

A black and white photograph of two women lying in bed. The woman on the left is lying on her side, looking towards the camera with a slight smile. She has dark braided hair and is wearing a watch on her left wrist. The woman on the right is lying on her side, looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. She is wearing a watch on her left wrist. The background is dark, and the lighting is dramatic, highlighting the contours of their bodies and faces.

“The gap between our constitutional rights and the daily realities of LGBTI people is widening by the day.” - Marlow Valentine, Deputy Director of The Triangle Project.

Out in Africa: the persecuted continent

There has been a global outcry over Uganda's anti-homosexuality draft bill. If passed, it could spell life imprisonment for homosexuals or, in some cases, a death sentence. But this is just one piece of an ugly portrait. Africa is a hostile place for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersex (LGBTI) people. Brendon Bosworth investigates the rise of homophobia on the continent.

From South Africa to Sudan, anti-homosexual prejudices abound and hate crimes, torture, murder and rape are a very real threat.

To put the extent of homophobia in Africa into context, there are currently 38 countries that criminalise homosexuality on the continent. This amounts to almost half the nations outlawing homosexuality in the world.

In Sudan, Mauritania and Somalia convicted homosexuals face the death penalty. The same goes for the northern states of Nigeria, where gay men can be executed by stoning and convicted lesbians may receive 50 lashes or six months in prison.

In Zimbabwe gay men have long been at risk of being imprisoned for up to 10 years, while homosexuals in Gambia face up to 14 years in the slammer and in Tanzania the law allows them to be incarcerated for life.

Besides Uganda, several other African countries have recently come under the spotlight for failing to protect the rights of LGBTI people.

Last December two Malawian men were arrested for "gross indecency" after enacting a risky public same-sex traditional marriage. If convicted they could face up to 14 years behind bars. The Malawian constitutional court has refused to hear their case.

Last month in Kenya a mob protesting under the banner "Operation Gays Out" attacked two men rumoured to be involved



(Above and right) Cape Town's LGBTI community protests against Uganda's anti-homosexuality draft bill.

in a gay wedding. The victims were arrested, along with three other gay men, and released without charge the following day.

An Un-African Concept?

Homo-prejudice in Africa is often initiated and encouraged by high-ranking political and religious leaders, many of whom frame homosexuality as un-African; a vice imported from the morally corrupt west.

As Canon Joshua Foluso Taiwo of Nigeria has said: "(Homosexuality) has never been part of our (society), that man will be sleeping with man; (there is) nothing like lesbianism in our dictionary. All these come from the West."

According to Ugandan religious leader, Paul Wasswa Ssembiro, homosexuality only arrived in Uganda with the Arabs in the 1800s.

Nigeria's president Olusegun

Obasanjo has been quoted as saying that homosexuality "is clearly un-Biblical, unnatural and definitely un-African." And let's not forget good 'ol Bob Mugabe next door, whose 2006 vitriolic attack on homosexuality claimed gay people were worse than "dogs and pigs", adding that it should be left to "whites to do that (have gay sex)".

But leading historians make a strong, factually based argument against the claim that Africans didn't engage in same-sex relations before the arrival of Europeans.

Historian Marc Epprecht maintains homosexuality on the continent has been around since time immemorial and suggests it was Western missionaries, with their hard-line puritanicalism, who introduced the idea that it should be reviled.

During the Portuguese colonial era, the missionaries' beliefs were transferred into law, resulting in the penal code of September 16, 1886, which called for practicing homosexuals in Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Sao Tome and Príncipe



Photos: Melany Bendix

to be sent to labour camps.

To the likely chagrin of supporters of the anti-homosexuality bill in Uganda, it has also emerged that Kabaka Mwanga, the King of the Buganda tribe in the 1880s, had a fondness for the pages in his palace that extended beyond the realm of platonic relations. And anthropologist Max Gluckman has proposed that Shaka Zulu was a latent homosexual.

Some researchers even maintain that the only reason homosexuality is condemned in many parts of Africa is because it is mistakenly believed to be an exclusively Western practice.

Kapya Kaoma, an Anglican priest from Zambia and project director of Political Research Associates, argues that the denunciation of homosexuality is an attack on the West rather than on sexual identity. This, he believes, arises from the “politics of post-colonial identity which rejects anything western.”

But anti-Western backlash isn't the only factor fuelling homo-prejudice on the continent.

The finger has also been pointed at conservative American churches and right-wing evangelical organisations.

A third hand stoking the fire

Kaoma is also the author of a damning report entitled *Globalising the Culture Wars: US Conservatives, African Churches and Homophobia*. His report exposes the way in which conservative US clerics have allegedly mobilised a number of prominent African religious leaders to help lobby against the ordination of LGBTI clergy by some mainline Protestant denominations.

This may sound strange at first, but it makes sense when looking at the figures. As Kaoma notes, the demographic centre of Christianity is shifting from north to south, with 30 million of the Anglican Communion's 77 million members living in Nigeria, Uganda and Kenya. Conservatives, who are a minority in the US, rely on the leverage provided by the African vote to sway the opinion of religious policy-makers at home.

“(Homosexuality) is clearly un-Biblical, unnatural and definitely un-African.” - Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo.

Kaoma claims that this conservative lobby group has been winning over the African clergy's vote using America's favourite campaign tool; the mighty dollar.

In his report, Kaoma asserts that conservatives have been funneling much-needed dollars into schools, universities and social services, while at the same time pressuring African churches to reject funding from mainline American churches. That the conservatives don't always insist on full accountability regarding the use of these funds is a carrot too good to resist, he adds.

Right-wing evangelists from the States have also played an active role in stoking the fervently anti-gay fire, according to well-documented reports.

Uganda's anti-homosexuality bill, currently under consideration by parliament, is widely believed to be the by-product of an anti-gay campaign led by zealous American Scott Lively, president of Abiding Truth Ministries (classified as a hate

The gay Malawian couple charged with “gross indecency” in the dock at Blantyre Magistrate's Court. Photo: Inter-Press Service.



group in the US) and author of the *Pink Swastika*, a book outlining his belief that the Nazis were homosexuals.

At the “Exposing the Homosexuals’ Agenda” seminar, hosted by the ultra conservative Family Life Network in Kampala last March, Lively was joined on stage by countrymen Caleb Lee Brundidge, a “sexual reorientation coach”, and Dan Schmierer from *Exodus International*, a Christian organisation promoting “freedom from homosexuality through the power of Jesus Christ”.

As captured on video, Lively’s presentation involved illuminating the ways in which gays “seek to defeat the marriage-based society”. He then used the age-old scaremongering tactic that all gay men are pedophiles, telling the crowd that homosexuals see young boys from broken homes as having “flashing neon signs above their heads”. Besides tarring homosexuals as predatory deviants, he stoked the crowd’s fear by saying legalising homosexuality

Capetonian activists protest outside parliament Photo: Melany Bendix



is on par with accepting molestation of children or having sex with animals.

A few days after the rally the evangelist met with Ugandan lawmakers and government officials, some of whom then went on to draft the anti-homosexuality bill. Lively has subsequently said the punishment the bill calls for is unacceptably harsh, but he reckons “if the offending sections were sufficiently modified, (it) would represent an encouraging step in the right direction.”

The abuse of religion, politics and foreign aide to further an anti-homosexual agenda in Africa does not surprise Marlow Valentine, Deputy Director of South African LGBTI lobby group, The Triangle Project: “Even in our own country...Jacob Zuma is courting religious leaders based in charismatic movements. They’re (allegedly) funded by American evangelical movements who’re saying to governments, ‘We’ll fund you—give money for your education and



The Very Reverend Dean Rowan Smith. Photo: Dave Adams. www.lightpainter.co.za

“The sadness to me is that amongst the churches in South Africa who were opposed to Apartheid, folk cannot see that discrimination based on sexual orientation is in fact no different.”
- Very Reverend Dean Rowan Smith.

HIV programmes—but you need to be conservative in certain areas.”

Nor does it come as a surprise to the Very Reverend Dean Rowan Smith of St George’s Cathedral, who points out that conservatives have long used the bible, particularly the so-called Levitical Laws, as grounds for denigrating homosexuality:

“[They] take the scriptures as unalterable and do a literal translation of every section, except when it is not convenient. If one says you should take everything in the scriptures as a literal truth then you should be able to offer your daughter as a sacrifice...We need to look at the context.”

The Reverend, who is an active campaigner for LGBTI rights in South Africa, likens homophobia to racism.

“The sadness to me is that amongst the churches in South Africa who were opposed to Apartheid, folk cannot see that discrimination based on sexual orientation is in fact no different. They say in this case it’s scriptural. But it was also scriptural under Apartheid. The justification for slavery, Apartheid, made use of scriptural texts to support it.”

Diplomacy or quiet complacency?

As the African country with the most liberal and advanced constitution in terms of protecting LGBTI rights and the first country on the continent to legalise same-

sex marriage, there’s an expectation that the South African government should come out strongly against countries which impinge on people’s rights to express their sexual orientation.

But, while world leaders like US President Barack Obama and the European Parliament have voiced strong opposition to homophobia in Africa, in particular to Uganda’s proposed bill, the South African government has remained disturbingly silent.

Equally as alarming is the spate of homophobic outbursts and ill-advised actions by government representatives, which flies in the face of the very constitution they are sworn to uphold.

President Jacob Zuma himself got the ball rolling at a Heritage Day celebration in KwaDuzuka in 2006 when he proclaimed: “When I was growing up, unqingili (homosexuals) could not stand in front of me. I would knock him out.”

Earlier this month, Minister of Arts and Culture Lulu Xingwana caused a furor when she stomped out of an exhibition her



A Treatment Action Campaign activist supporting anthropologist Max Gluckman's claim that Shaka Zulu was a latent homosexual. Photo: Melany Bendix

department had funded because it featured Zanele Muholi's photographs of naked black women in intimate poses, which the minister deemed "pornographic".

Another development, which has activists worrying that the rise of homophobia in other African countries is a harbinger of things to come at home, is the nomination of Jon Qwelane as South African ambassador to Uganda. Qwelane is an "out the closet" homophobe, who is currently facing charges of hate speech in

"When I was growing up, unqingili (homosexuals) could not stand in front of me. I would knock him out." – President Jacob Zuma.

the South African Equality Court for an article he wrote for the Sunday Sun in 2008 entitled "Call Me Names but Gay is NOT OK".

Asked to clarify South Africa's position on Uganda's anti-homosexuality bill and the reasons for nominating an admitted homophobe to represent South Africa in that country, spokesperson for the Department of International Relations and Cooperation, Nomfanelo Kota, told The Big Issue: "We don't deal with laws; we're not legal experts. Uganda does not comment on our laws. The law of international relations says that you will reciprocate: if people don't talk about your law and comment on how good or bad your law is then, in international relations, you don't comment on the laws of sovereign states."

Government's failure to take a firm stance on Uganda's bill has been condemned by human rights groups, as has its failure to ratify the 2008 UN declaration to decriminalise homosexuality worldwide.

"We are disturbed by the government's continued silence and refusal to engage human rights groups on the issue in Uganda," says Christina Engela of the South African Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation. "We'd like to see government not only uphold the Constitution of South Africa, but also defend the spirit of the Constitution and stand up in defense of those groups whose dignity, equality and civil or human rights are attacked by other groups, whether internally or externally."

Commenting on the need for government to make its policy on homophobia and hate crime in South Africa clear, Valentine says: "I'd like to see that a national debate is held. If you listened to the public debates surrounding the Civil Union Act, politicians exhibited levels of ignorance around sexual orientation. I don't think there's even been a debate around homophobic hate crimes. Does government understand what a transgender person is? Do they understand intersex people?"

He warns: "...The gap between our constitutional rights and the daily realities of LGBTI people is widening by the day."

TBI

“Corrective rape” a ticking bomb

By Brendon Bosworth

South Africa’s Constitution protects all people from being discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientation, but in reality there’s a massive chiasm between openly gay people living on Greenpoint’s liberal “Pink Strip” and those living in impoverished and rural areas.

“You cannot legislate attitudes. At a grassroots level nothing has changed: lesbians are still being raped in the townships, gay people are prejudiced against when it comes to employment. You can’t change attitudes through law,” stresses Glenn De Swardt, Chairperson of Cape Town Pride and Psychosocial and Project Manager of Health4Men.

“The majority of LGBTI people who’re caught in informal settlements and rural areas cannot access not only LGBTI rights, but human rights in general,” says Marlow Valentine, Deputy Director of the Triangle Project. “...The reality in townships is that by virtue of you coming out your life is under threat.”

This is especially true for lesbians living in South Africa’s townships, where the phenomenon of “curative” or “corrective” rape (often in the form of gang rape) is prevalent.

“As a lesbian woman living in Khayelitsha, I’m still scared of walking down the streets at night, at any time, because I know that if people know I’m lesbian there are guys who want me, to show me that I’m a woman. The only way they can show that is to rape me. We’re still facing the problem of hate crime,” says Nokubonga Yawa, who works for NGO Equal Education.

Valentine believes our patriarchal society and some men’s insecurity of their own masculinity “in relation to people who challenge gender conformity and heteronormatively” is largely to blame for the rise in

“corrective rape”.

“Certain men are saying, ‘How can two women satisfy themselves? Do they also want penises now?’ They’re saying, ‘Bring them to us, we’ll fuck them, we’ll show them what it’s like to sleep with a man.’ It’s as if men are saying they own women and have a right over their bodies.”

“Corrective rape” is usually extremely violent and has often ended in murder. According to *Hate Crimes: the Rise of “Corrective Rape” in South Africa*, a report by international

“It’s as if men are saying they own women and have a right over their bodies.”
—Marlow Valentine.

NGO ActionAid, 31 murders of lesbian women were recorded between 1998 and March 2009, although the actual figure is thought to be much higher.

Of these 31 reported cases, only one resulted in a conviction. The same report highlights the sorry statistic that only one in five reported rape cases in South Africa end up in court, with just over 4% of these resulting in conviction.

“How long will it take for government to stand up and say that’s enough violence, not only against women but gay and bisexual women too?” demands Valentine.

“There is no dialogue around gender-based violence against lesbian women, certainly not black women; they (government) haven’t recognised that we have a ticking time bomb in the townships.” **TBI**



Marlow Valentine. Photo: The Triangle Project

SETTING BACK THE FIGHT

The criminalisation of homosexuality will impede Africa’s fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

This is according to experts, who say that homosexuals facing jail time for coming out are unlikely to disclose their sexual orientation to doctors and nurses or seek counselling at government institutions for HIV/AIDS.

“If somebody in the rural areas gets a sexually transmitted infection they can’t go to just any hospital because of fear...Lack of information and homophobia has led to a rapid spread of HIV/AIDS,” asserts Javince Ochieng, project officer for Gay Kenya.

His claim is backed by Anand Grover, UN Special Rapporteur on Health, who recently stated: “Lessons from the last 30 years of the HIV epidemic have shown us that recognition of the rights of people with different sexual identities is a necessary component for a successful HIV and health response...In many countries where sex between men is not criminalised and where stigma and discrimination have been reduced, men who have sex with men are more likely to take up HIV prevention, care and support and treatment services.”