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INTERSECTION OF RACE AND SEXUALITY IN *THE QUIET VIOLENCE OF DREAMS*

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Abstract: K. Sello Duiker's novel *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001) is an important intervention in the area of sexuality studies. The book is a twenty-first century critique of the idea of compulsive heterosexuality. The text looks at the binaries of heterosexuality and homosexuality manifested in linguistic construction and powered through a network of institutions. In Duiker, the 'spectral' presence of homosexuality is compounded by the presence of the great divide that race brings within leading to what Stockton calls, "intrusion of narratives on narratives" (Stockton 117). This paper proposes to interrogate Duiker's critique of compulsive heterosexuality. Central to the analysis is the exploration of the interconnectedness between race and sexuality. Intersection of sexuality and race leads to new dynamics, of oppression and resistance. This is intricately connected to notions of identity and power. This paper will also interrogate Duiker's exploration of Un-African character of homosexuality and how he reimagines African sexuality anew. The intertwining of these aspects magnifies the complexities of existence, exemplified through Tshepo's experiences as a black gay man. The text's portrayal of Tshepo's journey becomes emblematic of the broader quest for authenticity, unearthing the intricate layers that define the multidimensional experiences of those at the crossroads of race and sexuality.

Keywords: Duiker, compulsive heterosexuality, homosexuality, un-African and power

Introduction:

K. Sello Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001) is an important intervention in the area of sexuality studies. The book is a twenty-first century critique of the idea of compulsive heterosexuality. Duiker's text goes beyond simple homogenization of same-sex desires to look at the interconnection between race and sexuality. The thematic interest in same-sex desires and its connection with race is one of the important highlights of *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*. This paper will explore and interrogate Duiker's idea on compulsive heterosexuality and homosexuality. But the particular interest of this paper lies in understanding the relation of sexuality and race, and how these relates to notions of power in the Foucauldian sense of the term. Power, as Foucault theorizes, is not singular but manifests through intricate networks that shape and regulate behaviors and identities. Intersection of sexuality and race leads to new dynamics, of oppression and resistance.This paper will analyze these ideas in Duiker's novel *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*. The paper will also examine and interrogate the claims of Un-African notion of homosexuality. The idea

that homosexuality is Un-African and has been imported to Africa, particularly in the context of the colonial legacy from the West is subjected to critical gaze in Duiker.

Sam Durrant in 'The Invention of Mourning in Post-Apartheid Literature' writes that following the apartheid period, the African literary scene was characterized "in its transformative potential, its ability to grapple with legacies of oppression and imagine new states of being and even new beings of the state" (441). Duiker played an important role in this. Duiker's primary contribution to this is his re-imagination ofwhat constitutes African sexuality. *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, amongst other things, looks at the intersection of race and sexuality. Duiker interrogates compulsive heterosexuality and racial apartheid and the connections between these as well as notions of Un-African character of homosexuality. In the process, he reimagines African sexuality anew, cutting though its conventional and ordinary standards.

The Quiet Violence of Dreams is divided into two parts and explores a series of incidents connecting to the central protagonist Tshepo in a stream of consciousness. The first part of the novel builds the general background in which the question of sexuality and its intersection with race is taken up for discussion sometimes later in the second part. Duiker explores the intricate mechanisms of pedagogical establishments, family as well as the institution of marriage all subjected to the discerning scrutiny of his critical gaze. The text also dissects and critiques hospitals and prisons and the intricate interplay of authority, control, and discipline emblematic of these establishments, reminiscent of Foucault's central thesis of 'truth' and 'power' explored in texts like *Madness and Civilization* (1961), *The Order of Things* (1966), *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality* (1976).

The thematic interest in same-sex desires and its connection with race is one of the important highlights of *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*. The novel explores the question of compulsive heterosexuality, homosexuality and other alternate sexualities within the South African sexual tradition. But this is emblematic of much of Africa.The text explores this through the central protagonist Tshepo. Like any other book, Duiker's text enacts a coming-out of its central protagonist and this entwines with the undercurrents of self-doubt that cast ephemeral shadows upon the path of self-discovery. As the narrative unfolds, it delicately explores the intricate interplay between introspection and the journey towards self-acceptance, unraveling the layers of identity with a sensitivity that echoes the nuances of human experience. In Duiker, the 'spectral' presence of homosexuality is compounded by the presence of the great divide that race brings within leading to what Stockton calls, "intrusion of narratives on narratives" (Stockton 117). *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* has emerged as an important site for the negotiation and renegotiation of cultural and civilizational differences in Africa, where colonial legacies and African 'authenticities' struggle to imagine the relationships between 'Africa' and 'homosexuality'.

Duiker takes on the "bigots, hypocrites, heterofascists who only want to further their own prejudices and intolerance of life" (Duiker 444). Heterosexuality, in Duiker, is seen as putting limits on the body. It is seen as a site where the body is imprisoned. The text looks pleasure, loneliness, natural homosexual feeling, the absence of father figure, peace and security and others as important motivations in homosocial fellowship. For Tshepo the relations with men, even if they are clients, are beyond sexual gratification or even necessity. They are a relief to his life where, "…I have always had something to be sad about, my whole life" (Duiker 298).

Race and Sexuality Connection:

Duiker's critique of race and sexuality in their interconnectedness is explored through his description of Capetown, the parlour in which Tshepo works and in the brotherhood that Tshepo is a part of. The city of Capetown plays an important role in the exploration of race and sexuality.

Capetown initially emerges as an 'inclusive' metropolitan that offers, "…something deeper, something real" (Duiker 322).Such a view is also initially echoed by Tshepo for whom in Capetown "no one really cares you're black…No one really cares that you're white…People want to make their own reference about who they are and where they fit in or not" (Duiker 37). Tshepo interprets this as 'the true face of humanity" (Duiker 401). Similarly, the parlour in which Tshepo works initially emerges as a site where there is free association of sexes, regardless of gender. Tshepo celebrates the brotherhood in the parlour as an embodiment of 'truth', 'beauty', 'tenderness' and 'simplicity' and as a heaven of transgression.

Duiker allows his readers to gradually see through the heaven that Capetown, the parlour and the brotherhood signify. Duiker problematizes race and sexuality in course of this. The parlour that attends to diverse range of sexualitiesis actually anexclusive fraternity; it restricts its embrace solely to the realm of whiteness. And in this, Tshepo becomes acutely cognizant of his unique position as the sole black gay individual present. The confluence of racial and sexual dimensions reduces him to a distinct hierarchal order where people like him exist to 'serve'. It's within these subtle nuances that the broader implications of this setting come to light, spotlighting the subtle ways in which social constructs of race and sexuality intertwine to create identity 'categories'. It is these that wake him up to the sad realities of racial discrimination in the world of alternate sexualities.

From Foucault, we know that 'power' operates in various ways and at multiple levels, permeating social interactions, institutions, and discourses. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault defines power as "the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organisation" (92). Embedded within the intricate matrix of societal dynamics, a complex interplay unfolds wherein notions of racial and sexual superiority extend a cloak of authority, giving heterosexual individuals and those of white complexion a perceived power in dictating and influencing the destinies of individuals categorized as black and homosexual. This dynamic, woven into the historical fabric of power structures in Duiker, perpetuates a subtle yet deeply entrenched system of privilege and dominance.

Central to this intricate interplay lies an assertion of innate superiority intricately interwoven with the complex tapestry of skin color and sexual orientation. It perpetuates asemblance of entitlement that emboldens heterosexuals of white origin to assume positions of command and control over those who bear the dual markers of blackness and non-heteronormative identity. Such a construct is underpinned by historical echoes manifested in apartheid regime. It is this 'power' that situates Shaun and his kinds above Tshepos and Wests of the world. West rightly characterizes this power when he says "This whole brotherhood thing is very convenient…But make no mistake…This thing is about power and about who has it and who doesn't. We don't have it" (Duiker 462). In cosmopolitan Capetown, where Duiker works out his homosexual and racial discursivities through the character of Tshepo, the body becomes a site of control and dominance through classification of skin and sexuality. And as Jenkins reminds us, classification, whether in sexuality or race or in their intersection are not disinterested divisions but one that involves power play. The brotherhood, the parlour, and even Capetown eventually turn into a place where "You have to fit into this or that" (Duiker 36).Mmabatho remarks in the preliminary course of the text that, "I think I came to Cape Town so that I could run away from that whole race thing…But it's here, even in Cape Town. You can't really avoid it" (Duiker 36). Such a remark acquires a prophetic resonance foretelling a path where Tshepo's own journey unravels the realization that even gays are not free from this vicious circle, a realization etched upon the canvas of his own personal existence. Through Tshepo, Duiker scrutinizes the South African sexual landscape wherein individuals of Black descent find themselves less integrated into and more estranged from the prevailing white-dominated urban gay community institutions.

Books, novels, critical discourses and other substantial body of literary works emanating from the west, especially in the 70s and the 80s, often overlooked other factors that might complicate sexuality. This phenomenon entailed a concentration on the exploration of sexual orientations without taking into full account the nuanced landscape of diverse distinctions that coexist within the broader spectrum of human experience. It culminated in a homogenized worldview. Duiker's book addresses this gap. The fact that factors like race, class, ethnicity, culture might complicate sexuality studies is worked out in this important section of the novel.

Un/African Question of Homosexuality:

An important question that Duiker interrogates in course of the narration is the Un-African nature of homosexuality. The Un-African thesis posits homosexuality as a 'white' disease (Epprecht 631). A character in Amady Maddy's play Big Berrin remarks: "Homosexuality? Wheyting be dat?" (Maddy 16), an attitude that displays not only ignorance but also an implicit disdain and contempt. This is the characteristic attitude of the Un-African thesis. Homosexual practices are invariably linked and attributed to the inimical influence of colonialism and imperialism and is seen as removed from African social and historical realities and therefore UnAfrican. The Un-African thesis builds heterosexuality and homosexuality in terms of black/white, Africa/Europe binary with pervasive and pronounced consequences for the homosexual minorities, an escape from which is not very easy. Texts like *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776) and Richard Burtons' *Terminal Essays* (1885) to his translation of the *Arabian Nights* in 1885 have been influential reads on African sexual 'exceptionalism'.

The doctrinal premise underpinning the Un-African nature of homosexuality has not gone unnoticed and uncritiqued; in fact it is a hotly contested site. The (African) heterosexual claim to truth encounters significant opposition through the presentation of verifiable evidence within different African traditions. This trajectory of discourse culminates in a compelling argument: that instances of homosexual behavior have persisted throughout history, challenging the very legitimacy of attempts to curtail or suppress them as unnecessary and unwarranted.

Daniel Vignal in an article in, 'Peuples Noirs, PeuplesAfricains' writes that, "For the majority of [African writers], homophilia is exclusively a deviation introduced by colonialists or their descendants; by outsiders of all kinds: Arabs, French, English, Metis, and so on. It is difficult for them to conceive that homophilia might be the act of a black African" (qtd. in Dunton 422). However, investigations on the emergence of 'homosexuality' in a variety of African historical contexts throw interesting insights. Geoffrey Parrinder's seminal work on sex in the *World's Religion* (1980) that explores and investigates the different positions held by different religions of the world in relation to sex is explicitly categorical in saying that it is homophobia and the condemnation of homosexuals that is UnAfrican. Arlene Swidler in his work *Homosexuality and World Religions* (1993) says that homosexuality was a thing not unknown in traditional African society; and that it was a part of African "culture, cosmology and spirituality." "The colonialists did not introduce homosexuality to Africa but rather intolerance of it— and systems of surveillance and regulation for suppressing it" (Murray etal. Preface XVI).

Stephen O. Murray in 'Homosexuality in "Traditional" Sub-Saharan Africa and Contemporary South Africa', argues that absence or lack of evidence of homosexualculture in Africa should not interpreted as evidence of absence, but rather as an absence of research. Murray and Roscoe in their text *Boy-Wives and Female-Husbands* (1998), in their study of African homosexualities, assert that scholars have often, "denied (or dismissed) the presence of homosexuality even when they observed it" (Murray et.al Preface XIII). Murray and Roscoe write, "Among the many myths Europeans have created about Africa, the myth that homosexuality is

absent or incidental in African societies is one of the oldest and most enduring" (Murray etal. Preface XI). They go on to assert that African homosexuality is neither random nor incidental but a consistent and logical feature of African societies and belief systems.

Duiker echoes a similar sentiment. In his discussion with Tshepo, Sebastian argues:

> I mean, people always say that black culture is rigid and doesn't accept things like homosexuals and lesbians. You know the argument - its very unafrican. It's a lot of crap. In my experience that kind of thinking comes from urbanized blacks, people who've watered down the real origins of our culture and mixed it with notions from the Bible. It's stupid to even suggest that homosexuality and lesbianism are foreign to black culture. Long ago, long before whites, people were aware of all this. (Duiker 329)

Duiker cites anthropological proofs of cross-cultural narratives to make his point to build his argument against the notion of Un-African character of homosexuality. According to Duiker, the negotiation of African identity has remained tied to European standards of morality; its rigidity linked to the arrival of white people, to the new urbanized black culture and to Bible. The western construction of sexuality is seen in terms of sanitized politeness, an idea that has been passed down to Africa. Consequently,the idea of Africa as a heterosexual siteis held up as a 'stupid' proposition, a 'crap' that has been imposed upon the African psyche. On the other hand, the idea that homosexuality has little connect to the black culture, with the people of Africa is disputed in favor of native acceptance of it, as real African culture, something that has been distorted over the years. It credits African wisdom of seeing and understanding "gender roles and the ambiguities of sexualities better than Western people give them credit for" (329).

Sexuality, in South Africa, is often looked in terms of binaries of man and woman, girl and boy, male and female. This binary often coincides with the utilitarian idea of sexuality. *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* questions such dualistic and oversimplified worldviews. It sees sexuality, including heterosexuality, as a matter of choice. "You mustn't get confused about the sex, hey? Sex is always the same, whether you do it with a man or a woman, it's just a matter of choosing. How do you say again? Preferences" (Duiker 323). The text reduces heterosexuality as a choice amongst many other choices. Similarly, it strips sex of its utilitarian value and sees sexuality in the spirit of "ars erotica" (Foucault 57) against the more popular "Scientia Sexualis" (Foucault 58). It looks at sexual act as a ritual, as a spiritual act and something that celebrates and honours the phallic potential as a hot energy spot. Duiker negates the morality and the immorality and the forbidden and the permitted discourse with a more philosophical and more poetic optic as well as something that concerns more to an immediate experience.In this worldview, homosexuality is seen as a liberating exercise. Duiker's text further intellectualizes sex. While being a homosexual is seen as deviant from what is passed as 'normal' and is seen as stripped of masculinity, the text argues that a homosexual may be more masculine than a heterosexual in his overt celebration of phallus, in using the phallic power beyond the small territory of 'women' to include 'men'.

Conclusion:

In the intricate interplay of the human experience, the nexus between race and sexuality emerges as a profound landscape of exploration. *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* is an important intervention in the exploration of this nexus. The intersection of race and sexuality in Duiker unveils a story of both struggle and resilience. Duiker further invites us to look at the connection between Un-African notion of homosexuality and compulsive heterosexuality and what these entails for those sitting at the tip end of minoritized existence. This problematizes the entire gamut of scholarly writings that foregrounds either race or homophobia as dominant drives within the narrative. *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* transcends those simplified and homogenized discursivities to look at

their connections.This unveiling of connections fosters a meditation on the myriad ways of existence—spanning not only "being" and "living" but also the profound act of "surviving." (Duiker 392)

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