

**DEFIANCE AGAINST QUEERPHOBIA IN AFRICAN POETRY:
AN EXPLORATION OF THE INWARD GAZE: AN ANTHOLOGY OF
QUEER ART**

BY

Garvey AKPOTOHWO

ART2000625

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERATURE
FACULTY OF ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN
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**AN ESSAY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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CERTIFICATION

I certify that this study was carried out by **Garvey AKPOTOHWO** in the Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City under my supervision.

Dr. Clement Eloghosa Odia
Project Supervisor

Date

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to God, for his unwavering guidance and grace.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.7 Purpose of Study

This essay examines defiance against queerphobia in African poetry in order to explore how African poets challenge queerphobia through their works. It sets out to investigate the strategies adopted by African poets in championing inclusivity as well as opening the space for queer acceptance.

1.8 Scope of Study

The study focuses on a selection of poems from *The Inward Gaze: An Anthology of Queer Art*. The essay draws poems by different Nigerian and other African poets, namely, Karen Kennings, Onwubiko Chidozie, Akola Thompson, Ezenzer Agu, Chinthu Udayarajan, and Chisom Okafor. These six poets are closely read to reveal their queer ideas.

1.9 Research Methodology

The essay adopts a qualitative research methodology, which includes among others, the following: a close reading of the poems. Also, it involves in-depth analysis of poetic devices, themes and structures. There is a critical discourse analysis, examining language, imagery, and symbolism in selected poems. Queer theory is adopted as the framework of the interpretation. Also applied is the postcolonial theory, especially the alterity study.

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1.10 Theoretical Background

This essay adopts the queer theory to interpret poems under study. Lilith Acadia describes queer theory as:

A network of critiques emerging from a legacy of activism and looking ahead to utopian futures. The analytical tools queer theory provides as a mode of close reading and critique makes it a relevant contemporary approach to literary theory. (46)

The pivot of queer theory is that it is inspired by a combative tendency especially which makes queer individuals to fight for a space for their acceptance. Thus, activism is the foundation of the queer theory. It also encompasses the critical weapon, social activism and envisioning the future with a utopian impulse which presupposes that queer marginalization and sexual profiling will one day become a thing of the past.

Henry L. Minton writes that: “Queer theory is concerned with the non-essentialising nature of sexual identities and is premised on the notion of resistance to forms of dominion, such as heterosexism and homophobia” (110)

Minton argues that sexual identities are not essential to queer identity. Put differently, queer theorists are often concerned with how queer individuals confront dominant ideas that preclude and marginalize queer identities. Hence, queer theory expresses concerns about the status of queer people in the context of

heteronormativity. It also shows how queer characters survive in the face of heterosexual orientations as well as homophobia.

As for Matt Brim and Ghaziani Amin, queerness has a unique expression and peculiarity:

The idea evolved out of the works of philosopher Michel Foucault, who argued that gender and sexual identities are not biologically determined but are results of the social constructs that shape our understanding of society and culture. (69).

Brim and Amin establish the basis of queer studies by explaining the criterion on which sexuality is based. According to them, relying on Foucault's theory of sexuality, they agree that gender is not determined by biological criterion, rather they are products of social constructs. Hence, according to them, the heteronormative society has a way they consider who is male or female. Sex therefore is not biologically determined, instead it is constructed by social consideration. Also, religion and tradition have thus far determined how sex is constructed. The concept of heteronormativity which considers sex and marriage as an experience that must occur between male and female only.

1.11 Review of Related Scholarship

Critical essays on queer studies have started to beam interest in queer imagination in Nigerian social context. Few of these essays have been reviewed in this section. Emily Shun Man Chow-Quesada explores canonizing the mundane

by narrating and transgressing the Nigerian queer self/selves. To this end, the scholar recognises that:

Discussions of LGBTQIA + rights are still a taboo in parts of Africa where traditional and religious values remain significant. As public discussions of queer life can bring about marginalization and threaten personal safety, some Nigerian authors have opted to present literary queer selves. (298).

Chow-Quesada's views are against the backdrop of Unoma Azuah and Chike Frankie Edozien's novels, the points raised are also germane to the poems. The fact that LGBTQIA + issues are considered a taboo in African societies owing to traditional and religious inhibitions shows the enormous values which LGBTQIA represents. The focus of the essay is on queer life exposing the predicament of gay people who experience marginalization and threat. There is also focus on "literary queer selves" as against the queer other.

Paul Onanuga examines the linguistic advocacy on queer Nigerian Twitter with special interest on the phenomena of "coming out" and "reaching out". According to Onanuga:

Anti-homosexuality and anti-LGBTQ attitudes persist in Nigeria, cutting across the activities of state and non-state actors. However, away from the hostile public physical spaces, the digital world has become a refuge where Nigerian queers attempt to exist true to

their self-identities, and to take charge of the narrative about their existence. (489).

In Onanuga's essay, the research explores the linguistic angle to reading queer predicament as well as advocating for their acceptance. He explores the courage exhibited by queer individuals who have come out of the closet and reach out to other members of their communities. However, the essay does not explore the defiance through the poetic engagement to ventilate their anger. Instead, Onanuga studies online platform like Twitters (now X).

As for Olubunmi Funmi Oyebanji, the scholar examines discourse representations of identities in the Tweets of Nigerian LGBT people. According to Oyebanji:

Linguistic studies on the media representation of same-sex sexualities have explored how heteronormativity is accentuated, without adequate attention paid to how sexual minorities have also used language to emphasise their identities and resist homophobia. (84)

Oyebanji's essay also employs the linguistic praxis to read the representation of same-sex sexualities. The pivot of the essay is the representation of the plight which sexual minorities often experience owing to their sexual preferences. The essay is clearly a linguistic study of online tweets. However, it does not explore

how poets represent sexual marginalization. This situation leaves critical gap in queer studies.

Erik Gleibermann reviewing *the Inward Gaze: An Anthology of Queer Art* explains that:

What distinguishes their depictions beyond the specific character identities is that they shed the heterosexual gaze as indicated by the title of the second 14 anthology, *The Inward Gaze*. (7)

Gleibermann identifies the poets' depictions of specific individuals who expose the heterosexual gaze into the inward realities of the same-sex individuals. Gleibermann's review reveals the heterosexual marginalization of the queer people. The review does not concentrate on how the queer people combat their treatment and seek freedom and acceptance.

Clement Eloghosa Odia and Esther Iria Jamgbadi explores queering the heteronormative self through motifs of Rome Oriogun's queer poetry. According to Odia and Jamgbadi:

The writers repudiate the anti-gay culture and call for collaboration, co-existence of gay rights to self-expression and sexual orientation. This essay has concentrated on the poetic nuances employed by queer poets to articulate queer themes. (133)

The primary focus of their essay is the representation of anti-gay issues through motifs in Oriogun's poetry to highlight some of their sufferings. However, the

essay is not focused on how African poets present defiant attitude to the heteronormative society. Instead Odiya and Jamgadi are interested in how queer poetry articulate queer themes.

1.12 Thesis Statement

Through their poetry, contemporary African writers employ defiance as a powerful tool against queerphobia, by interrogating fear, reinterpreting biblical texts and defying heteronormative and social biases in order to foster dissent, liberation, and queer visibility, while challenging heteronormative discourses and reclaiming African identities in *The Inward Gaze: An Anthology of Queer Arts*.

CHAPTER TWO

**INTERROGATING FEAR, UNPACKING INTERNALIZED
QUEERPHOBIA IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN POETRY**

Fear, a pervasive and insidious emotion, has long been wielded as a tool of oppression against LGBTQ= individuals in Africa. Internalized queerphobia, born from societal stigma and heteronormative expectations can silence queer voices and erase queen identities. However, contemporary African poets have begun to challenge this narrative, using their verse as a powerful counter-discourse.

This chapter explores how African poets interrogate fear, confronting the internalized queerphobia that threatens to erase their identities. Through close reading of poems by Karen Jennings, Onwubiko Chidozie, and Akola Thompson, we will examine the ways in which fear is constructed, performed and subverted. We will analyse how these poets confront the shame and guilt imposed by heteronormative societies, reclaim their bodies and desires from the margins of societal acceptance as well as forge new languages of self-expression and identity.

By interrogating fear, these poets create spaces for queer visibility, self-acceptance, and liberation. This chapter argues that their poetry not only reflects the complexities of queer African experiences but also challenges the dominant narratives that have historically silenced them. In Thompson's poem entitled "Rain", the poet interrogates fear that restrains queer individuals from expressing

loves between them. The speaker situates the poem in the context of rain, which provides a comfortable ambience for love. The speaker begins thus:

The rain is falling here.
 You remember how it rose and fell-
 First in heavy drops, and then in
 Pitter-patter-on our zinc sheets in Berbices?
 Yes, just like that. (*Gaze*, 121)

The stanza above operates on a symbolic level, like several queer poems. The rain in the above stanza is a metaphor or an image of emotion. The falling rain connotes the upsurging emotion and desire for the expression of their inner world for each other. On a literary level, the rain functions as a means of enacting a flashback. That their emotion, “rose” and “fell”, similar to the rain, conveys the unstable sense of desire.

That place you had asked me to take you that time
 And I'd said no, I had family there,
 I couldn't be seen with you-
 Alone-
 Not after all the rumors were finally retreating (121)

The fear of the speaker stems from three adduced reasons. Firstly, there is the fear of being found out by the family members. The queer guys like to operate in secret. They give impression that they are straight. Secondly, there is the fear of

being found alone in that place. This creates serious problems for them because the society as represented by the family in this context, abhors queer orientation. Thirdly, there is the fear of having the rumours, of their gay sexual orientation, being confirmed. All these reasons when viewed shows the poet's interrogation of fear or queerphobia.

Despite the fear of being found out, the speaker is ready to defy the odds against gay sexual orientation and continue to get involved in homosexuality:

As I tapped on your naked back
 You'd breathed deeply to show that
 My fear affected you
 And I'd grown grey with anger
 at my own fear,
 Feeling your fingers more stiltedly
 against my skin. (121)

Fear has been reinvigorated to express the speaker's audacity, brazenness and utter disdain for what may happen when found out.

The use of synecdoche amplifies the freedom and unhindered access to the male body. Thus, "tapped" and "naked back", just as, "fingers" and "skin" evoke nudity and sexual overtures, which heteronormative society frowns at in male to male relationship. By openly expressing sexual advances, the speaker reclaims and challenges the heteronormative queerphobia. What can be perceived is queer

visibility. We see gay men expressing sexual contact. There is no holdback. The speaker reimagines the scene with nostalgia. The speaker recalls when he has “tapped on” the “naked back” of the male addressee and how he has “breathed deeply”, reciprocating and savouring the romance. The impact of the speaker’s initial fear is felt more in the breath of the addressee who has grown unease. In the end, the speaker has become angry at his “own fear”. They continue their sexual encounter “more stiltedly” to avoid public anger or queerphobia.

Another poet, Karen Jennings from South Africa, in the poem “Nella”, which serves as a powerful symbol of resilience, community and self-love in South Africa’s LGBTQ+ community. It specifically refers to a gay man, especially one who is effeminate or openly queer. The speaker recounts the fear that characterizes queer people. Therefore, gay men are easily recognized:

We were both teaching then
and more than half afraid
of what their pupils thought. (*Gaze*, 34)

this opening stanza captures the fear that defines the lives of gay men. Their existence is often threatened by those who have queerphobia. Being gay predisposes them to fear. They are concerned about what their “pupils thought” and imagined must be going on in their heart and what they will do when left alone. Hence, they avoided being seen alone. Later, the speaker explains:

they laughed at us,

those teenagers, seeing
 clearly what we couldn't

 say out loud. That we
 were drawn to one another
 and afraid to be found out. (35)

The usual reaction to “Nella”, gay men, in South Africa, as expressed in the first stanza above is ridicule. They laugh at them, firstly, because their sexual orientation appears to be different from the norm. secondly, they laugh because they know the frustration, gay men suffer, for not being able to openly express their sexual preferences. Finally, they laugh at their closeness. This prompts the gay men in the second stanza to feel “afraid” of being “found out”. This fear has also indirectly exposed the internalized queerphobia in not only the “teenagers” in the poem, but also the teeming members of the heteronormative society in South Africa and Africa in general.

Onwubiko Chidozie also interrogates fear, by unpacking internalized queerphobia in the poem, “patience” the speaker exposes the above in the stanza below:

Attention is what holds the eyes
 It's what starts the fire.
 Heartburns need no medicine,

but only patience to heal

A wagging head says no

but denial is self-inflicted pain. (*Gaze*, 36)

One distinctive quality of queer poetry is the subtlety of language. Every linguistic choice deployed conveys specific ideas. Firstly, the attention expresses the secrete bond that brings gay men into a sexual relationship. According to the speaker, it responsible for the “fire”, a metaphor for intense amorous desire. Just as heartburns need no medicine to cure it, homosexuality cannot be eradicated. The image of sickness compounds the sense of fear that is associated with the heteronormative queerphobia. Also, the image of a waging head signals disapproval. In the speaker’s opinion, the society’s denial or disapproval of gay marriage, inflicts severe pain on the one who denies others. The fear of being rejected exacerbates queerphobia.

You say none and don’t lie

but one day the heart will tire.

Nod your head on the day you know

the time is right this way you’ll gain. (36)

This stanza challenges the narrative that queerness is unacceptable. This verse offers a counter discourse by educating the queerphobia community to embrace gay marriage. In the speaker’s words, the day the people come to know about queer relationships, they are counseled to accept it. By embracing inclusivity, the

society will gain. As Chidozie has advocated, accepting gay men as they are will help to eradicate the unnecessary fear, fueled by internalized queerphobia.

In interrogating fear, we uncover the complex web of societal, cultural and personal factors that perpetuate harm and marginalization. By confronting and dismantling these fears, we can begin to build bridges of understanding, empathy, and solidarity. Ultimately, interrogating fear is not about eradicating it entirely, but about transforming it into a catalyst for growth, compassion and justice. As we cultivate courage, critical thinking, and community, we can reimagine a world where fear no longer controls, but rather informs and inspires our collective pursuit of love, liberation, and humanity. Similarly, by interrogating fear, we expose the harmful narratives and power structures that sustain inequality and oppression. Through this process, we uncover opportunities for healing, resilience and transformation. May our critical examination of fear ignite a courageous movement toward justice, empathy, and inclusive communities, where diversity is celebrated, and all individuals can thrive without constraint.

CHAPTER THREE

REINTERPRETING BIBLICAL TEXTS

for centuries biblical texts have been misused to justify discrimination, marginalization, and violence against LGBTQ+ individuals. Traditional interpretations have perpetuated harmful attitudes, reinforcing heteronormativity. However, a growing movement seeks to reclaim and reinterpret these texts, uncovering alternative perspectives that promote love, acceptance, and inclusivity.

By challenging traditional interpretations and reclaiming biblical text, we can disrupt heteronormative assumptions, amplify marginalized voices, foster empathy and understanding and promote LGBTQ+ affirmation and inclusion. This chapter explores the complex journey of reclaiming scripture, examining how LGBTQ+ communities, often silenced, excluded, or harmed are reinterpreting and appropriating sacred texts to challenge dominant narratives and power structures, amplify marginalized voices and experiences, uncover hidden and progressive truths as well as foster inclusively.

Queer poets reinterpret biblical texts to amplify LGBTQ+ predicament. One such poet is Ebenezer Agu, in the poem, “Our Bodies, Like Gethsemane I”. the poem explores the allusion to Gethsemane thus:

Sometimes our bodies are like Gethsemane, a place of flowers
where we go to, first, agonize and then dance, in full naked bodies,
the week of seduction. (Gaze, 103)

The opening line of the above stanza holds the key to the meaning of the poem. The speaker makes use of biblical allusion to Gethsemane, a garden on the Mount of Olives, where Jesus makes agonizing prayer, angels strengthened Him, Judas betrayed Him and sheds tears like drops of blood. Thus, this garden symbolizes Jesus human struggle with God's will, ultimate submission to God's plan, His crucifixion's suffering and love. Equally true is human weakness. In the context of the poem, utilizing simile, the speaker compares gaymen's "bodies" to "Gethsemane", instead of being a place of serious prayers, it is "a place of flowers", a kind of garden, where they engage in sexual intercourse. The reliance on metaphorical devices clarifies the message as well as boosts the poem's quality. The bodies offer pleasure and agony. They "dance", a euphemism for sex, as they do so "in full naked bodies". Just as Gethsemane reveals Jesus' human weakness, the speaker's equates gaymen's "bodies" to points of weakness "the weak of seduction". This implies that with their bodies, they yield to seduction. Hence, their bodies have become Gethsemane, a place of human frailty.

In the subsequent stanza, the speaker concludes:

When Christ comes,
 he'll ask what we have done with our bodies
 and we'll tell Him we have found spouts in them
 that taste like vinegar. (*Gaze*, 103)

Relying on the biblical text, the speaker reinterprets it to accommodate gay views. The return of Jesus Christ is a significant biblical teaching to which the speaker has alluded. According to the poet persona, when Christ returns, He will ask gaymen what they have done with their “bodies”, he says that they will tell “Him” that they have found “spouts in them” which “taste like vinegar”. This stanza contains two important symbols: spouts and vinegar. In the speaker’s words, they found “spouts”, a euphemism for sexual organ, especially the penis. Unfortunately, they taste like vinegar. This simile draws attention to the underlying biblical allusion and its significance. Vinegar is a sour-taste liquid drink. Jesus was given vinegar on the cross, but it symbolizes self-denial, suffering, bitter experience and cleansing from sin. Additionally, it symbolizes enduring hardship with faith.

The vinegar imagery conveys the hardship which their sexual orientation appears to use their way. The beauty of this poem is the use of biblical texts to re-evaluate how they have been used to exclude gaymen and marginalize them. Agu cleverly applies the texts to reinterpret and convey defiance against queerphobia.

Similarly in the poem, “Our Bodies, Likd Gethsemane II”, Agu reinterprets biblical texts to interrogate queerphobia:

Each time he had come to me (after Block Rosary)
we recited the parody of his faith:

*come father, son, come holy ghost
the one that sets little boys' tents on fire.*

Then we became Shedrack and Abednego in amorous flames (104)

The context of the above poem centres round the speaker's relationship with a fellow gay man. The stanza narrates the experience he has had with the gay man. He recalls how his gay partner has returned from Block Rosary, a reference to catholic group of people who congregate to pray the Rosary together. Then the speaker introduces a parody of the Catholic creed, which he recites. The text is reinterpreted to justify the fact that even God, the father, the son and the Holy Ghost approve of gay relationship, because, according to the speaker, the Christian God is the "one that sets little boys" tents on fire". The word, "fire" refers to amorous intensity. Additionally, both partners have become "Shedrack and Abednego in amorous flames". Here again, the poet employs biblical allusion, but twisted to reclaim the narrative that queerness is obnoxious to Christianity and to foster inclusivity. The Shedrack and Abednego in the Bible are symbols of defiance against idolatory. Similarly, the two gay men in the poem assume the posture of defiance against queerphobia.

Once he prayed to God (before he paid with his Presence, and an extra pain, for whom he was). And I despaired against the God who received an unpaid service from his extra pain. (105)

The central message of the above stanza is externalizing the repressed pain which queer men endure as a result of religious extremism and exclusion. The speaker narrates the physical and psychological pain of being a gay man owing to religious discrimination. As the stanza indicates, the said gay character in the poem, “prayed to God” which goes to show that gay men are also Christians. They too serve the Almighty creator. For being a Christian, he pays by being in God’s presence to pray. Also, he suffers psychological pain for being a gay man. All these made the speaker to be “despaired”, against the God who tolerates the pain gay men suffer for being gays.

All day, I have made supplication to loneliness, learning how a boy
grows into a grown man dancing in the scared body of Christ. (105)

The stanza begins with a reinterpretation of biblical texts and terms. For example, it is natural to make supplication to God, but in this poem, the speaker makes a “supplication to loneliness”. This expresses the speaker’s deep longing for connection and companionship with the gay partner. Also, he has learned “how a boy grows into a grown man”. The process of the growth takes place through maturity and engagement with other gay men. The boy who in the opening part of the poem is unable to practice gay sexual intercourse has suddenly matured and independent in making that decision. Thus, the grown man is presented as “dancing” in the scared body of Christ. This presupposes that the gay man even

though, has embraced Christianity, he has not abandoned his faith in Christ, neither has he stopped attending church.

In another poem, Chinthu Udayarajan in “sinfully” interrogates the concept of sin and reinterprets it, by imbuing it with new consciousness. The poem has two stanzas exploring the concept from two diverse angles. The opening stanza begins thus:

As we lay sinfully amidst China roses,
Your cat raised its eyes at us
And its soft cry was almost a smile.
I would run as the flowers began
To shed their petals but you held me. (43)

The primary focus of this stanza is the word, sin, which sees LGBTQ+ as a sinful sexual orientation. The speaker recalls the posture in which both he and his partner were found to be a place of sexually sinfulness. But to the queer men, it is not a sin. To them, it is just normal. Through a combined interplay of both animal and plant images, Udayarajan uses the cat image and that of flowers to draw attention to the queer characters.

The second stanza begins thus:

It wasn't lust, it wasn't love.
It was sheer curiosity
To know each other as bodies.

We were thirteen

And what did we know? (*Gaze*, 43)

The stanza is organized round two distinct Christian or biblical ideals: “lust” and “love”. The one tends to set off the contrast between them. In the speaker’s view, it is neither “lust” nor “love” that propelled the speaker to explore sexual advances between him and his gay partner. Rather, it was “sheer curiosity”. To compound matter, they were only “thirteen” years old, when they began to “know” or engage in sexual relations, by exploring each other’s “bodies”. The danger is that the gay partners have been indulging in their sexual escapades for many years owing to sheer curiosity. Hence, lust and love are not responsible for their filandering.

As we reclaim and reinterpret biblical texts, we unlock new possibilities for inclusive and affirming faith communities. By challenging traditional interpretations, we expose the harmful effects of heteronormative and patriarchal assumptions. Embracing queer perspective=, we rediscover the transformative power of scripture to promote love, justice, and equality. This has our reclaimed understanding of biblical texts inspire a new era of compassion, empathy, and solidarity, where all individuals can find affirmation and belonging.

CHAPTER FOUR

DEFYING HETERONORMATIVE AND SOCIAL BIASES

Heteronormative and social biases permeate our society, often unconsciously reinforcing harmful attitudes and marginalizing vulnerable groups. This chapter explores strategies for recognizing and challenging themes, biases and fostering a more inclusive and equitable environment. Chinthu Udayarajan's poem entitled, "Purple Rain" advocates fluidity which blurs the line between feminine and masculine identities. The poem begins thus:

Sounds of Prince

Melodies of Purple Rain

A crowd dancing on deck.

My music is in my backpack. (*Gaze*, 42)

The poem is based on a literary allusion to the song by Prince, the American singer in 1984 album and film, *Purple Rain*. The song challenges traditional notions of gender and sexuality. Thus, "*Purple Rain*" symbolizes fluidity and blending of binaries. The poet in the above poem has employed allusion as a weapon of resistance to societal norms, nonconformity and a means of embracing individuality. In Prince's *Purple Rain* character, "The kid", is an iconic representation of queer Black masculinity, defying traditional notions of Black male identity. In fact, *Purple Rain* exemplifies queer theory core concepts especially disrupting norms. Having explored the background to the poem, let us engage with the text. The poem opens with a "crowd" of people, especially gay men "dancing on the deck to Prince's "Purple Rain". What the speaker has

indirectly evoked, through the dance metaphor, is defiance of heteronormative and social biases against queerness. While he keeps the “music” in his “backpack”, he and the crowd of gay people openly defy queerphobia.

Just then, the speaker recalls an important experience thus:

I remember a friend from the past;

We'd found moments of magic

Intrinsic to mushrooms and chemical logic.

We'd swayed to our sweetness

And played smooth moves. (42)

The beauty of the above stanza is to be noticed in the exuberance of linguistic appropriateness of alliterative technique that seeks to express the poet's sense of pleasure. Beyond this there is a subtle hint at very private yet intimate “moments of magic” and “swayed to our sweetness” are alliterative words which euphemistically express deep sexual or amorous feelings. Equally intriguing is the mushroom image employed to convey sexual innuendoes. This is amplified by the expression “smooth moves”. The real question is that, why has the speaker brought back this experience? The memory of that beautiful experience reveals the speaker's inadvertent fondness and desire to openly relive the experience by damning the consequences. Although the experience has been done in the dark and away from social restrictions, the speaker intends to defy heteronormative biases against queerness.

To preserve the memory, the speaker explains:

Today I pray and reminisce

And light sacred incense.

Jasmine scent fills my air

And I dance again to Purple Rain. (42)

The jasmine imagery holds several symbolic interpretations and meanings. By lighting sacred incense, and using Jasmine scent which fills the air, the speaker creates a sensual and romantic space, thus evoking feelings of love and intimacy. The floral aroma wakens desires and passions while also striving towards emotional healing. By dancing again to Purple Rain, the speaker also relives the experience and yearns for a repeat of the emotions. As can be inferred from the above, the poem deals with three characters, namely, a crowd of dancers, a friend the speaker is unable to forget, and the speaker himself. The first part of the poem dwells on the crowd of dancers to Prince's Purple Rain. The aim of this to expose the defiance against heteronormative biases. The second part shifts attention to an unforgettable friend with whom the speaker has some sexual encounters. The most important image is that of the mushroom. Here it amplifies the dispersal of queer identities and experiences. Also, it mirrors queer communities underground connections, thus challenging traditional binarism. The last part takes the reader to the present and the fondness especially the desire to preserve the memory.

Another important poem that seeks to defy heteronormative and social biases is Chisom Okafor's poem, entitled "A Nigerian Recipe for Queerness". The poem references Isaac Newton's Third Law of Motion which states that: "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction". The poem hinges its ideological position on how heteronormative society especially the Nigerian society reacts to queerness. As the title indicates, the poem seeks to show the Nigerian recipe for queerness. The poem is written in three stanzas. The first begins thus:

Start with the other boy acting out a scene
 In a clubhouse shanty,
 how he must gamble love
 with the wrong bidder
 before he lets his body be chiseled
 into the shape of a lightning bolt. (*Gaze*, 67)

The stanza centres the experience of queer youth. The boy acts out a scene, suggesting a fluid, performative understanding of identity, thus challenging traditional notions of self. The boy's struggles resonate with queer youth experiences, navigating identity and desire. The stanza touches on body autonomy, consent and self-expression.

Gambling love with the "wrong bidder" implies vulnerability, highlighting the risks queer individuals face in seeking connection and acceptance. The image

of the body being “chiseled into the shape of a lightning bolt” symbolizes transformation, liberation, and self-recreation, echoing queer struggles for bodily autonomy. The “wrong bidder” implies non-normative desire, disrupting heteronormative expectations and embracing queer possibilities. The clubhouse shanty represents a liminal space for exploration and experimentation, echoing queer spaces and communities.

The speaker narrates further in the following stanza:

He knows how to survive here every other night by silence –
against choking on strands of hard finger; the way each suspicious
eye comes with a crisscross of edible and inedible catcalls like
rotten teeth breathing through tight lips.

This stanza continues to explore themes of queer survival, vulnerability and resistance to heteronormative and social biases. The boy’s silence serves as a coping mechanism, highlighting the need for queer individuals to adapt and survive in hostile environments. “strands of hard fingers” and “rotten teeth breathing through tight lips” symbolize toxic masculinity emphasizing the suffocating nature of patriarchal expectations. “Edible and inedible catcalls” illustrate the objectification and commodification of queer bodies, reducing them to consumable entities. The image of choking and suffocation underscores the physical and emotional toll of navigating anti-queer spaces. Certain symbols evoke specific meanings. For example, “catcalls” represent not just objectification

transition and vulnerability. Eggs express fragility yet potent symbols of queer intimacy and possibility. Hawks embody predatoriness, oppression, and the risks queer individuals face. Finally, wings represent transformation, freedom and queer liberation.

Defying heteronormative biases demands intentional self-reflection, education, and collective action. By recognizing and challenging these biases, we dismantle harmful systems of oppression and create space for marginalized voices. Embracing diversity and promoting inclusive practices, we foster empathy, understanding, and solidarity. Also, in defying heteronormative biases, we confront the intricate web of societal, cultural and personal factors that perpetuate inequality. Through critical examination and intentional action, we unravel these biases, cultivating a culture of inclusivity, empathy and justice.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The central argument of this essay is that contemporary African poets employ defiance, as a powerful tool against queerphobia, by interrogating fear, reinterpreting biblical texts and defying heteronormative and social biases, in order to foster dissent, liberation, and queer visibility, while challenging heteronormative discourses and reclaiming African identities.

Among the aspect treated in this essay is the poet's interrogation of fear deployed by the heteronormative society to entrench internalized queerphobia. By interrogating fear, African poets create a space for actualizing queer visibility. In this aspect, we see queer individuals experiencing fear in expressing their sexual preferences. We see some cases where queer characters defy the odds against gay sexual orientation and continue to get involved in homosexuality. The queer people are constantly in fear of being attacked owing to the fact that they are gay individuals. Hence, the poems interrogate the fear. The poems challenge the narrative that queerness is unacceptable. Thus, many of the poems offer a counter-discourse by educating the queerphobia community to embrace gay marriage.

Many of the selected poets reinterpret biblical texts which have been employed to marginalize queer communities. By writing these poems they seek to reclaim the texts and uncover alternative perspectives that promote love, acceptance, and inclusivity. Queer poets reinterpret biblical texts to project

LGBTQ+ predicament. Some of the poets use allusion to specific places. For example, queer body is compared to Gethsemane. At another point, the poets reinterpret biblical texts to justify the fact that God, Almighty approves of gay men and their sexuality. Through this, the poets expose the physical and psychological trauma which gay people experience. Many of the poets portray God as all inclusive father who does not disincarnate. Biblical allusions and images pertaining to Christian faith used by the poets assume symbolic proportion and express the poets fondness for gay inclusivity.

Heteronormative and social biases receive introspective treatment as the poets show how LGBTQ+ individuals strive to defy these biases. Reactions to gay men have always been stereotypical. Utilizing liminal spaces to represent gay communities, the poets are able to confront heteronormative biases. The brilliance of the poems is to be enjoyed in how the poets have employed different artistic devices to enliven the poems and convey specific ideological positions contrived to strengthen the gay argument.

Queerphobia is real in Africa and there is need to recognize the fact that queerness is a matter of choice and a matter of human rights. Gay individuals have rights to prefer a particular sexual orientation. It is the duty of the government and respective organs of government to safeguard these rights. Government must proceed to put measures in place and even come up with

policies to promote inclusivity. The African societies must seek to learn and understand queer individuals in order to achieve peace and development.

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