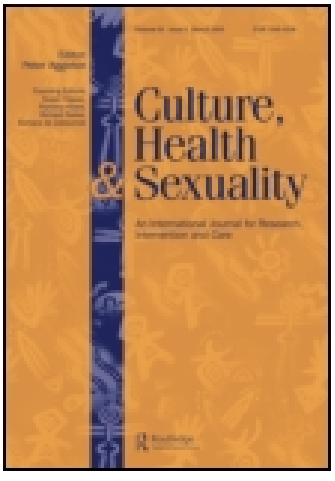

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Dismantling reified African culture through localised homosexualities in Uganda

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Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Bill of 2009 aimed at protecting the cherished culture of the people against emergent threats to the traditional heterosexual family. The Bill's justification, however, lay in myopic imaginings of a homogenous African-ness and pedestrian oblivion to pluralities within African sexualities. This paper revisits the debate that homosexuality is 'un-African'. Rhetoric analysis of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill exposes how dominant discourses of law, medicine, religion, geography and culture reinforce the view that homosexuality is foreign to Africa. Based on ethnography in contemporary Uganda, I explore how self-identified same-sex-loving individuals simultaneously claim their African-ness and their homosexuality. Their strategies include ethnic belonging, membership to kinship structures, making connections with pre-colonial histories of homosexuality, civic participation in democratic processes, national identity, organising of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and questioning support groups, language and nomenclature, visibility and voice in local communal activities, solidarity and adherence to cultural rituals. In present-day Uganda, same-sex-loving men, women and transgender people variously assert their African-ness.

Keywords: African culture; homosexuality; ethnography; culture; Uganda

Introduction

This paper revisits the age-old polemical assertion that homosexuality is 'un-African' (Epprecht 2004, 2008; Murray and Roscoe 1998; Van Zyl 2011). Over the years, national and religious leaders from different parts of Africa have increasingly pronounced that homosexuality is alien to African culture, tradition and heritage (Reddy 2002; Stobie 2003). More recently, there has emerged a growing body of opposing voices, including sexual minorities, queer activists, human rights defenders and academics (e.g. Gevisser and Cameron 1995; Morgan and Wieringa 2005; Teunis 2001). Scholars of human sexualities in Africa explore this highly polarised debate, drawing from diverse disciplinary sources. The bulk of this scholarship is from Southern African contexts (Epprecht 2004, 15), although some isolated studies come from Eastern and Western Africa.

As part of a larger three-year (2010–2013) ethnographic study of everyday lives of sexual minorities living in rural and urban Uganda, this paper explores how same-sex-loving individuals simultaneously claim the two identities of 'African' and 'homosexual'. A Ugandan anthropologist, assisted by local researchers, conducted the study. Data collection triangulated participant observation, individual in-depth interviews, focus-group discussions, policy analysis, public media content analysis and systematic literature

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The paper's first section unpacks claims that homosexuality is un-African by analysing the centrality of culture that is encoded within the language of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill (Bahati 2009). The second section explores everyday contestations by same-sex-loving Ugandans who dismantle the notion of a reified African culture.

Locating reified culture in Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Bill

The Anti-Homosexuality Bill received widespread public media attention, because it proposed the death penalty for 'aggravated homosexuality'[1] (Ssebaggala 2011; Strand 2011). Less publicised were other proposed crimes and penalties including: (1) three years imprisonment for not disclosing homosexuality to the police within 24 hours of knowing, (2) seven years' imprisonment for the promotion of, conspiracy to engage in, aiding and abetting of or attempting to commit homosexuality and (3) life imprisonment for same-sex-marriage or the offence of homosexuality. Legal analyses of the Bill (e.g. Ewins 2011; Hollander 2009; Tamale 2009, 54–7) reveal that it replicates existent laws, is unconstitutional and requires Uganda to opt out of previously ratified international treaties that go against the spirit of this Bill.

The rhetorical analysis offered here highlights that this Bill's justifications are mainly founded upon culturalist postulations. Encoded within the language of this Bill's preamble are assumptions of a very specific imagination of African tradition and culture. I examine three examples below.

> *'The objective of this Bill is to establish a comprehensive consolidated legislation to protect* the traditional family ...' (Bahati 2009, 1, emphasis added)

There is a strident lack of problematising critical concepts in the Anti-Homosexuality Bill. What is this 'traditional family' in the context of Uganda? With over 50 ethnic groups, multiple colonial influences (including British, French and German), Westernisation, increasing globalisation and three main religions (Christianity, Islam and African traditional religions each with innumerable dogmas, sects and ethos), what criteria definitively selects the one traditional family in Uganda? Given the ambivalences and ambiguities of marriage (e.g. Nyanzi et al. 2004) and their impacts on local conceptualisations and everyday enactments of 'family', is it meaningful to delineate an assumed traditional family? Marriage forms available in Uganda include polygamy, polygyny, polyandry, monogamy, bigamy, cohabitation, sorrorate, levirate, widow-inheritance, exogamous, endogamous, virilocal and matrilocal marriage types (Adam 1947; Grossbard 1978; Mukiza-Gapere and Ntozi 1995; Nyanzi et al. 2004; Nyanzi, Nyanzi-Wakholi, and Kalina 2009). Men head many families. Others are female-headed or child-headed households. Diverse nuclear- and extended-family models thrive in Uganda. Tamale's (2009) social-legal critique calls for unpacking the traditional African family, which the Anti-Homosexuality Bill (2009) seeks to protect.

Furthermore, anthropologists have long contested the reification of fluid traditions and codification of flexible dynamic cultures. For example, Ranger (1983) explains below:

> Since so few connections could be made between British and African political, social and legal systems, British administrators set about inventing African traditions for Africans. Their own respect for 'tradition' disposed them to look with favour upon what they took to be traditional in Africa. They set about to codify and promulgate these traditions, thereby transforming flexible custom into hard prescription ... many African scholars as well as many European Africanists have found it difficult to free themselves from the false models of

> colonial codified African 'tradition'. … The invented traditions imported from Europe not only provided whites with models of command but also offered many Africans models of 'modern' behaviour. The invented traditions of African societies – whether invented by Europeans or by Africans themselves in response – distorted the past but became in themselves realities through which a good deal of colonial encounter was expressed. (212)

Ranger's (1983) analysis exposes tradition(s) as constantly (re)defined, modified, contested and reclaimed to politically justify the actions of those in power.

> *This Bill aims at strengthening the nation's capacity to deal with emerging internal and external threats to the* traditional heterosexual family … (Bahati 2009, 1, emphasis added)

Problematic assumptions are articulated in this aim. Firstly, the imagined traditional family is identified and named as characteristically heterosexual. However, the notion of one homogenous heterosexual family is illusory in Uganda. Although heterosexuality is an unmarked category (Phelan 1993, 96; Richardson 1996), its nuanced conceptualisations and multiple enactments are as heterogeneous as the couples involved in its definition and performance. In addition to the heterosexual unions listed above, the local Ugandan heterosexual family may also include child-brides, forced marriages, cross-generational Sugar-Daddies or Sugar-Mummies, honour brides forced to marry a spouse because of unplanned pregnancies, sexual- and gender-based violence, and marital rape. Thus, the heterosexual family is not necessarily an unproblematic or perfect ideal, but can also be the site of gross violations.

Secondly, the assumption of emerging threats highlights the imagination of new, emergent factors previously inexistent. The fallacy of an undisturbed, pure and pristine period in the past is central to this formulation. This rhetorical trope appeals to the historicity of the polemics of the un-African debate around homosexuality. Alluding to the past and present presupposes that at one point in time, same-sex desire was introduced into an otherwise heterosexual context. The imagined distant past of pre-colonial Africa was devoid of homosexuality, but invaders, explorers and traders wrought change.

Thirdly, defining emergent threats as external gives currency to claims that homosexuality is a foreign imposition to Africa, adopted by poor, gullible and youthful locals.

> *The bill further aims at providing a comprehensive and enhanced legislation to protect* the cherished culture of the people of Uganda, legal, religious, and traditional family values of the people of Uganda *against the attempts of sexual rights activists seeking* to impose their values of sexual promiscuity on the people of Uganda … (Bahati 2009, 1, emphasis added)

Patronising paternalism and protectionism are evident in this rhetoric. Akin to erasures of the vast array of traditions in Uganda, this aim of the bill hinges on narrow culturalist arguments. It confirms Nagadya and Morgan's (2005) conclusion about the important role culture plays in shaping local attitudes towards homosexuality.

> None of the many cultures that exist in Uganda accept homosexuality, which is seen as un-African. This cultural opposition has played a large part in the government's position of intolerance towards gays and lesbians. Most of the members of parliament are traditionalists with strong cultural beliefs. It is highly unlikely that our government will consider passing a law to free lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in our country, as long as they see same-sex sexuality as an imported lifestyle which is destroying Ugandan culture (Nagadya and Morgan 2005, 65)

The widespread assumption that all sexual rights activists are donor-funded and external to Uganda is particularly alarming in its attempts at invisibilising, dismissing and erasing the growing local grassroots social movement of sexual rights activists operating in Uganda (Oloka-Onyango 2012; Ssebaggala 2011). While these imagined foreign sexual rights activists are active, the people of Uganda are projected as passive powerless beings easily

bullied or fooled into accepting whatever impositions are thrust at them. This representation is an injustice to the intelligence, innovations, resourcefulness and boundless energies of Ugandan sexual rights' activists. To suggest that sexual promiscuity is an imposition on the people of Uganda is to miss the varieties of locally occurring sexual behaviours, practices, meanings, cultures and mores of diverse peoples of Uganda. For example, Nyanzi et al.'s (2009) qualitative research explores layers of the cultural significance and meanings of male promiscuity among Baganda men in the time of HIV/AIDS.

The foregoing analysis of the rhetoric of Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Bill reveals something of the paternalistic and myopic protectionism of a homogenised, static and illusory African culture characterised by the ambiguous imagination of a certain cherished traditional heterosexual family. Conservative fascination with the imagined heterosexual family as the only normative tradition disputes burgeoning scholarship that asserts the complexities, diversities, flux, contradictions, inherent transformations, paradoxes, contestations, ambiguities, ambivalences and heterogeneity of African sexualities (e.g. Epprecht 2004; Morrell and Ouzghane 2005; Tamale 2008; Teunis 1996).

Given the dynamic diversities within Uganda, what was the premise for this problematic encoding of culture and tradition within the Anti-Homosexuality Bill? What factors gave this bill currency in contemporary Ugandan society? I propose three fundamental factors, namely: dominant discourses circulating locally, the homophobic hate-speech of African presidents and the politicisation of 'the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah' by African religious clerics.

Contextualising homosexuality in Uganda

In Uganda, same-sex acts are criminalised as 'carnal knowledge against the order of nature' in the Penal Code, and same-sex marriage is prohibited in the Constitution (Hollander 2009; Mujuzi 2009a; Oloka-Onyango 2012, 19–23, 105–8; Tamale 2009). Dominant religious interpretations frame homosexuality as an abomination to God (see Anderson [2011] Kaoma [2009] and Sadgrove et al. [2010], who report diverse Christian interpretations of biblical scriptures about homosexuality in Uganda). Many healthcare providers still pathologise homosexuality, specifically as psychosis (Tamale 2007b). Leading local practitioners prescribe reparative psycho-therapeutic interventions for same-sex-desire (Epprecht 2008). For example, James Lwanga, a Ugandan sexologist-cum-psychologist revealed that he has routinely cured 'homosexual patients' in his practice.[2]

Epidemiological surveillance highlights increased risk for sexually transmitted infections, including HIV and AIDS, among men who have sex with men in Uganda. The Uganda AIDS Commission's (2009) Crane Survey found higher prevalence rates (13.7%) of HIV infection among men who have sex with men compared to the population more generally (6%). Historical discussions about local geographies of desire locate the origins of homosexuality outside Uganda: same-sex-practices either entered Africa with colonisers, missionaries, explorers and tourists from the West or with artisans, construction workers or traders from the Arab-East (Kaoma 2009; cf. Nannyonga-Tamusuza 2005, 211–8). Furthermore, patriarchy and heterosexism dictate gender norms and sexual behaviour. Children are valued for extending kinship structures and ritual definitions of maturation. Consequently, same-sex relationships are ostracised because of widespread myths that homosexuals cannot procreate (Tamale 2007b).

Prevalent stereotypes of same-sex-loving individuals caricature them as immoral, evil, deviant, decadent, degenerate, diseased, poor and insane. Tamale (2009) quotes

descriptions of homosexuals by a public audience including 'mad people … like bats seeing the world upside down … animals … wicked…' (56). These stereotypes are informed by law, biomedicine, religion, geography, history, heteronormativity, heterosexism and patriarchy (Nagadya and Morgan 2005; Tamale 2007a, 22).

Fomenting homophobic hate-speech, these stereotypical caricatures are produced, reproduced and circulated in speeches and official rhetoric of leaders, politicians and public authorities in Uganda. Most notably, President Yoweri Museveni has changed his stance from blatant denial to acceptance that homosexuals exist in Uganda (Ssebaggala 2011). During the International AIDS Conference in Durban in 2000, Museveni denied there were homosexuals in Uganda. Earlier, in 1997, he ordered the arrest of all homosexuals after the local public media published the wedding of two gay men in Kampala city. In response to international pressure against the Anti-Homosexuality Bill (2009), Museveni declared that historically homosexuals were tolerated, although homosexuality was discouraged in pre-colonial societies (Ssebaggala 2011, 50; Tamale 2009, 50). More recently, in December 2012, he advised against killing homosexuals in Uganda. Kihumuro Apuuli, the Director General of the Uganda AIDS Commission announced that due to limited resources, national HIV programmes would not target homosexuals, although men who have sex with men were a high-risk population group.[3] Nsaba Buturo, the former Minister of Ethics and Integrity fervently supported the Anti-Homosexuality Bill and variously alleged that homosexuality was immoral, unethical, un-African, un-cultural and foreign (Oloka-Onyango 2012). So coercive was this hate-speech that in February 2012, the current Minister of Ethics and Integrity, the Right Reverend Father Simon Lokodo stormed uninvited into a Leadership Skills Building workshop organised for sexual minority groups, ordered its immediate closure and threatened arresting some of the queer leaders in attendance.[4] Several ministers, state officials, religious clerics and leaders have publicly issued homophobic speeches. Tamale (2007b) compiled samples published in the local *vox populi*. However, homophobic rhetoric is not unique to Uganda.

African presidents rhetoric about the un-African-ness of homosexuality

Different national leaders of African countries have uttered homophobic hate-speech over the years. Their arguments draw from reified traditional African culture, conservative religious interpretations, heteronormative moralities and the pro-natalist assumptions illustrated below. In 1995, for example, President Robert Mugabe asserted that homosexuals were worse than animals, which differentiate between male and female. To him, homosexuality was 'an abomination, a rottenness of culture' (Epprecht 2004, 4). In 1997, Mugabe candidly assigned homosexuality to the West, dissociating it from Zimbabwe:

> Let the Americans keep their sodomy, bestiality, stupid and foolish ways to themselves. Let them be gays in the US and Europe. But in Zimbabwe, gays shall remain a very sad people forever. (Reddy 2002, 164)

In 1996, President Sam Nujoma of Namibia condemned homosexuals as negative influences. Externalising homosexualities to foreigners, Nujoma alienated African homosexuals:

> … most of the ardent supporters of these perverts are Europeans who imagine themselves to be the bulwark of civilization and enlightenment. … We made sacrifices for the liberation of this country and we are not going to allow individuals with alien practices such as homosexuality to destroy the social fabric of our society. (Reddy 2002, 168)

In 2001, Nujoma ordered the arrest, deportation and imprisonment of homosexuals.[5]

In 2008, President Yahya Jammeh of The Gambia threatened to behead homosexuals and gave them an ultimatum to leave the country within 24 hours. Jammeh asserted that The Gambia was a Muslim country and hence homosexuality was ungodly and un-Gambian (Nyanzi 2013).

Former Presidents Arap Moi of Kenya and Chiluba of Zambia have publicly broadcast that homosexuality is un-African and contrary to Christianity.

In 2010, President Bingu wa Mutharika of Malawi extended presidential pardon to Stephen Monjeza and Tiwonge Chimbalanga, two gay men sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment when their marriage ceremony was publicised. However, on their release, Bingu reiterated that homosexuality was alien:

> These boys committed a crime against our culture, our religion, our laws. However, as the head of State, I hereby pardon them and therefore ask for their immediate release with no conditions. I have done this on humanitarian grounds but this does not mean that I support this.[6]

In 2012, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia declared her disfavour of decriminalising homosexuality because of 'tradition':

> We've got certain traditional values in our society that we would like to preserve. We're going to keep to our traditional values. [7]

Responding to international critique,[8] Sirleaf clarified that she was neither repealing the existent sodomy laws nor signing two new Bills introducing tougher anti-homosexuality legislation in Liberia.

These contemporary African presidents belaboured to articulate that homosexuality is antithetical to African-ness on grounds of location, race, origin, religion, culture, tradition, identity or social norms. Homosexuality therefore provides a potent idiom and rhetorical technique that leaders employ to maintain state-power over the electorate. However, it is noteworthy that not all African presidents espouse homophobia. Festus Mogae, the former president of Botswana variously argued for tolerance and protection from discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation. Situating his advocacy within the context of HIV prevention, Mogae decried criminalising homosexuality. While visiting Uganda, Thabo Mbeki, former President of South Africa also defended the rights to privacy, self-determination, security and freedom from harm for consenting adults who engage in homosexual practices. A few of Uganda's political leaders publicly opposed the Anti-Homosexuality Bill, including Kiiza Besigye (the outgoing leader of the main opposition party), Prime-Minister Amama Mbabazi in 2012, and human rights advocates.

Politicising the 'sin of Sodom and Gomorrah'

Similar to African statesmen, religious leaders from diverse parts of the continent have also produced and disseminated homophobic utterances. During sermons, public speeches and interviews, religious clerics articulate their interpretations of biblical and quaranic scriptures against homosexuality. Akin to presidents, the religious clerics' words are powerful because they influence meanings associated with sexual practices and persuade the masses to act in accordance to the circulating hate-speech. However, contrary to presidential logic, the rhetoric of religious clerics is widely framed by scriptures – specifically biblical and quaranic references to the 'sin of Sodom and Gomorrah'. Building on conservative interpretations of scriptures, religious clerics convince their audiences that homosexuality is not only sinful abomination, but also un-African and foreign (Anderson

2011). For example, Nigerian Archbishop Peter Akinola's stance against homosexuality was articulated during the Global African Future Conference (GAFCON) in 2008:

> In ancient Africa societies, we had what we call taboos – 'the don'ts' – and if you break the taboos, there are consequences. … And this taboo … in fact the word homosexuality doesn't exist in our vocabulary. We don't have any words for this in our language … so if the practise is now found in a [rural society] it induces punishment against it … to prevent importation of foreign practices and traditions that are not consistent with native conducts, native way of life … (Sadgrove et al. 2010, 201)

During the same GAFCON, Archbishop Henry Orombi of Uganda failed to condemn torture, rape and discrimination based on sexual orientation but, instead, emphasised the potential of forsaking homosexuality through Christian intervention. This rhetoric echoes prevalent virulent local organising by Pentecostal churches and pastors in the Ugandan anti-gay movement that is influenced by the American Christian Right (Kaoma 2009).

Contesting this dominant religious rhetoric is a small but growing ecumenical body of pro-gay religious leaders in Uganda, notably Retired Bishop Chistopher Ssenyonjo, of St. Paul's Reconciliation and Equality Centre, and Reverend Gideon Byamugisha.

Ugandan self-identified homosexuals

Located among same-sex-loving individuals living in Uganda, this ethnography rejected the thesis that homosexuality is un-African. Because I was studying self-identified African homosexuals, I focused on unravelling the multiple ways in which they made meaning of their supposedly antithetical identities. How were these individuals laying claim to their dual identities as simultaneously African and homosexual? The following section explores local everyday enactments of homosexual Ugandans.

Claiming homosexual tags and forging local queer nomenclature

Analysis of the demographic profiles of 320 individuals reveals multiple labels for same-sex-loving people in the local Ugandan context. Because many urban-based interviews were conducted in the English language, several individuals distinctly identified as homosexual: 'I am a homo' was a common response to the open-ended questions 'How do you identify sexually?' and 'What is your sexual identity?' Contrary to arguments in the literature that the label 'homosexual' is loaded with historical baggage, Westernised, stigmatised, disparaged and shunned by same-sex-loving individuals living outside Europe and America, many research participants reclaimed and appropriated it for themselves. Conversations or speeches predominantly in the Luganda language were interspersed with this English label or, indeed, its shortened form. I commonly encountered the expression '*Nze ndi* homo!' – meaning 'I am a homo!' During gatherings, spokespersons variously stated: '*Ffe ba* homo …' – meaning 'For us, homosexuals …'. It was a solidarity-enforcing label appropriated by insiders when in homo-friendly company or safe spaces.

'Lesbian' and 'gay' were also common labels of individuals' sexual identity. 'Bisexual identity' was less common, although bisexual practise was often reported, even when referring to oneself (see also Oloka-Onyango 2012, 28). There were localised variants to being either lesbian or gay. These included 'straight lesbian', 'lesbian man', 'gay lesbian', 'gay heterosexual', 'gay man', 'top' for the insertive partner during sex, 'bottom' for the recipient partner during sex, 'chapati' – or 'versatile' for one who played both insertive and recipient roles during sex, 'gay homo', 'trans f-to-m' for individuals born female but expressed a masculine gender, 'trans m-to-f' for those born male but expressing feminine

gender, ' bi-lesbian', 'heterosexual with gay feelings', 'accidental heterosexual', 'gay but want to have children', 'transgender man' and 'dyke'.[9] Gender expression sometimes featured as an integral component of individual sexual identities (see also Nagadya and Morgan 2005; Nannyonga-Tamusuza 2009, 366–368).

A localised label – *kuchu* – is colloquially employed to refer to same-sex-loving individuals. It is an identity label employed by political advocates for sexual minority rights. Largely an urban label, *kuchu* is centralised to Kampala city and its immediate environs. *Kuchu* belongs to the nomenclature of the local sexual minority rights movement, with public discourse embracing it. For example, one refers to *kuchu*-friendly programmes, *kuchu*-safe spaces, *kuchu*-bars, *kuchu*-businesses or *kuchu*-subcultures (e.g. Tamale 2007a, 20). Support organisations appropriated the label, such as the first HIV/AIDS-support organisation for sexual minorities called *Kuchus* Living with HIV/AIDS (KULHAS) and a youth organisation called *Kuchu* Love Uganda (KLUG). Popular culture productions employ the label, such as documentaries about early struggles of the Ugandan sexual minority rights movement entitled '*Kuchus* of Uganda' and 'Call me *Kuchu'*. Oloka-Onyango (2012) explains that *kuchu* '… as a political statement represents the attempt by the LGBTI [lesbian gay bisexual transgender and intersex] community to assert its own handprint on how it wants to be viewed and characterized' (34). Similarly for the label *hungochani*, Epprecht (2004, 2) explains that the evident African-ness of the word validates the integrity of black Africans who come out as homosexual. However, despite its wide circulation as the preferred label for sexual minorities in Uganda, I also encountered same-sex-loving individuals who strongly disassociated from the label *kuchu* because it was highly politicised, connotated militant activism or radical 'in-your-face' advocacy for sexual minority rights:

> For me, I don't want to be called a *kuchu*. [frowns] That word sounds very offensive to my ears. It is for those who advertise themselves to funders as being gay. For me, I want to live a quiet life, do my business and love my partners without drawing attention to myself. (Paul[10] 29-year-old gay market-trader of legumes)

> The word *kuchu* was used by the male sadomasochists to talk of the numbers they had *kukuchulad*. This was to mean the number of boys they had conquered through having sex with them. Then butch lesbians also use it to prove their manliness. Sometimes they count for you how many sexual partners they have done. And then other people adopted *kuchu* to mean the sex with a person of the same gender. It is the sex that they have. For others, it's just a fad word that the people they consider to be hype are using. So they take it up, too, for themselves without knowing its history. It is just a peer label for them. (Timothy, 38-year-old gay medical doctor)

> *Kuchu* is so much focused on the sex act. So *kuchu* is not a good word because you can have gay life minus sex until you get the right partner at a given period with the right qualities not quantities. Basically it is about finding a person with the brains. Some of us think beyond the navel yet we are gay. Me I am a gay I am not a *mukuchu*. (Peter, 34-year-old gay office-attendant)

> The *kuchu* word is very heavy with sexual intercourse and not the humanhood around those who are sensually same-sex attracted. I know celibate friends who are gay. I know others who do sexual intercourse once a month or even after three months. Others do it all the time. So *kuchu* is just focused on sex. (Mugunjuzi, 32-year-old gay programme director)

Objections to the popular colloquial label also focused on its overly sexual innuendo and the conquest imbued in localised meanings of *kuchu*. However, only a few participants objected to being referred to as *kuchu*. Generally, most research participants preferred *kuchu* to the alternative Luganda expression *abali b'ebisiyazi* or *abasiyazi* (literally meaning 'eaters of rubbish'), which was blatantly derogatory and restricted to connoting

anal sex/sodomy. Nannyonga-Tamusuza (2005, 215) analyses the etymological evolution of *okulya ebisiyaga* (meaning 'to eat rubbish') – the derivative verb that derogatorily refers to homosexuality. A less known colloquial label common among homosexual inhabitants of peri-urban slums in Kampala was *abaana b'omu Ndeeba* (meaning 'children from Ndeeba'[11]).

National, geographic and ethnic claims to African-ness

Most (306/320) research participants were Ugandan nationals who claimed citizenship through birth, ancestry, residence or naturalisation. A few individuals quickly pulled out their identification papers, passports or voter-cards to legitimate their Ugandan nationality. When discussing their African identity, some people laid claim over place and being born, bred and living in Uganda – an African country. The centrality of belonging to, being attached to and living in a specific geographical location on the African map emerged in narratives about African-ness. Furthermore, during the 2011 presidential and other elections, different sexual minorities participated in this national exercise of their democratic and civic right to vote:

> People say that we learnt this thing from foreign white people. But me, I was born in Uganda, went to schools only in Uganda, and started working in Uganda. I will die in Uganda. So, although I am a lesbian, no one can say that I am not an African unless of course they want to say that my Uganda is not in Africa. (Julie, 28-year-old lesbian radio-broadcaster)

> When they want my vote, I am a good Ugandan and I matter. They do not see that I am a lesbian, a homo. They count my vote. Since my vote matters, our gay votes matter. We are Ugandans who vote like everyone else with voting rights. (Sammy, 26-year-old lesbian-man and researcher)

Beyond place, race was another mode of aligning individual allegiance with Africa (see also Maclean and Ngcobo 1995; Tamale 2007a, 18). Although essentialist and reductionist – whereby African identity was conflated with being black (having dark skin pigmentation) – many research participants contrasted themselves to the white other as their proof of being African. In these emic explanations, race was never factored as a social construct:

> I am a Ugandan. I am a black African. I am a *kuchu*. Yes, I am boldly black and *kuchu.* As one of the African *kuchus*, I feel that Africans do not need their white sisters and brothers to approve of our existence. There are black *kuchus* just as there are white *kuchus*. (Joyce, 23-year-old lesbian law-student)

> Many of our members are gay but they have never met a white man to teach them about being gay. Our organisation offers support to LGBTI [lesbian gay bisexual transgender and intersex]. Often new members join us a long time after they started having desires and attractions towards people of the same sex. Most are like this from a young age which can be many years before meeting white people. So, we can be Africans who are homosexual without knowing any white person to teach us about homosexuality. (Billy, 28-year-old gay sexual rights activist)

> For me, it doesn't matter where homosexuality came from and who brought it. What matters is that it's here in me. I'm here. I'm an African. I am very gay. People have to deal with it or get out of my way. (Micheal, 26-year-old gay travel-agent)

Same-sex-loving individuals claimed their African-ness through ethnicity. Clan membership, lineage position, tribal ties, adherence to ethnic rituals, owning cultural insignia, speaking local tongues and successfully mapping kinship genealogies were among the strategies employed to establish individual belonging to an African ethnic group:

> My name is African. It shows you my descent, family, clan, tribe, and sex. You know my nationality by my name. You even know the language I speak by hearing my name. I am a

> Muganda, from the line of Nambi. So how can someone say I am not an African because I love my fellow men? Hmm, whoever said Africans cannot be gay should come and check me out. (Loulou, 33-year-old lesbian-man and footballer)

Historical, indigenous and cultural claims to African-ness

Some research participants celebrated that homosexuality was indigenous to pre-colonial Africa. They reclaimed the rich history of Buganda's King Mwanga's homosexuality (Hoad 2007) and the same-sex-liaisons of pages living within royal courts before Christianisation by foreign missionaries (Faupel 1962; Nannyonga-Tamusuza 2005, 211–30). On their arrival, foreign missionaries found homosexual practices thriving in Buganda's royal palace and courts (see Epprecht [2004, 2008] and Murray and Roscoe [1998] for historical studies of homosexualities in Africa). Conversion to Christianity led to a denouncement of these practices.

Other research participants claimed continuities of indigenous performances of homosexuality in contemporary society. Six individuals said they were possessed by the spirits of ancestors who demanded same-sex relationships. While four of these individuals were transgender, two maintained their biological sex and chose same-sex partners:

> Although I was born a woman, the spirit of my great ancestor possessed me at a much younger age. It led me to behave in ways that are mannish. When I tried to insist on being a woman, this spirit made my life very miserable: I was poor and nothing I did succeeded. I could even become mad. When I yielded and began allowing to be a medium through which he acted, then my life settled. I am now a man in my gender expression. Only my body can reveal the original female I used to be. So when I am with a woman, my ancestor's manliness takes over and I behave as any other man can. In my clan, I am accepted as a spirit medium. There are people who come to seek the help of my ancestor through me. They call me the name of the ancestor. They call me a man. (Ricky, 39-year-old transgender activist)

> I don't believe homosexuality isn't part of my culture. As I said, my ancestors chose me out of all the people in my family. I'm the only *kuchu* out of my father's children. In my extended family, we're two – one of my cousins is also a *kuchu* lesbian-man. But the ancestors left all the other people who are straight and they chose me to be the medium through whom they communicate to the people in the clan about cultural matters. When the spirits climb on my head, I get into a trance and start dancing Kigisu traditional dances. My family know it's time to take me to the village home. I help people to solve their problems. I'm powerful in that moment. I can even sit in fire and not get burnt. But then if homosexuality was bad, the ancestral spirits wouldn't have chosen me. Or the power would die when I have sex with a fellow man. This thing is part of our culture. (Marvin, 24-year-old music producer)

> For me, I'm a gay man. I'm a bottom. I'm also a Muganda businessman. But aside from that, I'm also a traditional healer. Some *kuchus* think that I'm a witch doctor who bewitches people but this isn't correct because the ancestors of my clan just chose me to sort out people's problems. If being gay was a problem to my ancestors they would have killed that desire in me. But it just keeps getting stronger and stronger. In fact they just killed the desire for women and increased the desire for my fellow men. (Jude, 28-year-old mobile-phone exporter)

Indigenousness was here framed as veneration of and possession by ancestral spirits – an integral component of many African Traditional Religions (Mbiti 1970). Successful operation as cultural conduits of ancestral messages and interventions greatly challenged assertions that homosexuality was alien to African tradition. Nkabinde (2008) examines similar homosexual *sangomas* from South Africa:

Adherence to cultural rites of passage marking the life cycle enacted African-ness. I participated in numerous ceremonial gatherings including four same-sex weddings,

and six death ceremonies of same-sex-loving individuals. Marriage was actualised through customary or religious models widely practiced by heterosexual couples. Likewise, in death, customary funeral rites were observed, irrespective of individuals' non-heteronormativity. Families accepted their dead member into ancestral graveyards alongside other deceased lineage members.

Public visibility and local organising

One unanticipated effect of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill (2009) in Uganda has been the galvanising and strengthening of a localised grassroots-based social movement of sexual minority rights activists (cf. Oloka-Onyango 2012; Ssebaggala 2011, 52–7). Before the bill, struggles for sexual minorities were sporadic, disjointed, inchoate and lacked requisite resources, including finances, personnel, platforms, collective will and mainstream support (Nagadya and Morgan 2005; Tamale 2007a, 2007b). Local homosexuals were largely invisible, voiceless and on the fringes of society. Although lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and questioning-support organisations existed, the main mobilisation for solidarity, visibility and voice occurred in response to the Bill. By April 2012, there were 24 support organisations specifically targeting sexual minorities in Uganda, many founded and run exclusively by self-identified homosexuals. Although exclusive, elitist and partial in its politics of affiliation,[12] Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG) is an umbrella organisation created in 2004 for advocacy. The Civil Society Coalition on Human Rights and Constitutional Law (http://www.uganda4rights.org/index.php) was formed in October 2009 to prevent passing the Anti-Homosexuality Bill into law. It comprises over 50 civil society organisations, many of which are mainstream allies.

The organised sexual rights movement in Uganda variously claims public visibility through participating in national and communal activities, including active involvement in annual street marches commemorating World AIDS Day, Women's Day and demonstrations against sexual and gender-based violence. Some sexual minority organisations offer outreach services to their neighbours. Pro-gay rights articulation is sometimes published in the local public media. Sexual minority rights activists have boldly staged peaceful protests and demonstrations at national gatherings and international forums in the country, most notably the Commonwealth Heads of Government and Ministers' meetings held in Kampala. The first lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and questioning-pride March occurred in August 2012, further affirming the growing public visibility and local organising of the local sexual minority rights' movement. Recent court victories ruling in favour of sexual minority complainants heightened public visibility of the existence of self-identified homosexuals in contemporary Ugandan society (see Kabumba 2009; Mujuzi 2009b; Oloka-Onyango 2012; Ssebaggala 2011, 52).

In addition to political advocacy for sexual minority rights, the creation of queer social spaces attests to the forging of a public homosexual presence. Unlike the militant and confrontational character of the politically motivated organising, social organising for same-sex-loving individuals and groups focuses on availing safety, security, solidarity, privacy and a healthy environment for socialising. Such avenues facilitate meeting new and old community-members, relaxing and leisure without maintaining façades of the closet, forging queer modes of sociality and fraternising with queer allies. There is a history of *kuchu* and *kuchu*-friendly bars, restaurants, hotels, disco halls, gardens, streets, suburbs and service providers. The popular culture scenes of music, art, literature, poetry, dance, fashion and drama are increasingly widening spaces for the performances of local queer gendered sexualities. Diverse queer spaces are actively expanding on the internet

and in virtual space, mainly set-up and run by local Ugandan lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and questioning individuals.

Conclusion

Drawing from a recent ethnography of same-sex-loving individuals living in contemporary Uganda, I have sought to counter the stale yet potent argument that homosexuality is un-African. Rhetorical analysis of Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Bill clarifies its linkage to dominant heterosexist discourses situated within authoritarian institutions, including national laws, biomedicine and epidemiological statistics, conservative interpretations of religion, presidential rhetoric, reified tradition and homogenised African culture. Importantly, the roots of these foregrounding discourses – that is, colonial law, biomedicine and Christianity – are themselves un-African. Further entrenching a heteronormative social order, the fallacy of a homogenic heterosexual family is flaunted as the authentic essence of African tradition and culture. Morrell and Ouzgane (2005, 1) caution that:

> … there continue to be debates about what the term 'Africa' might refer to and whether it has any political utility. … Africa is an exceedingly diverse continent in terms of religion, language, climate, topography, economy, governance, and culture. In historical and political terms, therefore, advancing the notion of some kind of conceptual unity for *Africa* is to make a specific claim. (1, emphasis in original, see also Epprecht 2004, 5)

That powerful presidents, who have overstayed in power, vociferously echo each other's refrain of a universally heterosexual *African* culture, is particularly telling about Africa's autocratic despots.

Swimming against the homophobic tide driven by African national and religious leaders, self-identified homosexual men, women and transgender people actively carve out new spaces and reclaim old terrains in which they enact non-heteronormative sexualities. They simultaneously claim their dual identities as African Ugandans and homosexual individuals. Their situated-ness within the same space in which their negation is produced and circulated attests to the diversities and resistance within local African sexualities. Oloka-Onyango (2012, 109) suggests that:

> … Ugandan societies were and are basically pluralist and polyetheist [*sic*]. It is those qualities that we need to harness, revisit and reintroduce into the contemporary structures of the forces governing sexual politics in the country, and into our strategies for addressing homophobia and heterosexism.

Local allies among national and religious leaders, mainstream organisations, friends and family highlight the availability of support accorded same-sex-loving individuals in the country. Uganda's self-identified homosexual individuals variously assert their African-ness through multiple routes, including actively laying claims to their ethnic group belonging, membership to kinship structures, civic participation in democratic processes, national identity, social organising of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and questioning-support groups, language and lexicon, visibility and voice in local communal activities, solidarity, adherence to and participation in cultural rituals.

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Notes

1. A new crime created by the Bill's drafters, aggravated homosexuality was defined as same-sex-activity by an HIV-infected person with a minor or disabled person.
2. This was during a workshop-presentation delivered on 'Violence among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex communities' organised by School of Law at Makerere University.
3. http://www.ccrjustice.org/files/SMUG-Amended-Complaint.pdf
4. http://www.observer.ug/index.php?option=com_content&task = view&id = 17167&Itemid = 114, http://www.observer.ug/index.php?option=com_content&view = article&id = 19508:ngos-gay-plans-leak-govt-furious
5. http://www.afrol.com/News2001/nam008_gay_purges.htm
6. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/malawi/7782886/Malawi-president-pardons-gay-couple-after-UN-pressure.html
7. http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/video/2012/mar/19/liberia-tony-blair-anti-gay-law-video
8. As a 2011 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Sirleaf was expected to espouse tolerance.
9. A subsequent paper will focus on gender and sexual diversities emergent in these data.
10. Pseudonyms are used to ensure anonymity of study participants.
11. Ndeeba is a multifarious peri-urban slum on the outskirts of Kampala, with a busy informal trade sector, booming retail markets, small-scale industries, private offices and a few residences. Anything can be obtained in Ndeeba, it is claimed.
12. SMUG comprises only a selection of existent lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and questioning-support organisations in Uganda. Membership is erratic with some organisations joining and leaving, new applicants being rejected for not fulfilling requirements and some organisations choosing not to join. Available transgender/transsexual and intersex organisations are excluded.

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Résumé

Le projet de loi contre l'homosexualité (2009) en Ouganda visait à protéger la culture vénérée du peuple des menaces émergentes contre la famille hétérosexuelle traditionnelle. L'argument en faveur de cette loi reposait cependant sur la vision étroite d'une africanité homogène et l'oubli obtus de la pluralité des sexualités africaines. Cet article réexamine le débat sur la non-africanité de l'homosexualité. L'analyse rhétorique du projet de loi contre l'homosexualité démontre comment les discours dominants inspirés par la loi, la médecine, la religion, la géographie et la culture renforcent l'opinion selon laquelle l'homosexualité est étrangère à l'Afrique. En m'appuyant sur une étude ethnographique sur l'Ouganda contemporain, j'examine comment des personnes qui s'identifient comme aimant des personnes de leur propre sexe revendiquent à la fois leur africanité et leur homosexualité. Leurs stratégies incluent l'appartenance ethnique, l'appartenance à une structure familiale, la recherche de correspondances avec des histoires d'homosexualité remontant à l'ère précoloniale, la participation civique aux processus démocratiques, l'identité nationale, l'organisation de groupes de soutien, du langage, de la nomenclature LGBTIQ, la visibilité et la prise de parole dans les activités communautaires locales, la solidarité et l'adhésion aux rites culturels. Dans l'Ouganda d'aujourd'hui, les hommes, les femmes et les transgenres qui aiment des personnes de leur propre sexe affirment leur africanité de manière très diversifiée.

Resumen

El proyecto de ley contra la homosexualidad (2009) de Uganda tenía como finalidad proteger la valiosa identidad cultural del pueblo contra las nuevas amenazas para la familia tradicional heterosexual. Sin embargo, la justificación de este proyecto de ley consistía en ideas miopes de una africanidad homogénea y olvidos elementales de las pluralidades en la sexualidad africana. En este artículo reconsidero el debate de que la homosexualidad no es compaginable con la africanidad. El análisis retórico del proyecto de ley contra la homosexualidad muestra el modo en que los discursos dominantes de la ley, la medicina, la religión, la geografía y la cultura refuerzan la idea de que la homosexualidad es extrínseca a África. Basándome en la etnografía de la Uganda actual, analizo cómo las personas que afirman tener relaciones de amor con personas del mismo sexo defienden a la vez su africanidad y homosexualidad. Para ello utilizan estrategias tales como su

origen étnico, la adhesión a estructuras familiares, la creación de vínculos con las historias precoloniales de la homosexualidad, la participación cívica en procesos democráticos, la identidad nacional, la creación de grupos de apoyo para lesbianas, homosexuales, bisexuales, transexuales y personas de orientación sexual excéntrica, el lenguaje y la nomenclatura, la visibilidad y la voz en actividades comunitarias locales, la solidaridad, y seguir rituales culturales. Actualmente en Uganda, los hombres, las mujeres y personas transgénero que tienen relaciones sexuales con personas del mismo sexo reivindican de distintas maneras su africanidad.