

# CHAPTER ONE

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the study

Concepts like culture and society did not develop as a major conceptual tool for thinking about sexuality until the 1970s and early 1980s, mostly in opposition to the concept of nature. This was the result of a long-term series of modifications in how sexuality was conceptualized and examined.

Gender and sexuality are inseparably linked, and both are shaped by culture and society. They both play important roles in preserving relationships in our communities, and they shape each other so much that any inquiry into one uncovers the other. Gender is the lens through which any data on sexuality is logically interpreted, despite the fact that sexuality is firmly interwoven in the meanings and interpretations of gender systems. In reality, sexuality study is meaningless without gender analysis.

Sexuality is a topic of great interest to most people. It entertains and intrigues and is a source of both personal happiness and frustration. However, it should be broadly understood that sexuality shouldn't be conflated with sex as any specific activity (Haralambos & Holbom, 2013). It pervades, shapes, and is inextricably linked to gender, religious, social class, ethnic, and other issues related to identities.

Given its private and public nature, sexuality is both powerful and potentially disruptive. While liberal political discourses may dismiss sexuality as basically personal, Foucault's ideas suggest otherwise. Although Foucault accepts the primary historical assumption that sexual repression began in the nineteenth century, he believes it is minor in the history of sexuality. Much more significantly, he believes it is a prohibition against discussing our sexuality, which has been imposed regularly even during the years of repression and is now being strengthened, supposedly to lift the repression.

Butler (1990) builds on his work and further weakens any naive naturalization of sexual identities, as he did with the closely related idea of gender. These, she believes, are largely

fictive and performative social creations. The interpretation of sexuality which Butler attacks, has gone hand in hand with such dominant beliefs, artificially distancing it from the lived experiences of children and young people.

Children continue to be ill-informed and misinformed about sex and sexuality, both by parents, educators and wider society (UNESCO, 2009). With schools serving as sites of conflict and cultural negotiation, it's no surprise that their ability to transmit information about sex and sexuality is often limited. The introduction of specialty journals, such as *Sex Education*, which began publishing in 2001, has provided an essential ongoing forum for scholarly discussion on the subject, and World Health Organization recommendations (WHO, 2010) is beginning to affect educational practice.

Nonetheless, as Hall (2009) points out, sexuality education is still mostly focused on damage reduction (e.g., the dangers of sexually transmitted infections [STIs], adolescent pregnancy, and reputational and moral difficulties), rather than a sex-positive rhetoric of potential pleasure and empowerment.

The pursuit for sexual knowledge, which is driven by natural drive, pleasure, and culture, is uptight with reluctance, censoring, and/or repression, as well as hypocrisy. Sexuality is an intriguing and crucial model of sites of dispute in education studies, as well as in wider culture, because of these difficulties.

## **1.2 Statement of Research Problem**

This research sets to examine the essentiality of sexuality and romance in Africa (precisely in Nigeria) due to the anti-LGBT tenets prevalent in African communities. This examination would be done through a comparative analysis of poems written by Folu Agoi and Sylvia Kankara.

## **1.3 Research Aim and Objectives**

The aim of this research is to explicate the themes of sexual identity and romantic attraction in creativity as depicted in Africa, especially Nigeria. Hence, we shall examine four objectives to explain this aim.

- i. To examine sexual norms as related to social codes in the selected poems of Folu Agoi and Sylvia Kankara
- ii. To investigate sexual complexities as related to African communities through selected poems of Folu Agoi and Sylvia Kankara
- iii. To examine the place of Romance in African communities as depicted in Folu Agoi and Sylvia Kankara's selected poems.
- iv. To contrastively portray what sexuality means in Yoruba and Hausa culture, using the selected poems of Folu Agoi and Sylvia Kankara.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

1. How are sexual norms displayed in relation to social codes in selected poems of Folu Agoi and Sylvia Kankara?
2. Using Sylvia Kankara and Folu Agoi's selected poems, how are sexual complexities investigated?
3. What is the place of Romance in African communities as depicted in Sylvia Kankara and Folu Agoi's selected poems?
4. How is sexuality in Yoruba and Hausa contrastively portrayed in the selected poems of Folu Agoi and Sylvia Kankara.

#### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

In a literal sense, this study shows how exquisite literature, specifically poems, may be utilized to interpret, clarify, and enlighten the reader or listener about the complexities of sexuality in Africa. This research benefits those in the area of gender and social matters by not only providing a wealth of data on sex and its politics but by extension through studying the physical and social aspects of sexuality and romance, thus demystifying how sexuality influences relationships and the roles of choices and desire as connected to sexuality.

To the society at large, this study looks into various sexualities and the beliefs that surround them, with the goal of providing clarity to stories behind sexuality.

## **1.6 Scope and Delimitation of study**

The scope of this study is the sexual identity and romantic attraction in Africa, precisely Nigeria as described in Sylvia Kankara and Folu Agoi's selected poems. The central preoccupation of this research is to spell out and clarify the themes of sexuality and romantic attraction in relation to the complexities surrounding these subjects in Africa, precisely the Northern and Western Nigeria. To accomplish this, the research work will be limited to analyzing the selected poetry of Folu Agoi and Sylvia Kankara.

## **1.7 Research Methodology**

The researcher's interview is the major source of information for this study. After a deliberate pre-exploration of the title of this research and the biographical information required for the investigation, such questions pertinent to the topic in relation to the poet were coined for responses and further interpretation.

This was done through a one-on-one interaction between the poet, Folu Agoi, known as the respondent and the researcher, known as the enquirer at Babcock University, Ilisan, Ogun state on the 26th of April, 2021.

The primary data was gotten from *'I know the smell of my Lover's Skin'*, a collection of creative materials written by the poet, Foluso Adedoyin Agoi, which was explored in tandem with the raised questions in the interview, and *'Hymns and Hymens'* by Sylvia Victoria Kankara.

The secondary data was mostly drawn from theories and other resourceful materials that were taken from the library, internet, and the environment.

## **1.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theories of psychoanalysis and queer theory will serve as the theoretical framework for this scholarly production, as the major subjects of this research, which include society, sexuality, romance, etc. are central to both theories.

### **1.8.1 PSYCHOANALYSIS**

Psychoanalysis was more of a release of emotions defined as tragedy by Aristotle in the fourth century, and is a mother theory to other theories hatched by it.

Sigmund Freud, a practicing neurologist in Ancient Vienna, developed it under the umbrella of psychiatry and parapsychology, and it has since spread to literature, medicine, and cultural studies.

According to Olatunbosun (2020), thought and experimentation that led to the birth of psychoanalysis began with Dr Josef Breuer, a colleague and mentor of Freud, who was struggling medically with his patient, Bertha Pappenheim, also known as "Anna O," on a traumatic problem without symptoms. It was later discovered that the condition was caused by repressed thoughts. Following this, Freud became fascinated by studies of the human psyche, diseases, and the structure and illusory pattern of their unconscious, which led him to psychology and eventually literature.

He also believes that Freud can be seen as one of the long-awaited messiahs who will deliver 'men' from their remote ignorance and the emergence of postmodernist adventure because he is one of the greatest theorists who have revolutionized human consciousness on how we think and why we act, which was borne out of his nineteenth-century research on hysteria before he became a professor.

The underlying principles that frame awareness, afterwards implicating the unconscious—the mind's functionality without the bearer's knowledge—are the content of psychoanalysis. The study of this functionality tries to reveal what happens in the conscious and unconscious recesses of the human mind through feelings, sayings, and actions, as well as provide answers to questions of action, inaction and reaction.

Psychoanalysis is therapeutic in that it aids in the interpretation of unconscious mental activities, the treatment of emotional illnesses, the understanding of innate urges, and the provision of sexual expositions that underpin sexual perversion and non-sexual occurrences, among other things.

Sigmund Freud believed that a work of literature is the external expression of the author's unconscious mind, and that it should be treated as if it were a dream in order to uncover the author's hidden motivations and repressed desires. As much as psychoanalysis is an extended arm of

numerous disciplines, our arm of psychoanalysis is exclusively literary, wherein creative materials (in this case, poetry) constitute the basis of examination, analysis and interpretation.

Certain psychoanalytic concepts were introduced to enhance information and discoveries due to the theoretical intersectionality of the subject of inquiry. They are:

### **The Dynamic Unconscious**

Many aspects of a person's mental life, both cognitive and emotional, go unnoticed. You may need to pay close attention to bring some things to memory. Psychoanalysts are particularly interested in the dynamic unconscious, which consists of thoughts and feelings actively held out of consciousness by defenses. If such feelings and thoughts become conscious, they might lead to anxiety and self-criticism. They have a long-term impact on a person's behavior, attitudes, and experiences, and are frequently organized as fantasies.

These fancies are throwbacks to the past that characterize idealized self-to-other relationships. Direct vision cannot penetrate the dynamic unconscious. The free association technique and an emphasis on fantasies, dreams, and transference make it easier for psychoanalysts to learn about the dynamic unconscious through observation and inference.

### **Defense**

Defense is an unconscious habit that aids maintaining mental balance. Defenses can take many forms, but most people keep to a handful that help them order their personality.

Intellectualization, reaction creation, doing and undoing are examples of obsessional character defenses; repression and hyper-emotionality are examples of hysteric defenses; and denial and splitting are examples of borderline personality organization defenses. Defense against painful feelings is unavoidable in the psychoanalytic context.

Modern psychoanalysts accept that every idea, emotion, action, or symptom can be used defensively, despite the fact that Freud established specific defense mechanisms and others were later added (most notably by Anna Freud). When defenses fail to control painful feelings like anxiety, or when defenses are used excessively, symptoms, inhibitions, and other forms of psychopathology occur.

## **Transference**

Transference is the patient's collection of conscious and unconscious thoughts and sentiments towards the psychoanalyst that derives from his childhood relationships with his parents. The psychoanalytic environment (session frequency, use of the couch, free association approach) is designed to elicit childhood fantasies with organized intrapsychic links. These fantasies are resurrected in the present and directed against the analyst, indicating to the patient the power of the past in the present.

While transference is a universal tendency, the ability of the patient to comprehend its causes within the context of psychoanalysis provides the most therapeutic leverage. Transference, according to some analysts, comprises all aspects of the patient-analyst relationship. Others find it beneficial to distinguish transference from the "true relationship" and therapeutic alliance. Even when there is a negative transference, the relaxing union is characterized as the patient's readiness to work with the analyst.

## **Free Association**

The psychoanalytic approach of free association was created by Sigmund Freud, and it became the cornerstone for psychotherapy. The patient shares his views to the analyst without being censored or having a specific goal. In a typical human conversation, the goal is to provide the listener with content that is orderly, understandable, and goal-directed.

The analyst may make inferences about the patient's unconscious mental life and uncover connections that would otherwise go unnoticed. The patient's defense systems, as well as his or her desired outcomes, are revealed. Every patient faces difficulty in revealing personal, sometimes embarrassing, and guilt-ridden aspects of their inner lives.

## **1.8.2 QUEER**

Queer Theory was coined in the early 1990s to describe a body of critique on themes of gender, sexuality, and subjectivity that arose from historical, sociological, psychological, and literary studies of gay and lesbians. Queer theory deconstructs binary oppositions like "gay" and "straight."

Gloria Anzaldua and other researchers coined the phrase "queer theory" in the 1980s, motivated by the work of French post-structuralism philosopher Michel Foucault, who saw sexuality as socially produced and rejected identity politics. In the early 1990s, the phrase began to gain acceptance in academia.

Even the usage of the term "queer" was a sort of treason, with a new generation of activists reclaiming the homophobic insult as liberating and uplifting, rather than a means of intimidation and violence used against sexual and gender minorities.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Michael Warner, Judith Butler, and others are notable authors affiliated with queer theory.

The way power works to institutionalize and legalize certain forms and displays of sexuality and gender while stigmatizing others is the subject of queer theory. It came with the rise of LGBT studies, which aims to examine LGBT persons as fixed identities, whereas Queer theory questions strict identity categories, sexuality norms, and so on.

‘Queer theory is an indispensable tool for researchers asking questions about the roles of power, discourse, and knowledge in the development and sustenance of structural forms of domination, especially those forms of oppression that appear to be normal or natural. It is a vital approach for social researchers seeking to illuminate and critique taken-for-granted concepts and social dynamics, and it is hardly limited to the study of sexuality and gender.’ (Grzanka, 2019). It is the lens through which researchers, activists, artistic texts, and the media analyze and critique how gender and sex-based binaries are utilized to combat social inequity.

Queer theory is mostly based on post-structuralism and deconstruction. Rather than defending any particular identity, it actively attempts to expose and deconstruct heteronormativity, exposing and deconstructing traditional beliefs that sexual and gender identities are assumed to be heterosexual.

Queer theorists disagree about many things, but one thing they do not disagree on is that if queer theory is to be understood as a way to test the established and stable categories of identity, then it should not be defined too early (or at all) because of the possibility of it becoming too limited.



Queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argued against North American society's solid definition of sexuality—against its reduction to a single factor: the sex of one's desired partner. Sedgwick identified dozens of other ways in which people's sexualities were different, some of them are:

- Even identical genital acts mean very different things to different people
- Sexuality makes up a large share of the self-perceived identity of some people, a small share of others.
- Some people, whether homosexual, heterosexual, or bisexual, experience their sexuality as deeply embedded in a matrix of gender meanings and gender differentials. Others of each sexuality do not (Sedgwick, 1990)

Fundamental concepts of Queer theory include;

### **HETERONORMATIVITY**

In one of his key works of queer theory, Michael Warner popularized this term in 1991. Theories of heteronormativity have always involved a critical examination of gender; according to Warner, "any individual who comes to a queer self-understanding realizes in one way or another that her stigmatization is intricately linked to gender."

In a prominent essay by Michael Warner, heteronormativity is defined as the belief that heterosexuality is the sole 'normal' sexual orientation and that romantic relationships may only exist between opposite sexes. The idea that heterosexuality is the default, preferred, or typical sexual orientation. It is predicated on the gender binary (i.e., that there are only two separate, opposing genders) and that sexual and marital connections are most appropriate between people of different genders.

Persons who depart from standard gender, gender roles, and sexual orientations face a system of expectations, demands, and limits.

### **LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) MOVEMENT**

This movement is founded on reform principles, which seek formal equality through changes in legal norms, as well as radical principles, which seek fundamental fairness by altering cultural value systems that stigmatize minority sexual orientation and gender identity.

LGBT movements have often adopted an identity politics that considers gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals as a fixed class of people; a minority group or groups, and this is common within LGBT communities. Those that employ this strategy aim to achieve liberal political goals of liberty and equality, as well as to join the political mainstream on an equal footing with other social groups.

## **PERFORMATIVITY**

In her 1990 book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, feminist philosopher and gender theorist whose work has had impact on political philosophy, ethics, and the fields of third-wave feminism, queer theory, and literary theory, Judith Butler coined the term "gender performativity." She claims that whether a person is born male or female has no bearing on their behavior. People instead learn to behave in specific ways in order to fit within society. Gender is a performance, an act. The way a person walks, talks, dresses, and acts is referred to as this act. This type of acting is referred to as "gender performativity" by her.

Because performativity is intricately linked with politics and legality, Judith Butler's concept of 'performativity' is significant for critical legal thinkers. It is most famously related with her ideas on gender. Her emphasis on performance has had a broad impact because it allows debaters to go beyond legal definitions and status to the political and social discursive processes that shape and normalize legal and political practice.

### **1.9 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

The conceptual framework of this research project work is comprised of both the operational terms which are terms found in the title of this research and the functional terms which are totally related to the topic of research.

#### **1.9.1 Operational terms**

**SEXUAL:** Sexual is an adjective referring to the fact of being either male or female; in other words, gender, or to the social relations between the different sexes, which is usually characterized by sexual behaviors or feelings.

**IDENTITY:** Identity refers to the sense of who one is; the qualities that differentiates an individual from the other people.

**ROMANTIC:** Romantic is an adjective used for a phenomenon pertaining to a fanciful form of love. It's also a term used for a person who thinks, says things about love, and shows strong feelings of love for someone else.

**ATTRACTION:** Attraction could refer to the kind of emotion which is usually sexual, that causes someone to like another because of the way they look or behave. It also includes emotional, romantic, sensual and aesthetic attraction, among other forms.

**SEXUAL IDENTITY:** Sexual identity is a person's understanding of who he/ she actually is, sexually, including the sense of being male or female, and also in terms of whom one is romantically or sexually attracted.

**ROMANTIC ATTRACTION:** Romantic attraction is a form of emotional pull based on a person's desire for romantic relationship or deeds with someone else.

### **1.9.2 Functional terms.**

**SOCIETY:** A established group of people who share cultural aspects such as language, dress, norms or behavior and artistic forms and are engaged in a common interest or are joined by mutual consent.

**SEX:** Sex is a term used to refer to both males and females and the anatomical characteristics associated with them. It's the relation between the groups of gender.

**SEXUALITY:** Sexuality involves the way a person identifies or experiences sexual and romantic attractions and the person's inclinations and interests in sexual behavior and relationships.

**ROMANCE:** The term '**Romance**' originates with the primitive ideal of courteous behavior, especially that of men towards women, and is an expressive feeling of love or attraction towards someone else.

**PERSONALITY:** Personality refers to a set of inherent or acquired psychological and social qualities that differentiates a person from another, either in thinking, feeling or behaving, and is mostly expressed in interactions with other people.

**PSYCHOSEXUAL:** Psychosexual refers to the mental aspects of sex and sexuality such as sexual fantasies or impulses.

**HOMOSEXUAL:** Homosexual is a term that describes the individuals, whether male or female who possess sexual and romantic attraction towards persons of the same or similar gender, especially between men. Gay is a substitute for homosexual, though its used principally for men. Some gay-identified women, however have a preference for the term **lesbians**.

**TRANSGENDER:** Transgender doesn't infer any specific form of gender identity as they may identify as gay, lesbian, heterosexual, bisexual or even asexual. Transgender refers to those who have a gender identity that differs from their composition. The person's body may be male, but he feels like a woman and vice versa.

**HETEROSEXUAL:** Heterosexual refers to having a sexual preference or attraction towards persons of the opposite sex. A heterosexual person is also regarded as **straight**.

**BISEXUAL:** Bisexual refers to having sexual preferences or relations, emotional attractions or gratification with people of both sexes or genders that are different from their own. A bisexual is thus a person with both heterosexual and homosexual desires. Some clinical surveys suggest that a significant number of persons experience bisexual desires and engage in bisexual activity. As the tolerance of homosexual behavior increased in many societies in the late 20th century, the number of people identifying themselves as bisexual also increased.

**EMOTIONS:** Emotions are all those feelings that so change men as to affect their judgements, and that are also attended by pain or pleasure. Such are anger, pity, fear and the like, with their opposites. Emotions motivate moral (as well as immoral) behavior, and they play an essential role in creativity and in scientific curiosity. Emotions as well as the physical senses shape the basic processes of perception and memory and influence the ways in which people conceive and interpret the world around them.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

#### 2.1 Gender, Sex and Sexuality

The terms "gender" and "sex" are intrinsically linked to sexuality. These contrasts between these notions, on the other hand, will be established for better understanding before being linked to sexuality. In fact, a study of sexuality would be incomplete if gender were not taken into account. Despite the fact that most sociologists and other social scientists regard the terms "sex" and "gender" to be distinct, the general public frequently uses them interchangeably. On the other hand, sex and gender are two separate concepts that must be differentiated.

Gender is a person's firmly held inter-personal identity, whereas sex refers to physical or physiological distinctions between males and females, comprising both basic and secondary sex traits (the reproductive system) as well as secondary attributes such as height and muscularity. A person's biologically determined sex may not always correspond to his or her gender. As a result, sex and gender are no longer interchangeable words.

Gender refers to... 'the relations between men and women, both perceptual and material. Gender is not determined biologically, as a result of sexual characteristics of either women or men, but is constructed socially. It is a central organizing principle of societies, and often governs the processes of production and reproduction, consumption and distribution' (FAO, 1997).

"Sex" refers to the differences in physical characteristics between males and females. Gender is involved with a person's feeling of self-identification. In contrast to natal sex, gender has no binary forms. Gender, on the other hand, is a broad term that encompasses many different aspects.

GLAAD (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) makes a distinction between sex and gender in their most recent Media Reference Guide:

Sex is "the classification of people as male or female" at birth, based on bodily characteristics such as chromosomes, hormones, internal reproductive organs, and genitalia. Gender identity is "one's internal, personal sense of being a man or woman (or a boy or a girl)".

Sexuality is a topic of great interest to many people, and human sexuality involves erotic attractions, identity and practices (Haralambos & Holobom, pg163).

Sylvia Tamale, in her paper, *Reviewing and Theorizing Sexualities in Africa* asserts that sexuality is a deeply complex phenomenon. Hence, studies around it must be specialized to reflect its nuances, its multilayered nature and the various dimensions of this study which include sexual knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, orientation and personal and interpersonal sexual relations. (Sylvia Tamale, 2003)

Sexuality refers to a person's sexual traits, inclinations, and interests, which are frequently (but not always) discussed in the context of interpersonal relationships. It is frequently tied to one's sexual orientation, which refers to whether a person is attracted to persons of the same gender (homosexuality), people of other genders (heterosexuality), or people of both genders (bisexuality).

The seventeenth century was the beginning of an age where calling sex by its name became more difficult. In Michel Foucault's book, *Histoire de la sexualite*, translated by Robert Hurley, he posits that;

‘As if in order to gain mastery over it in reality, it had first been necessary to subjugate it at the level of language, control its free circulation in speech, expunge it from the things that were said, and extinguish the words that rendered it too visibly present.’ (17)

As regards sexuality and silence, Folu Agoi says...

‘I think sex was a sacred phenomenon in those days, but things have really changed now because people are now liberal with certain things including sex. There were liberal people then too, but there was much more respect for relationships or sexual matters, you know,

but it wasn't as open as it is now. Even the discussion of the phenomena was more like a taboo so much that the mention of it was more sacred than the act itself.'

Also, in Foucault's Repression hypothesis, he stresses that;

'...it had long been asserted that a country had to be populated if it hoped to be rich and powerful; but this was the first time that a society had affirmed, in a constant way, that its future and its fortune were tied not only to the number and the uprightness of its citizens, to their marriage rules and family organization, but to the manner in which each individual made use of his or her sex'  
(Pg. 26)

Kankara S. has this to say about the repressed homosexuality in Nigeria;

'...That's a very interesting question considering that the issue of homosexuality/gay relationships was recently debated at the National Executive Council Meeting where the proposal for same sex marriage was condemned, and it was affirmed that Nigeria is still a conservative society, and so would not tolerate some of these clearly western influences. It is significant that this issue has attracted such level of attention, suggesting that the development is more rampant than we are generally willing to admit. More recently, gays have become bolder and have made public appearances, threatening to form associations. Also, there are indications that even among writers, those heeded to suppressed voices are beginning to advertise themselves. On the whole, it would appear that in the near future, "repressed homosexuals" would claim their rights of free expression in public. But I believe that it will be a tough one for them in the light of such recent developments, as Nigerians' protest votes against inmates of Big Brother Nigeria House seen to be rather sexually liberated.'

## **2.2 Sexual Identity and Romantic Attraction.**

The stable sense of who one is, one's aims and desires, and so on is referred to as one's identity. Sexual identity, on the other hand, is a person's perception of who he or she is sexually, including

the experience of being male or female, as well as the romantic or sexual attraction to whoever he or she is attracted.

Sexual identity is multi-dimensional; it occurs on numerous scopes that combine to provide an endless range of differences and possibility.

The Student Counseling Center, University of Texas, Dallas opines that...

‘... Gender identity, sexual orientation and romantic orientation are three integral components of sexual identity. Each component exists independently, yet they also intersect in ways that form a person's overall sexual identity’.

- Gender identity refers to a person's internal perception of their gender. Many people define their gender largely by the sex they were given at birth, a practice known as cisgender. Transgender people identify with a different sex/gender than their body type. For example, despite being assigned female at birth based on a doctor's inspection of external genitalia, a person may identify as a man and present as a woman socially.

Transsexuals are transgendered people who want to change their bodies by medical treatments such as surgery and hormonal therapy to better align their physical being with their gender identity.

‘...Not all transgendered individuals choose to alter their bodies: many will maintain their original anatomy but may present themselves to society as the opposite gender. This is typically done by adopting the dress, hairstyle, mannerisms, or other characteristic typically assigned to the opposite gender. It is important to note that people who cross-dress, or wear clothing that is traditionally assigned to opposite gender, are not necessarily transgendered. Cross-dressing is typically a form of self-expression, entertainment, or personal style, not necessarily an expression against one's assigned gender’. (APA 2008).

- Sexual Orientation is to whom we are sexually and romantically attracted. Terms for sexual orientation can include heterosexual/straight, gay/lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, queer/questioning. Our conceptualization of *sexual orientation* refers to an individual's



patterns of sexual, romantic, and affectional arousal and desire for other persons based on those persons' gender and sex characteristics. (APA, 2008).

Heterosexuality is described as an attraction to individuals of the opposite sex; homosexuality, an attraction to individuals of one's own sex; bisexuality, an attraction to individuals of either sex; and asexuality, an attraction to neither sex. Informally, heterosexuals and homosexuals are referred to as "straight" and "gay," respectively.

- Romantic orientation is reflected in our urge to form romantic relationships with others. A person may be attracted to someone romantically but not sexually, or vice versa (e.g. hetero-romantic asexual, aromantic bisexual).

The most basic definition of romantic attraction is that it is an emotional response which most people experience at one time or another. This feeling results in the desire for them to have a romantic relationship with the person who makes them feel that way.

There is a thin line between being romantically attracted to someone and being sexually attracted to them, and sometimes we develop love feelings for someone because of our first sexual attraction to them. This allows us to look at them more closely, pay more attention to their behavior and mannerisms, and love feelings may grow over time.

### **2.3 The Importance of Literature in the Acceptance of Sexuality in Society.**

Poetry, in literature as a genre is intensely significant in social awakening.

‘There is just no sense in pondering on the functions of literature without relating it to the actual society that uses it, to the centers of power within that society, and to the organizations mediating between literature and individuals,’ says Richard Ohmann (English in America 1976, 303)

Adetuyi et al state that...

‘Poetry is not an expression of identity, but an escape from personality, but they write from experience which they had earlier in life, they visualize societal ills using symbols through poems, they proffer solutions to the ills...’

LGBT literature has explored a wide range of subjects and concepts, and it has served as a source of validation, understanding, and beauty for LGBT people, and it may highlight the positive aspects of homosexuality in situations where it has been stigmatized, because social acceptability has changed throughout history in many foreign cultures. This literature may document prejudice, legal discrimination, AIDS, bullying, violence, denial, suicide, and other comparable difficulties.

## **2.4 Sylvia Kankara**

Sylvia Victoria Kankara was born in Kaduna, Nigeria, and released her first poetry collection, "Hymns and Hymens," in 2004. She was the Association of Nigerian Authors' (ANA) National Deputy General-Secretary at the time.

Seeing fragile, vulnerable youngsters clustering and begging openly made her concerned, so she and her companion, theatre artist Adaobi Ifejuka, founded an NGO named "The Good Sisters Project" to rescue juvenile whores. Sylvia Kankara considers herself a womanist and believes that women should have more economic power. She claims to be a supporter of women enjoying responsible and prosperous lives.

*'Hymns and Hymen'*, a poetry book by Sylvia Kankara, illustrates the northern experience. The series depicts a lady expressing the raw truth of love in the face of an environment that either ignores or ignores such plights. Because she dares to engage her trapped ideas rather than reportage on love or the accentuation of her cultural viewpoints on the topic of love, romance, sex, and relationships, her stance on romance, sex, and relationships is too innovative. As a result, the poetess embarks on an unapologetically sexual exploration of the libido, which leads to erogenous excitations of femininity, aiding in the unraveling of the poetess' perspective of hagiographic sexual identity of womanhood, girlhood, motherhood, and love-lust adventure in northern Nigeria.

## CHAPTER THREE

### INTERVIEW WITH FOLU AGOI

An interview with Folu Agoi by Oladapo Oluwaferanmi Olateju on the 26th of April, 2020 at Babcock University, Ilisan, Ogun state.

**‘Feranmi:** Sir, may I know you by your full name and pen name?

**Folu Agoi:** Well, my full name is Folusho Adedoyin Agoi, and my pen name is Folu Agoi.

**‘Feranmi:** How, where and when were you born?

**Folu Agoi:** I was born in Akoko- Ilisan, Ondo state in the ‘60s, precisely 1965 and I was taken away from the state as a toddler. So, right now, if I should go back there, I’ll seek direction.

**‘Feranmi:** What schools have you attend?

**Folu Agoi:** I attended many primary schools because my father was a teacher who moved from town to town. In fact, I attended like 6 to 7 primary schools. However, I attended St. Charles Secondary School, Oshodi. I actually started from Ondo town at Independence Grammar School before I went to St. Charles Grammar School. Then, I went to Lagos African Church Grammar School at Ifako, Agege to finish up.

I had my WASSCE in 1982 after which I moved on to Lagos State College of Education, Ote-Ijanikin which is now known as Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education where I did my NCE in English and C.R.K and I graduated in 1986. Then, I went to Ondo State University which was then at Ado-Ekiti before Ondo Ekiti clashed to study English after which I stayed back to do an MLD (Educational Management). I left the place in 1995, then I came to UNILAG and got an M.A in English Language. That was in 2000.

**‘Feranmi:** What’s your state of Origin?

**Folu Agoi:** I would say Ondo State, but you know the way it is. Following the dictates and convention of constitution, I wouldn’t be a Lagosian, but having been here for in Lagos for 40+ years, I’ll like to say I’m a Lagosian with Ondo descent or something.

**‘Feranmi:** Where and how long did your parents live, and how many wives did your father marry?

**‘Folu Agoi:** My parents were strict Christians, so that will tell you it was a monogamous family. They were both teachers and they were from Ipe-Akoko, Ondo state.

My dad was a teacher who usually taught in secondary schools, then he became a lecturer at Adeyemi College of Education after which he moved to Lagos to join Lagos State college of education until his retirement and was at a point, the dean of education. He’s no more now. He died in 2005 at 72. My mum left earlier. I think she was 56. She was also a teacher, and had established a school prior to her death.

**‘Feranmi:** How many projects have you done as a writer?

**‘Folu Agoi:** Well, I have done a couple of projects. Apart from the works I edited or co-edited, I have at least 7 publications and I have visited a couple of countries too in Africa, starting from Benin Republic where my first daughter schooled. However, paying attention to Literature, activities have taken me to South Africa, Malawi, Seirra Leone.

Outside Africa, I once delivered a lecture at Harvard, close to Boston in a village called Cambridge. I’ve been to Switzerland in a Bilingual village. I’ve been to Manilla in the Philippines in 2019. Also Germany who were so hospitable as a way to redeem their figure which Adolf Hitler painted black. They also have a flare for arts. They have massive music and visual arts schools.

**‘Feranmi:** What positions have you held in the writing world?

**Folu Agoi:** I think I’m more visible in ANA (Association of Nigerian Authors) where I was the Deputy Chairman of the Lagos Chapter in 2003, shortly after which I became the Chairman for two terms and that was in 2004-2007.

I’ve also been a member of PEN for some time. I was at a point the Vice President of the Nigerian center for 6 years. I am the President of the center now and I’ve been president for 4 years. I did the first year and was re-elected.

**‘Feranmi:** Are you married?

**Folu Agoi:** Yes, I am.

**‘Feranmi:** So, how, where and when did you meet her and what got you attracted to her?

**Folu Agoi:** It happened while I was living in the College of Education in 1986. I belonged to a theatre group in school and after our final exams, we weren't in a hurry to leave the campus. I lived with my parents so it was easy for me. While we were waiting for our results, we were still members of the theatre troupe. We got talking and that was it. It didn't set out to be a relationship, but there was that attraction and that was how God said YES.

**'Feranmi:** How many children do you have?

**Folu Agoi:** Five, because I have a set of twins.

**'Feranmi:** How can you explain your childhood and interactions with the opposite sex?

**Folu: Agoi:** Well, my parents were very strict and my father was someone you could now call 'Old skool'. He was always interested in books and he used to tell us about how he used to wash his books just to keep them neat and it was when we grew that understood and used to make jest of him, so the house was always packed with books.

I grew up in campuses. Even when he was lecturing, we lived in the staff quarters in the campuses; we didn't have the opportunity to mix with other children. I loved visual arts. I had that innate tendency to be an artist and I would fill up my notes with drawings of old men with bald heads, police officers and funny looking characters and my friends would really applaud me and I would display them in my room, then. My father would see them and say I was wasting my time instead of reading, and this really discouraged me.

When I was to select the subjects I would offer in form 4, I knew it was sacred to choose Fine arts because he wanted the Sciences, Biology which I never passed at any point, anyway.

My father tried to jack me off art. Maybe because of the thinking of that particular time or age, he didn't see art as anything serious. He wanted to see me around books.

Book reading was always a punishment for wrong doing, and he was always waiting for me to commit an error in pronunciation so he could beat me.

I loved arts, but not literature because of the way teachers taught it. Even till today, they aren't able to appreciate literature, especially, so they rely on the comments of lawyers, reviewers or some hungry authors and teach the students along the line of these people's subjective ideas

thoughts which is not right because if you pick a poem; a love poem for example, you can interpret it in a lot of other ways, like themes of hate or conflict.

I was a normal student and wasn't known to be very regular in many classes, especially in English and Literature classes.

**'Feranmi:** So, does that mean you didn't have any interaction with the opposite sex or didn't get involved in any form of sexual play?

**Folu Agoi:** Well, I honestly wouldn't say NO. It's too late for anyone to punish me because even mum and dad didn't know it happened in what we called Form 3, and it was a juvenile kind of relationship where you know, you got into it but you weren't conscious of what you were getting yourself into but you just felt there was some substance in it and you got to the end of the road.

**'Feranmi:** What were the concepts of sex and romance like in those days?

I think sex was a sacred phenomenon in those days, but things have really changed now because people are now liberal with certain things including sex. There were liberal people then too, but there was much more respect for relationships or sexual matters, you know, but it wasn't as open as it is now. Even the discussion of the phenomena was more like a taboo so much that the mention of it was more sacred than the act itself.

**'Feranmi:** Did you have reading partners when you were in school?

**Folu Agoi:** When I was in secondary school, I had no reading partners. I was a bit rascally when I was in school and we used to do a lot of things during the day time like drinking palm wine and other running around, but what many of my friends didn't know is that I used to read at midnight, and they could swear that there was more to me doing well in my studies.

So, there was no chance to have a reading partner because I was a midnight reader. Even in the university, I didn't have a reading partner. It was a natural thing with me, I am more active at night, and I have to be in a solitary place to assimilate.

**'Feranmi:** Sir, can you explain any romantic or sexual involvement of yours?

**Folu Agoi:** I think the symbolic one was the one I had in JSS3 (Form 3) and that's because it was the first and at least, one of a teenager and one lived faster than one's age so there was no maturity. I just saw myself go into it and that was how I became an adult.

**‘Feranmi:** Why are you keenly writing about sexuality in your poems?

**Folu Agoi:** It’s not a conscious or deliberate thing. You know, writing is a projection of the character and personality of the writer; it’s like your handwriting. It’s possible to decipher your personality from your handwriting, so, writing is like that.

Even in visual arts, you’ll still find some figments of yourself in the writing.

So, it’s not like I ventured into romantic poetry or something. You know creative writing is mostly a product of inspiration. Writing that doesn’t come with inspiration would definitely come with an element of force and any critic that reviews that work will notice that there was some form of force, so the one that comes quickly is the one that comes from your muse which could be erotic which I cannot help or have power over.

I just write under the influence of my muse; it’s like someone in church under the influence of the Holy Spirit and will say all sorts of things he wouldn’t say ordinarily.

**‘Feranmi:** What is your idea of feminism and your view of African women supporting or becoming feminists?

**‘Folu Agoi:** You know there are different waves or brands of Feminism and the concept of Feminism is wide. You know it was brought from the western world and the first set of Africans to react were the ones who were descendants of slaves; People like Alice Walker whose four girls were stolen in Africa and hasn’t forgotten the reality, said that Black women were different from white women and were coming from different cultures. She also said that there are different things white women would love to indulge in (like Lesbianism) that black women wouldn’t.

Some other people like Catherine Achilonu who came up with the concept of ‘Motherism’ and died about four years ago also emerged. Akachi Ezeigbo also has her own style of Feminism which is ‘Snail Sense Feminism’.

While Buchi Emecheta will ask you to get out of the relationship if it’s not working, Akachi will ask you to keep tagging along like a snail which is gentle and is just there climbing things slowly and steadily and that a woman should be able to tolerate the challenges in her matrimony, but should not lose sight of her goals.

So, if you want my personal opinion, I think I am for equal treatment of everyone, so I don't believe in treating people differently on account of sex or gender.

Doing a bit of confession, while I was growing, I used to see girls as having advantage over boys; something about partiality that your teachers will do and will favor the girls over the boys and I didn't quite like it, so I would revolt silently.

**'Feranmi:** Do you as a person support gay, lesbian or bestiality among Africans?

**Folu Agoi:** No, definitely not. Those things aren't African. There are some things written about the fact that there's been gay in Africa even before the coming of the white man. There's Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad that was set in the Congo where people masturbated and black men being sexual. Also, the case of bestiality in *Beloved* by Toni Morrison.

I do not support it, as well as many African people. I am mindful of the fact that while some might be involved in it for no fault of theirs, some might be products of natural defect or whatever, and some got lured into it.

**'Feranmi:** Is it true that the whites are more romantic than Africans?

**Folu Agoi:** You know there are two different settings now. One could easily say YES. I've been in a place in Germany where you have a long bridge and padlocks all over the bridge. Our guide then explained that the locks represented lovers who locked their love and then threw away the key, and that there's nothing that can unlock what they have locked.

I also know of someone who invited his fiancé to a restaurant to propose to her and he also invited an air force band who just rushed into the place, and the girl got really embarrassed because it was too much for her.

So, we can say the whites (Male and Female) are more romantic than the blacks, and so many things are affecting the blacks; maybe something about illiteracy or poverty.

**'Feranmi:** What's your view on romance?

**Folu Agoi:** Romance is one of those phenomena that tend to spice up life. You know life will be boring without any act or show of love. It's magical especially when it's a show of genuine love,



and not the one that is watered down by what they see whereby today, you have two people, and tomorrow, they have fallen apart.

**‘Feranmi:** Do you have dreams?

**Folu Agoi:** Sure, I have dreams.

**‘Feranmi:** What do you always dream about?

**Folu Agoi:** I don’t see myself doing what you think I should be doing. You know, from my experience, there are various kinds of dreams. Some dreams are prophetic, and I know I have that gift. There are some dreams I have and I’ll be very sure that they are prophetic.

There were even some poems that occurred to me in the dream. I could dream up a whole poem and when I get up, I’ll start writing wildly or furiously so I wouldn’t forget any lines, and some of them have won awards; One even won the BBC award.

**‘Feranmi:** What are your likes when it comes to food, places, friends, environment and books?

**Folu Agoi:** I love nature a lot, and in my house, I try to create that atmosphere of a jungle. You know, planting tree, flowers, leaving them wild and not trimming them,

When it comes to food, I prefer natural and organic food and not synthetic food or junks and that’s one of the problems I have when I go out.

About friends, I believe you cannot choose your friends. You have a lot of classmates or colleagues interacting with you, but only few are your friends and you know. I think I am more comfortable in my own company. Most people aren’t real, so I try to pull back. I don’t have many friends, but I enjoy my own company. There are even times I see myself talking to myself.

I also prefer the natural environment. I even prefer the natural air to Air conditioner.

I’m a lover of books; mostly literary books although I’m a grammarian.

**‘Feranmi:** What are your dislikes?

**Folu Agoi:** My major dislike is hypocrisy. I love to be seen in my true colors. Most members of our society are hypocrites. A pastor is preaching and all you can remember is where you saw him and what you saw him doing the previous night. For me, I’ll prefer to not preach.

I like being straightforward; I won’t smile with you when I hold something against you.

**‘Feranmi:** What fear do you have about the world?

**Folu Agoi:** Terrorism! The fear of the possible effect of nationalistic tendencies that might lead the world to destroy itself. You know, nations are now going inside of themselves now, being conscious of the fact that the other people do not belong with them and having that kind of thing will make free movement of people to be curtailed. People with parochial mindsets not being broad-minded enough to accept the other people to coexist with them. A Nigerian cannot go to Ghana and feel safe, and that happens almost everywhere in the world, and that’s my major fear- That new wave of nationalistic thinking that has really added to destruction and even violence.

**‘Feranmi:** What fear do you have about the women folk?

**Folu Agoi:** We may need to contextualize here. I think the fear I have for the African women is what’s now happening in the west. In America, a lot of women are really lonely, finding it difficult to have husbands, and it is because of the freedom women really enjoy in the country by the constitution.

However, African women enjoy their matrimonial homes because of their ability to endure, unlike the American women, and in the end, they laugh last and become very strong in the family.

My concern for the women is that they shouldn’t be pushed so much by the society that they are now the ones to start craving sex, up to the point of advertising themselves in magazines and all.

**‘Feranmi:** What fear do you have about the men folk?

**Folu Agoi:** I think the fear I have for the men is that they’re losing their self-respect which is born out of responsibility, but when a man abandons his home out of laziness and greed and relies on a woman, then he’s robbed of his dignity

Irresponsibility in the family keeps the woman in charge of the home. Nowadays, I feel disturbed when I hear terms like ‘house husbands’ which is a man who isn’t responsible and his wife starts to call the shots in the house.

Recently, there was an actress that kicked out her husband because she had been providing for the man and he wasn’t reciprocating, so he was unnecessary and was kicked out.

So, that’s my fear.

**Feranmi:** Sir, how do you relate emotions to some of your poems?

**Folu Agoi:** Poetry is a product of emotions; it's different from other genres of literature. If you don't feel strongly about yourself, you can't write poetry. My poetry is always a product of my emotions. I can't take my emotions away from my poetry because there's nothing left.

**Feranmi:** How individualistic are your poems to yourself?

**Folu Agoi:** Most poems are brought about by personal experiences which can then be appropriated by other people. So, it's either you are involved directly, or someone close to you was. A good poem is one that cannot be restricted by space or time; take it anywhere and it will be relevant and relatable.

**Feranmi:** What do you love about nature and the past?

**Folu Agoi:** We need to appreciate the present and also the past. The past is very important, and that's why the so called Nigerian leaders that expunged history from our curriculum were only being mischievous and wicked because they only wanted to take the past away from us so we don't know where we're coming from; and if you don't know where you're coming from, you won't know where you're headed.

About nature, Art is definitely about nature. For instance, poetry must have rhythm and rhythm is taken from nature. We have day and night to balance and beautify things. Look at the sky, if we have blue and no patches of grey or white, everything will be boring.

Imagine there was no other food but rice and chicken, at a point, you want to take something else like garri.

There was a boy that committed suicide; he was an all-rounder, always the best at everything and didn't know what it meant to fail or lose. Life was boring to him, and he committed suicide.

You can't have a poet that's not in love with nature and that's the essence of beauty of nature which is accentuated by rhythm.

**Feranmi:** What are some of your escapisms or thinkings?

**Folu Agoi:** That's what poetry does to me- A means of escape from the reality of my environment.

I had a paper today- Advanced statistics, and for a man who is in the English Department, even the course title is scary. Instead of studying hard and killing myself, I was writing poetry and I was happy.

So, it comes as a means of escape and it helps a lot to conserve energy because if we are to think about all the problems of Nigeria, one will become haggard; but once we write it off the system, beauty even comes out of it.

**‘Feranmi:** Sir, do you still believe in Nationalism, Patriotism and Nigerianism?

**Folu Agoi:** Nationalism is OK, but shouldn't be taken to the extreme. The ultra-modern Nationalism is dangerous where we're totally conscious of nationalistic divide and boundaries.

Patriotism is a positive thing but is usually in response to one's environment. A lot of Nigerians are not patriotic while some Americans can die for the flag of America.

Germany, for instance pays a certain amount into the account of a child from his first month till he's 18, and if at 18, he's not established, they continue to help out. At a certain age, the children are allowed to go spend time with other families to foster social integration. That's different from a place where you're told to not expect anything from your government; just pay tax and all, but don't expect anything.

What's the function of the government that can't do anything (water, security) for its citizens and they expect the citizens to be patriotic?

Sometime ago, an American was kidnapped and Americans had to come to Nigeria to rescue him and we didn't even know about it until he was rescued and taken back to America. It's different from the situation whereby students were abducted and the government is negotiating with the abductors.

**‘Feranmi:** Do you believe in the Oduduwa concept?

**Folu Agoi:** Yes, I do. The first thing is I do not believe in forced unions. I believe that a union should be about mutual conceptions. Because of the current socio-political situation of the country where the government seems to be executing some kind of agenda, having people come to claim that they own the country and other people are fake, I have no choice but to think that its better the parties separate and everyone goes their separate ways.

For example, if a particular section of the country is uncomfortable because of western education, I'd like every section to grow at their own pace, and not feeling threatened about the ones who are ready to grow and develop and not be dragged back.

**'Feranmi:** Does that mean you believe in Nigeria as a separate form than as an entity?

**Folu Agoi:** A lot of very great countries in Europe are small countries. Take for instance, Switzerland's population isn't up to 9million and it has companies such as Geneva, Rolex, a very strong banking industry and some other great companies. Also, it's not about the size. However, size is a big factor here, which might even be a minus.

However, I believe that every sections that wants to opt out of a union, they should be allowed to. You know, our size would have been a great advantage if not the tendency of the people that would want to enslave other people. Its better we nullify that.

We have the American dream; they know where they are going; Do you know anything about the Nigerian dream? We have different cultures put together, no cohesion, no sincerity, so I do not think they should stay together if they don't want to.

**'Feranmi:** What other comments you have about Nigeria?

**Folu Agoi:** Nigeria is a very beautiful country. Diversity like I said should be an advantage but that's sad because some people who do not mean well for the country are the sacred cows. If you go outside the country, Nigeria are well respected for their population and for the quality of the citizens, they always make a mark where they go because of their strength and intelligence. The missing link, however, is the Leadership virtue which some criminals have come to fill, now threatening the peace of the country. These are the things that are leading to the verge of insanity.

**'Feranmi:** Thank you for the opportunity, Sir.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ANALYSIS OF SELECTED POETRY COLLECTIONS OF FOLU AGOI AND SYLVIA KANKARA

This chapter is the analysis of data; which are the selected poems of Folu Agoi and Sylvia Kankara.

#### 4.1 THE PLACE OF SEXUAL NORMS AND SOCIAL CODES

*'Marriage and hanging go by destiny; matches are made in heaven'*

*-Robert Burton.*

The sentence above is from Folu Agoi's *A flower was all I sought*, and it refers to the mental attitude that things were meant to be, which is known as fatalism. This means that God created all forms of sex and sexuality, and that whatever sort of sexuality someone has was meant to be by God.

However, certain societal codes addressing sexuality repress, restrict, and govern people's sexualities and sex behaviors in society. They are unwritten rules of conduct that all members of a group or community follow, and they are intended to influence people's sexual actions and habits.

The term "sexual norm" can apply to a societal standard. Most societies have societal norms about sexuality that limit natural sexuality to certain sex acts between individuals who meet certain age, kinship, race/ethnicity, social role, and socioeconomic position requirements.

In most societies, the phrase "normal" refers to a broad variety of behaviors. Many activities are considered as "more or less acceptable by different people, and the judgment on how normal or acceptable they are strongly depending on the individual voicing the opinion as well as the society itself.

The following are some of the common sexual codes in the African community:

- While a male can have multiple sexual partners, a woman cannot.
- A male can be a polygamist, but not a woman.
- A woman is obligated to live in her husband's home for the rest of her life.
- Two relatives are not allowed to have sex or marry each other.
- Two relatives are not allowed to have sexual contact with the same person.

- A friend is not expected to have sexual contact with his friend's wife.
- A child is not expected to see his mother's nakedness.

Folu Agoi, in his poem, *Bottom line* emphasizes the social norm of a man having more than one sexual partner.

I say look at me from head to toe  
 Front and back  
 Up and down  
 And say the thing you see in them  
 But fail to find in me

(*Bottom Line*, Lines 35-39, Pages 46-47)

The usage of terms like '...Red eyes, flaming eyes stabbing the statue's commencing eyes/ She spat, rubbing one worn corset worn inside out' makes this extract sound like a frustrated woman's appeal (Lines 3-4). The young lady also wants to know why her husband/partner is attracted to other women while she is purportedly his wife and may or may not have the same qualities as these other ladies. The poetess persona bemoans her partner's interest in other women, and wonders if her physical structure isn't enough to dissuade him from seeking other women.

'What a toothless beauty to an ageless wrestler?'  
 Saying even twin sisters taste not alike  
 Like cherries or grapes- some sweet, some sour  
 Stone-blind, too blind to see all holes smell the same  
 Stone-cold, too numb to know the worth of stale wine  
 Why can't men see a babe in the one they call their Eve?

(*Bottom Line*, Lines 28-33, pg. 46-47)

In the preceding lines, Folu Agoi emphasizes the light in which most men view women, as well as breaking the societal taboo that two relatives cannot have sexual intercourse with the same individual.

While he compares women to "cherries" and "grapes" in these words, he also portrays that two people born of the same parents can be 'tasted' because they do not have the same sexuality or structure.

Folu Agoi, in *Daddy's Pet* also emphasizes the broken social/sexual norm of incest which is illustrated with a sixteen-year-old who has sexual relations with someone she calls 'dad' and who she claims calls her 'pet'.

I call him dad  
He calls me pet  
Yes, pet, like parrot  
Pigeon, puppy, kitten...  
Like pets in fabled bunkers  
Cooped pets, pretty fledglings  
Pets kept to keep the bunkers cool  
Cosy pets tending an ancient kitchen  
Graceful silhouettes gracing a living room  
Fiery flowers flavouring life in the other room  
Sacred chamber, super spa spurting faux pas  
Sometimes cooking claustrophobia  
Selfie stick in chicken stew

I'm a pet  
Sixteen serving sixty  
Fledgling pet suckling sixty  
Sixteen, sixty; perfect match, Siamese twins;  
Who doesn't savour the flavor of daddy's pet  
Or sugar daddy's- cosy pet clasping caches of cash  
Pretty little pet fed on a hard liquor called power?  
(*Daddy's pet*, Lines 1-2, Page 78)



According to Wikipedia, a pet is a companion animal that is kept primarily for the company or entertainment of its owner. If this is true of a pet, then this sixty-year-old father preys on his sixteen-year-old daughter, treating her as if she were an object meant for entertainment; in this case, to satisfy his sexual desires.

In the second stanza, the girl mocks herself by introducing herself as a “sixteen suckling sixty”, further using the phrase "perfect match" and her tone is one of coercion and discomfort as she declares that her breasts "Siamese twins" and the fact that they are inseparable, ‘do not savour the flavor’ of the so-called ‘daddy’. They don't like the mounds of cash that encircle them, either, because the sexual relationship is one of violation and abuse, as evidenced by the usage of the phrase "... pet fed on a strong liquor called power?"

The lyrical persona doesn't have the luxury of letting out her anguish since she has been silenced by a seemingly constant speech which might also be a threat aimed to repress her feelings when she persona asserts that;

I call him dad

He calls me pet, sometimes muttering:

Parrots hardly make great pets.

*(Daddy's pet, Lines 21-23, Page 78)*

This disparity in ages also shaped the power dynamics between certain married couples, putting the wife at a disadvantage in these relationships.

The poet depicts the struggle between sexual norms and social codes that are supposed to regulate and state the acceptable ways of sexual relations or activities, confirming data from sexological studies that a large number of ordinary people's sex lives are frequently extremely different from popular perceptions of normal in private; While a society has a set of standards that it considers acceptable and normal, many people in that society have alternative perspectives, and consider normal to be whatever they feel comfortable doing as long as it fulfills their desires.

## 4.2 SEXUAL COMPLEXITIES IN AFRICAN COMMUNITIES

Many behaviors linked with sexualities are prohibited and highly stigmatized in Africa. Because Western colonialists' language has dominated sexuality discourses, the shape and creation of related concepts, meanings and definitions must necessarily mirror facts and experiences outside of Africa.

Sylvia Tamale (2005) affirms that...

‘... there is a legitimate silence surrounding the sexualities of some African women that is ambiguous and not able to be engaged’.

Tamale, citing Smith's *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples'* states that...

“A great deal of rich information about African sexualities lies in ancient histories. Historical accounts of African sexualities are alive in folklore, traditional songs, dance, folk art, body markings, clothing, jewelry, names and naming systems. Yet these systems of knowledge are denigrated in the theoretical and normative domains of mainstream research. In fact, they have been “reclassified as oral traditions rather than histories”

The relatively unhindered sexualities of Africans, in contrast to the imported and highly conservative sexual conventions of Europe, offered great problems to the early explorers. Without a doubt, Victorian women were expected to mute their sexuality and be sexually reserved. Their dress, behavior and customs were geared to erasing any hint of sexuality and women who acted otherwise would immediately be branded prostitutes. (Wolf, 1991).

This is still evident in the sexualities of the Hausa people, specifically women, as is portrayed in this stanza of Sylvia Kankara's *Embattled Hymens*.

The day breaks, the light stays  
So we can find our way to the stream where  
We rehearse our dreams of embattled hymens... (11)

The *Battled Hymens* story depicts how the individuals in question must wait till they can go to the river before rehearsing the stories of embattled hymens. The preceding lines raise problems

regarding why they must wait and then leave the area before discussing their options, which are subsequently answered by the following lines...

Now washed away by the forbidden fruit  
We were coaxed to eat,  
Despite our deflated resistance. (11)

...whose tone reveals the victims' resistance and dread of fully expressing the reality of their pleasures/sexuality in their surroundings.

In the interview with Folu Agoi, he emphasized the issue of sexuality and silence;

‘I think sex was a sacred phenomenon in those days, but things have really changed now because people are now liberal with certain things including sex. There were liberal people then too, but there was much more respect for relationships or sexual matters, you know, but it wasn't as open as it is now. Even the discussion of the phenomena was more like a taboo so much that the mention of it was more sacred than the act itself’. (see interview).

Sylvia Kankara describes another type of intricacy in her poem, "*Thoughts of You*," in which she describes what a girl-child goes through in her environment when she is not allowed to meet her wanted lovers. As a result, during her depression, she thinks and frets about how she wasn't given any opportunities to express herself, causing her to daydream to the point where her "pelvic walls contract". This could indicate masturbation as a result of buried psychoses inflaming, which could eventually impact her sexuality.

However, this isn't just applicable to the girl-child, but also to the male folks who after repressing their thoughts and feelings for a long while engage in masturbation and even homosexuality. This is very common in boarding schools and schools restricted to one gender only.

Kankara S., in her interview with Amatoritsero Ede of Sentinel Poetry, says that;

‘...That's a very interesting question considering that the issue of homosexuality/gay relationships was recently debated at the National Executive Council Meeting where the

proposal for same sex marriage was condemned, and it was affirmed that Nigeria is still a conservative society, and so would not tolerate some of these clearly western influences. It is significant that this issue has attracted such level of attention, suggesting that the development is more rampant than we are generally willing to admit. More recently, gays have become bolder and have made public appearances, threatening to form associations. Also, there are indications that even among writers, those heeded to suppressed voices are beginning to advertise themselves. On the whole, it would appear that in the near future, “repressed homosexuals” would claim their rights of free expression in public. But I believe that it will be a tough one for them in the light of such recent developments, as Nigerians’ protest votes against inmates of Big Brother Nigeria House seen to be rather sexually liberated.’

#### **4.3 THE PLACE OF ROMANCE IN AFRICAN COMMUNITIES**

Because some people tend to assume that love did not exist in Africa until the Europeans arrived, it is necessary to de-mystify romance among African societies. These individuals believe that Africans did not fall in love in pre-colonial times. Weddings were arranged, young girls were married to old men with harems, and if that wasn't enough, children were forced into marriages through betrothals arranged before they were even conceived by their parents.

People should be entitled to make their own choices in terms of sexuality, as this has an impact on romance in one way or another. We witness numerous examples of males purchasing women into marriage in Africa today without proper wooing, which serves to spark and grow love in a relationship. It's no surprise that many of these unions end in divorce. Other instances are;

‘...Bride-capture was practiced in many Nigerian communities such as Akoko Edo, Igboland and Ibibio land. Sometimes, parents of the bride were a party to this. If parents accepted a marriage proposition and collected gifts but were not able to convince their daughter to consent to the marriage, then capture was arranged. Also bride capture took place where the economic condition or the excessive demands of the parents did not permit

a young man to marry. In some cases, if a girl and a young man fell in love without the consent of their parents, a capture was arranged...’ (Eno, 2004)

Okojie, 1994 also asserts that;

‘In Ibibio land (in south-south) Nigeria, a man could get engaged to a yet unborn child. If the baby happened to be a girl, then she would be regarded as married but would be nurtured by her parents till she reached the handing over age. This same practice was seen among the Esan.’

This, and many other gestures of passion that eventually translate to love, generate a lot of wrangling among African societies when it comes to defining the concept of romance, which Folu Agoi believes is due to illiteracy or poverty.

I am set on the edge of extinction  
From wanting You, oh my love.  
Swing low! Let your chariot of compassion  
Descend at the cascade of my plea... (3)

In these lines from Sylvia Kankara's poem *Evergreen*, the literary character is pleading for the return of her beloved, who has left for unclear reasons and is forced to marry someone she doesn't love. This also shows that marriage isn't a definition of happiness or acceptance because there was no justification for the concept to begin with. To her, it can be regarded as ‘The symphony of love at its making’ (17)

Moved two months ago by the moon lighting the village sky  
We rose, Rose and I, going for a stroll in a rose garden  
Just strolling, coasting, cruising the moonlight orbit  
And then, struck by something strange, stirred  
By tipsy stars teasing the gentle moon  
We played a bit of hide and seek.  
We met again a moon ago, and she said she missed her thing

And next thing I knew, I was called to meet her dad!  
How on earth can one be held for just a game?  
Just one game of hide and seek!  
(*Just a game of hide-and-seek*, page 73)

These lines depict what Folu Agoi describes in *Just a game of Hide-and-Seek* about how attraction begins with love and ends with lust, in which there appeared to be a spark between the two, which is referred to as cruising here because of the enjoyments and seeming romance, but later referred to as a "game."

Sweetie  
I still know not  
why we seem bent on knowing not  
each other.  
(*Mystery*, page 42)

The verses of the above poem by Folu Agoi also imply that two people can walk together under the same roof for years but never truly meet. It says that because of the circumstances that bring a big number of Africans together in marriage, they end up not knowing much about themselves. Today's young Africans, like many others, enter partnerships without adequately crossing friendship off their list, resulting in relationship frustration.

Many Africans are thought to be anti-romantic because they never seemed to fall in love with their various spouses, but rather happened to be with them by accident or by parents' choice.

#### **4.4 THE CONTRAST OF YORUBA AND HAUSA SEXUALITY**

Religion, particularly traditional African faiths, Christianity, and Islam, continue to impact sexual attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors in most African civilizations. To put it another way, religion impacts cultural perceptions of sexuality, and since fashion is one of the ways in which culture is expressed, it is fair to conclude that religion plays a role in the genderization of fashion and sexuality.

Chidi, (2015) affirms that;

‘... with the great advances made in social (under)development in the postcolonial era, sexuality in Africa, like politics, apparently remains male-privileging, although some would argue that women have become more assertive and “liberated” and that men have begun to lose their privileged position in matters of sex. In the whirlwind of globalization, women in Africa are beginning to have more say in their own sexual needs. Not only that. In spite of the taboo embedded in culture with regards to sexual matters and the parameters of sexual correctness set by most cultures of Africa, as elsewhere, sexuality in Africa has taken a new turn in the post-colonial *mélange* as hitherto unspoken and forbidden sexual attitudes and acts now flash in the continent’s socio-cultural pan.’

The Hausa sexuality is influenced by Islamic culture and education and the nature of this influence according to Olatunbosun (2018) is still ‘reflective in the creative enterprise of Hausa creative writers revealing how an average northerner is shaped by Islamic patrilineal... features’.

In Hausa sexuality, men are to be seen and heard, but women are to be hidden behind the *purdah* system, both in action and appearance. This acculturation of women's quiet is paralleled by silence in sexuality, which is supposedly protected under the guise of Sharia law.

Sylvia Kankara, on the other hand, debunks the myth that women should only be seen and not heard –as a means of forming religion –in her poetry ‘*Amina*.’ The poem then defines a northern woman as a "Pearl of the North" (45), implying that gender is not synonymous with inferiority, as some religious extremists portray the northern lady to be.

Also, in Hausa community, one part of sexuality education committed exclusively to parents is the expression of sexuality during courtship and marriage. Although courting is forbidden in both Islamic and Hausa culture, the suitor is permitted to pay a visit to the girl at her parents' home, take gifts and offer her token money. The young pair is not permitted to stay alone in a private location during such visits.

Despite the fact that Hausa sexuality education and socialization include numerous steps aimed at preventing premarital sexual intercourse, the common Hausa practice of sending youngsters and young girls to hawk is rapidly undermining such efforts. Unscrupulous men acting as customers

of their items expose these hawkers to sexual solicitations, sexual assault, and harassment at a young age.

Yoruba sexuality, on the other hand, is impacted by western culture and education.

Yoruba culture revolves around sexuality. Yoruba culture emphasizes the importance of authentically feeling and expressing this component of human nature in both ancient and modern times. Illegitimate sexual relationships are not encouraged, although they do happen as an exception to the rule of sexual continence. The major goal of marriage for the Yoruba is to ensure the survival of the Yoruba race through lawful and responsible procreation. Virginity was seen as extremely valuable in ancient times.

Alaba, (2004) adds that;

‘No sooner had modernity (literacy, colonialism, capitalism, individualism, etc) crept into the hitherto preliterate, subsistence agrarian, communal Yoruba society than this great importance attached to virginity waned and almost disappeared. But it did not tamper with the aforementioned primary purpose of marriage among the people. Pre-marital sex became acceptable. Happy is a fiancée who got impregnated by her fiancé during courtship. The wedding ceremony would be arranged judiciously to pre-empt the arrival of the first baby of the marriage. Most churches and mosques have been condoning this practice.’

Because they were not encouraged to participate in sexual intercourse before marriage, Yoruba husbands and wives-to-be were understandably enthusiastic about the anticipated sexual contacts in the past. Sexual fantasies are very popular among Yoruba children. They play by impersonating adults on occasion, such as a hypothetical married life's spouse, wife, brother, and sister.

Promiscuity, based on sexual indiscipline is a means of expressing sexual fantasies especially among males who are erroneously looking for variety. (Alaba, 2004)

This is evident in the lines of *Bottom Line* by Folu Agoi;

I say look at me from head to toe  
Front and back  
Up and down  
And say the thing you see in them



But fail to find in me

(*Bottom Line*, Lines 35-39, Pages 46-47)

And by variety, he illustrates saying; 'Even twin sisters taste not alike' (29)

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSION**

This research work was carried out to explore the theme of sexuality and romance in Folu Agoi and Sylvia Kankara's poems through the examination of their selected works. It is intrinsic that for a long period of time, poetry has been one of the means of expression in Nigeria and in the world at large and it has been used audaciously by the likes of Folu Agoi and Sylvia Kankara.

This research kicks start with Chapter one which contains the introduction, background to the study, research objectives and questions, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, scope and limitation, research methodology, theoretical interpretations and conceptual clarifications which are divides into the operational terms and functional terms.

Chapter two focuses on the review of related literature which discusses gender, sex and sexuality, sexual identity and romantic attraction, affirming these concepts with related literatures of various scholars.

Chapter three is an interview with Folu Agoi, giving insight nto the poet's biography and societal stance.

Chapter four is an analysis of the data which are the selected poetry collection of Folu Agoi and Sylvia Kankara and these analyses were used in answering the research questions.

Chapter five is the conclusion of the research work.

## **Contribution to Knowledge**

1. This study foregrounds the relevance of poetry to issues of sexuality in Nigeria and has proven that poetry is a potent medium of exploring social maladies that affect the society. Hence, this research work has contributed to literature because poetry as an art is a salient element of creativity that could be employed as a tool for expressing displeasure.
2. This research has also contributed to the society by demystifying the roles of relationships, choice and desire in sexuality.

## **Recommendation**

It's important to remember that sexuality is a component of identity, and that if someone wants to have an all-encompassing interpretation of their identity, sexuality must be included. As a result, there is a need to improve on the conceptualization of sexuality in African communities, as well as how Africans are ideologically influenced, by bringing to the society's attention what they have failed to realize about sexuality.

## **Research Limitation**

The major limitation to this research is the inability to have an interview with Sylvia Kankara, whose poems were also used for this research, in order to gain more insight, due to distance.

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