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Unsettling the Boundaries of Taboo in Contemporary Nigerian Poetry: An X-ray of Selected Romeo Oriogun's Poems

Ogochuku O. Anigala
Department of English and Literary Studies
Delta State University,
Abraka, Delta State
Nigeria

Abstract

The boundaries of taboo in Nigerian literature have been overrun by modernist thinking and cosmopolitan ideals. One such is the topic of sexual identity and sexualities in Nigerian poetry, which is a relatively under-explored area of literary studies. However, a growing body of Nigerian poetry has engaged with these issues nuanced and complexly in recent years. These poets often use their work to challenge societal norms and perceptions of sexuality and to provide a voice for marginalised and underrepresented communities. This paper argues that what was once culturally considered taboo has been displaced in contemporary Nigerian literature (poetry), and as a recourse from globalisation, this trend has come to stay. It aims to provide an in-depth analysis of selected Romeo Oriogun's poems, focusing on how the poet's writing unsettles the boundaries of taboo and challenges our understanding of its place in society. This paper, through the lens of Judith Butler's Queer theory, explores selected Oriogun's poems and other contemporary poets to buttress its argument. Oriogun delves into the complexities of taboo and its fluidity in society. Through a series of interconnected poems, the poet unpacks how cultural norms and perceptions of morality shape our understanding of taboo and its place in our lives. The article concludes that Nigerian poetry is increasingly engaging with issues of sexual identities and sexualities. Among others, these poets also use their poems to critique societal structures and power dynamics through the lens of sexuality. Their poetry is evocative and powerful, helps to broaden the understanding of these issues, and further displaces the boundary of taboo in Nigerian society and beyond.

Keywords: Boundaries, Taboo, Nigerian Poetry, Sexuality, Cultural Norms

Introduction

Contemporary Nigerian poetry is a vibrant field that continues to push the boundaries of what is considered acceptable and taboo. This is particularly evident in the work of Romeo Oriogun, whose poems, selected from his collection, *Sacrament of Bodies*, challenge conventional norms and expose the hidden complexities of human experience. In this article, we will examine how Oriogun's work unsettles the boundaries of taboo —what is societally regarded as unmentionable, sin or crime, amongst others— in Nigerian poetry and what this tells us about the state of the genre.

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Though this paper is an attempt to map out the seeming displacement of taboo in the Nigerian literary space, specifically poetry, we must first trace the beginning of a concept to arrive at a logical end; it is undoubtedly the case that African writing in the twenty-first century often contains an entanglement of both the old and new. Indeed, as Harry Garuba writes, "Even at the most propitious of times, when a convergence of historical events and a creative ferment of the imagination appear to announce their evidence, literary periodisation remains a messy business"[1]. In 2006, the Nigerian minister of justice proposed a bill that codifies the dominant national stance on homosexuality. On January 7, 2014, the then-President of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan, signed the anti-same-sex marriage bill into law. The new Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act expands on long-standing colonial-era sodomy laws. The act criminalises a range of activities, mandating up to fourteen years in prison for same-sex couples who cohabit or enter marriage, punishing those supporting gay organisations with a ten-year prison sentence, and making any same-sex public displays of affection illegal. Response to this law can be chronicled in two ways: first, the supporters and next, the resistance.

In a country where, according to a Pew Global Attitude poll (2013), 98% of the population does not believe that homosexuality should be accepted, the law was met with widespread popular support. However, as Gaudio (2014) points out, "When the Nigerian government was asked in 2009 to report to the United Nations on the status of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people as part of a nationwide survey of human rights, the then-Minister of Foreign Affairs declared, "We went out of our way to look for gay, lesbian and transgender groups but we could not come across Nigerians with such sexuality"[2]. The irony, of course, is that the enactment of legislation prohibiting same-sex practices presupposes its existence. The dominant discourse in Nigeria, therefore, persists in oscillating between outright denial of homosexuality and support for legislation to criminalise it.

Furthermore, Nigerians' dominant views on homosexuality are often expressed in Nollywood video films. Nollywood, the prevalent video-film industry producing movies widely consumed across the continent, is the first form of African popular culture to provide an archive of gay-themed narratives[3]. Since 2003, at least twenty-five films have been released that feature characters involved in same-sex affairs or relationships. While these films, many of which star A-list Nollywood celebrities, make visible relationships that are most often underground, they do so by casting homosexuality in a negative light and have arguably helped to legitimate laws that criminalise homosexuality. Gay characters are portrayed as murderous and lecherous, often involved in other vices such as prostitution and witchcraft, and they are almost always a direct and clear threat to heterosexual marriages. Nollywood has only three possible endings for these characters: they are either killed off, imprisoned or become

[1] Garuba, H. "The Unbearable Lightness of Being: Re-Figuring Trends in Recent Nigerian Poetry." English in Africa 32.1: 2005, 51–72.
[2] Gaudio, R. "Dire Straights in Nigeria." Transition 114: 2014, 60–68.
[3] Green-Simms, L. and Unoma A. "The Video Closet: Nollywood's Gay-Themed Movies." Transition 107: 2012, 32–49.

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born-again Christians who return to heterosexuality and denounce their sins[4]. In this way, gay characters are erased and denied agency and, at the same time, shown to be appropriately punished.

Resistance to the law came from multiple channels, which gave birth to a steady and bold flow of queer Nigerian literature. In the year the anti-same-sex marriage act law was passed, Kola Tobosun edited an online e-zine, *The Gay Edition*, as a response to the repressive law. Then there was Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Tree,* published in 2015, featuring a lesbian protagonist. Next came a flurry of queer literature and queer writing with the publication of books like *Blessed Body: The Secret Lives of LGBT Nigerian Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender*, a collection of the real-life experiences of queer people edited by Anoma Azuah in 2016. The same year came Joe Okonkwo's *Jazz Moon*, which made the finalist list of the LAMBDA Literary Award for Gay Fiction. Also, in 2016, an essay that garnered significant attention was *Africa's Future Has No Space for Stupid Black Men* by Pwaangulongii Dauod. In the same year, a South African-based Gerald Kraak Prize, which gives visibility to queer literature, celebrated four Nigerian Queer narratives. They include Otosirieze's *You Sing of a Longing*, Olakunle Ologunro's *the Conversation*, Amatesiro Silas A. Dore's *for Men Who Care*, and Ayo Sogunro's *One More Nation Bound in Freedom*.

In expanding the reach of LGBTQ writing, in 2017, Nigeria's first LGBTQ+ literary collective used the pun "14" as their title, which is a play-on word for the 14-year jail term that awaits any Nigerian LGBTQ+ person. Other writers of courage came along. In 2017, for instance, Romeo Oriogun won the Brunel International African Poetry Prize for his bravery in treating issues of desire in the aftermath of Jonathan's criminalisation of LGBT lives[5]. Chibuihe Obi's bold Brittle Paper essay, *We're Queer, We're Here* (2017), received wide applause and then Arinze Ifeakandu's *God's Children Are Little Broken Things*, a queer-themed story, was shortlisted for the Caine Prize of African Literature[6]. However, between 2016 and 2017, with the energy that LGBTQ+ writing brought with it came violent and homophobic attacks. For instance, in 2016, the writer Chibuihe Obi was constantly threatened because of his outspokenness about his sexuality. He was consequently kidnapped and assaulted. Another writer had to vacate his home for a safe space after constant harassment and threats to his life[7]. A third was stripped of his money, beaten, and extorted. Despite these setbacks and threats, Nigerian queer literature is picking up pace and gathering momentum. For example, Chike F. Edozien's memoir, *Lives of Great Men*, the first memoir by a gay Nigerian, won the LAMBDA Award for Gay Memoir, and then Uzodinma Iweala's novel *Speak No Evil* was published. The book followed this, *She Called Me Woman: Nigeria's Queer Women Speak* – a Nigerian anthology of queer female experiences by Azeenah Mohammed, Chitra Nagarajan, and

[4] Green-Simms, L. and Unoma A. 35
[5] Cox, Sarah. "Brunel International African Poetry Prize Awarded to Nigeria's Romeo Oriogun." Brunel University London. Last modified May 5, 2017.
[6]Kpade, Sabo. "Caine Prize Preview 2017: 'God's Children Are Little Broken Things' by Arinze Ifeakandu." *OkayAfrica*. Last modified June 1, 2017.
[7]Obi-Young, Otosirieze. "Un-silencing Queer Nigeria: The Language of Emotional Truth." *Brittle Paper*. Last modified August 15, 2017.

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Rafeeat Aliyu. Furthermore, in 2018, the first-ever anthology of LGBTQ-themed Nigerian poetry was published.

Though this study certainly cannot analyse every Nigerian author who writes about homosexuality in the twenty-first century, one of its objectives is to provide breadth without sacrificing close attention to the text. What I argue is that the increased criminalisation of homosexuality has compelled both young writers and more established third-generation writers to insist on telling their own stories of love and suffering and to do so in a public and visible way that provides levels of detail and intimacy previously unseen. Focusing on five poems from Romeo Oriogun's collection and relevant online/offline material, the research offers insight into the experiences of individuals who identify as queer and navigate the spaces between heteronormative and homonormative prescriptions.

One of the most striking aspects of Oriogun's poetry is his bold and unapologetic treatment of taboo subjects. Through his use of vivid imagery and evocative language, he explores themes such as sexuality, death, and power, which are often considered taboo or forbidden in Nigerian society. In doing so, he invites readers to confront the fear and shame surrounding these subjects and question the norms that shape our attitudes towards them. Oriogun's work is particularly significant in contemporary Nigerian poetry because it reflects a growing trend towards experimentation and boundary-pushing. As the genre evolves, poets like Oriogun increasingly explore new and unconventional subjects, styles, and forms, challenging the boundaries of what is considered acceptable in Nigerian poetry. This is not to say that all contemporary Nigerian poets are pushing the boundaries of taboo, but rather that there is a growing movement of poets actively challenging conventional norms and exploring new frontiers. Unoma Azuah, Michelle Omas, Akwaeke Emezi, and Toyin Adewale are among them.

It is important to note that Oriogun's work is not simply a matter of shock value or sensationalism. Instead, his poems are profoundly insightful and thought-provoking, offering fresh perspectives on complex and challenging topics. Using metaphor, symbolism, and other literary devices, he invites readers to consider the human experience in new and profound ways, challenging our preconceived notions and encouraging us to see the world with fresh eyes.

Queer Theory and the Selected Poems

Sacrament of Bodies is a collection of thematically interconnected poems written in free verse based on the poet's experiences and musings. It encompasses a total of 41 poems, but for time and space, this article has selected five poems from Oriogun's invigorating collection that best highlight the focus of this research, which is to prove that writers have begun to attempt dethronement of what is considered taboo as it pertains to sex and sexuality. Judith Butler's Queer theory, which emphasises the performative nature of gender and sexuality and how societal norms regulate these identities[8],

[8]Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge, 1990.

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provides a valuable framework for analysing Oriogun's poetry. Oriogun's work often engages the complexities of sexual identity, societal perceptions, and the experience of marginalisation, making it a fertile ground for applying some tenets of the theory. The poems are; "Departure", "Cathedral of a Broken Body", "Denial", "How to Survive the Fire", and "The Guilt of Exile".

The poet uses powerful imagery, allusions, and metaphors to deploy his message. Be it feelings of fear, hate, self-hate, shame, disgust, and trauma. Oriogun falls into the category of poets striving to normalise what has been considered deviant. He is standing as a voice for the voiceless and marginalised emerging Nigerian LGBTQ+ community. The fact that he is doing this from outside the country does not take away from the efficacy of his intellectual advocacy. He is merely practising what he preaches, as he advised in one of the poems under discussion, "How to Survive the Fire" if you are homosexual in a toxic environment…"run".

"Departure"

It is a poem on the violence perpetuated against homosexuals, citing "hate" as the root cause. The diction of the first stanza opens the reader's mind's eye to the seemingly acceptable murders carried out on men simply for loving other men

> I do know about the hate that sinks a name
> and turns water into homes drowning boys…[9]

The persona writes about the feeling of disgust and hatred members of his society have for people of a non-normative sexual orientation and how he survives it. He feels the disconnect – existing in a place as opposed to living – as he claims to be "born to be darkness hiding under a cave" and to "know the weight of exile in a body". The metaphor of the darkness of a cave creates the vivid imagery of sadness and despair. The reader is given insight into the psychological battle the persona has between how he believes he was born and the identity prescribed to him by biology and heteronormative society.

As the poet persona ponders on the words spoken to him – presumably by his guardians – and their attendant torment: "faggot, sin, bones waiting for the tongue of fire", he lets these words "slice" and "burn" him, noting that after all he "was born into a war", simply by being categorised as deviant because of sexual orientation. He is adamant in his claim to know what it means to live in a place that is highly toxic to the queer, with their "words invented for hate, with wounds asked to be silent".

The last and fifth stanzas explain the poem's title as the poet writes about the persona sending off other boys to more accepting climates, with apparent fear and impotence, and tells them, "do not forget I still live here". One only wonders why the persona does not migrate as other boys do. Why stay? Maybe it is because he is emotionally and psychologically dependent on his guardians. Alternatively, he has been humiliated, threatened, or intimidated too often and

[9] Oriogun, Romeo. *Sacrament of Bodies*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2020, 5.

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now lacks the mental capacity to make that decision to run. The persona might want to fight the societal hegemony and be physically present for a change in the persecution of his ilk. He could be financially constrained; thus, his only recourse was an illegal means of crossing international borders: the Sahara Desert. This scares him because there are over a thousand ways things could go sour as he tells the reader that the boys are "filled with the fear of dying in the Sahara". The logical and illogical reasons are endless, but the persona does not categorically tell us why he stays despite living in a hostile environment. Instead, he chronicles his experiences, supposedly hoping that things will change and he might be there to witness it.

Judith Butler's notion of performativity—where gender and sexuality are seen as repeated acts rather than inherent truths—explains how the persona navigates his sense of self in a hostile environment. The poem captures the pain of leaving behind a familiar yet oppressive society to find a space where one's true self can be performed without fear. The act of departure itself becomes a performative resistance against societal norms that seek to confine and define the person's identity.

"Denial"

This poem, as the name implies, is about denial. A queer person engaging in same-sex relations but, because of a heteronormative society, denies himself and his lover in the light of day. Butler's concept of the heteronormative matrix, which defines and limits acceptable expressions of gender and sexuality, is crucial here. The poem's exploration of denial—both self-imposed and societally enforced—reflects the pressure to conform to heteronormative standards. The persona's struggle to accept his identity amidst external rejection and internalised shame underscores Butler's assertion that identities are constrained by societal norms that dictate what is permissible. The poem drives this message with a series of biblical allusions. Beginning with the first lines:

> In the dark, my lover with a halo
> offered his skin to me and said eat[10].

Halo is associated with angels to signify holiness or innocence, and the second line alludes to the Garden of Eden, where the serpent offered the forbidden fruit (his lover's skin) to Eve (him). He further develops this Garden of Eden allusion, as in the Christian doctrine, it was a taste of the forbidden fruit that led to the fall of man:

> It is a fact that we are born free
> before tasting the fall of man[11].

Another glaring biblical allusion is the persona's juxtaposition of his experience with that of Jesus Christ, even insinuating that the queer experience a more painful persecution than Jesus Christ because of their "other" sexual preference:

[10] Oriogun, 17
[11] Oriogun, 17

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… how you betrayed me
thrice in a room filled with angry men.
There's a part of me willing to forgive
but unlike Christ I can't find my voice[12].

The persona's insinuation can be intuited from the fact that before Christ died, he forgave his persecutors with the famous lines, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do". In his view, homosexuals are beaten or burnt to death, and there is no breathing space to voice forgiveness.

"Cathedral of a Broken Body"

The cathedral is a metaphor for a Christian gathering place/church in this poem. A cathedral connotes a place of worship, an aspect of the Christian faith. The poet engages in a double displacement of taboo. Firstly, to portray that the sexual act is initiated in the church, which is considered the holiest of places and considers homosexuality a sin; secondly, even if the venue for the rendezvous changes as the persona follows the soldier home, the image of the cathedral is fresh in the readers mind as the personas go on to perform the sexual acts the church preaches against.

In a room full of burning candles
I saw the man staring at me
….
I followed him home,
….
I wanted to know how a man begs for sex[13].

Queer theory advocates for the right of humans to have sexual freedom. That is, everyone is entitled to have sexual relations with whomever they choose, regardless of gender. It frowns on and rejects disenfranchisement of the LGBTQ+ communities and instead presents the experiences of the queer intending to change or end their continued persecution. Butler's idea that the body is a site where social norms are inscribed is evident here. The poem describes the body as both a sacred and violated space, reflecting the societal taboos surrounding queer bodies. Oriogun's portrayal of the body as a cathedral—a place of reverence and worship, yet broken—challenges the normative views of what bodies should represent and how they should be treated. This juxtaposition aligns with Butler's argument that the body is a performative space where identity and societal expectations clash and are negotiated. Oriogun addresses the topic of taboo with a nonchalant attitude in this poem, using explicit language to attempt a demystification of the sacred nature with which Nigerian society treats the discussion of sex. Sex education is not even taught in the Nigerian educational curriculum. Still, Oriogun uses diction to unsettle this boundary of taboo with visual imageries like "semen-stained sheets", "as I went down on him", and "swallowed his semen".

[12] Oriogun, 17
[13] Oriogun, 4

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Broken in the title symbolises the mental state of some LGBTQ+ members represented by the soldier, where throughout the act with the persona, he kept repeating, "*I want you; I don't know what we are doing here*". The poet equates having gay sex with the miracle of life as he relates the experience to that of:

> a baby seeing light for the first time
> and all I did was caress his hair, closed my eyes
> and swallowed his semen[14].

"How to Survive the Fire"

Once again, the goal of survival is addressed as the poet persona intimates to the audience the secret of survival in a space that considers you and your sexual preference taboo: "The first rule of survival is to run". The poet persona uses the metaphorical statement "memories/ are floods drowning a lonely man" to write about the trauma of "seeing a man burning" and the resulting damage of said trauma manifesting as nightmares that reflect the burning man's screams turning to his (persona) at night.

The persona is afraid and recounts cities in Nigeria where "boys are beaten to death" without consequence for not identifying as heterosexuals. He cites cities like "Lagos…Onitsha…Lafia" and opines that the only way for gay men to be free in such cities is to flee. Some people might argue that Oriogun wrote this poem in response to other queer activists questioning his silence while he was in Nigeria, castigating him for not speaking up while he was in any of these cities. In this poem, he presents a simple explanation that most people can relate to: "I do not want to die". Oriogun, through the persona, claims that "for a man who loves another man", "there is nowhere safe in this city"; his only recourse is to leave. If you prove stubborn, all that must happen is that:

> You have to see nails drawing blood
> from a swollen head
> before you understand why God turned
> his face from Christ and whispered, Run[15].

"How to Survive the Fire" can be seen through Butler's lens of resistance and survival within oppressive frameworks. The poem metaphorically represents the struggles and resilience of queer individuals navigating a hostile world. Butler's theory emphasises the importance of subverting norms and creating spaces for alternative identities. Oriogun's depiction of survival as a defiance against societal rejection aligns with Butler's call for recognising and validating diverse identities. The fire represents societal hostility, and surviving it becomes an act of reclaiming agency and identity. Notably, the poet has migrated and is now domiciled in the United States of America, a reportedly more welcoming clime to the LGBTQ+ community.

All this is not to say Oriogun is the only Nigerian poet who addresses the topic of toppling the boundaries of taboo in bold poetic confrontation or even that all

[14] Oriogun, 4
[15] Oriogun, 14

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queer Nigerian poetry is bold and confrontational. They often present similar themes, albeit from different perspectives. One of such is Ochuko Sowho, a Nigerian poet. In Sowho's "The Dream," the theme of sex and sexuality is delicately portrayed through the dream-like narrative of the protagonist's experience. The poem opens with a scene of intimacy between two people whose genders are initially ambiguous to the narrator:

> Two people Their backs to me Hands held together
> The curve of her body to her hair, one
> is a woman The other, I can't tell Lovers they
> seem And I can feel what they feel Think what
> they think Feels like love...[16]

As they observe these figures holding hands, the narrator empathises with their emotions, sensing the love between them. This portrayal sets the tone for exploring love and desire, transcending conventional gender norms.

The poem progresses as the setting changes, with the sun rising and the surroundings becoming busier, symbolising the intrusion of external forces on the intimacy of the two women. The narrator finds themselves in a familiar yet chaotic environment, where societal expectations and norms manifest through the bustling cityscape. Despite the chaos, the magic of the women's kiss amidst the traffic captures the narrator's attention, highlighting the defiance of societal constraints on their love. As the poem unfolds, the protagonist follows the two women to a place that evokes a sense of déjà vu, suggesting a connection to their past or subconscious. The familiarity of the surroundings, particularly the tree, triggers a realisation within the persona. Upon seeing the face of one of the women, they recognise themselves, blurring the boundaries between self-discovery and external perception.

The poem's climax occurs when the narrator is abruptly awakened, her heart filled with fear and adrenaline:

> I'm startled awake Adrenaline pumping A
> heart full of fear I kissed a girl on the streets
> Then it hit me: It was just a dream And the tree
> outside Just by my window[17].

Realising that the intimate moment was merely a dream disrupts the initial euphoria, prompting reflection on the boundaries between reality and fantasy. The poem concludes with the protagonist recognising the tree outside the window, a tangible reminder of the dream's transient nature.

In contrast to Sowho's gentle treatment of the taboo theme, a different Nigerian novelist and poet, Akwaeze Emezi, in her poem "Disclosure", explores the themes of sex and sexuality in a bold, non-conventional manner. Not paying attention to conventional poetic form or structure to engage the taboo issue of

[16] Azuah, Unoma, and Michelle Omas, eds. *Mounting the Moon: Queer Nigeria Poems*. Jackson, TN: Cookingpot Publishing, 2018, 12
[17] Azuah and Omas, 13

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homosexuality in Nigeria. This theme is portrayed as a deeply personal and often fraught journey marked by societal rejection, familial disapproval, and internal struggle. Emezi captures the complex intersection of identity, desire, and societal expectations through raw emotions and intense imagery. The poem opens with the persona's initial experience of coming out as bisexual, characterised by a sense of self-affirmation and defiance against societal norms:

> when i first came out i called myself bi a queer tangle of free-form dreads/my mother said i was sick and in a dark place my father said i would get/ AIDS my father-in-law stopped speaking to me my marriage had been/ folded open its spine cracked…[18]

However, the persona's family response is one of rejection and condemnation. The mother perceives the speaker as "sick" and "in a dark place," while the father predicts dire consequences, such as contracting AIDS. This reaction highlights the stigma and fear surrounding non-heteronormative identities, reflecting broader societal attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals.

Moreover, the dissolution of the speaker's marriage serves as a poignant illustration of the impact of societal pressure and internalised homophobia on personal relationships. The husband's return to "snow in his sinuses" symbolises his withdrawal and emotional detachment, signalling the breakdown of intimacy and connection within the marriage. This experience emphasises the toll societal customs and expectations can take on individual happiness and fulfilment.

Throughout the poem, the speaker confronts various forms of discrimination and violence, both physical and emotional, stemming from their non-conformity to traditional gender and sexual norms. The speaker's recollection of past abuse, such as being "raised with blows across the face" and subjected to "incoherent rage", speaks to the pervasive nature of trauma and the enduring impact of societal intolerance. Despite adversity, the speaker demonstrates resilience and self-empowerment, reclaiming agency over their identity and asserting their right to self-love and acceptance:

> …one day a coward/ who will break my heart asks me how i ended up still so soft i tell him i am/ stubborn i wanted a better world a diving bell made of tender glass a better/ family i remembered how to be a god i give myself what i want no one/ raises their voice in my house no one lays their fleshy hands on me no one/ is cruel if they are fool enough to try then they die…[19]

The imagery of the "diving bell made of tender glass" evokes a sense of vulnerability, fragility, resilience, and strength. It symbolises the speaker's ability to navigate the complexities of their identity and shield themselves from

[18] Emezi, Akwaeke. *Content Warning: Everything*. Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2022, 10
[19] Emezi, 10

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external harm while remaining true to their authentic self. The poem concludes with a powerful declaration of self-love and affirmation as the speaker embraces their identity and celebrates their survival in the face of adversity.

> …who/ knew i could love me so loudly who knew i would
> survive who knew their/ world meant nothing meant
> nothing meant nothing look when i last came/
> out i called myself free[20].

Through introspection and self-discovery, the speaker transcends societal constraints and finds liberation in embracing their true self.

"The Guilt of Exile"

In this poem, the persona experiences a type of survivor's guilt, and although he survives and is out of the toxic environment, he still feels guilty. Survivor's guilt is a particular kind of guilt that develops in people who have survived a life-threatening situation while others in the same situation or environment die[21]. Some believe they could have done more to save the lives of others. While enjoying the freedom he found by leaving the country, the persona often remembers others like him stuck in a myopic society and can only wish and write that things change. Nevertheless, until then, the persona cannot truly enjoy his gained freedom. The last three lines of the poem convince the readers of this view:

> …. What is freedom
> if a million people
> still walk with the fear of being seen?[22]

Butler's discussion of the abject—those cast out and deemed unintelligible by societal norms—resonates here. The poem captures the emotional turmoil of exile, not just as a physical displacement but as a metaphorical state of being outside societal acceptance. Oriogun's exploration of guilt and belonging speaks to Butler's idea that societal exclusion creates profound internal conflicts and a sense of being perpetually on the margins.

In conclusion, Romeo Oriogun's *Sacrament of Bodies* is a powerful and transformative work that blurs the limits of what is considered unmentionable in contemporary Nigerian poetry. Applying Judith Butler's Queer theory to Romeo Oriogun's poems reveals how the poet unsettles the boundaries of taboo and defies societal rules surrounding sexual identity and sexuality. Through performative acts of resistance, the exploration of the body as a site of conflict, and the depiction of survival amidst oppression, Oriogun's work embodies the core tenets of Queer theory. The poems provide a powerful critique of the societal structures that seek to confine and marginalise queer identities, ultimately advocating for a more inclusive and fluid understanding of identity

[20] Emezi, 10
[21] Cherry, Kendra. "What is Survivor's Guilt?" Verywell Mind. Last modified October 1, 2021.
[22] Oriogun, 18

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and belonging. This analysis underscores the transformative potential of contemporary Nigerian poetry in broadening the discourse on sexuality and displacing the boundaries of taboo. Through his bold and unapologetic treatment of taboo subjects, Oriogun invites us to confront the fear and shame surrounding these topics and question the norms that shape our attitudes towards them. His poem collection is a testament to the continued growth and evolution of the genre and a reminder of the power of poetry to inspire and challenge us in new and unexpected ways.

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