerpts draw attention to the threats and violence which follow the public expression of homosexual orientation. While Tweet 3 emanates from a homosexual ally, Tweet 4 is an in-group homosexual tweet.

**Tweet 3:** You talk about it like it's a disease, I don't think it's a disease and I just think he needs to live in a developed country. Where nobody will judge him. He also deserves to be happy.

**Tweet 4:** Before setting up a meeting with anyone. I have been chatting with several guys but not met anyone. I choose to remain with guys I know. In fact I am just here for fun and to view what I can jerk off with coz we are in wicked time. In developed nations these guys 'll be punished

In Tweet 3, one identifies a castigation of homophobic language – disease – in contextualising the ideology of development. Globally, and despite empirical evidence to the contrary, frames of medicalisation and psychiatrisation of queer sexualities have been perpetuated in the treatment of members of the community (Cacchioni and Tiefer, 2012). However, this persists in the Nigerian environment. In rectifying the negative construct, the tweep admonishes that the homosexual referent should consider relocation to ‘a developed country. Where nobody will judge him. He also deserves to be happy.’ One can infer from the statement that being resident in Nigeria as a homosexual means one is predisposed to judgemental accusations, emblematic of being in an undeveloped social space. Inevitably, a society which does not afford self-identification and expression restrains and inhibits people who do not perform normative sexuality from being true to themselves. Thus, they are denied happiness. The lack of these affordances, to the tweep, suggests that Nigeria is not progressive. In Tweet 4 however, the tweep expresses the fear and danger that comes with public expression and self-outing even on online gay platforms. It also serves as a form of warning to other Nigerian homosexuals who are still within the country and who seek partners. One of the in-group refuges on Twitter for Nigerian homosexuals is the @KitoDiaries handle. According to Okereke (2019), ‘the word “kito” is a Nigerian gay term used to describe the experience of falling into the hands of swindlers’. The Kito platform thus attempts to share information on persons and locations that are unsafe for other group members in order to prevent the continued exposure of gay people to calculated attacks predicated on dating, extortion and threats of outing. While Tweet 4 remarks the attendant challenges that seeking gay partners online portends, it further avers that attacks on gay people persist in Nigeria because the

assaulters go unpunished whereas ‘[i]n developed nations these guys ‘ll be punished’.

Beyond the above, queer supportive countries, significantly represented by the United Kingdom and the United States, are also depicted as progressive while Nigeria is contrasted to them and regarded as primitive. The attitude of Nigerians to homosexuality is depicted as representative of other homophobic societies.



Figure 3: 'US' in the data



Figure 4: 'UK' in the data

In Figures 3 and 4, the US and UK are portrayed as places of refuge and asylum for subaltern groups and identities. Regarded as locales synonymous with choice, freedom and other democratic ideals, marginalised demographics often look forward to enjoying these opportunities and possibilities. According to Adeeko (2008: 18), they are

in turn expected ‘to encounter and engage with new ideas [and] gain the knowledge and tools to return to fight the neo-colonial forces crippling their nations’. Western ideals are thus portrayed as liberating and worthy of emulation. The nominal collocates of US and UK, as identifiable in Figures 3 and 4, revolve around ‘government’, ‘embassy’, ‘engagement’ and ‘law’ and exist within contexts that signify power and purposive will to contribute to the global fight for the acknowledgement of human rights and democratic ideals. The same is reflected within the verb context where ‘is’, ‘has’ and ‘justifies’ and their lemma are realised within lexical and equative senses, thus showing directness and assuredness in tackling anti-homosexual stances. This progressivist ideology is further reinforced through the fetishization of human rights wherein homosexuality proponents deploy human rights in the formulation of the politics of sexuality, enacted as a form of liberality and provenance of self-identity (Stychin, 2014). Here too, the US and the UK are represented as bastions of true democracy and upholders of human right ideals.

Hit	KWIC	File
1	a country that was progressing, these new backward and devastating laws make living true and	more tweets
2	the reason you pit hoe Nigeria is backward and the United Kingdom is still one	more tweets
3	free. But don't say Nigeria is backward because gay union not legal Air chief	more tweets
4	of nature. Yes o, Nigeria is always backward in everything including legalising gay marriage t	even more q
5	certain areas of the world continuously moving backward in regard to homosexuality. #nigeria Oquals #Turk	even more q
6	improve the quality of life in this backward region of Nigeria. I commend them. Now	Tweets.txt
7	right like every other humans. Nigeria is backward, the countries that legalize homosexuality are fa	Tweets.txt
8	right like every other humans. Nigeria is backward, the countries that legalize homosexuality are fa	Tweets.txt

**Figure 5: ‘Backward’ in the data**

**Tweet 5:** you're backwards and annoying and you're part of the bigger problem, nobody should be subjected to such, Queer or not. engaging in multiple sexual partnerships is a personal choice. Heterosexual men are not beaten for having multiple girlfriends.

In contrast to the positive representations which are accorded to these countries, the collocation of Nigeria exists within the construct of ‘backwardness’. Hit 1 in Figure 5 for instance reports that the anti-homosexuality law instituted in the country was ‘backward and

devastating’. This reflects in Hit 5 too where the non-legalisation of homosexuality is remarked as one of the ways in which Nigeria is ‘continuously moving backward’, a viewpoint which is sustained when one examines the dominant verbal collocate ‘is’ which represents a state in the present tense and which precedes the use of ‘backward’ as an identifier with Nigerian realities. The backwardness of Nigeria is further foregrounded in the depiction of homophobic violence as a signifier of primitivism in Tweet 5. The Tweet is a response to other tweets which sought to validate violence against a homosexual person who had multiple sex partners. Rebuking the victimisation and the validations as ‘backwards and annoying’, the tweet draws attention to the discriminatory practices which vaunt and privilege hetero-patriarchal relations over other marginalised sexualities.

**Tweet 6:** Fight for Nigerians to be richer, better educated... and you wouldn’t need to fight for gay rights.

**Tweet 7:** People’s lives and constitutional rights are at stake because you spew such verbal violence and hate on air. I suggest you try to educate yourselves on sexual orientation

Within the narratives, language positivity to queer is applauded while alternative perspectives are toned down. An underlying yet identifiable representation in the narrative constructs the progressive and tolerant perception of homosexuality as being indicative of being more educated and culturally liberal (Loftus, 2001; Burdette *et al*, 2005). These are obvious in Tweets 6 and 7 which hinge positive disposition to gay rights on education.

#### **Neutralising the tension: Counter-discourses and De-legitimation ideology in Homosexual Narratives**

Expectedly, the framing of Nigeria as backward and primitive while the West is depicted as progressive and developed received opposition within the data examined. This is because a significant majority of Nigerians, regardless of religious and ethnic affiliations, agrees that homosexuality should not be accepted by society. This conservative sentiment explains the strong opposition to social recognition and legal rights for homosexuals (Jung, 2016). While the progressivist narrative is couched in the narrative which portrays pro-homosexuality as liberal, egalitarian

Western ideology, there are alternative constructs which attempt to delegitimise perceived pro-Western leanings. Exemplifications are:

**Tweet 8:** But don't say Nigeria is backward because gay union not legal

**Tweet 9:** So bcoz UK and US justifies it Nigeria too should? If yes. Remember UK and US also justifies gay practices. So on that basis Nigeria too should? Each society is different from another. Rules are meant to be autochthonous. The Nigerian society is not ready for such rule

**Tweet 10:** Since u want everything done in America happening in naija.. u should come and legalise Gay/Lebanism into law in Nigeria.

**Tweet 11:** You don't accept polygamy but accepts being gay... Well this is just sad.... Despite the health risks associated with being gay... Ok

**Tweet 12:** Tell your US,UK,CA to also legalize polygamy, human blood sacrifice to Obatala and the likes, since you all want to sound WOKE because "Oyinbo" madness must be very sweet.....Sodom and Gomorrah is better than you people. Why Americans Must Embrace Polygamy

**Tweet 13:** Yeah I don't like the way they force the idea on us. It's not normal to some of us. we don't force polygamy on them you know. Imagine the farce that will cause considering we have feminist now

The inversions of the hitherto established discourse of civilization as enunciated in the pro-homosexuality narratives is documented within a post-colonial context where the need to chart an independent course away from the perceived dominance of Western constructs and ideals of the performance of sexuality becomes a dominant trope. Such an ideological basis, according to Stychin (2004: 956), suggests that:

the defence of heterosexuality becomes essential to securing the group right of self-determination of a people protecting its cultural heritage, precolonial way of life, and very survival. This is a communitarian claim in defence of a people against threats from globalization and (neo) colonial powers, and it also lends itself to the language of international human rights (i.e., the right of a community to preserve its way of life)

Within this context, Tweets 9 and 13 are attempts at the assertion of nationalism and independence as an ideology. They submit that the acceptance of homosexuality in the US and UK should not necessarily imply that the sexual orientation automatically becomes unobjectionable in Nigeria. Hinging their opposition on societal differences, they also indicate an undercurrent of the perception that the Nigerian, nay African, society is being ‘forced’ to acknowledge and accept homosexuality. This is evidential in Gevisser’s (2015: 15) submission that ‘[w]estern threats to withdraw aid if the rights of sexual minorities were not respected only seemed to fuel such indignation’. Tweets 8, 10, and 12 signal their resistance by fronting the differing legal contexts within which Nigeria functions. Reverberating the independence ideology earlier established, Tweets 8, 10 and 12 reinforce that the legal framework in Nigeria criminalises homosexuality, and that this should be respected and not be used to conclude that ‘Nigeria is backward’. Tweets 11, 12 and 13 further counter the narrative by suggesting that the intersection of cultures should be a two-way influence. This implies the developed and progressive societies should also be open to accepting practices – polygamy and indigenous religious activities – from the Nigerian society. As a way of repudiating the ‘othering’ established, these tweets provide the tweeps the opportunity to uphold their individual identity, while being part of a large social movement that expresses its antagonism to homosexual advocacies.

By counter-framing the argument, the responders to the progressivism vs. primitivism narrative challenge the contents of the arguments presented by members of the out-group (pro-homosexuality community) and provide alternative perspectives within the same frame. It is obvious that the oppositional reaction is constructed as a countering of perceived threat by Western civilization. Asserted within the context which frames queer sexualities as foreign and un-African, sustained opposition is indicated as a way of preserving the purity of the Nigerian moral codes. The counter-discourse further attempts to mitigate the framing which

presents Nigeria and the Nigerian society as primitive and backward on the basis of its opposition to the legalisation and societal acceptance of non-heterosexual orientations. It avers that justification for the embrace of the queer community should not be on the basis of acceptance by the West or through the narrative that deprecates the Nigerian people as backward.

### **Conclusion**

The narratives discussed in this study have drawn attention to the dialectics of the framing of otherness in homosexual discourse in Nigerian digital media. Within the examined narratives, one identifies power interplays among actors as they attempt to promote their interests and values. This is in tandem with Nahon's (2015: 1) submission that 'where there is social media there is politics; neutrality is the exception rather than the norm in social media'. The depiction has focused on the undercurrents and dynamics of the ideological framing of progressivism and primitivism in Twitter-generated discourses and reveals the constant negotiation and re-working which are commonplace in the narratives. The realisations in this study have brought to focus the transformations which are identifiable in the public expression of sexuality in the Nigeria socio-cultural landscape in the past decade – progressing from being an avoided topic to becoming one publicly engaged with and contested. The narratives also affirm that language is never neutral (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002) but is instead used to propagate viewpoints and opinions of individuals and groups. The two perspectives discussed reflected the influence of persuasive message in creating strong in-group unity and mobilizing a high level of support for their conviction. The study has examined discourse around ideological polarity of 'Progressivism' and 'Primitivism' on Nigerian Twitter through analysis of language and the manifested socio-cultural practices. These socio-cultural and historical constructs, references to events, nations, actions and cultures served to promote one group and to debase the opposition. Countering the backwardness or primitivism perspective to discourses around same-sex orientations provides a platform for examining the realisation of homonationalistic concerns in queer studies. While the progressivist ideological leaning draws attention to the transnationality of 'gay human rights' discourse under neoliberalism (Wahab, 2016: 685) and looks to see its domestication in Nigeria, the counter-discourse asserts the



necessity of cultural preservation as a form of identity retention and assertion in the face of globalisation. The ideological perspectives as identified in the study constitute labels which show the range of the possibilities of public acceptance or rejection of alternative sexualities. The study submits that discursive strategies are appropriated in the formation, negotiation, and establishment of identities and ideologies, and through their articulation, oppositions represent themselves versus the 'other' and disclose their positions in sexual ideology (Zainon, et al, 2018). The findings also reveal how 'ideologies are expressed and generally reproduced in the social practices of their members, and more particularly acquired, confirmed, changed and perpetuated through discourse' (Van Dijk, 2006: 115).

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