

Pentecostalism, Deliverance and Queer Sexuality in Nigeria: Literary Representations

Hi, welcome to our podcast series with the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography at the University of Oxford. My name is Olivia Feininger, and I'm a master's student studying social anthropology. In this episode, Professor of Religion and African Studies, Adriaan Van Klinken from the University of Leeds, guides us through his lecture. Titled Pentecostalism, Deliverance and Queer Sexuality in Nigeria, literary representations. He takes us to Nigeria, a conservative Pentecostal capital of the world. which both demonises and pejoratively spiritualizes queer life in the culture. Van Klinken engages with the power of Nigerian literature to illustrate how the text simultaneously critique Conservative Pentecostalism and at the same time offer new imaginaries on what he calls radical queer possibility for a Nigerian religious social reality that is more inclusive and life affirming for LGBTQ plus individuals. In all this lecture integrates anthropological, gender and sexuality, literary and religious studies, in a truly unique and powerful way. Without further ado, I hope you enjoy.

Deliverance prominently features as a central theme in the emerging body of queer Nigerian literature. For instance, the novel *Working with Shadows*, which has been welcomed as the first Nigerian gay novel, includes a dramatic scene where the protagonist undergoes a physically violent ritual -- deliverance ritual -- by a Pentecostal pastor. He is beaten with a whip on his bareback, until he loses consciousness, while the pastor shouts at him, 'Banish the devil from your heart and accept God in your life!'.

In another acclaimed novel, *Speak No Evil*, the young gay protagonist who grows up in the Nigerian diaspora in the United States, is taken by his father back to Nigeria, in order to be delivered by a Pentecostal pastor. And the latest diagnosis is that this demon of homosexuality has become so entrenched in America, that you can't really fight it here -- you can't really fight it there. That's why you had to come back. This is a place, Nigeria, where the faith is strong, and hasn't been infiltrated by the devil. Other texts centering around what has been described as the 'emergent queer' in Nigerian fiction includes similar scenes. And to give you just one more example, this is a beautiful fragment from a very rich and moving poetry collection by a gay -- an openly gay -- Nigerian poet, who actually recently was awarded a National Poetry prize in Nigeria; which might actually destabilize some of our assumptions, I guess, about the politics of sexuality in that country.

But in one of his poems, Romeo Oriogun writes, 'We do not want the tears, no mother dragging us to church, no Altar filled with the smell of burning incense, no profits, clad in a white gown. No Bible raised high like a sword, no whip, coming down hard on bare backs. No boy holding his lover's name in a song of pain, no words of deliverance, hanging over beautiful heads'. Clearly, deliverance is a central theme in contemporary queer Nigerian literature. It is a critical theme, because through narratives of deliverance, Nigerian queer literary texts critique the dominant religious culture that is opposed to, and indeed demonizes, queer subjects. It is also a productive theme, as I will demonstrate in this paper, because through these narratives of deliverance, literary texts stimulate a creative social and religious imagination. The implicit suggestion of many of these texts is that perhaps it is not the queer body that needs to be delivered from the demon of homosexuality, but the society that needs to be delivered from religious views and practices that demonize and dehumanize a segment of the population.

The type of Christianity that has become enormously popular across sub-Saharan Africa, and in particular in Algeria, and that can rightly be described with the title of the seminar series, 'an emerging political and religious form', is known by the shorthand term Pentecostalism. And Nigeria is widely considered to be the epicenter of African and global Pentecostalism, with Lagos in particular being referred to as the Pentecostal capital of the world. In the words of political theorist Ruth Marshall, but she borrows from Foucault, Nigerian Pentecostalism constitutes the expression of a political spirituality. In her analysis, the Pentecostal program of conversion presents a specific regime of practice in and through which particular moral and political projects are produced. In the anthropology of Christianity, the study of African Pentecostal charismatic religious cultures and social formations has been a particular area of interest. Generally associated with a notion of 'born again conversion', as involving, as Meyer calls it, 'a complete break with the past', African Pentecostal churches have developed a particular concern with practices of deliverance. That is, according to Meyer rituals, during which these powers of darkness the devil and demons manifest themselves and are exercised.

According to Achille Mbembe, the war against demons is one of the ideological symbolic formations for which Pentecostalism exercises profound influence on contemporary African conceptions of the self. As much as these powers of darkness are often linked to spiritual forces associated with indigenous religion, such as ancestors, witchcraft and other spirits, the afflictions and the problems that these forces are believed to cause can be highly modern -- such as Visa issues, immigration issues, employment- material wellbeing, fertility, and indeed homosexuality. As such, the discourse of regime of deliverance enables Well Joel will Robbins -- who will be speaking here in a week time -- what Joel Robbins describes as the first paradox of global Pentecostalism: it becomes local, without ever taking the local into itself. So a paradox of globality, globalization, and locality. As much as deliverance rituals demonstrate the centrality of rupture, or discontinuity in Pentecostal life, in African contexts, they also demonstrate a significant level of continuity, with the spiritual cosmologies of indigenous religions. This reveals another paradox explored in anthropological studies of Pentecostalism. The paradox of discontinuity and continuity, as Martin Lindhardt puts it, processes of rejection and diabolization are simultaneously processes of preservation; or in other words, Pentecostalism preserves indigenous traditional religious ontologies by demonizing them.

In recent years, many African Pentecostal churches have developed a particular concern with issues of sexuality -- specifically homosexuality -- in their deliverance ministries. This is no surprise given the fact that many of these issues have become highly politicized across the continent.

According to Naomi Richman, who I believe might be present online, in her study of a typical Nigerian Pentecostal deliverance church and its attitudes towards homosexuality, the church's position on homosexuality derives from its theological vision of human bodily creation, and rightful relations between created persons. In short, homosexuality is seen as wrong, as it runs counter to an understanding of God's intentions for human sexuality. Against a backdrop of spiritual warfare theology, which sees God as engaged in a cosmic conflict with Satan, homosexuality emerges as de facto demonic in origin. Homosexual desires in this system become the product of demonic interference, confusions, or illusions, elicited by Satan to subvert the divinely created order. Interestingly, in as much as churches like this, and the church in the Richmond study is the Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries, which was led by the pastor

who also authored this book, *Healing and Deliverance Prayers for Gays and Lesbians at the Midnight Gate*, a very telling title. As much as churches like this demonstrate a very modern concern with homosexuality, responding to what they perceive as a Western secular agenda of imposing gay rights on Africa. They understand same sex desire from an indigenous cosmology, according to which the body and sexuality are directly afflicted by spiritual realities.

Spirits in this religious culture, are often sexualized, and vice versa. Sex and sexuality are spiritualized. Forms of sexuality considered as immoral, such as homosexuality, are not just seen as sinful, as in other Christian denominations, but are linked to evil spirits and are associated with a Satanic plan to bring about the end of the world. This has reflected in an increasingly popular discourse in Algeria and in other parts of Africa, about the spirit of homosexuality, or the demon of gayism and lesbianism. And in subsequent deliverance practices that aim to drive out such spirits from the bodies believed to be possessed by them. In the novel that I just mentioned, *Walking With Shadows*, Pastor Matthew advises the gay protagonist, Adrian (must be a coincidence), 'Sometimes we let the devil come into our lives and rule our hearts. It is the devil that tempts you, my brother'. Thus the intense politicalization of homosexuality in Nigeria and other parts of Africa is partly driven by a spiritual panic, which has generated a Pentecostal culture -- if not an industry -- concerned with deliverance of the queer body from the demon of homosexuality. And of course, this effort doubles as a deliverance of society from the evil of queerness.

As a brief intermezzo some methodological considerations: obviously literary texts should not be simply considered as factual mirrors of reality -- of social reality. As Ellen Wiles in a recent review essay of literary anthropology points out, even the most realist, socially realist novels, are still fiction. And thus by definition not confined to factual accuracy. The value of literary writing is precisely that it is not so much concerned with offering an accurate description of reality, but with a representation of social reality that is creative, critical and imaginative. As Marilyn Cohan puts it in the introduction to her volume, *Novel Approaches to Anthropology*, the aesthetic experience of reading a literary work of art activates the imagination to visualize other worlds, existing in the past, present, or future. And it stimulates a critical sociological imagination, by allowing readers to take a fresh look at social norms. To use a term from literary studies, Otto Kraisen's concept of calibration useful here. According to Kraisen post colonial literature offers a calibration of social reality; and hence, he advocates a method of reading literary texts for the social -- reading for the social -- which embraces the ideological notion of using the literary as a means towards social enlightenment. This notion is particularly helpful for my reading of queer Nigerian literature. These texts all have a more or less explicit agenda of calibrating the conditions of queer life, in a context of severe social, political and religious homophobia and transphobia, and contributing to social enlightenment in the midst of misrepresentations, stereotypes, prejudice and legislation against LGBTQ people.

Over the past two decades or so, much energy has been invested by anthropologists and by scholars of religion more generally, in the study of Pentecostalism. I think, almost on a weekly basis, there is another monograph about Pentecostalism somewhere in Africa. Yet, little attention has been paid to the ways in which Pentecostalism itself is increasingly subject of cultural, religious and political critique. So in this paper, I would like to foreground African, and specifically Nigerian literature, as an important site of an emerging critique of Pentecostalism as

a hegemonic political culture, specifically in relation to its practice of deliverance as a heteronormative discipline of queer bodies. By exercising such critique, literary texts also open up alternative social and religious imaginations. The anthropologist George Paul Meiu, in a recent paper on a Kenyan queer artwork, writes that art can also inspire anthropologists to reflect on the importance of attending to queer future making, past and present, and of activating through ethnography their critical and transformative possibilities. In a similar mode, I suggest that engaging with Nigerian literature offers rich insight into queer world making and future making, which merits anthropological and ethnographic consideration.

Over the past 15 years or so, there has been a rapid growth of queer themes in African literary texts; and a new generation of Nigerian writers, in particular is at the heart of this development, tackling the previously taboo issue of queer sexuality. This may reflect Nigeria's general status as a literary powerhouse on the continent. Yet it is remarkable nevertheless, given the country's very strict anti LGBTQ legislation and its conservative social-political climates. As Chris Duntan has pointed out in African queer literature, religion is engaged as central to ideological formations in Africa. There is a tendency in queer studies at large to mostly associate religion with conservativeness and anti-queerness. However, thinking queerness from Africa, foregrounds religion, broadly defined as a productive site and category.

Indeed in African queer social formations and cultural production, religion appears to be multifaceted. As much as it is subject of critique, it is also creatively and constructively engaged to explore its potential for queer world making. Even Pentecostal Christianity, often seen as a particularly strong factor in the anti-LGBTQ politics in Africa. According to Kwame Otu in his recent ethnographic monograph on queer subjectivity in Ghana, Pentecostalism can be recycled as a site of radical queer possibilities and freedom. Yet little attention has been paid so far, to the ways in which literary texts engage this side of radical queer possibility. So, in the following part of this paper, I will discuss three recent Nigerian queer-themed texts, which are selected on the basis of a couple of criteria, being they featured a theme at the heart of our discussion today: queer sexuality, deliverance and Pentecostal Christianity. Second, they provide literary insight into different forms of queerness, male same sex relationships, female same sex relationships, and intersex condition. And third, they present different narrative strategies that offer alternative modalities of Nigerian queer religious world-making, in their engagements with Pentecostalism, specifically the practice of deliverance. These novels respectively seek to expose religious hypocrisy, reclaim indigenous religion, and reinterpret Christianity.

This novel I chose as a cover image just because of the title, but actually the novel hasn't been published yet. It's forthcoming early next year. But the title blessing is again, a kind of, a religious connotation, obviously. So the first off what I'd like to discuss is *On Ajayi Crowther Street*, which is a graphic novel, illustrated by Àlàbá Ònájìn and written by Elnathan John. And as a graphic novel, it makes a unique contribution to queer Nigerian literature. The novel centers around the family of Reverend Akbar Bori, who is the lead pastor of a Pentecostal church called the Reformed Endtime Ministries.

The setting is Lagos, which I earlier alluded to as the Pentecostal capital of the world. The novel presents a literary version of what anthropologist Daveed Casiano has described as the popular tales of pastors, luxury, fraud and corruption that surrounds Nigeria and Pentecostalism. The

pastor in this novel is a crook, who runs his church as a money-making enterprise with scam miracles; and he also is a moral hypocrite, who preaches family values, while forcing himself onto the house mate and firing her afterwards. One of the narrative threads in this novel is a miracle service. That Reverend Akpoborie is organizing in his church. Interestingly, at the beginning of the novel, the Reverend acknowledges his own inability to heal people and to perform miracles. And therefore, in order to have this miracle service, he plans to hire a gang of scoundrels to perform fake miracles. He sends his junior pastor to negotiate with the criminals and is told by the gang leader that good miracles cost money. The agreed price doubles after Reverend Akpoborie comes up with the idea that the deliverance service should specifically focus on homosexuality. This idea is inspired by the passing of an anti-gay law. And the story here alludes to the passing of that same sex marriage prohibition bill in Nigeria in 2014, with Akpoborie, capitalizing on the moral panic around homosexuality to market his church, the billboard advertising the miracle service refers to Reverend Akpoborie, as the anointed man of God, and as the Godly destroyer, a destroyer of demons. These words contrast to the earlier acknowledgments by the pastor himself, that actually he can't really heal people. During the service, Reverend Akpoborie casts out demonic spirits, causing illness and other inflections constantly invoking the mighty name of Jesus. It culminates in the pastor introducing a young man who has been arranged by the criminals claimed to be possessed by the spirits of homosexuality.

The graphics depicts the drama that deliverance is in a Pentecostal context, with the pastor laying his hands on the young man and pushing him hard till he falls on the floor, while shouting at him, 'In the mighty name of Jesus be loosed, be loosed, be loose, loose, I say!' And you can imagine the volume with extra pasture in kind of in the fictional setting the throat here would be shouting these words. The invocation of the mighty name of Jesus illustrates how for Pentecostals, Jesus Christ is a source of ultimate spiritual power that can be mobilized to combat any perceived evil. The repetition of the phrase 'be loosed' is part of the speech act of deliverance. The young man's rolling over the floor is the sign that the evil has left him. When the pastor asks him afterwards, whether he still likes man, the young man responds, 'Man, no, God forbids. Why would I like man?' -- so he can't even remember his earlier desires. The dramatic deliverance ritual from the spirit of homosexuality has been successfully faked. And the congregation shouts and excitement, 'Praise the Lord!'. In the meantime, there is a separate storyline in the novel, in which Akpoborie son, with the telling name God's time, has become increasingly intimate with his friends, Onyka. When his father finds out, he sees it as a threat to his own reputation and ministry, telling his son, 'I will not allow the devil to use you to ruin me'. He then subject the two boys to a private deliverance ritual, spraying them with anointing oil, while praying, praying loudly. In the mighty name of Jesus, I command every demon of Sodom to get out of these children. Onyka plays along during the deliverance, responding to the ritual, by shaking and speaking in tongues. Apparently, he has internalized the demonization of his sexuality. In a tragic turn of events, soon after, Onyka commits suicide. With Godstime blaming his father for the tragedy, saying it is all your fault. Jesus didn't drive people away, the subtitle being, you do.

Afterwards, Godstime is sent to Germany for studies but ends up in a severe depression. However, the pastor who serves as his host in Germany presents a nonjudgmental version of Christian faith, and helps Godstime to come to terms with his sexuality. According to the social theorist, Nimi Bodi Boko, anointing, holiness, and prosperity are the trinity of the Pentecostal

experience and are keys to understanding the Nigerian Pentecostal movements. Yet, John and Ònájìn's satirical novel suggests that this trinity is at serious risk of becoming a false pretension. Reverend Akpoborie might claim to be anointed by God, but this is a religious marketing language with no substance to it. In the novel, it turns out to be a fake anointing. Likewise, his concern with holiness turned out to be a concern about his own reputation as a man of God, which he has carefully cultivated to hide his immoral character as a crook, pastor, an unfaithful husband, and as a sexual harasser. He has built his wealth and prosperity on his reputation, but at the end of the novel, he has lost it all. *On Ajayi Crowther Street* offers a sharp critique of Pentecostalism as a hypocritical religious culture, and of deliverance practices as a scam to exploit people's anxieties -- to enrich self-proclaimed man of God. The main objective of the novel is to subject Pentecostalism and specifically its preoccupation with homosexuality as a satirical critique, and to expose his moral and spiritual bankruptcy. Yet, in a subtle way, the novel can also be seen as engaging in constructive religious folds. First, by the name Godstime for the central gay character, which can be read as a suggestion that the time has come -- Godstime has come -- to accept all human persons, regardless of the sexuality, as created in the image of God. Second, the way in which the character of Reverend Akbar BaBori is contrasted to that of Jesus is eliminating, as it invokes a model of religious ministry that is inclusive, rather than judgmental. So as much as the novel offers a critique of Pentecostalism, it imagines queer subjectivity as possible within a Nigerian Christian frame.

The second novel is a beautiful novel with the title *An Ordinary Wonder*, written by Buki Papillon, which is unique in Nigerian and African queer literature for centering around an intersex protagonist. The novel presents the coming of age story of Otolorin -- shortly Oto -- who grows up with his twin sister Mora. Upon birth, Oto's genitalia were found to be ambiguous. He is gendered as a boy; but when growing up he becomes more attuned towards being a girl. Seeing the ambiguous genitals of the newly born baby, the midwife who also is a prophetess in a Pentecostal church, screams and tells Oto's mother that, 'your true son from heaven was stolen from your womb by worshipers of Satan and replaced with an Amira demon'. An Amira is as a Yoruba word for spirit child. The novel captures the stigma associated with Oto's condition immediately on the first page, which opens by saying, 'My name is Oto Lauren. I've been called 'Monster'. The stigma of being different results in Oto [being] bullied at school; such as my Bio, who forcibly strips Otto naked and ridicules him. 'Ha ha ha ha. Oh my god, you're really strange, Oto. Do you know that? You look like an emi igbo Yemoja'. 'emi gibo' is the Yoruba word for a spirit of the forest, while Yemoja refers to the well known water spirits, who features in many West African traditions; and which is associated with gender diversity and gender ambiguity. Bio's comments are an illustration of the ways in which spirits in many African cultures are associated with gender ambiguity and fluidity.

For Bio, this clearly is a negative association; yet at least potentially, the spiritualization of the queer body can also be constructive. As the Ugandan queer theorist Stella Nyanzi has argued, cultural and indigenous understandings of gendered spirits of ancestors who may possess individuals offer socially appropriate notions of handling fluid transgender identities. *An Ordinary Wonder* is concerned with exploring this queer potential of spirits; yet it does so against the background of popular beliefs in Christianized Nigeria --that indigenous-gendered spirits belong to the realm of the devil. Oto's grandmother, Mama Oando uses the explanatory framework of witchcraft to explain why Oto is abnormal down there. She successfully

encourages Olo's mother to join the Pentecostal Church, the Seraphic Temple of Holy Fire, to seek spiritual protection against the spell put on her family. The services at the temple feature preaching prophecies, and deliverances performed by charismatic leaders. These leaders are referred to with the Yoruba word 'woli', meaning prophets. The senior prophets, 'woli ohmalorya', makes mother believe that Oto's condition is caused by the devil. Twice in the novel, the prophets subject Oto to a deliverance ritual, narrated in great detail to convey its traumatizing effects. After the first act of deliverance, Oto enjoys several months of peace at home, until another incidence makes mother doubt but the demon has truly left him. She drags Oto to the temple again for a second deliverance session with the prophets, in private and at night this time. And this attempt is much more forceful than the first one, complete with whipping Oto's back, and a baptism, in fact, a drowning, in a water stream to wash the filth of darkness from the sinner.

Seeing the burning eyes of the prophet cast upon him, Oto realizes that, 'I wasn't meant to survive this, not intact'. In both these cases of deliverance narrated in the novel, Oto experiences another spiritual presence that protects and saves his life. This female mermaid spirit first appears early in the novel, after mother has beaten Oto into hospital for putting on a dress of his sister. The Spirit appears to him and says, 'Call Yemoja. You are safe, here between worlds. At the parting of the veil, you may rest'. 'Yemoja', meaning 'my mother', is a symbol of maternal divinity, who appears at the most critical moments in the novel when Oto is in trouble. During the first deliverance, Oto has a vision of her -- feeling embraced by her presence. During the second deliverance, Oto screams for her, 'Yemoja save me! And she comes again to his rescue'. Viting Voli Ohmalieya was then forced to let Oto go -- making that he survives his drowning ritual. The figure of Yayemi is one way in which the novel suggests that indigenous religious belief can be life-affirming for queer people. The second way is through a babalawo, a Yoruba diviner, in the Ephah divination system. Explaining Oto's condition, the priest shares a piece of Yoruba mythology about how at the time of creation, the gods made a small mistake, a small oversight, resulting in a body that looked neither fully male or female. But that was adopted by the Goddess Yemoja as falling under her female ori, destiny, and receiving her protection and guidance. And this validation is a declaration that Oto's embodiment inhabits sacred meaning: far from demon possessed Oto is indeed an ordinary wonder. So the novel suggests that indigenous religious traditions offer wisdom to understand and affirm gender ambiguity, in contrast to Christianity that frowns upon anything outside of the binary construction of male and female.

Pentecostalism in particular, delegitimizes the embodied experience of people like Olo, by demonizing them. Turning this around in the novel, Oto suggests that instead of him being demon possessed, it was, 'the people who whipped me till I fainted, that were evil'. In other words, they are the prophets of the church that need to be delivered from the evil of rigid cisgender heteronormativity, and the subsequent violence against intersex and other queer bodies. As much as this novel critiques Christianity, specifically in its Pentecostal form, and reclaims indigenous religion, it also makes subtle reference to the potential within Christianity to affirm queer bodies. This comes in the form of a Catholic nun, who is a teacher at Oto's school. She reaffirms him, like the babalawo earlier, that there is nothing wrong with him. Sister Angelica uses language that merges Christianity and biomedical science. When she tells Oto, 'You're just a child. God created you in His image. Your condition likely has to do with your hormones'.

Thirdly, *Under the Udala Trees*, Chinelo Okparanta, which has been hailed as the first Nigerian lesbian novel. Although the word 'lesbian' actually is never mentioned in his novel; which I think is interesting in itself. The novel was published in response to the passing of the Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act in 2014, in Nigeria. And Okparanta uses a significant historical context, setting her story in the aftermath of the Nigerian Civil War. The protagonist named Ijeoma is Igbo and loses her father in the war. With her mother, Mama, being left traumatized and seeking comfort in her conservative faith. When Mama finds out Ijeoma has a relationship with another teenage girl, a Hausa girl -- a Muslim girl -- for that matter, she subjects her daughter to a rigid program of religious discipline. In her words, 'there's nothing more important now than for us to begin working on cleansing your soul'. This program of cleansing the soul consists of daily Bible study lessons. Immediately from the first lesson, Mama uses the opportunity to explain that homosexuality, according to the Bible, is an abomination.

Discussing the creation story of Genesis One, she tells her daughter, that clearly God created man and woman to live as husband and wife. So, it continues, to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Laws of Leviticus and other so calledlobber verses, which for Mama all center around this issue of abomination. For Mama, Ijeoma's sexuality is caused by the devil, and she prays for God's protection for her daughter: 'Protect my child from the devil that has come to take her innocent soul away. Protect her from the demons that are trying to send her to hell!', Mama prays. Yet, when the Bible study lessons don't show any effects, Ijeoma confesses that she still is a love with the girl. Mama realizes that something stronger than a prayer for protection is needed. The devil needs to be exercised -- to be cast out. In a dramatic scene, Mama performs a deliverance, praying over Ijeoma, while sprinkling her with anointed water and ordering the demon to come out. As the story goes, her voice was progressively louder. Each time it's repeated, but still controlled. 'In the name of the Almighty God, I order you to leave my child!'. The repeated language and the volume of her voice are typical of the Pentecostal drama of deliverance, which is a performance of spiritual power. At the end, her mother loses self control, crying for the devil to leave. And in the silence that follows this drama, Ijeoma realizes that the only way to get out of this situation, of the pressure of her mother, is by giving in -- or pretending to give in -- to her mother's prayers. Ijeoma is neither delivered nor cured. Instead, she gradually comes to the understanding that her sexuality is not demonic, but a natural part of herself. Being reminded of what her father once told her about traditional folktales being allegorical and symbolical commentaries on real life situations, Ijeoma wonders why the same might not be the case for biblical stories. When she makes a suggestion to her mother, Mama dismisses the suggestion saying, 'The Bible is the Bible and should not be questions' -- reinforcing a literalist interpretation of the Bible.

But Ijeoma has an independent mind and is not satisfied. She keeps questioning in the story her mother's take on the Bible, and comes up with alternative interpretations. For instance, in a discussion about the story of Adam and Eve, Ijeoma muses, 'Just because the story happens to focus on a certain Adam and a certain Eve, that does not mean that all other possibilities were forbidden. What if Adam and Eve was morally symbols of companionship, instead of being delivered from an evil spirits?' Ijeoma is being liberated by giving into a newly found love. While dancing together with her girlfriend Amina, she felt a sense of liberation that, 'I had not known until then'. Yet, this queer liberation is a process with setbacks. Still living with and

influenced by her mother, Ijeoma keeps having doubts, and even wonders whether she might be a witch under the influence of the Devil. And after a violent attack of the community of queer women that she has become part of, she gives in to her mother's pressure to marry a childhood friend and lead a normal life without fear of being found out. The marriage fails and at the end of the novel, Ijeoma returns to Amina, her girlfriend. And by then, even her mother finally obeyed, albeit reluctantly, accepts her daughter, when she mutters, 'God who created you must have known what he did'. Ijeoma in this difficult journey of coming to terms with her sexuality, and freeing herself from her mother, does not lose her faith; yet, she does have to reimagine it. Not only does she have to change her view of the Bible, she also grows in her understanding of God.

Moving away from a rigid image of a certain God, a judgemental God, and instead adopting a notion of God as an artist who is creatively and actively involved in the world -- transforming it for the better. As Ijeoma muses, 'if the Old and New Testament are any indication, then change is a major part of God's aesthetic -- a major part of God's vision for the world. Maybe God is still speaking, and we continue to do so for always. Maybe God is still creating new covenants, only we are too deaf, too headstrong to certain old ways to hear'. These theological reflections are a direct critique of a conservative form of Christianity, which believes that God's laws are unchangeable. Yet they also open up an alternative progressive understanding of Christian faith, in line with a humanistic vision of human diversity and freedom. This way, *Under the Udala Trees* creates a space for the question of legitimacy of female same sex love in the Nigerian context. And it helps to imagine a Christian social practice that is radically different from popular Pentecostal culture. So, this novel can be read as a literary account of queering faith within Christianity, through a post process of Biblical and theological reinterpretation that is woven through the narrative. In the novels we have just discussed, deliverance clearly is a central topic prominently featured in each of these texts. Yet, in each of these texts, the Pentecostal performance of deliverance doesn't have the intended effects. None of the queer bodies featured in those stories are delivered from the demon of their non-confirming sexuality. Thus at one level, we can read these texts as narratives of ritual failures. Does the Holy Spirit refuse to fall? Or is it the charismatic pastor or the mother who was unable to make that anointing happen? Or is it the queer body, whether or not with the help of other spiritual realities, that successfully resists Pentecostal deliverance? Whatever the cause, in each of these texts, the performance of Pentecostal deliverance does not lead to the effects intended by the person exercising it. However, at another level, we can read these texts, at least in my interpretation, as engendering a deliverance themselves: not a deliverance of the demon of homosexuality, but a queer deliverance.

Tweaking Kraisen's notion of reading for the social, I suggest a reading of these texts as a reading for deliverance, which draws attention to the imaginative world-making potential of these novels. Deliverance, in the words of philosopher Biko Mandela Gray, 'invokes freedom, capacity, renewal and possibility'. The texts under discussion enact a queer deliverance, in at least two ways. They critique the oppression and harm that Pentecostal deliverance practices do to queer bodies. And second, they open up alternative imaginations of how queer life is, or can become liveable, within and beyond the constraints of a homophobic, and heteronormative world. As much as these texts critique the Pentecostal demonization of the queer body, they don't necessarily have an issue with spiritualization of sexual embodiments.

Nigerian queer world-making, as reflected in these texts, does not break away from what occurs within the realm of the religious -- although it involves profound religious negotiations and transformations. Earlier in this paper, I mentioned Richman's study of a prominent Nigerian Pentecostal Church and its gay deliverance ministries. I quoted her saying that, 'homosexual desires in this system become the product of demonic interference, confusions or illusions elicited by Satan to subvert the divinely created order'. The novels we have discussed today, speak back to the accusation of queer sexuality as demonic; yet they don't resist or reject a notion of sexuality as embedded in a spiritual battle. The name *Godstime*, in the first novel, subtly suggests that queer liberation is a divine project that will happen at God's time. *Under the Udala Trees* is much more explicit in making a similar suggestion, that sexual diversity is part of God's creative design of the world. And that queer liberation is part of God's ongoing revelation. *An Ordinary Wonder*, finally, is also very explicit in its narrative of queer embodiments as being divinely protected and sanctified. So, as much as Pentecostalism preserves traditional ontologies by demonizing them, these novels, particularly *An Ordinary Wonder* -- but in different ways also the other two texts -- preserve these ontologies by reclaiming them in a queer-affirming way. I mentioned Ruth Marshall's notion of Pentecostalism as a political spirituality. To use the same terminology, these novels presents us with an emerging Nigerian queer political spirituality, drawing on both Christianity and indigenous religions. Resisting a Eurocentric, secular, LGBTQ identities framework, these novels explore their religious and spiritual resources that are relevant and meaningful in the Nigerian context. They claim that queer sexuality is in fact, not a threat to, but part of a divinely created world. That is why Pentecostal deliverance of the queer body fails in each of these novels; yet the failure of Pentecostal deliverance engenders a process of queer deliverance -- a coming out if you like -- where queer subjects find freedom and embrace the possibility to exist, to flourish, to be affirmed by the spirits, by the gods that gave them life.