



**QUEERING CONTEMPORARY BRITISH
THEATRE: COMING OUT IN ZODWA
NYONI'S *NINE LIVES* AND ROB MADGE'S
*MY SON'S A QUEER (BUT WHAT CAN YOU DO?)***

Yunus Emre ÖZMEN

**Master's Thesis
English Language and Literature
Asst. Prof. Tuğba AYGAN
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ÇAĞDAŞ İNGİLİZ TİYATROSUNDA BİR KUIR OKUMA: ZODWA
NYONI'NİN *NINE LIVES* VE ROB MADGE'İN *MY SON'S A QUEER* (*BUT*
WHAT CAN YOU DO?) OYUNLARINDA AÇILMA

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT**MASTER'S THESIS**

**QUEERING CONTEMPORARY BRITISH THEATRE: COMING OUT IN
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(*BUT WHAT CAN YOU DO?*)**

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The term coming out refers to LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer+) individuals' disclosing of their gender identity and sexual orientation to their families, friends, or the society they live in. The term 'coming out' is a shortened version of the expression 'coming out of the closet', which essentially means revealing a secret. With the efforts of LGBTQ+ individuals and the egalitarian people to increase equality and visibility towards different gender identities and the increasing awareness in the society, the act of coming out continue to increase gradually. Contemporary British playwrights also focus on the subject of coming out of LGBTQ+ individuals in their plays, which play an important role in contributing to the community's visibility. The purpose of this thesis is to scrutinise different coming out experiences in Zodwa Nyoni's *Nine Lives* (2014) and Rod Madge's *My Son's a Queer (But What Can You Do?)* (2021) plays.

In the study, the concepts of queer and queer theory, which represent the letter 'q' in LGBTQ+ abbreviation, are discussed. The word queer, which means something or someone with an odd appearance, was first used to mean 'to disrupt something' and/or 'to make it weird', but over time it turned into a pejorative term for homosexual individuals. With the increasing awareness of different gender identities and the pride of LGBTQ+ individuals in their selves, the word queer is reinterpreted and adopted by the

community as a rebellion against the tyranny endured by those with gender identities outside the gender binary. Thus, the word begins to be accepted as an umbrella term that LGBTQ+ individuals use for themselves.

With the word queer being identified with LGBTQ+ pride, queer theory emerged in the twentieth century as a field of critical theory mainly associated with gender studies. By emphasising the fluid nature of sexuality and encouraging the removal of identity categories that limit a person's gender, sexuality, and gender role, queer theory aims to eliminate gender binary while problematising societal norms regarding gender classifications. In this direction, while the theory opposes gender essentialism, it highlights the existence of individuals who cannot find a place in traditional gender categories and fall under the category of 'Others'.

Queer theory entered the literature as a concept when it was used by Teresa de Lauretis at a conference held at the University of California in 1990. De Lauretis emphasises that queer identities should be respected as separate and independent identities, and they should be studied on their own terms rather than being seen as a deviation from existing norms. De Lauretis argues that associating queer theory only with lesbian and gay identities contradicts the core ideas of queer theory. The main reason for the emergence of queer theory is that it aims to eliminate existing discriminations, and that definitions such as lesbian and gay lead to identity categorisation.

After the term's coinage in the 1990s, queer theory began to gain formal recognition in gender studies. Gender theorists such as Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick became pioneers of queer theory as their works form the basis of queer theory. Michel Foucault is also considered as one of the founders of queer theory. Although Foucault does not contribute directly to the theory, his work on the concept of sexuality paves the way for many queer theorists, including Butler and Sedgwick. The main purpose of queer theory to eliminate identity categories is also seen in the works of Butler, Foucault, and Sedgwick. These theorists do not try to eliminate heterosexuality as a sexual preference or lifestyle but aim to emphasise the existence of different gender identities and sexual preferences. Acting from different perspectives, each theorist defends the freedom of sexual identity, claiming that this identity may change over time.

Foucault argues that sexuality cannot be regulated or controlled. In this direction, he argues that it should be related to the individual's unique pleasures rather than being one of the materials on the experimental tables of scientists and should not be controlled by social taboos or ideologies. Butler reinforces Foucault's ideas by stating that gender is not determined innately. Furthermore, Sedgwick claims that queer is an open mash of possibilities and argues that it is not possible to talk about a monolithic understanding of gender. In addition, Butler and Sedgwick explain gender through performativity and claim that gender is determined only by the actions people take in their society.

In the following part of the study, the concept of coming out is explained in detail. Since heterosexuality is accepted as normal in every society, heterosexual individuals are not expected to come out with their gender identities or sexual preferences. Sedgwick states that since coming out only applies to nonbinary individuals, it emerges as an oppressive consequence of heterosexuality. Unless a person discloses any information about their gender identity or sexual preferences, they are considered heterosexual. However, LGBTQ+ individuals are required to disclose their gender identity. Since it increases the queer visibility, the process of coming out is one of the most important stages in the lives of queer people from the moment they embrace their identities. Nonetheless, if a person is aware of the risks that they may face by coming out, they may choose to remain silent. It is common for people to lose their privileges after coming out. Queer individuals may lose their families, jobs, reputations and most importantly their lives in this regard. Losing privileges is not the only negative consequence of coming out. LGBTQ+ individuals, especially young people, are exposed to violence and hate crimes every day. Coming out may have extreme consequences such as homophobic violence and usurpation of the right to live which make this process more problematic and push these individuals to hide their identities.

One of the biggest factors in coming out of LGBTQ+ individuals and the acceptance of one's own sexual identity becoming a problem can be seen as the religion to which one belongs. Individuals tend to feel pressured to keep their identity a secret unless their religious teachings support their non-normative orientations. Additionally, the lack of family support causes individuals to have low self-esteem and feel insecure, and again makes the process of coming out more problematic. Furthermore, LGBTQ+ individuals living in a country other than their own may experience more painful

processes of coming and ostracisation from the society due to their ethnic origins as well as their queer identities.

Literature plays a very important role when it comes to providing visibility to the queer community. The fact that literature is a safe tool for individuals to tell their experiences with fictional characters and events created based on real life stories and experiences makes it possible to reach a wider audience. The visibility provided by literature helps queer individuals to embrace themselves and realise that they are not alone, while creating a kind of common forum for individuals with the same experiences. Especially since theatre offers a direct communication, it continues to be one of the leading genres of queer literature as one of the most effective ways to examine problems and reach large masses.

Before the legalisation of homosexual acts in Britain in 1967, it is hardly possible to speak of a queer theatre. In 1968, with the liberalisation of British theatre from the Lord Chamberlain's Office, censorship in the theatre was lifted. With the liberation of the theatre, the queer visibility on the stage and in the society increases. The legitimisation of homosexuality in 1967 opens the theatre to queer identities and thus begins to contribute to queer visibility. Over time, the subject of queer in the theatre paves the way for LGBTQ+ theatre actors, producers, directors, and playwrights to come out and begin to stand out with their LGBTQ+ identities. In this direction, theatre contributes to queer awareness, visibility, and coming out. The presence of the queer increases radically not only on stage but also off stage. Bert Royal, Joe Mantello, Louise Parker Kelley, Mark Ravenhill, Megan Terry, Michael Mayer, Maureen Duffy, Nancy Cárdenas, Rob Madge, Ryan Murphy, Tony Kushner, and Luke Sheppard are some of the playwrights, actors, directors, and producers who came out with queer identities.

In this study, Zodwa Nyoni's *Nine Lives*, Rob Madge's *My Son's a Queer (But What Can You Do?)*, which focuses on the subject of coming out in the British theatre, are examined in the light of the ideas of queer theorists. *Nine Lives* depicts the experiences of Ishmael, a gay asylum seeker who has recently fled Zimbabwe and is struggling to get residency in Leeds. Knowing that his sexual preferences will not be accepted by his friends and family, Ishmael flees his country. Because the homophobic atmosphere

created in African countries deprives people of their freedom to be themselves, LGBTQ+ members cannot publicly express their identities and feelings.

Throughout the play, various difficulties faced by LGBTQ+ individuals are told through Ishmael. Ishmael often considers coming out to his family and friends about his identity from a young age, but he decides to remain silent, believing that staying closeted will have better results for him as he feels pressured by his family's religious beliefs and heterosexual lifestyles. Unable to endure the pressure any longer, Ishmael flees his country with his lover, David. Hoping that his troubles will end with his arrival in Leeds, Ishmael is exposed to discriminatory behaviour by those responsible for refugees in the country's Home Office. Besides, David turns his back on Ishmael when he finds his asylum.

Nyoni's play sheds light on the bleak experiences of a queer individual who takes refuge in a different country and illustrates what kind of troubles these individuals face. As the spokesperson for LGBTQ+ individuals who have problems coming out because of their country, religion, belief, values, and/or family, Ishmael stands out as an example of how difficult this process is. However, the play ends by pointing out that the struggles of individuals to live freely with their selves and preferences continue and will continue despite these negativities.

Rob Madge's play *My Son's a Queer (But What Can You Do?)* depicts Madge's own experiences. The playwright successfully blends theatre and queer while displaying their memories through which they discovered themselves. Presenting glimpses from their past through an old television and at the same time recreating these glimpses on stage, Madge presents their queer identity in detail. Madge's younger aspirations and inclinations differ from those of their peers. Madge is seen enjoying performing theatrical plays in the living room of their home, while their peers enjoy activities such as football, computer games, and playing outside. In addition, Madge enjoys portraying female characters and has a keen interest in wigs and dresses.

Although the title of the play gives the impression that the content of the play is about a family drama and Madge will address family obstacles and give advice on this issue, the play exemplifies that there will also be positive experiences in the lives of LGBTQ+ individuals. Although they encounter negative happenings such as being

bullied by their peers during their childhood, Madge focuses on the contribution of the family environment, where they can be themselves by mentioning that positive happenings are more dominant. Madge's family has been very embracing of their differences, moreover, considers them normal. Similar to the title of the play, the question 'My son is a queer, what should I do?' is rephrased by Madge as 'Is your son a queer? I'm jealous of you'. The play advises that the only thing to do is to be happy and the family members should support LGBTQ+ children and value their differences.

In the study, experiences of Zodwa Nyoni and Rob Madge's characters from different societies, different times, and places are exemplified during and after coming out. In the light of these examples, it has been seen that the act of coming out is a process rather than an act that is done and completed all at once. In this regard, the effects of individuals' families, friends, societies, and their values and beliefs on the process were examined. At the same time, how these factors and the process shape the lives of LGBTQ+ individuals was evaluated through examples.

Keywords: Coming Out, Queer Theory, Contemporary British Theatre, Queer Theatre, Zodwa Nyoni, Rob Madge.

GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

ÇAĞDAŞ İNGİLİZ TİYATROSUNDA BİR KUIR OKUMA: ZODWA NYONI'NİN *NINE LIVES* VE ROB MADGE'İN *MY SON'S A (QUEER BUT WHAT CAN YOU DO?)* OYUNLARINDA AÇILMA

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Açılma terimi, LGBTQ+ (lezbiyen, gey, biseksüel, transseksüel, kuir+) bireylerin kendi arzuları doğrultusunda ailelerine, arkadaşlarına veya içinde yaşadıkları topluma cinsiyet kimliklerini ve cinsel yönelimlerini açıklama eylemi anlamına gelir. İngilizce ‘coming out’ kavramının karşılığı olan terim esasen bir sırrın açığa çıkarılması anlamına gelmekte olan ‘coming out of the closet’ ifadesinin kısaltılmış halidir. LGBTQ+ bireylerin ve eşitlik savunucusu insanların farklı cinsiyet kimliklerine yönelik eşitliği ve görünürlüğü artırmak adına sarf ettikleri çaba ve toplum içerisinde artmakta olan bilinçlenme ile açılma eylemleri gün geçtikçe artmaktadır. Çağdaş İngiliz oyun yazarları da azınlıkların görünürlüğüne katkıda bulunmakta önemli rol oynayan oyunlarında LGBTQ+ bireylerinin açılma eylemlerini konu edinmektedir. Bu tezin amacı, Zodwa Nyoni’nin *Nine Lives* (2014) ve Rod Madge’in *My Son’s a Queer (But What Can You Do?)* (2021) oyunlarında farklı açılma deneyimlerini irdelemektir.

Çalışmada ilk olarak LGBTQ+ kısaltmasında ‘q’ harfini temsil eden kuir (queer) ve kuir teori (queer theory) kavramlarının tartışması yapılmıştır. Sözlük anlamı tuhaf görünümlü şey ya da kimse olan kuir kelimesi, İngilizcede ilk olarak ‘bir şeyi bozmak’ ve/veya ‘tuhafılaştırmak’ anlamında kullanılırken, zaman içerisinde eşcinsel bireyleri tanımlayan bir aşağılama ifadesi halini alır. Farklı cinsiyet kimliklerine yönelik farkındalığın artması ve LGBTQ+ bireylerin benlikleri ile gurur duyması ile kuir kelimesi

bu toplulukça ikili cinsiyet rejiminin (gender binary) dışında kalan cinsiyet kimliklerine mensup kişilerin katlandıkları zorbalıklara bir başkaldırı olarak yeniden yorumlanıp benimsenir. Böylece terim LGBTQ+ bireylerin kendileri için kullandığı şemsiye bir kavram olarak kabul görmeye başlar.

Kuir kelimesinin LGBTQ+ gururu ile özdeşleşmesi ile kuir teori, esas olarak toplumsal cinsiyet çalışmaları ile ilişkilendirilen bir eleştirel teori alanı olarak yirminci yüzyılda ortaya çıkar. Cinselliğin akışkan doğasına vurgu yaparak bir kişinin cinsiyetini, cinselliğini ve cinsiyet rolünü sınırlayan kimlik kategorilerinin kaldırılmasını teşvik eden kuir teori, toplumsal cinsiyet sınıflandırmalarına ilişkin toplumsal normları sorunsallaştırırken cinsiyet ikiliğini ortadan kaldırmayı amaçlar. Bu doğrultuda teori, toplumsal cinsiyet özcülüğüne karşı çıkarken, geleneksel cinsiyet kategorilerinde yer bulamayıp ‘Öteki’ olarak nitelendirilen bireylerin varlığını ön plana çıkarır.

Kuir teori, bir kavram olarak 1990 yılında California Üniversitesinde gerçekleşen bir konferansta Teresa de Lauretis tarafından kullanılmasıyla literatüre girer. De Lauretis, kuir kimliklere ayrı ve bağımsız kimlikler olarak saygı duyulmasının ve halihazırda var olan normların bir sapması olarak görülmek yerine kendi koşulları altında incelenmesinin gerekliliğine vurgu yapar. De Lauretis, kuir teorisinin yalnızca lezbiyen ve gey kimlikler ile bağdaştırılmasının, kuir teorisinin savunduğu esas düşüncelere ters düştüğünü savunur. Bunun nedeni olarak ise kuir teorisinin ortaya çıkmasındaki esas nedenin mevcut ayırımları ortadan kaldırmayı amaçlamasını, lezbiyen ve gey gibi tanımlamaların ise bu görüşün aksine yeni kategoriler yaratıyor olmasını gösterir.

1990’larda terimin ortaya çıkmasından sonra, kuir teori toplumsal cinsiyet çalışmaları alanlarında resmen tanınmaya başlar. Judith Butler ve Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick gibi cinsiyet teorisyenleri, çalışmaları kuir teorisinin temelini oluşturduğu için teorisinin öncü isimleri haline gelir. Öte yandan Michel Foucault da kuir teorisinin kurucularından biri olarak kabul edilir. Foucault teoriye doğrudan katkıda bulunmasa da cinsellik kavramı üzerine yaptığı çalışmalar Sedgwick ve Butler dâhil birçok kuir teorisyenin yolunu açar. Kuir teorisinin kimlik kategorilerini ortadan kaldırmaya yönelik temel amacı, Foucault, Sedgwick ve Butler’ın eserlerinde de görülür. Bu teorisyenler, heteroseksüelliği bir cinsel tercih ya da yaşam biçimi olarak ortadan kaldırmaya çalışmamakla birlikte farklı cinsiyet kimliklerinin ve cinsel tercihlerin varlığını

vurgulamayı amaçlar. Farklı bakış açıları ile hareket ederek, her bir teorisyen cinsel kimlik özgürlüğünü savunurken bu kimliğin zamana göre de değişkenlik gösterebileceğini iddia eder.

Foucault, düzenlenebilir veya yönetilebilir bir olgu olarak kabul edilen cinselliğin yanlış anlaşıldığını öne sürer. Bu doğrultuda, cinselliğin bilim insanlarının deney masalarında yer alan malzemelerden biri olmaktan çok, bireyin kendine özgü zevkleri ile ilgili olması gerektiğini ve sosyal tabular veya ideolojiler tarafından kontrol edilmemesi gerektiğini savunur. Butler, cinsiyetin doğuştan belirlenmediğini ve doğal olarak kararlaştırılmadığını belirterek Foucault'nun fikirlerini pekiştirir. Sedgwick ise, kuirin açık bir olasılıklar karması olduğunu iddia eder ve monolitik bir toplumsal cinsiyet anlayışından bahsetmenin mümkün olmadığını savunur. Bunların yanı sıra Butler ve Sedgwick, bir kişinin cinsiyetinin yalnızca toplumlarında gerçekleştirdikleri eylemlere göre oluştuğu gerçeğini 'performatiflik' terimi üzerinden açıklar.

Çalışmanın ilerleyen bölümünde kuir teorisyenlerin de üzerinde sıkça durduğu açılma kavramının detaylandırıldığı bir bölüme yer verilmiştir. Heteroseksüellik her toplumda normal kabul edildiği için heteroseksüel bireylerin cinsel yönelimleri hakkında bir bilgilendirme yapmaları yani açılmaları beklenmez. Sedgwick, açılma yalnızca cinsiyet ikiliğine mensup olmayan bireyler (nonbinary) için geçerli olduğundan, heteroseksüelliğin baskıcı bir sonucu olarak ortaya çıktığını belirtir. Bir kişi cinsel tercihleri veya cinsiyet kimliği hakkında herhangi bir bilgi ifşa etmediği müddetçe, heteroseksüel olarak varsayılmaktadır. LGBTQ+ bireylerin ise cinsiyet kimliklerini açıklamaları gerekli görülür. Kuir görünürlüğü arttırdığı için açılma süreci, kuir kişilerin benliğine kavuştuğu andan itibaren hayatlarındaki en önemli aşamalardan biri olarak kabul edilir. Bir kişi açılarak karşılaşılabileceği risklerin farkındaysa, sessiz kalmayı seçebilir. İnsanların açılma nedeniyle yaşamlarındaki ayrıcalıklarını kaybetmeleri sık görülen bir durumdur. Bireyler bu doğrultuda ailelerini, işlerini, itibarlarını ve en önemlisi hayatlarını kaybedebilir. Ayrıcalıkları kaybetmek, açılmanın tek olumsuz sonucu değildir. LGBTQ+ bireyler, özellikle gençler, her gün şiddet ve nefret saldırılarına maruz kalmaktadır. Açılmanın çoğu zaman homofobik şiddet ve yaşam hakkının gaspı gibi aşırı sonuçlar doğurması da bu süreci daha sorunlu hale getirip bu bireyleri kimliklerini saklamaya itmektedir.

LGBTQ+ bireylerin açılma sürecinin, hatta bireyin kendi cinsel kimliğini kabul etmesinin sorun haline gelmesindeki en büyük etmenlerden biri de mensup olduğu din olarak görülebilir. Bireyler, dini öğretileri normatif olmayan yönelimlerini desteklemedikleri takdirde, kimliklerini gizli tutma konusunda baskı hissetme eğilimindedirler. Bunun yanı sıra, aile desteğinin eksikliği, bireylerin özgüvenlerinin düşük olmasına ve kendilerini güvensiz hissetmelerine neden olurken yine açılma sürecini daha sorunlu hale getirir. Bunların yanı sıra kendi ülkeleri dışında bir ülkede yaşayan LGBTQ+ bireyler, kuir kimliklerinin yanı sıra etnik kökenlerinden dolayı toplumdan daha fazla dışlanıp açılma sürecini daha sancılı geçirebilmektedir.

Kuir toplumuna görünürlük sağlamak söz konusu olduğunda edebiyat oldukça önemli bir rol oynar. Gerçek hayat hikayelerinden ve deneyimlerden yola çıkılarak yaratılan kurgusal karakterler ve olaylar ile, bireylerin deneyimlerini anlatabilmeleri için güvenli bir araç olan edebiyat aynı zamanda daha geniş kitlelere ulaşmayı da mümkün kılar. Edebiyatın sağladığı görünürlük, kuir bireylerin yalnız olmadıklarını fark ederek kendilerini benimsemelerine yardımcı olurken aynı deneyimlere sahip bireyler için de bir tür ortak forum oluşturur. Özellikle tiyatro, doğrudan bir iletişim sunduğundan sorunların irdelenmesi ve geniş kitlelere ulaşmanın en etkin yollarından birisi olarak kuir edebiyatın önde gelen türlerinden biri olmayı sürdürmektedir.

1967’de Britanya’da eşcinsel eylemlerin yasallaşmasından önce bir kuir tiyatrodan söz etmek pek mümkün değildir. 1968’de İngiliz tiyatrosunun, Lord Chamberlain’ın Ofisi’nden ayrılmasıyla birlikte tiyatrodaki sansür kalkar. Tiyatronun özgürleşmesi ile, sahnede ve toplumda kuir görünürlüğü artar. 1967’de homoseksüelliğin meşrulaştırılması ile tiyatro, kuir kimliklere sahnesini açar ve böylece kuir görünürlüğüne katkı sağlamaya başlar. Zaman içerisinde kuirin tiyatroda konu edilmesi, LGBTQ+ tiyatro oyuncularının, yapımcılarının, yönetmenlerinin ve oyun yazarlarının da açılmasına zemin hazırlar. Oyun yazarları, yönetmenler ve yapımcılar kuir karakterlerle ve/veya zaman ve mekanlar ile ilgili yapıtlarını yayınlamayazken, LGBTQ+ kimlikleriyle ön plana çıkmaya başlar. Bu doğrultuda, tiyatro, kuir farkındalığına, görünürlüğüne ve açılmaya katkı sağlar ve sağlamaya da devam eder. Kuirin varlığı sadece sahnede değil, sahne dışında da radikal bir şekilde artar. Bert Royal, Joe Mantello, Louise Parker Kelley, Mark Ravenhill, Megan Terry, Michael Mayer, Maureen Duffy, Nancy Cárdenas, Rob

Madge, Ryan Murphy, Tony Kushner, ve Luke Sheppard, kuir kimlikleri ile açılan oyun yazarları, oyuncular, yönetmenler ve yapımcılardan birkaçıdır.

Bu çalışmada, İngiliz tiyatrosunda açılma konusunun merkeze alındığı Zodwa Nyoni'nin *Nine Lives* ve Rob Madge'in *My Son's a Queer (But What Can You Do?)* isimli eserleri kuir teorisyenlerinin fikirleri ışığında incelenmiştir. *Nine Lives*, yakın zamanda Zimbabwe'den kaçan ve Leeds'te ikametgahını almak için mücadele eden eşcinsel bir sığınmacı olan Ishmael'in deneyimlerini konu edinir. Eşcinsel olduğu gerçeğinin, arkadaşları ve ailesi tarafından kabul edilmeyeceğinden emin olan Ishmael ülkesinden kaçır. Çünkü Afrika ülkelerinde yaratılan homofobik atmosfer, insanları kendileri olma özgürlüklerinden mahrum bıraktığından, LGBTQ+ üyeleri, kimliklerini ve duygularını alenen ifade edememektedirler.

Oyun boyunca LGBTQ+ bireylerin katlandıkları çeşitli zorluklar Ishmael aracılığıyla anlatılır. Ailesinin dini inançları ve heteroseksüel yaşam biçimleri nedeniyle baskı altında hisseden Ishmael, genç yaştan itibaren kimliği hakkında ailesine ve arkadaşlarına açılmayı sık sık değerlendirse de kapalı olarak kalmanın kendisi için daha sağlıklı sonuçlanacağı kanısına vararak sessiz kalır. Baskı altında olmaya daha fazla dayanamayan Ishmael, erkek arkadaşı David ile ülkesinden kaçır. Leeds'e varması ile yaşadığı sıkıntıların son bulacağını ümit eden Ishmael, ülkenin İçişleri Bakanlığında mültecilerden sorumlu olan kişilerin ayrımcı davranışlarına maruz kalır. Bunun yanı sıra, birlikte kaçtığı ve ilgi duyduğu kişi olan David, sığınacak bir yer bulduğunda Ishmael'e sırtını çevirir.

Nyoni'nin oyunu, mülteci olarak farklı bir ülkeye sığınan kuir bir bireyin kasvetli tecrübelerine ışık tutarak bu bireylerin ne tür sıkıntılarla karşılaştığını örnekler. Ülkeleri, dinleri, inançları, değerleri ve/veya aileleri sebebiyle açılma konusunda sorun yaşayan LGBTQ+ bireylerin sözcüsü olarak Ishmael bu sürecin ne kadar zor olduğunun bir örneği olarak ön plana çıkar. Ancak oyun bu olumsuzluklara rağmen bireylerin, benlikleri ve tercihleri ile özgürce yaşayabilmek için verdikleri mücadelelerin devam ettiğine ve edeceğine işaret ederek son bulur.

Çalışmanın diğer eseri Rob Madge'in *My Son's a Queer (But What Can You Do?)* adlı oyunu Madge'in kendi tecrübelerini anlatır. Oyun yazarı, çocuk yaşta başladığı ve tutku ile bağlı olduğu tiyatro sanatı aracılığı ile kendini keşfettiği anılarını oyununda

sergilerken tiyatro ve kuiri başarılı bir şekilde harmanlar. Eski bir televizyon aracılığı ile geçmişinden kesitler sunan ve aynı zamanda bu kesitleri sahnede canlandıran Madge, kuir kimliğini detaylı bir şekilde sunar. Madge'in küçük yaştaki istekleri ve eğilimleri hemcinslerinden farklılık gösterir. Hemcinsleri futbol, bilgisayar oyunları, dışarıda oynamak gibi aktivitelerden zevk alırken, Madge'in evinin oturma odasında tiyatro oyunlarını canlandırmaktan hoşlandığı görülür. Buna ek olarak Madge, kadın karakterleri canlandırmaktan hoşlanmakta olup peruk ve elbiselere yakın ilgi duyar.

Her ne kadar oyunun başlığı, oyunun içeriğinin bir aile dramı olduğu, Madge'in ailevi engellere değineceği ve bu konu üzerinde tavsiyelerde bulunacağı izlenimini verse de oyun, LGBTQ+ bireylerin yaşamlarında pozitif tecrübelerin de olacağını örnekler. Madge, çocukluğu esnasında, akranlarının zorbalıklarına maruz kalması gibi olumsuz olaylar yaşamasına rağmen, olumlu olayların daha baskın olduğuna değinip kendisi olabildiği aile ortamının katkılarına odaklanır. Madge'in ailesi farklılıklarını oldukça hoş karşılar, üstelik, bu farklılıkları normal olarak değerlendirir. Oyunun başlığının benzerini içerdiği "Oğlum bir kuir, ne yapmalıyım?" sorusu Madge tarafından "Oğlunuz bir kuir mi? Sizi kıskandım" olarak yeniden yorumlanır. Oyunda ailelere mutlu olmaları, LGBTQ+ çocuklarına destek çıkmaları ve onların farklılıklarına değer vermeleri öğütlenir.

Çalışmada, Zodwa Nyoni ve Rob Madge'in farklı toplumlardan, farklı zaman ve mekanlardan gelen karakterlerinin açılma esnasında ve sonrasında yaşadıkları örneklendirilmiştir. Bu örnekler ışığında, açılma eyleminin bir anda yapıp tamamlanan bir eylem olmaktan çok, bir süreç olduğu görülmüştür. Bu süreç içerisinde bireylerin ailelerinin, arkadaşlarının, toplumlarının ve sahip oldukları değer ve inançların, süreç üzerindeki etkisi incelenmiştir. Aynı zamanda bu faktörlerin ve sürecin LGBTQ+ bireylerin yaşamlarını nasıl şekillendirdiği örnekler üzerinden değerlendirilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Açılma, Kuir Teori, Çağdaş İngiliz Tiyatrosu, Kuir Tiyatro, Zodwa Nyoni, Rob Madge.

PREFACE

I could not have completed this study without a great deal of support. First, I would like to express my most sincere gratitude to my advisor, Asst. Prof. Tuğba AYGAN for her boundless patience and immeasurable support. Throughout this long journey, my family has provided me with a great amount of support. I would like to express my special thanks to my parents Nazan and Taner ÖZMEN, and my brother Erkin without whom none of this would have been possible.



INTRODUCTION

Oxford Dictionary describes 'queer' as someone or something with an odd or unusual appearance or of questionable and dubious character (Oxford Dictionary, 1989). It is highly possible to use the word queer to indicate an unfamiliar object, to express a sick feeling, or even to marginalise people for their looks and attitudes without any sexual implication. Yet, by its relation to the unusual, at the beginning of the twentieth century, queer has started to be used as a pejorative term for homosexual people. The word's usage as a homophobic slur caused homosexuals to be marked as deviant enemies and to be verbally and physically assaulted for who they are. The fact that queer is often referred to as the 'q' word attests to the word's past usage as a slur and gives the feeling as if fully pronouncing the word will bring bad luck or bad reputation to the person uttering it.

As a word, queer has a rather complicated history that begins with oppression yet ends in liberation. At the beginning of the twentieth century, queer has started to be used in its current meaning, delineating homosexual people yet in a degrading way. The end of the twentieth century, however, has reclaimed the term queer. An activist group named Queer Nation was formed in the United States in 1990 in order to increase queer visibility and to put an end to homophobia. The group has regenerated, the queer, so far, a taboo word, as an umbrella term for homosexual people. This way, they have also paved the way for the word queer to be embraced as a label with their famous slogan 'we're here, we're queer, get used to it'.

In this regard, queer can be considered an evolved word. It began to be used in a liberating context after the 1990s. Academics started to use queer to get rid of any sort of specific identity categories. In order to explain queer's distinction from identity categories, Butler says "I worry when queer becomes an identity. It was never an identity. It was always a critique of identity. I think if it ceases to be a critique of identity, it's lost its critical edge" (Butler, 2008, 32). This means, limiting queer to a certain identity would clash with queer's strife to provide emancipation of identity. Academics such as Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick, and Teresa de Lauretis argue that the fact that gender is categorised, and people are expected to fit into these categories cannot be accepted. As gender is personal, people should not feel obligated to belong to a certain category to be accepted by society. They also suggest that regardless of their gender, every person should

live under equal circumstances and discriminatory actions toward people of queer identities and preferences should be eliminated.

Although the word's acceptance by the queer community was controversial, given that most of its background was based on a hateful attitude, the LGBTQ+ community seems to have grown fond of the word in time. That has something to do with the word starting to be used in a proud and liberating context as LGBTQ+ individuals accept their identities and differences. Reclamation of the word queer simply displays that queer people do not want to be marginalised and a change in the definition of normal when it comes to gender identities is long due. The slogan 'we're here, we're queer, get used to it' used in gay parades also indicated that queer people are on good terms with who they are, and they want to be accepted the same way. Today, queer is still used to refer to nonbinary people. One of the main reasons why the word is being used the way it is used today is because the community required a more inclusive name. Referring to people as gay, lesbian, or transgendered was still categorising these people. Hence, queer exists to include all those who are otherised by heteronormativity.

Theatre is one of the artistic fields that strongly contributed to the queer's visibility. Plays regarding queer characters or themes continue to increase and provide different perspectives into queer people's lives, their struggles, and achievements. After the legitimisation of homosexuality in 1967 and liberalisation of theatre from Lord Chamberlain's Office in 1968, queer presence began to increase and queer's place in theatre as a subject matter enabled many playwrights, actors, producers, and directors to come out with their queer identities. Bert Royal, Joe Mantello, Louise Parker Kelley, Mark Ravenhill, Megan Terry, Michael Mayer, Maureen Duffy, Nancy Cárdenas, Rob Madge, Ryan Murphy, Tony Kushner, and Luke Sheppard are some of the LGBTQ+ playwrights, actors, producers, and directors who came out.

This thesis sets out to trace the coming out process in contemporary British plays to provide different coming out experiences of LGBTQ+ members and their consequences. *Nine Lives* (2014) by Zodwa Nyoni and *My Son's a Queer (But What Can You Do?)* (2021) by Rob Madge are two plays that exemplify the negative and positive consequences of this process. Nyoni's play portrays a gay asylum seeker, Ishmael who takes refuge in the United Kingdom due to fearing that his sexual preferences will not be

accepted by his family and friends in Zimbabwe. As Ishmael encounters several difficulties and discriminations, he strives to embrace his identity as well as having it accepted by others. Quite differently, Madge's play provides a more positive perspective to coming out. Through glimpses of their upbringing, it is seen that Madge grows up in a supportive family environment in which they can be themselves without needing to come out. Their play shows that there will be negative and discriminatory encounters in one's life but happiness and acceptance by their families and friends can lead to a better future for the LGBTQ+ individuals. By providing different perspectives and lives, these two plays exemplify the impact of LGBTQ+ people's family and society on their lives. People of queer identity continue to face discrimination when they attempt to be themselves. Yet, despite these bleak and disheartening experiences, they continue to strive to have a place among their societies as themselves and theatre as provides a fruitful and safe place to reflect on their experiences. This thesis aims to evaluate the coming out process for two different characters and how the characters and the processes are affected by external and internal factors in their lives.

CHAPTER ONE

QUEER THEORY

1.1. QUEER THEORY

Despite the diversity in gender identities, heterosexuality, which can broadly be defined as the attraction to the opposite sex (Manning, 2009, 1), is considered as the accepted form of having a relationship in every corner of the world for centuries. The concept of heterosexuality brings about yet another concept called heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is the assumption that heterosexuality is the 'normal' sexual orientation and suggests a consistency between a person's sex, sexuality, and gender identity. Celia Kitzinger (2005) describes heteronormativity as "the myriad ways in which heterosexuality is produced as a natural, unproblematic, taken-for-granted phenomenon" (478). According to heteronormative culture, an individual's sex at birth and gender are connected and they are assigned *naturally*. In these lines, although heterosexuality has been the most prevalent sexual orientation for ages, its validity was strongly challenged with the introduction of nonbinary identities such as gay, lesbian, and transgender and preferences such as asexuality, bisexuality, homosexuality, and pansexuality in the twentieth century. Lexicalising and acknowledging these identities have opened up new perspectives on the discussions of sex and gender while providing more visibility for nonbinary individuals.

In the wake of nonbinary identity politics, queer theory emerges as a field of critical theory that is mainly associated with gender studies. It puts the emphasis on the fluid nature of sexuality and encourages the removal of identity categories that limit a person's sex, gender, sexuality, and gender role. Furthermore, queer theory questions socially established norms regarding gender classifications and seeks to eliminate gender binaries. To this end, while the theory opposes gender essentialism, it foregrounds the existence of those who do not fit into the conventional categories, falling under the category of 'Others'.

Queer theory has formed an analytical and systematic viewpoint based on queer studies throughout the twentieth century. Texts such as Kenneth James Dover's *Greek Homosexuality* (1978), and John Winkler's *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology*

of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece (1990) trace the roots of homosexuality to the Ancient Greece in order to draw forth the history of homosexuality. Besides, *The Psychological Phenomena of the Homosexual* (1937) by Mildred J. Berryman, and *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* (1980) by Adrienne Rich are some other ground-breaking works contributing to the field by reinforcing the fact that heterosexuality is but an imposed institution and that same-sex sexual preferences can be innate.

Berryman's seminal work, *The Psychological Phenomena of the Homosexual* (1937) sheds light upon several gay and lesbian individuals and discusses their identities. In her work, Berryman works with several lesbian and gay individuals in order to provide an insight into their lives. Regarding Berryman's work, Ann Louise Mussey states that "[Berryman] drew from an eclectic mix of scientific literature to argue that homosexuality was an inborn but benign variation in gender roles" (Mussey, 2001, xi). It is observed that lesbian and gay individuals have erotic interest toward people of the same sex from their childhood. It reinforces the argument that nonbinary feelings are not acquired but are innate.

In the 1980s, queer theory begins to be used informally in the works of scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa until it is officially recognised with Teresa de Lauretis' conference at the University of California in 1990. Proceedings of the conference were collected under the title *Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities* in *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* in 1991. De Lauretis explains that "the conference was intended to articulate the terms in which lesbian and gay sexualities may be understood and imaged as forms of resistance to cultural homogenization, counteracting dominant discourses" (1991, iii.). At the time, gay and lesbian sexualities were not granted their liberty in identity, and their tendencies were treated as a deviation from heterosexuality. Hence, de Lauretis goes on to say that gay and sexual identities should be studied on their own terms. This means that queer identities should be respected as separate and independent identities and should be examined under their own terms rather than being seen as a deviation from already existing norms.

However, de Lauretis does not only use the word queer to liberate gay and lesbian studies but also forms a distance between queer, and gay and lesbian studies. To distinguish the two terms, de Lauretis interprets:

The term 'queer,' juxtaposed to the 'lesbian and gay' ... is intended to mark a certain critical distance from the latter ... For the phrase 'lesbian and gay' or 'gay and lesbian' has become the standard way of referring to what only a few years ago used to be simply 'gay' (e.g., the gay community, the gay liberation movement) or, just a few years earlier still, 'homosexual'. Today we have, on the one hand, the terms 'lesbian' and 'gay' to designate distinct kinds of life-styles, sexualities, sexual practices, communities, issues, publications, and discourses; on the other hand, the phrase 'gay and lesbian' or, more and more frequently, 'lesbian and gay' (ladies first), has become standard currency. (1991, iv-v)

De Lauretis claims that this sole focus on the phrase 'lesbian and gay' conflicts with the very core principle of queer theory. That is to say, the usage of the phrase to refer to lesbians and gays clouds the diversity and fluidity of queer identities. De Lauretis further claims:

The term 'queer theory' was arrived at in the effort to avoid all of these fine distinctions, ... not to adhere to any one of the given terms, not to assume their ideological liabilities, but instead to both transgress and transcend them – or at the very least problematize them. (1991, v)

The studies conducted on lesbian and gay sexualities were not inclusive as queer theory is meant to be. Although differences in sexual identities were supposed to be cherished, they were being obscured within these studies as lesbian and gay identities were privileged. In other words, the phrase lesbian and gay as a standard currency was suppressing the diverse identities that sheltered under the term queer. As the term starts to be used in a less inclusive way, de Lauretis distanced herself from the term by calling it a “vacuous creature of the publishing industry” (1997, 316). In a way, the term stopped to serve its inclusive purpose and was used by publishing industry to attract more readers with a hot topic, rather than contributing to its main purpose. With the term queer theory losing its critical point by being dedicated to a specific term such as lesbian and gay studies, de Lauretis distances herself from it.

After the coinage of the term in the 1990s, queer theory began to be officially recognised in the fields of gender studies. Gender theorists such as Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick became the pioneers as their works have formed the basis of queer theory. Michel Foucault is also considered one of the founders of queer theory. Because “it was Foucault’s overall model of the discursive construction of sexualities that was the main initial catalyst for queer theory” (Spargo, 1999, 26). Although Michel Foucault did not contribute to the theory directly, his works conducted on the concept of sexuality helped pave the way for many queer theorists, including Sedgwick and Butler.

In many societies, rather than accepting that a person can be born with queer tendencies, people tend to believe that external factors in a person’s life might be the reason behind their nonbinary identities. For example, if a boy grows up spending too much time around females and has very little contact with males, the boy is likely to have feminine qualities. The same thing can be the case for a girl growing up in a masculine environment. However, Butler, Sedgwick, and Foucault suggest that a person’s gender and preferences should not be decided at their birth on their behalf. Butler further seeks to break the links between sex, gender, and sexuality. Regarding how the connection between sex, gender, and sexuality are understood, Callis states that “sex had been understood as the biological body, gender as the cultural understandings of the biological body and sexuality as an articulation of sex object choice” (2009, 15). While it is true that sex is considered as the biological body, gender as its cultural understanding, and sexuality as its expression of personal choices, these concepts are all linked. This suggestion does not particularly mean that one cannot have opposing preferences. According to Butler, there are two kinds of genders. One of them is the intelligible genders which possess coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexuality, and desire. On unintelligible genders, Butler states:

The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of ‘identities’ cannot ‘exist’—that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not ‘follow’ from either sex or gender. (1990, 24)

What this demonstrates is that it should be perfectly normal for someone with feminine qualities to be heterosexual. This is what Butler calls unintelligible genders as they maintain these opposing qualities such as the feminine heterosexual.

Queer theory's main goal to sweep away such identity categories are also propounded in the works of Foucault, Sedgwick, and Butler. These theorists do not attempt to eliminate heterosexuality as a sexual preference or a way of living. Rather, they aim to eliminate the threat it poses upon other genders or sexual preferences just because they do not fit into heterosexual categories. Beginning from a different point of view, each of them promotes the liberty of identity and claims that it should remain fluid varying from person to person. Foucault states:

One had to speak of sex; ... one had to speak of it as of a thing to be not simply condemned or tolerated but managed, inserted into systems of utility, regulated for the greater good of all, made to function according to an optimum. Sex was not something one simply judged; it was a thing one administered. (1978, 24)

Therefore, sexuality is a misunderstood concept. It is treated as something that can be regulated or administered. Rather than being yet another material on the experimental desks of scientists, it should be about the pleasures of an individual which are specific to them. It should not be controlled by social taboos or ideologies. Reinforcing the ideas of Foucault, Butler argues that gender is not assigned at birth and not decided naturally. However, Sedgwick argues that queer brings an open mash of possibilities (1993, 8), and it is simply not possible to speak about a monolithic understanding of gender.

In addition, both Butler and Sedgwick explain gender through performativity which is based on the fact that a person's gender only occurs according to the actions they perform in their societies. Butler asserts "Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed" (Butler, 1988, 527). Both consider gender as a doing and these performances shape up the gendered subjectivity of the doer. These certain acts are performed as a result of social consent, or a taboo and they define the gender identity of a person. They can either match up to the expected standards of gender identity or can oppose them.

1.1.1. Homophobia

Homophobia is the repulsion, prejudice, and fear of homosexual people. In 1972, George Weinberg coined the term homophobia which he originally referred to as “a heterosexual person’s dread of being in close proximity to homosexual men and women” (quoted in Rosik, Griffith, Cruz, 2007, 10). European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights also defines homophobia as “an irrational fear of or aversion to homosexuality and gay people” (2009, 8). Homophobia generates discriminatory and negative feelings and attitudes toward homosexuality. Making observations on homophobia in the society she lives in, Sedgwick asserts “our own society is brutally homophobic; and the homophobia directed against both males and females is not arbitrary or gratuitous, but tightly knit into the texture of family, gender, age, class, and race relations” (1985, 698). Homophobia’s existence is not spontaneous but a corollary of heteronormativity. Heteronormativity places homophobic traits into the parts of its society. In such societies, not only that heterosexuality is the accepted as the normal, but also nonbinary identities are seen as secondary. The hostile attitudes or behaviours toward homosexuality can also be a result of traditional or religious beliefs, or sheer ignorance.

The intolerance against nonbinary gender identities is in close association with religious beliefs. Christianity, Islam, and traditional beliefs play a pivotal role in shaping the approach towards these identities. Regarding the conflict between religion and homosexuality, Oliver B. Papa writes “religious opposition to homosexuality stems from many sources. Religious texts, such as the Bible, directly forbid homosexual activity, creating the basis for tension between traditional religion and homosexuality” (2015, 121). Getting involved in a homosexual relationship or having any fluid identity is considered a heresy. Any of these bonds and identities are labelled sinful, and homosexuals are looked down upon and regarded as ungodly.

Often, the religious response to being homosexual is quite harsh. Regarding homosexuality, it is written in the Bible that “if there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them” (Leviticus 20:13). Religious canons are not content with homosexuality, and homosexuality and religion are not compatible with one another. Due to such statements, it is expected for religious people

to have the same spiteful approach to the point where they wish death upon nonbinary people, or even assault them.

Homophobic hate crimes and assaults know no boundaries and they often engender antipathy, belittling words, or slurs. In his book *Beyond the Down Low: Sex, Lies, and Denial in Black America* (2005), regarding HIV/AIDS epidemic among black gay and bisexual men, CNN commentator and best-selling author Keith Boykin writes:

I remember the feeling [of] being blamed for something I did not do. Facts are not important in this environment. Perception is reality. I live in a world that has already been trained to fear and despise me. It is not because of what I have done. I have never murdered anyone. I have never smoked crack. I have never been in prison. And I have never passed a deadly disease to anyone. But none of that matters. I am still guilty, and I will still be held accountable for the rest of my life.
(4)

In Boykin's situation, it can be seen that homophobic approaches might take place due to pure hatred. Although the non-heterosexual individuals did not do anything wrong or pose a threat to anybody or anything, they might still encounter homophobic reactions. Society's perception of homosexuality is their reality and the fact that these people are innocent does not mean anything.

Nonbinary individuals' differences from the norms are enough for them to be stigmatised, shamed, feared, and hated. In their work *'The Scholars Formerly Known as ...': Bisexuality, Queerness and Identity Politics*, Jonathan Alexander and Karen Yescavage articulate the experiences of Dr. Marci Bowers who went through gender transition. After her transition from man to woman, Dr. Bowers encounters homophobic responses from her students. Regarding Dr. Bowers' transition, a student questions Dr. Bowers' right to become a woman by stating that "What right do you have to change yourself from one sex to the other[?] My thought is all it helps is yourself" (Alexander and Yescavage, 2009, 60). Yet another student:

I see no reason for him [sic] to put himself through what he went through. Life is hard as it is and we don't need little things like that in our way. All in all I have nothing against it, I just don't agree with it in any way, shape, or form. (Alexander and Yescavage, 2009, 60)

Although some of her students support her transition, some male students interpret it as selfish and disrespectful and does not respect Dr. Bowers' pronouns. In the second comment of the student, the impact and importance of gender on human lives are completely belittled and deemed as unimportant. The homophobia in students' reaction continues to increase when one student claims:

This is what gets people killed. If a straight man that hated to even be around gays slept with a woman and later found out that the woman was really [sic] a man, it could traumatise him and even drive him to murder that person. (Alexander and Yescavage, 2009, 61)

When these students' comments on Dr. Bowers' transition are concerned, a change in someone's gender is seen as something trivial. It is understood that the impact someone's gender can have on their lives is still not comprehended. It is still believed that people should not have the right to change their gender. Furthermore, someone's gender transition is seen as a justified reason to take their life.

Homophobic perceptions do not always limit themselves to mere words. In many cases, people can resort to physical violence as a way of reacting to homosexuality. For example, a transgender performer Venus Xtravaganza was strangled to death in a hotel room in 1988. In *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Judith Butler writes:

[Venus Xtravaganza] 'passes' as a lightskinned woman, but is—by virtue of a certain failure to pass completely—clearly vulnerable to homophobic violence; ultimately, her life is taken presumably by a client who, upon the discovery of what she calls her 'little secret,' mutilates her for having seduced him. (130)

Venus Xtravaganza is killed most likely for seducing a heterosexual man who could not cope with the fact that he was seduced by a transgender woman. Similar to the comment made by Dr. Bowers' student, homophobia is seen as a justified reason to take someone's life just as in the case of Venus Xtravaganza.

Sedgwick further argues that homophobia is practiced among many societies when it comes to any male-male social bonds. She asserts that "The diacritical opposition between the 'homosocial' and the 'homosexual' seems to be much less thorough and dichotomous for women, in our society, than for men" (1985, 697). Compared to the bonds two females can grow to support and love each other, it is not easy for two males

to be involved in the same social bonds. On male homosocial bonds, Robyn Wiegman states that “male homosocial bonds were structured by homophobic prohibition, denial, and violent negation—not generically, but as a primary characteristic of twentieth-century Western patriarchy” (2015, 58). The male homosocial bonds are influenced by the homophobic approach instituted by the patriarchal system. Additionally, when two people of the same sex are involved in an erotic interest regardless of their sex, homophobia intercedes. Sedgwick claims that “our society could not cease to be homophobic and have its economic and political structures remain unchanged. [...] Because most patriarchies structurally include homophobia, therefore patriarchy structurally requires homophobia” (1985, 698). What Sedgwick claims is that it seems highly unlikely to imagine a society where no homophobic slurs or actions take place. It seems improbable for societies to let their homosexual members be, even though their existences do not pose any sort of threat. However, Sedgwick further asserts that a patriarchal society may require heterosexuality to be at its centre, but it does not necessarily need homophobia to maintain its heterosexual lives. She exemplifies that the heterosexual way of living was maintained in Ancient Greece although homosexual affairs were also common.

It is also possible to see the high rates of homophobic hate crimes across the world. In a survey with more than 2500 respondents conducted in United Kingdom in 2013, it is concluded:

Almost half (48 per cent) of all lesbian, gay and bisexual people have been the victim of some type of crime or incident in the last three years, which includes homophobic hate crimes or incidents but also general crimes ranging from harassment, theft and damage of property to physical and sexual assaults. (Stonewall, 6)

In addition, in the report with more than 1100 respondents conducted online by Luke Hubbard in United Kingdom in 2021, it is stated:

Two-thirds (64%) of respondents had experienced anti-LGBT+ violence or abuse. 9 in 10 had experienced verbal abuse (92%). 3 in 10 had been subject to physical violence (29%). 2 in 10 had experienced sexual violence (17%). Over 9 in 10 of

respondents were negatively impacted by their experiences of anti-LGBT+ violence and abuse (94%). (7)

Despite the increase in queer visibility and awareness, the results of these surveys that took place eight years apart show that queer individuals still endure homophobic violence and/or abuse at an increasing rate. As much as there is a growth in queer acceptance, there are also individuals in these surveys that find it safer to change their looks or stay put to avoid homophobic actions taken against them.

It is never easy for a community to accept something that challenges traditions and norms that it follows. If a person diverts from the social practices of their community, they are marked as deviant or heretic and immediately excluded from society. The same treatment applies to the members of the queer community. Many societies either failed to accept the new identities and sexes or simply did not want to accept them, which is still mostly the case. Queer theory seeks to break free from these heteronormative confinements. Rather than favouring the already accepted gender binary, it promotes a liberated society where people can unapologetically be themselves regardless of boundaries.

Queer theory's effort to provide an emancipated society to nonbinary individuals comes from the homophobic and oppressive environments that many of these individuals live in. Just as many other minorities, queer community experiences violence, verbal and physical assaults, discrimination, and injustice in their everyday life. Hence, many LGBTQ+ individuals choose to remain silent without taking a public step in their lives. It is mostly because these public steps can result in being exposed to shaming, humiliation, and discrimination in their social circles. Hence, unable to endure oppression, ordeal, or social stigma, they either turn in upon themselves or, less commonly, reveal their identities to their families, friends, or even to the societies they live in. This disclosure is referred to as the act of coming out in queer terminology.

With more individuals coming out to their closed ones, visibility of different gender identities began to increase among societies. This visibility, in turn, has raised awareness among people. Through their closed ones' coming out, people continue to notice that homosexual people or people with differing gender identities do not really pose a threat to those around them. Therefore, from being regarded as a deviance,

homosexuality is being recognised and many people's sexual preferences are being respected day by day. Although religious beliefs and denominations strictly forbid homosexuality, the number of religious practices and institutions accepting LGBTQ+ members also continue to increase.



1.2. COMING OUT

Coming out indicates the disclosure of LGBTQ+ people's gender identities and sexual orientations. On coming out, Helen Sauntson writes that "coming out can involve revealing sexual orientation to oneself, family members, friends, colleagues, and wider communities" (2015, 1). This process is often described as coming out of the closet, and in *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick coins the phrase "skeleton in the closet" (1990, 65), meaning someone has something to hide or keep private from others. In the world of queer, the skeleton symbolises the identities of queer community hidden in their closets. While the closet derives from skeleton in the closet notion, Helen Sauntson states that 'coming out' part of the phrase is thought to be originated from coming out parties of upper-class women when they were introduced to their societies (2015, 1). Once the LGBTQ+ individuals come out to their societies, they are referred to as out.

In every society, heterosexuality is considered the accepted normal, hence, it is not expected for heterosexual people to be out with their sexual orientations. As the phrase 'coming out of the closet' only applies to the nonbinary people, it exists as a result of heterosexuality. Regarding the closet, Sedgwick states that "the closet is the defining structure for gay oppression in this century" (1990, 71). If a person does not disclose any information about their sexual preferences or gender identity, they are seen as heterosexual by default. It is deemed necessary for an LGBTQ+ to disclose their gender identities. Therefore, the closet is built by society which determines heterosexuality as a norm, and it amounts to an oppression for the 'Others'.

As it increases queer visibility and presence, coming out process can be considered as one of the most important phases in a queer person's life once they embrace their selves. It is every person's dream to live their lives as they want, without being judged or attacked for who they are, or without having to apologise for not fitting the standards. If a person is aware of the risks they might face for coming out, they may choose to keep quiet. Just like being open about one's gender, being reserved about it is also a part of this process. If an individual wishes to keep their identity a secret, they are referred to as 'closeted'. Sedgwick describes closetedness as a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence (1990, 3). While being closeted is described as living one's life without disclosing their gender identities and remain in their closets, coming

out is described as disclosure of one's identity to themselves, their families, friends, and societies.

From the earlier times till today, coming out has been quite challenging as differences are not often embraced immediately. Michel Foucault, in his *The History of Sexuality* (1978), brings up the process of coming out in the form of confessions. Foucault describes them further:

The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated; and finally, a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation. (1978, 61)

Foucault points out remedial nature of confession. In order to be purged or treated, people should first confess their faults or ailments. Once the homosexual people were identified, they were being treated so that they could fit into their societies' understanding of normal. However, through these confessions, people with queer identities began to recognise the presence of others with differing gender identities or sexual preferences. This recognition allowed these individuals to acknowledge that they are not alone and

it also made possible the formation of a 'reverse' discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturalness' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified. (Foucault, 1978, 101)

Therefore, confessions turned out to be beneficial rather than being a tool for categorising, labelling, and controlling as they enabled the atypical people to communicate with each other through which a self-identifying process commenced.

Since visibility of nonbinary identities has always been a struggle, pride parades started to be organised to enable coming out in a safe and familiar environment and raise awareness to the struggles of the community. It is the general name given to the activities held by the LGBTQ+ community. To describe the parades, Abhinav Tandon and T. S. Sathyanarayana Rao say that “these events also help individuals embrace themselves and take pride in letting the world know who they are. Commemorations are also held for members who lost their lives to violence, hate crimes, and HIV/AIDS” (2021, 209). These activities are held to provide visibility, self-acceptance, public acceptance, and legal rights to the community as well as celebrating the differences and cherishing the equality and freedom. These parades may include marches, gatherings, and political rallies as well as drag shows, concerts, and festivals. Although the participants of the parades are mainly the members of queer community, their families and friends, people who support the LGBTQ+ community might attend as well.

The spark to initiate the pride parades was the Stonewall riots. Stonewall Inn was a bar that welcomed gay people and drag queens. On June 28 in 1969, New York Police Department raided the Stonewall Inn due to having people that do not follow gender-appropriate dressing and having no liquor license. The raid resulted in reprisal of the crowd against the police that lasted for six days. Regarding the results of Stonewall riots, Tandon and Rao assert:

On the first anniversary of SWU in 1970, community members of New York City marched through the local streets as a remembrance of SWU. This is considered the America’s first gay pride parade also known as Christopher Street Liberation Day. The concept of ‘Pride Month’ was given by activist Brenda Howard who was a bisexual. Known as ‘The Mother of Pride,’ she had organized the first year foundation parade and pride week of SWU. The first pride parade eventually transformed into what we know today as ‘the New York city pride parade’ and was the guiding light for many such parades around the world. (2021, 210)

After the Stonewall riots of the gay community, pride marches took place in New York City in 1970 and the events got bigger and annual ever since. These riots also led to forming of supportive organisations such as STAR (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries) by Marsha Johnson and Sylvia Rivera who participated in Stonewall

riots. In 1971, Gay Liberation Front movement was founded in London along with the founding of Homosexuelle Aktion Westberlin in Berlin and Front Homosexuel D'action Revolutionnaire in Paris in the same year.

The first parade in the United Kingdom known as Pride in London took place in 1972. Since the first parade, a pride festival is celebrated annually in June in the United Kingdom. On June 29, 2022, the United Kingdom hosted its first global conference called "Safe To Be Me" to spread kindness, tolerance, and openness and celebrate the United Kingdom's fiftieth anniversary of Pride parades. The parade events aim to create and demonstrate social and self-acceptance for the members of the LGBTQ+ community while commemorating queer people who have lost their lives.

One of the most important aspects of coming out is that it cannot mean the same thing for every individual. It is often mistaken as if it is something that takes place in the same order of identical events for everyone. As more people decide to come out with their queer identities, more and more different experiences are encountered. Coming out, then, is an ongoing process that differs from one person to another. This process begins with coming out to self. While it might take some time for some people to cope with their newly discovered identities, the others might accept and feel relieved with the realisation.

While it may seem easy for nongay people to encourage nonbinary people to come out with their identities, reactions to these identities and their coming out have not always been positive. For a long time, homosexuality was considered as a disease or a psychological disorder. World Health Organization and American Psychiatric Association recognised homosexuality as a mental illness. In DSM-II, APA classified homosexuality as a sexual deviation under personality and nonpsychotic mental disorders category (1968,10). In 1973, a proposed change in DSM-II occurred and in seventh edition, APA stated that homosexuality does not constitute a psychiatric disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 1973). It was as late as 1992 when WHO followed APA to declassify homosexuality as a psychological disorder (WHO, 1992, 10).

Through confessions, gay people were being identified and led into the *right path* by experts. E.M. Forster's seminal work, *Maurice*, provides such an example. The protagonist, Maurice, is gay but he is in dilemma about his sexual orientations. Although he knows what he wants, he is not able to confess it to himself and his surroundings. That

is due to the fact that he is aware that he will lose his privileges and reputation in his society. Maurice is first in an act of denial due to the fear of homosexuality being a taboo. He is not able to come out even to his close friend Clive with whom he had a fling. As his depression intensifies, he decides to visit a specialist who cures people like him. Mr. Larker Jones is a hypnotist who claims that more than half of his patients are like Maurice. During the hypnosis session, Mr. Jones diagnoses Maurice with “congenital homosexuality” (Forster, 1971, 114). He claims that a treatment is possible if Maurice consents. Although, Forster’s book was published posthumously in 1971, the book was written in around the early 1910s tackling the subject of homosexuality as a disease that can be cured. Literary texts may involve fictional characters or occasions, but they enable the readers to better understand and acknowledge the history.

It is also common for nonbinary people to lose their privileges in their lives due to coming out. The coming out process may result in loss of one’s family, job, and/or life. Sedgwick also tells the story of a science teacher named Joe Acanfora who also loses his job due to his sexual preferences. His appeal at the court was denied as he was not open about his preferences when he first applied for the job. Sedgwick describes Acanfora’s situation as “the space for simply existing as a gay person who is a teacher is in fact bayonnetted through, from both sides, by the vectors of a disclosure at once compulsory and forbidden” (1990, 70). It is depicted as mandatory for Acanfora to be open about his preferences, yet he still loses his job and his privileges after coming out. People are first encouraged to be open about themselves but shortly after their coming out, they are cast out of their communities. Consequently, while many individuals struggle to have their identities accepted by their societies, many others choose to remain silent in order to avert the risk of losing their lives and privileges.

Losing privileges is not the only negative result of coming out. LGBTQ+ individuals, especially the youth, suffer from queer bashing and hate crimes every day. Unfortunately, this behaviour is passed from parents, family members, or adults to younger straight generation. They are often judged with statements such as ‘you’re so queer’, ‘you’re so gay’, and ‘stop acting like a girl/boy’. These expressions pass on to the youth and start to be used in more malicious ways. Whether the person being judged is gay does not matter as it is used to derogate either way. Linda Goldman tells the story of a 14-year-old boy, Jimmy, who comes out as gay in high school. After coming out, he

goes through a traumatic experience as he gets bullied, punched, and urinated on (2008, 10). His homosexuality gets called out even by his coach in a homophobic way. As his parents consult the counsellor, they are told that it is the expected outcome of being openly gay. This traumatic coming out experience leads Jimmy to a breakdown.

These individuals may also end up absorbing these homophobic slurs and turn them into a sort of internal problem of their own and they blame themselves for who they are. As they are made to feel marginalised, they begin to doubt themselves. In another example, Goldman tells the story of Thomas and Brenda. Thomas finds out his homosexual feelings at the age of 8. After being told that he is living a sin by his dad, Thomas begins to internalise his dad's homophobia (Goldman, 2008, 12). This incident results in Thomas' growing a sense of self-hatred and dropping out of school. The internalisation of his dad's homophobia leads him to think that God hates him. Additionally, Brenda comes out as lesbian at the age of 16. She endures with intense amount of homophobia at her school. As a result, Brenda begins to hate school and stays home but even her parents barely speaks to her. She begins to internalise the homophobic pressure and hate herself as she thinks that everyone around her hates her (Goldman, 2008, 15).

Homophobic results of coming out go further to involve violence and death. One of the well-known cases of hate crimes involve the death of Matthew Shephard, a 21-year-old college student who was savagely beaten and left to die in 1998 because of his sexual identity. Shepard's story later becomes a verbatim play called *The Laramie Project* (2001). The play is structured on the interviews about Shepard's death, the hate crime committed against him, and his funeral. In 2002, the play was adapted to the screen with the same name. Another case involves the murder of Brandon Teena, a trans man who fell victim to homophobic hate crime by two men. Later, Teena's life was told in two movies. *The Brendon Teena Story* (1998) and *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) which tell the story of Teena as a trans man in search of his identity and his tragic death.

Given that the reactions are not always positive, some individuals may choose to remain closeted. It simply depends on whether the person wants to come out or not. However, because a person decides to stay in their closet, it does not mean that they are dishonest or incompetent in any way. A person's sexual identity may not be their choice

yet being open about their orientations is all about however they wish to live their lives. Being closeted is often related to the fact that coming out can be problematic. These problems may depend on racial, religious or ethnic background, and familial pressures and threats. Just a racial or religious background might prevent from being open about one's gender identity. The chances of being in a conflict with their families and losing their families' financial supports might also be threatening.

As an obstacle for coming out, racism is one of the reasons why LGBTQ+ people face discrimination and find it safer to stay in their closet. In their study conducted on ethnic/racial differences in the coming out process, Margaret Rosario, Eric W. Schrimshaw, and Joyce Hunter (2004) write that "For ethnic/racial minority LGB individuals, the coming-out process may be complicated by cultural factors that operate to re-tard or arrest the process" (216). LGBTQ+ members with different ethnicities living in foreign countries are often victimised by the bigotry towards their ethnicities on top of their queer identities. Some of the examples of racism can be listed as Arabic, Asian, Black, Hispanic, Latino, and Turkish racism. They are not welcomed or accepted by the ethnic groups because of their identities or sexual preferences.

In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick links the coming out of a gay person to the racial coming out of another. In *Book of Esther*, Queen Esther keeps her Judaism a secret from her husband King Ahasuerus (1990, 75). She feels as if she conceals her identity while concealing her beliefs. However, she is forced to keep it a secret as her husband possesses a sort of Jewish hatred. She argues that "the particular operation of suspense around her would be recognizable to any gay person who has inched toward coming out to homophobic parents" (1990, 76). Queen Esther's situation can be considered similar to the coming out of an LGBTQ+ community as she is unsure if she would lose her love and her privileges. She is also unsure whether she may continue to live or end up dead after coming out.

Religion is considered as another reason as to why LGBTQ+ people feel oppressed about coming out. In their study conducted on LGBTQ+ individuals' experiences with religion, Brendan Beagan and Brenda Hattie state that "Many people experience conflict between an LGBTQ identity and any religion with which they identify, since many faith traditions denounce homosexuality" (2015, 1). In the 2020

survey conducted by CAP and NORC, 22% of the people change their behaviour based on their religions to avoid facing discrimination (Center for American Progress, 2020). Individuals tend to feel pressured to keep their identities hidden if their religious doctrine is not supportive of non-normative orientations. Religious groups or organisations are not very tolerant of LGBTQ+ people and same-sex desire as it is deemed sinful in religious beliefs. Regarding homosexuality being deemed as a sin, Foucault asserts that it is not easy to be “truly independent of the thematics of sin” (1978, 116). This still applies to the beliefs of certain religions today. Homosexuality is still seen as a sin and forbidden by the God.

Today, in some parts of the world, religious beliefs of people still make them think that nonbinary identities do not exist. For instance, Gibson Ncube states that “in Zimbabwe, as is the case in many African countries, non-normative sexualities are not only considered unnatural but they are also criminalised” (2016, 10). In addition, Tabona Shoko explains that “politicians call them the ‘festering finger’, endangering the body of the nation; churchmen say God wants them dead; the courts send them to jail. Zimbabwe has declared that it will not tolerate homosexuality” (2010, 634). This point of view toward homosexuality partly stems from the religious views of these countries and it is partly because of the fact that their limited vision is not open to deal with novelties. Either way, this understanding forces the homosexual individuals to remain in their closets to avoid stigmatisation. Coming out bears the risk of costing them their privileges, freedom, and in some cases their lives. In such cases, being closeted benefits people in a way that they can continue living respected lives.

Familial support also plays an important part in the coming out process of an individual as they are the most important people in a person’s life. Since coming out is not a one-time action but a process, continuous support provided by the family might encourage individuals to be proud of and open about who they are. On the contrary, lack of familial support might end up causing individuals to have low self-esteem and feel insecure due to their identities not being accepted by their own family. The fear of losing their families might force individuals to stay in their closets. They might also consider staying in their closet in order to not lose their financial support if they are dependent on their families.

In addition to homophobic encounters in ethnicity, religion, and family, social media is instrumental in LGBTQ+ visibility. Social media usage increases every day affecting the queer community in different ways. Social media helps individuals to find social support on the internet and learn more about their identities. However, it also has downsides for nonbinary individuals. Its negative effect on coming out can be seen in the form of cyber-bullying. In their research conducted on cyber-bullying, Patchin and Hinduja state that victims and offenders of cyber-bullying are reported to have low self-esteem, high depression, and encounter increased school problems (2013, 431). Same as any sort of homophobic bullying, cyber-bullying could lead to isolation, depression, and hopelessness for an individual. It is not easy to escape cyber-bullying other than disconnection from all social media which might also mean disconnection from their supportive online social interactions.

It is also essential to draw attention to the coming out process of LGBTQ+ members with disabilities. Coming out experience can be notably challenging when individuals have disabilities because they may lack people to share the same experience in their lives. In his study on sexuality and disability, Tom Shakespeare concludes that “people with impairments are often infantilized in Western societies: the price of being treated like a child is to be treated as lacking adult attributes like sexuality and autonomy” (1999, 40). There is a common judgment that disabled people are associated with asexuality. It is believed they cannot possibly be sexual or identify as lesbian or gay.

Individuals with disabilities go through coming out twice because coming out with a nonbinary identity is often considered similar to coming out with disabilities and claim a social identity. Shakespeare claims that since they might go through a denial period, individuals with congenital disabilities might also go through a coming out process (1999,40). Therefore, it is possible to consider the process of coming out as LGBTQ+ similar to the process of coming out with disabilities because individuals go through a challenging path of accepting who they are and disclosing their identities to public. To exemplify the situation of queer people with disabilities, Shakespeare involves interviews with different people. In one interview, Zorah who comes out as lesbian at the age of 20 says, “I seem to have come out several times- as a dyke, as a Jew, as physically disabled and now as someone with mental health issues” (1999, 44). In another interview, Kirsten says, “... in 1981 I did come out as disabled, and very soon after that in 1982 I came out

as a lesbian, and I think without one there might not have been the other in some ways” (1999, 44). It is possible to see in these examples that individuals consider coming out as a disabled person same as queer coming out. Both coming out experiences involve internally accepting identity and disclosing it to their environments.

Like queer coming out, people with disabilities might benefit from coming out as it would allow them to communicate and bond with people who share related issues. While it is pretty tough for one to be on their own in their closets and not have anyone to sympathise, it can be even more compelling to deal with disabilities and nonbinary gender identities alone. Hence, coming out as a LGBTQ+ with disabilities to other people with disabilities can be empowering and encouraging for the people to embrace themselves. However, in some cases, it is possible for people with disabilities to stay closeted because they simply do not want to endure homophobia, or they are dependent on their caregivers and families.

Problematic encounters are not only limited to LGBTQ+ individuals remaining in their closets. Isolation, hopelessness, powerlessness, stress, and depression caused by the homophobic encounters might lead them to suicide ideation. Attempts and thoughts of suicide are commonly considered when an individual feels overwhelmed remaining in their closet or if the reactions to their coming out are not tolerative. According to the analysis of Human Rights Campaign, it was concluded that 54% of LGBTQ+ youth are struggling with symptoms of depression compared 29% of non-LGBTQ+ youth. Same analysis indicates that 35% of LGBTQ+ youth have considered attempting suicide compared 13% of non-LGBTQ+ youth, 31% of LGBTQ+ youth have made suicide plans compared to 10% of non-LGBTQ+ youth, and 22% of LGBTQ+ youth along with 27% of LGBTQ+ youth of colour have attempted suicide compared to 5% of non-LGBTQ+ youth (Human Rights Campaign, 2020).

Therefore, it is of utmost importance to support and take preventive actions to diminish homophobia and increase queer acceptance starting from familial environments. Goldman uses the adage “it takes a village to raise a child” (2008, xx) to draw importance on the impact of a community on queer youth. The adage promotes the idea that a community should interact with the children and contribute to their welfare by ensuring them a safer and healthier environment to grow up in. The suicide ideation and attempts

can easily be avoided if LGBTQ+ members, especially its youth, live in supportive environments. In order to raise consciousness in families with queer members, FFLAG (Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gay) was founded in the United Kingdom in 1965, and PFLAG (Parents and Families of Lesbians and Gays) was founded in the United States in 1973. These organisations are among the first ones to unite LGBTQ+ members with their parents, families, and friends. They provide support and education to families with LGBTQ+ members.

The welfare of members of the community is not only guaranteed with familial and friendly environments. It is believed that the more visible the queer community is, the less likely it will have to endure any kind of discrimination, inequity, and prejudice. Social media serves a great deal when it comes to visibility and suicide prevention. Nonbinary individuals have the chance to interact with people with similar experiences and they are provided with support regardless of where they live. In their book, Patrick M. Johnson concludes that the content and intent of online LGBTQ+ messages have not changed over the years: they still involve personal connections, coming out, the need to survive, and the need to be politically active (2020, 102). The only change is that the messages have started to appeal to broader audience. The fact that the messages are sent to a broader audience allows LGBTQ+ community to raise more awareness and take care of its members.

The use of social media enables people to share their stories both as a way of relief for their own and a way to help others. Since it is not always easy to find people to share one's experiences in daily life, the online stories and experiences of coming out being shared through social media encourage queer individuals who are still in search of their identities and lack support from their surroundings. Since coming out is an ongoing process, the stories and experiences might also educate people in a way to better shape their lives after coming out. They might not only help to identify best ways of coming out, the results of coming out but also help prepare them for possible reactions they might get. It is possible, then, to suggest that social media has contributed to the coming out and post coming out process of LGBTQ+ members.

The conscious is not only raised for people to tolerate nonbinary identities but also for LGBTQ+ people to better understand themselves compared to earlier times. Goldman

states that today's youth is far more visible than people living in rural areas in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (2008, 6). In the past, it was not common for people to be open about their sexual orientations, so they were simply not be involved in partnership. In his book, *A Lesbian Gay Guide to Selecting the Best-Fit College or University and Enjoying the College Years*, Donald Hinrichs tells his story of coming out. Hinrichs suppresses his feelings for men during his college years in 1960s. He concentrates on his education and his then girlfriend and future wife. After seventeen years of marriage, Hinrichs comes out. His wife and kids are very supportive of his sexual orientation. Although he does not regret his marriage and having kids, he asserts that "I suffered over my 17 years of marriage. ... because I never had the opportunity to explore my sexuality in college, I spent many years hurting people whom I truly love" (2007, 2). Hinrich's story reinforces the notion that coming out today is more tolerated than it was in earlier times. Because with increase in visibility of nonbinary identities, nongay people learn to accept and live with the fact that heterosexuality is not the default sexual behaviour and diversities in sexuality exist.

LGBTQ+ organisations, social media, parades, and festivals gradually increase queer acceptance. As the conscious about queer individuals is raised, people liberate themselves by coming out to their close ones or their societies in general. In a survey conducted by Pew Research Centre in 2013, it is concluded that 86% of the participants have told their close friends about their sexual orientations and gender identities and 54% of the participants say that all or most of the important people in their lives know about their sexual orientations and gender identities (Pew Research Centre, 2013). It can be said that coming out today is more common than it was before, the time around Stonewall riots took place.

This increase in queer visibility and coming out is positively affected by queer literature and theatre. Fictional characters and settings as well as real life experiences reflected in literary works provide an insight to the history of the queer community as well as their current lives and struggles. Through literature and theatre, people better understand what it means and takes to be a queer. Playwrights start to deal with queer characters, themes, and settings which further contributes to queer presence. With the expanding awareness and consciousness, playwrights, actors, directors, and producers were given the opportunity to come out with their nonbinary identities.

CHAPTER TWO

QUEER IN THEATRE

2.1. QUEER LITERATURE AND THEATRE

Literature plays a pivotal role when it comes to providing visibility to the queer community. With its subject matter diverging from real life stories and experiences to fictional characters and incidents, it enables the community to appeal to a broader audience. Although literary works contain fictional elements, they still allow the reader to better understand and empathise with the difficulties queer people experience as they often relate to a real-life character or story. The visibility provided by literature helps queer people to identify themselves with characters or instances which would help them to embrace themselves by simply realising that they are not alone. It is also possible for the reader or the audience to witness the historical background of LGBTQ+ community, its ordeals, and achievements.

The process of incorporating homosexual themes in literary works goes a long way back. The act of sodomy was strictly forbidden in the early times with Buggery Act 1533 (Kaylor, 2006, 83) and remained in force until its repeal with first section of Offences against the Person Act 1828 in Great Britain. During the time of the Buggery Act, the writers and playwrights were not allowed to blatantly write about homosexuality or include homosexual characters. Because of the prohibitions, many works ended up changing their homosexual characters or themes to cisgender ones or include closeted characters and undercover relationships. However, with the Age of Enlightenment, interest in classical lives arose. Themes of nudity and same sex friendship began to be used in literary works, as the common idea was that homosexual relationships were tolerated and encouraged in Ancient Greece (Dover, 1978, 1).

In the history of English novel, some works have brought such themes to the attention of their readers. In his novel *The Monk: A Romance* (1796), for example, Matthew Gregory Lewis portrays a homosexual relationship. In the novel, Ambrosio, the Monk, falls in love with a boy named Rosario. However, due to the unacceptability of overt gay themes, Lewis turns Rosario into a woman in disguise. In 1805, Augustus, Duke of Saxe-Gotha-Altenburg, wrote *A Year in Arcadia: Kyllenion*. It is known as “the earliest

novel that centres on an explicitly male-male love affair” (Haggerty and Zimmerman, 2000, 612). Despite its time, the novel involves an explicit homosexual couple falling in love and living happily. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) by Oscar Wilde is about a boy named Dorian who lives a hedonistic life. The main characters of the novel overtly manifest homosexual tendencies and admire one another’s beauty. However, they do not officially come out. In British literature, Edward Morgan Forster confidentially writes *Maurice* (1971), a story of a young man who discovers his attraction to other males in an inconsiderate society. Although Maurice tries several ways to get rid of homosexual feelings which are referred to as a sickness in the first place, he eventually decides to embrace himself and come out to the man he loves, and they move on to build a life together. Forster writes work in 1913-1914, yet as he deems it unpublishable due to the way homosexuality was perceived at the time, the novel gets published posthumously in 1971.

Literature’s contributions are not only limited to novel. Theatre is one of the most efficient ways for appealing to its audiences as it offers a more direct communication. Therefore, it serves a similar purpose when it comes to building a gay community. Because, as a medium of reality, it allows queer performers to demonstrate themselves to the audience and build an actually visible society. Theatrical performances include liberation of interpretation that enables one to explore and demonstrate a variety of possibilities. Therefore, a queer perspective in theatre is fairly absorbing because it allows the usage of ingenious form and content as well as unchallenged notions of gender.

The concept of identity and body have existed long before the emergence of queer theatre in theatrical performances. The role and place of men and women in society, the differences in sexual tendencies and new forms of identities that exist in artists and philosophers’ works and ideas have been a part of these performances. Literary works were depicted revolving around traditional understanding of gender, honouring the gender binary and undervaluing any sort of non-binary identities. However, queer theatre properly starts to problematise it by offering the perspective of queer community as themselves rather than being a minority in mainstream plays, therefore, bringing visibility to both the community and how its members are oppressed by the gender binary and heteronormativity. Because it encourages its actors and audience to be agents of change rather than being passive observers and that it attempts to raise consciousness or response

to political and social situations, queer theatre sets its ground with agitprop and avant-garde theatre. As a matter of fact, it is not possible to speak of an organised queer theatre society before the legalisation of homosexual acts in Britain in 1967 along with the liberalisation of British theatre from Lord Chamberlain's Office in 1968. The liberalisation of the theatre allowed the queers to come out of their closets and be present on the stage in public. The gay and lesbian perspective in theatre, hence, emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. Sexual debates were started to be given more and more space, and the socialist movement paved the way for gay theatre groups to be started.

Although it was still forbidden to be involved in an act of homosexuality, the number of ongoing discussions about homosexuality caused a change in the public attitude and at the end of the decade, playwrights were finally granted the freedom to involve homosexual characters or homosexuality as a theme in their works. What caused this shift was the publication of the Report of the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution, also known as the Wolfenden Report in 1957. The report was presented after a committee was set up in 1954. The government decided that it should not be the law's function to meddle with citizens' private life. Following this report, a change in censorship took place that authorised gay characters and themes. With the legalisation of homosexual acts in Britain in 1967 along with the liberalisation of British theatre from Lord Chamberlain's Office in 1968, censorship of theatre was abolished. The liberalisation of the theatre allowed the queers to come out of their closets and be present on the stage in public.

The plays produced around this time usually involved closeted or undercover characters and themes. For instance, *The Quare Fellow* (1954) by Brendan Behan tackles the subject of homosexuality as a crime without directly referring to it. Furthermore, Terence Rattigan's *The Deep Blue Sea* (1952) is considered one of these undercover plays tackling homosexuality as it tells the real-life experience of Rattigan through a cisgender couple. Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* (1959) also includes a gay character, but the character never comes out and is often humiliated by other characters in the play. As the societies were not open to such drastic changes, it was not easy for them to accept such characters or themes. It was considered appropriate to involve such themes and characters as long as they were not blatant and controversial. Therefore, rather than involving such

characters and themes blatantly all at once, the changes took place on a slow pace allowing the readers and audience to cope with them.

In 1969, LGBTQ+ community revolted against the New York police at the Stonewall Inn. To stress the impact of the Stonewall riots, Lillian Faderman says “the Stonewall Rebellion was the shot heard round the world... The gay liberation movement was an idea whose time had come. The Stonewall Rebellion was crucial because it sounded the rally for the movement” (quoted in Tandon and Rao, 2021, 209). This impactful riot brought a worldwide attention to the queer community and accelerated a change in LGBTQ+ history. The riot paved the way for a major update in queer visibility that enabled queer people to come out more proudly than ever before. The effects of riot on coming out started to be seen in theatre. The plays produced after the Stonewall Riots ceased to include inferior state of nonbinary identities and started to be more inclusive of them. It was not only the beginning of an era for queer plays, but also the era for queer playwrights to come out and to be recognised.

It is possible to see queer producers, actors, and playwrights all around the world. Bert Royal, Joe Mantello, Louise Parker Kelley, Mark Ravenhill, Megan Terry, Michael Mayer, Maureen Duffy, Nancy Cárdenas, Rob Madge, Ryan Murphy, Tony Kushner can be given as examples of some of LGBTQ+ producers, actors, and playwrights. In the beginning, let alone coming out, they were not even able to produce their works with LGBTQ+ themes or characters. However, with the increase in visibility in theatre, queer community including its actors, playwrights, and producers is able to live a freer and more open life.

Early in 1975, the Gay Sweatshop Theatre Company was founded in the United Kingdom. The gay-themed season of theatre was named *Homosexual Acts* by Gay Sweatshop Theatre in 1975. The season was meant to include three plays written by gay playwrights. The plays included in *Homosexual Acts* were *Limitations* by Roman Baker, *Ships* by Alan Wakeman, *Thinking Straight* by Laurence Collinson, *Passing By* by Martin Sherman, and *One Person, Fred and Harold*, and *The Haunted Host* by Robert Patrick. The company intended to provide the public with a more realistic image of what homosexuality is rather than the image given in the mainstream theatre meanwhile standing up against the oppression of sexuality.

The foundation of Gay Sweatshop Theatre sparked the visibility of gay practice and performances as well as theatre companies. With more artists feeling the confidence to step forward, there was more awareness rose about queer presence. The community, then, had the desire to be more visible without being apologetic about who they are. However, the reaction to the coming out of actors, playwrights, and producers was not always positive. There were playwrights or producers who lost their lives because of their sexual preferences or gender identities. For instance, one of the founding members of Gay Sweatshop Theatre, Drew Griffith lost his life due to a homophobic assault in 1984. Nevertheless, the playwrights of the early gay theatre were able to publish their works. The plays were either about an experience to connect the audience with the performer or the performance itself or to challenge their assumptions. On the stage, an attempt to break the wall between the performer and the audience was noteworthy. At the end of the performances, the performers were usually involved in a discussion with the audience about the play.

In 1980s, several important works such as *Ripen Our Darkness* (1981) and *Neptide* (1984) by Sarah Daniels, *Another Country* (1981) by Julian Mitchell, *Breaking the Code* (1986) by Hugh Whitmore, and *Coming Clean* (1982) by Kevin Elyot were produced. In addition, the theatre was dominated with the HIV and AIDS health problems. American writer Louise Parker Kelley's *Anti Body* (1983) was the first play to address the AIDS crisis. Kelley wrote the play in the aftermath of her friend's AIDS diagnosis and the play depicts the experiences of William Davis a gay man with AIDS. The themes of HIV and AIDS made Tony Kushner to write their prominent play *Angels in America* (1991) that touches upon the AIDS problem in the gay community. The play revolves around different characters infected by the disease. One of the characters Prior finds out that he has the disease and is left alone by his lover due to his condition. Roy also carries the disease but refuses to admit that he is gay and has AIDS, instead he claims to have liver cancer. The play successfully delivers its message and wins several awards including a Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

The decade of the 1990s was the time of in-yer-face theatre in Great Britain. Mark Ravenhill is one of the gay dramatists who used the in-yer-face movement by including homosexual themes in his play *Shopping and Fucking* (1996). The play revolves around

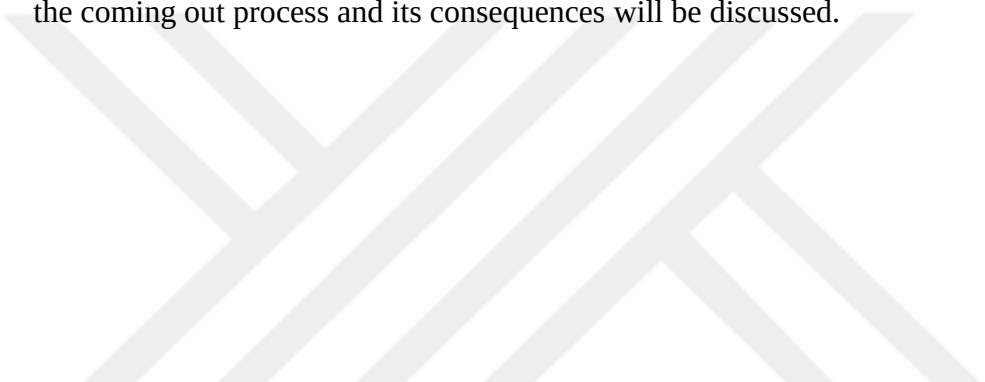
the possibilities of what is likely to happen if all the moral codes are overthrown by consumerism. The four main characters are constantly involved in an act of buying and stealing anything, including drugs and sex. *Mother Clap's Molly House* (2001) is also another play by Ravenhill. The play is a black comedy that touches upon the diversity of sexuality. It can be considered as a monumental play as it underlines the gay history. After her husband's death, Mrs. Tull heads the shop of elegant dresses. The customers of the shop consist of a group of people with different sexualities. Mrs. Tull first appears as a character who cannot quite cope with the diversity of sexual identities. As the play progresses, she becomes the Mother Clap of mollies who organises gay parties.

In time, the subject matter of queer plays makes a shift to youth and teenage identity. In *Dog Sees God* (2004) by Bert Royal, the main character CB is a teenage boy who begins to question his existence and identity after losing his dog. CB is not able to find solace in people around him until he bonds with his friend Beethoven who is an outcast since he was abused by his father. Unknowingly, CB falls for Beethoven and kisses him. The play continues with Beethoven kissing CB in public. *Bare: The Musical* (2000) by Jon Hartmere, *Spring Awakening* (2006) by Steven Sater, and *Zanna, Don't!* (2003) by Tim Acito are also among the plays that brings together homosexuality and youth.

Recently, Zodwa Nyoni's *Nine Lives* (2014) and Rob Madge's *My Son's Queer (But What Can You Do?)* (2021) deftly shed light on the process of coming out. *Nine Lives* (2014) focuses on a Zimbabwean asylum-seeker Ishmael who struggles to come out. He is faced with severe homophobia in his country, and he ends up fleeing to live in Leeds. Yet, he cannot find the peace he is looking for in Britain, too. Rob Madge's *My Son's Queer (But What Can You Do?)* is about the coming-of-age story of Madge and their coming out of the closet. It includes scenes from the early ages of the actor where they discover their identity through the characters that they enact in their living room with their family. Unlike Nyoni's Ishmael, Madge is lucky as their family embraces their identity and cherishes the endearing moments of their childhood that shaped who they are today.

It is quite clear that theatre has contributed a great deal to queer awareness, visibility, and coming out. As it allows real life or fictional incidents to be enacted on

stage, it provides the audience a glimpse of queer characters with their histories and experiences, which enables people to be more conscious and informed about LGBTQ+. Throughout the years, many actors who came out began to appear on stage either performing their own lives or other LGBTQ+ members. Queer presence has radically increased not only on the stage but also off-stage. From not being able to publish their works with queer characters and/or settings, playwrights, directors, and producers moved on to be able to come out with their LGBTQ+ identities. This increase in queer presence on and off the stage enables and empowers LGBTQ+ people to be out and proud of themselves more and more every day. In the following part, coming out process in the plays of Nyoni and Madge will be examined. The external and internal factors affecting the coming out process and its consequences will be discussed.



2.2. TO COME OUT OR NOT TO COME OUT: *NINE LIVES* BY ZODWA NYONI

The writer of *Nine Lives*, Zodwa Nyoni is a Zimbabwean playwright, poet, and filmmaker. Due to her father's studies, Nyoni and her family moved to England from Zimbabwe in 1992. She completed her MA in Writing for Performance and Publication at the University of Leeds. Her writing experience began as she joined Leeds Young Authors in 2005. She represented the United Kingdom at the Brave New Voices International Youth Poetry Slam in the US in 2006. Nyoni made her debut with *Boi Boi is Dead* in 2014. The play was performed at Leeds Playhouse and was a finalist for Susan Smith Blackburn Prize. She also won Channel 4 Playwright's Scheme in 2014.

In 2014, Nyoni also wrote *Nine Lives*, a monologue of a gay asylum seeker Ishmael who recently fled from Zimbabwe and is dispersed into Leeds struggling to get his residency. The play was originally written in 2014 for Òran Mór and West Yorkshire Playhouse for A Play, A Pie and A Pint, which hosts one-act plays along with a pie and a pint for a low-priced ticket. However, it started to be performed in a tour nationally and internationally in 2015 until 2020. In the writing process of the play, she made use of the experiences of asylum seekers, as well as her own. Regarding her experience to get a residency, Nyoni says:

Most of my teens and all of my 20s were shaped by applications for residency. I spent a lot of time feeling unwanted despite giving back to communities and to the arts, representing the United Kingdom at international poetry festivals and exchanges, and contributing to the landscape of British theatre. (The Guardian, 2020)

Being a refugee, Nyoni portrays how is it to be a refugee and gay through her protagonist Ishmael as opposed to how it is reflected by the governments. Ishmael goes through challenging experiences while trying to maintain his ethnic and gender identity.

The first scene of the play mainly focuses on Ishmael's escape to the United Kingdom and how much he craves for adapting to his new surroundings as himself. It is acknowledged that he does not have a permanent place to stay in. He is constantly being

dragged wherever the Home Office sends him to. He waits for the time to come so that change will happen which is why he likens people like him to larvae living in concrete cocoons (Nyoni, 2014, 1). After their metamorphosis takes place, they leave their chrysalises to shed their past, and new ordeals are revealed as the past is shed.

He flees from his home country as he was afraid of being rejected by his friends and family. Furthermore, there is also a possibility that due to the spiteful approach towards homosexuality in his country, he would encounter homophobic persecutions if he were to stay. Because, as Ncube states “non-normative genders are criminalised in Africa” (2016, 10). They are considered “un-African” (Epprecht, 2008, 6). Being one of them Ismael leaves Africa and pursues happiness in the UK.

Attesting to this flight, the play opens with Ishmael on the stage dimly lit. In order to light up the place, he takes out a light bulb from his pocket and screws it into the holder. As the light switches on, Ishmael gets startled. It is at this point the march of an angry mob kicks in and Ishmael starts running for his life as the angry mob chases him. Ismael’s turning on the light can be read as a metaphor for his coming out as he is immediately chased by a group of people referring to the homophobic reactions of society to queer visibility. As soon as a queer individual comes out with their gender identity or sexual preference, they may encounter negative responses or even assaults from their society. In Ishmael’s case, it is seen that when he is under the dim light, in other words, in his closet, he is not disturbed or agitated. However, the moment he gets to have a bit of visibility, he starts to be chased down by a group of people.

Commenting on this chase, as he outruns the mob, Ishmael stops to sing to a Zimbabwean instrument:

Some of us are running. Some of us are fleeing. Some of us know wars that will never cease. Some of us were persecuted. Some of us were stripped and beaten. Some of us have scars that will never heal. Some of us are broken. Some of us were thrown into prisons. Some of us were sent back. Some of us were dispersed. Some of us were alone. Some of us felt invisible. Some of us felt time slow in our wait. (Nyoni, 2014, 1)

The song has a crucial function when the overall message of the play is considered. Because Ismael sings for people alike. ‘Some of us’ in the song refers to refugees, nonbinary people, and nonbinary refugees like him. It comments on their common fate. They have to flee from the oppressions of their people, countries, and beliefs in order to be themselves and find peace. Yet, each of them has to face various difficulties as accentuated at various parts of the song. Each and every sentence reveals the fact that these people’s lives will never be free of suffering. They get assaulted, beaten, and wounded. They are either imprisoned, sent back, dispersed, or left alone without any choices. His likening the possibility of being kicked out of the United Kingdom and being sent back to Africa to a “nightmare” (Nyoni, 2015, 2) explains how it feels for this people to live. In this sense, the song turns into a collective elegy of those who share the same fate with Ishmael.

The homophobic atmosphere created in African countries deprives people of their freedom to be themselves. LGBTQ+ members are not able to publicly express their identities and feelings. A person’s gender identity is something that should be private and specific to them. It is not meant to be controlled by laws. But in this case, nonbinary identities are marginalised, and rather than choosing to remain closeted with their own free will, people are forced to do so. David Smith concludes that “[Africa] is the most homophobic continent on Earth. Same-sex relations are illegal in 36 of Africa’s 55 countries” (2014, 1). Surprisingly enough, when its history is reviewed, homophobia’s roots can be found in the colonisation period of Africa. Ruth Morgan and Saskia Wieringa assert that “homophobia is an idea introduced by missionaries and colonial administrators and copied by post-colonial leaders” (2005, 281) and “post-colonial governments perpetuated colonial policies in denouncing same-sex relations” (2005, 13). This conflicts with Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni’s claim that homosexuality is a “western import” (Higginbotham and Collis-Buthlezi, 2015, 7). As Ishmael checks his old lover David’s social media page, he reads messages that say “Good riddance to them all. A disgusting import from the colonial days. Un-African. Ungodly. (Nyoni, 2015, 3). Through the homophobic comments on David’s page, Nyoni acknowledges how African society sees homosexuality as a western import and un-African.

However, some African practices and vocabularies can be considered homosexual or related to homosexuality. It would not be accurate to call all these practices blatantly homosexual because there appears to be different approaches and understandings regarding homosexuality in some of these traditions of Africa. For instance, Morgan and Wieringa exemplify homosexual traditions by claiming that “[marriages] occurred between powerful women such as rain queens and traditional healers (sangomas)” (2005, 17). A rain queen is queen regnant of Balobedu who possess “rain-making powers” (Davison and Mahashe, 2012, 48). Although the queen is not considered blatantly homosexual as she is not married to women, she has several royal servants who are referred to as wives in Balobedu language.

In her article, Ugandan Professor Sylvia Tamale acknowledges “mudoko dako” (2014, 1) as a term used to indicate effeminate males who were treated as female and could marry men in Uganda in precolonial times. She also mentions “inkotshane” (2014, 1) a term used to describe same-sex relations in Shangaan, “motsoalle” (2014, 1) another term used to describe Basotho women’s erotic relationships, and “gor-digen” (2014, 1) a term used to describe homosexual men in Wolof language of Senegal. Tamale also enounces that “the ancient cave paintings of the San people near Guruve in Zimbabwe [to] depict two men engaged in some form of ritual sex” (2014, 1). Tamale’s examples reinforce the notion that homosexuality has long existed in precolonial Africa.

In another instance, Bisi Alimi claims that “in digging up facts I found that, while many Africans say that homosexuality is un-African, African culture is no stranger to homosexual behaviours and acts” (2015, 1). Alimi further mentions the Hausa term “yan daudu” (2015, 1) which means effeminate men who are considered wives to men in the northern part of Nigeria. This demonstrates that homophobia in Africa is a western import. It is an image painted and imposed upon Africa by western media which does not equally apply to other European countries when they are involved in homophobic actions. Ayo Coly best describes this situation by comparing homophobia in Africa to homophobia in other countries. Coly mentions the antigay propaganda bills in Russia and Ukraine that did not draw enough attention, at least not as much as African countries such as Senegal, Nigeria, Cameroon, and Uganda. Coly writes:

the kind of global shaming campaign that has been directed to Africa in the form of online petitions, calls for boycotts, or threats of political and economic sanctions has not been applied to Russia and Ukraine. Homophobic Europe cannot exist, because homophobia has become a conceptual cognate for Africa. There is homophobia in Europe—but Europe is not homophobic. There is homophobia in Africa—and Africa is homophobic. (2013, 22)

Although precolonial African traditions and vocabulary seem to be open about homosexuality, with the postcolonial impact, Africa becomes the most homophobic continent. Part of the reason why Africa has homophobic approaches is seen to be because of the religions introduced to Africa by western societies. Regarding the western influence on Africa, Joan Njagi writes “the irony in using Christianity to label homosexuality as ‘un-African’ is that Christianity is equally ‘un-African’, having been introduced to Africa by European missionaries” (2016, 4). This means that Africa is portrayed to be homophobic in heart, when it is something that is imposed upon its leaders and societies by colonialism.

Regardless of how it came into being, Africa is still considered homophobic, and its intense homophobic approach is the very reason why Ishmael ends up fleeing his country. He knows that his country will not tolerate his homosexuality in any way. He knows that he will not have a place in his society if he chooses to come out. He fears that he would be treated differently by his friends and family alike. As he gets older, he starts to be afraid of what “drunk mouths would say” (Nyoni, 2015, 4). As he realises and embraces his tendencies, his country begins to feel more like a prison rather than home. It is at this point he begins to long for a place that he can call home and feel it. The consequences of coming out and staying in his country might have been fatal for Ishmael which justifies his decision to leave the country in the first place. Even if he were sympathised with by a few people, he would still have to deal with homophobic slurs and assaults. He would be marginalised in his society; he would be chastised and/or end up losing everything that he has, and it might even lead to a point where he loses his life.

Coming out bears risky consequences because the attitude towards nonbinary gender identities in modern-day Zimbabwe is not tolerative. Homosexuality is seen as a sin, a taboo, a crime, something that is un-African. It goes further to the point where

Zimbabwe's old president Robert Mugabe sees homosexuals as inferiors who should not have any rights. In 1995, In Zimbabwe International Bookfair on Human Rights and Justice, Mugabe further argues:

I find it extremely outrageous and repugnant to my human conscience that such immoral and repulsive organisations, like those of homosexual who offend against the law of nature and the morals and religious beliefs espoused by our society, should have any advocates in our midst and elsewhere in the world. ... I don't believe [homosexuals] have any rights at all. (as cited in Phillips, 1997, 43)

In the same year, Border Gezi, a Member of Parliament says:

I would like to ask Mr. Chihuri the head of the police that police should be on the lookout and look for homosexuals and lesbians. They should take them and put them somewhere they can never be seen because we cannot mix with such people. They will tarnish our image. We should look for ways of keeping these people separate from the ones who are normal. (as cited in Phillips, 1997, 43)

The speeches of two different politicians demonstrate that Zimbabwe has a spiteful approach towards homosexuality. First, President Mugabe claims that homosexuals have no place among them or anywhere else in the world. They should be deprived of basic rights that heterosexual people can have. Then, Border Gezi refers to homosexual people as if they are diseased beings who should be quarantined so that they cannot blend in with the crowd. More importantly, he categorises nongay people as normal, typical of the heteronormative ideology.

However, this does not necessarily mean that all of Africa is homophobic. As President Mugabe mentions, there are organisations that favour the queer community in Africa. For example, Gay Association of South Africa (GASA) is an organisation that was formed in 1982. Organisation of Lesbian and Gay Activists (OLGA) was formed in 1987. However, even with the efforts of such organisations, homosexuality remains to be one of Africa's problems. It is also demonstrated in Tendai Huchu's work *The Hairdresser of Harare* which was published in 2010. Huchu's protagonist, Dumisani is a gay hairdresser who comes out to his family. As his family does not support his

homosexuality, he is forced to live his life in his closet. As his relationship with the minister's husband is revealed, Dumisani is beaten to death and is forced to leave his country as his injuries heal. He forcefully leaves his country to migrate to the United Kingdom.

Dumisani's experience resembles Ishmael's struggles. Nyoni successfully brings attention to the subject by correlating it with the ordeals of being a refugee. The fact that the play starts to be performed in 2015 and tours until 2020 proves that the subject does not age. It is still able to convey its message even after many years which shows that homophobia in Africa remains to be a recent issue. Coming out in a country that does not tolerate nonbinary genders has its negative impacts upon its people. Their self-confidence is often shattered, and they adapt to the idea of being invisible among the crowd. Since they are not respected in their own countries, they are not shown any in other countries that results in having low self-esteem. When it comes to acknowledging his identity, he feels hesitant. Due to the oppressions and constraints he endures, Ishmael lives in a state of doubt even when he attempts to act with pride. In his case though, he is an out gay, he lives his life as if he is still closeted.

The oppressive environment and intolerant attitude towards nonbinary gender identities are affiliated with the religious beliefs. In a study on the role of religion in internalised homophobia conducted by Kubicek et al., a participant claims that "I am always committing a sin just because I'm being me" (2009, 612). This sort of approach naturally affects the individuals who are a part of a religion. Such negative depictions supported by religious claims might lead individuals towards internalised homophobia. This means that LGBTQ+ people would start to be in a state of doubting, questioning, and conflicting themselves due to the idea that they do not meet the needs of the correct way to be.

When such an oppressive topic turns one against oneself, such religious passion can have their families and friends turn against them after coming out. Since coming out is an ongoing process that a nonbinary person relives with each person they come out to, ongoing support is utmost needed. Familial support can contribute to an individual's mental welfare, self-esteem, and independence to be themselves even when their religions

are strictly oppressive. In their study, Kathleen Miller, Ryan Watson, and Marla Eisenberg conclude:

Religious affiliation, while associated with both depressive symptoms and family acceptance, was not clearly identified as either a detrimental or protective quality for LGBTQ youth. Rather, we found that family acceptance, regardless of religious affiliation, continued to be a powerful protective factor for LGBTQ youth. (2020, 35)

Familial and friendly bonds are the most intimate bonds a person can have. Therefore, this kind of support is mainly provided by one's family. It can be emotional support or a financial one depending on the individual's age. It further complicates things when they are not accepted by their families and friends alike. When they lack the support of the ones, they feel closest to, it may result in LGBTQ+ people repressing themselves.

It is no surprise that LGBTQ+ people feel an immense amount of stress when they cannot find the courage and freedom to come out to people closest to them. Regarding familial support, Adam McCormick and Stephen Baldrige state that "family acceptance is one of the strongest predictors of the health, mental health, and well-being outcomes of LGBTQ youth" (2019, 36). This can easily be seen in Ishmael's example. Ishmael admits that after he left his country, he did not contact any of his family or friends. For years, Ishmael contemplates coming out to his parents, curious as to what they would say, and how they would react. He claims, "I spent years practicing what I'd even say to my father" (Nyoni, 2015, 4), but he remains silent as he could not predict whether his father can handle the news. Regarding his father's reaction, he says, "maybe he'd understand. Or maybe I'd die right there on the spot. No, not his only son. Not the one who's supposed to carry his name. Not in this family! Not in this house!" (Nyoni, 2015, 4). In the end, the oppressive burden to carry out his father's bloodline weighs heavier and he gives into it as the heteronormative understanding of his family would not allow such a stain on their family.

He also admits that he contemplates coming out to his mother. Yet, he does not, as he is sure of the result. Humorously, he says "I thought about telling my mother. But maybe she'd die right there on the spot, and then be resurrected to drag me to church to

receive a healing” (Nyoni, 2014, 4). The possibility of his son coming out as gay is so impossible that he thinks she would have a heart attack and be resurrected immediately to drag him into a church. He believes that his mother would recognise his identity as a sort of sickness to be cured in church. Her reaction exemplifies the ancient confession ritual which “exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation” (Foucault, 1978, 61). E. M. Forster’s *Maurice* (1971) provides a similar example of how his identity is noticed as a sickness; Maurice’s homosexual tendencies are diagnosed as “congenital homosexuality” (114) which can be cured for as long as the person consents to being treated.

From his monologue about his parents’ reaction, it can be understood that they would not be okay with who Ishmael is. Just like other visions blinded by religion and heteronormativity, they would believe that he is sick and should be treated in a church. Ishmael uses African dancing shells to imitate his mother’s reaction, he goes, “Yeessss Lord! Cleanse him! Heal him! Saaaaaave him!” (Nyoni, 2015, 4). He enacts her praying as if she is possessed crying out for the Lord to save her son from what he is. It is possible to see that Ishmael represses who he is and hides it from his parents. He claims, “they needed a good son. I tried to be a good son for as long as I could” (Nyoni, 2015, 4). In a way, he puts his family first in order to not hurt them because the only alternative reaction to saving him would be to die on the spot. This exemplifies how LGBTQ+ people pretend to be someone else when coming out is not an option. They act like a different person would in order not to be judged just as Ishmael pretends to be someone else to be accepted as ‘good’.

The situation is not so different when it comes to his friends. Although he feels so close to them, Ishmael does not feel comfortable enough to come out to them. He receives messages from his friends everyday asking his wellbeing and why he does not tell them about himself, but Ishmael does not respond to them. However, his acknowledgment of his own tendencies becomes the clearest as he reminisces the time when he wished to come out to them. “I wanted to tell them. When I was fifteen, I knew for sure. But, I was worried about them treating me differently.” (Nyoni, 2015, 4). Although he wanted to come out to them, he felt forced to stay closeted due to the fact that their responses might be negative. He claims that he knew about his identity for sure yet, he chose not to come

out to them because he thought they would not understand. As he grew older, he started to feel those around him will not see him as a man. Eventually, he started worrying about what “drunk mouths” (Nyoni, 2015, 4) would say. Even when it is the people to whom he feels closest, he feels oppressed about coming out.

It is evident that LGBTQ+ people encounter many hardships throughout their lives when they attempt to be accepted by their families, friends, or societies in general. Lacking support from the loved ones leads to lack of confidence, and hopelessness. In order to explain the feelings of LGBTQ+ people, Rozhan Khdir and Gözde Latifoğlu state that “feelings of hopelessness and pessimism have been commonly experience[d] among [LGBTQ+] people” (2021, 1). Therefore, LGBTQ+ people often feel ostracised when they live in homophobic and discriminatory environments. Ishmael’s situation presents a comparable example. Throughout the play, Ishmael appears to be overtly stressed about revealing his identity. Regarding this, Željka Kamenov, Aleksandra Huić, and Margareta Jelić express that “stress appears when a person perceives that the demands of the environment are excessive and finds that [they are] unable to successfully meet them” (2016, 42). In the case of LGBTQ+ members, their identities “remain stigmatised and must develop within a heterosexist environment; one that dictates heterosexual normativity and expects gender conformity” (Kelleher, 2009, 4). Ishmael’s stress mainly stems from the fact that he comes from a country that has heterosexual expectations with a homophobic frame of mind. He feels as if he would be judged and shamed regardless of whom he comes out to. Although there are no blatant homophobic signs shown by the people he meets in England, Ishmael creates a state of mind where he feels that what he is inferior. The possibility of stigmatisation suppresses him from being open about his identity everywhere.

Ishmael’s ostracisation is also caused by his loneliness as he is denied support from people like him. He tries to contact someone named David in the first scenes. David is Ishmael’s ex-lover whom he was together with before leaving their country. At the end of the first scene, Ishmael makes a phone call that leads to voicemail. He phones David, but David does not pick up the phone. He claims that he gives up on his bread and milk to save enough money to have two hours at Cath and Bri’s café (Nyoni, 2015, 3). The fact that he gives up on his food to have two hours at a café shows how little he gets as

an asylum seeker which he uses to look at David's social media platform in the hopes that he can hear from him or contact him. The comments on David's page do not seem very positive as people call his absence a "good riddance" (Nyoni, 2015, 3). It is understood that David found his own asylum. Therefore, he does not want to risk seeing him, so despite Ishmael's numerous messages, he avoids contacting him.

Ishmael eventually receives a phone call from David. He simply asks Ishmael to stop calling for help because he cannot help him, he prefers to focus on saving himself. David admits that in order to find asylum he had to explain what he does with men and why he likes it (Nyoni, 2015, 13). Although he feels degraded about what he has done, he was able to find his asylum. It is understood that gay refugees are only granted asylum if they decide to come to terms with the Home Office. They are not granted any privacy or respect and they are sent away to wait to be sent back or give up on their own if they do not sacrifice their dignity and embarrass themselves. Ishmael's broken relationship and lack of support by David contribute to the feeling of hopelessness and helplessness. David justifiably does not want to risk losing hard-earned asylum by helping Ishmael. But this does not change the fact that Ishmael is left alone even by people that share the same fate. Instead, he suggests Ishmael to pay others to support his claims (Nyoni, 2015, 13). Overwhelmed and disheartened by the fact that he is denied help by someone who is like him and very dear to him, Ishmael feels ostracised which makes it even harder for him to accept and be open about who he is.

His experiences lead him to feel oppressed by minority stress which can be seen among the members of a minority group. Minority stress is described as "excess stress to which individuals from stigmatised social categories are exposed as a result of their social, often a minority, position" (Meyer, 2003, 675). Ishmael's minority stress seems to be rooted in both external and internal factors. Nicholas C. Borgogna, Ryon C. McDermott, Stephan L. Aita, and Matthew M. Kridel explain such factors as "discrimination, harassment, and prejudice based on one's identity (i.e., heterosexist social policies) are considered external stressors, whereas the negative thoughts, feelings, and emotions one has as a result of their identity (i.e., internalized heterosexism) are considered internalized stressors" (2019, 55). As someone who is aware of the discrimination and prejudice his country harbours, and the harassment he endures during

his encounter in the Home Office, Ishmael begins to feel the minority stress due to external factors. His experiences with these external factors lead him to have negative thoughts and feelings towards his identity. Although this does not necessarily mean that he despises what he is, he is still not comfortable with being open about himself.

Later, with a flyer he pulls out of his suitcase, Ishmael demonstrates that he has been to a place called the Sanctuary Point, a place that holds gatherings of others like him. He meets a Nigerian man who greets him warmly. He is informed that there are five Nigerians, one Ghanaian, and six Libyans. As the man advises him to not worry, Ishmael begins to worry. Although he is out and is in a different country, he still feels somewhat oppressed to talk about his homosexuality. He fears to let them know about his claim in the United Kingdom. He says “I know that, even in our collective misfortune, my brothers and my sisters could still shun me. A citizen of the unwanted being excluded by the excluded” (Nyoni, 2014, 5.) In their study, Robin J. Lewis, Valerian J. Derlega, Jessica L. Griffin, and Alison C. Krowinski state that “... One’s expectations regarding prejudice and discrimination as a result of being gay/lesbian may also be important in understanding the distress of G/L/Bindividuals” (2003, 718). He believes that although everyone else in the room is cast away or forced to run, they would still be judgmental about Ishmael’s sexual orientation. He fears that his homosexuality could be perceived as inferior to others’ claims.

Ishmael leaves his country due to knowing that his preferences will not be understood and respected but there is also a variety of other reasons why people leave their countries. People mainly escape from the bad living conditions and for the lack of a bright future. In order to explain his life native country Iran, Ishmael’s flatmate Cyrus says that “my family is waiting for me to bring them here. We all suffer in Tehran. There, there is no life” (Nyoni, 2015, 11). Despite the diversity in reasons to leave their country, Ishmael sees his homosexuality to be unspeakable. Starting from his childhood as he feels ashamed to talk to his parents and friends, Ishmael develops a sense of isolation that causes him to restrain and oppress him from being himself and being open about who he is. He does not even attempt to take any risks to reveal his identity even to those who are closest to him because, let alone everyone else, he sees what he is as secondary to other people. He believes that what he would be shunned by those who are also otherised for

different reasons. Ishmael feels doubly ostracised as he feels like a pariah not only in his country but also among those who are excluded.

As the story progresses, it is found that Ishmael was not eagerly accepted when he first came to the United Kingdom. The Home Office does not believe that he is gay, so they ask him to prove it. “They ask me, what does a penis feel like? Why do I like it? (Visibly upset.) I need to tell them we weren’t dirty. I need to tell them we were so much more. I need David” (Nyoni, 2014, 4). Although he was forced to keep his true identity a secret back in his own country, he is now asked to be open about it and is embarrassed as he feels uncomfortable to even talk about it because of the direct way the questions are asked. Despite the fact that the United Kingdom is known for its embracive attitude towards variety in genders, it does not seem to apply equally to Ishmael as he will not be granted asylum for as long as he does not cooperate.

His troubles continue as he is cut off by a boy named Ricky who seems to be around the age of fifteen and his dog. Threatened by the dog’s presence, Ishmael cowers with fear and wets himself. Ricky appears to be following Ishmael all the way back from the church. Knowing they get free food and clothes from the church; he threatens Ishmael to give him and his dog what he has under the name of giving it back to the community. About racist approach to people of colour, Suzanne Pharr asserts that “Queers of color face multiple risks in a racist, homophobic, and sexist society, where economic injustice is rationalized as necessary and acceptable” (1997, 114). Ishmael’s encounter with Ricky is a good example of how refugees are treated by the society they wish to be a part of. It is indicated that he endures an economic injustice. He is given very little amount of money to survive through the week. Furthermore, it is also made clear that refugees cannot afford something as simple as public transport. Then, Ishmael is humiliated and robbed by a boy who is much younger than him. His own food is forcefully taken to feed an animal. His needs are seen as secondary to an animal. After the incident, Ishmael is left alone devastated. He does not return to the drop-in centre or leave his room at night. He stays put for eight days. Then, traditional mbira music of Zimbabwe chimes to interpret the situation:

Some of us found others, like us. Some of us found them seething. Some of us were called leeches. Some of us were dirt beneath their shoes. Some of us broke

our African names. Some of us erased our histories. Some of us conjured up secret identities. Some of us couldn't recognise ourselves anymore. (Nyoni, 2014, 6)

Based on Ishmael's experiences, the song sheds light on what the refugees feel. The refugees are seen like leeches who feed off of free services provided by the church. As one of them, Ishmael is belittled by a nonrefugee and is seen and treated as an inferior. By being out of their countries, they leave or are forced to leave their names and histories. In a way, they break out of their characters and cannot be recognised.

Later on, the play introduces Ishmael's flatmate Cyrus who is also a refugee who is waiting to get his claim from the Home Office. In the case of Ishmael and refugees like him, they are in a constant state of waiting without getting a claim. He says "waiting to be allowed to live is like flickering in and out of existence. Sometimes you're not even sure if you are real" (Nyoni, 2015, 17). They are not treated like a normal person. It is as if they do not exist. Despite suffering the same fate, the two flatmates try to avoid meeting or talking to each other at all costs. They are at a point where they become invisible to their own people. In Scene Four, they finally share a moment where they have no boundaries. Cyrus admits that he is there to bring his family along with him because they cannot have a life in Tehran. It has been two years since he came to the United Kingdom, and he is still waiting. He does everything by the law and yet, he is still not given an answer and he constantly gets rejected.

The landlord Angie's approach to both men is also significant. Regarding Angie, Ishmael states "she owned everything in this flat, including my dignity" (Nyoni, 2014, 12). She looks upon them and sees them as inferiors to the point where she does not acknowledge their presence to greet them back. She laughs at their moves, expectations, gestures, and even religion. They are not granted any sort of privacy as Angie can walk in using her own keys to check in on them at any moment. It is as if Angie does not only own the apartment, but also own the refugees living in it. Through Cyrus, it is noticed that the refugees cannot even use public transport because they are not given enough money and they walk wherever they need to go regardless of the distance. During their talk, Cyrus claims that they try to break the spirit of the refugees so that they give their hopes up before they are asked to leave (Nyoni, 2015, 12). As Cyrus is one of those who would not give up, Angie appears with three men to pick him up and take him. Unable to

get a chance to dress, Cyrus is dragged out of the room. The mbira song appears again to sing about shattered dreams and cravings for a taste of liberty. Pointing out their wait, and expressing how the process makes them feel Ishmael states:

[People] sort of look past you, look through you, and the ones that see you only see what label you have. This letter says I'm a reference number. I'm an applicant. I'm circumstances. I'm categories. I'm outcomes. But it doesn't say that I'm real. It doesn't say that I exist. That I laugh. I cry. I dance. I dream. I wonder. I want. I think. I question. It doesn't say that I'm a person. (Nyoni, 2015, 17)

In these lines, Ishmael becomes a spokesperson for Nyoni who successfully underlines the struggles of all asylum seekers. Once those people leave their countries, it does not always mean an easy new beginning.

Forfeiting his family, friends, and home to be himself, Ishmael comes to Leeds. He hopes that he will find a haven, a place where he does not have to feel embarrassed or afraid because he is different. However, he realises that Leeds turns into yet another struggle in his life, another battle that he has to fight. He has to fight for a place to call home. He has to fight to become somebody. At times, he even loses his dignity. It does not end with Ishmael alone. He may appear selfish as he refuses to help Ishmael, but David goes through the same traumatic experiences. He is also expected to reveal private information about his preferences to find an asylum. Once through with this scarring encounter at Home Office, he cannot really be blamed for choosing to put himself first.

As Ishmael continues with his waiting, he starts to lose track of time. He takes walks to take a look around and he realises that he wants to adapt to the United Kingdom. He wants it to become a part of him, so he does not feel strange or left out. He does not want to relive the past experiences which he refers to as nightmares. He loses sleep because he thinks that the laws will change overnight. He is afraid that the country will vomit him out (Nyoni, 2015, 2). Ishmael decides to go to a park where he finds a sort of freedom as people are not squashed together and can have their own space, he meets a white girl named Bex and she appears to be one of the few people who do not feel repulsed by Ishmael's existence. Although Bex approaches him friendly, Ishmael does not want to reveal his identity due to his insecurities, so he lies about it. He introduces himself as Sam

who studies business at college. One lie follows another, and Ishmael builds up a new story for his character. It appears as if he creates Sam's life according to how he would want his life to be. A man with dreams to be rich who does not worry about struggling in life. He refers to not having a girlfriend part as complicated without providing any other detail. Again, he does not risk coming out as gay even when he creates a utopic life in front of a total stranger. This forces him back to his closet even in the country where he fled to come out.

Ishmael does not want to leave it to chance to see whether people like him and accept him for who he is. His stress leads him to forget how to be someone around people. He either chooses to remain silent or lie about his identity. This is one of the results of minority stress faced due to the distal stressors. Kyle K.H. Tan, Gareth J. Treharne, Sonja J. Ellis, Johanna M. Schmidt, and Jaimie F. Veale assert that "proximal stressors also [include] nondisclosure, which describes attempts made by TGD [trans and gender diverse] people to conceal their TGD identity in an attempt to protect themselves or others close to them from directly experiencing distal stressors" (2019, 12). Despite the fact that he did not suffer any homophobic responses for coming out, he gets involved in a mental state where every coming out scenario ends disastrously. He does not even come out to people who seem to show affection and connection. This is mainly because he longs for any amount of support that could be shown to him. However, having to leave his family and friends, being left alone by his lover all because he is different caused him to act out of learned hopelessness and helplessness.

As both his possession and stage prop, Ishmael carries a suitcase that he brought with him from Harare. Changing from scene to scene, he uses the suitcase as different objects such as a chair, bench, or a sofa or he pulls out different sets of objects such as African dancing shells, Sanctuary Point fliers. The suitcase symbolises the fact that Ishmael is not settled in one place. He is constantly on the move and regardless of where he is, the residence consists of the suitcase. It represents Ishmael's closet as a refugee and as a nonbinary person. In the simplest and most obvious meaning, the suitcase can be interpreted as his life. All his possessions and items regarding his experiences are placed inside the suitcase belonging nowhere waiting to be opened. As he proceeds with his story, he uses the items one by one linking them to his past and current experiences.

The suitcase also stands for his closet as a refugee because Ishmael cannot really reside permanently in one place that he can call home and his suitcase is always with him wherever he goes. It becomes a chair in his flat which resembles his nightmarish life in Leeds, a bench in the unappealing park where he feels liberated, or a sofa in Bex's house. He also uses it to carry his mother's religious dancing shells, the Sanctuary Point flyer, and even his flatmate Cyrus' family picture. It contains several items that resemble lives and past experiences of him and the people around him. These are the life and experiences that he wants to let out and get rid of, but he is incapable of doing so as he relives those times with every moment and the person, he comes out around. Such as when he pulls out the flyer, or when Cyrus is taken away by the Home Office as Ishmael cowers next to his suitcase.

The reason why the suitcase resembles his closet as a gay person is because it also includes items that are only known to Ishmael. Throughout the play, the inside of Ishmael's suitcase is not seen by anyone else unless he tells the stories related to the items that he pulls out of it. Similarly, his homosexuality is not known to everyone unless he decides to reveal it to certain people such as David, and indirectly to Bex. He also tells the Home Office that he is gay to justify his claim. But he is not truly out. He does not feel comfortable enough to come out and reveal his sexual preferences vocally. Hence, just like his suitcase, Ismail is loaded but both can never find a place to settle and to open.

Sedgwick describes the closet as the defining structure for gay oppression in the twenty-first century (1990, 71). The reason why she describes it as a structure for gay oppression is because the closet exists as societies accept heterosexuality as the default sexual preference along with the gender binary as the default gender identity. Therefore, nonbinary individuals feel forced to come out to disclose their identities and if they choose to remain closeted, they will be regarded as heterosexual. It is quite appropriate to link Sedgwick's statement to Ishmael's situation. Because he is raised in a country that only sees the gender binary as the only possible gender category, he is oppressed. He is afraid of facing the consequences of coming out because of his homophobic country, religious family, David's abandonment, and discriminatory approach of the Home Office. He spends all his life worrying about how he would be perceived if he dares to come out. In an mbira song, Ishmael acknowledges, "Some of us wear our secrets, like a cloak

around our shoulders. Some of us don't know how to act when they label us aliens. Some of us don't know how to be when limbo comes with every morning" (Nyoni, 2015, 10). The song represents the lives of refugees and nonbinary people. In different situations, people are forced to keep their identities a secret, or they are labelled aliens and otherised. Ishmael's learned hopelessness leads him to never be at ease with anyone around him. Despite his gloomy background with homosexuality, Ishmael struggles to come out directly even to Bex. He says "I went to this club and whilst I was there I felt alive. I chose to be there, proudly" (Nyoni, 2015, 17). He does not clearly disclose his sexual preferences but instead, he does so implicatively. This shows that the pressuring mental state that Ishmael is in forces him to be self-closeted. Regarding the well-being of LGBTQ+ members, Cathy Kelleher states that "results suggest that the oppressive social environment created through sexual/transgender identity-related stigma negatively impacts on the well-being of LGBTQ youth" (2009, 2). Even though he longs to come out and be himself, his mind would not allow him to do so because he is overstressed about the possibility to be judged and stigmatised. He is too occupied with overthinking what people would say if they knew who he was.

In the fifth scene, Ishmael finally lets go of his insecurities and fears to embrace himself even for a brief moment. He pulls out a pair of pink and glittery stilettos from his suitcase. This allows the readers and spectators to realise that this is one of the examples in which his suitcase should be interpreted as his closet as a gay man. It is where he can keep his most special and private items, desires, wishes, and past without having to worry about being revealed. As he shows the stilettos to the spectators, he appears hesitant. It is crystal clear that Ishmael might be an out gay man, but he did not yet completely leave his closet and still lives in it. The coming out process is not realised in a short period of time. It cannot be considered done as one decides to come out to a person or a group of people. It is an ongoing process that repeats itself every time the person decides to come out to someone new. In this case, his hesitation in front of the audience illustrates that reliving the process is still brand new and challenging for him. He might be in a different country that is known for its openness about diversity in gender identities, but he still struggles to be freely open about it due to his past experiences.

At night, Ishmael decides to go to a gay club that, he could not find the courage to enter before. As he puts on the stilettos, he says “I want to know what it’s like to become. Inner beings escaping from their cages. Free to be. I want to escape my body” (Nyoni, 2014, 14). Though he does not verbally come out to anyone, Ishmael embraces himself and visibly steps into his reality. Regarding coming out Paula Rust (1993) states that “[c]oming out is a process of discovery in which the individual sheds a false heterosexual identity and comes to correctly identify and label her true essence, which is homosexual” (53). Similar to how Ishmael likened their lives to concrete cocoons from which they shed the past to new inflictions, his coming out exemplifies Rust’s description of coming out. By accepting to be himself, Ishmael finally comes out to himself and starts to shed the hidden and false heterosexual image he maintained to keep his own identity a secret. Since he feels trapped in his cocoon, he craves to get a taste of his true nature. He dares to take a step closer to his fulfilling, metamorphosis. He voices his hesitations as he is worried about what his people would think of him if they saw him right then and there. He would be seen as a disgrace to his own people. As he compares his home to the United Kingdom, he expresses the differences such as the neon lights, queens, and rainbow flags (Nyoni, 2014, 14). There appears to be a gigantic difference between the two countries. He begins to see things and feel emotions he has never seen or felt before.

He is now accompanied by a possible drag queen in the club. He is asked to let go and start dancing. He thinks “Is this what it feels like to not be afraid? Is this what freedom feels like? Is this how it feels to be yourself?” (Nyoni, 2014, 14). He recognises his awkwardness, and he embraces it. He finally gets a glimpse of what it means to be himself or what it feels like to become. He is able to communicate with the drag queen in gay slang. As he gets lost in the moment, he realises that he has been holding himself for too long and he finally lets go. Again, he does not openly come out, but he begins to perform his gender. Regarding performing one’s gender, Butler states:

Gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative— that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be (1990, 33)

It is evident that as Ishmael begins to perform his gender, he accepts and becomes who he is supposed to be. He dresses, acts, dances, and speaks like a gay man. He is finally at peace with himself. For the first time in what feels like forever, he feels free of his worries, insecurities, and fears. Pure joy completely takes over him as he dances. The mbira song comes to play again: “Some of us wanted to stop being afraid. Some of us wanted to find ourselves. Some of us wanted to belong” (Nyoni, 2014, 15). Its interpretation of the situation is still hopeful but not as gloomy as it used to be. It states their need to stop being afraid, to be found and become. As long-lost people, they need a place to call home and they want to be themselves unapologetically. Ishmael has been around the refugees like him, but this is the first time he was with his own community after leaving David. It makes him realize how much he longs for any opportunity to be himself and be with his people.

After a dream-like night, Ishmael wakes up to the same nightmare. The suitcase now contains a letter from the Home Office which makes him feel broken and disappointed. At that point, he pulls out a toy car from his suitcase and decides to pay a visit to Bex to be completely honest with her. Ishmael tries to calm down Bex who is infuriated about him leaving. He hands her the letter and tells her that his name is Ishmael, and he has to leave. He explains that he lied because he did not want to be who he was so he made up Sam, someone Ishmael could only dream about being.

At the end of the play, when Ishmael receives a letter from the Home Office that bursts his bubble, and he is reminded that it is not that easy to have a choice once again. He will have to go for his last appeal, and he has to prove himself yet again. As the result of his appeal is unknown, he expresses it by saying it is as if his existence flickering while he is on the wait. It is due to the fact their lives turn into a matter of uncertainty after a while. They do know what is to come tomorrow. They are forced to believe that they are not real. They are treated as something rather than someone.

However, Ishmael’s story does not only consist of abandonments, hopelessness, and helplessness. Bex can be considered as the first person to whom he becomes someone. Initially, Ishmael uses a fake identity when he introduces himself to Bex. As their bond gets more intimate, Bex asks Ishmael if he would want her to contact a friend to help him get a job. Ishmael starts to panic with the burden of his lies, so he escapes Bex’s flat. His

lies and his escape from Bex's flat happen because Ishmael was in his own head for the last two months of his life as a refugee. As Nyoni states in the mbira song, "Some of us don't know how to act. ... Some of us don't know how to be." (2014, 10). Being a gay refugee, he is treated as if he is invisible, even by his flatmate who is also a refugee. This solitude caused him to forget how to approach other people and communicate with them. But she eventually accepts him as he is, and she opens up about her private matters. Bex seems to be the only character who does not judge Ishmael because of who he is despite his mistakes towards her.

Ishmael admits to seeing Bex as her friend but his experiences of having a friend fall short as he did not know how to be her friend. His traumatic experiences seem to wipe out all the good parts, so he did not know how to react to someone who is genuinely good. Regarding Bex's approach to him and how others have treated him Ishmael explains:

You reminded me what it's like to be a person and it's silly because you didn't do anything. You just sat next to me and said, hi. Not many people said hi. Not many people made me feel good. (Nyoni, 2014, 17)

Although Bex did not really do anything special, she acknowledged Ishmael's existence and treated him like one of her kind. In the letter, Ishmael and other refugees are referred to as a reference number. They are treated and regarded as possessions of the government who are labelled by numbers. As for Bex, Ishmael is a person who she treats as her equal. She does not feel repelled by his looks or his ethnic background that she did not even feel the need to talk about them. Unlike Angie, she greeted Ishmael. To be recognised as a person who is not inferior to her by Bex made Ishmael feel special which is something he did not know how to respond to, as he is not familiar with such feelings.

In the very last scene of the play, Ishmael comes out to Bex as he tells her about the club that he visited prior to meeting her. He speaks with pride and claims that he was there proudly. It looks like, even for a brief moment, he felt alive in a way that he has never felt before because he chose to be there, and he realised what choice feels like for the first time. Since all his life felt like he is like a puppet whose strings are being pulled by the decisions and sanctions of others, the liberating feeling of choice destroyed Ishmael's cage for the moment he stayed in the club. Feeling genuinely sorry for lying,

Ishmael waits for a response from Bex, but he cannot tell whether Bex forgives him or not. To his surprise, Bex holds out her hand and greets Ishmael once again. They both smile and shake hands as the mbira song chimes in once again:

Some of us leave pieces of ourselves, in all the places that we've been. Some of us are still counting how many battles we have to face. Some of us, are just at the beginning; Hoping to call somewhere, Home again. (Nyoni, 2014, 17)

Bex's character is a ray of hope for someone like Ishmael who has struggled to be accepted all his life. She is the light that shines in his darkest moments. Although his life is full of failed attempts to be himself, Bex is the person whom he manages it with. She shows him the intimacy and kindness no one ever has. Through Bex, Ishmael gets to have a glimpse of acceptance that he has longed for his entire life.

Ishmael's story exemplifies the case of many LGBTQ+ members like him. Whether it is their countries, religions, faiths, values, families, or all of these reasons together, they are forced to live their lives within the boundaries without being allowed to settle anywhere. The results of coming out are not always positive. Families and friends of LGBTQ+ individuals do not always support them. In several cases, individuals choose to remain closeted to not risk their privileges in life. When they do, they lose their families, friends, home, jobs, and everything else that might fall under the category of a privilege. This situation may even end up in queer individuals losing their lives. As for Ishmael, he is also one of the people who chooses to remain closeted due to the intolerance his parents are likely to show. He is also aware that his society and their religion are homophobic. Therefore, he decides to give up on his family, friends, and country to start a new chapter where he can be himself unapologetically. However, life does not treat him kindly even after his departure. He is ostracised, belittled, and seen as inferior. Nevertheless, all the bleak encounters and experiences do not lead to Ishmael's surrender. He is overtly overwhelmed, and he struggles to keep going but he does not give up regardless of what it is that he encounters. The title of the play, *Nine Lives*, seems to be related to Ishmael's durability. As a gay asylum seeker attempting to live in a different country after fleeing from his country, Ishmael continues to move on with his life while constantly striving to be himself. The phrase having nine lives is about one's ability to survive overwhelming and disastrous events. Similarly, Ishmael gets involved in a

phenomenal clash to maintain himself despite the challenging encounters. His strife indicates that queer people undergo harsh happenings in their daily lives, yet they keep going and stand against all odds.



2.3 BORN OUT OF THE CLOSET: *MY SON'S A QUEER (BUT WHAT CAN YOU DO?)* BY ROB MADGE

Robert Dennis Madge is an English actor from Coventry. Madge identifies as nonbinary and goes by the pronouns they/them. They started their acting career as early as at the age of 9. They studied Drama at Ashbourne College and they performed as Michael Banks in *Marry Poppins* in Prince Edward Theatre in West End from 2005 to 2007. They also performed as Artful Dodger in *Oliver!* in 2008 and as Gavroche in *Les Misérables* and *Les Misérables: 25th Anniversary Concert* in 2010 in West End. After their 2021 play, Madge also took part in *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* in 2021 and *Millenials: A Pop Song Cycle* in 2022.

In 2021, Madge wrote their coming-of-age play *My Son's a Queer (But What Can You Do?)* which was performed at Turbine Theatre between June and July of the same year. Madge appears as the only actor of their autobiographical play. On the stage, an old television is used to show videos from their childhood, as Madge enacts and interprets on them. In the written form of the play, video links are given to provide the reader with a glimpse of Madge's childhood videos. The play is about Madge's upbringing as a theatre aficionado. They show how they were the perfect fit for the stage from a very early age by involving clips from their childhood where they turn their living room into a stage and perform for their family. The title of the play makes it open to being interpreted as a family drama, as if Madge will address familial barriers and make suggestions on how to remove them. Yet, it presents the spectators with the opposite; compared to the gloomy atmosphere portrayed in the mainstream queer plays, Madge's family appear to be quite embracing. They support Madge's enthusiasm for theatre and even make them costumes for the female characters they wish to portray.

The stage is turned into a living room with family photos, a dress box, and an old television. Here the play starts as a meta-theatre with a video of Madge as a child on the old television, announcing that they will perform a show. They ask their father to put on their costume, hinting that he will take part in the play (Madge, 2021, 18). Their father is also the cameraman, which also indicates that Madge was supported by their parents as a kid when they attempted to put on a theatrical show. There appears to be home-made

Academy Award, wigs, and hand-made costumes to further indicate that their family contributes to Madge's enthusiasm.

From the very beginning of the play, Madge's queer identity is made manifest. Their upbringing differs from the usual understanding of raising a child. Regarding their upbringing, Madge expresses:

What also became clear was that my upbringing is not necessarily the norm. I received many messages saying how lucky I was, that their family would not indulge them so, that their dad would never have let their son wear a wig, let alone be seen dead wearing one himself. (2021, 8)

Unlike many queer stories like Ishmael's, Madge's story portrays rather positive picture of a queer life and a process of coming out. Conscious of the extent of queer society's problems around the world Madge states that "So often the only queer stories we see are those that are rooted in trauma. That is not to deny the importance of these stories, nor am I suggesting they should not be acknowledged. They are vital. However, we also desperately need to offer an alternative" (2021, 8). As important as the negative and traumatic stories which are written to acknowledge the struggles of the community, to draw attention to the impacts of the negative outcomes of these stories, Madge holds the opinion that optimistic and encouraging ones should also be noticed and given credit to shape the understanding of LGBTQ+ members, and their families and friends and to show that alternative ways to accept and live with a queer family member exist to maintain the hope. To that end, they present their queer life as a hopeful alternative.

Madge's exceptional upbringing begins even before they were born. Throughout their play, Madge makes suggestions to the parents of LGBTQ+ individuals. In the very first of these suggestions, Madge says that "Do not. I repeat. Do not. Throw. A gender-reveal party" (2021, 24). This is because Madge's parents did not want to learn Madge's gender until their birth. At Madge's gender reveal party, the parents pop a balloon to reveal Madge's gender. However, the colours are neither blue nor pink. Instead, a rainbow of colours burst out of the balloon which means that even at their gender reveal party, the parents did not know Madge's gender. Until their birth, Madge is given a gender-neutral name, Charlie which, unfortunately (2021, 23), became Robert after birth.

A person's gender identity may not always correspond with their sex at birth. In their study conducted on sex assignment at birth, Cullen O'Keefe states:

In most cases, therefore, the label of female or male is assigned to a child based solely or largely on a single aspect of that child's sex: genitals... Old as it may be, this genital-based system is flawed in important ways. Since sex can be understood to refer to many different aspects of an individual's anatomy and physiology, to refer to an individual as simply 'female' or 'male' based solely on the inspection of one aspect of sex constitutes a misleading simplification... Human sex is complex, and to characterize someone's sex as a whole on the basis of only one aspect thereof (the person's genitals) unnecessarily ignores those complexities. (2016, 54)

According to O'Keefe, a person's genitals or their sexes assigned at birth do not define their gender identities, which means that their gender identities may differ from their sex assigned at their birth. Therefore, assigning kids' sexes at birth and assuming their gender may be seen as where the categorisation issue begins. In this regard, Kevin McDonough writes:

... the term 'queer children' refers to children whose sexual identity is not simply 'in formation' as are the sexual identities of all children, but children whose identities depend upon social categories that are as yet not widely understood or recognised, and often are excluded by liberal law, or within public political and social discourses within liberal societies. (2009, 797)

Parents expect their kids to behave in a certain way that would be appropriate for their assumed gender. This automatically makes their kids to struggle to live up to the expectations they are not otherwise meant to meet. The question whether it is a boy or girl leads to many complications as it simply limits and categorises the gender identity of children and takes away their liberty to be and live as who they are.

In reality, there is more to someone's sex at birth and someone's gender than being labelled as male or female. Anne Fausto-Sterling describes five different layers of sex of a new-born. They are identified as the "chromosomal sex, fetal gonadal sex, fetal hormonal sex, reproductive sex, and genital sex" (2012, 4-5). Fausto-Sterling further elaborates:

To recap: a newborn is a multilayered sexual creature, the result of having a chromosomal sex, a fetal gonadal sex, fetal hormonal sex, a fetal internal reproductive sex, a brain sex, an external genital sex, and, starting from the moment the child leaves the womb, a developing body image and social gender fortification. (2012, 54)

Fausto-Sterling's study demonstrates that a new-born has several layers of sex. Genital sex is used as the defining factor for whether one is a male or female but one's anatomy and identity may not always be in synch. Fausto-Sterling also uses a term called gender fortification (10). Gender fortification is raising barriers and borders between masculinity and femininity. The best example that can be given to gender fortification is the act of pinking the environment for girls and blueing it for boys. In Madge's case, their parents were not involved in such an act of confinement. Throughout the play, it is possible to see that Madge's childhood involved many colours just like a rainbow rather than a simple blue. Even after their birth, a big rainbow painting is hung in Madge's bedroom. Their theatrical performances at a young age also allow them to enact both male and female characters and respectively dress up as both, not refrain to only one.

The stories in the play demonstrate that Madge is a queer child whose identity cannot be limited to a certain label. They are the perfect fit for the uncategorisable nature of queer. Regarding queer, Phillip Harper, Margaret Cerullo, and E. Frances White write that "Queer includes within it a necessarily expansive impulse that allows us to think about the potential differences within that rubric" (1990, 30). It is the differences that make Madge a unique child. They were not an ordinary kid whose childhood was shaped by gender fortification. Madge starts the disidentification of their identification as a kid. They are not a part of the existing norms, in fact the norms make them feel strange. To exemplify their differences, Madge states that "Unfortunately, I'm the only one at school who fangirls over Rodgers and Hammerstein. No, I think quite a lot of the others struggle to wrap their heads around a 'boy' that's not into football and stuff" (2021, 30). One of the other examples of gender fortification would be to assume that all boys must be interested in certain things such as football and video games. As a kid, Madge was not impressed with the things that boys were expected to be impressed with. Instead, things that would be deemed unusual caught their attention such as the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical of Cinderella. Theatre could simply not be what a boy would be

interested in (Madge, 2021, 47). It is obvious that Madge, as a child, does not seem to like to follow the gender stereotypes. They simply follow their dreams into whatever it is that makes them happy. In one Christmas, they stumble upon a girl wearing a Santa hat with plaits. Although others may deem it not boy-like, Madge pleads their parents to have one for themselves and wears it with pride. Madge's parents cannot see any specific reason why Madge would want to wear the Santa hat with plaits; other than that it makes them "feel happy" (Madge, 2021, 40).

Madge's fluidity and queerness do not end with their interest in dressing up differently. It is clear that "nothing about the Princes or Spidermen or the Beast spark [their] attention" (2021, 30). They are pretty invested in expanding their dress-box. So, when they realise that the boys' section of dressing stores does not involve the fancy dresses, in fact, they are placed in the pink side of the store, they seem baffled. Yet, this does not stop them. Bewitched by seeing Dame Ria Jones dressed up as Maleficent, Madge even goes to the pink side of the store to find the Maleficent dress to their liking. While commenting on stills from their Disney World journal, Madge states:

At Hollywood Studios we went straight into the Villains Shop. I was very disappointed to find out that the Cruella de Vil wigs have vanished into thin air. ... Went straight into a shop called Outfitters. Was hoping they'd have some queen dresses for CRYSTAL (you know, my sister...). ... On the way out, guess what I spotted? An Ariel wig! Next time when Mum's here I'll buy it. It'll look a bit strange. Two blokes buying a wig! (2021, 47)

During the Disney World journal, wigs and dresses draw the attention of Madge as a kid. However, they believe that it would be seen as awkward for a father and a son to buy wigs and dresses, so they decide to wait until they revisit with their mother. Therefore, they end up coming up with a white lie that the said dresses and wigs are often for Madge's sister named Crystal. To explain the using of Crystal story, Madge states:

So many of us would have wanted that Ariel wig but it's scary to be different so we'd invent a Crystal, an excuse, it's not for 'him', it's for 'her'. So, next time, when Mum's there, we buy that wig. For 'Crystal'. And she's really good. (2021, 48)

Although Madge's family was overtly embracing and supportive that they were able to be themselves when they were around their family, they were forced to stay somewhat closeted outside the family. This is solely because the society seems to have its own prejudices about a boy wanting to wear dresses or wigs. Therefore, in order to avoid judgmental responses, Madge and their family decides to keep Madge's queer preferences hidden in their closet.

As most societies are not tolerant to queer identities and their preferences, family support can mean a lot for a queer person. Regarding the importance of family support, McCormick and Baldrige state that "... those LGBTQ young people who identified their families as accepting were nearly six times less likely to have depressive symptoms than those with rejecting families" (2019, 34). It contributes to the person's welfare, when LGBTQ+ members are accepted and supported by their parents and when families do not provide any sort of support, it damages the individual. When Zodwa Nyoni's Ishmael's situation is concerned, he lacks the self-acceptance and self-esteem to be himself proudly to a point where his identity causes him to feel inferior among other refugees who also escape their country. One of the main reasons as to why Ishmael is struggling is because he was never supported by his family. In fact, it is possible that finding out about their son's sexual preferences might inflict fatal damage to Ishmael's parents. However, in the case of Madge, it is seen that their parents' support plays a major role for Madge to be who they are. The fact that Madge's differences are cherished by their family provides Madge an embrative environment.

Madge touches upon parenting a queer child in their play. However, they do not offer a certain suggestion or solution to how a parent should deal with their children if they are LGBTQ+. Because they do not know what to do either. Madge contributes to topic by stating the question that exists on the title of the play. "My son is a queer but what can I do?" (2021, 47). As an answer, Madge offers "How about we shift the narrative. 'My Son's a Queer, What Can I Do?' 'Your Son's a Queer? I'm Jealous of You?'" (2021, 47). This means that there is nothing to do but to accept it and treat it as something positive that brings happiness. They state that there is no handbook so the parents should roll with it (2021, 47). Yet, this does not necessarily mean to neglect a child but it means to let the children be so they can explore, find out, and become who they really are. In a way, Madge asks the parents not to limit their children to be a certain

somebody. They ask them to offer a liberty and let it shape who they will become. Madge sings a song to remind parents that knowing that they are not alone will help the children to feel loved and accepted. The song goes “Don’t be afraid if you don’t understand. They will feel safe if you’re holding their hand. It doesn’t take much, just a simple ‘I’m here’. Oh, no need to fear” (Madge, 2021, 48). In one of the old videos played during the video, Madge’s father Jon Madge asserts that “If our only duty as parents is to allow our kids to be what they want to be... then it makes parenting pretty easy in my opinion?” (Madge, 2021, 48). The play suggests that this point of view embraced by the parents during the upbringing of their children ultimately makes them accept who they are and boosts their confidence.

However, family support is not always granted to LGBTQ+ members. McCormick and Baldrige further contribute to the topic by stating that “Many families lack the necessary knowledge and education around their child’s sexual orientation or gender identity to respond in appropriate and affirming ways” (2019, 36). In situations where the parents lack the education on differing gender identities, they tend to deem their children as a disgrace to their names and/or to their families. Such negative responses usually lead the queer individuals to leave their parents’ household to live on their own. In a questionnaire conducted on unstable housing, it is concluded that “16% of LGBTQ youth, 22% of transgender youth and 17% of LGBTQ youth of color are usually sleeping somewhere that is not the home of a parent or guardian, compared to 3% of non-LGBTQ youth.” (Human Rights Campaign, 2020, 2). Ishmael’s situation can be given as an example of being marked as a disgrace by their family. Ishmael is certain that his parents’ reaction will be negative, so he chooses to leave before even coming out. His situation leads him to such a dead end that he ends up leaving not only his parents’ household but also his country.

Most societies are dominated by certain stereotypical norms when it comes to defining a gender. These norms come along with certain rules to follow for one to live up to the expectations of their gender. For example, when it comes to kids, it is believed that boys wear blue and girls wear pink, or boys play with trucks and girls play with dolls. Even certain sports are expected to be limited to certain genders such as football being a masculine sport. Throughout their early acting career, Madge does several interviews. One of which involves an interviewer that asks if there was anything they would like to

be doing such as playing outside or playing computer games instead of acting (Madge, 2021 47). Madge informs the interviewer that they are not “that sort of person” and that “they are not into football and stuff” (Madge, 2021 47). Madge links the conversation that took place in this particular interview to how people would assume their parents would be. Since they are not into playing football or video games, their parents are often interpreted “pushy” (Madge, 2021 47). When in reality, Madge appears to be the one pushing their parents to help them act and film them doing so.

In most of Madge’s old videos shown throughout the play, the parents do not seem enthusiastic all the time. As expected, Madge’s everlasting energy appears to be exhausting at certain points. However, they do not attempt to limit Madge’s imagination to be less of themselves. In fact, when they feel off about being themselves in public, they seem to end up feeling relieved by their familial atmosphere. This leads to Madge altering the lyrics of the Mary Poppins song *Anything Can Happen If You Let It*. It is now called *Anything Is Possible (When the Stage is Your Living Room)* and the song is sung throughout different parts of the play (2021, 18). The song is important because it highlights queer’s openness to possibilities. As Sedgwick describes queer presents an “open mash of possibilities” (1993, 8). Every person’s gender identity is specific to them and is also about their pleasures and preferences. According to queer, gender cannot be defined or controlled by certain norms, as it is fluid and cannot possibly be a monolithic structure. The song empowers and encourages people to use their imagination and household goods to make anything possible. The song flawlessly fits the environment Madge grows up in. For instance, when Madge mentions the Santa-plaits hat, they state that “They wear [Santa-plaits hat] with pride, joyfully tossing their wig. And their family don’t bat an eyelid. No judgement. Just happiness” (2021, 40). Caring about the family welfare and happiness is what Madge suggests prioritising rather than being pressed about living up to expectations or norms.

At the end of the play, Madge includes an afterword from their parents. Their parents say:

We think it’s important to understand that there is no handbook on parenting. There’s no exclusive right way, we certainly aren’t experts. We wanted Robert to be happy, to enjoy every moment of their childhood and to aim for nothing but

happiness in life. So we created really; we encouraged Rob to do what they wanted to do, and be what they wanted to be... it's pretty simple. (Madge, 2021, 55)

Their parents agree with Madge as they use similar expressions that Madge used during the play. They offered Madge a light-hearted childhood for them to be themselves and enjoy who they are unapologetically. This leads Madge to live a memorable childhood where they get to do what they want as they are which eventually becomes a real play. They further state that "If your child wants it, go with the flow, which will hopefully enable them to be themselves and establish their own unique identity and personality. There is so much in the way of anybody growing up in the LGBTQ+ community already that the sanctuary should always be their home and their family" (Madge, 2021, 55). Madge's parents offer Madge haven for to be who they are because others already cause LGBTQ+ people to struggle and suffer in daily life simply because they are different. In a tweet posted in 2021, regarding their coming out, Madge states "I think I just came out as non binary to my Mum" (Madge, 2021). Their coming out does not receive any negative reactions. In fact, similar to their childhood, their mother simply acknowledge their difference and goes along with it.

During the play, Madge tells a story in which a mother reaches out to them to talk about her son's transition and its aftermath. The story provides an example of the struggles of the LGBTQ+ community in their daily lives. Madge says:

In 2020, I post [a] video online. I get a comment from a mother. She says that her 'beautiful little girl is now an extremely handsome little boy. She goes on: I'm so so blessed to have him as my son. He is such a sweetheart with the most beautiful soul. Unfortunately once we came out to his friends' parents everyone turned their backs on us. He has absolutely no friends. It's devastating. We can't ever have birthday parties because nobody will come. I love my son so so so much. (2021, 48)

Daily life in real world involves such encounters where people turn their back to their acquaintances, friends, or family after they come out. In Madge's encounter, it is seen that a loving parent supports their child's coming out. However, they are isolated by the people around them simply because their child is not as they expect. Despite the fact that a person's transition poses no threat to anyone, there are several occasions where the

transitions are feared, shamed, and stigmatised. It is similar to when Madge tries to conceal their identity and buy their Ariel dress by saying that they are for their sister. The real world would deem such things as scary. Madge further states:

We don't like what we don't understand. In fact, it scares us? I don't think a child turning a towel into a mermaid tail and using a scooter to represent the motion of swimming is particularly terrifying. But some people do. (Madge, 2021, 48)

When people observe things that they are not used to seeing, it often intimidates them. Similarly, when a queer person's identity is made manifest, it attracts a comparable negative reaction. Regardless of the fact that queer people do not mean or intend any harm, they are still appalled by their communities when they act in accordance with their queerness.

Despite the fact that Madge's family embraces their differences, and they had a lovely childhood, Madge gets a fair share of negative moments and bullies. Regarding the negative reactions, Madge states that "Some people choose hatred. You can't take that away from them. They're infected. In the words of Whitney's Fairy Godmother, 'She can't handle how fabulous you are'" (Madge, 2021, 48). The fact that family support contributes to LGBTQ+ members' self-esteem and confidence can be seen in Madge's way of dealing with negativities. Because they grew up in an environment where their differences were respected and cherished, they seem to know that they are better than what negative responses make them out to be. Conversely, in *Nine Lives*, it is seen that as an LGBTQ+ member, Ishmael lacks the support of his family. This ultimately makes him feel relatively vulnerable about his identity. Ishmael's situation goes further to a point where he internalises the homophobia he encounters.

Madge also had people that could not handle the fact that they were not like everybody else as a kid. In school, they got beaten up by 6-year-old boys. They explain that "some of the 6 year old lads don't quite understand how a 'boy' might not be into football and stuff decide to work out their confusion the only way they know – a cheeky punch at the school gates" (Madge, 2021, 42). After the beating up incident, Madge's mother starts to work at the school to keep a close eye on her child. As Madge starts to spend more time with their mother at school, the kids start to taunt them for having their mother as their only friend. This particular situation exemplifies society's biased response

to seeing a glimpse of visibility of a queer individual's identity. Although Madge is not blatantly out with their identity, their preferences are judged and assaulted when they conflict with the existing norms. Such negative reactions to seeing a queer person being partially out at such an age might pave the way to even more adverse situations for when they actually come out with their identities.

As their mother cannot stand the beating, then the taunting, they arrange a meeting with the school. When she asks the school what they will do, they answer by saying "well maybe if your son didn't spend so much time as Cinderella in the imaginative play area, he might make friends" (Madge, 2021, 42). Despite the fact that a child is being beaten for not wanting to play football, the teacher uses Madge's being different as a reason to blame them. Regarding the teacher's reaction, Madge states that "Essentially, it's my fault. Now the year 6 lads are 10. Still kids. Their punches are a bit excusable. But that's the real punch to my stomach. What the teacher says" (Madge, 2021, 42). The teacher's statement indicates that when Madge does not hide their preferences and interests that differ from stereotypes, others feel uncomfortable and push them back to their closet. Furthermore, on their report card, the teacher states that "Robert needs to be more careful that his dramatic facial expressions don't upset some of his peers, as this will not help him maintain friendships" (Madge, 2021, 42). Again, Madge was the kid that was bullied by their peers, but they were considered to be taunting them with their facial expressions. In this example, it is seen that enacting Cinderella in an imaginative play area or having dramatic facial expressions are deemed more culpable than physically violating someone.

In these encounters, it does not seem to be normal for a child to have differing interests. It is not so much about the six-year-old lads but more about their families and the environments that they grow up in. Those kids, who bully LGBTQ+ kids for being different, usually inherit such mentality from their parents or families. Goldman states that "Our society teaches our children to take a condescending view of homosexuality from a very early age" (2008, 9). Therefore, when they get involved in act of violence with simple or severe consequences, it is the grown-ups' influence on them which causes them to act in a certain spiteful way. This is the simplest example of kids growing up in toxic environments with grown-ups who do not respect others and their preferences or choices in life.

Madge sings another song to commentate on the negative situations and their impacts upon a queer individual. While singing *Anything is Possible*, Madge changes its lyrics in order to make a point:

Then why do I still doubt? Pack up the suitcase and the hat, you are a boy. No use for that. Pack up the glitter, wig and dress. Didn't they bring me happiness? All of the treasures of my past. Shouldn't have been so bold at school, shouldn't have stood up on that stool, belting my heart out proud and strong. Who knew such things could be so wrong? People use words that cut and sting. Think of the pain your words can bring. Why be cruel when you could sing? One tiny word spoils everything. (Madge, 2021, 42)

During the song, Madge refers to the old stage props from their childhood as not only the “treasures of their past” but also as “the pieces of their heart” (Madge, 2021, 42). They simply point out that these wigs and dresses are not just things he used but they are a part of who they are, and they are what shaped them. Yet, alluding to widespread homophobia in their society, Madge states that when others see that Madge is into different stuff than ‘normal boys’ would not be interested in, they comment in such hateful ways that offend them.

It is also important to interpret Madge's grandmother who is also known as Granny Grimble as the true source of joy, hope, and love in their life. Granny Grimble supports and accepts Madge as they are from the very beginning of the play. She is one of the people who refer to Madge with their gender-neutral name assigned to them before their birth. It is possible that Granny Grimble was not familiar with the diversities in gender identities at the time. Therefore, it was pure love and acceptance towards her grandchild that made her embrace Madge as they are. It can also be said that her unconditional love, acceptance, and support encouraged Madge to be themselves and be out of their closet.

Granny Grimble is one of the biggest supporters behind Madge's childhood plays. She is not only the audience of most of Madge's childhood plays, but also the very person to make the dresses for a majority of their roles. For instance, Madge and their family spend a good amount of time looking for Maleficent costumes, yet they come home empty handed. In the following scene, Madge unwraps a present and finds out a

Maleficent dress made by Granny Grimble (2021, 30). She also makes a yellow Belle dress for Madge's *Beauty and the Beast* performance. In many of the performances, Granny Grimble plays along and takes Madge's characters and performances very seriously. During the enactment of Ariel, she interprets Madge's look by expressing that "*she is so graceful (emphasis mine)*" (Madge, 2021, 20).

As one of the seven steps to put on a successful Disney Parade which refers to raising a queer child, Madge suggests to "be like Granny Grimble" (2021, 42). Regarding Granny Grible, Madge states that "She once said, 'Charlie is the unseen star of the video.' I think we now know that role belongs to her. If I have to accredit someone for pulling me out of my rut, it's Granny Grimble. She always did" (2021, 42). As they play a video involving Granny Grimble saying, "we've had a lovely day" (2021, 42), Madge further states:

Perfect example. She'd always make everything a lovely day. She just had this instinct for when I'd be about to lose my shit and she quickly placate the situation by making everything nice and wonderful. It's a technique I need to get better at. But I urge you all, if you're ever faced with a broken bubble gun or technical difficulties or a homophobic arsehole on Twitter, just say, 'WE'VE HAD A LOVELY DAY': And to any teacher that tells you that you spend too much time as Cinderella in the imaginative play area, 'We've had a lovely day'. (2021, 42)

Granny Grimble never judges or upsets, and always appears to be joyful and lovely in a way that spreads on to the people around her. Such love and acceptance by their grandmother are two of the factors that enable Madge to have the self-esteem to be who they are today. Their parents and family are what turn this play into a story of pure love, acceptance, and happiness rather than letting the negative happenings become the centre of it.

It may not include traumatic consequences, but Madge's play positively contributes to queer visibility. On the Foreword, regarding queer, play's director Luke Sheppard states:

Queer. Like Rob, and like so many others, no longer do I run and hide from it, I celebrate it. And I believe that is what this play is about: a story of hope for all those young people who find themselves creating their own one-person show

when they feel there's no role in the world around them. To all those who would rather be. (Madge, 2021, 5)

The play shows that although there will be negative encounters, it is possible to overlook them and still be proud of one's differences and celebrate them. As a person who encountered these negativities, Madge manages to look forward and come out as nonbinary. Sheppard further states that "But importantly, this play is also for another key audience too. It's for the grown-ups. The mums, dads and guardians who are also maybe just a bit scared of [the word queer]" (Madge, 2021, 5). Madge's story is empowering because it educates families and friends to be more supportive of the LGBTQ+ members in their lives. It also shows that how such support and acceptance can positively affect the individual's life. Madge stands out as a role model for people to be more of themselves regardless of how different they are than the stereotypes.

CONCLUSION

The word queer has come a long way. At the beginning of its controversial history, queer was originally used to refer to something unusual. In time, it started to be used to belittle gay men for their preferences. However, as queer visibility increased, the word shifted from being used as a derogatory word to being a symbol of revolt against homophobia. On its rather long and controversial journey, Annamarie Jagose writes:

Once the term ‘queer’ was, at best, slang for homosexual, at worst, a term of homophobic abuse. In recent years ‘queer’ has come to be used differently, sometimes as an umbrella term for a coalition of culturally marginal sexual self-identifications and at other times to describe a nascent theoretical model which has developed out of more traditional lesbian and gay studies. (1996, 1)

Unlike many homosexual insults or slurs, it made its way to even stand up for the undesirable communities of society and became a shelter for them and the word has started to be used for referring to their non-binary identities. Yet, queer is better described by what it tries not to be rather than what it is. Mary McIntosh (1997) explains that queer is “defined more by what it is not than what it is for” (365). It aims to be excessive, pushes boundaries of the probable, questions what is perceived as normal, and calls out the inefficacies of the existing norms.

With the increasing queer visibility, many gender theorists such as Eve Sedgwick, Judith Butler, and Michel Foucault contributed to the forming queer as a theory and finally it emerged to tackle the flexibility of identity as an academic field of study. To describe queer theory, Teresa de Lauretis states that “Queer theory attempts to break down the continual use of categories and labels that stereotype and harm those who are in marginalized positions, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people” (quoted in Gedro and Mizzi, 2014, 450). De Lauretis’ coinage of the word parallels with the meaning of queer. The theory aims to cease the use of categories and labels and the harming of those who fall under the others category. Not only as a concept itself but its theory also attempted to break all sorts of categorisation of the identity. In a way, queer theory strives to free the identity from itself. It would be safe to say that it has succeeded to do so to some extent as people can come out as their true selves and slowly but surely become more visible in public with more and more awareness being raised.

The increase in queer presence empowered individuals to be involved in a coming out process for a chance to be more open and prouder of their identities. Coming out process is known as disclosing one's gender identity and preferences to their families, friends, and/or societies. This process is also referred to as coming out of the closet. The closet symbolises a person's gender identity, preferences, or beliefs. This process is one of the most important phases in a queer person's life as it grants them publicity which allows freedom. The process does not only involve being open with one's identity, but it might also involve being private with it. When a queer person decides to come out with their identity, they are referred to as out and when they choose to keep it private, they are referred to as closeted.

It is concluded that coming out exists as a result of the dominance of heterosexuality. Sedgwick states that "the closet is the defining structure for gay oppression in this century" (1990, 71). Heterosexuality is considered as the default sexual orientation, so, if a person does not come out with any specific gender identity, they are regarded as heterosexual. Therefore, LGBTQ+ people are expected to come out with their identities. Therefore, the closet is built by society which determines heterosexuality as a norm, and it amounts to an oppression for the others.

The reactions given to the coming out process vary from one environment to another. This means that the consequences of coming out might involve negative responses or actions taken against the queer people. Differing gender identities can be seen as a stigma, it may even go further to a point where these identities are seen as sickness that needs to be cured. These negative responses exist because of certain reasons. For instance, racism remains to be one of the biggest problems of the world. People with certain inherited attributes still endure hard times because of their racial background. When queer people face racism, they are doubly ostracised both because of their ethnic and gender identity. Religion is considered to be another reason as to why LGBTQ+ people feel oppressed about coming out. In most beliefs, having same-sex desire is considered a sin therefore, religious groups or organisations are not very tolerant of LGBTQ+ people. These beliefs do not acknowledge or accept the nonbinary identities. Such identities are either chastised or cast out their societies. This ultimately force queer people to find it safer to remain in their closets. In such cases, queer people long for a continuous support as their coming out is a process that takes place throughout their lives.

Family support is one of the most important sources of support. When nonbinary individuals lack such support, they end up having low self-esteem and feeling insecure due to their identities not being accepted even by their own family. This might also result in one's losing their family. Hence, they might feel forced to stay in their closets rather than losing their families.

After the change in queer's meaning as a word and emergence of queer theory, literature plays its part to contribute to raise queer awareness and visibility. Literary works involve real life characters and happening as well as the fictional ones. This enables the community to find a glimpse of themselves in such works, appeal to a broader audience, and make the audience familiar with queer characters and settings. It allows the reader or the audience to witness the historical background of LGBTQ+ community, its ordeals, and achievements.

Theatre appears as one of the most important literary devices to examine problems and reach large masses. It allows queers to be open with their identities and take their place on the stage among the public. Theatre begins to play an important role in providing the necessary interest, value, and visibility to queer identities. Over time, the queer's presence in theatre paves the way for LGBTQ+ theatre actors, producers, directors, and playwrights to come out. In this direction, theatre contributes and continues to contribute to queer awareness, visibility and coming out. The presence of the queer increases radically not only on stage but also off stage.

In this study, two contemporary British plays, *Nine Lives* by Zodwa Nyoni and *My Son's a Queer (But What Can You Do?)* by Rob Madge are examined to provide a better insight into the consequences of coming out. Nyoni's *Nine Lives* revolves around an African asylum seeker who recently flees his country and migrates to the United Kingdom. Ishmael is a closeted gay individual who struggles to come out to his parents and friends. His struggles come from the fact that his country is strongly homophobic which does not tolerate same-sex practices or nonbinary identities.

Ishmael knows about his identity and his preferences from a young age but decides to keep it private to himself. From the moment he realises that he is different, he strives to come out, but he gets scared by the fact that he will be stigmatised and seen as inferior. Therefore, he finds escaping his country as the only solution to be himself. Ishmael's

story exemplifies the struggles that queer people endure because of their families and their religious beliefs. Ishmael shares his take on how his parents would react if he came out to them. Although there is a part of him that hopes his parents would take it well, he acknowledges that they would not be able to cope with the fact that their son is gay.

As his parents' understanding of most things are shaped by their religion, Ishmael thinks that they would not accept him as he is. He claims that he would die on the spot the moment his father finds out about his son's preferences. In such family environments, queer identities are seen as a disgrace by their families. Rather than trying to understand their children, parents tend to worry about how their societies would regard them for having a queer child. When it comes his mother, Ishmael claims that she would also die at the spot, but she would be resurrected to take him to church to cleanse her son. In cases where a family is not educated about nonbinary identities, they think that such differences are sicknesses that need to be cured.

Ishmael believes that he could have a better life in a different country, so he escapes. However, his struggles continue even in the United Kingdom. As he is dispersed to Leeds, he appears at the Home Office to get his claim. To his surprise, he is asked obscene questions to prove that he is gay which ultimately leads him to leave the place without getting a claim to maintain his dignity. This leads Ishmael to find himself in an awkward dilemma. He was first forced to keep his identity a secret back in his country. He is then asked to come out by revealing experiences that are private.

Ishmael's ethnic background also becomes one of the reasons why he is troubled by others. He gets bullied by a boy and his dog and ends up having his possessions stolen. As a person of colour and a refugee, Ishmael is looked down upon. He feels as if he is not person but a possession of the country. It is concluded that these negative encounters cause an internal homophobia for Ishmael. The fact that he grew up feeling that he must keep his identity private and was humiliated the moment he came out in the Home Office causes him to have a minority stress. From then and on, Ishmael tends to think that everyone will judge him because he is different. He feels like an inferior even when he is at a church among other African refugees.

Nyoni's play sheds light on the bleak experiences of a queer individual who took refuge in a different country and illustrates what kind of troubles these individuals face.

They endure discrimination both because of their gender and ethnic identities. Because of their country, religion, beliefs, values and/or family, LGBTQ+ individuals may have to live within borders without being allowed to settle anywhere. There are also cases where attempts to open up are unsuccessful. Although Ishmael is completely worn out, he does not give up on his strife to be somebody. The title of the play, *Nine Lives* also seems to be related to Ishmael's durability. Despite going through such hard encounters, Ishmael manages to stand up and look forward. As the phrase is about one's ability to survive through devastating experiences, it is possible to link it to Ishmael's outstanding strife to continue maintaining himself despite the challenging situations. Such tough situations, which are also exemplified in Nyoni's play, show that the actions of coming out do not always result positively, but despite the negativities, the struggle of individuals to live freely with their nonbinary selves and preferences continue.

In Rob Madge's play *My Son's a Queer (But What Can You Do?)*, a different and a rather more positive perspective is provided. The mainstream plays that tackle subject of nonbinary people often end up in traumatic experiences. Although such plays are quite important for disclosing the struggles of queer people and raising awareness about them, Madge's optimistic perspective plays a vital part in queer visibility. Such plays not only empower the queer individuals to be prouder about their differences but also provides an alternative perspective for the families, friends, and non-queer people to understand, accept and live with a queer person in their lives while maintaining the hope.

The title of the play can easily be regarded as just another family drama where the playwright appeals to the difficulties in families with queer members and makes suggestions on them. However, Madge's family appear to be extremely embracing towards their identity. Starting from their gender reveal party, their family continuously show that their child's gender does not matter long as they are happy. Rather than being a part of the societal gender norms, they refuse to learn the gender of their child before their birth and associate their gender with rainbow colours.

The acceptance shown by Madge's family proves how effective family support can be in a queer person's life. While growing up, Madge's family supports them to act however they want. During their childhood performances, Madge dresses up as the female characters using their dresses and wigs. In fact, their grandmother makes most of their

dresses that they use. This ultimately contributes to Madge's self-esteem and confidence. Growing up in such an embrative environment enables Madge to be at peace with themselves. The importance of lack of family support can be seen in Ishmael's example in *Nine Lives*. In their study conducted on family support's effects on LGBTQ+ youth, McCormick and Baldrige conclude that "LGBTQ youth who are not out to their family report that the lack of acceptance was the most overwhelming obstacle in their lives (2019, 33). Ishmael's internalised homophobia and lack of self-esteem mainly stem from the fact that he was never taught to be proud of his differences. Instead, his differences would either damage his parents or break his bonds with them. Through such opposite point of views, it is seen that family support positively contributes to a queer person's life.

Presenting glimpses from their past through an old television and at the same time recreating these sections on stage, Madge performs every aspect of their queer identity in detail. In their videos, Madge stands out with their queer identity that cannot be limited to certain labels. They feel strange about the societal gender norms such as not being able to find dresses in the boys' section of clothing stores. Madge's younger aspirations and inclinations differ from those of their peers. Madge enjoys wearing wigs and dresses and performing theatrical plays in the living room of their home, while their peers enjoy activities such as football, computer games, playing outside. The fluidity in Madge's identity and preferences do not succumb to the societal norms. Instead, they dress up and act in a way that simply makes them happy.

Although they were raised in such an encompassing environment, Madge and their family have their fair share of negative encounters. As a kid, Madge is assaulted by 6-year-old boys simply because they do not want to play football. When their parents make an appeal to the school, the teacher points out to Madge's preferences being the reason why they are not welcomed among other kids. To explain how one's gender is being controlled, Butler asserts that gender is "so taken for granted at the same time that it was violently policed. It was assumed either to be a natural manifestation of sex or a cultural constant that no human agency could hope to revise" (1990, xix-xx). Butler's statement can also be supported by Foucault's claim that sexuality is controlled and shaped by regimes of power (1978, 11). The understanding behind controlling gender is that there is only the gender binary, and people are expected to obey the set of rules given

to each gender. When one is to go rogue, they were immediately corrected. Madge's case is a great example of how members of many societies deal with seeing the queerness of a person or their coming out. Not only that such differences are not appreciated, but queer people are also forced to remain closeted. The fact that Madge is not into what other boys are into is seen as a result of their parents being pushy. However, it does not seem likely that what he does is Madge's own preference. To avoid judging responses, Madge and their family use a sister excuse to buy the dresses and wigs Madge is interested in. Again, despite the fact that Madge's queerness is visible among their family, they are forced to stay closeted in larger society.

Madge's perspective stands out as they choose to focus on positive happenings rather than letting the negative ones that shape who they are. They acknowledge the negative happenings but choose to not let them interfere with the way they want to live. Regarding the negative incidents that they encountered, Judith Butler writes:

I grew up understanding something of the violence of gender norms: an uncle incarcerated for his anatomically anomalous body, deprived of family and friends, living out his days in an 'institute' in the Kansas prairies; gay cousins forced to leave their homes because of their sexuality, real and imagined; my own tempestuous coming out at the age of 16; and a subsequent adult landscape of lost jobs, lovers, and homes. All of this subjected me to strong and scarring condemnation but, luckily, did not prevent me from pursuing pleasure and insisting on a legitimating recognition for my sexual life. (1990, xix)

In this regard, Butler and Madge share the same understanding when it comes to dealing with negativities. They do not allow the pessimistic people or happening prevent them from getting what they want. The play also shows that despite the negative encounters, it is still possible to find a way for one to be who they are. As one of the people who struggled through certain parts of their lives, Madge manages to look forward and come out as nonbinary. It bears importance because Madge appears as a role model to those who strive to come out. It is also important because their story educates families and friends to be more supportive of the LGBTQ+ members in their lives.

Both plays provide a different perspective on a queer person's life. Madge's story provides a glimpse of how almost *normal* a queer person's life can be when it is supported

by their family. It is seen that the support provided by families positively contributes to queer people living their lives as themselves. Despite having difficulties in their lives, they learn to embrace themselves and proudly come out to their societies after being able to overcome the negative encounters. In Nyoni's story, however, we witness a rather negative portrayal of a queer life. It is seen that a lack of family support can have damaging effects on a queer person's life. Throughout the play, Ishmael claims that he always wanted to come out to his parents but as he was aware that their reaction would not be positive and embracing, he backs out and decides to remain in the closet. This is because Ishmael grows up in a country where differentiations in identity are not appreciated. His country is homophobic and coming out with nonbinary identity has severe consequences. Unlike Madge, Ishmael lacks the family support and always endures difficulties before and after coming out. Therefore, he feels inferior in a way that he even hesitates to embrace himself among people like him. However, despite his ordeals, he still strives to be himself which is the reason why he escapes his country in the first place. It is concluded that individuals from different parts of the world continue to embrace and accept their own identities, and get those around them to accept. However, being supported by their families and friends allows them to come out. Even though they may experience difficulties along the way, such reinforcement provided by their environments enable them to look forward.

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