

Of Gay Struggle and Resistance in Africa: Contesting Queer Politics in Kenya and Uganda

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ABSTRACT

End of cold war in Africa and the widening of freedom of media, press, rise of international and local NGOs, increasingly sophisticated tourism industry, widespread use of the internet and social media as well as trade liberalisation has produced a globalisation in Africa which in turn has accelerated internationalisation of the sexual rights and identities, resuscitated women's movement, and increased demands for basic equality, and above all escalated new sexual orientation in many urban areas of Africa. Interestingly, in tune to these changes, the African urban youth have in turn deployed music and clothing styles in order to form new subcultural youth identities which are seen as acts of resistance against a dominant culture. Today, sexual relationships are being socially constructed as an appropriate expression of intimacy, but also as a statement about a particular kind of modern identity. In this paper, we intend to view globalisation as one of the most powerful forces shaping the modern world and a key idea explaining the transition of the human society into the third millennium. People consider globalisation a tidal wave sweeping over the world. Consequently, today one can talk differently on what it means to be male and female in modern African contexts; because there are different ways in which sexualities have been constructed, performed, resisted, transformed and transgressed; thereby producing tensions between traditions and modernities.

INTRODUCTION

It's commonly agreed that since end of Cold War, in the 1990s, Africa has experienced a marked decay in human security, from increasing of petty crime to the advent of ethnic clashes. The local and international media were often preoccupied with the phenomenon of 'rising ... crime and insecurity' [3] yet a silent revolution and underground socially transformation was concurrently, taking place-that of sexual revolution.

In addition, the powerful forces of the end of Cold War, demographic transformations such as rising age at marriage and increasing levels of urban migration played a part in changing the nature of male-female relationships in Africa. So that then, sexual relationships were being socially constructed as an appropriate expression of intimacy, but also as a statement about a particular kind of modern identity. [4] In South Africa, a slogan was hatched in tune to these changes: *it is fashionable to be gay*. Globalisation therefore has been widely viewed as one of the most powerful forces shaping the modern world and a key idea explaining the transition of the human society into the third millennium. People consider globalisation a tidal wave sweeping over the world. [5]

Globalisation has had an impact in all spheres of life, including the construction, regulation and imagination of sexuality and gender. We suggest some of the ways in which this impact is occurring, primarily in Kenya and Uganda, with some emphasis on questions of queer sexuality, identity, and human and sexual rights. In issues of sexuality, as in other spheres, globalisation seems to increase inequalities, not only, having a liberatory but an also oppressive influence. In summary, therefore, collective identities of urban youth are shaped by – and expressed through– music, dance, fashion, art, and other cultural forms. [6]

Through, globalisation the youth culture has become a global phenomenon. Young people are growing up in a

world in which goods, capital, technology, information, ideas, and people move swiftly across borders. With the rapid expansion of fast food restaurants, homogenous shopping malls, and young people who dress alike and listen to the same music, city centers throughout the world increasingly resemble each other.

GLOBALISATION OF RIGHTS AND TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM

Not long ago, a 'simple' Kenyan woman walked right into the middle or centre-stage of international controversy at a Beijing plus 5. Caught up on CNN camera carrying a placard to be *lesbian* is a right' demonstrating on Gay-lesbian rights-Her stories went viral in most of the African media. The news reached the floor of the Kenyan Parliament that Kenyans were in the forefront campaigning for this unconventional form of sexuality. This did not only end here but signalled a new dawn of freedom and liberty especially to African Feminist movements. As Njambi says:

Women are clearly radically disrupting the male domination that operates in their everyday lives. While...their stories ...begin with land and struggles over material resources, ... have ended up being stories of love, commitment, children, sexual freedom, vulnerability, and empowerment. ..the implosion of all these things make these women's stories unique and all the more compelling to feminists who are constantly searching for unique practices of feminism that resemble, but are not engineered by, western feminism.[\[7\]](#)..

The inspiration of the above incidence can directly be attributed to the rise of international movements. International NGOs and transnational coalitions have been the central advocates and implementers of a politics of reproductive health and rights, and to a somewhat lesser degree, of sexual health and rights.[\[8\]](#)

Since, during the 1990s, these concepts became mainstreamed. Although with the exception of Africa Sub Sahara, many authors held that In the mid- to late-1980s, women's movements in the South had began to mobilize in their own ways and out of their own situations around reproductive health and rights issues, a framework firmly linking these issues to both development issues and human rights emerged.[\[9\]](#) But this suggestion does not reject the fact that concepts of reproductive and sexual health/rights have been mainly Western phenomenon. While it is true –according to Petchesky - that ideas are not the property of any one nation or culture” it is common knowledge that these ideas have originated from the west.

In addition, the 1980s saw the rise of women's groups in both the South and North who argued for a rethinking of international population initiatives based on reproductive health rather than fertility control. The result was a language of reproductive health which maintained a focus on medical intervention over systemic changes, and reinforced the construction of women solely in terms of their reproductive and gender roles.[\[10\]](#) Later on women argued for a fundamental rethinking of population programmes to shift the focus away from fertility regulation to the empowerment of women. They argued for the need to explicitly recognize women's sexual and reproductive rights.[\[11\]](#)

So that the, in the 1990s, sexual and reproductive rights became the subject of vigorous debates at the UN's world conferences, such as the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) in Beijing. The Cairo Conference was a notable departure from its two predecessors, in number of ways for one it was a large international event, attracting intense media coverage. Secondly, the Cairo Conference involved the participation of a large number of nongovernmental organisation (NGOs), and particularly, feminist and women's groups from a range of geographic areas.

The Platform for Action, which was adopted by 189 delegations at the Beijing Women's Conference, reaffirmed the Cairo Programme's definition of reproductive health and advances women's wider interests. Paragraph 96 states:

The human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. Equal relationships between women and men in matters of sexual relations and reproduction, including full respect for the integrity of the person, require mutual respect, consent and shared responsibility for sexual

behaviour and its consequences. [\[12\]](#)

It is therefore not surprising that, five years after the FWCW, sexual and reproductive rights were once again at the center of the UN's "Beijing Plus Five" progress review, held in New York between March and June 2000. Beijing Plus Five gathered 180 government delegations and over 2,000 women's groups to discuss progress and obstacles in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, and to decide on concrete steps to accelerate implementation. [\[13\]](#)

As in Beijing, debates quickly focused on health and sexuality, and on women's roles in their communities and families. A few conservative Governments-Africa included-and off course, led by the Holy See, sought to insert into the final agreements a vision of women as mothers, to the exclusion of their other roles and aspirations. They also promoted amendments supporting their concept of the "ideal" family i.e. the nuclear family based on a man and woman united by marriage, and their children. North American right-wing groups actively lobbied for this agenda inside and outside the negotiating rooms. In March, the right-wing group "Real Women of Canada" even obtained UN passes for 30 Franciscan monks, thus providing delegates with the curious spectacle of bearded "Real Women" in cassocks and sandals wearing buttons that proclaimed the virtue of motherhood. [\[14\]](#)

Many government delegations, as well as women's groups, fought hard against these positions. They argued that the nuclear family is not the norm in many parts of the world, and that many families are neither safe, particularly for young girls, nor models of gender equality. They also pointed out that, without full control of their sexuality and reproductive life, women cannot realize the full range of their human rights. In Beijing, the issue of sexual orientation remained a subtext in the discussion on sexual rights, since so many countries—particularly the African bloc—would have withdrawn their support for the language of sexual rights if the phrase had been explicitly interpreted as including freedom from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Nevertheless, Paragraph 96, construed broadly, can be understood to allow this interpretation.

Further, the international consensus has gone as far in its definition of reproductive health as including a statement that “people are able to have a safe and satisfying sex life.” [\[15\]](#) Sexual pleasure for its own sake, however, is not yet on the international agenda. HERA, one of the international NGOs which lobbied for the sexual rights terminology in Cairo and Beijing, had provided a definition of sexual rights that reached much farther than simply protecting women from harm but toward creating the conditions in which sexuality and sexual experience can be positive and pleasurable. Rather than seeking a commitment to sexual rights solely to avoid discrimination or prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, HERA argued that sexual rights are valuable in their own right.

In their definition, “Sexual rights are a fundamental element of human rights. They encompass the right to experience a pleasurable sexuality, which is essential in and of itself and, at the same time, is a fundamental vehicle of communication and love between people. Sexual rights include the right to liberty and autonomy in the responsible exercise of sexuality.” This was further interpreted to include having satisfying sex, with anyone regardless of sex and being homosexual in South Africa, was in tune to exercising those rights. [\[16\]](#)

This recognition provided an entry point for promoting actions focusing specifically on the sexual dimension of sexual rights—on building a new culture of sexuality that allows an individual the right of choice, expression, and pleasure. No wonder, in South Africa, there is full legal recognition of gay and lesbian identity, and gay and lesbian groups have mobilized around a human rights discourse. Recently, the economic discrimination faced by gay and lesbian people has been recognized, leading to attempts towards redistribution—for example, to grant same sex partners the same medical and life insurance benefits as heterosexual married. [\[17\]](#)

Finally, the year 2003 went down in history as the year when women's sexual and reproductive health and rights were put irrevocably onto the pan-African agenda. This was the largest gathering so far of policy makers, researchers, health care providers, activists, academics, lawyers and advocates working on women's health and fights from 22 African countries. They came together in Johannesburg for a conference celebrating African women's fights to healthy bodies, minds and souls.

The African Women's Sexual & Reproductive Health & Rights Conference: "Prosperity through

Empowerment", was organised by Amanitare, a London based Pan-African partnership working towards the recognition of African women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and fights as fundamental to their civil and human rights. It refined and redefined women's sexual rights which *inter alia* read:

The right to sexual autonomy, sexual integrity, and safety of the sexual body. This right involves the ability to make autonomous decisions about one's sexual life within a context of one's own personal and social ethics. It also encompasses control and enjoyment of our own bodies free from torture, mutilation and violence of any sort. Women's body should not be the only arena for family planning; The right to sexual privacy. This involves the right for individual decisions and behaviours about intimacy as long as they do not intrude on the sexual rights of others; The right to sexual pleasure. Sexual pleasure, including autoeroticism, is a course of physical, psychological, intellectual and spiritual wellbeing. This should be achieved regardless of marital status, or age with or without a partner and The right to emotional sexual expression. Sexual expression is more than erotic pleasure or sexual acts. Individuals have a right to express their sexuality through communication, touch, emotional expression and love etc.

The resolutions of the conference in part read:

We the women and men of Africa gathered at the 1st Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights conference February 4th to 4th, 2003 organised by AMANITARE, in consideration of the fact that next year will be 10 years after the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo, reaffirm our strong support for the ICPD and the ICPD+5 agreements in their totality and original form....Furthermore, in order to successfully meet the commitments outlined in the ICPD Programme of Action, and the ICPD + Five priority actions, we call on the Bush Administration to use the funding they have pledged for HIV / AIDS prevention to implement the above agenda.[\[18\]](#)

The conference participants were *inter alia* asked to lobby for the implementation of these rights to their respective governments. The conference proceedings were covered extensively in both local and international media. Today the subject of homosexuality can be viewed as central to politicians, journalists and academics. Whether gender roles and categories are natural or whether they are social creations, sex and sexuality have followed gender issues in moving from the private to the public and political spheres. Historically, the debate has become robust in contemporary Kenya. From the political circles, politicians as well as spiritual leaders have out rightly opposed this form of sexual identity.

From the above examples therefore, we can see that globalization has been characterized by increased interconnectedness and interdependence among countries, has played a significant role in shaping cultural, political, and social dynamics worldwide. One of the notable impacts of globalization has been on the spread and advocacy of LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) rights. In Africa, the influence of globalization and international movements has been both profound and contentious. This essay explores how globalization and international movements have contributed to the spread of LGBTQ rights in Africa, highlighting the complex interplay between global norms and local cultural, political, and religious contexts.

Globalization has facilitated the rapid dissemination of ideas, norms, and values across borders. This has been particularly evident in the realm of human rights, including LGBTQ rights. International organizations, such as the United Nations and various human rights NGOs, have played a pivotal role in promoting LGBTQ rights globally. These organizations advocate for the recognition and protection of LGBTQ individuals' rights through treaties, declarations, and international forums. For instance, the Yogyakarta Principles, established in 2006, outline a set of international principles relating to sexual orientation and gender identity, providing a global framework for LGBTQ rights.[\[19\]](#)

The advent of the internet and social media has further accelerated the spread of LGBTQ rights by providing platforms for advocacy, information sharing, and community building. Online platforms allow LGBTQ activists in Africa to connect with global movements, access resources, and gain visibility for their causes.[\[20\]](#) This digital connectivity has empowered local LGBTQ communities, enabling them to organize more effectively and to draw international attention to their struggles.

International movements and advocacy groups have been instrumental in supporting LGBTQ rights in Africa.

Organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and ILGA (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association) have actively campaigned against discriminatory laws and practices in African countries.^[21] They provide critical support in the form of legal assistance, advocacy, and funding to local LGBTQ groups. These international alliances help to amplify the voices of African LGBTQ activists and to exert pressure on governments to uphold human rights standards.^[22]

In addition to advocacy groups, foreign governments and international bodies often link development aid and diplomatic relations to human rights, including LGBTQ rights. For instance, countries like the United States and members of the European Union have, at times, conditioned aid on the protection of LGBTQ rights.^[23] This approach, while controversial, underscores the influence of global norms on national policies.

Despite the positive impact of globalization and international movements on the spread of LGBTQ rights, significant challenges and resistance remain. Many African societies are deeply rooted in conservative cultural and religious values that view homosexuality and non-binary gender identities as taboo. This cultural resistance is often reinforced by political leaders who exploit anti-LGBTQ sentiments to garner political support.^[24] The imposition of Western norms and values related to LGBTQ rights is frequently perceived as a form of neocolonialism, provoking backlash from local communities and leaders who argue for the preservation of traditional values. This resistance can manifest in the form of stringent anti-LGBTQ laws, such as Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act and Nigeria's Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, which impose harsh penalties on LGBTQ individuals and their allies.^[25]

POLITICS OF 'UNCOMMON' SEXUAL INTIMACIES

While globalization and international advocacy have sought to advance LGBTQ rights, local resistance rooted in traditional values and political conservatism has been significant. In this section, we explore the political landscape surrounding LGBTQ rights in East Africa, focusing on the influence of cultural norms, the role of international pressure, and the responses of East African governments.

East Africa, like many parts of Africa, is deeply rooted in conservative cultural and religious values that often view LGBTQ identities as alien and immoral. These values are reinforced by influential religious institutions and leaders who vehemently oppose LGBTQ rights. In Uganda, for instance, religious groups have been at the forefront of anti-LGBTQ rhetoric, which has significantly influenced public opinion and policy. The passage of the Anti-Homosexuality Act in 2014, which initially included a death penalty provision, exemplifies the extent of this influence.^[26]

In Kenya, cultural resistance to LGBTQ rights is similarly entrenched. Despite some progress in recognizing the rights of LGBTQ individuals, such as a landmark 2019 High Court ruling that decriminalized same-sex relationships, societal attitudes remain largely hostile.² This hostility is often perpetuated by political leaders who exploit anti-LGBTQ sentiments for political gain.

The Ugandan Purge

In Uganda, Colonialism brought not only Western legal systems but also Christian missionaries, who played a crucial role in framing homosexuality as immoral and unnatural. Christian teachings on sexual morality were embraced by Ugandan converts and have had a lasting impact on the country's political and cultural views. By the time Uganda gained independence in 1962, these moral codes had become embedded in its legal framework, a legacy that continues to influence Ugandan society and politics to this day.^[27] In the years following independence, Uganda's political leadership rarely addressed homosexuality directly. However, as political instability grew, particularly during the regimes of Idi Amin (1971–1979) and Milton Obote (1980–1985), issues of morality became tools for consolidating power. Homosexuality began to be framed as part of broader Western decadence that undermined African values, although it did not yet occupy the central role it would come to play in Ugandan politics later.^[28]

The emergence of President Yoweri Museveni on the political scene in the mid-1980s marked a turning point in the politicization of homosexuality. Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM) initially focused on

stabilizing the country, but as his rule extended into the 1990s and 2000s, political opposition to his government grew. Museveni began to rely on cultural and religious conservatism to maintain his political base, portraying homosexuality as a Western import designed to corrupt Uganda's moral fabric. This narrative resonated with many Ugandans, who were influenced by decades of religious indoctrination against homosexuality.[\[29\]](#) The 21st century saw the anti-homosexuality movement gain momentum, culminating in the introduction of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill in 2009. Evangelical Christian groups, both local and foreign, were instrumental in pushing for this legislation. The bill proposed harsh penalties for same-sex relations, including the death penalty for "aggravated homosexuality," which included cases involving HIV-positive individuals or minors. While the bill was passed in 2014, it was annulled on a technicality by the Constitutional Court later that year.[\[30\]](#)

The bill's reintroduction in 2023, now with significant public and political support, reinforced the state's stance on homosexuality. The 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act maintained the provision of the death penalty for aggravated homosexuality and included new measures aimed at criminalizing the promotion or advocacy of LGBTQ+ rights. By framing homosexuality as both a legal and moral issue, the government effectively silenced dissent and consolidated Museveni's rule amidst growing international criticism.[\[31\]](#) The role of religion in shaping Uganda's politics around homosexuality cannot be overstated. The influence of both Catholic and Protestant churches, alongside the growing presence of evangelical Christianity, has been pivotal in shaping public discourse. Religious leaders often speak out against homosexuality, portraying it as an affront to both Ugandan culture and Christian values. This alignment between the state and religious institutions has created a powerful alliance that sustains the political repression of LGBTQ+ individuals.[\[32\]](#)

At the same time, homosexuality is often portrayed as a cultural threat, with leaders emphasizing the idea that it is a foreign import incompatible with African traditions. This notion, despite evidence of same-sex relations in pre-colonial Africa, has been used to justify harsh legal measures. The portrayal of homosexuality as un-African has been instrumental in garnering domestic support for anti-LGBTQ+ laws.[\[33\]](#)

Uganda's anti-homosexuality laws have drawn sharp criticism from the international community. Human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have consistently condemned Uganda's legal framework, arguing that it violates international human rights standards. Western governments, particularly in Europe and North America, have threatened or imposed sanctions on Uganda in response to its laws. Despite this, Museveni has used the backlash to further consolidate his narrative of resisting Western neo-colonialism, framing LGBTQ+ rights as part of a broader foreign agenda that threatens Uganda's sovereignty.[\[34\]](#)

The politicization of homosexuality has also had far-reaching effects on Uganda's broader political landscape. The government's aggressive stance on LGBTQ+ rights has contributed to a wider climate of repression. Civil society organizations, opposition politicians, and journalists who criticize the government's stance often face intimidation, harassment, or legal repercussions. Thus, the anti-homosexuality laws are part of a larger strategy of authoritarian control that limits freedom of expression and civil liberties more generally.[\[35\]](#)

The issue of homosexuality in Uganda, is deeply intertwined with colonial legacies, religious influences, and political power dynamics. The Ugandan government, particularly under Museveni, has effectively used homosexuality as a political tool to consolidate power and reinforce cultural and religious conservatism. While this strategy has garnered domestic support, it has also led to significant international condemnation and raised serious human rights concerns.

The Pan African Queer

The global movement for LGBTQ rights has put considerable pressure on East African governments to conform to international human rights standards. Organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) have been vocal in their condemnation of anti-LGBTQ laws and practices in the region. These organizations provide critical support to local LGBTQ activists and advocate for policy changes through international forums and diplomatic channels. However, the pressure from international actors is often met with accusations of neo-colonialism. Many East African leaders argue that LGBTQ rights are a Western imposition that threatens traditional values and societal norms.[\[36\]](#) This narrative has been particularly potent in Uganda, where President Yoweri

Museveni has framed LGBTQ advocacy as an external threat to national sovereignty and cultural integrity.^[37]

The responses of East African governments to LGBTQ rights are shaped by a combination of internal and external factors. In Uganda, the government has adopted a hardline stance, enacting and enforcing stringent anti-LGBTQ laws. The Anti-Homosexuality Act of 2014, although later annulled on procedural grounds, reflects the government's alignment with conservative religious and cultural sentiments.^[38] Despite international outcry, the Ugandan government continues to resist efforts to advance LGBTQ rights, viewing such efforts as incompatible with national values.

In contrast, Kenya's approach has been somewhat more progressive but still fraught with challenges. The 2019 High Court decision to decriminalize same-sex relationships marked a significant legal victory for LGBTQ activists. However, enforcement of this ruling and broader societal acceptance remain problematic. Political leaders often adopt ambivalent or contradictory positions, balancing international expectations with local opposition.^[39]

Tanzania, under the leadership of President John Magufuli, saw a marked increase in anti-LGBTQ rhetoric and actions, including raids on LGBTQ organizations and arrests of individuals based on their sexual orientation.^[40] This crackdown was justified by the government as a means of upholding moral values, despite widespread international condemnation. Local LGBTQ activists and civil society organizations play a crucial role in advocating for rights and protections. These groups work under challenging conditions, often facing harassment, threats, and violence. In Kenya, organizations like the National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (NGLHRC) have been instrumental in legal advocacy and public education efforts.^[41] These organizations leverage international support to bolster their activities and to bring international attention to their causes.

In Uganda, Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG) has been at the forefront of LGBTQ advocacy, despite operating in an extremely hostile environment. The organization's efforts to challenge the Anti-Homosexuality Act and to provide support to LGBTQ individuals are critical components of the broader struggle for rights.^[42]

In November 1994, Kenya deported an Australian homosexual who worked at a hotel in Lamu. The Immigration officials said the man was told to leave so that this act will *to protect him from the angry people of Lamu*. The local authorities there explained thus:

we condemn homosexual activities.... Homosexuality is prohibited under our country's laws and is morally unacceptable in our society, ... we shall not allow these people to come and teach our people bad manners.^[43]

In 1995 the Kenyan president President Daniel arap Moi claimed that "words like lesbianism and homosexuality do not exist in African languages"^[44] in 1998 he publicly denounced homosexuals by saying that: *Kenya has no room or time for homosexuals and lesbians...Homosexuality is against African norms and traditions, and even in religion it is considered a great sin,*^[45] Again in 1999 President Daniel arap Moi joined the already growing list of African leaders to attack gays, quoting from the newspaper:

...homosexuality is a "scourge" that goes against Christian teachings and African traditions...Kenyans should guard against "dangerous practices" such as homosexuality...It is not right that a man should go with another man or a woman with another woman. It is against African tradition and Biblical teachings.... I will not shy away from warning Kenyans against the dangers of the scourge."

On 3 October 1999, it was reported that a 24 year-old Kenyan man was taken into protective custody at the instigation of the District Administrator, because of the danger of being lynched, after it became known that he planned to "marry" another man. The chief of police of Lamu, who was providing the protective custody, commented that if the allegations were true, the young man would be prosecuted. The young man had denied the allegations.^[46] A recent 2006 report alluded to the fact that

Kenya's idyllic coastline of white sands and turquoise waters belies an alarming child sex industry, driven by widespread acceptance and even approval of the vice". The report went on to say" Anal sex represented 12 percent of all sex acts, and 30 percent of sex acts with Italian men involved anal sex, while no condom was used during almost a third of all penetrative sex acts."^[47]

In my view the widening of the rights debate and the opening of the democratic space in Africa, after the end of the Cold War, has provided an opportunity for many African to renegotiate different sexualities in different ways, this has often been supported by international rights movements in the west but opposed by religious and political leaders. The issue of homosexuality has excited deep and often extreme reactions in Africa. For instance, with the fall of the KANU regime in 2002, Kenya's gays and lesbians were hopeful the new government of President Mwai Kibaki will herald the beginning of acceptance. After decades of repression Kenya's gay community is mostly closeted, but a growing gay rights movement is expressing confidence in the reforms announced this week by Kibaki, including a new constitution which guarantees basic human rights.

Kenyan gay rights group Galebitra says it does not expect the constitution to include specific references to gays but the group's co-ordinator Jeremy Mirie said he believed basic human rights protections would be interpreted as including sexual minorities. it will give his group a pipeline to advocate on lesbian and gay issues.

Mirie said he believed that Kibaki would keep his promises to liberalize the country citing pressure from IMF, World Bank and other bodies in the industrialized world. He said that "External pressure from [GLBT] organizations outside Kenya will help give voice to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered community within Kenya." [\[48\]](#)

However, in 2005, The United Nations Human Rights Committee wrapped up consideration of Kenya's second periodic report on compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Tuesday, pushing Kenya to legalize abortion and homosexuality.[\[49\]](#) Roman Wieruszewski, the UN 'expert' from Poland, expressed concern that the country considered homosexuality an unnatural act and had enacted laws to that effect. He asked, "Does the country consider this to be inconsistent with the Covenant's non-discrimination clauses?" Wieruszewski was supported in his charge by Michael O'Flaherty the UN 'expert' from Ireland who, according to a UN press release, "was also concerned with the issue of prejudice regarding homosexuality and asked what was being done to address them."

Today, gay culture is spreading around the world and it is becoming one of the most popular export products of in Africa, it was recently when a popular aphorism was printed in T-shirts in South Africa that "it is modern to be gay"? as such media and sex tourism men all over the world become acquainted with western gay lifestyles. Travel books and tourist guides help to create such an international gay culture. Certainly, queer globalisation is taking place.

Queer and the Domino Effects: From Cape Town to Tunisia

The struggle for queer rights in Africa is often characterized by significant regional variations, influenced by a complex interplay of cultural, religious, and political factors. Despite these challenges, there has been a gradual, albeit uneven, spread of LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) rights across the continent. This phenomenon can be understood through the lens of the "domino effect," where progress in one country sparks movements and legislative changes in neighboring countries. This essay explores the dynamics of queer rights in Africa, examining how the domino effect operates and the factors that facilitate or hinder this process.

The domino effect, in the context of social and political change, refers to a situation where an event in one country causes similar events in neighboring countries, leading to a chain reaction. In terms of queer rights, this effect can be seen when legal victories, social acceptance, or increased visibility in one nation inspire or influence movements in other nations. This effect is driven by various factors, including transnational advocacy networks, regional human rights bodies, and the interconnectedness brought about by globalization.

Queer rights in Africa are marked by stark regional differences. South Africa is often cited as a beacon of progress for LGBTQ rights on the continent, having enshrined protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation in its constitution and legalizing same-sex marriage in 2006. This legal framework provides a model for other African nations and has had a significant influence on queer activism across the region.

However, the situation is drastically different in many other African countries. For instance, Uganda and Nigeria have some of the most draconian anti-LGBTQ laws, including Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act of 2014, which

initially included life imprisonment for certain homosexual acts. Despite these harsh laws, there is evidence of the domino effect at work in subtler ways, as activists in these countries draw inspiration from South Africa and other nations with more progressive stances.

Several factors facilitate the domino effect in the spread of queer rights in Africa. Transnational advocacy networks, comprising local and international NGOs, play a crucial role in supporting LGBTQ movements across the continent. These networks provide legal assistance, funding, and platforms for visibility and solidarity. For instance, organizations like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International work closely with local groups to challenge discriminatory laws and practices.

The role of regional human rights bodies, such as the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), is also significant. The ACHPR has issued resolutions condemning violence and discrimination against LGBTQ individuals, providing a regional framework that can influence national policies. These resolutions, while not always binding, offer a form of moral and legal support for activists and sympathetic lawmakers.

Globalization and the proliferation of digital media have also been instrumental. Social media platforms enable activists to share their struggles and successes, creating a sense of global and regional solidarity. The visibility of queer issues online can lead to increased awareness and pressure on governments to address LGBTQ rights.

Today, Africa is a sexed continent. Queer contamination seems unstoppable. There is a huge presence of gays and lesbians in Kenya, Somalia, Egypt, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe and elsewhere in Africa, this presence has not gone well with state authorities, for example, International Lesbian and Gay Human Rights Commission (ILGHRC) once reported that two women in Somalia were sentenced to death for having such "unnatural behavior." [\[50\]](#)

In Egypt, three men accused of setting up a gay web site were charged with violating the Egyptian legal code, which penalizes homosexual sex. And in the year 2002, the government began closing down bathhouses frequented by gays. In Zimbabwe, where President Robert Mugabe has compared homosexuality to bestiality, which he accused of being "worse than pigs and dogs" it has been reported that offices of Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) have been frequently raided by the police who have recovered pornographic magazines and made arrests for violating the Censorship and Entertainment Act. [\[51\]](#)

In Uganda, church leaders of the Uganda House of Bishops called on the government not to register a gay and lesbian group called Integrity Uganda. The church group reportedly described the gay organization as unbiblical and inhuman, and a church statement accused the gay organization of serving as a front for U.S. gays and lesbians to set up a base in Uganda.

In Namibia, Sam Nujoma announced that *"the Republic of Namibia does not allow homosexuality or lesbianism here. Police are ordered to arrest you, deport you and imprison you."* Nujoma described homosexuality as *"against God's will"* and called it *"the devil at work."* His statements follow those of Jerry Ekandjo, Namibia's home affairs minister, who last year urged newly graduated police officers to *"eliminate gays and lesbians from the face of Namibia."* [\[52\]](#)

In contrast to its continental neighbors, South Africa has actually been a world leader in civil rights for gays and lesbians. After all, it was the first country to adopt a constitution that outlaws sexual orientation discrimination. But even in South Africa, the same problems do exist. For example, a recent marketing campaign to lure GLBT tourists sparked an outcry from religious groups, who reportedly held an assembly in Cape Town last month *"to pray for a sin-free city."* And on April 11, Durban Mayor Obed Mlaba reportedly told a group of business leaders that Durban should stop comparing itself to the more cosmopolitan Cape Town--a city that *"can stay with its moffies and its gays."* [\[53\]](#)

Lesbian and Gay movements in Africa have been carried out not only as movements in defence of basic human rights which I have slightly given a historical background upon which they spread but also as powerful expression of sexual identity and therefore sort of sexual liberation and that is the reason why the strong

resistance of these movements are likened to the resistance to rights movements and multipartyism and other by the institutions imposed by western powers from the early 1990s.

AFRICAN LITERATURE AND QUEER GLOBALIZATION

In many cultures throughout the world, traditional sexualities and alternative sexual identities are disappearing or transforming as a result of the diffusion of modern sexual identity constructions and the emergence of global gay and lesbian subcultures modeled on North American and European cultural models. It can be argued that a queer globalization is taking place. In this section, will seek to examine issues related to the interaction and confrontation between traditional sexualities and western sexual identity constructions in Africa.

The influence and focus on HIV/AIDS studies in Africa and the re-emergence of social studies and history on academic discourse has opened up numerous windows on the study of African sexuality, although specifically from the western scholars. Sexuality had been a neglected theme in most African scholarly literature. The fact that science has been unable to provide a cure for the problem, there has been a shift to the social sciences that has gone deeper into questioning the nature of African.

The 1990 therefore represented initial attempts to come to terms with discussions of alternative sexualities in the context of African literary studies. Yet still in my opinion, a thorough discussion of the complexities of the subject has yet to take place. Recent scholars have argued that, for a very long time now, one of the most pervasive position about homosexuality in Africa is that it is a foreign imposition and not an indigenous cultural practice.^[54] This they done despite the fact that there is no literature to suggest that homosexuality is a foreign imposition? There is almost no one has written on the subject.

But there is a growing literature in western scholarship to support the presence of homosexuality ion pre-colonial Africa. These studies have gone to “prove” of “patterns of identity formation and indigenous cosmologies that give light to the notion that such sexualities were only the result of foreign cultural contact”^[55] Indeed, as Desai writes, the evidence suggests that in many cases, homosexual behaviors, while not always explicitly discussed or identified as such in the larger public sphere, were often treated with more tolerance in pre-colonial Africa than in Africa after the colonial period.^[56]

It is true however, that early writers in this area, chose to defend other indigenous practices such as polygamy that were looked upon with skepticism by the colonial authorities but few, in the early period of nationalism and independence, came openly in writing on such issues as homosexuality. In recent times the global media has represented African sexuality in a more problematic way, and this has always been done in the context of the west-which are then circulated as the last word on a particular sexual identity. It is important to dissect these stereotypes with care and to then dissociate them from the larger cultural claims in which they get mobilized. While much more research needs to be done on both the history of sexual practices in Africa but with a background of the understanding of the effects of modernity -technology, industrialization, the growth of literacy, the expansion of the public sphere and so on - the formulation of newer forms of sexual identities.

As already mentioned before, the publication of Roscoe and Murray’s *Boy-Wives and Female-Husbands* and the claims concerning the presence and status of homosexuality in African cultures have become central points of contention in debates among contemporary African and Africanists scholars worldwide. Some of those involved in the debate have even asserted that the original languages of Africa contained no words for gay or lesbian, therefore concluding that they did not exist. As the first work of its kind on the subject, *Boy-Wives and Female-Husbands* tried to prove that there existed same sex relationships in Africa that real desires in these relationships were purely sexual.

The contributions to this volume unequivocally refute claims that African societies lacked homosexual patterns and had no words for those who desire their own sex. “Evidence” of same-sex patterns has been reported or reviewed here for some fifty African societies. These societies are found “within every region of the continent, and they represent every language family, social and kinship organization, and subsistence pattern.” The book claims that there is a substantial evidence that same-sex practices and patterns were “traditional” and “indigenous.” While contact between Africans and non-Africans has sometimes influence both groups’ sexual

patterns, there is no evidence that one group ever “introduced” homosexuality where it had not existed before. In support to this claim. Atit Shah claimed in her seminal paper that:

To the best of our knowledge, homosexuality in Kenya dates back as early as 1882. There have been many reports of men in the city of Ngambo, that distinguished themselves as gay by cross-dressing and they would derive their income from prostitution. In about the 1950’s Godfrey Wilson studied Lamu, a town north of Mombasa and he described an occasion where boys dressed as women would perform stripteases and then pair off with older men from the audienceThere used to exist traditions of homosexual behavior in Africa before the “brainwashing” (Drucker) of the African people by the Christian missionaries. The missionaries called upon biblical references that proclaimed homosexuality was ‘un-African’. This notion spread throughout Kenya not only to the lower and middle-class citizens but also to the well-educated rich inhabitants. Kenyan people had seemed to lose touch with old African traditional practices[57].

But is it true that homosexuality existed in the precolonial past? Citing from Murray and Roscoe she writes:

The Swahili-speakers on the Kenyan coast provide an instance where reports of same-sex patterns are not only detailed but also have some historical depth” Same sex relationships have existed in Kenya for a long time, and seem to have begun in the port cities of Kenya, mainly Zanzibar and Mombasa, where trade is and has been prosperous and communicating with others is made possible. European reports of homosexuality in Mombasa and Zanzibar date to the nineteenth century, a time which dates back more than the leaders of the African nations would like.[58]

I do not want to be misunderstood here, I do not dismiss the notion of the presence of precolonial homosexuality in Africa because no substantial research has been carried out to ascertain such facts. For one to get the real picture of existence of homosexuality in Africa, one must as I have indicated before, rely on deep historical inquiry and analysis- no wonder even the great majority of African literary representations homosexuality have been historically negative. It is also imperative that we must be careful of the global consciousness of alternative sexualities and the effects on the continent. So that literary and cultural texts are beginning to be produced showing cultural production that is eager to portray positive images of alternative sexualities.

CONCLUSION

The struggle for queer rights in East Africa is marked by both progress and setbacks, influenced by the domino effect of regional and global developments. While there have been significant legal and social advancements in countries like South Africa, the broader African context remains challenging due to cultural, religious, and political resistance. Transnational advocacy networks, regional human rights bodies, and digital media play critical roles in supporting and spreading LGBTQ rights across the continent. However, overcoming the deeply entrenched barriers requires sustained and nuanced efforts that respect local contexts while advocating for universal human rights. The domino effect, while powerful, must be carefully managed to ensure that progress in one nation can inspire and influence positive changes across the region.

Despite the ubiquity of sexual imagery in contemporary Western popular culture, most people in Africa regard sexuality to be a personal, private, and intimate topic that concerns the desires, experiences, pleasures, and difficulties of individuals and should be nobody's business but their own. Globalisation has however, opened up these horizons and placed different meanings to sexual desires, practices, and politics across cultures of the African people. The rise, proliferation of, and challenges to modern sexual identities, with an emphasis on reproductive and sexual rights based on lesbian, and gay sexualities are highly contested in African society this has been possible through the liberalisation and globalisation of the African media.

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