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COMMENTARY

Editors' note: The editors of the *African Studies Review* are pleased to publish as this issue's Commentary a discussion of homophobia in Africa written by three distinguished scholars, Patrick Awondo, Peter Geschiere and Graeme Reid. The editors are also planning a special issue on homophobia in Africa for publication in September 2013; the special issue will feature several articles compiled and guest-edited by Ayo Coly of Dartmouth University.

Homophobic Africa? Toward A More Nuanced View

Patrick Awondo, Peter Geschiere, and Graeme Reid

Abstract: The recent emergence of homosexuality as a central issue in public debate in various parts of Africa has encouraged a stereotypical image of one homophobic Africa, often placed in opposition to a tolerant or depraved West. What is striking is that this image of Africa as homophobic is promoted by both traditionalists who insist that homosexuality is a Western intrusion *and* by the Western media that focus on homophobic statements from African political and religious leaders. What both neglect, however, is the existence of internal debate and disagreements among Africans on the subject of homosexuality. In this article we try to counter this image of a homophobic Africa with a more nuanced discussion, including a comparison of dif-

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ferent trajectories in the emergence of homosexuality as a public issue in four countries (Senegal, Cameroon, Uganda, and South Africa). The comparison highlights considerable variations in the ways in which the issue became politicized. There is a world of difference, for example, between the image of the homosexual as *un Grand* (a rich and powerful "Big Man") who imposes anal penetration as a supreme form of subjection (as in Cameroon or Gabon, where homosexuality is associated with witchcraft and other occult forces; compare Achille Mbembe's visionary evocation of a "phallocracy") and the often quite marginal persons who become victims of gay persecution in other contexts. More insight into the variations of what is loosely and inaccurately called "homophobia" can help connect international pressures for decriminalization and protection to local circumstances. Working through local activists is crucial for the effort to counter homophobia in Africa.

Résumé: L'émergence récente de l'homosexualité comme question centrale des débats publics dans plusieurs régions d'Afrique a encouragé l'émergence du stéréotype d'une Afrique homophobe, souvent placée en opposition à une culture occidentale soit tolérante soit dépravée. Il est marquant que cette représentation de l'Afrique comme homophobe est soutenue aussi bien par les traditionalistes, qui insistent que l'homosexualité est un phénomène importé de l'Occident, que par les médias occidentaux qui se concentrent sur des déclarations homophobes faites par des chefs politiques et religieux d'Afrique. Ces deux courants négligent d'admettre l'existence d'un débat interne et de désaccords parmi les Africains eux-mêmes sur le sujet de l'homosexualité. Dans cet article, nous tentons de contrer cette image homogène d'une Afrique homophobe avec une discussion plus nuancée en incluant une comparaison des différentes trajectoires dans l'émergence de l'homosexualité comme question publique dans quatre pays (Le Sénégal, le Cameroun, L'Ouganda, et l'Afrique du Sud). La comparaison met l'accent sur les variations considérables dans les manières dont la question de l'homosexualité s'est politisée. Par exemple, un monde sépare l'image de l'homosexuel comme un "Grand" (un homme riche et puissant) qui impose la pénétration anale comme une forme suprême de soumission (comme au Cameroun et au Gabon, où l'homosexualité est associée à la sorcellerie et autres forces occultes) et les personnes souvent marginales devenues victimes de persécution dans d'autres contextes. Une meilleure compréhension de ce qui est vaguement et incorrectement appelé "homophobie" sera utile pour rapprocher la logique des pressions internationales de décriminalisation et de protection de l'homosexualité avec les cultures locales. Il est indispensable d'obtenir le soutien d'activistes locaux pour contrer l'homophobie en Afrique.

Peter Geschiere is a professor of African anthropology at the University of Amsterdam and co-editor of *Ethnography*. Since 1971 he has undertaken historical-anthropological fieldwork in various parts of Cameroon and elsewhere in West Africa. His publications include *The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Post-colonial Africa* (University Of Virginia Press, 1997) and *Perils of Belonging: Autochthony, Citizenship and Exclusion in Africa and Europe* (University of Chicago Press, 2009), and *Witchcraft, Intimacy and Trust: Africa in Comparison* (University of Chicago Press, forthcoming). E-mail: P.L.Geschiere@uva.nl

The first decade of this century brought a sudden propulsion of "homosexuality" as a burning issue on the public scene in many parts of Africa. Of course, this had a much longer history, certainly in the southern part of the continent. Presidents Mugabe of Zimbabwe and Nujoma of Namibia initiated their attack on homosexuality as an imported Western depravity in the 1990s.[1] Around the same time, the struggle over the liberal South African Constitution—with its famous antidiscrimination clause that explicitly forbids discrimination because of sexual orientation—made homosexuality a burning issue there. But elsewhere in the continent it was only in the last decade that there was an explosion of popular concerns—often encouraged by political and religious leaders—about homosexuality, and a sudden intensification of government persecution, notably of "gay" young men. The abruptness of this explosion came as a surprise to many observers.[2]

To mention just a few examples: in Cameroon, the government intensified persecution by police and judicial authorities from 2005 on, after several newspapers published lists of "prominent homosexuals" in order to denounce certain practices among the elite. Since then popular indignation is still mounting. In at least four countries (Morocco, Senegal, Nigeria, and Malawi) affairs of "gay marriages"—two young men being photographed during a (fake?) wedding—created great unrest among the population and had very troubling effects for the people involved. In 2009 the Ugandan politician David Bahati submitted a bill—apparently with strong support from American missionaries—to impose the death penalty for cases of "aggravated homosexuality" (see Sadgrove et al. 2012). International pressure led President Museveni to declare the bill "a foreign policy issue" and ensure that it would languish in Parliament, despite strong support for it among the MPs (the last time it was introduced they erupted in a chant, "our bill, our bill"). In Ghana, the 2011 declaration by U.K. Prime Minster Cameron at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting that certain forms of bilateral development aid might be reconsidered if the country did not decriminalize homosexual behavior led to great indignation. Pentecostal spokesmen in particular insisted that the government should not sell out its principles in order to safeguard development money. Throughout the continent the strong pressure from international human rights missions to abolish laws that criminalize homosexuality continues to

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raise fierce reactions.[3] The furor has led in many cases to the victimization of young men, but lesbians have also been attacked. In some countries (South Africa, Namibia) gang rape of lesbians became a regular practice, and in these countries lesbian associations have been in the vanguard of protest.[4]

Indeed, it is important to emphasize that this uproar has been reinforced by the rapid growth throughout the continent of LGBT organizations that could profit from the increasing availability of funding to combat AIDS, including among "men who have sex with men" (MSM); this has helped to shape new networks and new forms of organizing among people who identify themselves as "gay." Yet it is clear that this increased visibility has been met with an increase in homophobic rhetoric. It is also clear that human rights interventions from the outside have been triggered by the initiatives of a new type of local activists.

These and similar matters have raised considerable international attention. They have also given new fuel to older debates concerning the issue, especially the question of whether homosexuality was (and is) "un-African." Politicians like the ones quoted above, but also religious leaders and traditional spokesmen, insisted ever more strongly that the very idea of same-sex practices was foreign to Africa, and that it had been imported from the West. Mugabe, for instance, chastised it as "an immoral import"; in 1998 the Zambian government even stated that "homosexuality is a Norwegian conspiracy" (since the Norwegian ambassador intervened when a Zambian gay activist ran into trouble—see Hoad 2007:83). Against this, others emphasized that same-sex practices and identities have a long history in Africa and even more important, that homophobia, rather than homosexuality, is a Western import.[5] After all, the articles criminalizing homosexuality were often copied from laws of the former colonial power. The very idea of Africa as a part of the world free from same-sex contacts seems to go back to the nineteenth-century explorer Richard Burton.[6] And the very language of the attacks on homosexuality—such as the word "sodomy" used by Mugabe and others—points to a Christian background. Indeed, Christian (and Islamic) leaders are often a driving force behind attacks on homosexuality. For Hoad (2007:84) this expression of a supposedly "traditional" aversion to same-sex practices is a graphic illustration of an absolute "refusal to engage Christianity as a colonial legacy."

However, homophobia was also shaped by the postcolonial context, often in quite complicated ways. For the Middle East Joseph Massad (2007) has warned that interventions by global gay activists (he uses the term "Gay International" for a conglomerate of mostly Western gay and lesbian organizations) may be well intentioned but have had highly destructive effects on the spot. He emphasizes that the discursive imposition of homo- versus hetero- as a universal dyad (as implied by the idea of a "global gay identity") runs the risk of repressing "same-sex desires and practices that refuse

to be assimilated in[to] . . . [Gay International's] sexual epistemology." In Massad's view there is a serious risk that the imposition of these Western concepts will have dire consequences for "the poor and non-urban men who practice same-sex contacts and do not *necessarily* identify as homosexual or gay" (2007:163,189; see also Gaudio 2009:182). African echoes of Massad's fierce attack can be found in recent declarations by local activists, but also in academic debates.[7] A relevant question—to which we will return—may be how exactly, and by whom, notions of homosexuality versus heterosexuality are spreading. This may be different in each situation.

All of this debate has already produced a sizable literature, including journalistic reports and a growing corpus of academic studies. It is impossible in this short text to give a full overview of this work.[8] We propose instead to focus on what seems to be the most promising trend in this debate, certainly for academic studies: the effort to overcome a simplistic opposition between homophobic Africa and a tolerant (or depraved) West. It is important to note that it is certainly not only African traditionalists who create such an opposition. As stated, reports in the international press and other media outlets also tend to reinforce this simplistic contrast by focusing on homophobic utterances from Africa, especially the more sensationalist ones—thus ignoring the considerable variation and debate inside the continent. In his recent Ph.D. dissertation Patrick Awondo (2011) analyzes how the international media contribute to the crystallization of a monolithic image of one homophobic Africa. He focuses on Cameroon, but the same is true for other parts of the continent. Also important is Awondo's focus on the "politicization" of the issue, since this helps to highlight the considerable variation in the ways this politicization has taken place, in each case with specific implications for the course of events.[9]

These two focal points offer convenient axes for this short overview.[10] We propose to juxtapose different trajectories in the politicization of the issue in four countries: Cameroon, Senegal, Uganda, and South Africa. By providing short sketches of how the issue became a central political concern in each case, and also by paying attention to striking differences in the contours of "the" homosexual, we hope to highlight the specificities of each setting and their different implications. This may help to provide a view of the issue that is more nuanced than the prevailing impression, both inside and outside the continent, of one homophobic Africa—without, however, playing down the very real impact of recent outbursts of homophobia. In the conclusion we will return to general implications of this more situational approach—both in terms of the discursive imposition of homo/hetero as a central dyad, and in relation to the even more vital question of how a more variegated perspective can help us find a more prudent route for creating (or restoring) more space for alternative sexual expression.

Cameroon: Homophobia as a Political Critique

The case of Cameroon is of particular interest for a general overview, precisely because developments there had quite specific aspects and implications. In this country, popular concern about a supposed spread of same-sex practices in higher circles triggered a determined attack on the political elite and its moral depravity.[11] The denouncing of such hidden practices embarrassed the government and led to the unleashing of a witch hunt against gays that, not surprisingly, targeted mainly boys from poorer social backgrounds. Another striking aspect—but one with clear parallels elsewhere—was the central role of Christian leaders, especially Catholic clergy, in mobilizing this popular anger.

The most detailed analyses of the events that marked the emergence of homosexuality as a central public issue in Cameroon are those of Charles Guébogo (2006, 2009) and Patrick Awondo (2010, 2012a, 2012b).[12] A turning point was what is now known as "l'Affaire des listes d'homosexuels" (the affair of the lists of homosexuals). On January 11, 2006, a minor Yaoundé newspaper, *La Metéo*, published a lead article on the subject of homosexuality in higher circles, followed by a list of eleven persons. On January 24 another minor newspaper, *L'Anecdote*, attracted even more attention when it printed a list of fifty "prominent homosexuals." Both lists contained familiar names: a former prime minister, some MPs, renowned journalists, and other well-known figures, mostly men but some women as well. The exact accusations were not clear. In the list in *L'Anecdote* a small photograph and a short text were added to each name. A recurring theme was that job applicants were forced into homosexual acts ("but soon the pants came down . . . "); the implication was that elite persons were taking advantage of the willingness of many unemployed youths to do anything for a job, including subjecting themselves to a homosexual "initiation." The lists created great excitement. Other newspapers copied parts of the lists, adding more general articles about homosexuality throughout the centuries in various parts of the world but also as a creeping threat to Cameroon society.

It was clear that the lists did not appear out of thin air. During a crowded press conference a few days later, Jean-Pierre Amougou Belinga, *L'Anecdote*'s editor-in-chief, referred to the Christmas sermon a month earlier by the archbishop of Yaoundé, Monseigneur Victor Tonye Bakot, in which the latter warned about homosexuality among the Cameroonian elite and also criticized the European Union and the Amsterdam Treaty "of 1997" (actually 1999) that required member states to prohibit any form of discrimination based on sexual orientation. (Since 1972 homosexuality has been a criminal offense under Cameroonian law). The archbishop insisted that any plea for the decriminalization of such a sin was contrary to the teachings of the Bible. But his attack was also informed by the long-standing concern of notably the Catholic Church about the influence of secret soci-

eties of European origin, first the Freemasons and later the Rosicrucians, among high-placed Cameroonian politicians and civil servants. There was a direct link with colonial history here, notably with the hostility inspired by the notion of *laicité* (emphasizing the secular character of the French state) among missionaries, who always suspected civil servants of being Freemasons. This context is complicated by the fact that in Cameroon Freemasonry became popularly associated with homosexuality: in the 1970s and 1980s *franc maçon* was a common term of abuse for a homosexual.

This historical association may be one factor in turning indignation against the elites on the part of the Church and the citizenry into a furor over a supposed proliferation of homosexuality. Paul Biya, the country's president since 1982, is a practicing Catholic and a product of Catholic schools. Indeed, many priests enthusiastically celebrated his rise to power after he took over from Ahmadou Ahidjo, Cameroon's first president and a Muslim from the North. However, soon after he took office rumors developed that he was becoming increasingly involved with the Rosicrucians. The informal gossip and news networks of so-called pavement radio, or "radio trottoir" as it is popularly called in Cameroon, are a source of constant speculation about secret confrontations between factions of Freemasons and Rosicrucians in the struggle for power and wealth. The archbishop's Christmas sermon of 2005 and the lists of early 2006 signaled a new dimension to such rumors.[13]

In this context, "homosexuality" became a convenient outlet for venting the considerable popular dissatisfaction with the regime—an opening against which the political elite did not seem to know very well how to defend themselves. Within the country, most people feel the effects of the ongoing economic crisis since 1987. President Biya's government has nevertheless succeeded in hanging on to power—even surviving the abrupt introduction of multiparty politics in 1990—by a shrewd mixture of divide-and-rule tactics and brutal force. However, the unexpected accusations of immoral homosexual practices have been more difficult to counter. It was striking, for instance, that *L'Anecdote* was not banned. Only a few of *les Grands* (i.e., rich and powerful "Big Men") on the list filed a libel complaint with the Department of Justice, with limited success. But most of them just kept their heads low. Apparently, *L'Anecdote* and *La Metéo* had found a weak spot in the regime's armor.

President Biya himself reacted at first somewhat hesitantly. At the national Youth Festival in 2006, a few weeks after the publication of the lists, he spoke about the need to respect people's privacy. Yet at the same time the regime opted for a determined attack on homosexual practices, apparently in order to distance itself from such suspicions. Over the next few years a true witch hunt was conducted by the authorities, resulting in a long series of trials against people—mostly young men—accused of homosexuality (see Ndjio 2012b). Typically a person would be denounced by his

neighbors, and the police would break into his house and arrest him. The Catholic Church was also a powerful actor in the mobilizing of popular indignation about homosexuality. In 2009 Cardinal Tumi, a critic of the regime with great moral prestige, initiated a protest movement against the government for signing the 2003 Maputo Declaration on Human and People's Rights in Africa (focused on women's rights) with the claim that such continentwide agreements might lead eventually to the decriminalization of homosexuality.

Overall, what is particularly striking in the Cameroonian case is the quite specific image of the homosexual that was at the basis of the uproar. Both the lists and the attacks by the Yaoundé archbishop and others targeted mainly *les Grands*, who are supposed to subject young men to humiliating same-sex rituals. In this vision the link of homosexuality to witchcraft, as well as other forms of occult power and secret associations like Freemasonry and the Rosicrucians, is heavily emphasized.[14] It is this version of the homosexual that is powerfully evoked by Achille Mbembe as the ultimate *phallocrate:* anal penetration as a sublime form of subjection.[15]

However, it is important to underline that there were also other voices in Cameroon making themselves heard and expressing a contrary point of view. As Awondo (2012b) shows, the furor can be read differently—not only as a popular attack on the political elite but also as a scandal fueled by fierce rivalry within the media. He notes that both *La Metéo* and *L'Anecdote* were newcomers in the field, and clearly used the lists in order to establish a niche market—with considerable commercial success: over the next few years *L'Anecdote* in particular became quite successful. In contrast, the more established private newspapers—especially *La Nouvelle Expression* and *Mutations*—voiced completely different views, questioning the journalistic integrity of those who published material that violated the privacy of individuals and that was based solely on rumors. *La Nouvelle Expression* wondered what right the compilers of the lists had to assume the role of inquisitor. Unfortunately, such opposing voices were completely ignored by the international media, thus strengthening the image of one homophobic national press.[16]

For Cameroon, the most powerful voice speaking out against the wave of homophobia—and acting against it—was (and is) no doubt that of Alice Nkom, a lawyer in Douala and the founder of the Cameroonian gay rights organization ADEFHO (Association for the Defense of Homosexuals in Cameroon). Since 2005 Nkom has been one of the few lawyers defending people accused of homosexual acts. Her expert defense strategy—based on the statutory provision that a defendant cannot be condemned on account of a general suspicion of "homosexuality" but only for same-sex *acts*, which are often hard to prove—has resulted in acquittals in an important number of cases (see Ndjio 2012b). In 2011 the European Union accorded her and her organization an important subvention for creating more openness about homosexuality.[17] A figure like Nkom shows that in Africa there are

also powerful voices pleading for more tolerance for alternative sexualities. It is also striking that the persecuted "homosexual" youths defended by Nkom, one of whom died a few days after he was released from prison (see Awondo 2012a), present a very different image from that of the scheming *Grand* with occult powers that is central in so many popular rumors.

Uganda: Missionaries, Politicians, and the Manipulation of Moral Panics

Uganda has become synonymous with homophobia in Africa, largely as a result of the notorious Anti-Homosexuality Bill first proposed by David Bahati in 2009. As mentioned, Members of Uganda's Parliament chanted "our bill, our bill" when the bill made one of its intermittent appearances in parliament and they are of course right—the bill is Ugandan. But it is also the product of international interactions. The role of American missionaries, as well as the cynical manipulation of moral panics by the Ugandan government, paint a more complex picture.[18]

In Uganda, right-wing evangelical Christians enjoy access to the highest tiers of government. First Lady Janet Museveni, who is also an MP, is a born-again Christian who does not hesitate to use her position to promote a theocratic vision. Foreign missionaries, especially right-wing American missionaries, are entrenched in Ugandan society and have a great deal of political influence. Of course, missionary work in Uganda is not new, and the missions do important and necessary work, stepping in where the state has fallen short especially in the areas of education and health care and the running of orphanages. But what is new is the involvement of the U.S. religious right in local politics, where they campaign to prevent laws that would protect the rights of LGBT people and to promote laws that would curtail those rights.

In 2009 the American author-pastor Scott Lively and his cohorts from the U.S. religious right descended on Kampala for meetings with Members of Parliament, lawyers, religious leaders, and representatives from universities and secondary schools to warn against the "gay agenda." The trip culminated in a three-day seminar attended by Uganda's elite, including Bahati and other MPs, in which U.S. evangelists whipped up hysteria over the supposed scheming of gays to sodomize African children and destroy Ugandan culture. Bahati became the champion of this message, and his bill, which has circulated through the parliamentary process in various versions but has not been adopted, has all the hallmarks of U.S. religious right obsessions, including the idea that any concession to LGBT equality will lead to the destruction of the family, the building block of society. The "Kill the Gays" bill (as it was referred to in the media), which includes the death penalty as well as a provision that would require people (parents, doctors, priests) to report suspected homosexuals within twenty-four hours or face imprisonment, has provoked international condemnation. It led also to Museveni's warning MPs to "go slow" because the bill was a sensitive foreign

affairs issue, and a number of U.S. evangelists, including Lively himself, publically distanced themselves from some of its content. In a case that could set important legal precedent, Lively is being sued by the umbrella organization Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG) on American soil under the alien tort statute on the grounds that he has incited the persecution of gay men in Uganda, in violation of international law.[19]

Homosexuality is powerful symbolic terrain in Africa, as elsewhere. Indeed, the Ugandan trajectory shows most graphically how homosexuality can become embroiled in neocolonial politics. Ironically, the existing sodomy laws were first imposed by the British. The breathtaking stained glass windows of St. Mary's Cathedral on Lubaga Hill on the outskirts of Kampala depict the martyrdom of Buganda youth executed for withholding sexual favors from the Buganda king following their conversion to Catholicism (Hoad 2007). But when MPs chant "our bill," they are using this proposed law as a way of asserting moral authority and national autonomy *against* a neocolonial West. President Museveni himself uses his mixed tacit support for and public cautions against the bill as a way of navigating an ambiguous relationship with the West.

The backdrop to the "Kill the Gays" bill is economic woe, widespread social dissatisfaction, and an increasingly autocratic leadership in Uganda.[20] The violently suppressed "Walk to Work" campaign in Kampala was in response to rising fuel and food prices. It is precisely in these kinds of situations that moral panic can distract attention from the real, underlying causes of the problems and divert local dissatisfaction and international attention from other abuses. Most recently the Ugandan government has used the pretext that NGOs are "promoting homosexuality" to clamp down on civil society as a whole.

There is no doubt antihomosexual sentiment has a receptive audience in Uganda, and the U.S. religious right taps into these anxieties and fears.[21] Indeed, the same language that is used to talk about HIV and AIDS as a symptom of social decay and moral turpitude is used to whip up public sentiment against gays and lesbians. This suggests that in part the increase in homophobia might be understood as an oblique response to the ravages of AIDS. This is not to suggest that there is a stigmatized association between homosexuality and AIDS: the epidemic has been too heterosexual for that. But the social disruption caused by AIDS is surely one of the factors that create a climate in which moral panics—particularly around sex—occur (see Cheney 2012).

It also has to be acknowledged that LGBT organizations in Uganda have responded to the attacks, at times quite successfully, making deft use of the relative autonomy of the judiciary in Uganda and achieving small but significant gains. In 2010 the Ugandan newspaper *Rolling Stone* published the names, photographs, and addresses of one hundred homosexuals under the headline "Hang Them"; unlike the people named in Cameroon, the individuals were all gay activists, and the scourge of homosexuality was

not looked for in the heart of government, but rather in a new generation of young activists seen to be undermining Ugandan cultural values. But the journalists were sued in court and lost, and the decision set an important precedent upholding the right to privacy.[22]

Senegal: Between "Cultural Anger" and Religious Fervor.

Another country in which the politicization of homosexuality followed a specific trajectory is Senegal. A striking difference (in comparison, for instance, with Cameroon) is that while homosexuality is criminalized under Senegalese law, the Senegalese government intervened *against* violent homophobic actions.[23]

The Senegalese case can best be understood according to the notion of "cultural anger" as developed by Gilbert Herdt (2009). In the introduction to his book on "sexual panics," Herdt points out the mechanism by which one panic gives way to another: "It is this general process that I refer to as cultural anger—the marshalling of intense emotion across diffuse domains and arenas of action to unite disparate individuals and groups in political pursuit of a common enemy or sexual scapegoat" (2009:5). In particular, Herdt's emphasis on the linking of different panics—and their transfer from one domain to another—provides insights into the recent waves of homophobia in Senegal. Before 2008 this country was known as one of the most tolerant countries for homosexuality in Africa. It is true that for individuals too much visibility was always dangerous (as elsewhere in the continent—see Teunis 1996; Niang 2003) and that there was always the threat that Muslims might attack those who transgressed sexual norms too openly with a rain of stones (Niang 2010). Yet it was not by accident that Senegal was the very first country in Francophone Africa to implement public health programs that especially addressed men who have sex with men (MSM), thus allowing for greater public acceptance of this minority (see Wade et al. 2005; Larmarange et al. 2009). Three specific events in 2008 and 2009, however, sparked a sudden spread of homophobia in Senegal.

The first event was in February 2008 when the magazine *Icône* published pictures of young men celebrating a "gay marriage" in a restaurant near Dakar (see Gnagna 2012). This caused a great stir in public opinion and a frenzied search for those shown in the pictures. One of the partners in the supposed marriage was obliged to flee the country, first to Mali and then to Gambia, where he was similarly attacked, until he finally found safe haven in South Africa with the support of French activists. Mansour Dieng, the editor of *Icône*, accused this "presumed homosexual" of having threatened him with physical violence. Soon after that, a number of young men were arrested on charges of homosexual activity and the issuing of "death threats," but they were released a few days later, apparently due to the intervention of the government. What subsequently became known as "l'affaire du mariage homosexuel" turned into a public issue when Mbaye Niang,

an imam and Member of Parliament, organized a march to protest against homosexuality in general and the release of the young men in particular. The march was stopped by the police. Yet this *affaire homosexuelle* seems to have triggered a whole series of witch hunts by highly vocal groups in Senegalese society against people accused of same-sex practices.

In April and May 2009 a group of Muslim religious leaders, apparently frustrated by the apparent laxity of the government and also by the waning of popular indignation about *l'affaire*, decided to launch another attack. In April, nine presumed homosexuals who had been arrested during a meeting on HIV/AIDS prevention, convicted, and sentenced to eight years in jail were released in response to considerable international pressure.[24] The Muslim leaders, in turn, announced the creation of the "Front islamique pour la défense des valeurs éthiques" (The Islamic Front for the Defense of Ethical Values) and called for the death penalty for all the people convicted of homosexuality (*Agence France Presse* 2009).

The Front's fatwa had a broad impact on public opinion. In different parts of the country, for example, it was reported that young men had exhumed the body of a *Goor-gigen* (a term for "man-woman" that has a long history throughout Senegal) that was seen as desecrating the cemetery. In a village near Kaolack a group of young people disturbed the burial of a well-known *Goor-gigen* in August 2008 and then exhumed the body in November. A similar event was reported in June 2009 from Tiès, where Muslims dug up the corps of two presumed homosexuals.[25]

Indeed, influential Senegalese religious and political leaders seem to be convinced that an actual infiltration of homosexuality—as an imposition from outside—threatens the social order and the *intégrité nationale*. This idea is repeated regularly on the media. It also inspires other initiatives, like the staging of theatrical presentations about the fate awaiting homosexuals after their death and debates broadcast over local TV stations. In 2008 a number of MPs from both the government party and the opposition proposed a law imposing more severe punishments for homosexuality than those that already existed, namely five to ten years in jail and a fine of one to five millions FCFA (see Gnagna 2012). The striking cooperation between political parties on this issue is matched by the unanimity among religious leaders in their vituperation against homosexuals. For instance, on this issue leaders of the Murid brotherhood, a very powerful influence in Senegalese politics and society, seem to agree completely with orthodox Muslims, who in other respects are their arch-enemies. Young rap musicians join in this chorus (see Gnagna 2012). This remarkable unanimity offers a striking example of the spreading-out effect of "cultural anger": a moral critique of disrespect for the institution of marriage becomes a political issue that helps to articulate dissatisfaction with the laxity of the state and, even more widely, the postcolonial imposition in the context of international pressure to liberate anti-AIDS activists.

The events mentioned above illustrate again a quite specific trajectory of the politicization of homophobia. In the Senegalese case an ideology of homophobia acquired considerable scope due to an explosive mixture of religious excitement, disappointment with the state, and a feeling that crucial moral values were undermined by an inversion of sexual norms that threatened the very reproduction of society. Yet for Senegal there is also good reason to reject an unnuanced idea of "state homophobia" and to warn against a tendency to exaggerate the role of the politico-administrative elite in this respect. It is true that the law criminalizing homosexuality was initiated by the postcolonial state. But in a country in which religious-political leaders have succeeded in mobilizing considerable "cultural anger" against people suspected of homosexual acts, the government has attempted to play the role of negotiator, arbitrating between the demands of a rising tide of religious orthodoxy and the responsibility to protect a minority that is particularly affected by HIV/AIDs and is the target of often violent discrimination (see Niang et al. 2003, 2004).

South Africa: Legalization of Gay Marriage and Countervailing Forces

The politicization of homosexuality followed quite a different trajectory in South Africa, which, unlike other African countries, has passed laws affirming gay rights. However, the contrast is not absolute. In South Africa, countervailing tendencies remain very strong and vocal.

In November 2006 South Africa passed the Civil Union Act, becoming the fifth country in the world and the first in Africa to legalize same-sex marriage. Less than three months later, in response, the Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act 2006 was proposed in the Nigerian National Assembly—a law that, if it had been adopted, would effectively have outlawed same-sex activity and organizing in Nigeria. This sparring over same-sex marriage thus became a symbolic contest over culture, tradition, and authenticity. In this scenario South Africa, along with its liberal 1997 Constitution, is cast as aligned with the West and not authentically African.[26] But the tension that runs through South Africa's engagement on gay rights both regionally and internationally is also a tension within South Africa itself. In one sense legalizing same-sex marriage was the inevitable outcome of the article against discrimination on the basis of "sexual orientation" in the Bill of Rights in South Africa's Constitution, adopted a decade earlier. Yet it was precisely this final step that mobilized strong protest.

While most anticolonial movements in Africa fostered a particular version of heterosexual masculinity with women in supportive, but secondary, roles, South Africa's liberation movement embraced women's rights and gay rights too. The history behind the inclusion of sexual orientation in the Constitution has received a great deal of academic attention. The influ-

ences cited include prominent and visible gay and lesbian figures within the liberation movement; the solidarity politics of the antiapartheid movement (which included LGBT organizations); and the fact that exiled South African leaders were exposed for decades to struggles over gender and sexuality rights taking place elsewhere in the world. In 1984 the celebrated South African gay rights activist Simon Nkoli was arrested and charged with treason, along with the cream of South Africa's leadership, many of whom went on to occupy high level positions in government (see Gevisser 1999; Hoad 2005; Cock 2005).

Perhaps most important, at the time of the drafting of the Constitution in 1996, the recent demise of apartheid meant that there was a strong national consensus around the ideal of nondiscrimination. Opposition to the Constitution was muted; only the small and politically insignificant African Christian Democratic Party took a position against it. Human rights, not majority views, constitute the cornerstone of the Constitution (see Cock 2005), and the Bill of Rights is an especially revered document—it would be hard for any government to tamper with it. Religious, ethnic, and racial minorities recognize that their interests are protected by the same provision that protects sexual minorities, and in this respect sexual orientation has taken on a symbolic role as a litmus test of the strength and resilience of the Constitution, the foundational document of the new democratic order. How the most vulnerable and marginalized are treated is seen as symptomatic of the success of the democratic project (see Gevisser & Cameron 1995; see also Reid 2010a).

In response to the new Constitution, legal reform took place at a rapid rate, discriminatory legislation was scrapped, and new provisions were put in place. Marriage was the last obstacle to full equality for same-sex couples and it was this issue, more than all others, that generated a public debate about homosexuality. In the period preceding the passing of the Civil Union Act, the National House of Traditional Leaders—the stronghold of the chiefs created under the same Constitution—organized a countrywide series of public hearings in the rural constituencies that form the backbone of their support base. Throughout the country traditionalists found common ground with some Christians in their vociferous condemnation of same-sex marriage, especially during the public hearings that were held to debate the issue (see Judge et al. 2011). Nevertheless, in 2005 the Constitutional Court declared that the common-law definition of marriage as between a man and a woman was unconstitutional, and in 2006 the Civil Union Act was passed by the South African National Assembly in spite of this widespread public opposition. Its approval required a high level of party discipline; ANC Members of Parliament were obliged to be present and vote in favor of the bill.

Despite groundbreaking successes in terms of law and policy, however, the South African experience also speaks to the limits of the law. The Constitution remains an ideal, sometimes at far remove from lived reality. The

very high level of gender-based violence, including targeted rape of lesbians, is an extreme symptom of a gap between the ideals of the Constitution and everyday life. Reid's study (2010a) focuses on the sense of citizenship evoked by the minority rights provisions of the Constitution and the new forms of community and identity that have emerged as a result; but Tucker (2009) argues that race and class remain intractable conditions for accessing the relative freedoms enshrined in the Constitution.

The public debates around same-sex marriage, especially arguments based on "tradition and culture," reveal that social attitudes toward gay rights that prevail elsewhere in Africa are in many ways salient in South Africa as well. The existence of high-profile attacks places the aspirations of the Constitution in stark relief. Yet as Matebeni (2011) shows, lesbians in South Africa find ways of living creative, productive, and satisfying lives; the image of the lesbian as a rape victim is limiting and inaccurate. Gay men also find ways of navigating complex social worlds and experience levels of integration and acceptance that is surprising, even in rural areas (Reid forthcoming).

Conclusion

It is striking that the current image of one monolithically homophobic Africa has been adopted by both African "traditionalists" and Western observers—that is, by African political and religious leaders who contribute to the image and insist on the need to protect Africa against this imported vice *and* by Western news media and activists who feel they have to combat homophobia as a given on the continent. As the comparisons above show, both views assume a radical opposition between homophobic Africa and a supposedly tolerant West. Thus they ignore different points of view and policies within Africa. But they also overlook the reality that homophobic practices and utterances are part and parcel of everyday life in even supposedly tolerant countries (for instance, the Netherlands, which is known as a "guide country" for gay emancipation).

The focus above on the politicization of homophobia in Africa is intended to differentiate the image of one homophobic Africa and to highlight the historicity of recent explosions of homophobia, especially the way they are linked to the colonial and postcolonial background. However, this argument for a more nuanced image of homophobia on the continent should not understate the very real force of homophobic movements in present-day Africa—not only those instigated by political and religious leaders but also those inspired by widespread popular indignation.[27] What is clear in all the cases discussed above is that these homophobic reactions are closely related to resentment of Western imperialism.[28] But again, this picture has to be differentiated, since there are varying patterns in this linking to the West. On the one hand, political and religious leaders tend to use the image of same-sex practices as nonindigenous to Africa—that

is, as an imported Western vice—in order to mobilize popular sentiment against Western imposition of its own versions of liberal values. On the other hand, a prominent strand in the popular imagination is a growing disappointment with the promises of development. Fueled by visions of the enviable global lifestyles—which are becoming ever more visible and ever less accessible, at least for the many—this resentment is exacerbated by the visibility of a consumerist gay lifestyle that makes such moral "depravity" an easy target for feelings of discontent. Moreover, this lifestyle can easily be interpreted as a menace to the solidarity of the family and the material exchanges that reinforce this solidarity.[29] The refuge in religion can further reinforce homophobic tendencies.[30]

A further complication is that, as many scholars point out, Western imperialism takes many forms. It is clear that the antigay agenda being promoted by the U.S. religious right is a powerful force for aggravating homophobia. But the imposition of human rights ideals by well-meaning activists can also have negative effects. As Massad (2007) points out, gay activists who promote the notion of a global gay identity based on the homo/hetero dyad as universal can, in fact, reinforce homophobic reactions that victimize local people. A good example of this may be the confidence with which both the Cameroonian journalists of the "lists" and Catholic spokesmen speak about homosexuality versus heterosexuality as a self-evident dichotomy. Yet even here the complex nature of the influences propagating this idea of a global gay identity must be considered. Gaudio's fine-grained study of "sexual outlaws" in Northern Nigeria (2009), for example, raises the question of who exactly is spreading the homo/hetero conceptual dyad as self-evident and suggests that the answer may be more variegated than Massad's attack on "Gay International" implies. For Gaudio's informants in Kano during the 1990s, the term "homosexual" was still a foreign one. But with the rapid spread of the Internet and the publicizing of debates on homosexuality (and homophobia), these terms have been appropriated on a large scale. Compare the ease with which the supposed "gay marriages" in different parts of the continent were interpreted in this terminology. The identification in many parts of Africa (and elsewhere) of gays with modernity—as having a special taste for new forms of consumerism and new lifestyles—is also a powerful leverage in this context.[31] The implications can be different: this association can inspire nasty attacks, but also admiration. Once again, the way in which the issue is related to resentment or admiration of the West can follow varying trajectories. But they all help to propagate the language of "homo" versus "hetero."

Homophobia clearly differs in time and space, but what is also striking in the comparisons above is the way in which the figure of "the" homosexual can take on such different contours. There is the phallocratic homosexual associated with power, witchcraft, and the occult as highlighted by the rumors in Cameroon and Gabon and also by Mbembe's powerful evocation of an emerging practice of anal penetration as a supreme form of

subjection to the whims of *les Grands*. In Senegal, Uganda, and South Africa same-sex practices were associated not with powerful individuals but with marginal people; the association with witchcraft, let alone with secret associations like Freemasonry, did not play a central role. At the same time, we should not assume complete regional differences: the persecuted young men defended by Alice Nkom in Cameroon resemble the accused in Senegal or Uganda much more than they do *les Grands* of their own country.

This may suggest that we still know far too little of the practice of same-sex relations in present-day Africa. There is a rapidly growing literature on the debates and the discourses, but less about everyday practices. It is clear that very different figures are targeted, and that the attackers appropriate the general term of "homosexual" for their own purposes. This is perhaps not that different from elsewhere in the world, but what may be special for Africa is that, for obvious reasons, we know so little about same-sex practices in everyday life. In some respects Evans-Pritchard, in his classic 1970 study of the Zande, told us more than later scholars have.[32] More attention to the variegated patterns in same-sex practices in different parts of the continent and in different social situations might not only help disperse overly simplistic images of one homophobic Africa, but also free the issue somewhat from its close association with the West (whether as an example or as an abhorrent counterpoint). It might also help to move us beyond the extended debate on same-sex practices as imported or indigenous to Africa. In the end Neville Hoad is probably right in suggesting that a solution may not come from efforts to show that homophobia (rather than homosexuality) is un-African. Instead, Hoad puts his hopes on the fact that the defense of human rights was, and is, part and parcel of anticolonial, nationalist movements (2007:80). How, then, can one now possibly defend the notion that alternative sexualities should be expelled from human rights discourse?

On a practical level, one truism does emerge despite all differences: interventions from outside Africa—whether from politicians or activists—that prescribe certain values can very easily turn out to be counterproductive. They should always take into account the local differences around this sensitive issue. Close collaboration with people on the ground—who are the first to bear the brunt of a possible backlash—is vital.[33]

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Notes

1. See Human Rights Watch (2003).
2. See also Broqua (2012), whose overview focuses similarly on the need to reject the image of one undifferentiated homophobic Africa. See also Epprecht (2012).
3. As far as the law is concerned, there are striking variations between countries. Homosexuality remains criminalized in all former British and Portuguese colonies (although there is some question about this in Mozambique, where the Minister of Justice recently declared that the vague provisions of the law did not apply to homosexuality). In most of the former French and Belgian colonies in sub-Saharan Africa it is mostly not criminalized (homosexuality did not figure as a crime in the Napoleonic law). Exceptions are Mauritania (where the criminalization includes the death penalty), Senegal, Guinea, Cameroon, and Burundi (introduced only very recently, in 2009).
4. See Morgan and Wieringa (2005); Lorway (2008); Currier (2010); Mkhize et al. (2010); Morgan et al. (2009); Reid and Dirsuweit (2002).
5. On the long history of same-sex practices in Africa versus the idea of "homosexuality" as a Western import, see Murray and Roscoe (1998); Epprecht (1998, 2004); Reid (forthcoming); Gaudio (2007). See also see Epprecht (2008) on "heterosexual Africa" as a historical construct.
6. Apparently Burton got this idea from Gibbon (who saw England and Africa as resistant against the vice that had led to the collapse of the Roman empire). See Hoad (2007:11); Epprecht (2008:43).
7. See Broqua (2012:19–23); Hoad (2007:83); Gaudio (2007:182).
8. For a more complete overview, see Broqua (2012).
9. Broqua (2012) focuses, similarly, on the "publicitization" of the issue. Demange (2012:27) treats this publicitization as a kind of preliminary stage to the issue's "politicization."
10. This focus on different trajectories of politicization means that important aspects will be left aside, notably the very complex connections to the AIDS epidemic; see Nguyen (2010).
11. See Ladô (2011:921), who refers to the "homophobie populaire" in Cameroon as a "diabolisation de l'élite politique et économique."
12. See also Boulaga (2007); Geschiere (2010); Ladô (2011); and Ndjio (2012a).
13. However, Awondo (2012a: ch. 1) notes that the tendency by many commentators to see the archbishop's 2005 Christmas sermon as the beginning of the whole affair has to be nuanced. For instance, already in June 2005 the police had invaded a "gay bar" in Yaoundé and arrested 30 young men, 11 of whom remained in prison for almost a year (see ADEFHO 2008). In Awondo's view the archbishop, like the journalists of the lists, had "surfed" on rumors that had already been increasing for some time about a proliferation of same-sex practices in the city.
14. There are striking parallels with Gabon and Congo Brazza, where people are similarly preoccupied with the links among "homosexuality," witchcraft, Freemasonry, and occult power; see Aterianus-Owanga (2012); Tonda (2002:51; 2005:158; 2012). Indeed, Broqua (2012:14) suggests that the link with witchcraft is particularly salient in Central Africa (in contrast to West Africa). But it is also present, albeit less prominently, in South Africa (see Niehaus 2002a,

2002b). The image of nocturnal meetings where the witches stage huge cannibalistic banquets and sexual orgies is quite general to Africa (and beyond); sexuality in these images is always transgressive, and in African contexts it is often same-sex. Yet the further link of same-sex sexuality to the occult forces of *les Grands* and their phallocracy may get special emphasis in Equatorial Africa. Aterianus-Owanga (2012:64) quotes, for instance, a current saying in Gabon: "L'émergence n'aime pas les femmes"—referring to the new regime of President Ali Bongo, who succeeded his father in 2009 and likes to label his regime as "emergent"; rebellious musicians appropriated the expression to mock the new elite's depravity and their supposed preference for (anal) same-sex practices. Such mockery could fit in the Cameroonian context as well (see Pommerolle 2008:82), but might work less well in, for instance, Uganda or Senegal. But compare also the strong rumors in Nigeria about the country's former President General Ibrahim Babangida, whose supposed homosexuality was used to justify a military coup against him in 1990 (see Johnson 2000:145).

15. See Mbembe (2006). See also Mbembe (2001; 2010:213–21).
16. An early example, published one year after the promulgation of the lists, of more nuanced views was also a special issue of *Terroirs* (2007), edited by Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, the grand old man of the philosophy department of the University of Yaoundé I.
17. Yet her very success also shows the strength of homophobic currents. The government tried in all possible ways to block her E.U. subvention. When she succeeded nonetheless in using this money to organize a series of public seminars, they were disrupted by a group of fanatic opponents while the police stood by passively. In 2012 the same group organized a "day of hate against homosexuality" as an answer to gay parades elsewhere in the world.
18. See Tamale (2007); Tamale and Murillo (2007); Demange (2012); Sadgrove et al. (2012); Cheney (2012).
19. In March 2012 a U.S. nonprofit called the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) filed a federal lawsuit against Abiding Truth Ministries President Scott Lively on behalf of Sexual Minorities Uganda (see www.ccrjustice.org/lgbt-uganda-fights-back-case-against-scott-lively).
20. Sadgrove et al. (2012) relate the fact that "homosexual rhetoric has been able to gain such popular purchase within Uganda" to people's view of homosexuality as dangerously undermining the material exchanges—notably around marriage involving two kin groups—that constitute the very base of family life. This is certainly an important factor. Yet the authors seem to neglect the fact that many Pentecostal preachers, who often take the lead in attacks on homosexuals, are also quite critical of the family. In many parts of Africa the new charismatic churches warn the believers against the dangerous influences of the (extended) family, often depicted as the site of the Devil. Indeed, one of the attractions of the new creed seems to be that it helps to liberate converts from the often suffocating pressure of family networks (see Meyer 1999; Marshall 2009). Yet such attacks on the wider family do not seem to give rise to moral panics. It is important not to see Africans' perceptions of the family as timeless givens; there is also rapid change and ambiguity in this domain.
21. See Tamale and Murillo (2007) for a vivid report on the public outcry unleashed against one of the authors (Sylvia Tamale) when she publicly spoke up in support of rights of homosexuals; see also Tamale (2007).

22. Judgment issued on January, 3, 2011, in the Uganda High Court by Judge Vincent Musoke-Kibuuke, which granted an injunction against any media outlet publishing the names and personal information about individuals on the grounds that such behavior "threatens the rights of applications to privacy of the person and their home."
23. Article 319 of the penal code of Senegal prescribes a punishment from one to five years in jail for anyone who commits an "immodest" act or an act "against nature with an individual of the same sex." If the act involves a minor, the maximum punishment has to be imposed.
24. Again, notably, by the French, since the nine arrested were key collaborators of Sidaction and Aides, both French organizations.
25. See Jeune Afrique.com (2009); *Agence France Presse* (2009). Each time the police intervened and put the body back. Tariq Ramadan, the famous Swiss-Egyptian Islamist, arrived a few weeks later in the country, and during a well-attended lecture (organized by the orthodox Jama'atou Ibadou Rahman), people asked him to comment on this event. His answer was that, even though homosexuality was strictly forbidden by the Quran, believers should leave it to Allah to judge homosexuals (*Le Soleil* 2009).
26. When the bill reappeared before the Nigerian Senate in 2011, the Senate president, David Mark, remarked that same-gender marriage "is offensive to our culture and tradition." Yet as Wieringa (2005) shows, woman-to-woman customary marriage has a long documented tradition in Nigeria, Benin, southern Sudan, and Kenya. Unofficial same-sex marriages between men have a long history in southern Africa, associated with, but not limited to, the system of migrant labor. For further references see Reid (forthcoming).
27. See Sylvia Tamale's impressive testimony on the furious reactions toward her publicly coming out in support of "homosexual rights" in Uganda in 2003 (Tamale & Murillo 2007).
28. Achille Mbembe (2006) points also to other backgrounds: "It remains to be seen whether homosexuality existed in Africa before the colonial expansion. It has not been sufficiently stressed that the patriarchal structures of power in Africa are founded on an original repudiation, that of the homosexual relation" (translated by Peter Geschiere). See also Tonda (2005:214/18) on popular worries in present-day Congo-Brazza and Gabon about the spread of homosexuality, which is perceived as associated with "the end of the symbolic economy of reciprocity and the gift."
29. See Sadgrove et al. (2012). Yet, as mentioned, there is a paradox here since the Pentecostals, who are among the most vocal denouncers of homosexuality, also tend to try to liberate the individual believer from the family; see note 20.
30. Again there seem to be important differences in this respect as well. See Reid (2010b) on a very active gay Pentecostal black church in Johannesburg where religion offers a clear refuge for gays.
31. See Reid (forthcoming) for South Africa; but also see, e.g., Besnier (2011) for Tonga.
32. According to E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1970), the Azande warriors only had intercrural intercourse with their younger pages (the idea of anal penetration would have been abhorrent for the Azande in general, both for men and women). For present-day MSM in different parts of Africa, the literature suggests mainly anal intercourse, however, without being very explicit, but see Reid (forthcoming).

And on the subject of WSW (women who have sex with women), see Morgan and Wieringa (2005); Lorway (2008).

33. See also Epprecht (2012), who expects that organizations focused on AIDS but discreetly promoting sexual rights—that is, acting as a kind of "cover" for gay rights—can be the most helpful in neutralizing present-day tendencies toward homophobia.