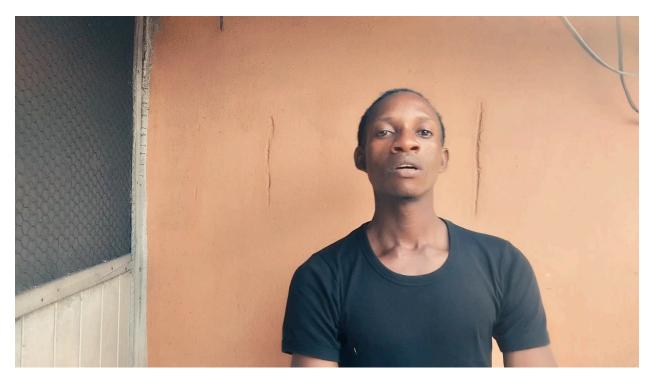




**First Prize** 



Suffer In Silence By Jon Kote, Nigeria

Jon Kote, a queer poet based in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, utilizes poetry as a tool for fostering social change. His work delves into themes such as politics, climate change, and sexuality. Jon seeks solace in the embrace of words and the melodic cadence of poetry. Connect with him on Instagram @jon\_kote.

## **SUFFER IN SILENCE**

Let me show you how I wear my pearls I wear them like a long string of shiny silence on my neck So the world can see my pain but not feel it So the world can admire from a distance The beauty of a buried being A free bird that cannot sing

On this continent, The ultimate prize is what you pay for being gay If you are queer You cannot be here Here, Love lives in jail 14 years in Nigeria, a lifetime in Uganda And a long list of dishonourable mentions in many black nations We say The gays are the end of days The last plague before humanity is wiped away So we numb our heart and rake the gays into dungeons of pain

We mob them in their parties, hound them in their houses And when we can't find a flimsy excuse to maim them, we chain them We plant, in their brains, shame and water it with a mother's love And watch it flourish into a fortress where they perpetually suffer in silence