

“All the world will be your enemy, Prince with a Thousand Enemies, and whenever they catch you, they will kill you. But first, they must catch you, digger, listener, runner, prince with the swift warning. Be cunning and full of tricks, and your people shall never be destroyed.”

— Richard Adams, *Watership Down*

Never did I think of the day when I would be comparing myself to a Rabbit, and yet, here we are.

I'm a Rabbit.

We often tend to be exclusive when we speak on issues that plague the Human Condition. One problem over the other. For instance, the genocide in Palestine is the most media-covered, thereby it must be the most devastating and requires all of our attention. Congo can take a backseat. This exclusion, I believe, is one of the problems of seeing the world in binaries. We're not computers. It's not one after the other, or one or the other. We are complex beings, and so are our issues.

This behaviour often manifests when we want to dismiss something or give all our attention to one problem. We ask questions like:

“Why do we have Pride Month and Men's Mental Health Month in the same month? Men suffer more!”

Like there aren't men who kill themselves because they differ from heteronormativity.

“Why are South Africans so pressed about race? Class affects us all!”

Except that the class issue is heavily rooted in race and segregation

“Why are we talking about trans rights in feminism? What about real women?”

Who decides what is real? Can you chase liberation if you seek to exclude people's realities?

Intersectionality shows that our problems are interwoven. Problems that behave like a Hydra because you cut one down and two more grow in its place. You need fire to blow out the stump and fully settle the issue; it's a bit of radicalism, if you will.

When you live the experience of people thinking your problems are exclusive to each other, you sort of feel forced to take a stand on the matter, because the arrows will come from all sides. They have come and are coming from all sides.

Growing up on fundamental Christianity, a system heavily rooted in Bible Legalism and a hunger for the doomsday apocalypse associated with Rapture, it was very easy to see the world in the blacks and whites so many have grown up to see. It's easy to judge and dismiss something you'll never have to worry about experiencing, so unless you're living the colour yourself, it takes nothing to dismiss the people outside the Venn diagram and move on.

Unfortunately, I didn't get that choice to be a dismissive prick, which led me down a rabbit hole of questioning, self-hate, existential crisis, and cognitive dissonance. My problem started with the statement:

"Christians don't get depressed," Said my mother to a very depressed me.

The topic of mental health and neurodivergence is often heavily spiritualized or ignored. They probably think that if you suppress it enough, it'll magically go. If it doesn't go, you're under a spiritual attack, and most times, they can't fathom why you'd be depressed, anxious, or even neurodivergent. You haven't suffered enough for your brain to start spazzing.

I get that mental health is a frustrating topic, one often shunned, and yes, ideally, I have no reason to be *depressed*. I had all my basic needs met, and I suppose that's as good a life as anyone can ask for. Good, except Neurodivergence comes with its own set of invisible problems, which can easily exacerbate when prodded by external factors; Intersectionality.

I was about 12/13 when I began to understand the realities of my queerness. Not being attracted to the norm the way I should has a way of shaking your thinking, but it was more than that. The outside wrestles you, and you fight the battle internally, waging against your internalized homophobia while crouching through grass like the Rabbit to make sure you don't stand out too much. I had family to tell me that the World is a wicked place, and I had my experiences to show me that humanity is depraved.

Nigeria, by internet traffic(Go check Google Trends), is one of the biggest global consumers of gay pornography and queer media, and yet remains one of the most homophobic countries out there.

What they demonize by day, they search for at night...

Oppression doesn't silence. It only drives underground, and it makes being a queer person even more dangerous, because you don't even have your people behind your back fighting for you. They're picking up the spears and the guns to hunt you down, so that they don't get singled out. It's not just Nigeria, it's so many other countries. It's not uncommon to hear of men and women dragged out to the streets, beaten, scarred, burned, straight up killed for even the slightest suspicion of heteronormative deviation. It does something to you because you know it could be you.

The churches call for your head, the Mosques seek to incinerate you, your friends think you're lost, and your family is too embarrassed to be seen with you, not to mention all the hate and destruction you put yourself through to resemble anything close to *normal*.

So let's see. Neurodivergent and Queer. Why won't my mental health take a toll?

Religious indoctrination is more of a thing than LGBTQ+ *indoctrination* will ever be. One calls for the submission of its subjects or the impending threat of eternal condemnation, the other just begs you to see their humanity and acknowledge their suffering. It's not a trend. Not an agenda. Not madness. Just a wish.

The purity culture that fundamentalist churches raise their congregation on is severely damaging to so many - Worse even, when you're queer. In church, there was a big board with a list of the biggest sins of apostasy, as well as those who would take a first-class ride to God's loving condemnation. Guess what appeared on the board twice? If you guessed homosexuality(queerdom in general), you are very correct. Every now and then, there was a message on the madness of the LGBTQ+ people, and I was in church all the time. Was I mad? It usually ensued a warning to parents not to let their kids watch things like Netflix to save them from being indoctrinated into the movement, then I would look to the big

board with my apostate *sin* written in big white letters and wonder, would God really dispatch me to a fiery hell? If Netflix were the problem, how the hell did I get indoctrinated?

It became such a hard thing to reconcile faith and sexuality, and when the mind and body are in disalignment, I like to think the spirit is in disalignment too. Although I'm sure Christians will have a differing opinion, Flesh is weak, spirit is willing, and all that. The walk in faith is a hard journey; it isn't easy for anybody, so it certainly doesn't need self-appointed *legislators* for God, making it so much harder for people. From conversion therapy, to hate speeches, to the fake sympathy where they understand at least that sexuality can't be changed(because it's not a choice), but condemn you to a life of chastity and one without romantic love. Involuntary chastity, that is. Being queer is difficult, and it is already a deeply isolating experience; to condemn one to a life without further intimacy is a spiritual death.

The homophobic sermons don't make you want to stay in the church anymore. Nobody wants to be on the receiving end of constant demonization. Your choice becomes: Stay and continue to shrink under the narrow-mindedness of the congregation, or leave to find your peace, but know that even from a distance. Their words will cut. In your absence, they will chant 1 John 2:19:

"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us."

They will pathologize your exit, convinced the Devil has gotten the better of you, rather than understanding you've been hurt and are hurting. Christians outside Bible legalism don't tend to be better when you tell them you've left the faith. Even if it's for a little while. They love to shift the goal post:

God didn't hurt you, the church did.

Our Church isn't like that.

Love the sinner, hate the Sin.

In their minds, God never hurt me; his people did. Which may be true, but as a Christian, as someone meant to believe in an invisible being, my closest reflection of Christ is the Church. It is the people who supposedly embody him, and if you cannot feel the love of God in that space, what is the love of God? Sexuality cannot be a sin, cannot be a test. I'm not a test. I can't be.

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Is it enough to bring up the struggle of being Black and African? Moreover, the crime of being Nigerian? In the Westernized world, where systemic oppression has forced POC to remain docile as *First World* countries tear up the planet, your reality is unfortunately limited. This isn't to play a victim card, as we do all have our shared responsibility in the current state of the world; however, your options as a Black African are highly limited. To travel out, say to escape the harrows of intersecting trauma, one

would have to do many forms of gymnastics to even be considered, because of their passport. Not enough to talk about the limited working opportunities that'll come with being that skin color, or having *that* accent. The world feels suffocating like that, and you're just begging to be seen.

Queer, Black, African, Neurodivergent places you in a rare box that most people will fortunately never get to experience. It is a daunting experience, but it also makes you ask the tough questions. The ones no one wants to ask or even answer. This is why Intersectionality is important. I'm not sure my mini biography hit the mark, but it is important.

You can't tackle the hardships of mental health and trauma in a country where a strong percentage feel they have to hide or kill themselves for who they are. Many men and women pretend to be straight and end up marrying straight people to fit the norm, but those marriages rarely last. Especially, if one of the parties isn't aware of the other's resounding sexuality. The suppressed party will cheat, lie, destroy their marriage, unknowingly pass on STDs to their innocent spouse, and wreck the psyche even more.

We can't have mental health advocacy if people can't even exist in their own minds. Until we understand that we need to draw a line between Bible legalism and taking into account the cultural context of the message's day, we will continue to hurt people. We will hurt the women, we will send the children into hiding, and we will beastify the men in the name of maintaining a polished image. Religion is an instrument of hurt, and it shouldn't be. We also need to acknowledge that even if your faith is against said behaviour, it cannot become the basis for Religious nationalism. Your religion does not equal morality and in this life, on this planet. Human Rights will have to come first. There needs to be sanity in all this demonization of marginalized people; The Queer, the disabled, the neurodivergent.

When you fight for the issues that affect Black people, directly or indirectly, you fight for Africans, the oppressed, the marginalised. The systems that ensure your oppression, thrives on the same roots that ensures the alienation of other groups of people. Intersection ensures you tackle the Hydra head on, it gives community and power. Watchouts and signals so that the Rabbit can hear of the problem before it reaches it, and it can evade. Live to fight another day.

We all live many different realities in one life, victors to each as some are victors to it. The fundamental principle remains that everyone deserves visibility, no human deserves alienation as the social creatures we are. It is our place, to do away with beaurocracy and age old systems that came from small minded civilizations, so that this life we have, not an afterlife, can be a little more bearable for all of us.