

# Troubling the waters of a 'wave of homophobia': Political economies of anti-queer animus in sub-Saharan Africa

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Sexualities

2014, Vol. 17(1/2) 23–42

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DOI: 10.1177/1363460713511098

sex.sagepub.com



## Abstract

During the debate over Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Bill in 2009 and 2010, journalists and activists warned of a 'wave of homophobia' in sub-Saharan Africa. In this article, I illustrate how this trope elides critical differences between contemporaneous incidents. I suggest that forms of anti-queer animus instead might be understood as the products of political economies, and use that approach to distinguish the Anti-Homosexuality Bill in Uganda, the arrest of Tiwonge Chimbalanga and Steven Monjeza in Malawi, and the efflorescence of anti-LGBTI persecution in Senegal. A situated understanding of the political economies that generate these incidents enriches activist responses, and raises critical questions about solidarity and responsibility for activists and theorists alike.

## Keywords

Homophobia, human rights, political economy, postcolony, sub-Saharan Africa

## Introduction: Surges, winds, and waves of homophobia

In late 2009, the tabling of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill in Uganda galvanized an unprecedented level of diplomatic intervention and global protest on behalf of LGBTI populations.<sup>1</sup> In the months that followed, media outlets around the world decried the worsening situation for queer populations in Africa, pointing to the possibility that same-sex activity would be criminalized in Rwanda and scattered raids, arrests, and violence in Malawi, Kenya, Senegal, Cameroon, and Zimbabwe. Both journalists and activists warned that these episodes signaled a 'growing tide' of homophobia in Africa (Raghavan, 2010).

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The imagery used to describe this spreading homophobia was vivid and striking. The Associated Press, BBC, and *Pambazuka News* were among the media outlets that identified a ‘wave of homophobia’ rolling across Africa (Allen, 2010; Callimachi, 2010; Tande, 2009).<sup>2</sup> Paula Donovan, the American co-director of AIDS-Free World, warned *Voice of America* that ‘Homophobia seems to be spreading like a contagion from country to country in Africa’ (DeCapua, 2010). In a *Washington Post* op-ed, Archbishop Desmond Tutu lamented that ‘a wave of hate is spreading across my beloved continent’ (Tutu, 2010). Cesnabmihilo Aken’ova of the International Centre for Reproductive Health and Sexual Rights, a Nigerian NGO, similarly observed that ‘the wind of state homophobia has swept over the African continent’ (Aken’ova, 2010). The idea that homophobia was spreading was helpful for activists seeking to broaden global conversations beyond the Anti-Homosexuality Bill in Uganda, and reliably appeared in media coverage linking disparate instances of anti-queer hostility across sub-Saharan Africa. In these analyses, activists, journalists, and public figures rarely interrogated what it means to say homophobia is ‘rising’ in Africa, or what such a rise might entail.

Although they were ubiquitous, tropes of ‘winds’ and ‘waves’ of homophobia are not merely descriptive. Homophobia is difficult to define, much less instrumentalize, and it is far from clear that it can simply ‘rise’ or ‘fall’ in any regional, national, or intranational setting. By lumping disparate incidents together, these framings homogenize complex responses to sexual acts, identities, and politics. Decrying a wave of homophobia in ‘Africa’ also elides local specificity, and bolsters racist dismissals of the Global South as inherently hostile to queers (Epprecht, 2012: 226; Puar, 2010). By glossing both ‘homophobia’ and ‘Africa,’ these tropes leave little room for the nuance and specificity of sexual politics in postcolonial settings.

Emphasizing a horizontal flood of homophobia across a region obscures the ways that homophobia bubbles up vertically from *within* a nation-state, and how that infuses anti-queer animus with particular memories, anxieties, and resonances. Although the episodes activists and journalists recounted were very real, they invariably emerged from specific histories of colonial and postcolonial politics, and were differentially complicated by national actors and transnational networks of activists, academics, fundamentalists, funders, journalists, and diasporic populations who shaped sexual policing and protestation.

With this in mind, why might it be useful to reject a monolithic concept of homophobia in sub-Saharan Africa and theorize plural and contingent *homophobias*? In this article, I argue for the theoretical and practical importance of a political economy approach that situates different forms of anti-queer animus in national and transnational context. Drawing on a year of fieldwork at a prominent transnational LGBT NGO, I suggest that episodes in Uganda, Malawi, and Senegal illustrate the contextual variability of anti-queer animus, and show how responses are impaired when homophobia is conceptualized monolithically. They also demonstrate where strains of anti-LGBTI animus might in fact share

commonalities, and where postcolonial formations emphasizing culture, tradition, and liberation might diverge from the Victorian, psychoanalytic, and scientific inflections of ‘homophobia’ in the North. A framework that situates expressions of anti-queer animus in the political economies that generate them enables us to insist on specificity while understanding how some tropes do diffuse, vernacularize, and resonate transnationally.

### Destabilizing ‘homophobia’ as an analytic term

Anthropologists have written at length about the ways in which African homosexualities and the meanings of same-sex activity, relationships, and identity are not reducible to the frameworks that dominate Euro-American sexual politics (Amadiume, 1987; Morgan and Wieringa, 2005; Murray and Roscoe, 1998; Msibi, 2011; Tamale, 2011). As a result, disclaiming the specificity of terminology has become standard practice in the cross-cultural study of sexuality. In spite of moves to acknowledge plural homosexualities, however, few anthropologists have critically engaged with plural *homophobias* and the political economies that produce them (Besen, 2010; Epprecht, 2012: 243; Awondo et al. 2012; Murray, 2009).<sup>3</sup>

In part, this is because ‘homophobia’ itself is a historically contingent and analytically imperfect term. ‘Homophobia’ emerged from the politicization of psychiatry and sexuality in the USA, where activists used it to pathologize disdain for homosexuality (Herek, 2000: 19, 2004: 6–7). As the concept developed in the North, ‘homophobia’ became a flexible signifier for different forms of anti-queer animus, which often blended Victorian notions of sexual morality, psychoanalytic notions of normal and abnormal development, and pseudo-scientific and psychological theories. The imperative to police ‘deviant’ sexualities did not develop independently of the nation-state, but grew from and was harnessed to state prerogatives in more or less overt ways (Bérubé and D’Emilio, 1984; Fone, 2000: 414; Graham, 1973; Johnson, 1994–1995; Kinsman, 1995).

Even in the North, the term ‘homophobia’ thus remains limited. It implies that anti-queer animus is rooted in fear rather than anger, hatred, bias, ignorance, jealousy, or other sources of antipathy toward queer persons. Unlike sexism or racism, it locates hostility in a person’s psyche and not in sociostructural dynamics that cultivate prejudice and hostility (Kulick, 2009: 23; Wickberg, 2000: 45). And it elides forms of anti-queer animus which are not about homosexuality per se, but may also be about gender, class, power, and other forms of difference and belonging (Fone, 2000: 6–7). Given its particular origins, too, the term does not adequately capture hostility that is linked to familial or social responsibilities, the preservation of customary or traditional laws and practices in the face of a seemingly inaccessible state, or the reassertion of national virility and sovereignty vis-à-vis the North.

A more productive move might be to discuss *anti-queer animus*, or the manifold expressions of prejudice or violence against same-sex activity, LGBTI mobilization,

and queer transgression and those associated with them. In many sex panics, anti-queer animus remains rooted in anxieties over pedophilia, recruitment, HIV/AIDS, denigration, pollution, and the fate of the nation, which generate fear and cause anti-queer animus to resemble a classic phobia. Elsewhere, animus may be politically or religiously motivated, or may be part of an apparatus privileging heterosexuality and reproduction while dismissing the validity of queer lives and relationships.<sup>4</sup> Theorizing anti-queer animus allows us to think about the many forms of personal and political hostility subsumed within the category, and to go beyond pathology to trace other historical, political, and ideological dynamics that militate against queerness.

### Theorizing political economy beyond 'Africa'

When homophobias are understood to be only one of many forms of anti-queer animus, it is easier to see how they are inflected by the sociopolitical systems from which they arise. The most nuanced understandings of anti-queer animus typically come from local activists, academics, and journalists who are keenly aware of the history, politics, and ideologies that give rise to anti-queer incidents (*Behind the Mask*, 2011; Bop, 2008; *Gay Uganda*, 2011; Tamale, 2003). The specificity of their accounts are often lost as a wider network of actors becomes involved—for instance, as political leaders dismiss homosexuality as 'unAfrican,' journalists seek out regional patterns and metanarratives, and activists respond with the putatively universal frameworks of human rights and public health. When this occurs, external efforts to show solidarity and support have sometimes been unhelpful or counterproductive (Cameron, 2009; Haritaworn et al., 2008; Long, 2009; Massad, 2002). The loss of nuance in globalized campaigns is in part because of the dearth of frameworks that can identify particularities as well as transnational patterns.

Given the nation-state's distinctive roles in producing antipathy toward homosexuality, a political economy approach is especially helpful. In spite of transnational capital, regional governance, and religious fundamentalisms, the nation-state retains the near-exclusive ability to regulate sexuality through penal legislation, family law, and a wide variety of state programs. Indeed, in the face of encroachment in other arenas, articulating a particular understanding of gender, sexuality, and the family has become an urgent project for many governments. The nation-state thus remains relevant in multiple ways. It is frequently invoked as an idea by those who link sexuality to the interests, morality, or tradition of the nation as an imagined community (Anderson, 1983; Engelke, 1999: 298–307). As a political apparatus, agents of the nation-state craft and sanction particular stances on homosexualities, and institutionalize these in state policies. The nation-state also functions as an arena where proponents and detractors of LGBTI populations engage in struggles over rights and recognition. Although a number of analyses have detailed how the nation-state structurally and ideologically shapes LGBTI

mobilization (see Adam et al., 1999), greater attention must be paid to its complex roles in the production of anti-queer animus.

Using a political economy paradigm, evidence of plural forms of anti-queer animus can be found in a variety of venues. In this analysis, I look at three of these: *structures* shaped by the history and legacy of colonialism, contemporary political dynamics, and the role of key state and non-state actors in the sociopolitical system; *discourses* in legislation, judicial rulings, public statements by different stakeholders, and the media; and *episodes* of homophobia where people navigate their attitudes in specific interactions and performances.

A comprehensive approach to political economies of anti-queer animus requires an interdisciplinary analysis of all three of these elements. The anthropological toolkit is virtually indispensable in this project. In particular, episodic animus is difficult to analyze without a rich understanding of the role that hostile attitudes and interactions play in the larger sociocultural systems that generate and shape them. Attitudes fluctuate, and thick description is necessary to provide insights into the specific inflections of animus, how attitudes are actualized in context, and critically, when prejudices may be set aside or overlooked.

This is not to say that other disciplines are inconsequential to the larger project. The insights generated by lengthy, single-sited fieldwork are likely to trade off with the systems-level insights that may be generated by historiography, multi-sited fieldwork, or other temporally or spatially comparative approaches. As evidenced by recent episodes in Uganda, Malawi, and Senegal, political economies of anti-queer animus are not straightforwardly national, but are also shaped by regional and global trends. Researchers engaging with these from a distance or from a cross-cultural perspective might thus productively contribute by considering the structural and discursive frameworks that shape and give voice to distinct forms of animus.

Indeed, a robust political economy approach enriches rather than forecloses cross-cultural work on anti-queer animus. Activists have correctly stressed that shared histories and globalization play key roles in shaping hostility toward LGBTI persons. Many forms of anti-queer animus in sub-Saharan Africa do draw on longstanding scripts, particularly the idea that same-sex activity is “unAfrican” and an “import from the West” (Morgan and Wieringa, 2005: 11). What a deeper analysis should avoid, however, are reductive heuristic tools which imply continuity or causality between distinct incidents. By examining the structures, discourses, and manifestations of animus in each situation, both the specificity and some overlapping themes of headline-grabbing bursts of animus become strikingly apparent.

In the following section, I offer some tentative comparisons of the structural and discursive specifics of recent episodes in Uganda, Malawi, and Senegal, which are lost under the gloss of ‘homophobia in Africa.’ This is primarily to demonstrate the potential of a more nuanced approach to the topic, and of a broader inquiry that would be fleshed out by ethnographies of systemic animus in these locales.

Ultimately, the political economies of anti-queer animus in sub-Saharan Africa are too complex to be treated monolithically, but also too complex for any single synthesis, inviting further elaboration and refinement.

### **Uganda: Christian nationalism and the war against homosexuality**

Given the considerable attention given to it in the popular press, a political economy approach to homophobia is especially helpful in understanding Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Bill of 2009 and the conditions that produced it at a particular moment in time. Structurally, a number of historical and sociopolitical factors have fueled state repression of queer Ugandans. Sodomy has a complex presence in Ugandan nationalism and anti-colonial resistance that both precedes and haunts contemporary debates about homosexuality (Hoad, 2007: 36–55). The most obvious legacy of colonialism for LGBTI people, however, is the prohibition of same-sex activity for both men and women under the Penal Code Act of 1950, using language which is virtually standardized among former colonies of Britain. Section 145 specifies that 'carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature' is punishable with life imprisonment. Section 148 states that 'gross indecency,' whether actual or attempted, in public or private, is punishable with seven years in prison (Ottosson, 2010: 20).

More recently, new tools have been proposed to repress same-sex activity and LGBTI people. The proposed Anti-Homosexuality Bill, introduced by MP David Bahati in 2009, prescribed life in prison for anyone who 'touches another person with the intention of committing the act of homosexuality,' and the death penalty for aggravated homosexuality. It permitted imprisonment of anyone who 'aids, abets, counsels, or procures another to engage in acts of homosexuality,' 'promotes homosexuality,' or fails to report violations of the law within 24 hours. The Bill drew fire from the human rights community for provisions which purported to void Uganda's adherence to any treaty or agreement that contradicted the letter or spirit of the law and rejected any recognition of the concepts of sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual rights, and sexual minorities within Uganda (Anti-Homosexuality Bill, 2009). After four years of controversy, Parliament passed an amended version of the Bill in December 2013.

The phrasing and timing of the Bill were themselves the products of a specific admixture of domestic and transnational factors. The rise of anti-queer animus in Uganda has been aided by evangelicals from the USA, including Scott Lively, Don Schmierer, and Caleb Lee Brundidge, who were linked to the crafting of the Bill (IGLHRC and SMUG, 2009). Yet the amplification and politicization of homophobia by domestic and transnational networks did not occur overnight. President Yoweri Museveni has held power since 1986, and his National Resistance Movement (NRM) holds a solid parliamentary supermajority that allows them considerable control over policymaking. Museveni's strong political relationship with the Bush Administration promoted conservative programming on sex and



sexuality through the PEPFAR program and facilitated the influence of a network of politicians and religious leaders known as the Family, who have become deeply involved in Ugandan social policy (Evertz, 2010: 22–28; Kaoma, 2009: 12). Although it was introduced as a private member’s bill, activists have also suggested that the Anti-Homosexuality Bill offered a useful distraction from social and economic stagnation in advance of the elections in 2011, which eventually triggered widespread protests and unrest (Nakaweesi-Kimbugwe and Mugisha, 2009; Namiti, 2011).

The reach and success of these networks in Uganda follow lengthy and persistent financial, political, and ideological maneuvering by renewal movements in the USA and Uganda, and power struggles in which leaders from both countries have vied for political and spiritual leadership transnationally (Kaoma, 2009, 2012). The potency of the Bill was deeply reliant on the domestic and transnational influence of Ugandan evangelicals such as Stephen Langa of the Family Life Network and Pastor Martin Ssempe, who loudly championed the legislation from the pulpit to the press to Parliament. Ssempe drew attention when he screened scatological pornography to an audience with a number of children in a church, accompanying this with the apocalyptic rhetoric he regularly uses to warn of the threat of homosexuality. The outrageousness of Ssempe’s response was shocking to many audiences who are unfamiliar with his campaign (including many Ugandans), but was firmly rooted in his emphasis on the destructive impact that homosexuality allegedly has on the moral and social fabric of Ugandan families, children, faith, and the futurity of the state and its people. The aggressive homophobia that catalyzed the Anti-Homosexuality Bill did not arise *de novo*, but grew from the fertile ground of religious fundamentalism which was laid over the past two decades.

The influence of these systemic and institutional engines of anti-LGBTI sentiments was mirrored in homophobic discourses, which justified their growth in a dangerous feedback loop. Months before the Bill was introduced, Minister of Ethics and Integrity James Nsaba Buturo reminded Uganda’s ambassador to the United Nations that the country’s position is that homosexuality is “unnatural, abnormal, illegal, dangerous, and dirty” (AFP, 2009). Since then, Langa, a sponsor of US evangelicals, has foregrounded the threat of what he dubs “the gay agenda – that whole hidden and dark agenda” (Gettleman, 2010). Bahati, the sponsor of the legislation, stated that “We are happy that we are involved in this issue of attacking homosexuality head on . . . Combating homosexuality is not easy” (Lumu, 2009). Even while cautioning parliamentarians to ‘go slow’ on the Bill, President Museveni stated, “We used to have very few homosexuals traditionally. They were not persecuted but were not encouraged either because it was clear that is not how God arranged things to be” (Gyezaho, 2009). The rhetoric of commentators in the press has been even more charged than these public invectives, but often invokes the independence, morality, and tradition of the post-colonial state. Preservation of the family, children, and nation is juxtaposed with epidemiological metaphors about the ‘spread’ of homosexuality and the

danger of 'recruitment,' which are often couched in the militaristic rhetoric of combat and warfare.

Opposition to the Bill has been similarly shaped by sociopolitical realities. Uganda has a strong domestic LGBTI movement with active organizations like Sexual Minorities Uganda, Freedom and Roam Uganda, and the Support Initiative for People with Atypical Sex Development, which have long been involved in regional and transnational networks. As a result of their longstanding advocacy, these groups and others forged a diverse network of organizations called the Civil Society Coalition on Human Rights and Constitutional Law. Notably, they also allied with journalists and found ways to influence media coverage and insert their voices into the debate.

The priorities and approaches of the groups in this coalition are reflected in the complex discourses around sexuality that played out in the public sphere after the introduction of the Bill. Opponents promoted their own frames, dubbing the Bill the 'Anti Civil Society Bill,' 'Anti Public Health Bill,' 'Anti Constitution Bill,' and 'Anti Human Rights Bill.' They mainstreamed the issue as much as possible, highlighting how the Bill would affect parents, teachers, landlords, politicians, doctors, civil society leaders, human rights activists, religious leaders, MPs, journalists, internet café operators, and anyone accused of being LGBTI (Civil Society Coalition, 2009). Notably, they also used resonant tropes in Uganda to their advantage. They criticized homophobic laws and faiths as imports from the West. They explicitly invoked the specter of regional despotism with references to the Amin regime, the ruling regime in Khartoum, and the sexual policing of apartheid South Africa. They frequently pointed to the urgent problems facing Uganda, including 'more pressing issues of human rights abuse, corruption, electoral reform, domestic relations, and freedom of the press,' to portray homophobia, not homosexuality, as a frivolous pursuit (Civil Society Coalition, 2009). Like supporters of the Bill, too, they drew on transnational networks to put pressure on an unsympathetic government. Opponents of the Bill cited Uganda's commitments under international law and actively invited international pressure, calling for global rallies and traveling extensively to voice concerns to activists and donors, the US State Department, and various branches of the United Nations.

The debates in Uganda were shaped by a particular political economy of homophobia, one which culminated in a spectacular dispute over the state's power to regulate sexuality. The Anti-Homosexuality Bill was deeply rooted in history, politics, and religion, and the debate about its passage was heavily shaped by the domestic and transnational networks and rhetoric that key stakeholders could draw upon. Once the issue of homosexuality was raised in the political arena, it was subject to distinctive and competing interpretations of citizenship, rights, sovereignty, and the morality, character, and future of the people and state of Uganda – a particular constellation that was distinct from contemporaneous debates about sexuality occurring elsewhere in Africa.



## **Malawi: The arrest, detention, and sentencing of 'gay lovebirds'**

After Uganda, Malawi was the focus of the most international media attention to anti-queer animus in sub-Saharan Africa in early 2010, particularly in donor states such as Norway and the UK. In some ways, the structural dimensions of animus in Malawi appeared to resemble those in Uganda. As a former colony of Britain, Section 153 of Malawi's Penal Code also criminalizes 'carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature' with up to 14 years imprisonment, with or without corporal punishment. Section 156 criminalizes 'gross indecency' between males, whether public or private, with up to five years imprisonment (Ottosson, 2010: 14).

Unlike Uganda, however, the flashpoint in Malawi was a traditional engagement ceremony between two people who the media, police, and many activists labeled men, one of whom identified as female, and the criminalization of their relationship as a *de facto* extension of the country's sodomy law. The precipitating event was the arrest of Steven Monjeza and Tiwonge Chimbalanga, a couple arrested for a 'same-sex' commitment ceremony in late December 2009. Monjeza and Chimbalanga spent six months in jail without bail or recourse to higher courts under what police deemed 'protective custody.' When a ruling was finally handed down in May 2010, Monjeza and Chimbalanga were sentenced to 14 years in prison with hard labor. After UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon personally intervened, the couple were pardoned by President wa Mutharika, who remarked that their behavior was 'foolish' and 'satanic,' and confessed that the pardon was only to pacify donors and the international community (Khunga, 2010).

Without a legislative proposal at its core, the situation was starkly different from Uganda. Malawi saw a great deal of state-sponsored persecution toward the end of 2009, with officials actively encouraging same-sex practicing people to come out to be arrested, persistently intimidating defenders of LGBTI rights, and raiding the offices of a pro-LGBTI NGO just weeks before Monjeza and Chimbalanga were arrested. The state did not initially seek to expand its powers through legislation; indeed, it was the media that first noticed the 'same-sex' wedding, and provoked local police to react. When the question of homosexuality was raised, the state simply interpreted its sodomy law to give it the power to crack down on LGBTI persons and the promotion of homosexuality with or without the commission of a sexual act. Following Chimbalanga and Monjeza's arrest and detention, there were further reports that staffers from the Centre for the Development of People (CEDEP), a group defending the couple, were being arrested or driven into hiding under threat of arrest, and a conference on HIV/AIDS prevention was disrupted by police who appeared without a warrant to harass attendees (IGLHRC, 2010). In a high-profile case, a young man was reportedly arrested and sentenced to community service for putting up posters that read 'Gay Rights are Human Rights.' Elsewhere, an older man was reportedly arrested on charges of sodomy and an older woman was allegedly driven from her town after being acquitted of having sex with two girls (*Mail and Guardian*, 2010). Notably,

few of these charges were derived from the actual commission of a same-sex act between men, making the persecution only tenuously related to the black-letter law of Malawi.

When journalists wrote of a 'wave of homophobia' reaching Malawi, however, they typically foregrounded Chimbalanga and Monjeza's arrest, detention, and sentencing. If the battle in Uganda was fought in the legislative arena, the battle in Malawi was fought through prisons and the court, with two defendants whose names, faces, backstories, and behavior were widely known and remarked upon. The difference was evident in media coverage, which overwhelmingly focused on the couple's relationship and gender roles. The two were frequently referred to as the 'gay lovebirds' and mocked for their ill-fated engagement, something that was painfully manifest in video of the two being jeered and laughed at as they arrived at court. The treatment of the couple in the public arena ranged from affection to belittlement to cruelty, but often struck a less genocidal and militaristic tone than common invectives against the gay agenda in Uganda. Reporters went to great lengths to interview the couple, to find and interview their families and document their backstories, and to speculate about Chimbalanga's gender – whether she menstruated, what she wore in court, whether Monjeza knew about her gender identity and so on. As the story of the 'gay lovebirds' unfolded, it was treated as a tragicomedy in the press.

Of course, some elements were similar to those in Uganda, and these were heavily influenced by colonial-era laws, political maneuvering, and the similarly condemnatory role that NGOs and governments took from the North. LGBTI persons were still deemed 'unAfrican' and 'unnatural,' and there were analogous allegations that LGBTI organizations in the North funneled huge sums of money to their counterparts in Malawi. These were given a great deal of publicity and an aura of legitimacy by a widely published story alleging that \$500,000 had been offered to groups who would promote homosexuality in the country (Mizere, 2010).

In important ways, however, the discourse surrounding the couple's arrest and queerness in Malawi differed from that used elsewhere in the region. The homophobic emphasis on same-sex practising people as recruiters, molesters, or as an insidious force that threatens the futurity of the nation was largely eclipsed by an emphasis on same-sex practising people as frivolous, embarrassing, or mentally ill. Instead of foregrounding rights and freedoms, spokespeople for CEDEP, a human rights organization with a strong focus on public health and human welfare, paired rights discourse with the rhetoric of love, dignity, and humanity, not only arguing for the couple's release but for the invalidation of Sections 153 and 156. The organization's director, Gift Trapence, went on record saying that 'what these two people have done is an expression of their legal rights . . . Here are two individuals who are expressing their sexual orientation as human beings.' In this formulation, the traditional engagement ceremony is not analogized to a same-sex wedding, but is posed as a form of expression that merits protection under law. Instead of focusing solely on the language of rights, Trapence foregrounded the human cost of the detention, saying that a full trial 'will only perpetuate misery for

the couple,' that there is overcrowding and the two 'go hungry' in prison, and that it is 'sad' that they are 'suffering just for choosing their own way of life' (CEDEP, 2010).

While nearly identical laws against homosexuality remain in place in Malawi and Uganda, the political economies of anti-queer animus in late 2009 were strikingly different. In Uganda, the Anti-Homosexuality Bill and the discussion around its passage were heavily shaped by a complex blend of globalizing right-wing Christianity, the linkage of anti-colonialism to anti-homosexuality, and the realities of election-year politics under a ruler and opposition party vying for authenticity and favor among the body politic. In Malawi, where the attention focussed on a much-maligned couple trying to celebrate their relationship, the political economy of animus was markedly different. The incident began with a sensational story in the media, not the active pursuit of the state, and was heavily fueled by outlets that pathologized the couple and linked their homosexuality to gender dysphoria, infidelity, and tragedy. Such nuances were largely ignored by the global press, and underappreciated by those who uncritically linked the incidents as proof of a wave of homophobia in Africa.

### **Senegal: The decline of the state and the rise of political Islam**

The importance of a methodological framework to situate animus in a political economy is evident when one looks at a nation-state with a very different historical trajectory and contemporary situation. The high-level interventions, petitions, and coverage surrounding Uganda and Malawi were largely absent in Senegal, which was often cited as an afterthought in pieces describing a wave of homophobia in sub-Saharan Africa. Coverage of the situation intensified in 2010, with a number of pieces highlighting some of the more egregious persecution against LGBTI persons and recalling the permissiveness of Dakar in years past.

The wave of homophobia narrative is difficult to impose on Senegal for a number of reasons. Senegal's political, social, and material conditions are distinct from those of Uganda and Malawi, and have produced different forms of sexual behavior, identification, and anti-queer animus (Bop, 2008; Teunis, 2001). Unlike the many postcolonial states that retained British sodomy laws, Senegal did not inherit its sodomy laws from France, but freely adopted them after independence in 1965. Article 319 of Senegal's Penal Code prohibits 'an improper or unnatural act with a person of the same sex' with up to five years in prison (Ottosson, 2010: 17).

The use of Article 319 seems to have increased in the past few years, thanks in part to other sociopolitical pressures. Rising poverty and discontent in Senegal have placed tremendous pressure on its ruling party, which has been criticized for failing to govern – or failing to govern morally – by Islamic leaders and opposition parties who use opposition to homosexuality as a means to build popular support (Diop, 2009; Seneweb, 2008). Senegal is French and Wolof speaking and

94% Muslim, which limits the reach of English-language media and the influence of the US Religious Right, but links the country to religious and political networks in the Middle East and North Africa.

Persecution in Senegal was not a new development in late 2009; if anything, homophobia had been especially intense and widespread since February 2008, when a tabloid magazine called *Icône* published photographs alleged to be from a same-sex wedding. The photographs depicted male-bodied persons exchanging rings, dancing together, and sporting the wedding garments of elite Senegalese women. Immediately after the issue hit newsstands, the Division of Criminal Investigations (DIC) began rounding up those who appeared in the photographs (HRW, 2010: 15–25). A subsequent crackdown sent LGBTI refugees to Mali, Morocco, and the Gambia, virtually decimated the LGBTI organization, *And Ligeey*, and triggered sporadic arrests for the next two years. In December 2008, an HIV/AIDS training group for MSM run by AIDES Senegal was raided and nine participants were arrested, forced to disclose phone numbers of friends and family, beaten in custody, denied access to food, water, and the bathroom, and brought to trial (HRW, 2010: 25–36). Although the prosecutor only sought a five year sentence, the defendants were sentenced to eight years in prison with the added charge of ‘criminal conspiracy’ to recruit others into homosexuality. After five months in detention, they were released on bail when the Court of Appeal found there was insufficient evidence of wrongdoing. Other arrests and police raids continued through the end of 2009.

The kinds of hyperbolic denunciations of homosexuality made by high-ranking officials in Uganda and Malawi were less pronounced in Senegal, although there are signs that this is changing in response to instability. As unemployment, food insecurity, and other socioeconomic pressures increase, criticism of the government has become more vocal, and opposition parties, including hard-line Islamic leadership, have taken up the issue of homosexuality as part of a campaign to reinforce public morality. In the weeks leading up to the 11th Islamic Summit Conference of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in Dakar on 13–14 March 2008, religious leadership undertook a public morality campaign to prepare Senegal for the gathering. Leaders urged the government to harshly punish those convicted under Article 319, and took legal action against dancers and filmmakers for indecent assault, offending public morals, distribution of pornographic materials, and organized crime. By 2009, Prime Minister Souleymane Ndéné Ndiaye was publicly railing against homosexuality as ‘aggression against Islam,’ signaling that the Minister of the Interior and Minister of Justice would more avidly pursue and punish individuals for homosexuality (HRW, 2010: 7–8).

Although the DIC and police forces have continued to actively infiltrate the social networks of same-sex practicing people, arresting 24 individuals at a party the week that Chimbalanga and Monjeza were arrested in Malawi, the most virulent homophobia has been from non-state actors. At times, the state has been forced to rein in religious leaders, with police firing gunshots in the air and using tear gas to disperse one unauthorized march against homosexuality at the Grand Mosque. A number of those who have fled Senegal have pointed to the rising fundamentalism and calls for

same-sex practising people to be stoned to death if the state fails to act. In at least one instance, the Safinatoul Amal, an organization charged with the spiritual protection of Touba, reportedly seized and arrested a man for practices against nature and incitement to debauchery. Although they acted as vigilantes, the man was said to be held at a police station in Touba (Diagne, 2009). Edicts against homosexuality are commonly carried out by family and community members. In a worrying trend, those suspected of being same-sex practising have been exhumed from religious cemeteries and dumped within family compounds, often repeatedly, to prevent them from corrupting holy ground (Callimachi, 2010).

The socioreligious fervor of anti-queer episodes in Senegal has decisively affected activist responses. With the collapse of *And Ligeey*, vocal critics of the crackdowns have included Women Living Under Muslim Laws, who express alarm over the enforcement of public morality, and HIV/AIDS groups, who highlight how repression makes it impossible to address the high seroprevalence rates of MSM. The rhetoric of human rights and constitutionality that were prominent in Uganda and Malawi are less visible in Senegal, as advocates for same-sex practising populations focus instead on questions of morality, privacy, and public health, and avoid using terms like 'LGBT' at all (Bop, 2010; Kassé, 2013). Here, the political economy of anti-queer animus has roots that run deep in community, family, and faith, and as the state's position against powerful non-state actors weakens, there may be good reason not to ask the state to get involved. As the specific political, social, and material dimensions of recent episodes in Senegal suggest, a dynamic political economy and the way it shapes sexual policing is a more useful heuristic tool than a 'wave of homophobia' to understand how and why LGBTI people and movements are at risk.

## **Mobilizing homophobias and resistance within African political economies**

The political economies that fostered anti-queer animus in late 2009 and early 2010 involved similar tropes, but had unique valences. Other examples from this period are manifold. In Kenya, the much-publicized civil partnership between two Kenyan men in the UK shaded discussions of homosexuality as a colonial import, and radio rumors and vigilantism against those perceived to be queer indicated a strain of hostility which transcended the state. In Zimbabwe, a fragile détente was finally broken when the government aggressively went after Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe, arresting and torturing two of its members. In Rwanda, an amendment to the penal code threatened to criminalize same-sex activity for the first time in the country's history, before officials reversed course and reaffirmed the sanctity of a private sphere protected from state intrusion while still criminalizing sex work. In each case, the form and tone of animus was markedly different, and linked to political, social, economic, religious, symbolic, and geopolitical dimensions of particular political economies.

When one considers how structural, discursive, and episodic manifestations of anti-queer animus create both sexual policing and sexual possibility, it becomes clear that the animus in each instance is not the same, nor is the pro-LGBTI response from activists in each country. Where there are sharp and aggressive articulations of anti-queer animus, there is almost always resistance. Indeed, across Africa, LGBTI movements are developing strategies in dialogue with, but often independent of, movements elsewhere in the region and the world.

It is imperative that activists and scholars develop methods of paying attention to what drives anti-queer animus on the ground, and to those who are most familiar with the contingent and specific strategies that will be effective in dealing with it. Indeed, resisting the urge to uncritically lump homophobias together is also a reminder to avoid overgeneralizations about the various transnational campaigns to combat anti-queer animus, as some activists and organizations pay far more attention to these variations and nuances than others. By theorizing a multiplicity of forms of anti-queer animus, there are also lessons to be learned to facilitate careful, responsible transnational solidarity work.

### **Queerness, transgression, and the right to do wrong**

Any of the episodes glossed as 'homophobia in sub-Saharan Africa,' and indeed, the idea of homophobia as a singular referent, could be explored in depth. This call for a better understanding of plural homophobias in the region suggests that locating forms of animus in the political economies that generate them might be one productive way of doing this. By looking at these in their specificity and similarity, researchers might better understand the hostilities that queer people in Uganda, Malawi, and Senegal face.

I would venture that this brief exploration of this approach points to two insights for those engaging sexualities transnationally. First, it demonstrates how the concept of 'homophobia in sub-Saharan Africa' obscures more than it reveals. This is not to deny that geographic models are useful; regional histories and networks of migration, media, and politics matter. It is to suggest that expressions of animus that are subsumed under a regional gloss might also be distinguished along axes like language, the relevance and intensity of Christianity, Islam, and indigenous traditions, the legacy of colonialism and relationships with the North, the stability, transparency, and diversity of political systems, the presence of factionalism, the freedom and integrity of the press, the vibrancy and coherency of civil society, the extent to which people recognize and enjoy civil, political, social, economic, and cultural rights, and the material well-being and equality of the population. Many of these conditions are decisively shaped by the nation-state and its apparatuses, making nation-states indispensable as a site for analyses of homophobia. Some tropes are frequently invoked, most notably, that homosexuality is 'immoral,' 'unAfrican,' and 'unnatural,' but even these vary in their prevalence, urgency, and the tone with which they are deployed. There is a need for nuance in theoretical and political discussions of these issues – and indeed, more complex



analyses of how animus and racist homonationalisms are not monolithic in the North (Puar, 2007).

Second, the vocal opposition to homosexuality and LGBTI persons in many of these contexts is an implicit challenge to *queerness*, and those genders and sexualities that subvert or transgress a heteronormative order. This is overlooked by frames that uncritically link all of these many diverse instances as a unitary form of homophobia, driven by hostility toward those who are visibly gay or lesbian. This invites both theorists and groups that Joseph Massad locates within the ‘Gay International’ to think critically about what provokes or invites approbation from place to place, and to engage with the historical, political, and social forces that give rise to arrests, persecution, and violence (Massad, 2002: 361–85). The need for rich understanding makes solid relationships, a regional presence, and deep knowledge about the advantages and disadvantages of action indispensable, just as it highlights how a lack of in-depth, sustained engagement can be fatally counterproductive.

To the extent that homophobias are grounded in a hostility to queerness, however, this also poses a challenge to more radical queer activists and theorists. The liberatory potential ascribed to queerness in the North is often linked to its promise to undermine the most sacred and patriarchal institutions in western culture, like the church, family, nation, or state. At times, that liberatory potential strikingly resembles the fears of those who would imprison or kill queer people; indeed, it is actively co-opted in some instances, as graphic pornography is shown to bolster the Anti-Homosexuality Bill and radical satire is trotted out as evidence of the depraved goals of queerness run amok. In response, activists in Uganda have adamantly asserted that ‘We, like all other Ugandans, are responsible and law abiding citizens ... We know that sexual orientation is not changeable. We are homosexuals and cannot change ... WE CANNOT, DO NOT, HAVE NEVER, AND WILL NEVER “recruit,”’ signing their statement ‘For and on behalf of all the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Queer People of Uganda. For God and Our Country!’ (SMUG, 2009).

Such an intervention raises pressing questions for activists and academics staking out claims against anti-queer animus and homonormativities in a globalizing era. If queerness inherently destabilizes institutions and normative orders, is there any way that transgression can be framed as a ‘right’? When might we reject normativities, whether from Northern activists or Southern nationalists, against immensely dangerous odds, and when might we acknowledge the life-saving potential of assimilation? As technology bridges the spatial gaps that separate queer populations, is there a responsibility to think about how queer theory and politics might be used in political economies beyond the spaces where we write and live?

These are questions that are unlikely to be answered immediately, but which become critically important when we recognize that forms of anti-queer animus are multiple in sub-Saharan Africa, and that queernesses are temporally and spatially unstable as well. The complexities and varieties of anti-queer animus merit an

approach that acknowledges the political economies in which they develop, and the multiplicity of incarnations this produces. Anything less not only impairs our understanding, but undermines our effectiveness as theorists and practitioners who are implicated in the politicization of sexuality.

## Notes

1. The terms I use should be understood as etic descriptors that are historically contingent, but also widely intelligible to those discussing sexual rights projects transnationally. I use 'LGBTI' to describe lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex populations who identify and organize as such. I use 'queer' both as an umbrella term for those with transgressive genders and sexualities and to generally describe transgressive behavior.
2. Although journalists and activists focused on Africa during this period, the trope is not unique to the continent. *Der Spiegel*, for example, ran a feature that discussed contexts as diverse as Iraq, Lebanon, and Malaysia subtitled 'Wave of homophobia sweeps the Muslim world' (von Mittelstaedt and Steinvorth, 2009).
3. A deeply insightful intervention in this regard is David Murray's collection *Homophobias: Lust and Loathing Across Time and Space* (2009), although it does not contain any discussion of African homophobias and how they are racialized and rendered monolithic in popular discourse. Wayne Besen has also sought to expand this field, although he typologizes forms of homophobia without mapping these onto historical and sociopolitical contexts (Besen, 2010).
4. In this piece, I focus on the more overt forms of animus directed at LGBTI people, but one could also think more broadly about multiple strains of heterosexism and how they arise.

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