

Chapter 6

Subversion of the Dominant Logic of Heteronormativity in Akwaeke Emezi's *The Death of Vivek Oji*: Queering the Society and the State

Guhan Priyadharshan P.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0583-4963>

Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, India

ABSTRACT

*Akwaeke Emezi's 2020 novel *The Death of Vivek Oji* narrates the death of the eponymous non-heterosexual character—as suggested by the title—and the emotional turmoil faced by people with non-heterosexual orientation. This chapter demonstrates how his death is the product of dominant logic—the prudishness of the Igbo society, which manifests heteronormative practices, and the legal system in Nigeria that castigate persons who diverge from normative sexual behaviour. Further, it examines the narration in the novel that subverts the heteronormativity perpetuated by the state and society, opening new avenues of resistance for non-heterosexual people in Nigeria that might otherwise be obscured in the narrative. The chapter considers the location of the experiences of the non-heterosexual characters in the novel in liminality so that the contradiction between the lived experience and the conformity articulated by the state and the society is apparent, which prepares the ground for resistance to occur.*

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-6572-1.ch006

INTRODUCTION

Akwaeke Emezi's 2020 novel, *The Death of Vivek Oji*, is set in South-eastern Nigeria. It narrates the coming of age and the death of Vivek, the eponymous character, as suggested by the title. Emezi presents the narration through various voices— in the third person and the voices of Vivek and Osita. Vivek's relationship with Osita is as crucial as his coming of age, as both are intertwined. Osita is Vivek's cousin, whom Vivek addresses as "bhai" throughout the novel, and the former reciprocates it by addressing the latter as "brother." However, their relationship is also sexual and covert to the public yet known to their friends; it would be condemned by society, the state and their families if revealed since their relationship is homosexual and incestuous.

This chapter contains three parts, apart from the introductory and concluding parts. Firstly, the narrative in the novel that acquiesces to the existing homophobia and heteronormativity perpetuated by the Nigerian state through the legal system and the cultural disposition of the Igbo society— the existing logic of the state and the society—is elucidated. Secondly, the inferences made in the first part are contested to showcase how Emezi subverts through the narration the state's existing logic and the social order, which informs the possible frontiers of resistance. The basic logic behind this methodology of the chapter is to foreground the role of liminality in subverting or transcending the existing dominant logic of both the state and the society, which are interlinked. Liminality is the position where the subjects find their lived experiences contradicting the dominant narrative perpetuated by the logic of the state and the society. Elisabeth Paquette (2020) notes that "such a contradiction is experienced because their lived reality is imposed upon by dominant positions that exclude them. At the same time, however, because of the experiences of the liminal position, marginalized persons are well situated to see the contradictions inherent to the normative view" (p. 142). The inference derived from the above is that liminality offers the understanding of the dominant narrative or logic and it also exposes the existence of a contradiction between the dominant narrative and the experience of the marginalised. Liminality is discussed in the third part. By inherently housing the narratives that contradict each other, the novel acts as a site of articulating liminality. This chapter considers the following argument of Alain Badiou, a contemporary French philosopher, as one of its core theoretical interventions. His argument is summarised by Paquette (2020) as follows: "Emancipation does not come through the expansion of the power of the state (...); rather, emancipation is when the logic of the state is interrupted and overturned such that the inexistent can become apparent" (p. 33). Though Paquette's (2020) argument is in the context of identity politics in Badiou's philosophy, it briefly summarises Badiou's notion of emancipation—the dominant logic has to be overcome. However, there is a caveat here: Badiou revised his position concerning overcoming the state in his

12 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/subversion-of-the-dominant-logic-of-heteronormativity-in-akwaeke-emezis-the-death-of-vivek-oji/309054

Related Content

Pedagogical Considerations in Teaching Implicit Bias

Lisa Bloom, Candy J. Noltensmeyer, Sur Ah Hahn, Charmion B. Rush, Pamela Heidlebaugh-Buskey and Tonya M. Westbrook (2020). *International Journal of Bias, Identity and Diversities in Education* (pp. 46-63).

www.irma-international.org/article/pedagogical-considerations-in-teaching-implicit-bias/258996

Data Science Process for Smart Cities

Elsa Estrada and Martha Patricia Martínez Vargas (2021). *Latin American Women and Research Contributions to the IT Field* (pp. 348-370).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/data-science-process-for-smart-cities/269199

Technodiversity: Lessons Learned From Diversity Exchanges

Kimberly Fletcher Nettleton and Lesia C. Lennex (2016). *Handbook of Research on Race, Gender, and the Fight for Equality* (pp. 49-67).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/technodiversity/148761

The Effects of Values and Gender Role Perceptions on Attitudes Towards Women Managers

Basak Ucanok Tan (2020). *Macro and Micro-Level Issues Surrounding Women in the Workforce: Emerging Research and Opportunities* (pp. 37-57).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-effects-of-values-and-gender-role-perceptions-on-attitudes-towards-women-managers/233189

Transforming Indigenous Education: Women Leadership Bundles to Sustain Indigenous Educational Pathways

Taima Moeke-Pickering and Sheila Cote-Meek (2025). *Women Transforming the Future of Higher Education* (pp. 1-14).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/transforming-indigenous-education/374647