

## Literature Review on the Representation of Selected LGBTQ+ Stories in New Nollywood

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### Abstract

The scarcity of feature-length LGBTQ+ films in Nigeria, highlighted by the limited number of such productions between 2014 and 2020, underscores the socio-cultural and regulatory barriers that stifle LGBTQ+ representation. These challenges, compounded by societal anti-activism and the restrictive influence of the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB), lead filmmakers to opt for smaller, more experimental formats like short films, as seen in *Ìfẹ́*. Despite the constraints, the short film stands as a bold testament to the growing resistance against the status quo, as both its creators, Pamela Adie and Uyaiedu Ikpe-Etim, are openly involved in LGBTQ+ advocacy. By dissecting the film's narrative and its social context, this study sheds light on the evolving role of Nigerian cinema as a platform for LGBTQ+ voices and examines how films like *Ìfẹ́* challenge societal taboos and contribute to broader discussions of inclusion and social change.

**Keywords:** Anti-activism, LGBTQ+ narratives, New Nollywood, Short film, Social change.

### Introduction

The Nigerian film industry, widely known as Nollywood, has undergone a remarkable transformation in recent years, emerging as one of the most influential cinematic movements globally. This evolution is marked by a shift towards higher production values, more comprehensive storytelling, and innovative distribution strategies. Scholars such as Jedlowski (2012), Onokoome (2014), and Adejunmobi (2015) have coined terms like "New Nollywood" or "Neo-Nollywood" to capture the industry's growing sophistication and international reach. This new wave of Nollywood is driven by filmmakers' efforts to distinguish their work from earlier, often criticized, low-budget productions. As noted by Ihidero (2020) and Ryan (2015), the advent of global platforms like streaming services, satellite TV, and theatrical screenings has enabled Nigerian filmmakers to bypass the traditional home video market, expanding their audiences beyond local shores. This global ambition reflects a deliberate attempt to elevate

Nollywood's artistic stature while navigating the socio-political realities that continue to shape the industry.

At the heart of this transformation lies the tension between artistic expression and the socio-cultural conservatism that permeates Nigerian society. This tension is particularly pronounced in the portrayal of LGBTQ+ identities in Nigerian cinema. Despite global advances in LGBTQ+ rights, Nigerian filmmakers face significant barriers when addressing these themes. From the oppressive influence of the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) to widespread societal stigmas, LGBTQ+ representation in Nollywood has been severely limited (Okpadah, 2020). Between 2014 and 2020, only a handful of feature-length LGBTQ+ films were produced, reflecting both the resistance within the industry and the legal constraints imposed by the Nigerian government. Faced with these barriers, filmmakers have increasingly turned to smaller, experimental formats, such as short films, as a way to navigate the complexities of addressing LGBTQ+ issues within the confines of Nigerian cultural and legal landscapes.

A striking example of this shift is *Ìfẹ* (2020), a short film directed by Uyaiedu Ikpe- Etim and produced by the pioneering LGBTQ+ activist Pamela Adie. *Ìfẹ* boldly confronts the taboos surrounding homosexuality in Nigeria, portraying a love story between two women in a country where such relationships are criminalized and socially stigmatized. The film stands as a testament to the resilience of Nigerian filmmakers who, despite the pervasive climate of anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment, persist in using cinema as a platform for social change. By examining *Ìfẹ* in the context of both its narrative and its socio-cultural backdrop, this study seeks to explore how short films, particularly those aligned with the principles of New Nollywood, can challenge societal norms and contribute to the ongoing conversations surrounding inclusion and diversity in Nigerian cinema.

In much of the discourse surrounding Nollywood's evolution, the focus tends to be on feature-length films, often overlooking the powerful potential of short films. Short films produced in alignment with New Nollywood's emerging standards – characterised by their high production values, innovative narrative structures, and strategic distribution – deserve equal recognition. While short in duration, these films can pack a significant punch in terms of thematic depth and cultural impact. *Ìfẹ*, for instance, is a prime example of how short films can engage in bold political and socio-cultural commentary, pushing boundaries and defying conventions in a way that mainstream Nollywood feature films often cannot. As the industry continues to evolve, it is critical to expand our understanding of what constitutes New Nollywood, broadening the conversation to include short films as vital contributors to the movement. By doing so, we not only recognise the diverse ways in which contemporary Nigerian cinema is challenging the status quo but also acknowledge the unique role that short films play in redefining the boundaries of storytelling and representation in Nollywood. This expanded view can ultimately foster a more inclusive, multifaceted discourse on Nigerian cinema and its potential to engage with complex social issues, including LGBTQ+ rights and representation.

### **LGBTQ+ Stories in New Nollywood**

LGBTQ+ is an acronym encompassing individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, 2018). This term has expanded to include a broad spectrum of sexual and gender minorities, symbolised by the "+" to recognize identities not previously acknowledged or still emerging, thus allowing for ongoing linguistic and self-identification evolution (Dellar, 2022; Los Angeles Conservancy, n.d.). In Nigerian literature, queer authors have significantly confronted homophobia through their writings. Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* (2004), Unoma Azuah's *Sky-High Flames* (2011), Frankie Edozien's *Lives of Great Men* (2017), Akwaeke Emezi's *Freshwater* (2018), and Romeo Oriogun's *The Wind in My Rib* (2017) are notable works that engage with LGBTQ+ themes and offer powerful narratives in defiance of the prevailing societal attitudes towards homosexuality in Nigeria.

Despite the boldness of these literary contributions, Nollywood has been slow to follow suit, with queer-themed films rarely being produced by openly LGBTQ+ individuals. These films often face strict censorship, heavily influenced by the country's moral, cultural, and religious values (Green-Simms, 2022). This discrepancy between the progress in Nigerian literature and the stifling of LGBTQ+ narratives in Nollywood highlights the difficulties filmmakers face when attempting to break societal taboos in a highly regulated cinematic landscape. The criminalisation of LGBTQ+ identities in Nigeria dates back to pre-colonial times, where various kingdoms imposed penalties like banishment, ritual propitiations, and fines for homosexual practices (Novak, 2018). This punitive stance was intensified with the enactment of the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act (SSMPA) by President Goodluck Jonathan on January 7, 2014. This law, which contradicts Nigeria's constitutional and international commitments to dignity, equality, non-discrimination, privacy, and freedoms, also reinforced existing laws that criminalised consensual same-sex activities, with penalties of up to 14 years' imprisonment (Human Dignity Trust, 2013).

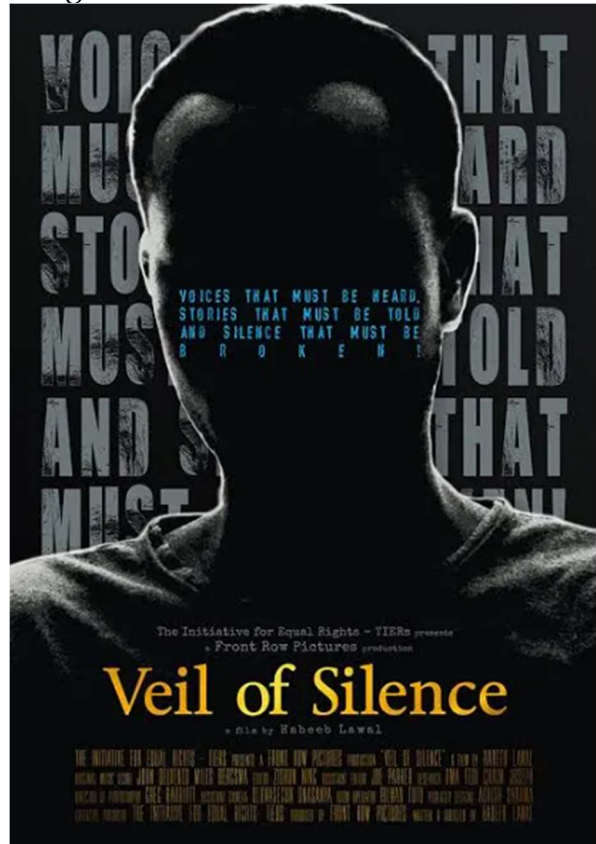
Notwithstanding these legal and societal obstacles, LGBTQ+ narratives are slowly on the rise in Nigerian cinema. To buttress, these Films addressing LGBTQ+ issues generally fall into two categories: those that portray LGBTQ+ experiences positively and those that depict them negatively. While most Nigerian films are in the latter they nonetheless provide a platform for critical discussion on LGBTQ+ matters (Okpadah, 2020). The review of LGBTQ+ films in Nigeria between 2014 and 2020 reveals that out of the six discussed, only two are feature-length – *We Don't Live Here Anymore* (2018) and *Walking with Shadows* (2019). This observation prompts an examination of the factors hindering the proliferation of LGBTQ+ narratives in the country's film industry. This study opines that the scarcity of feature-length LGBTQ+ productions can be attributed to societal resistance rooted in Nigeria's conservative religious and cultural fabric. Thus, given the reluctance of Nigerian audiences to fully embrace LGBTQ+ stories, filmmakers may opt for smaller-budget projects, anticipating minimal commercial success. Furthermore, the experimental nature of LGBTQ+ storytelling may find a more suitable

platform in short films, allowing creators to explore these themes without committing to larger-scale productions.

In the case of Funmi Iyanda's *We Don't Live Here Anymore* (2018), its limited theatrical release reflects a strategic response to potential backlash. Iyanda's prior controversy several years ago involving Bisi Alimi, a publicly acclaimed gay rights activist, likely influenced the film's distribution strategy, leading to its primary screening at film festivals (Faniyi, 2021). Similarly, Tope Oshin's *Walking with Shadows* (2019) faced challenges in achieving widespread visibility, primarily relying on private screenings and film festivals for dissemination. However, beyond private screenings, it was made available for watch on the digital platform JustWatch (Chiemeke, 2023). Despite these hurdles, the films managed notable premieres, showcasing industry personalities and generating media coverage (The Initiative for Equal Rights, 2018). This highlights the enduring resistance within Nigeria's religious and cultural milieu toward LGBTQ+ narratives in the film industry. In addition, when it comes to navigating the complex terrain of activism within Nigerian cinema, *Ìfẹ́* stands out as a beacon of resistance against prevailing cultural and religious norms. The film's portrayal of LGBTQ+ love and its advocacy for social change directly challenge the status quo, as evidenced by the backgrounds of its creators, Pamela Adie and Uyaiedu Ikpe-Etim, who are both prominent LGBTQ+ rights activists in Nigeria (Nwogu, 2020). However, despite the valiant efforts of filmmakers like Adie and Ikpe-Etim, the regulatory clampdown by institutions like the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) presents a formidable obstacle. The NFVCB, tasked with regulating film content in Nigeria, often censors material that conflicts with cultural or religious sensitivities, potentially stifling the activist dimension of films like *Ìfẹ́*.

Moreover, societal anti-activism, deeply rooted in Nigeria's cultural and religious conservatism, poses a significant challenge to the progress of LGBTQ+ rights advocacy through film. Endong (2023) highlights how entrenched biases against homosexuality permeate legislative and administrative systems, reinforcing societal norms that marginalise LGBTQ+ communities. This anti-activism manifests in public discourse, where discussions on LGBTQ+ rights are often met with resistance and condemnation. In this context, the odds seem stacked against the activist dimension of films like *Ìfẹ́*. Religion and culture wield significant influence over societal attitudes and governmental policies in Nigeria. Nigeria is a deeply religious country, with Christianity and Islam as the dominant faiths, both of which generally uphold conservative views on issues such as homosexuality. Scholars such as Onokome (2015) and Edem Okon (2016) have noted the challenges faced by independent filmmakers who seek to challenge societal norms while operating within mainstream frameworks. The tension between activism and regulation, fuelled by cultural and religious conservatism, underscores the uphill battle for LGBTQ+ rights advocacy in Nigeria's cinematic landscape. Below is a mapping of LGBTQ+ films in New Nollywood from 2014 - 2020:

Image-1



**Title:** *Veil of Silence*

Year: 2014

**Director:** Idris Akinbode

**Producer:** Golden Effects Pictures

The mini doccic was released in the same year former President Goodluck Jonathan signed the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act. It sheds light on the experiences of gay people in Nigeria and the consequences of legislation that encourage discrimination against the group. The doccic also includes interviews with attorneys and activists.

Image-2



**Title:** *Hell or High Water*

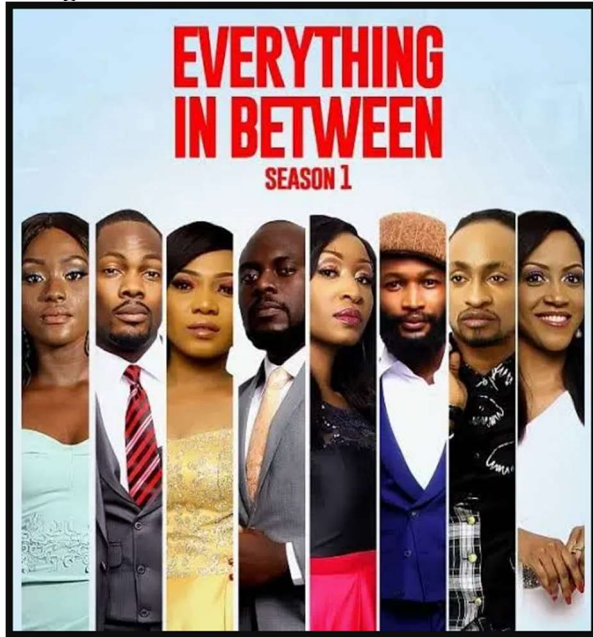
**Year:** 2016

**Director:** David Mackenzie

**Producers:** Sidney Kimmel, Peter Berg, Carla Hacken, Julie Yorn

The movie stirs an urgent discussion on homophobia, sexual orientation and religion in Nigeria. In the movie, a young married pastor, who is widely admired by his congregation is forced to come to terms with his sexuality; a realisation that ruined him spiritually, mentally and emotionally. Some of the characters in the film mirror a lot of queer Nigerians who marry a wife as a façade because they are worried about being discriminated against or banished from the church.

Image-3



**Title:** *Everything in Between*

**Year:** 2017

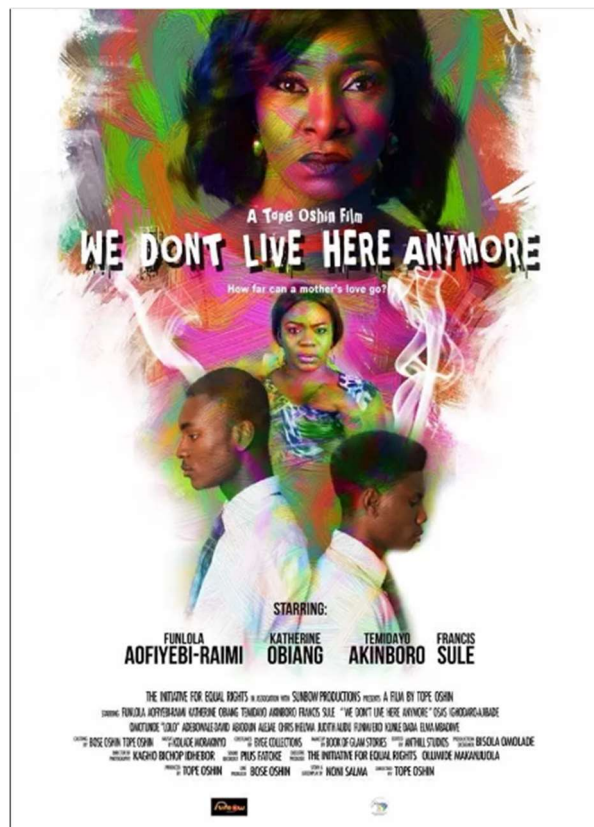
**Director:** Niyi Akinmolayan

**Producer:** Anthill Studios

The drama series documents the tales of three young men – Emma Okoye, Dayna Elliot and Demola Ogunjimi and the challenges they face trying to adhere to what is deemed the standard in Nigerian society. In an episode, Dayna’s spouse tried to blackmail his wife by extorting money from her in exchange for keeping her lesbianism affair private.



Image 4



**Title:** *We Don't Live Here Anymore*

**Year:** 2018

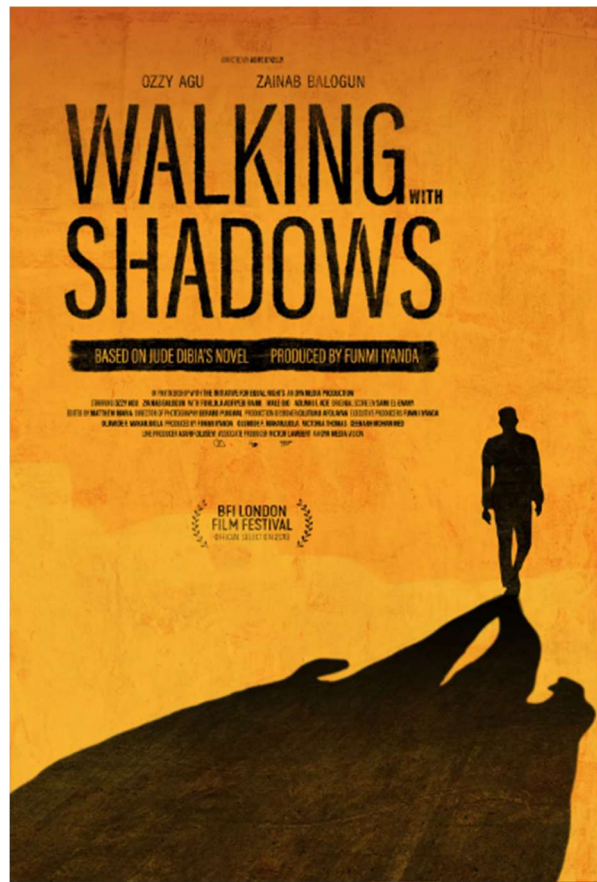
**Director:** Tope Oshin

**Producers:** The Initiative for Equal Rights (TIERs), Pamela Adie

The film focuses on dealing with homophobia and follows the story of two young male lovers; Tolu Bajulaiye and Chidi Egwuonwu struggling to defy society. The partners are involved in a crime that could transform their future. With a looming expulsion at a distance, Tolu's influential mother, Nike is determined and creates what developed into class rivalry and society prepared to chastise anything that is not the existing state of affairs.



Image 5



**Title:** *Walking with Shadows*

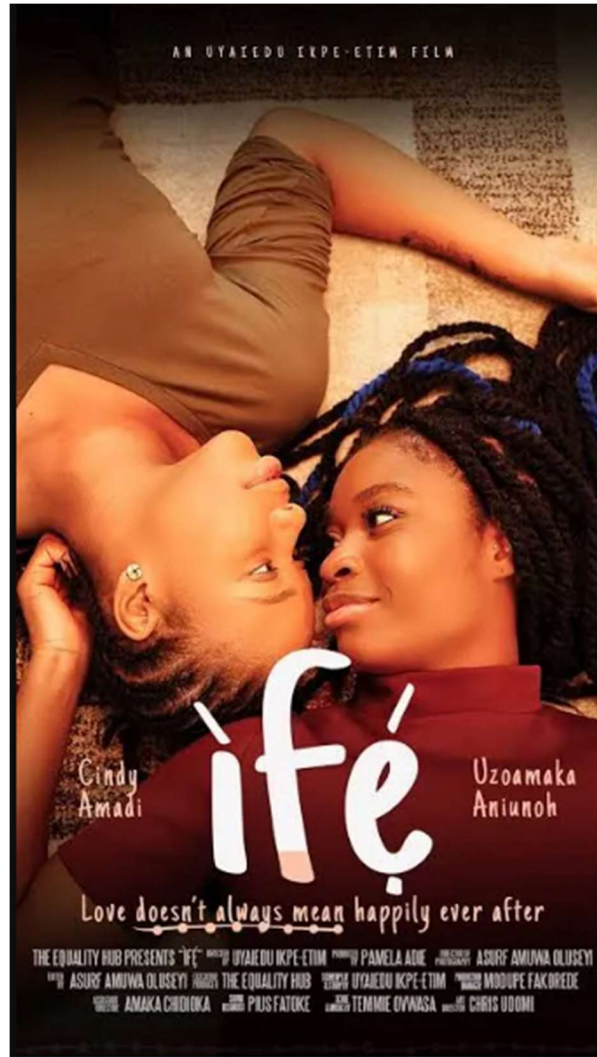
**Year:** 2019

**Director:** Aoife O'Kelly

**Producers:** Funmi Iyanda, The Initiative for Equal Rights

Former Television personality, Funmi Iyanda's movie is an adaptation of Jude Dibia's 2005 novel centred around a gay protagonist Ebele 'Adrian' Njoko. Adrian perfectly describes what society considers successful – he has a lucrative job, a wife, a kid and a hidden secret. The front falls apart when his wife discovers he is gay, which leads to the dissolution of his marriage and his family members turning against him. Every backlash towards Adrian's homosexuality uncovers the risks of being boldly gay in Nigeria.

Image 6



**Title:** *Ìfẹ̀*

**Year:** 2020 (but made available on Youtube in 2024)

**Director:** Uyaiedu Ikpe-Etim

**Producer:** Pamela Adie

LGBTQ rights advocates and filmmakers, Pamela Adie and Uyaiedu Ikpe-Etim released *Ìfẹ̀* in 2020. *Ìfẹ̀* follows the story of two lesbian lovers, *Ìfẹ̀* and Adaora, and highlights the troubles they experienced while indulging in a homosexual relationship in Nigeria. The movie tackles the misrepresentation of a homosexual relationship in Nollywood. The film has also been screened at festivals in Australia and Canada.

**LGBTQ+ films in Nigeria between 2014 and 2020 (source: author)**

### **An Exploration of *Ìfẹ̀***

*Ìfẹ̀* (which means "love" in Yoruba) stands as a remarkable achievement in Nigerian cinema, representing a pivotal moment in the ongoing evolution of New Nollywood. Directed by Uyaiedu Ikpe-Etim and produced by Pamela Adie in collaboration with The Equality Hub, *Ìfẹ̀* offers an intimate, raw, and beautifully understated exploration of same-sex love between two Nigerian women—*Ìfẹ̀* and Adaora. This short film, which runs for just 35 minutes, manages to capture the universal essence of love while breaking

significant ground in a film industry and a society that have traditionally been reluctant to openly depict LGBTQ+ narratives.

Set within the confines of Ifé's apartment, *Ifé* tells the story of two women who, over the course of a three-day date, fall deeply in love. The film opens with a simple yet profound scene – Ifé preparing for a date, her nervous excitement palpable as she adjusts her appearance. The soundtrack, a reggae-infused ballad with the lyrics "How I wish Mama would not have to cry when she finds out my love is on the other side," gently hints at the tension the character faces in navigating her sexual identity in a society that rejects it. This moment sets the stage for what unfolds in the next three days, where Ifé and Adaora get to experience love in its rawest and unfiltered form. Their time together is filled with light-hearted moments – awkward first encounters, failed attempts at cooking (like Ifé's disastrous pepper soup), and playful bickering over topics like whether listening to an audiobook is the same as reading a book. But amidst the humour and the nervous energy, something deeper begins to form between them. They bond over their shared love of poetry, reciting verses by Warsan Shire, and they begin to peel back layers of their emotional vulnerabilities, revealing their pasts and aspirations. In these moments, we witness the beauty of a love that is still in its infancy – uncomplicated yet profound.

The decision to limit the film's setting to a few rooms within Ifé's apartment is both a creative choice and a political statement. In a society where queer love is often forced to stay hidden, *Ifé* offers a brief respite – a space where the characters can explore their desires without fear of judgment or violence. However, the film also highlights the tension between love and the outside world. The comfort of Ifé's home is contrasted against the harsh realities of societal rejection and familial expectations. The film is clear that while the characters experience a sense of freedom in their private world, the outside world still looms large with its unspoken disapproval. In these intimate moments, *Ifé* avoids sensationalism and steers clear of portraying the characters as tragic or broken. Instead, it treats them as fully realised human beings, with complexities that extend beyond their sexual identities. Their relationship isn't defined solely by their being lesbians, but rather by the universal human themes of love, loss, and belonging. Through Ifé and Adaora's conversations, we see their emotional attachment to one another grow, but we also sense the weight of the larger world pressing in on them. Their love is tender, but it is also fragile – held together not only by their affection but by their shared understanding that the world outside their safe space might never fully accept them.

The film's portrayal of sensuality further challenges the typical depiction of women in Nigerian cinema. Early on, Ifé is shown admiring her reflection in the mirror, an act of self-love and acceptance that stands in contrast to the objectification often seen in mainstream films. There is a quiet, respectful sensuality between Ifé and Adaora, where the camera lingers not on their bodies but on their emotions – the longing in their eyes, the tenderness in their touches. In a society where women's bodies are often portrayed through a male gaze, *Ifé* flips the script, showing that desire and intimacy can be deeply emotional, grounded in mutual respect and understanding. But *Ifé* is more than just a love story – it's a commentary on the spaces that queer people are forced to occupy in a society that criminalises and ostracises them. While the two women find refuge in

the walls of Ifé's apartment, the film subtly reminds us that this love, like many others, cannot exist freely in the outside world. It's a reminder that the fight for acceptance is ongoing, and that the spaces we create for love, whether physical or emotional, are often the only places where we can truly be ourselves. *Ìfẹ́* thus offers a glimpse of what queer love can be in a place like Nigeria—beautiful, messy, fleeting, and full of possibility—while also acknowledging the ever-present tension between personal freedom and societal constraints.

By focusing on the emotions at the core of the relationship rather than the external obstacles, *Ìfẹ́* succeeds in making its story not just about being a lesbian in Nigeria, but about the broader experience of love itself. The film is deeply relatable, regardless of one's sexual orientation, because it deals with universal themes: the joy of finding love, the vulnerability of opening up to another person, and the challenge of balancing love with the realities of family and society. The fact that *Ìfẹ́* was written and directed by openly lesbian filmmakers is also significant, as it marks a shift in New Nollywood's storytelling. For so long, LGBTQ+ characters have been pushed to the margins of Nigerian cinema, often portrayed in harmful or simplistic ways. *Ìfẹ́* pushes back against this trend, offering an in-depth, respectful portrayal of queer women, and in doing so, it challenges the homophobic and patriarchal structures that have dominated Nigerian film. It's not just a story about love between two women; it's a declaration of the right for LGBTQ+ people to tell their own stories, to create their own spaces, and to be seen as they are—complex, multifaceted individuals worthy of love and respect.

In all, *Ìfẹ́* is a short but powerful film that invites audiences into the brief, beautiful world of two women in love. It explores the quiet joys of intimacy, the complexities of living authentically in a society that rejects you, and the fleeting beauty of a love that, while temporary, is deeply meaningful. By focusing on the emotional and human elements of their relationship, *Ìfẹ́* offers not just a glimpse into the lives of queer women in Nigeria, but into the lives of all people who have ever loved, longed, and hoped for acceptance. It's a film that speaks to the heart of human connection, regardless of sexual orientation or societal barriers.

### **Identity, Love, and Socio-Cultural Norms: A Textual Analysis of *Ìfẹ́*'s**

*Ìfẹ́* presents a compelling exploration of love, identity, and the complexity of navigating one's sexuality within the context of Nigerian society, which often marginalises LGBTQ+ individuals. The film charts the evolving relationship between Ifé and Adaora, two Nigerian women who, despite their shared desire, are shaped by very different social expectations, familial duties, and personal histories. While their love story appears simple—a romance that blooms over the course of three days—*Ìfẹ́* reveals the profound ways in which societal forces, family structures, and past traumas complicate the path to happiness. It is a love story not just about two women, but about how those women must reconcile their love for each other with the expectations placed upon them by the society they find themselves in.

In *Ìfẹ́*, the inclusion of two characters from different tribes—Ifé, a Yoruba woman, and Adaora, an Igbo woman—introduces a subtle yet profound layer of socio-cultural

commentary, reflecting the complex diversity within Nigerian society. The choice of these two tribes is significant, as the Yoruba and Igbo cultures are often seen as the two dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria alongside Hausa, each with its own distinct values, traditions, and expectations. By having the protagonists represent these two cultures, the film draws attention to how the complexities of Nigerian identity intersect with the personal experiences of its LGBTQ+ characters. The Yoruba and Igbo tribes are often characterised by contrasting cultural practices and societal expectations, particularly around gender roles and family dynamics. Yoruba culture tends to place a strong emphasis on communal living and emotional openness. In contrast, Igbo culture places a greater emphasis on duty and traditional gender roles, especially when it comes to family and marriage. These cultural differences are reflected in the characters of Ifé and Adaora. Ifé's personality – emotionally open, expressive, and free to explore her sexuality – aligns with the more fluid and communal aspects of Yoruba culture, which, while still rooted in tradition, especially within the family structure. Ifé's life seems more independent, with her role within her family more flexible, allowing her to pursue her desires without the intense pressure of cultural expectations.

Adaora, on the other hand, embodies the more rigid expectations tied to her role as the first daughter in an Igbo family. In Igbo culture, the first daughter often carries significant responsibilities, including caretaking, mediating family conflicts, and preserving the family's honour. Adaora's emotional restraint, her more masculine presentation, and her hesitance to fully embrace her relationship with Ifé reflect the weight of these cultural pressures. Her identity is not only shaped by her personal desires but also by the societal expectation that she will one day marry a man and take on traditional roles within her family. Adaora's reluctance to come out fully and her ongoing internal conflict over her relationship with Ifé are deeply tied to the more duty-bound values that dominate Igbo culture.

The interplay of these two cultural backgrounds in *Ifé* underscores the complexity of Nigerian identity, particularly in the context of a rapidly evolving global understanding of gender and sexuality. The film, by showing a Yoruba woman and an Igbo woman in a romantic relationship, subtly comments on the way Nigeria's diverse cultural norms both challenge and shape individual identity. Their relationship is marked by both connection and tension – not just because of their personal differences, but also because of the differing cultural expectations they must navigate. This serves as a microcosm of the larger societal tensions in Nigeria, where tribal, religious, and gendered expectations often clash with the growing demand for personal freedom and inclusivity. By highlighting these cultural divides through the lens of a same-sex relationship, *Ifé* reflects on the broader cultural challenges faced by Nigerians, particularly LGBTQ+ individuals, as they contend with societal expectations that continue to marginalise them.

Ifé's coming out to her mother provides one of the most poignant moments in the film. Unlike the experience of many LGBTQ+ individuals who face rejection from their families, Ifé's mother reacts with concern rather than condemnation. Raised in a polygamous family, where her mother was one of three wives, Ifé's mother has likely learned to accept and navigate the complexities of relationships in ways that challenge

traditional ideas of monogamy and sexual conformity. Ifé's mother's response—accepting her daughter's sexuality with a mixture of curiosity and concern—stands in stark contrast to the expected rejection many queer individuals face or are likely to face in Nigeria. In a country where coming out can be a perilous journey, Ifé's mother does not view her daughter's sexuality as a source of shame, but as something that needs understanding. Their relationship seems to operate in its own world, almost as if it's "Ifé and her mother versus the world." This dynamic suggests a deep emotional bond, one that might have been forged through Ifé's mother's own experience in a polygamous home, where familial loyalty and flexibility were perhaps valued over rigid social conventions. This unique bond between Ifé and her mother raises the question: would her mother's acceptance have been the same if they had come from a monogamous family, where expectations around family structure and loyalty might have been more stringent?

In contrast, Adaora's coming out experience is far more tragic and complex. When she reveals her sexuality to her late sister (as her parents are not options), she receives acceptance—an openness that is tragically cut short when her sister is murdered by her male lover. This devastating loss shapes Adaora's emotional landscape, contributing to her complicated feelings about men, and by extension, her attraction to women. Adaora's emotional turmoil is compounded by her role as the first daughter in a family that expects her to marry and uphold traditional values. She is caught between the desire for personal happiness and the pressure to meet her family's expectations. In many ways, Adaora's situation highlights the conflict faced by many LGBTQ+ individuals who, while embracing their own desires, must also navigate the responsibility of maintaining familial ties. Her ongoing communication with her family underscores this tension. Adaora is distracted, constantly texting someone—presumably family members—who are concerned about her whereabouts and her commitment to the wedding happening in a few days. This act of ignoring the calls and messages reveals the internal conflict she faces: while she is falling in love with Ifé, her familial duty is pulling her in another direction.

The film subtly addresses the question of whether Ifé and Adaora's identities align with a more straightforward understanding of lesbianism. Ifé, who openly embraces her sexuality and desires, represents what could be described as a "lesbian with the big L." She is unapologetically queer, completely invested in her love for Adaora and in the freedom to live authentically. Adaora, on the other hand, embodies what we might call a "lesbian with the small l." She is still negotiating her sexuality within the context of family pressures, past trauma, and societal expectations. While she clearly loves Ifé, she is less certain of how to fully embrace this love without losing her family and the life they expect her to lead. The "big L" and "small l" concept captures the idea that queer identity is not a one-size-fits-all label. Ifé's love for Adaora is clear and unambiguous, but Adaora's path is more convoluted, filled with emotional hesitation and uncertainty. This distinction between the two women speaks to the varying ways in which individuals engage with their sexual identity, and the internal and external conflicts that arise when love does not neatly fit into societal norms.

In many ways, *Ìfẹ́* is a reflection on the complexity of love itself. The film's ending—where the relationship between Ifé and Adaora dissolves—suggests that the external pressures of society, family, and personal history are too great for their love to survive. The breakup, while tragic, also feels inevitable. Ifé, with her open embrace of love and identity, represents a clearer path forward, while Adaora, tied by familial duties and the scars of past trauma, cannot fully commit to this love without sacrificing too much of her own identity. The film thus paints a poignant picture of how even the most intense and genuine connections can be thwarted by the weight of cultural and familial expectations. Ultimately, *Ìfẹ́* provides a powerful examination of the complex interplay between love, identity, and societal constraints. It speaks to the particular challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in Nigeria, where societal norms often demand conformity and rejection of difference. But it also transcends these specifics, offering a universal message about the difficulties of love in a world that is not always ready to accept it. Ifé and Adaora's relationship, though brief, exposes the ways in which personal happiness and familial duty often come into conflict, and how love, even when real and genuine, is not always enough to overcome the forces that seek to tear people apart.

## **Conclusion**

*Ìfẹ́* represents a significant moment in Nigerian cinema, offering a candid portrayal of same-sex love in a society where such relationships are largely invisible. As a short film, it effectively addresses the challenges LGBTQ+ individuals face, highlighting the tension between personal desires and the societal pressures that demand conformity. The film's significance lies not only in its exploration of a lesbian relationship but in its resistance to the conservative cultural and religious norms that dominate Nigerian society. By focusing on the characters of Ifé and Adaora, *Ìfẹ́* provides a voice to the marginalized experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals, especially women, in a context where their love is rarely depicted or understood. In the wider context of Nigerian cinema, *Ìfẹ́* contributes to a growing push for more diverse representation in film. However, it also underscores the barriers filmmakers must navigate, from censorship by the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) to societal rejection of LGBTQ+ themes. Despite these challenges, the film shows how short films can offer an important platform for exploring issues that might otherwise be censored or ignored in feature-length productions. *Ìfẹ́* is more than just a love story; it challenges the rigid norms that govern not only Nigerian cinema but also society at large. By centring LGBTQ+ love in a Nigerian context, it encourages audiences to rethink traditional understandings of identity and relationships. While the future of LGBTQ+ representation in Nigerian cinema remains uncertain, *Ìfẹ́* is a powerful reminder of the potential for film to disrupt societal expectations and create space for voices that have long been silenced. It is a clear indication that, despite the risks, there is room for activism and change in Nigerian film, and that stories like *Ìfẹ́* can be a catalyst for broader social transformation.



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