SPRING 2025

GEN(D)ER

ATIONS

ARTICLES ON:

NIGERIA,
ETHIOPIA
KENYA
UGANDA
SOUTH AFRICA
ZIMBABWE

HISTORICAL FICTION: WANJIKU'S JOURNEY
PAGES 58-65

GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN AFRICA

FORUM: LGBTQIA+ IN AFRICA
PAGES 23-42

TABLE OF CONTENTS

04 **EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION: REMEMBERING DIFFERENTLY**
BY EMMA VAN HAL

05 **THE RETURN OF THE QUEEN MOTHER: ART AND AGENCY IN NIGERIA**
BY CAIDE TOMASZEWSKI

15 **AFRICAN POSTCARDS: A LOOK AT HISTORY THROUGH PICTURES**
BY ZACHARY WARTHAN

23 **INTRODUCTION TO THE LGBTQIA+ IN AFRICA FORUM**
BY CAIDE TOMASZEWSKI

25 **OUTDATED LAWS OR AN OUTDATED MINDSET?: HOMOSEXUALITY LAWS IN KENYA AND HOW THEY HAVE BEEN SHAPED THROUGHOUT HISTORY BY WESTERN COLONIAL IMPACT**
BY RHIAN MEHLBAUER

30 **EVANGELISM, DRACONIAN LAWS, THE AIDS CRISIS, AND HOMOPHOBIA IN UGANDA**
BY JOSEPH MARTINDALE

36 **BETWEEN ANCESTORS AND THE STATE: A LESBIAN SANGOMA CHALLENGES COLONIAL GENDER**
BY JACK WALLACE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FICTIONS OF THE PAST: USING HISTORICAL FICTION TO UNDERSTAND THE EFFECTS OF COLONIAL GENDER ROLES ON 1940S ZIMBABWE 43
BY CHRISTOPHER MORRIS

HOW VIOLENCE MAKES A MAN: AN ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VIOLENCE AND MASCULINITY AS PORTRAYED IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S AFRICAN TRILOGY 50
BY SAMUEL CARTER

WANJIKU'S JOURNEY INTO WOMANHOOD: A HISTORICAL FICTION ABOUT A GIKUYU GIRL IN COLONIAL KENYA 58
BY EMMA VAN HAL

CLOSING REMARKS 66
BY JESSICA REUTHER

ENDNOTES 67

IMAGE CREDITS 72
BY CAIDE TOMASZEWSKI AND ZACHARY WARTHAN

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Remembering Differently

By Emma van Hal

Our intention in creating this magazine because we wanted is to think about gender and sexuality in African history in a new way. Bringing more attention to the stories and identities that are too often left out, misrepresented or oversimplified.

To help guide our analysis, each of us used the idea of the coloniality of gender, a framework developed by María Lugones. This theory helped us understand how colonialism didn't just change political and economic systems, but it reshaped how people thought about gender, sexuality, power, and identity. Lugones's work gave us a way to connect a wide range of stories and places in this magazine, while still exploring our own individual interests.

As a class, we decided to focus on primary sources; books, objects, photographs, oral histories. Some of us wrote historical fiction, others analyzed literature, law, or material culture. We shared ideas, peer-reviewed each other's work, and watched rough drafts slowly grow into something real. And throughout that process, I saw this question that kept coming back; who controls the narrative and how do we change that? Our magazine is one answer to that question, where personal stories and experiences from people that have been silenced, now occupy a central position in our research.

We do face the challenge of also coming from an outside perspective as writers and researchers. Reflecting upon our biases and perspectives, was a crucial part in the creative process of this magazine. This collaborative work allowed us to challenge narratives that we had learned previously that omitted African gender and sexuality from them.

Even though the topics vary, many of the same themes appeared repeatedly: resistance, identity, visibility, and erasure. These stories aren't just about the past; they ask us to think about the present too. About who gets remembered. About what gets preserved. And about what's still missing.

Putting this magazine together was a collective effort. With everyone in the class showing curiosity and doing lots of research, we created a collection of articles that compliment each other. We helped each other from conception to execution by providing helpful suggestions and inspiration to each other. Writing these pieces together was exciting since we were part of a bigger goal.

We also want to say thank you to Dr. Reuther, who gave us the space and encouragement to explore these topics freely. All your knowledge, combined with your kindness and understanding, made this class a place where everyone was heard and encouraged to write a great piece that mattered to ourselves.

With that, the magazine covers a great variety of topics, time, forms of writing and perspectives; showcasing the diversity in Africa as well when it comes to gender and sexuality. We hope readers come away from this issue with a better sense of how gender and sexuality have always existed in complex ways across Africa. Long before colonial rule, and importantly also long after. These aren't one-size-fits-all histories. They are layered, emotional, and still unfolding.

Most of all, we hope you'll read differently. Listen differently. And remember differently.

//

THE RETURN OF THE QUEEN MOTHER?

Art and Agency in Nigeria

by Caide Tomaszewski

Figure 1: Figural heads upon a shrine in the Oba's compound in Benin City, 1891.

Within the vast collection of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Met), there is a displaced woman sequestered away. In being located some five-thousand miles from her homeland of what is now Benin City, her cast brass eyes have glimpsed the outside world through exhibition only twice within the last thirty years.[1] She is the brass and iron representation of an Iyoba (Fig 1, Fig 2, Fig 3), a mother to the Oba (King) of the Benin Kingdom and a politically and ritually prominent figure in her own right.[2] Yet, before this entombment in an American museum, her still eyes had seen the royal lineage of her court revered. She had seen women of the same high title flex their powers as only second to the king. She had also seen the fiery destruction of her lavish palace by British colonial forces. After this, she was looted into the hands of those who set the grounds aflame. These violent processes of colonization that had seized this Iyoba from her home are the same processes that have abetted the disempowerment of Nigerian women within the realm of 20th-21st century politics. In that loss, however, lies a powerful link to help address the present. Conversations promoting the crucial goal of gender parity in contemporary Nigerian politics converge with discussions concerning the timely repatriation of artistic representations of women, such as the Iyoba, who played important ministerial roles within the nation's past. These

Figure 2: Edo peoples, Head of Iyoba, ca. 18th-19th century, brass (cast), iron, 53.3 x 26.7 x 27.3 cm, The Met.

Figure 3: Edo peoples, Head of Iyoba, ca. 18th-19th century, brass (cast), iron, 53.3 x 26.7 x 27.3 cm, The Met.

distinguished past figures aid in legitimating women's expanding political agency in the present.

THE QUEEN MOTHER OF THE BENIN KINGDOM

Understanding how the figural Iyoba head housed in the Met's collection visually testifies to the heights of women's power within the Benin Kingdom from the 16th century onward begins with an understanding of the Iyoba title itself. Her role is frequently referred to as that of a Queen Mother, as her royal position is usually first derived from having given birth to the male ruler of the Benin Kingdom, though the term exists elsewhere in Africa amidst other unique contexts too. The bronze commemorative head referenced here was designed to occupy a sacred altar space that placed her within a lineage of the Kingdom's divine rulers (Fig 1).[3] Much like the similar heads that captured the appearance of an Oba, the Iyoba head was displayed alongside past title-bearers, implicity connecting her to the history of her nation. The continuity established by such a display did not just celebrate the continuance of the Iyoba role. Rather, the display extended her maternal qualities and established her as responsible for continuing the royal family and the state itself.[4] Edo historian Jacob Eghaverba offers a list of women to hold the title that would place the Met's 18th-19th century bronze as possibly representing eight different rulers.[5] (Edo being the majority ethnic group within the historic Benin Kingdom and the pres-

ent Edo State, Nigeria where Benin City is today.) She may depict the particularly wealthy Iyoba Ohogha II who had ascended to the position in 1752, as the coral-beadwork trailing down her side and surrounding her neck in rings suggests a rich ability to adorn herself in fineries from the ocean. However, no certain identity is so far gleaned. No matter which Iyoba she is intended to portray, it is also important to explore the context of the office beyond the role of mother.

"WOMEN IN NIGERIA TODAY WILL HAVE TO AND ALREADY DO NAVIGATE MALE-DOMINATED SYSTEMS OF POWER. COMPARABLE ASCENSIONS TO A 'MALE' AUTHORITY REFLECTED IN THE FIGURAL IYOBA'S LIFE CAN PROVIDE THE NECESSARY HISTORICAL LEGACY TO DO SO. "

For all the influence the Iyoba might hold, it is worth understanding that she bore the title within a system of rule that enshrined men as the primary axes of decision-making, both within the task of governing and beyond. Art historian Flora Kaplan suggests that a "male ethos" fundamentally underpinned Benin society. The kingdom surrounding the rule of an Iyoba was patrilineal, where divine leadership centered hierarchically around men. Her admission to this space was a unique possibility of exception, though this should not be taken to lessen her importance. Much of the Iyoba's authority was defined in proximity to masculine rule, not in spite of it.[6] All the way through the latest Iyoba N'Eurra, the woman bearing the title performed a more masculine identityin being honored later in life among the male chiefs of her kingdom.[7] Attaining the same dimensions of courtly function, she would deliberate cases and settle disputes within a publicly male position. The corresponding status was initially founded within the maternal role unique to her, but the death of her husband (the prior Oba) and the natural end of her body's ability to bear children made available a new extent of her power.

This nuanced dynamic of gender is eternally present in her bronze form too. The very metal comprising the Iyoba's head examined here was a royally privileged material. While the other male chiefs could have themselves carved in wood, it was only the queen mother and her royal son that could be eternalized in strong, durable bronze.[8] The longevity of such a material indicates a timelessness to her power, a power that can still resonate centuries removed from her period of rule. As for the exact

rendering of her features, biological sex has proven an unreliable tactic in differentiating Iyoba heads from Oba heads.[9] Socially-gendered definitions of power meant that the commemorative bronze heads of men share similarities and some ambiguities within their facial features. Fewer clues are offered towards her precise mannerisms, but she would have been expected to be exemplary of Edo womanhood as being restrained and submissive.[10] She would generally keep to the interior court of her palace as this was the space where her deliberations were made, so the head that publicly represented her allowed for an extended assertion of her power borrowing from a visual coding of maleness. Of course, as the figural head's distance from her homeland might suggest, this visual power would be broken from its roots as the Kingdom of Benin transitioned into the 20th century. One must ask, how did she get there?

GONE FROM THE PALACE AT USELU

The displacement of the Iyoba as a figure of authority, both in art and political power, takes place over a century of history in southern Nigeria. The Benin Kingdom had been visited by Europeans as early as the fifteenth century. [11] These earliest Portuguese visitors were primarily interested in purchasing slaves taken as captives of war and spreading a Christian faith through a variety of missionary efforts. While these objectives are important to note for constructing the Kingdom of Benin's history of interaction with European peoples, they are not within the period of colonization central to this narrative. Instead, it was the colonizing agents of the British Punitive Expedition to Benin in February, 1897 that enacted the violent uprooting of the Iyoba both in power and artistic representation. This expedition of some 5,000 British troops violently dismantled the Benin Kingdom. It was billed as a reprisal for the killing of James Phillips and his party only a month before. This prior group was purported to represent British diplomatic interests in the region.[12] However, this was merely a smokescreen deployed to justify a military expedition into Benin City that had been planned well before the events surrounding Phillips.

The eventual arrival of the British expedition and the subsequent sacking of the capital city was a monstrous episode of imperial violence. Historian Dan Hicks describes the campaign of violence as a broad destruction of Edo life, culture, belief, and art.[13] Within the year, the expedition's intelligence officer, Reginald H. Bacon, published a biased account of the bloodshed in and around Benin City. His perspective on the events falls much into the same narrative trappings that permitted the expedition's cruelties in the first place. The very first page of his text might almost read as comically

Figure 4: Exterior view of the National Museum in Benin City, Photograph taken by Dipo Tayo

Figure 5: A statue in King's Square, Benin City depicts a Benin warrior standing over defeated colonial soldiers, Photograph by unknown photographer

prejudiced, if it were not for the wave of tragic violence that would follow its generalizations. Bacon regards the King and all his peoples of Benin as being savage, debased, absent of religion, and careless towards life.[14] Relying on his observations for anything approaching reasonable historicity would be foolish, but his characterization of this episode in Benin's history can yet provide insight into the mindsets of colonial agents that brutally founded the political and cultural restrictions that this article takes interest in.

The colonial attitudes that sanctioned the fiery dismantling of the Queen Mother's position are most clearly reflected in how the destruction of Iyoba Iyeha's (the then reigning Iyoba) palace is described.[15] Bacon's writing betrays a disdain for her position as he reports that one Captain Campbell had destroyed the Queen Mother's House, in the process "burning one more of the

"HER LIPS WILL BE FOREVER UNMOVING, YET SHE SPEAKS TO AN URGENT NEED FOR RESTITUTION OF MATERIAL CULTURE."

head centres of vice in the city."[16] Following from the earlier casting of the Benin Kingdom as uncivilized, his words appear intended to frame the carnage as necessary for implementing whatever degree of order the machine-gun-toting British brought with them. The palace at Uselu is here reduced to be representative of something perverse: something

in need of destruction by the colonial viewer.

This cruel, fraudulent reinvention of the palace's symbolic identity into another - one which attempts to justify the Iyoba's removal - is in line with patterns described by contemporary theorizations on gender and race within colonial situations. In her essay "The Coloniality of Gender," feminist philosopher Maria Lugones describes a violent system of gender concurrent with colonization that reduces and erases the participation in ritual and governance of nonwhite, non-male individuals.[17] The palace at Useulu was perhaps the most monumental representation of the Iyoba's place within these spheres. Its burning symbolically reduced that power, the "vice" discussed by Bacon, to ash in a stroke of violence. Materially, the burning of the palace and the larger sacking of Benin City destroyed the office. A living Iyoba would only be crowned again nearly one-hundred years on in 1981.[18]

This gendered process within Bacon's account becomes clearer when comparing the Uselu palace's fate to that of the Oba's. The Oba's palace was initially left standing and only later fell victim to flame in an event dubiously rendered as accidental.[19] Amidst these events though, Bacon summarily describes every other center of ritual or governmental prominence, including the Uselu palace, as "fetich places burned", doubling down on the condemnation of a female power. The Oba's palace instead is metaphorically subsumed into the new colonial order when Bacon writes that "the King's house is the palace of the White Chief…"[20] Examining this duality of consideration further within the terms of Lugones, she offers that women in the colonial situation came to be socially defined in relation to men. Male became the default, and that outside the default would have no power, no participation.[21] Women's power in proximity to men was a feature of the Benin Kingdom, yes, but its nuances appear to evaporate as the relation between the Oba's court and the Iyoba's is severed. The latter is razed to the ground. The former is hoisted up as the new center of a white male regime. The European morals and codes of the era that guided the policies of British colonial administrators made no room for women's participation, even as specific as that participation may have been the precolonial kingdom.[22] The first Oba since the sacking of Benin City, Eweka II, ascended to his kingly position in 1914. Resulting from these colonial exclusion of women in political office though, his mother Eghaghe was only given the title after she passed. The British administration had rejected the multiple attempts to do so during her lifetime.[23]

Alongside the destruction of the

central seat of her power, the art objects that represent the Iyoba's strength were systematically looted from her courtly spaces. Figures describing the total scale of looting roughly place the number of art objects stolen from Benin somewhere around 10,000.[24] Of the 2,000 objects looted from the Oba's palace alone, ten percent consists of court art featuring the Iyoba.[25] These objects have been severed from their land of origin and the projected indications of women's power they carry disrupted too. Lugones argues that the disempowerment of women requires a great degree of control over information and image.[26] With the bronze Iyoba head stuck firmly within the collection of the Met, who now controls that information? Who now controls her image? Certainly not women in Nigeria to whom such factors would matter most. The reaffirmation of such control back into those hands would serve to aid a reversal of the process that Lugones describes. Greater still, that reversal can extend to redress the dangers of colonial legacies within the world of art and beyond.

BELONGING

Restitution, the returning to their rightful owners, of objects looted through colonial violence has been a constant point of contention between former subjects and colonizing nations through the late 20th century, into the 21st. In 2021, The Met itself had returned three objects with origins in the Benin Kingdom to the Nigerian National Commission for Museums and Monuments, which manages the Benin City National Museum.[27] Disappointingly, little information is offered in the corresponding press release about the return of yet more objects. While promoting international collaboration, the language employed still affirms the Met as a possessor. In addressing these questions, art historian Benedicte Savoy provides a useful way to define the absence of restitution. In the spaces of the formerly colonized, she qualifies these absences as painful, unhealed wounds that grow more acute over time.[28] Within the spaces of the colonizer, instead the presence of the objects showcase processes of violent colonial appropriation. This appropriation extends not just to the objects themselves, but to the histories they visually convey. Hence, the convergence of women's disempowerment and the absence of historic art objects depicting them. Just as investigating the colonial situation through a lens of gender illuminates targeted systems of gendered oppression and violence, doing the same to collections of looted art objects holds the potential to directly target and dismantle the harmful legacies of these actions.

A POLITICAL PRESENT

Shifting to the position of women with Nigeria's political spheres today, scholarship with roots in studies

of international policy highlights their precarious presence and how the identity of the Iyoba can be employed to help. Some scholars of global policy have indeed already utilized the term 'Queen Mother' in referencing a past foundation from which initiatives of women's leadership in sub-Saharan nations can be constructed.[29] Nigeria is of special concern among them. Compared to nations considered more forward in gender parity, Nigeria is noted as a critical zone for improvement as only seven percent of its parliamentary body consists of women. Similarly, a harmful male-dominance is reflected in the nation's 1999 constitution too, as it bears a recognized lack of absence of women's input.[30] Among the challenges that define this level of limited participation, the most relevant of them is that of recognition. Owing to the patriarchal identity of the nation, women's feats within Nigeria's multiplicity of cultural histories are routinely devalued or outright ignored in media coverage.[31] Similarly, Nigerian political parties normalize women's exclusion by interpreting culture and religion through male-centered lenses. Institutional political action by Nigerian women is a difficult task because the very space to launch such action is routinely denied. Moving beyond the imposition of outside colonial gender values discussed earlier, Lugones' theorizations account for this internal struggle between the nation's men and women. She notes a collaboration between Western colonials and the men of a colonized population that together target women, leading to larger consolidations of explicitly male power.[32] There exists a great need for the heightened presence and action of women in Nigerian politics and this need will only grow with each passing year.

> " WITHIN THE SPACES OF THE COLONIZER, INSTEAD THE PRESENCE OF THE OBJECTS SHOWCASE PROCESSES OF VIOLENT COLONIAL APPROPRIATION."

Of course, this description of Nigerian politics is not to wholesale discredit the work and presence of women within the nation. The same pieces of scholarship that make warnings surrounding their positions invariably begin with mentions of valuable progress that has thus far been made. Within the realm of history and culture specifically, the oral tradition of southern Nigeria still extols the Iyoba, particularly that of Iyoba Idia (the first to bear the title in 1504), as a celebrated figure of state defense.[33] Discussing the Iyoba identity at large, one must remember that her own power was similarly defined within an otherwise patriarchal society. As women in Nigeria today must navigate male-dominated systems of power, comparable ascensions to a 'male' authority reflected in the figural Iyoba's life can provide the necessary historical legacy to do so. Bolstering what progress is already present, the restitution of a material culture that provides an inexorable lineage for nuanced women's authority then appears poised to aid contemporary women's issues of recognition through history, culture, and politics.

CONCLUSION

It is by this interrogation of the past and present that the bronze woman, the revered head of the Iyoba, within the depths of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's collections comes into view. She is separated from her origin through dispossession over space and time. Yet, there her metallic form rattles and stirs with symbolic purpose in redress-

ing narratives surrounding women much like herself. She points to the dynamic identities and political presence of historic women within a patriarchal kingdom. She underpins and inspires the novel possibilities by which similar efforts might be carried out within the nation of today. Her lips will be forever unmoving, yet she speaks to an urgent need for restitution of material culture. She speaks to the urgent need to expand political opportunities for Nigerian women. She only needs to be in the proper space: the space of public view in the care of the present state descended from her own. The implications of her return might register not just within the bounds of Nigeria, but for other nations with histories of women's disempowerment and cultural dispossession. As wider trends of scholarship and action within spaces of historical display shift towards ideas of decoloniality, indigenous authority, and equity, her own history, both symbolic of art and identity, may prompt needed reconciliations and restitution the world over.

Figure 6: British soldiers of the Punitive Expedition display looted objects within the burnt remains of the Oba's compound. Photograph taken by Reginald Kerr Granville.

AFRICAN POSTCARDS

A LOOK AT HISTORY THROUGH PICTURES

BY ZACHARY WARTHAN

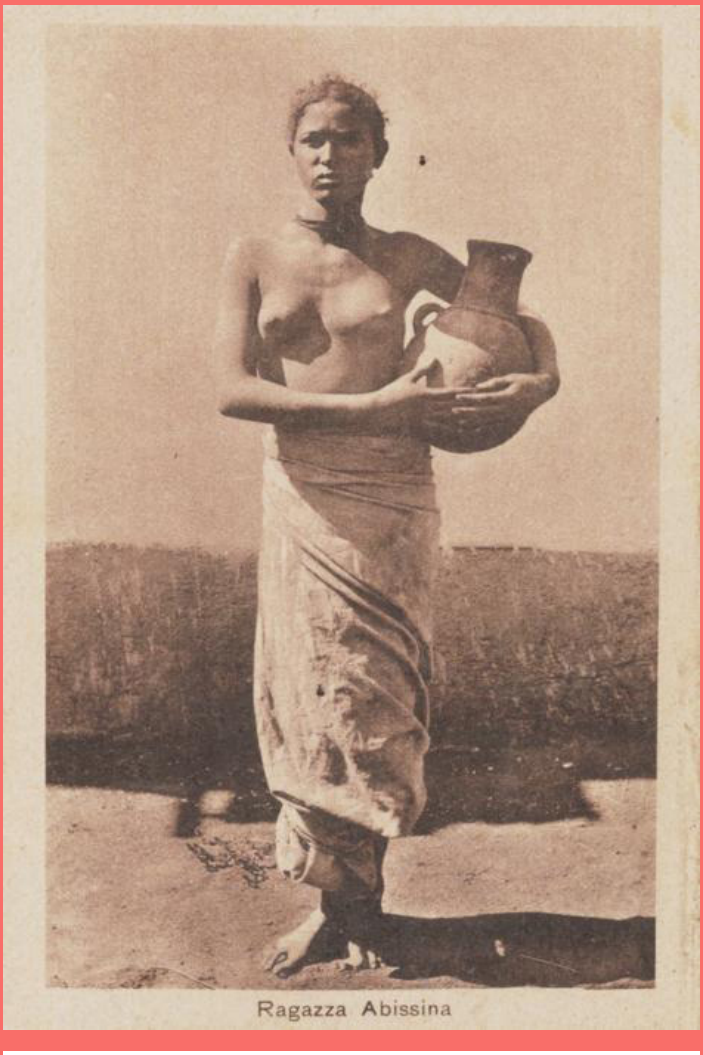


Figure 7: Ragazza Abissina. Photograph taken by Scozzi Attilio. Taken by 1900.

There are many ways someone can look at African women throughout history. One of these ways is to analyze photographs and postcards of Eastern African women during the first decades of the twentieth century and observe just how much gender norms have changed. This is important because not only can we figure out how Western countries and people thought of these African women, particularly European countries and people, but also how the lifestyles of these women changed over time due to Western influence. They have changed in many ways from the clothing they wore to how they are presented, and even to how they think later in time. I think looking at these postcards can show not only how they were presented, but also why they are presented this way.

Let's start by looking at 2 postcards from 1900 and see just how they were presented. This first postcard is titled, "Ragazza Abissina" which, translated from Italian, means, "Abyssinian girl." For context, Abyssinian is a part of Ethiopia. The second postcard is titled, "Africa Orientale - Ragarre bilene," which, also translated from Italian, means, "East Africa - Bilene girls." Both of these photos show African women not wearing much clothing, only wearing something either around their waist or over their shoulder. They are also shown as being outside looking dead-on towards the camera. The woman in the first postcard is holding a piece of pottery while the women in the other photo doesn't hold any objects, however there may be a chair that the woman in the very front is sitting on.

Next, let's look at 2 postcards from the interwar period. This first postcard, which is from 1925, is titled, "COLONIAL ERITREA - Madama abissinia," which, translated from Italian, means, "ERITREAN COLONY - Madama Abyssinia." This second postcard, which is from 1936, is titled, "Africa Orientale - Amatir e Unese (tipi abissini)," which, also trans-

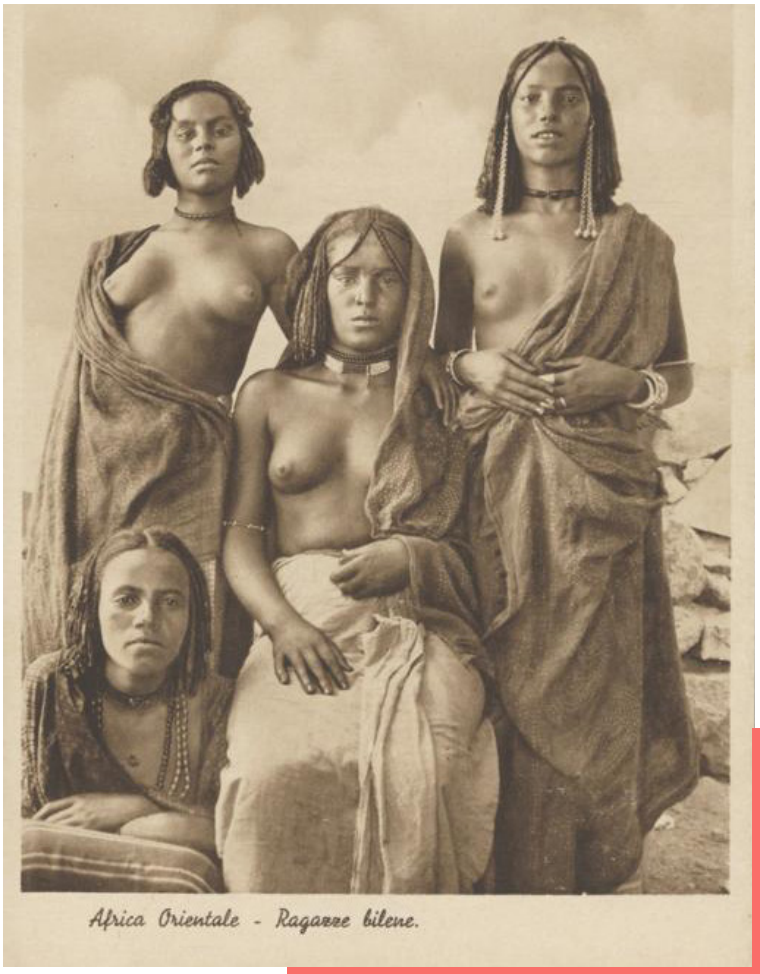


Figure 8: Africa Orientale - Ragarre bilene. Taken by 1900.

Figure 9: COLONIA ERITREA - Madama abissinia. Taken by 1925.

Figure 10: Africa Orientale - Amatir e Unese tipi abissini. Photograph taken by M. Decamerè Taken by 1936.

lated from Italian, means, "East Africa - Amatir and Unese (Abyssinian types)." These postcards show women in all white clothes, the first woman wears shoes, and they're all shown styled with necklaces, rings, and other possibly pricey items. The woman in the white is a wife of an Italian man, which we know this due to them being labeled as a "Madama." In these photos, the women's pictures are taken from a diagonal angle from a camera with them all sitting down inside and with most of them not directly looking at the camera besides for the girl on the right of the second postcard. They are all doing minor poses that make them look more feminine. These last 2 postcards seem very distinct and different from the other 2 postcards from the turn of the century.

In order to figure out why these postcards are so dramatically different, it is important to analyze these contrasts. To start, the most obvious difference is their clothing. The women in the first 2 postcards wore very little clothing, which all these photos show a clear front view of these women's breasts. Meanwhile the women in the other 2 postcards show them off in full clothing, including shoes, necklaces, rings, and other accessories. These accessories are likely much more expensive than any of the clothing or other accessories that the women had in the first 2 postcards. Many of these accessories make them look much more feminine, which leads to the next topic: how these women are portrayed in terms of masculinity versus femininity. The women in the first 2 postcards are all shown outside with them either in the fields or carrying poetry, which is shown in the first postcard shown. Meanwhile in the last 2 postcards, they are inside, sitting down, just trying to look as presentable as possible by Western standards. This also reflects in their poses. The women in the first 2 postcards aren't doing anything complex with how they are showing themselves. They are standing straight while looking directly at the camera. Meanwhile, the women in the other 2 postcards all are sitting down and either are shown as seemingly relaxed, either on furniture like in the first picture, or on someone else with their arm around them like in the second picture. This potentially portrays them not only as more feminine, but also more sophisticated than the women in the first 2 postcards. However, with all of these differences, it leads to a specific question: why portray these women the way they did? Well, to understand that, one must first understand the Colonial Gender System created by Maria Lugones.

Maria Lugones, who is a sociologist and feminist philosopher who has written much about how Western civilizations have tried to control African women, with a popular work of hers being about the Colonial/Modern Gender System. Based on Anibal Quijano's Coloniality of Power, Lugones uses the ideas

AFRICAN POSTCARDS

that people base power on the "'the four basic areas of human existence: sex, labor, collective authority and subjectivity/intersubjectivity, their resources and products'" , and "the basic and universal social classification of the population of the planets terms of the idea of 'race.'"[34] With these ideas, Lugones applies them to gender and how people use sex and gender to give certain people power. One such way is from femininity. Many feminists, who at the time were just the white bourgeois women, mainly looked at women through their own Western lens, which was based a lot on their own personal femininity. Women who did not fit this idea were often seen as "animals" and eventually this viewing of them as lesser caused the "heterosexual rape of Indian [and] African slave women[.]" African women in particular "were characterized along a gamut of sexual aggression and perversion, and as strong enough to do any sort of labor."[35] These descriptions do not line up with how feminity was back during this era. However, this was not entirely these feminists' fault. This gender system also focuses a lot on patriarchal control who controlled who and what was seen by people. This includes creating "the colonial meaning of men and women[,...]the banning of white bourgeois women from the sphere of collective authority," and what was shown of many of these African women.[36] Due to creating what they considered to be men and what they considered to be women, they had control over how that was presented, which thus led to them trying to control how African women looked. If they were to marry these women like some did, they would likely want them to look more feminine, which to them, means "sexual purity and passivity."[37] However, they also portrayed them through sexualization. According to race and gender academic Patricia Hill Collins, which was quoted by Lugones, "Black women were portrayed as being, to use Jewelle Gomez' words, 'sexually aggressive wet nurses.'"[38] This characterization of African women throughout history likely led many men to having more sexualized thoughts of these women.

Returning to the question posed earlier: Why were these women portayed in the way they were? Postcards from Africa in general were made for a few reasons: "distorting social ideas, promoting empire, justifying colonialism, and misrepresenting indigenous peoples and cultures." They did this in order to "nurture the

belief in European superiority."[39] The portrayal of the women in the postcards is very important to see how they distorted social ideas, justified colonialism, and misrepresented people and cultures. Something important to note is that these postcards were made for "European and North American audiences — without the knowledge of the subjects," meaning that the people in these photos did not know that these photos will be used this way. When discussing this with the co-curator Prita Meier

"'CAN YOU IMAGINE A PRIVATE FAMILY PHOTOGRAPH BEING TURNED INTO A TOURIST SOUVENIR?'"

for an exhibition called, "World on the Horizon: Swahili Arts Across the Indian Ocean" at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art, he asked the question, "'Can you imagine a private family photograph being turned into a tourist souvenir?'"[40] Not only this, but it is clear that many of the postcards were sexualized. With the first 2 postcards, the women were portrayed with their breasts being shown to the camera. Considering how many white men sexualized African women, it is clear that postcards like the first 2 were shown in order to achieve this goal. These women in the first 2 postcards were also shown as more able to do labor based on their location outside, which helped show the idea the characterization of African women shown in Lugones of them being, "a gamut of sexual aggression and perversion, and as strong enough to do any sort of labor."[41] The sexualization was also done with postcards of other Eastern African countries, not just ones in the Ethiopian area. In some of the postcards of Swahili women from the exhibition at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art, the women were given money "to stretch out in suggestive poses."[42] This portrayal of the women helps strengthen the narrative that African women are allegedly, extremely sexual beings, which results in European men wanting to "'have access to these exotic people. Especially exotic women,'" which, when combined with their ideas of African women being "inferior" to white women, likely led to not only the justification of them colonizing these women, but also many of the potential rapes that happened to these women.[43] This likely also led to a great need to control these women, and make them more inline with Western norms. This need for control eventually leads to the portrayal of the women in all white shown in the latter 2 postcards.

These postcards show women as more feminine by the standards of the time with the women's accessories and their overall appearance. This shift to more Western ideas of femininity shows the need men had during this time to control African women. During the colonial era, a lot of white men were trying to control the "'4 basic human areas'" as described with Quijano's coloniality of power.[44] To do this, they had to create the definitions for men and women, which for women, was based a lot around their femininity. So when they started doing madamism, which "is a for-

mal cohabitation between an Italian man and an Ethiopian woman," they likely tried to control a lot more of what the Ethiopian women had to wear in order to make them look more feminine.[45] This eventually led to how the "Madama abissinia" was shown.[46] Even when these women started to get less sexualized, it is still possible that many men wanted these women for sexual reasons. While the postcards for the Swahili women were still fully dressed, they were still sexualized according to Meier. As she describes it, "'Postcards were [...] meant to fulfill European fantasies about Swahili women,' [...] 'They wanted a sexualized, sensual image of Africa.'"[47] This can likely be broadened to include much more than Swahili woemn when you consider the 4 postcards shown and discussed here. While this sexualization helped further the exploitation of African women, they can be seen much differently by others, whether it be the women in some of the pictures, or African people who see these photos today.

The colonization of Africa affected it much more than how women dressed and how they were thought of by colonizers , but also how the women themselves thought and acted. When it comes to the Swahili postcards, some of them were actually commissioned by women, where they still did more sexual poses. They did this in order to rebel against the familial traditions and expectations they had placed on them. As stated by Meier, "For the [person in the portrait], it was a beautiful, playful or even humorous portrait."[48] This is

Figure 11: Zanzibar Beauty. Photograph taken by A.C. Gomes & Son. Photograph taken before 1900.

important because it shows that women were influenced by Western ideas in some ways. To see how they did this, let's look at this postcard. The photograph was taken before 1900, but the postcard was printed between 1907 and 1908. It is labeled, "Zanzibar Beauty," and is from the Smithsonian Museum of African Art, specifically the exhibition, "World on the Horizon: Swahili Arts Across the Indian Ocean." She is shown in a dark-colored garb that is styled in very traditional East African patterns, as well as wearing some bracelets and necklaces. She is facing the camera, with a smile on her face with her hands on her hips. This would be seen as something very feminine by Western standards, but her expression differs from the women who were also shown in a very feminine way in the 3rd and 4th postcards. This feels more playful compared to the 4 postcards shown earlier, just as they were described earlier by Schreiber. The clothing these women wore, while covered "with elaborate patterns that might seem to be traditional to East Africa," were still made in factories from North America and Europe.[49] This shows how women living along the Swahili Coast at the time did take some influence from Westernization, allowing them more freedom with how they express themselves. According to the book written by Meier titled, "The Surface of Things: A History of Photography from the Swahili Coast," going to take pictures at a studio was considered a "popular leisure activity."[50] This form of expression reflects the start of an era of both Western influence, but the combining of it with their own culture that when shown to "'people from Mombasa or Zanzibar look at these images, they focus on the beauty and elegance and see the photographs as historical documents.'"[51] Maiar believes that these postcards not only, "'tell us about the history of photography in a seemingly faraway place, like the coast of Africa,' [...], 'But they also tell us a story about women's fashion'."[52]

When looking at these postcards from 1900s East Africa, it can be easy to see just how much they were used to affect the African women of the land. They were used by colonizers to sexualize women, push an agenda of colonization, and to manipulate how we saw African women as a whole. However, that only tells part of the story. While all women were subjected to the negative parts of this treatment, some women were influenced by it positively by using it as a way to express themselves freely. This would influence future generations in much more positive ways. While the European gaze was the more important part of these postcards, it's still important to see both the positives and negative parts of postcards to get a full understanding of them and why they were important for the presentation of these women.

LGBTQIA+

IN AFRICA FORUM

Figure 12: LGBT Flag map of Africa, 2013, DrRandomFactor.

CONTENTS

Outdated Laws or an Outdated Mindset? Homosexuality Laws in Kenya and How They Have Been Shaped throughout History by Western Colonial Impact

by Rhian Mehlbauer

Evangelism, Draconian Laws, The AIDS Crisis, and Homophobia in Uganda

by Joseph Martindale

Between Ancestors and the State: A Lesbian Sangoma Challenges Colonial Gender

by Jack Wallace

LGBTQIA+ IN AFRICA FORUM

INTRODUCTION

By Caide Tomaszewski

The production of this magazine has required a great deal of shared learning, communication of ideas, and feedback on our myriad approaches from one author to another. While we each chose to study differing nations, periods in time, and figures of interest, the articles presented herein collectively investigate issues of gender and sexuality in African history, as inspired by the eponymous course. However, it is for these next three articles that the latter term - sexuality - comes to the fore. Even in the earliest stages of our collaborative ideation, a mutual interest in African histories surrounding sexual orientation and LGTBQ+ identity had begun to take shape. It is this specific scholarly impetus that then prompted the realization of not just a few articles covering such topics, but an entire forum in which the pieces would build from and communicate with one another in a larger whole. Taking this precious opportunity to write in conjunction with their fellow history students, Rhian Mehlbauer, Joseph Martindale, and Jack Wallace have produced substantial contributions in their writings that together inform a larger, deeper understanding of sexuality in African history.

The forum begins with the writings of Mehlbauer and Martindale, who both seek to problematize the persistent effects of colo-

nial rule on present day legislation surrounding LGBTQ+ individuals. Mehlbauer highlights a section of Kenya's penal code, examining how its criminalization of homosexuality is a direct legacy of British colonial rule retained through the nation's 1963 independence. She argues that the limited legal and social statuses of LGTBQ+ individuals in the Kenya of today are rooted in foreign moral values and laws imposed upon societies who had not intrinsically held such biases before the colonial situation. Martindale investigates much the same pattern, though his research instead centers on Uganda and the contents of its 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act. Rather than look into the 20th century to define the origin of the legislation central to his article, Martindale opts to detail conflicts between the Ugandan government, Ugandan queer-rights groups, and United States religio-political foreign interests. He similarly argues that homophobia, while resisted internally by certain advocacy groups, is a Euro-American import wielded both by these foreign interests and the Ugandan government as a means of solidifying moral and political control. Both of these arguments operate on a macro level that looks to examine their respective legislation within the full context of the colonial and postcolonial situation. However, that approach might obscure what is personal, what is human, or what is intimate within such narratives.

In constructing the deeper understanding of diverse African sexualities that this forum seeks to define, shifting these investigations to an individualized level becomes a necessity. The final article of three, written by Jack Wallace, readily takes this opportunity. Wallace centers his article on Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde, a lesbian Sangoma (spiritual healer) living in South Africa. Employing her memoir as a primary source, Wallace builds from the intricacies of an individual life to affirm the presence of queer identity in colonial situations that otherwise aim to destroy it. The gripping quotes and anecdotes pulled from Nkabinde's own story serve as remarkable, individualized moments to demonstrate the larger observations made by Mehlbauer and Martindale. It is this ability to uncover complimentary, bolstering moments in each author's writing that makes this portion of our magazine so special.

I eagerly invite you to explore this forum on LGBTQ+ identity with the consideration of each article not just as a separate entry in our publication, but as interconnected ideas that merit a unique mode of comparative, cross-referential reading.

Homosexuality Laws in Kenya and How They Have Been Shaped Throughout History by Western Colonial Impact

Figure 15: A Woman in a Red Shirt is Holding a Flag, Photograph taken by Hassan Kibwana, 2024.

OUTDATED LAWS OR AN OUTDATED MINDSET?

By Rhian Mehlbauer

The laws surrounding homosexuality in Kenya reflect the country's complicated history that is deeply influenced by Western colonialism. Western colonialism had lasting effects on local cultures and legal systems in Kenya. Before British colonial rule, many communities in Kenya had diverse views about sexuality with many indigenous societies having a more fluid mindset on gender and sexual orientation. However, when European colonizers arrived in the late 19th century a significant shift occurred in how sexual behavior, especially homosexuality, was viewed and regulated. Western ideas of morality and law, which were heavily influenced by Christian values, were forced onto Kenyan society. This transformation criminalized same-sex relationships.

British colonial officials introduced laws that specifically targeted "unnatural offenses" such as sodomy. These rules and regulations were based on British laws that saw any deviation from heterosexuality as immoral and illegal. These colonial-era laws were not only an attempt to control sexual behavior but also served to suppress indigenous cultures and enforce European standards. When Kenya gained independence in 1963, these colonial laws remained strong in the legal system, continuing to shape the way homosexuality was treated in the country. The Penal Code 162-165, inherited from the British, still contains sections that criminalized same-sex acts even though Kenya was no longer a colony.[53]

The persistence of these laws and the influence of colonial-era ideas about sexuality have had a profound impact on contemporary Kenyan society. They have contributed to a stigma against LGBTQ+ individuals and created a legal environment that makes it difficult for many to openly express their sex-

Figure 16: Demonstrators hold placards and chant slogans during the protests in Nairobi, Photograph taken by John Ochieng, 2022.

Figure 17: Mau Mau Suspects at Manyani in Kenya, Photograph taken by Authenticated News, 1955.

"The criminalization of homosexuality in Kenya cannot be fully understood without recognizing the impact of colonialism"

ual identities. Despite ongoing advocacy from human rights organizations and LGBTQ+ groups, the legal and social status of homosexuality in Kenya remains an issue. In this article, we will explore how homosexuality laws in Kenya have evolved over time, from the colonial period to the present day, and analyze the ongoing influence of Western colonialism on Kenyan legal and cultural perspectives on sexuality. By understanding this historical context, we can better grasp the challenges and struggles faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in Kenya today.

The article "Fake History: Misunderstanding Colonial Legacies and the Demonization of Homosexuality in Africa" provides an insightful critique of colonial legacies in Africa, and how they have shaped attitudes and laws surrounding homosexuality.[54] In the article, the author Aileen Waitaaga Kimuhu argues that the knowledge for anti-LGBTQ+ ideas in African societies when compared to traditional African cultures is inaccurate and oversimplified. In reality, the criminalization of same-sex relationships in Kenya and other African countries is largely a result of colonial laws and Western moral ideas forced upon them during the colonial period.

During British colonial rule, Kenya, like many other African nations, inherited the Penal Code which criminalized homosexuality. As Kimuhu highlights, these laws were not a reflection of pre-colonial African traditions but were instead products of European legal systems that said homosexuality was immoral and unnatural. This legal shift was a significant 180 from pre-colonial

Figure 18: Anthony, a volunteer at Ishtar, Photograph taken by Nell Freeman, 2012

societies where sexuality was more fluid and open to a range of expressions.

Following Kenya's independence in 1963, the colonial-era laws that criminalized homosexuality stayed, further embedding the lasting effects of Western influence. As the article points out, the demonization of homosexuality in Kenya cannot be fully understood without recognizing the impact of colonialism. The post-colonial Kenyan government, while striving for independence found itself fighting the contradictions of inherited colonial laws. Consequently, the criminalization of homosexuality persisted, despite the fact that Kenya was now a sovereign state.

"The struggle for LGBTQ+ rights in Kenya is ongoing with legal reforms being complicated by deep colonial legacies."

Today, Kenya continues to face significant challenges regarding LGBTQ+ rights, and the influence of colonial-era laws remains a key factor in this ongoing struggle. As Kimuhu suggests, debates about homosexuality in Kenya are often framed in terms of African cultural values and Western ideals. However, the persistence of colonial laws in Kenya reveals the deep roots of these legal systems in the country's history. Until these colo-

THE CURRENT LAWS IN KENYA

- Censorship - State enforced
- Changing Gender - Ambiguous (New legislation only allows intersex persons identified as male or female at birth to request a change to "I.")
- Gender Affirming Care - Restricted
- Nonbinary Gender Recognition - Intersex only
- Discrimination - Illegal in some contexts
- Employment Discrimination - No protections
- Housing Discrimination - No protections
- Adoption - Illegal
- Intersex Infant Surgery - Full ban
- Military - Illegal
- Donating Blood - Ambiguous
- Conversion Therapy - Not banned

nial influences are fully acknowledged and addressed, the path toward legal reform and greater acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals in Kenya remains difficult.

The article “Kenya: The Shameful Truth About British Colonial Abuse and How It Was Covered Up” by Duffy Aoife sheds light on the abuse by the British colonial authorities in Kenya, particularly during the Mau Mau uprising in the 1950s.[55] While the article primarily focuses on the physical and political repression faced by Kenyans during colonial rule, it also indirectly addresses the larger colonial idea that tried to reshape almost every aspect of Kenyan life, including sexual norms. The adding of Western legal systems and morality during this period laid the groundwork for the criminalization of same-sex relationships in Kenya, a legacy that persists in the country's laws and attitudes today.

The article shows the cover-up efforts by Britain to hide their abuse during the colonial period which was largely ignored or suppressed for many years. This culture of denial and repression is important when considering the colonialism in Kenya, especially in the context of sexuality. The British colonial regime not only imposed a rigid sexual morality but also set in motion the stigmatization of LGBTQ+ individuals. The criminalization was used to suppress Kenyan culture and identity, which led to the distrust of both the British colonial system and the foreign laws forced upon Kenyans.

Equaldex provides an overview of the current legal landscape for LGBTQ+ individuals in Kenya, shedding light on how colonial-era laws continue to shape the nation’s approach to homosexuality.[56] Section 162 of the Kenyan Penal Code, which criminalizes "unnatural offenses" such as sodomy, was introduced during British rule and remains in place today. As the webpage notes, Kenya's laws against homosexuality are a direct result of colonial laws that were meant to regulate the personal lives of the colonized population. The continued existence of these laws is a reminder of the influence of colonialism on Kenya's legal and social society, particularly in regard to issues of sexuality and identity.

The data gathered on Equaldex highlights the ongoing criminalization of homosexuality in Kenya. Although the country is no longer a British colony, the colonial legal structure has persisted, and the stigma against LGBTQ+ individuals remains deeply ingrained. The refusal to repeal or amend these colonial-era laws has led to a situation where LGBTQ+ individuals are at constant risk of prosecution and harassment.

The current legal situation in Kenya has been a source of ongoing debate. While some groups continue to advocate that the laws should go away but there is significant opposition from both political leaders and religious groups. This opposition is often in terms of a defense of Kenyan cultural values even though as the history of colonialism demonstrates, these "values" were largely constructed by the West. The thought that homosexuality as a foreign practice is still common belief in Kenya.

All in all, the legacy of British colonialism continues to play a major role in the legal and social treatment of LGBTQ+ individuals in Kenya. The laws that criminalize homosexuality are a direct result of colonial-era policies that imposed Western moral standards on Kenyan society. The struggle for LGBTQ+ rights in Kenya is ongoing with legal reforms being complicated by colonial legacies. While there is growing support for LGBTQ+ rights within the country and internationally, the path to full equality and acceptance in Kenya remains blocked by the influence of these laws. Understanding this historical context is crucial for anyone seeking to understand the legal and cultural challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in Kenya today.

EVANGELISM, DRACONIAN LAWS, THE AIDS CRISIS, AND HOMOPHOBIA IN UGANDA

BY JOSEPH MARTINDALE

The nation of Uganda has engaged in some of the harshest crackdowns on queer and homosexual rights in the world. Codified in national law in 2023 and upheld in court in April 2024. Why is this, what does this act entail, and how has this come to be? These laws are not unprecedented within Uganda's history, both in the long and short terms, and connect with the response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the actions of fundamentalist groups both inside and outside Uganda. While there is a long and storied history with homophobia in Uganda, thisarticle will choose to focus on more recent history roughly within the last twenty-five years. To understand the present situation of queer rights in Uganda it is also important to look at the recent history leading up the current day. There have been multiple attacks on Uganda's queer communities and rights groups both by the nation's governmental bodies and private domestic groups such as two high profile cases with newspapers printed in the country.

One of the first legally canonized restrictions on queer rights in Uganda was in 2005 when the Ugandan Parliament amended the nation's constitution to only legally recognize heterosexual marriages. The first of the homophobic attacks produced by newspaper groups came in August 2006. The Red Pepper tabloid paper, which has been in operation since 2001, leaked the first names and professions of forty-five Ugandan men it alleged were gay. This was followed a month later with a list of 13 women it alleged were lesbians. The second tabloid's release in turn was followed by threats of further leaks, though these seemingly were not followed up on. While condemned for this, the tabloid and its publishers suffered little consequences for these articles. As of April 2025, the tabloid is still in operation, though it was subject to a police raid in 2013 and evicted from its offices in 2022 and was forced to relocate. Both happenings are unrelated to the magazine's published allegations. The

other case and the more notable event occurred in October 2010. The Rolling Stone magazine, a small right-wing publication. unrelated to the Rolling Stone magazine in the US, released an article leaking images, full names, and addresses of 100 homosexual Ugandans, with a yellow banner that said, "hang them."[57] The magazine released another article afterwards which claimed a connection between queer Ugandans and a Somali terrorist group al-Shabaab. Queer rights group Sexual Minorities Uganda successfully appealed for the Ugandan High Court to order a verdict to cease production of the doxxing paper, shut down, and pay a 1.5 Ugandan shilling fine, in addition to court costs. This large scale doxxing was followed by the murder of David Kato, who was a high-profile member of Sexual Minorities Uganda, and who was one of those whose names and addresses were listed, was murdered in his home in January 2011. A large part of the onus of his death can be attributed by the actions of Rolling Stone. The naming, and with Rolling Stone doxxing, is one the more apparent results of the atmosphere of homophobia which is prevalent in Uganda. Attacks and threats against suspected queer people often spike after public events such as these or with the passing of legislation such as the Anti-Homosexuality Act. A similar version of the current Anti-Homosexuality Act was signed by the president Yoweri Museveni but was overturned on procedural grounds not long afterwards that same year. This version was very similar to the current act, though it came with more severe punishments for the imposed offenses. The next attempted law to try to criminalize queer expression was the Sexual Offenses Bill in 2021, which was vetoed by President Museveni on the grounds that the bill's contents were too like other laws already on the record. This was then followed by the 2023 act that is now codified in law. One of Uganda's queer rights organizations, Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), was ordered by the Ugandan government to shut down operations in 2022. This ban was justified ostensibly as being due to issues with the name of the organization, which was labeled as "undesirable and unregistrable" for an LGBTQ rights group, this ban has not yet been altered.[58] The group now operates as SMUG international though is no longer directly based in Uganda. It's important to note that many of the bans being applied to LGBTQ groups are similar to bans which have been doled out to human rights organizations in Uganda as well. It's necessary to understand that these are not the actions of a healthy government and by extension people who all choose to be hateful but instead connected to a corrupt regime looking for ideal targets.

10 years

in prison is the minimum sentence for acts of "aggravated" homosexuality

$6.9 billion

2023 PEPFAR Funding budget

$500 million

2025 PEPFAR reauthorized budget

"The Red Pepper tabloid paper, which has been in operation since 2001, leaked the first names and professions of 45 Ugandan men it alleged were gay. This was followed a month later with a listof 13 women it alleged were lesbians"

This recent historical context is important in understanding the present atmosphere and background for the current laws in Uganda. These are laws that have been repeatedly pushed for years, meeting both successes and failures in cracking down on human rights. This victimization gay and queer people have in turn been supported, funded, and promoted by many US based groups.

T he 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act which has been passed and upheld in court bans all homosexual sexual activity and criminalizes committing the "offense" of homosexuality. As defined in the words of the act itself: "A person commits the offence of homosexuality if the person performs a sexual act or allows a person of the same sex to perform a sexual act on him or her."[59] The punishments mentioned within the act range from sentences varying from up to 10 years to life, or execution for acts of "aggravated" homosexuality. Aggravated homosexuality mainly falls under cases of rape, molestation of minors, and concerning those listed as "serial offenders". The wording of the act in many ways equates homosexuality with sexual crimes, and even links child grooming as a related offense. Additionally, the law bans consent as a defense. The act also fines people who knowingly allow homosexual acts on their premises, bans the promotion of homosexuality with charges up to twenty years, and mandates a duty for people with "a reasonable suspicion" of others committing the act of homosexual conduct to report them to the police. Within the text of the law many threads can be made to homophobic rhetoric by linking it with acts of pedophilia and the criminalization of promoting homosexuality connects with arguments of the "gay agenda" and the concept of gay people preying on children. Beyond the legal charges, the act effectively encourages a state of suspicion and ostracization around any suspected homosexual actors. How is it that this current state came to be? Homophobic tensions in Uganda and even the law itself has had a palpable presence for years. There is a long history with homophobia in Uganda, enshrined even in the history of the nation itself with the story of the Buganda King Mwanga and his execution of Christian pages who refused to engage in sexual ritual practices demanded by Mwanga.

Part of what led to the present state of affairs is the massive influence evangelical groups or other anti-LGBT groups such as Family Watch International have within Uganda. These religious groups and NGOs are split between groups from outside Uganda. These are generally Evangelical groups located within the United States, and these are paired with actions by religious

Figure 19: Map of Uganda, 2025, Mappr.

groups based in Uganda itself. The foreign American groups act in Uganda most prominently by using Non-Governmental Organizations, or NGOs, to influence Uganda and promote their ideals. This influence can range from taking the form of charitable donations, up to personal meetings like that when Family Watch International's founder Sharon Slate met with Uganda's First Lady Janet Museveni in April 2023 weeks before the Anti-Homosexuality Act was codified. Many forms of social work, healthcare, and other social services that are run by governments in many other nations are instead owned and run by NGOs that are operating within Uganda, enshrining and promoting these Evangelical groups within the nation's civil framework. Many of these NGOs in turn benefit from US foreign aid programs such as the President's Emergency Plan For Aids Relief or PEPFAR that help them provide their funding.

Looking briefly at PEPFAR itself, it is important to note that the program is responsible for bettering countless lives in acting against the AIDS epidemic since it was created by George W. Bush in 2003. It is also important to note the program is conservative in its nature, with two thirds of its funding being dedicated to promoting questionably effective abstinence until marriage programs and requiring organizations receiving funding from it to undertake an anti- prostitution pledge. As such the act most supports views pushed by religious conservatives. Since then, the state of US based Evangelical NGOs engaging in funding social work and services has only become more entrenched, though it is unclear if this will be the situation in the near future as of writing. While in the process of blind fire executing US foreign aid President Donald Trump has massively cut funding for PEPFAR, and all other forms of US foreign aid. Currently the program still exists in a butchered state, with "$500 million of PEPFAR was reauthorized; the program had a budget of $6.9 billion in 2023."[60] The program is effectively not currently in operation. This paired with the colossal layoffs for USAID as a whole and the cuts for all other aid programs have essentially broken off funding for

"UGANDA CANNOT HAVE HOMOSEXUALITY OR NATIVE HOMOSEXUALS IN IT. QUEER PEOPLE MUST BE 'PAID TO BE GAY' FROM OUTSIDE THE NATION AND ARE ATTEMPTING TO 'RECRUIT' SUSCEPTIBLE PEOPLE INTO BECOMING HOMOSEXUAL WITH THEIR PRESENCE. UNLIKE WHAT THESE ALLEGATIONS CLAIM THIS STATE OF RAMPANT HOMOPHOBIA IS AN IMPORT RATHER THAN HOMOSEXUALITY ITSELF."

those in need. While the near complete Evangelical control of services that are state run in other nations is an awful status quo, not having an existing form of social services or health care is worse.

In many ways the dependency on NGOs and the United States' funding has spurred the development of neocolonial practices enforcing a dependency for the United States's funding in the receiving nations. These practices are not healthy for the receiving nations and have helped to give rise to fundamentalist groups with Uganda.

The presence of these evangelical NGO groups is tied to and is partially responsible for the general rise of religious fundamentalism within the entire nation. Home grown fundamentalist groups exert additional influence in Uganda, fundamentalist sects have given rise to the trend of people who have labeled themselves as the Balokole, meaning "the redeemed" or "the saved" people, within the nation. Pentecostal-Charismatic and other fundamentalist preachers and ministers exert great influence, enough that government officials greatly benefit from obtaining endorsements from them. Aside from the influence of NGO groups Ugandan evangelical churches also work to provide outreach for the HIV epidemic as well.

There are many strands of connective tissue between the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Uganda and the actions of religious groups as well. The moralization of the Ugandan response to the epidemic is painted with the same brush as the often religiously motivated homophobia now prevalent in the nation. The presence of the AIDS crisis has additionally aided Evangelists in recruiting and converting as well. By treating HIV as being caused by immoral behaviors that must be mended with moral sexual behavior, proper Christian sexual behavior of abstinence until marriage and faith becomes the true way to behave and act. This rhetoric has incited a move to promote a "moral revolution" within the country by Pentecostal groups. This is a move away from older tactics such as the ABC model, which promoted Abstinence, Being faithful, and Condom use to only an AB model. Queer Ugandans are exempted from relief and treatment within the current setup for HIV and AIDS relief. The moralization of HIV/AIDS in turn connects with the demonization of queer people who are choosing to engage in corrupt behavior.

The actions against homosexuals and queer groups in Uganda is tied with the erasure of acknowledging homosexuality historically. With the case of King Mwanga, his court's homosexual practices are often erased from renditions of the narrative, or the blame for them placed on foreign, such as Arab, influences pressed onto him. Homophobic rhetoric regards homosexuality as being unnatural or imposed, Uganda cannot have homosexuality or native homosexuals in it. Queer people must be "paid to be gay" from outside the nation and are attempting to "recruit" susceptible people into

"UNLIKE WHAT THESE ALLEGATIONS CLAIM THIS STATE OF RAMPANT HOMOPHOBIA IS AN IMPORT RATHER THAN HOMOSEXUALITY ITSELF ... HOMOPHOBIA IS THE IMPORT, NOT HOMOSEXUALITY."

becoming homosexual with their presence.[61] Unlike what these allegations claim this state of rampant homophobia is an import rather than homosexuality itself. Aspects of what is considered in the current day as queer sexuality and identity has existed in Uganda at least to the late pre-colonial era. Homophobia is the import, not homosexuality. One fundamentalist and anti-LGBTQ group, the Fellowship Foundation, had by 2020 spent over twenty million dollars of funding into Uganda since 2010. These processes and funding affect not just Uganda but many of the nations within Africa as a whole. The connections which many of the nation's religious groups bear with neo imperialism should not be missed. There is a clear coloniality in these ideologies in imposing a Eurocentric and regressive view of sexuality and gender. There is a great deal of overlap with the methods and tactics seen here action here in Uganda and those involved in coloniality within the gender system as presented by Maria Lugones. The erasure of gay history and the treatment of queer people as corrupt is an extent of the efforts to enshrine and naturalize anti-LGBTQ and Christian fundamentalist ideology within the nation of Uganda. Homosexuality becomes as such a white import being pressed into Uganda by outsiders, and a threat to the "traditional" values of the Ugandan people.

With this it is also important to note that the actions being made in Uganda are not just relevant for Uganda alone but instead are to be concerned everywhere. The religious justifications and bad faith arguments such as defenses of acting in favor of "family values" and labeling being homosexual as a choice which are present within Uganda homophobic rhetoric are present in nearly the same shape everywhere, just adapted slightly from place to place. The draconian laws within Uganda are the natural result of homophobic ideology.

Before concluding it is important to bring up that queer groups within Uganda have not been silent about these abuses of authority and are still active within the nation. For example, Sexual Minorities Uganda International, founded in 2004, is still acting and operational. While the organization has been forced to close its headquarters and hosting workshops thegroups still maintain an active site and engage in outreach programs. An additional queer rights group present within the country is Freedom and Roam Uganda, or FARUG. FARUG, established in 2003, is a feminist women's rights group focusing on the promotion of lesbian, bisexual, and queer advocacy and support. The tactics and laws being used to repress LGBT people in Uganda are not made with the genuine belief that gay and queer people are an actual social illness to be fixed. The people enacting and signing laws such as President Museveni do know better but choose to enable and enact repressive legislation. The end goal is to force LGBT either into the closet, into exile, or into the grave. These are goals which are pushed by religious and anti LGBT groups in the United States and modeled on Eurocentric norms. Awareness of this is critical in understanding the motives, history, and tactics of fundamentalist hate groups. Uganda's draconian anti-gay laws are the model in which all these groups strive to enact everywhere.

BETWEEN ANCESTORS AND THE STATE

A LESBIAN SANGOMA CHALLENGES COLONIAL GENDER

BY JACK WALLACE

Figure 20: Photograph of Refiloe Letuma, an African healer

In a Soweto clinic, just before the 1976 student uprisings, a baby girl was born— minutes after her twin brother was delivered stillborn. Her birth was not celebrated but shrouded in superstition. In traditional Zulu belief, twins are considered a bad omen. "Twins die in the Nkabinde family," her mother was warned. But this baby survived. She grew into a sangoma—a traditional healer—and later publicly declared herself a lesbian. Her name is Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde, and her life reveals a truth too often erased from African history: queerness has always existed, even when colonial systems tried to deny it.

South Africa is often praised for its progressive constitution—the first in the world to explicitly ban discrimination based on sexual orientation. Yet LGBTQ people, especially Black lesbians, continue to face disproportionate violence and social exclusion. Nkabinde's life complicates celebratory narratives of progress. Her autobiography, *Black Bull, Ancestors and Me*, recounts a story of gender, sexuality, spirituality, and survival. She moves between gender roles, dances in both men's and women's clothing, and communicates with male and female ancestors alike. "As a sangoma," she writes, "it is more flexible. I can dance like a woman and wear a woman's clothes and dance like a man and wear a man's clothes. I can do the work of a man, like slaughtering a goat or a cow although in traditional Zulu culture a woman

"A TRUTH TOO OFTEN ERASED FROM AFRICAN HISTORY: QUEERNESS HAS ALWAYS BEEN HERE, EVEN WHEN COLONIAL SYSTEMS TRIED TO ERASE IT."

cannot slaughter."[62] To understand the radical potential of this fluidity—and the resistance it embodies—we must turn to the decolonial feminist theorist María Lugones. In her essay "The Coloniality of Gender," Lugones argues that colonialism imposed a Eurocentric gender system onto colonized people, replacing indigenous ways of knowing with rigid binaries: man/woman, heterosexual/homosexual, domestic/public.[63] These binaries were tied to Western ideals of race, productivity, and civilization. Under colonial rule, Black women were hypersexualized and denied femininity, while gender-nonconforming individuals were rendered either invisible or pathological. But Nkabinde's life as a sangoma offers a counterpoint to that imposed system. It suggests that African cosmologies had—and still have—room for more expansive expressions of identity. Her acceptance within her spiritual community, even as she faces hostility in broader society, demonstrates how precolonial traditions can serve as sites of resistance against colonial gender norms and their post-colonial legacies. "The ancestors don't mind," she writes simply, referring to her sexuality.[64] But society does. And that tension—between what the ancestors accept and what the state punishes—is where her story unfolds.

"NKABINDE'S LIFE AS A SANGOMA OFFERS A COUNTERPOINT TO THAT IMPOSED SYSTEM. IT SUGGESTS THAT AFRICAN COSMOLOGIES HAD—AND STILL HAVE—ROOM FOR MORE EXPANSIVE EXPRESSIONS OF IDENTITY. "

LUGONES'S COLONIALITY OF GENDER AND THE SANGOMA AS COUNTERPOINT

Lugones challenges us to view gender not as biological destiny, but as a tool of empire. In "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," she describes how gender, as we know it, was constructed to support racial and capitalist hierarchies. The colonial gender system fused racial, sexual, and gendered oppression, creating hierarchies like male/female and human/nonhuman.[65] This system did not simply categorize people, it dehumanized them. In precolonial African societies, Lugones asserts, gender roles often operated along different logics, if they existed in the binary form at all. Instead, many communities recognized a diversity of social and spiritual roles that did not map neatly onto Western ideas of masculinity and femininity. Colonizers erased these nuances, replacing them with the idea that a proper society required fixed male

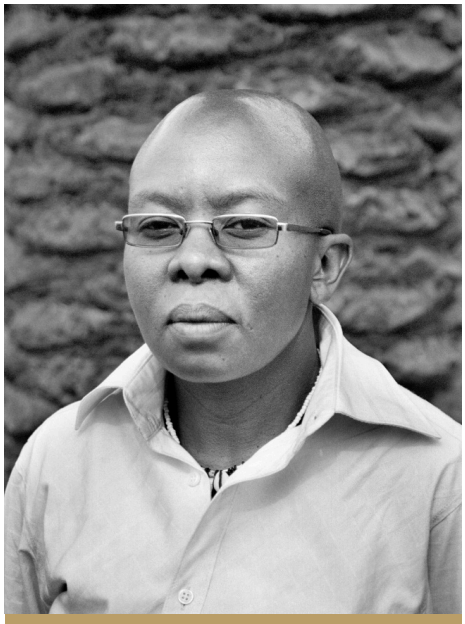


Figure 21: Photograph of Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde.

Figure 22: A gay pride event held in Cape Town, South Africa

and female roles, heterosexual unions, and the subordination of women. In many ways, it meant that to be a proper woman (under Lugones' framework) meant being white, bourgeois, and heterosexual. Black and indigenous women were never women according to this model."[66] This is where Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde's life provides both a personal testimony and a political counterpoint. As a sangoma, a spiritual healer called by ancestors, she exists within a tradition that resists the rigid gendering of colonial ideology. "I can dance like a woman and slaughter like a man," she writes, matter-of-factly. But this fluidity is not a modern invention or a Western import; it is rooted in African spiritual cosmologies.[67] Her calling, she says, came from both male and female ancestors. Her identity, in other words, is ancestral. "Nkunzi is the ancestor who called me and gave me his name," she writes in a praise poem. "Lo! I am now Black Bull… the young man of Sangweni."[68] In colonial logic, this kind of dual embodiment—woman and Black Bull, lesbian and healer—is unintelligible. The colonial gender system demands fixed categories. But in indigenous spiritual epistemologies, such duality is not only possible, it is sacred. A 2003 ethnographic study of lesbian sangomas in Soweto found that same-sex attraction is often explained through ancestor possession. "When this ancestor enters me, my entire sexual feelings (for men) die," one healer said. "I have a feeling in such a way that I want to be with another woman today."[69] The fluidity of gendered behavior, wearing both men's and women's clothes, taking lovers of any gender, moving between masculine and feminine expressions, is seen not as deviance, but as spiritual complexity. For Nkabinde, navigating this complexity means balancing the expectations of her family, her church, the South African state, and her ancestors. Each presents a different vision of what it means to be a woman, a healer, and a lesbian. But it is her relationship with the ancestors that offers her the most affirmation—and the most space to exist authentically. At the same time, Nkabinde is not romanticizing the past. Her story is not one of seamless acceptance. In fact, it is marked by deep pain. She recounts how members of her own community questioned her sexuality, how she feared being outed during her sangoma initiation, and how the broader society, shaped by Christian and colonial moralities, continued to treat her as a threat. "It is difficult and dangerous for black lesbians in Soweto. Lesbians are contracting HIV

because of rape. Men don't accept lesbians. They think they have to teach them a lesson by raping them."[70] Indeed, the danger is real. In one of the most wrenching sections of her autobiography, Nkabinde recalls a hate crime committed against a fellow lesbian. "Sizakele and Salome were found by a man who was jogging past a vacant plot. Both had been raped and brutally murdered. Sizakele was found with her hands tied together with her underwear and her ankles tied together with her shoelaces, with three bullet holes in her head and three in her collarbone. Sizakele was a well known out lesbian and an HIV activist working for the Positive Women's Network. Whoever murdered her and Salome, who was the mother of a one-year-old baby, knew they were lesbians."[71] These brutalities are not just acts of interpersonal violence, they are the legacies of a colonial system that marked queer Black bodies as disposable. Lugones's theory makes clear that gendered violence in post-apartheid South Africa is not new—it is historical. The colonial regime enforced gender through labor codes, domestic norms, and legal definitions that sought to discipline Black bodies and their sexuality. During apartheid, sexuality was tightly controlled through spatial governance: who could live where, who could love whom, who was allowed visibility. Many of those systems endure today. As Gunkel writes, "In 1996 South Africa became the first and only country in the world to explicitly incorporate the rights of lesbians and gay men into its constitution… However, fifteen years into democracy, the public discourse of homosexuality in South Africa still remains controversial and contested."[72] Yet Nkabinde's life is not only one of victimization—it is also one of survival, spiritual authority, and power. As a sangoma, she holds a respected position in her community, one that predates colonial systems and gestures toward alternative ways of understanding gender and sexuality. Sangomas, as Morgan and Reid observe, "negotiate a space in which same-sex sexuality becomes both a source of marginality and a site of power."[73] Nkabinde is both outsider and healer, queer and sacred.

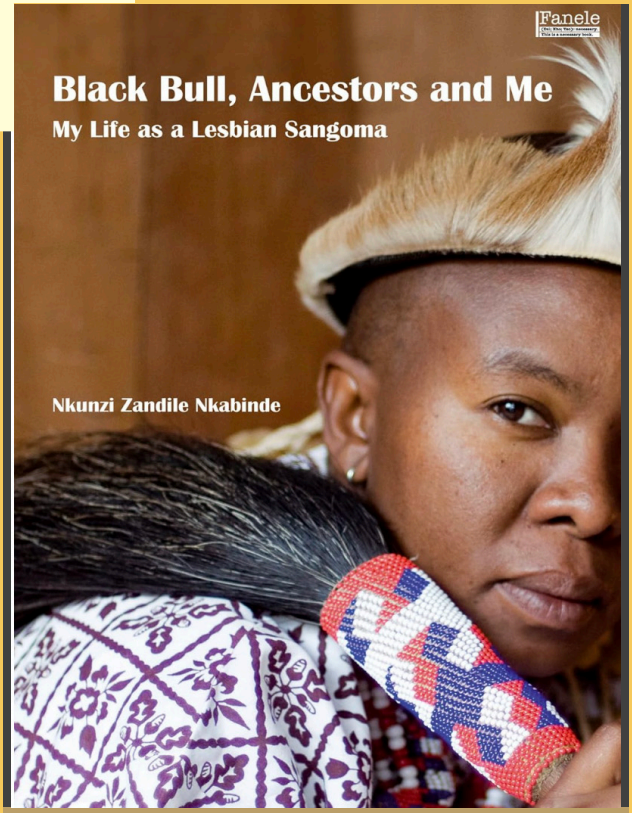


Figure 23: Image of the cover of the book, "Black Bull, Ancestors and Me: My Life as a Lesbian Sangoma," written by Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde.

POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA AND THE GHOSTS OF COLONIAL GENDER

South Africa's 1996 Constitution is often hailed as one of the most progressive in the world. For LGBTQ+ South Africans, it promised not only visibility but dignity, enshrining sexual orientation as a protected category and affirming that freedom meant the right to love, live, and exist without fear. But the law, as Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde's life reveals, is not enough. In her chapter titled "Hate Crimes," Nkabinde recounts the horrors that continue to stalk queer bodies in the country's townships, such as the one referenced prior of the double rape/murder. These stories are not isolated. In fact, South Africa has become infamous for "corrective rape," a brutal and systemic form of gender-based violence aimed at lesbian women. Nkabinde's life unfolds at the intersection of these forces. As a san-

goma, she carries ancestral knowledge that affirms gender fluidity and same-sex desire. But as a lesbian in modern South Africa, she also lives under constant threat. This threat, however, is directly challenged by the active resistance of Nkabinde, who complicates and enriches the ideas of what womanhood, lesbianism, and spiritualism truly mean. Ruth Morgan and Graeme Reid's research into same-sex identified sangomas supports this idea. They write, "Sangomas' construction of identity and desire shifted between that of personal agency and that of a dominant male ancestor. This required constant negotiation and encompassed elements of both the 'modern' and 'traditional'. In the case of these sangomas, same-sexuality the basis of marginality assumes a social status and becomes a source of power."[74] In other words, sangomas like Nkabinde are not simply trapped between two worlds, they are actively weaving them together. Nkabinde's autobiography illustrates this beautifully. Her narrative is not just personal, it is geopolitical. It asks: who gets to claim tradition? Who defines African culture? And who is allowed to belong? In *The Prize and the Price*, Melissa Steyn and Mikki van Zyl expand this question to the nation itself. They write that post-apartheid South Africa must reckon with "…the invisible power of heteronormativity as the dominant ideological formation…" especially when it intersects with race, class, and tradition.[75] Nkabinde's life embodies this reckoning. She is both deeply traditional and radically queer. She performs ceremonies in rural areas and gives public talks on LGBTQ rights. Her very existence forces a conversation that many would rather avoid. This conversation is not only about rights, it is about memory. The colonial project erased entire ways of being.

ANCESTORS, EMBODIMENT, AND THE FUTURE OF GENDER

Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde's story is not one of exception—it is one of exposure. Through her life, what is exposed is not just the depth of her personal strength or the complexity of her identity, but the lie of the colonial gender system itself. That system told Africans who they were and who they could not be. It dictated that men must act like men, women must behave like women, and queerness could only be an illness or a sin. It buried fluidity beneath ideology and tradition beneath dogma. But Nkabinde, dancing in both men's and women's clothes, living as a lesbian and a sangoma, breaks that spell. Maria Lugones gives us the language to name what Nkabinde lives. The modern/colonial gender system is a system of power that classifies people along axes of race, gender, and sexuality.[76] Nkabinde's life resists that logic. Her very being is impure in the best sense: hybrid, layered,

rooted in ancestral tradition but fully present in modern political struggles. She carries the weight of the colonial gender system in her body, and still, she walks. What makes Nkabinde's story so crucial is that it does not fit into the usual narrative arcs. It is not simply about pride, or trauma, or even resistance. It is about embodiment. About what it means to carry history in your bones—both the violent history of colonization and the deeper history of ancestors who speak across time. To read her autobiography is to be invited into an epistemology that does not separate spirit from flesh, past from present, identity from community. In that world, queerness is not deviance, it is vocation. And gender is not a line to follow, but a river to move through. For readers conditioned by Western binaries, this can be difficult to grasp. But that difficulty is the point. This unintelligibility is precisely what makes Nkabinde dangerous to many. She cannot be neatly categorized. She is not simply a lesbian activist, nor just a traditional healer, nor only a Zulu woman. She is all of these, and none of them fully. That is why her story matters, not because it confirms what we already know, but because it demands that we learn to read differently. To listen differently. To remember differently. And remembering is essential. For too long, African queer lives have been remembered only through violence—when they are remembered at all. Colonialism told Africans that homosexuality was foreign, that gender fluidity was abnormal, that African identity was inherently heterosexual and patriarchal. These lies were not just spoken—they were codified, preached, beaten into bodies. Undoing them requires more than legal reform or cultural tolerance. It requires a return to histories that were silenced. As *The Prize and the Price* reminds us that heteronormativity is not natural; it is manufactured. And like all systems of power, it can be unmade.[77] That is perhaps the greatest lesson of her story. Not that gender and sexuality in Africa have always been fluid, though they have. Not that colonialism distorted those realities, though it did. But that even now, in the face of violence and erasure, there are those who live otherwise. Who keep alive the memory of older ways of knowing. Who carry the ancestors not as a burden, but as a blessing. If we are to truly decolonize gender, if we are to create a world where people like Nkabinde can live without fear, then we must start by listening to stories like hers. Stories that trouble the borders of identity. Stories that remind us that the past is not behind us, but within us. Stories that, like sangoma rituals, call us to remember.

" IT IS NOT SIMPLY ABOUT PRIDE, OR TRAUMA, OR EVEN RESISTANCE. IT IS ABOUT EMBODIMENT. ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS TO CARRY HISTORY IN YOUR BONES—BOTH THE VIOLENT HISTORY OF COLONIZATION AND THE DEEPER HISTORY OF ANCESTORS WHO SPEAK ACROSS TIME."

" AND GENDER IS NOT A LINE TO FOLLOW, BUT A RIVER TO MOVE THROUGH."

FICTIONS OF THE PAST:

Using Historical Fiction to Understand the Effects of Colonial Gender Roles on 1940s Zimbabwe

by Christopher Morris

Figure 24: Image of Yonne Vera taken in her garden in Bulawayo, Photo taken by Eric Beauchemin, 2004.

Throughout history there have been numerous influences that have affected and shaped African society and culture, few of which have been as impactful as the colonization from European settlers. The impacts from the colonization of Africa reach beyond political, economic, and historic changes and affected African societies down to a personal level. As Europeans left their home continent and began to colonize and establish settlements in Africa, their ideas regarding gender, sexuality, and bodily autonomy followed. These "western" ideas would eventually spread throughout the continent of Africa, ultimately changing and influencing Native Africans cultural practices, identities, and beliefs about gender and sexuality. The impacts from colonization regarding these topics of personal identity have influenced countless forms of artistic expression ranging from music, artwork, and written stories and novels. Zimbabwean author Yvonne Vera is well known for her novels rooted in issues plaguing colonial Zimbabwe, addressing harsh subject matters such rape, abortion, gender inequality and other sensitive topics. While most of her work is historical fiction, Yvonne Vera's writings are an example of how historical fiction can bridge the gap between personal memory and collective trauma.

Understanding the impacts

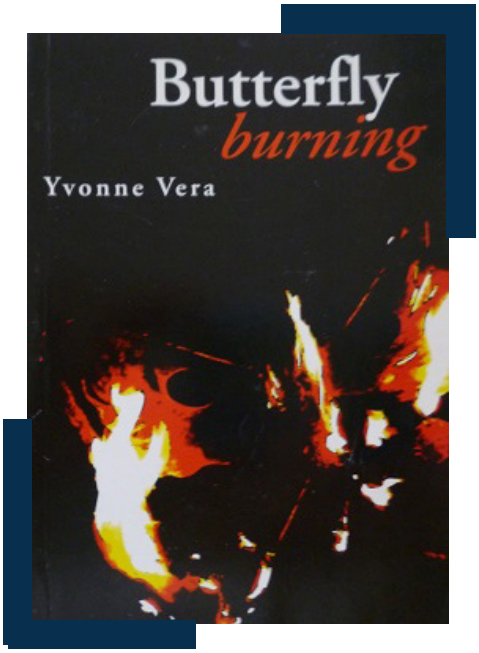


Figure 25: Front cover of first edition of Butterfly Burning by Yvonne Vera, 1998.

from colonial rule in Zimbabwe is significant because it can be used to understand how the rigid patriarchal culture developed, as well the increase in violence, abuse, and lack of autonomy that plagued the women of twentieth century Zimbabwe. As the British South African Company began to establish a settler colony in the region, they would create the white minority ruled colony of Southern Rhodesia in 1923.[78] With European settlers in control of political power in Southern Rhodesia they were able to control and manipulate the economic distribution as well. These new policymakers of the region, influenced by their European customs and cultural practices regarding gender, often passed laws that increased the women's economic dependence on men.[79] Women were forced to shift away from their agricultural and spiritual leadership roles into new colonial shaped roles that revolved around family producing and caretaking.[80]

This idea of colonization forcing the native African women into more man dependent roles is reenforced by the access and type of education available to black men and women. While black men had earlier access to a "western education" and a focus on agricultural practices, black women were taught more domesticated, caretaking, and religious values with an emphasis on educating them in the style of European housewives.[81] Forcefully shifting the native women of Zimbabwe away from their historical agricultural ties also removes them from chances at economic opportunity. Black women were often subjected to unpaid labor and faced inequalities when it came to access of paying jobs in comparison of black men.[82] These discrepancies between the economic and educational access for black women and men are later echoed throughout published writings.

Black men had earlier access to western education and more chances at economic development, they were the first to write and publish their own narratives.[83] As men dominated the early scenes of African publications the patriarchal system that made women dependent on their male counterparts became normalized through these publications. The lack of black women voices in Zimbabwe publications also suppressed the visibility of the inequality, abuse, and violence women faced under the same system. As black women gained access to the western education the men of their commu-

Figure 26: Map of Zimbabwe

" YVONNE VERA'S WRITINGS ARE AN EXAMPLE OF HOW HISTORICAL FICTION CAN BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN PERSONAL MEMORY AND COLLECTIVE TRAUMA. "

nity already received, there has been an increase in the efforts in painting a fuller, more inclusive history of the era of colonial rule.[84] Authors like Yvonne Vera, Ama Ata Aidoo, and Tsitsi Dangarembga are great examples of women who have retold the colonial past of Zimbabwe through their works in historical fiction that features strong women characters and genuine hardships and struggles of black women in Zimbabwe.[85]

Analyzing works of historical fiction allows readers to be immersed in the memory and personal recollections of past events dictated by the author. In the case of Yvonne Vera her novels often address the hardships and struggles of women in the "era of decolonization". Vera's 1998 novel *Butterfly Burning* is no exception to the levels of insight on the negative and horrific experiences endured by the women of Zimbabwe during the late 1940s. *Butterfly Burning* follows the story of a young woman, Phephelaphi, who meets an older man, Fumbatha, in the Makokoba region of Zimbabwe. Despite Fumbatha's lack of economic stability and his poor living conditions, Phephelaphi falls in love with Fumbatha and agrees to move in with him. Despite the treacherous living conditions, the two seem to be living happily with one another making the best out of what they have. The honeymoon phase of the relationship doesn't last forever as Fumbatha has to travel for work, leaving Phephelaphi alone sometimes for days at a time. In these moments of Fumbatha's absence Phephelaphi was given time to explore moments of independence, traveling into Makokoba, staying with friends, visiting social spots late at night, and even finding motivation to get back into the nursing program in Zimbabwe. However, as Fumbatha learns of Phephelaphi's desire to become more independent he grows angry, demanding she drop out of the nursing program and forbids her from traveling back to the downtown area while he's away. Fumbatha's reaction makes it clear to Phephelaphi that she cannot live the life she dreams of with Fumbatha. As tensions begin to rise between the two Phephelaphi discovers that she has become pregnant, and with that her future as a nurse is in jeopardy. In an effort to save her dreams of independence she performs a self-induced abortion without telling any-

one but a close friend. The final chapters of the novel end with Fumbatha finding out about the abortion, physically and sexually abusing Phephelaphi, and condemns her for lying before ending their relationship. This violence and abuse against Phephelaphi eventually break her, driving her to commit suicide.

Using *Butterfly Burning* as a source for analysis we can develop an understanding of how black women from post-colonial Zimbabwe chose to remember their past and highlight the variety of injustices that black women faced during the colonial era. Author Yvonne Vera creates a strong female character to centralize our analysis around in Phephelaphi. Phephelaphi being a young woman craving independence in 1940s Zimbabwe creates an interesting dynamic to follow throughout the novel. One of the prevalent examples of the patriarchal society that has developed in Zimbabwe is the dynamic Phephelaphi has between Fumbatha and other men she encounters in Makokoba. The male characters throughout the novel create a sense that women are supposed to be dependent on men. Fumbatha claims he is obsessed with Phephelaphi, and despite what she may want Fumbatha constantly insists that she must just stay at home and let him take care of her. This is well displayed in the tenth chapter in the novel during an argument regarding Phephelaphi returning to school to become a nurse. "He must keep her close. Somehow. All the time. He must make her belong… 'We are happy together. I work. I take care of you. It is not necessary for you to find something else.'"[86] This passage from the novel shows that Fumbatha wants Phephelaphi to be dependent on him, despite his struggling financial and living situations. Phephelaphi becoming a nurse would provide extra income and allow the two of them to move away from their one room house that is actively falling apart, but instead Fumbatha continues to insist that she does not need to work as he can take care of the both of them.

Fumbatha has become normalized to the colonially established patriarchy, and he is not the only one Phephelaphi will encounter. In the eleventh chapter of the novel Phephelaphi travels into the downtown part of Makokoba while Fumbatha is away. She ends up visiting a friend named Deliwe, a woman whose house is a "club" for black men and women to smoke and drink. While Phephelaphi is visiting she begins talking to a group of men who are arguing with her about a woman's role in society. The center point of this argument revolves around the patriarchal belief that women are to be subordinate to men. She remarks that one man says

"A women is for loving. If you love a woman enough she will unburden herself. That is the sweetest women there is, a woman who has been loved enough. This was the truest woman there was, and a man could live a happy life."[87] Once again we see that the men of Makokoba believe that "loving" a woman is enough for them, and that enough love will make them "unburdened" and obedient to men.

"A WOMEN IS FOR LOVING. IF YOU LOVE A WOMAN ENOUGH SHE WILL UNBURDEN HERSELF. THAT IS THE SWEETEST WOMEN THERE IS, A WOMAN WHO HAS BEEN LOVED ENOUGH. THIS WAS THE TRUEST WOMAN THERE WAS, AND A MAN COULD LIVE A HAPPY LIFE."

This idea that women are not supposed to work but instead let men provide for them is not native to historical cultural practices in Zimbabwe. Before colonial rule women often had complex and multiple roles as farm laborers, livestock investors, and spiritual mediums and figures.[88] These precolonial societies in Zimbabwe did not feature the strong patriarchy that European settlers establish, instead women could live somewhat independent lifestyles but could also hold cetain kinds of political authority as a spiritual medium. The colonization of Zimbabwe dramatically changes the roles of black women in the region, forcing them out of roles of independence and political power. These changes established by the Europeans put black women at the bottom of a newly established hierarchy, using race to keep the white minority in control and introducing their European ideas of gender roles that promotes patriarchal societies.[89]

The effects of colonization on black women also affected their bodily autonomy and the harsh reality black women face in terms of making choices for themselves. One of the darkest moment of *Burning Butterfly* occurs when Phephelaphi makes the choice to perform a self-abortion. Phephelaphi comes to this difficult decision after realizing that she cannot continue to be a nurse while pregnant and giving birth to this child would make it almost impossible to leave Fumbatha. Fearful of Fumbatha's response she keeps her pregnancy hidden, and

when it comes time to perform the abortion, she does it alone without telling anyone.[90] At this point in the novel we are aware of how controlling Fumbatha is over Phephelaphi's life, and if he knew of her pregnancy he would force her to birth the child and she'd be forever dependent on him. Phephelaphi's abortion and fear of Fumbatha's overreaching control exemplifies the lack of bodily autonomy black women faced in 1940s Zimbabwe.

This lack of bodily autonomy is only more apparent after Fumbatha finds out Phephelaphi has aborted her pregnancy.[91] When Fumbatha learns the news of Phephelaphi's abortion he cheats on her with Deliwe, the same woman Phephelaphi went to stay with when Fumbatha is away. Once he confronts Phephelaphi about her abortion he also verbally berates her, revealing that he was aware that she aborted their child and buried it. After this incident we learn in the next chapter that Fumbatha has managed to impregnate Phephelaphi again assumably by force.[92] Phephelaphi seemingly has no control over her own pregnancy. She was unable to find access to a safe abortion and forced to do it herself, the man who impregnated her becomes enraged when finding out about the abortion and forcibly impregnates her again. While this may be an extreme and dramatized example of the lack of bodily autonomy in Zimbabwe, the story of Phephelaphi can be used to understand how black women like Yvonne Vera look back on the lack of fundamental rights the women in colonial Zimbabwe endured.

Historical fiction offers a powerful lens in recreating the narrative of black women in Zimbabwe but it also allows for the authors within this genre of writing to portray history through their own understanding. Authors like Yvonne Vera chose to highlight and emphasize the struggle and abuse that black women were subjected to. They are important in ensuring that the dark history of colonization in Zimbabwe is not male centric as well as the dominating effect a patriarchal society has on black women. The impacts of colonization were devasting on the black communities in Zimbabwe and long lasting. Historical fiction aims to bring these historical issues to a modern audience. While they often rely on dramatic stories set in the hardships of colonization to maintain interest with a popular audience, the dramatization is not purely for entertainment as it offers multiple historic and symbolic purposes. Works of historical fiction provides a great means of getting readers interested in historical discussions that otherwise would be overlooked by historians.

"HOW VIOLENCE MAKES A MAN:

An Analysis of the Relationship between Violence and Masculinity as Portrayed in Chinua Achebe's African Trilogy

by Samuel Carter

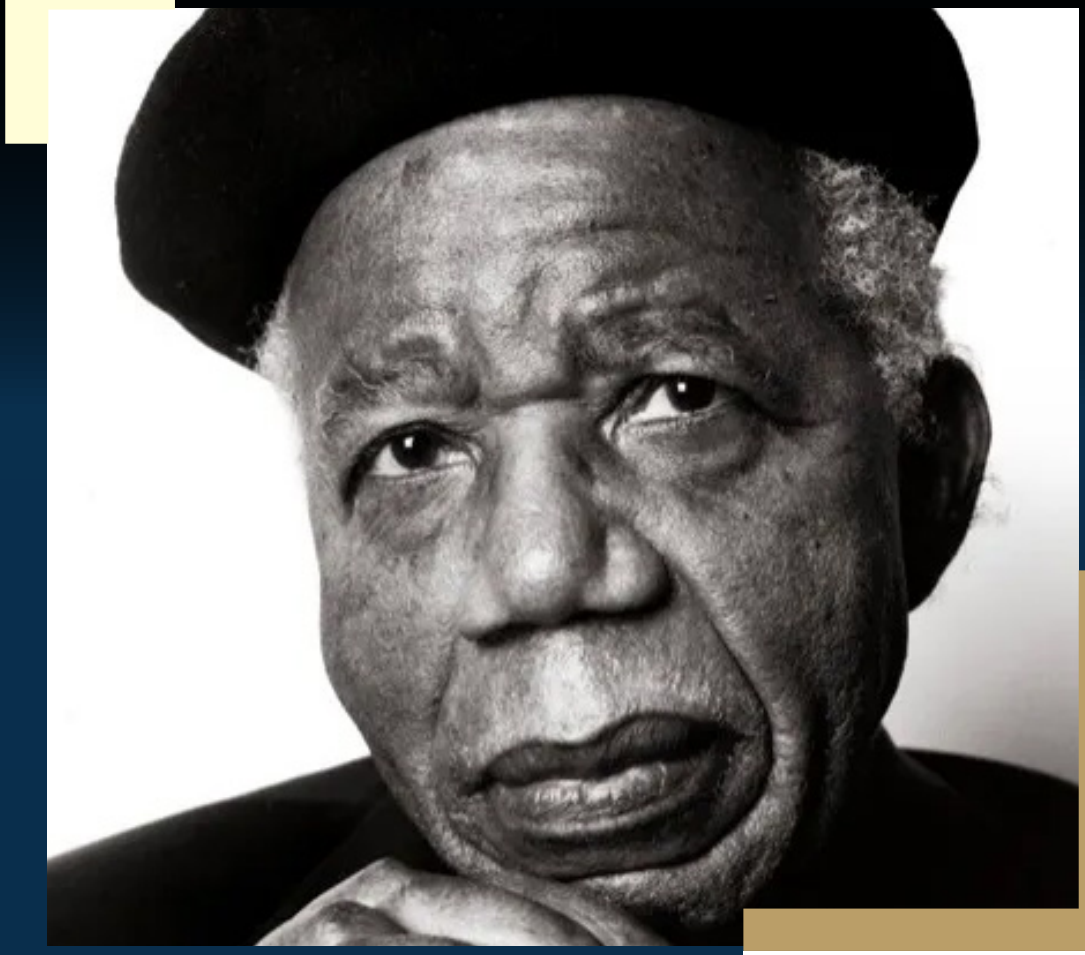
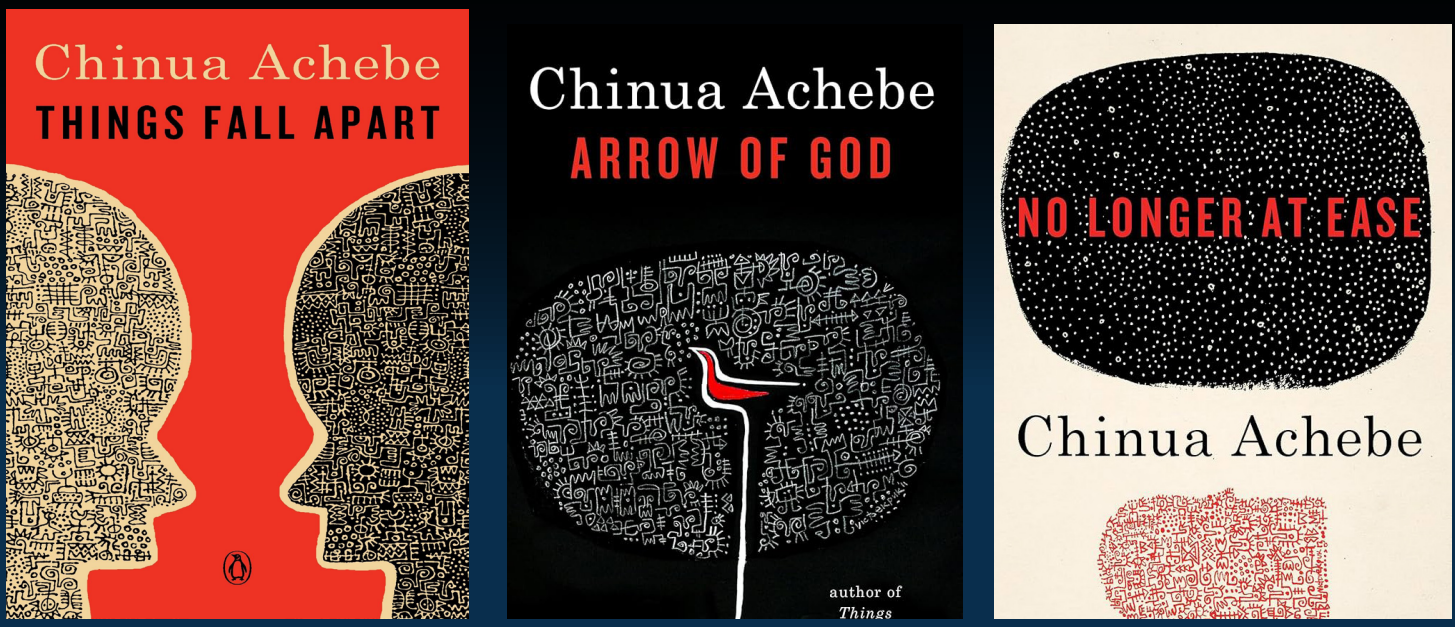


Figure 27: Achebe at home in Annandale-on-Hudson.Photograph by Steve Pyke, 2008.

Introduction

One of the first truths we learn in the human experience is that violence is a foundation of nature. This is not some big secret that lurks behind the corners of walls, it is a truth that stands proudly in the light, waiting for us to look. The relationship between humans and violence is a complicated one, as some are revolted by it and others are elated at its existence and perpetration. One of the most complex facets of the phenomenon is the relationship between violence and identity.

Humans like to relate concepts to create some semblance of understanding of the world and masculinity and violence are a prominent pairing, the hunter that provides for the village or the soldier who bears the scars for his home, but what is the understanding of the relationship between individual perpetrator and communal identity? How does violence make a man? What makes violence a masculine act in the eyes of the social zeitgeist? The colonization of Nigeria and Africa as a whole, led to the ideas around such concepts to change. The injection of Christianity, the legislation that changed the lives of Africans, and the cultural norms that circulated during this period of African History all transformed norms concerning violence and masculinity. To better understand this change in the relationship between violence and masculinity, this article will analyze the African Trilogy by Chinua Achebe, a prolific Nigerian writer whose works are praised to this day. Of course, no one is free from the eye of criticism, so we will be framing his works against criticisms of his writings and the Gender System developed and coined by Maria Lugones.



Figures 28, 29, & 30: : Cover Designs by Susan Yuran for the African Trilogy commissioned by Penguin Press

Baseline in Nigeria

Intimate Partner Violence is a widespread phenomenon and is one of the most common forms of violence committed, with it having a 20 to 71% prevalence rate in official reports, but it is also believed to be higher due to poor reporting systems and societal pressures against reporting.[93] This number rises in situations when the victim is a woman in a vulnerable state, such as impoverished or disabled. 28% of Nigerian women have experienced intimate partnerviolence starting from the age of 15 onward, with rates increasing when teens and adult women become pregnant or contract HIV or AIDS. The most common source of this violence is the male counterparts expressing an identity conflict, as they start to see themselves as less masculine because of the inability to provide for their families and loved ones, which leads to a crisis of identity because the logic is if a man can't provide for his family he is not a man.[94]

In certain regards, the concept of gender in Nigeria resembles that of the western world, echoing the sentiments of those who colonized it. A man's ability to provide for their family, their physical ability, and their proclivity towards violence will dictate how "masculine" they are. Intimate Partner Violence stems from a frustration with masculinity, with men using violence to undermine accusations of "femininity".[95]

The use of violence being a separator for men and women can be seen within the communities of the Central Nigerian city Jos and the

nearby rural area of Plateau State. They have faced a series of conflicts starting in 2001 that have led to the deaths of 7,000 people and even state-sponsored military intervention and have only recently started to reduce in their frequency due to peace programs and initiatives aimed at reducing this conflict.[96] Curiously, a common attitude of mockery towards the men who either didn't participate in the violent conflicts and those who strived to create the peace programs, with the jabs and insults being "reduced" to women. In the eyes of both camps, it was better to have contributed to the conflict and be responsible for 7,000 deaths than to have been a non-participant or actively opposed because peace was the feminine option.

The Lugones Gender System

The theoretical frame created by Maria Lugones, the Modern/Colonial Gender System (MCGS), is an amalgam of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Anibal Quijano's Coloniality of Power. The majority of the MCGS is Quijano's work on the Coloniality of Power but reviewed and in Lugones's own words "complicated" using CRT.[97] The Coloniality of Power recontextualizes how "race" is a fabricated way for specific groups of people, Europeans, to have a level of "natural superiority", Lugones further develops this system to recognize that race is not the only social class created to have a "biological" superiority; gender is also a victim of this colonization of concepts.[98]

"[R]ace is not the only social class created to have a "biological" superiority; gender is also a victim of this colonization of concepts. "

Lugones then divides the MCGS into two aspects, the Light Side and the Dark side. The Light Side is the "surface" level of gender discrimination such as wage gaps, lack of the same freedoms afforded to men, a societal expectation for women to reduce themselves to only being mothers. The Dark Side is the intersection of the colonization of race and gender, where African men were made to be lesser by on the one hand, making them seem feminized or on the other hand, African Women were hypersexualized and exploited for sex. While not great, the Light Side is the "hyper idealized" version of Coloniality, whereas the Dark Side is the intersection where gender is used as a weapon against those of a non-European "race" or heritage.[99]

Chinua Achebe's African Trilogy

In *Things Fall Apart,* the first book in Achebe's African Trilogy, we fol-

low Okonkwo, a revered and well-respected man of the Umuofia village. One of the main parts of his character in the novel is his violent nature as he will beat men he finds lazy, his wives, and even his own children. The other men of his village are also violent, but Achebe repeatedly illustrates that Okonkwo is far more violent than his village can tolerate. Okonkwo's motivation in the novel is to avoid becoming like his father, in both the negatives and the positives, and in such starts to internalize a divide between the masculine and feminine. A man with no titles in his village is referred to using the same word for a woman, and so he treats every man with no titles as a woman and attempts to dominate them. Whether that domination be in the form of social humiliation, such as the one time a man attempts to interject into a village meeting and Okonkwo stated "this is a meeting for men" as a reply. He also sets clear divides between tasks for his children, as when one of his daughters offers to help him carry some of his belongings his response is that's "a boy's job". Okonkwo sees women not as peers but as chores that he needs to beat into submission, to the point that he sees men who "can't control their womenfolk" as not men.

Near the beginning of the novel, a young man named Ikemefuna from different village is taken as a tribute for the death of an Umuofia woman. Ikemefuna spends three years with Okonkwo, becoming part of the family in the meantime and creating a close familial bond. At the end of the three years, he is sentenced to death by an oracle of the village, and Okonkwo is the one to deliver the fatal blow. It is obvious that he is mourning Ikemefuna as he had become like a son, but he feels shame at the guilt for having been part of his death.[100] He sees this emotional turmoil as feminine and therefore shameful, asking himself "When did you become a shivering old woman," and stating that this turmoil over violence has made him a woman. This theme of femininity and peace being shameful to Okonkwo continues throughout the novel.

Initially, Achebe leads the reader to believe that all the Umuofia acted

Figure 31: A map of the Igbo-speaking community within Nigeria and within Africa by NuclearVacuum, 2013.

and believed this way. Later in the novel after Okonkwo has been exiled for committing manslaughter against a kinsman, Okonkwo is confronted by his uncle for his misogyny and sorrow of being forced to live in his motherland. Other elders in the Umuofia clan also place their wives on an equal footing, as one wife wielded a similar level of authority in her home as her husband.

In *Arrow of God*, the second book in the trilogy, we follow Ezeulu, the chief priest of the Ulu for the Umuaro clan, during the early days of the colonization of Nigeria. While the gendering of violence isn't prevalent, the societal view of violence is discussed and as previously established in *Things Fall Apart*, violence is seen as masculine in the Igbo society these novels take place. In the very first chapter there is a sharp contrast to the behavior of Okonkwo in the first novel. Ezeulu's daughter is beaten by her husband and instead of accepting it as "controlling his womenfolk" Ezeulu and his son see it as a grave offense. Consequently, Ezeulu's eldest son goes and beats the abusive husband half to death.[101] In the second chapter of the novel, the main conflict begins to unfold as a nearby village claims a plot of land that was originally given to the Umuaro people to be cultivated. In an effort to negotiate, a messenger party is sent to gage whether the other village is willing to negotiate for that land or is prepared for war. One of the messengers is killed by the rival clan, but half of the Umuaro believe that he had invited death upon himself for destroying a vital piece of the rival clansman's shrine. At a later point in the story, Ezeulu's son overhears a group of men discussing how Ezeulu had killed a python, which is a crime on the same level as killing a kinsman to the Umuaro people. When Ezeulu's son comes home to tell his father what he overheard, Ezeulu's response is that instead of coming home he should have beat the man spreading "lies".[102]

It seems that in this novel, and to the Umuaro people, violence is seen not as a crime but as an end in and of itself in the same way words are. Beating a man to settle abuse, killing a man for offending one's ancestors, and beating a man for telling lies are all seen as somewhat acceptable means of resolution. There is strength in the ability to settle conflict with violence, to beat or bleed understanding into those you are opposed with, and that strength is seen as a masculine feature.

No Longer at Ease follows the grandson of Okonkwo, Obi, as he attempts to balance his new position within the colonial government and the traditional beliefs of his mother and family. Unlike the previous two novels, this one doesn't feature any notable acts of violence, besides an abortion near the end. The opening is a series of scenes that take place after the events of the novel, in which the protagonist's boss talks about how Africans aren't able to

resist the temptation to commit crimes, such as taking bribes. Later in the novel the same boss states, "But in a country where even the educated have not reached the level of thinking about tomorrow, one has a clear duty." He made the word "'educated' taste like vomit." Obi may not perpetrate physical violence as the past novels did, but he does engage with the effects of colonialism directly. Racism and poverty are focal points of his experience. Obi's masculinity does start to become tied to his ability to provide, as he starts to spiral from the expectations of the Igbo, his family, and for his partner Clara. He starts to buy more and more things to maintain a level of materialism, as his wealth becomes tied in part to his masculinity.[103]

Within this trilogy, the reaction to violence also changes, evolving with the progression of colonialism. *In Things Fall Apart*, violence has a ceremonial and legal place within society. When Okonkwo beats his wife, he is only chastised for this when he does so during a week of peace. When he accidentally killed the son of a prominent man, he was exiled, and the rest of his village performed a ceremonial desecration of his property. This is different than the reaction found within *Arrow of God*, as violence is returned in kind. When Ezeulu's daughter is abused by her husband, her family goes and beats him to an inch of his life. When an envoy of Ezeulu's village destroys an idol while in the rival village and is killed for it, the people of Ezeulu's village start killing the other village's people. This starts a war between the villages, which is only stopped by negotiations between the two villages. In *No Longer at Ease*, the violence is not physical, rather it is social and systemic. Obi faces racism from his boss and those around him at his work, and instead of returning that treatment in kind he bears it. Violence was ceremonial, then a tit for tat kind of reaction, and then normalized during the height of colonialism.

Achebe and the MCGS

Achebe provides a perspective in *Things Fall Apart* that emulates the viewpoint of masculinity in modern Nigeria, and slowly throughout the story confronts the idea that femininity is shameful, but it has its purpose in society just like masculinity. We are shown examples of men and women occupying similar places in their households, such as with Ndulue and his wife, whom Ndulue consults for every decision he makes. Okonkwo is confronted by his uncle Uchendu for his blatant hostility towards the feminine and having to live on his motherland during his exile, Uchendu confronts him with a lecture about the importance of the mother in Igbo culture:

> It's true that a child belongs to its father. But when a father beats his child, it seeks sympathy in its mother's hut. A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good, and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness, he finds refuge in his motherland. Your mother is there to protect you. She is buried there. And that is why we say that mother is supreme. Is it right that you, Okonkwo, should bring to your mother a heavy face and refuse to be comforted?[104]

"It's true that a child belongs to its father. But when a father beats his child, it seeks sympathy in its mother's hut. A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good, and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness, he finds refuge in his motherland. "

Achebe continues this confrontation of the hegemonic masculinity of Nigeria in *Arrow of God* by directly confronting the domestic violence that

was illustrated in the first novel. Ezeulu's daughter is beaten severely by her husband and instead of treating it like any common occurrence or routine chore as it was in *Things Fall Apart*, Ezeulu's family immediately takes drastic measures to achieve a sense of justice for such disrespect. While his son is the one that commits the act of violence against the husband, Ezeulu is the one to confront the behavior of the neighboring village:

> You should have seen her the day she came home. Is this how you marry women in your place? If it is your way then I say you will not marry my daughter like that." The men agreed that Ibe had stretched his arm too far, and so no one could blame Obika for defending his sister.[105]

Achebe starts the trilogy confronting the idea that the masculine and feminine are two ends of a spectrum and not two independent factors of identity. Achebe confronts this with his first protagonist, whose viewpoint is strikingly similar to the dominant one in Colonial and Post-Colonial Nigeria, where Okonkwo is confronted directly by his uncle and indirectly by the example Ndulue and his wife sharing authority. He also confronts this idea of polarity between the masculine and feminine with *Arrow of God*, in which Ezeulu performs actions that were previously seen as feminine in the earlier books of the trilogy, such as the way he sits when interacting with a shrine. The idea that those who run away from conflict are cowards and therefore feminine is present from not only Okonkwo but also in contemporary Nigeria, but Achebe consistently confronts that notion with wise and powerful men stating the opposite. When confronted over killing Ikemefuna, Okonkwo responds that he isn't a coward afraid of blood, to which his friend responds that this is an offense to the earth mother and a transgression upon the land.

While his confrontation of the polarity of masculinity and femininity is laudable, he does write women to be somewhat one dimensional rather than fully developed, agentive characters. Okonkwo's wives are never as deeply analyzed as their male counterparts, with Ikemefuna having more depth than Okonkwo's wives combined. Okonkwo's other children besides Nwoye are ignored in the novel besides his daughter Ezinma, but only for the fact that Okonkwo can wish she was born a boy multiple times in the novel. Ezeulu's daughter is the victim of domestic violence and the catalyst for the dispute between the two families, but the focus quickly shifts from her to her brother and father. In *No Longer at Ease*, Obi's conflict comes from his mother and Clara, and while they do receive more depth here than other women in this trilogy, Achebe doesn't first describe Clara's personality but her body and objectifies her in the process.

Reflection

Violence is seen as a tool in the Igbo society, as framed by Achebe's African Trilogy, but had evolved into a form of masculine identification for Nigerians. Instead of a nuanced balance between the masculine and feminine aspects, coloniality slowly turned gender into a two-category polarized system, in which violence is a positive masculine trait and peace is a negative feminine trait.[106] Okonkwo is a character written to have the viewpoints of historic and indirectly contemporary viewpoints towards gender, and throughout his work Achebe works to not only destigmatize femininity within his works, but he also seeks to deconstruct the concept of violence and especially its relation to masculinity. He confronts the colonial ideas of gender with the nuanced and insightful understandings of the Igbo people, and while Violence is seen as a Masculine trait still to this day, Achebe illustrates through his writings the flaws of such a divisive perspective.

WANJIKU'S JOURNEY TO WOMANHOOD

A HISTORICAL FICTION ABOUT A GIKUYU GIRL IN COLONIAL KENYA

BY EMMA VAN HAL

WANJIKU'S JOURNEY

PREFACE

'Irua was a way of doing what the ancestors had done. It was a way of staying part of them.' This is how Wangeci, a Gikuyu women born in 1930, describes why Irua is important to her. This quote is from *Voices from Mutira: Change in the Lives of Rural Gikuyu Women, 1910-1995* by Jean Davison. Davison's book recorded seven life histories from Gikuyu women in rural Mutira, Kenya. The Gikuyu are the largest ethnic group in Kenya making up approximately 20% of the contemporary population. Historically, the Gikuyu have lived in the highland area of south-central Kenya. As a group, they were the most dramatically affected by the white settlers in the colony of Kenya. Irua now is not a common ceremony practiced anymore. Times have changed, traditions and their meaning have changed. This historical fiction piece tells a story which takes place in the 1940s in Kenya under British colonial rule. Wanjiku is a Gikuyu girl living amid change and this is her story about experiencing Irua, its meaning and how she experienced the changing socio-political landscape. It focusses on Irua, the process of initiation into female adulthood, which in Gikuyu society includes female circumcision, sexual education and ceremonial rituals. Fictionalizing Wanjiku's journey allows for the historical narrative to be centered around and told from the voice of a girl as she becomes a woman.

Women's bodies have been subject to policies made by male authorities in Kenya during and after colonial rule. This statement also holds true for the rest of sub-Saharan Africa in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as well. This has caused the undermining of women's ability to regulate their own cultural practices and has virtually erased traditional forms of female leadership, such as the age-set system of mariika, for example. Formerly, the mariika was a foundational social structure in Gikuyu society that organized individuals into gendered assigned groups based on shared stages of life. Colonial ideas have impacted on women's reproductive rights and family structures, including the practice of Irua. Showcasing how women dealt with this change and disruption, will highlight the resistance and power women had in Kenyan history.

British colonial rule and African male authorities jointly shaped a political landscape in which women's bodies became a way of exerting control. As Lynn Thomas argues in her article "Imperial Concerns and 'Womens Affairs'" colonial officials in Meru (part of Gikuyu speaking area), Kenya sought to regulate clitoridectomy and eradicate abortion not only as moral or health concerns, but also to manage fertility, labor, and imperial reputation.[107] This colonial disruption undermined female authority, while having a direct impact on their bodies and agency.

Writing about the cultural and political mobilization centered on Irua , Gikuyu researcher and author Ngaruiya Njambi highlights the importance of understanding the long history and the meaning of the tradition when understanding Irua. Irua has been seen as oppressive to women by Western feminism; the narrative of seeing Irua rather as a form of empowerment and resistance has been overlooked. According to Njambi, 'It [the contemporary discussion of Irua] suffers from its over-generality and failure to see complexities of such practices in different places and times.'[108]

Similarly, Anna Adima's work on the 1929-30 female circumcision controversy in Kenya shows how even during national debates, the voices of the women most directly affected were

absent from both colonial and African male-led records.[109] This historical pattern of erasure has informed academic interpretations of Irua, reinforcing these narratives that are still present today. There is a historical lack of acknowledgement of Kenyan women's voices and their experiences. Highlighting the agency of women and their experience surrounding Irua is important to learn about and understand the importance of this cultural practice.

Scholars like Jazmine Derwin and Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira emphasize the continued need to center women's perspectives, not only to correct past absence, but to challenge present-day assumptions about African womanhood, tradition, and agency.[110] By fictionalizing a Gikuyu girl's experience in colonial Kenya, this story intervenes in those silences.

Historical fiction allows a scholar to create a deeper emotional and personal engagement with historical change. The internal conflicts of these women were not often documented in these historical sources. Historical fiction allows a scholar to bring this to the fore and encourages empathy from the audience. Historical fiction also allows topics such as Irua to be accessible to a broader audience, particularly those unfamiliar with the Gikuyu society and its traditions. This story touches on parts about Irua and the lives of Gikuyu women, while also acknowledging broader themes in Kenyan history- changes in education, religion, and the cultural and political sphere.

The main source used to write this story is *Voices from Mutira: Change in the Lives of Rural Gikuyu Women, 1910-1995* by Jean Davison. This book is a collection of seven life histories of Gikuyu women between 1910 and 1955. By combining these firsthand accounts and using secondary sources about Gikuyu women and society, I have written the story about Wanjiku, a girl growing up in Mutira, and her story on how she experiences her journey to womanhood, including Irua.

This story is written in connection to María Lugones's concept of the coloniality of gender. This story highlights the agency of women and the definition of womanhood in (pre) colonial Africa. Lugones argues that colonialism fundamentally altered gender systems in colonized societies, imposing Eurocentric patriarchal structures that redefined gender roles and marginalized women.[111] These changes affected the ideas about womanhood in Gikuyu society. This story creates an understanding of colonial gender roles, susceptible to change through multiple influences. Indirect or direct causes created new understandings of Irua; a growing influence from Christianity, education and governmental policies.

A Historical Fiction about a Gikuyu girl in Colonial Kenya

The sun was setting, creating a warm glow over the landscape of Mutira. Wanjiku watched as her mother stirred *githeri* over the fire, the scent of maize and beans filling their hut. "Watch carefully, Wanjiku," her mother said, "when you are mature, you will need to know how to do this."[112] These words carried weight. Lately, her mother had been speaking differently to her, watching her more closely. The time for Irua was coming close, and Wanjiku could not ignore the change in her life that was about to come.

Born in 1930, Wanjiku had spent her childhood running freely through the coffee fields, playing with her friends, and listening to the stories of her grandmother. Now, at thirteen, she was about to grow up. Irua was not just a ritual, it was the door between childhood and womanhood. Her best friend, Nyawira eagerly anticipated the ceremony, speaking of it with excitement. "It will finally make us women," she would say, eyes gleaming. But Wanjiku hesitated. She wondered what Irua meant to her and felt scared about the unknown.

Wanjiku had watched the older girls undergo their initiation with both awe and fear. Some appeared proud, decorated with beads and new responsibilities. Others whispered of pain and fear. And then there were the girls who rejected

GLOSSARY

- **irua -The process of initiation into female adulthood. Including female circumcision, sexual education and ceremonial rituals**
- **mariika - the age set system was a foundational social structure in Gikuyu society that organized individuals into groups based on shared stages of life.**
- **mũthuru- a skirt with slits worn during by adult Gikuyu women**
- **mũhiki - newly married woman with one child**
- **mugiro, the impurity of childhood**
- **mathangu-fresh leaves spread carefully on the ground to catch the blood**

"IRUA WAS NOT JUST A RITUAL, IT WAS THE DOOR BETWEEN CHILDHOOD AND WOMANHOOD. "

Irua altogether. They were influenced by Christian missionaries who preached against the practice. The British colonial government and Christian missionaries, rejected Irua, calling it outdated and cruel.[113] Among them was Wambui, Wanjiku's cousin, who had run away to the mission school. The elders spoke of her with disapproval, but Wanjiku had understanding for Wambui, she was brave, but in a different way.

Wambui had told her, "The missionaries say we can follow Christ and still be Gikuyu."[114] Maybe that was true, and Wanjiku knew that many girls who went to church did not participate in Irua anymore, but Wanjiku could not see herself without having Irua as a part of her. Irua did feel like something that belonged to her. It was not something forced upon her. She did not want to do it because she had to; she wanted to do it because she had chosen it. She had felt some pressure from her family to do Irua, but Wanjiku did not see it as bad pressure. It was to keep this important tradition going.

Her mother and grandmother wanted her to feel the same pride in being a Gikuyu woman. Wanjiku's grandmother would never tell her much about what womanhood meant and life as a grown-up girl, but one thing she would always tell Wanjiku was the exact opposite of Wambui. 'Being Agĩkũyũ means having followed the steps of mbuci, matũ, and Irua.'[115] Wanjiku always looked up to her grandmother, she was a very wise woman. She could appreciate the connection her grandmother had with their community. On the other hand, she had learned about the different ideas about this tradition, which created space for Wanjiku to find her own meaning of this Gikuyu tradition.

Her father had never trusted the mission schools. "The missionaries try to stop traditions like this," he would say. "Any girl who puts on a dress and goes to school is no better than a prostitute."[116] Wanjiku had heard the stories and the warnings about what happened to girls who refused Irua. They whispered of a man, that was the first to deny the rite to his daughters, and how no man would take them as wives. "We went through Irua so we could marry," an elder had once said. "No man wanted an uncircumcised woman."[117]

Her mother tried to encourage her in a different way, pointing to the girls who had already gone through the rite. 'You see so-and-so? She is circumcised now. You are also going to get circumcised.'[118] These encouragements from her parents meant a lot to Wanjiku, but they were not what truly convinced her. It was not fear or pressure that made her want to go through with it - it was belonging.

The mariika, the age set system, was the foundation of their lives. Girls who underwent Irua together became bound as sisters. They had grown up learning together, laughing together, dreaming of the day they would step

into womanhood side by side. After the rite, they would take on responsibilities in the community, earn the right to marry, and have their voices heard among the women. Without it, a girl remained a child, forever keeping her childish manners. Wanjiku's mother would tell her that a girl that did not go through Irua would not leave her childhood acts and behaviors behind her. 'She grows with them, matures with them, and even marries with them.'[119]

Wanjiku had grown up knowing exactly where she belonged, her age group moving through life together. When she was younger, she always known her place. The older girls seemed like another world, walking with confidence while their beads were jingling as they passed. The younger children ran in wild games, too small to understand the importance of growing up. People of different mariika rarely spoke to one another except out of necessity. The elders reminded them that respect was found in distance. You did not laugh and joke with someone who had already gone through Irua—they had earned their place. Those who had undergone Irua did not waste time with those still considered children.[120]

The importance of being a part of your age group was what frightened Wanjiku the most. It was not the ceremony itself, not even the pain. It was the thought of being left behind, of standing outside the circle while her friends went forward without her. Those who refused Irua were mocked, left out of the gatherings of their mariika, and forced to find their own way alone.

The days passed, and the talks of Irua grew louder. It was coming closer. One evening, as she watched her mother carefully prepare dinner, she asked 'Did you ever wonder what it would be like... to not go through it?' Her wavering voice revealed that she was scared to ask the question.

Her mother paused, stopped stirring the pot. Then, with a small smile, she answered, 'I did not need to wonder. It was simply what was done.'[121] She looked at Wanjiku. 'But times are

"YOU DID NOT LAUGH AND JOKE WITH SOMEONE WHO HAD ALREADY GONE THROUGH IRUA—THEY HAD EARNED THEIR PLACE. THOSE WHO HAD UNDERGONE IRUA DID NOT WASTE TIME WITH THOSE STILL CONSIDERED CHILDREN."

WANJIKU'S JOURNEY

changing. You must choose for yourself, my child.' Wanjiku knew that her mother wanted her to do Irua, but hearing that her mother understood the changing ideas about Irua, made Wanjiku feel heard. Maybe, for the first time, she truly understood that Irua was not just about keeping the tradition or expectation. It was about stepping into the life she wanted, the life she chose. She wanted to become a woman, and she knew Irua will give her the empowerment to grow as the woman she wanted to become.

And so, when the time came, Wanjiku had gotten her ears pierced; Matũ and Mbuci. This meant that a girl would be ready for Irua soon. [122] Wanjiku did feel ready, she was getting mature.

As the season of initiation ceremonies approached, Wanjiku's mother and aunts began preparing for her transition. They wove new garments for her and taught her the songs she would sing. Her father, normally distant, acknowledged her more often, as if seeing her as someone new.

Wanjiku's grandmother was her greatest source of wisdom. One evening, as they sat by the fire, she told Wanjiku stories of her own initiation. "It was not just about the pain, child. It was about knowing who you are. We, the Gikuyu, have always marked this passage. To be a woman is to be strong, to carry the burden of the family and the land. But only you can decide if you are ready."

The night before her ceremony, Wanjiku lay awake. She thought of Wambui, of her grandmother, of the girls who walked proudly into womanhood and those who had walked away. The tradition was changing, but her connection to this change in her life felt strong.

The morning of Irua arrived with a warm sun. Wanjiku woke to the sound of women singing outside. Her mother entered the hut, carrying a bundle of fresh garments. "It is time," she whispered, her voice steady.

Wanjiku felt a thrill run through her. This was the day she had long watched others experience, it was the day she would become a woman in the eyes of the community. She stepped outside, where a group of girls, including Nyawira, stood waiting. They were dressed in beads that draped across their bare shoulders, and short skirts of reeds and beads (thira) hung from their waists.[123] The beads across Wanjiku's chest glimmered in the early morning light. The slow-moving water at the river's edge now had reflections of the red, white,

and deep cobalt blue colors from the skirt.

Wanjiku felt much love for her friend. Nyawira had always been looking forward to this moment, and being able to do it together was special. For years they had talked about this moment. They finally would become mature women and be loved like them. Nyawira was excited to wear beads, have her sheet smeared with oil, acquire a mũthuru (a skirt with slits) and finally be able to go to dances.[124] Wanjiku was more excited to finally understand what her mother and grandmother had been talking about and feel the connection to her community deepen.

The women led them toward the river, their singing growing louder with each step. Wanjiku's skirt swayed gently with each step, the tiny bells at her waist chiming softly. She liked the sound. It reminded her she was being seen. At the water's edge, the newly married women, mũhiki, each with one child, took charge of the initiates. She was being cleansed, washed of mugiro, the impurity of childhood. The river's icy water shocked her skin as the women bathed her, their hands firm, yet gentle.[125]

Once clean, she was lifted onto the back of one of the women, carried away from the river so her feet would not touch the ground. Wanjiku felt weightless in that moment, like she was hovering between two worlds-the girl she had been, and the woman she was about to become.

Back in the clearing, the other girls were already preparing for the final stage. Wanjiku's circumcision mother, the eldest of their mothers, laid out mathangu-fresh leaves spread carefully on the ground to catch the blood.[126] Around them, the entire village had gathered, young and old, forming a tight circle. The hum of excitement and tension filled the air.

"Look away," her supporter whispered. "Do not let fear take you."[127]

Wanjiku tilted her head up, staring at the sky as she had been told. She focused on the soft clouds drifting above, trying to feel nothing. Even the wind seemed to still. The trees, usually flowing freely, stood motionless.

"GIRLS WHO UNDERWENT IRUA TOGETHER BECAME BOUND AS SISTERS."

The sharp pain came suddenly, but she clenched her jaw. Around her, some girls whimpered, some screamed, and as the tradition dictated, they would be mocked for their weakness. But Wanjiku would not cry. The weight of so many eyes pressed down on her; men, women, boys, and girls, all watching. She forced herself to stand, while her legs were shaking.

The girls who had endured the ceremony without crying were praised and carried home with honor. Those who had shown weakness would be given leftovers in the days to come, a quiet shame that would follow them.[128]

Back home, Wanjiku lay on a soft mat, exhaustion consumed her. Her circumcision mother fed her small spoonfuls of warm porridge and ngima ya mũhia, as if she were a child once more.[129]

Outside, the village feasted, roasting meat, a delicacy reserved for only the most special occasions. The sounds of singing and laughter filled the evening, but Wanjiku barely heard them. Though her body was in pain, she felt something new within her: pride. She was at the start of something new. Tomorrow, she would wear her beads, her skin smeared with oil. She would walk with the respect of a woman, and no boy would dare joke with her now.[130]

When Wanjiku recovered after a few weeks she had become part of something greater than herself, just as her ancestors had done before her. She felt brave and empowered. She felt different, like a grown-up woman now, ready for dances.[131]

CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Dear Students and Readers,

In Spring 2025, I was blessed with a small, dedicated group of students who participated in a colassal undertaking - the writing of long-form journalistic style writing on historic topics that would eventually be compiled into a class magazine. This is the result of their efforts! Students were allowed to choose any topic related to the courses' themes of gender and sexuality in modern Africa as long as they used a theoretical piece that we all read in common the first week of class. Students read the feminist philosopher Maria Lugones's article "The Coloniality of Gender." Through the writing of these articles, each student participated in Lugones call to action, as she put it: "There is important wok done and to be done in detailing the dark and light sides of what I am calling the 'modern colonial gender system.' In introducing this arrangements in very large strokes, I mean to begin a conversation and a project of collaborative, participatory, research and popular education..." I am impressed by the range of creativity and analysis that this group of article shows in contributing to Lugones' goal. These students have indeed entered the scholarly conversation!

To my students, specifically, thank you for being my guinea pigs on this project! It started off as an off hand remark as a possible assignment that we realized together. I naively entered into this project not realizing just how much work it would be. I think some of you did as well! I am so proud of what you have produced and the risks that you took in experimenting with new genres of historical writing from fiction to human rights activism and the creativity you employed in conceptualizing each piece, the innovation of your methodologies, and your determination to find the primary sources that allowed you to research your desired topics.

I would like to thank the Department of History at Ball State for their financial support in printing the hard copies of this magazine.

Dr. Jessica Reuther

Endnotes

"The Return of the Queen Mother" by Caide Tomaszewski

1 “Head of Iyoba.” The Met Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Accessed March 3, 2025, www.themetmuseum.org/art/collection/search/316614.
2 Flora E. S. Kaplan, “Images of the Queen Mother in Benin Court Art,” African Arts 26, no. 3 (1993): 55.
3 “Head of Iyoba.” The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
4 Flora E. S. Kaplan, “Iyoba, the Queen of Benin,” Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences 810, no. 1 (1997): 100.
5 Jacob Egharevba, A Short History of Benin 4th ed. (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1968): 75.
6 Kaplan, “Images of the Queen Mother,” 55.
7 Kaplan, “Iyoba, the Queen of Benin,” 78.
8 Kaplan, “Images of the Queen Mother,” 60.
9 Kaplan, “Images of the Queen Mother,” 57-58.
10 Kaplan, “Iyoba, the Queen of Benin,” 100.
11 Kate Ezra, The Royal Art of Benin: The Perls Collection in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), 9.
12 Dan Hicks, The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence, and Cultural Restitution (London: Pluto Press, 2020): 91-94.
13 Hicks, The Brutish Museums, 113.
14 Reginald H. Bacon, Benin: The City of Blood (London: Edward Arnold, 1897): 13.
15 Egharevba, A Short History of Benin, 75.
16 Bacon, Benin: The City of Blood, 105.
17 Maria Lugones, “The Coloniality of Gender,” Worlds & Knowledges Otherwise (Spring 2008): 16.
18 Kaplan, “Images of the Queen Mother,” 57.
19 Hicks, The Brutish Museums, 131.
20 Bacon, Benin: The City of Blood, 111-112.
21 Lugones, “The Coloniality of Gender,” 8.
22 Isidore Okpewho, Once Upon a Kingdom: Myth, Hegemony, and Identity (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998): 130-131.
23 Egharevba, A Short History of Benin, 75.
24 Hicks, The Brutish Museums, 137.
25 Kaplan, “Images of the Queen Mother,” 57.
26 Lugones, “The Coloniality of Gender,” 10.
27 “The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Nigerian National Commission for Museums and Monuments Announce the Return of Three Works of Art to the Nigerian National Collections,” Press, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Accessed March 17, 2025, www.metmuseum.org/press-releases/met-and-ncmm-announcement-2021-news.
28 Benedicte Savoy, Africa’s Struggle for Its Art (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022): 139-142.
29 Julianna Tappe Ortiz and Julia Kobrich, “Queen Mothers: Women in Leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa,” German Institute of Global and Area Studies (2022): 2.
30 Theophilus Nwano and Lillian Akhirome-Omonfuegbe, “Recognising patriarchy at the core of gender discrimination in Nigeria,” International Journal of Law, Justice, and Jurisprudence 4, no. 1 (2024): 113.
31 Ugwuegede Patience Nwabunkeonye, “Challenges to Women Active Participation in Politics in Nigeria,” Sociology and Anthropology 2, no. 7 (2014): 288.

32 Lugones, “The Coloniality of Gender,” 9.
33 Josephine Ebiuwa Abbe, “Queen Idia, the First Iy’Oba of Benin Kingdom,” Digital Benin, Accessed March 3, 2025, digitalbenin.org/oral-history/interactive/40.

"African Postcards" by Zachary Warthan

34 Lugones, 189-90, 2007.
35 Lugones, 203, 2007.
36 Lugones, 206, 2007.
37 Lugones 206, 2007.
38 Lugones, 204, 2007.
39 Rare Historical Photos, 2021.
40 Schreiber, 2018.
41 Lugones, 203, 2007.
42 Schreiber, 2018.
43 Schreiber, 201 & Lugones, 203, 2007
44 Lugones, 189, 2007
45 Le Houérou, 2015
46 Fioretti, 1925
47 Schreiber, 2018
48 Schreiber, 2018
49 Schreiber, 2018.
50 Meier, 2019
51Schreiber, 2018
52 Schreiber, 2018

"Outdated Laws or an Outdated Mindset?" by Rhian Mehlbauer

53 National Council for Law Reporting with the Authority of the Attorney-General, THE PENAL CODE ACT CHAPTER 63, Revised Edition 2023, http://kenyalaw.org:8181/exist/rest//db/kenyalex/Kenya/Legislation/English/Acts%20and%20Regulations/P/Penal%20Code%20Act%20-%20No.%2010%20of%201930/docs/PenalCodeAct10of1930.pdf
54 Aileen Waitaaga Kimuhu Fake history, misunderstanding colonial legacies, and the demonization of homosexuality in Africa, 2023, https://democracyinafrica.org/fake-history-misunderstanding-colonial-legacies-and-the-demonization-of-homosexuality-in-africa/
55 Duffy Aoife, Kenya: the shameful truth about British colonial abuse and how it was covered up, 2023, https://theconversation.com/kenya-the-shameful-truth-about-british-colonial-abuse-and-how-it-was-covered-up-218608
56 Equaldex, LGBT Rights in Kenya, 2025, https://www.equaldex.com/region/kenya#homosexuality

"Evangelism, Draconian Laws, the AIDS Crisis, and Homophobia in Uganda" by Joseph Martindale

57 Britton, Bianca, (2017) “Kasha Nabagesera: The face of Uganda’s LGBT movement”, CNN
58 Nyeko, Oryem, “Uganda Bans Prominent LGBTQ Rights Group”, Human Rights Watch, 2022
59 Anti-Homosexuality Act, 2023, Open Law Africa, 2023
60 Schrieber, Melody, “What's happening with the anti-HIV program PEPFAR? It depends whom you ask”, NPR, 2025

61 Kasha, Jacqueline “LGBTI rights in Uganda: An interview with activist Jaqueline Kasha”, Amnesty International, 2024

"Between Ancestors and the State: A Lesbian Sangoma Challenges Western Gender" by Jack Wallace

62 Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde, Black Bull, Ancestors and Me: My Life as a Lesbian Sangoma, reprint ed. (Auckland Park, South Africa: Fanele, an imprint of Jacana Media, 2009), 73.
63 Maria Lugones, “The Coloniality of Gender,” Worlds & Knowledges Otherwise (Spring 2008): 2-3.
64 Nkabinde, Black Bull, Ancestors and Me, 121.
65 Lugones, “Coloniality of Gender,” 2-5.
66 Lugones, “Coloniality of Gender,” 13.
67 Nkabinde, Black Bull, Ancestors and Me, 73.
68 Nkabinde, Black Bull, Ancestors and Me, 157
69 Ruth Morgan and Graeme Reid, “‘I’ve Got Two Men and One Woman’: Ancestors, Sexuality and Identity among Same-Sex Identified Women Traditional Healers in South Africa,” Culture, Health & Sexuality 5, no. 5 (2003): 375–391, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4005344. 384.
70 Nkabinde, Black Bull, Ancestors and Me, 145.
71 Nkabinde, Black Bull, Ancestors and Me, 4.
72 Henriette Gunkel, The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa (New York: Routledge, 2010), 3.
73 Morgan and Reid, “‘I’ve Got Two Men and One Woman,’” 375.
74 Morgan and Reid, “‘I’ve Got Two Men and One Woman,’” 375.
75 Melissa Steyn and Mikki van Zyl, eds., The Prize and the Price: Shaping Sexualities in South Africa (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2009), 3.
76 Lugones, “Coloniality of Gender,” 1-4.
77 Steyn and van Zyl, Prize and the Price, 7-8

"Fictions of the Past" by Christopher Morris

78 “Conflict in and around Zimbabwe | Imperial War Museums.” Imperial War Museums . Accessed April 5, 2025. https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/zimbabwe.
79 Seidman, Gay W. “Women in Zimbabwe: Postindependence Struggles.” Feminist Studies 10, no. 3 (1984): 423. https://doi.org/10.2307/3178033.
80 Seidman, Gay W. “Women in Zimbabwe: Postindependence Struggles.” Feminist Studies 10, no. 3 (1984): 419–40. https://doi.org/10.2307/3178033.
81 GAIDZANWA, RUDO B. “Gender and Canon Formation : Women, Men and Literary Art in Africa,” 2016.
82 Seidman, Gay W. “Women in Zimbabwe: Postindependence Struggles.” Feminist Studies 10, no. 3 (1984): 419–40. https://doi.org/10.2307/3178033.
83 GAIDZANWA, RUDO B. “Gender and Canon Formation : Women, Men and Literary Art in Africa,” 2016.
84 GAIDZANWA, RUDO B. “Gender and Canon Formation : Women, Men and Literary Art in Africa,” 2016.
85 GAIDZANWA, RUDO B. “Gender and Canon Formation : Women, Men and Literary Art in Africa,” 2016.
86 Vera, Yvonne. Butterfly burning: A novel. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013. Pg.68
87 Vera, Yvonne. Butterfly burning: A novel. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013. Pg 78

88 Cheater, Angela P. 1985. “The Role and Position of Women in Pre-colonial and Colonial Zimbabwe”. The Institute of Development Studies and Partner Organisations. https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12413/9977.
89 Lugones, María. "The Coloniality of Gender" In Feminisms in Movement: Theories and Practices from the Americas edited by Lívia De Souza Lima, Edith Otero Quezada and Julia Roth, 35-58. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2023. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839461020-002
90 Vera, Yvonne. Butterfly burning: A novel. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013. Pg 118
91 Vera, Yvonne. Butterfly burning: A novel. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013. Pg 132
92 Vera, Yvonne. Butterfly burning: A novel. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013. Pg 138

"How Violence Makes a Man" by Samuel Carter

93 Nelson, Ubong E. "Intimate Partner Violence against Women and the Social Construction of Masculinity in Oron, South-Coastal Nigeria." Nordic Journal of African Studies 26, no. 1 (2017). https://doi.org/10.53228/njas.v26i1.95.
94 Nelson, “Intimate Partner Violence Against Women and the Social Construction of Masculinity in Oron, South-Coastal Nigeria.”
95 Eyo O. Mensah, “To Be a Man Is Not a Day’s Job: The Discursive Construction of Hegemonic Masculinity by Rural Youth in Nigeria,” Gender Issues 38, no. 4 (January 3, 2021): 438–60, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12147-020-09271-2. Morrell, Robert. “Of Boys and Men: Masculinity and Gender in Southern African Studies.” Journal of Southern African Studies 24, no. 4 (1998): 605–30.
96 Jana Krause, “Gender Dimensions of (Non)Violence in Communal Conflict: The Case of Jos, Nigeria,” Comparative Political Studies 52, no. 10 (March 4, 2019): 1466–99, https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414019830722.
97 Lugones, Maria. “The Coloniality of Gender.” Worlds & Knowledges Otherwise, (2008)
98 Lugones, Maria. “The Coloniality of Gender.”
99 Lugones, Maria. “The Coloniality of Gender.”
100 Achebe, Chinua. Things Fall Apart.
101 Achebe, Chinua. Arrow of God.
102 Achebe, Chinua. Arrow of God.
103 Achebe, Chinua. No Longer at Ease.
104 Achebe, Chinua. Things Fall Apart.
105 Achebe, Chinua. Arrow of God.
106 Mensah, Eyo O. “To Be a Man Is Not a Day’s Job: The Discursive Construction of Hegemonic Masculinity by Rural Youth in Nigeria.”

"Wanjiku's Journey" by Emma van Hal

107 Thomas, Lynn M. "Imperial Concerns and ‘Women’s Affairs’". *The Journal of African History* 39, no. 1 (March 1998): 121–45.
108 Ngarúiya Njambi, Wairimú. Irua Ria Atumia and Anti-Colonial Struggles Among the Gikuyu of Kenya: A Counter Narrative on “Female Genital Mutulation” 1. (2007). Critical Sociology, 33(4), 689-708
109 Adima, Anna. "The Sound of Silence: The 1929-30 Gikuyu ‘Female Circumcision Controversy’ and the Discursive Suppression of African Women’s Voices." Gender a Výzkum (on-Line) 21, no. 1 (2020): 18-37.
110 Derwin, Jazmine. “Female Circumcision and Colonial Discourse in Kenya.” The Historian, December 19, 2019. https://thehistorianjournal.wordpress.com/2019/12/19/female-circumcision-and-colonial-discourse-in-kenya/ . Kabira, Wanjiku Mukabi. “Why Hearing the Voices of Kenyan Women Is

Important for a More Just Future." The Conversation, September 25, 2015. https://theconversation.com/why-hearing-the-voices-of-kenyan-women-is-important-for-a-more-just-future-47638.
111 Lugones, Maria. "The Coloniality of Gender."In The Palgrave Handbook of Gender and Development, 1–17.
112 Davison, Jean. Voices from Mutira: Change in the Lives of Rural Gikuyo Women, 1910-1995. Second ed. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996, 81. From the life history of Wamutira: 'But later, when I was bigger, I watched the way she cooked – how she peeled potatoes with a knife and the amount of beans and maize she put into the cooking port for githeri. When I was finally allowed to cook, I copied what I had seen my mother doing.'
113 The colonial government and missionary groups framed female initiation as a moral and public health issue, using their authority to regulate or abolish it while simultaneously enforcing patriarchal control over women's bodies. Thomas, Lynn M. Imperial Concerns and 'Women's Affairs'. The Journal of African History 39, no. 1 (March 1998): 121–45.
114 Davison, Voices from Mutira, 62. From the life history of Wanjiku: 'The girls who went to church refused to go for irua and so others began to follow.'
115 Davison, Voices from Mutira, 74. Direct quote from the life history of Wanjiku.
116 Davison, Voices from Mutira, 119. Direct quote from the life history of Watoro.
117 Davison, Voices from Mutira, 87. Direct quote from the life history of Wamutira.
118 Davison, Voices from Mutira, 86. Direct quote from the life history of Wamutira.
119 Davison, Voices from Mutira, 142. Direct quote from the life history of Wangeci.
120 Davison, Voices from Mutira, 83. From the life history of Wamutira.
121 Davison, Voices from Mutira, 142. From the life history of Wangeci. 'Irua was our tradition. There was the time for women to go for Irua and so we did. I had much meaning, as it was a way of doing what the ancestors had done. It was a way of staying part of them. Irua was a tradition and something one just did just as we eat every day and never stop to think about it.'
122 Davison, Voices from Mutira, 85. From the life history of Wamutira.
123 Davison, Voices from Mutira, 140. From the life history of Wangeci
124 Davison, Voices from Mutira, 140. From the life history of Wangeci.
125 Davison, Voices from Mutira, 139-140. From the life history of Wangeci.
126 Davison, Voices from Mutira, 141. From the life history of Wangeci.
127 Davison, Voices from Mutira, 141. From the life history of Wangeci. 'I had been told by my supporter to look away so I wouldn't see the circumciser and become frightened. So I was looking up at the sky. I was brave and did not cry. – when you realize that men, boys, girls, and women are watching you, you make yourself brave and afterwards get up and walk home even though you are feeling weak. I would not want the people to see me as a coward.'
128 Davison, Voices from Mutira, 141. From the life history of Wangeci. 'If a girl cried or screamed, the others in he line could beat her after the operation. And later, when we went home and were healed and started visiting each others, she was given the leftovers to eat.'
129 Davison, Voices from Mutira, 118. From the life history of Watoro.
130 Davison, Voices from Mutira, 119. From the life history of Watoro.
'After it was over, I felt grown up and walked around proudly. When a girl got her ears pierced, then was circumcised, she was looked upon as a grown-up and was treated like one. Circumcised girls were very respected. No young boys would dare to joke about with her or abuse her, for the boy's father would beat him.'
131 Davison, Voices from Mutira, 89. From the life history of Wamutira. 'After I had gone through Irua, I felt different. I felt like I was a grown-up girl now, ready for dances.'

Image Credits

Cover

Photograph taken by John Ochieng, Demonstrators hold placards and chant slogans during the protests in Nairobi, 2022, Getty Images Archive Photos.

"The Return of the Queen Mother" by Caide Tomaszewski

Figural heads upon a shrine in the Oba's compound in Benin City. Photograph taken by Cyril Punch, Ancestral Shrine Royal Palace, Benin City, 1891, 1891, Wikimedia commons.
accessed April 18, 2025, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ancestral_shrine_Royal_Pala ce,_ Benin_City,_1891.jpg.

Edo peoples, Head of Iyoba, ca. 18th-19th century, brass (cast), iron, 53.3 x 26.7 x 27.3 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
accessed April 18, 2025, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/ collection/search/316477.

Edo peoples, Head of Iyoba, ca. 18th-19th century, brass (cast), iron, 53.3 x 26.7 x 27.3 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

British soldiers of the Punitive Expedition display looted objects within the burnt remains of the Oba's compound. Photograph taken by Reginald Kerr Granville, Interior of Oba's compound burnt during siege of Benin City, 1897, Wikimedia commons.

accessed April 18, 2025, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Interior_of_Oba%27s_compound_ burnt_during
_siege_of_Benin_City,_1897.jpg.

Exterior view of the National Museum in Benin City, the institution to which three objects of The Met's collection were restituted. Photograph taken by Dipo Tayo, National Museum, Benin City, 2019, Wikimedia commons.
accessed April 18, 2025, https://commons.wiki media.org/wiki/File:Nat_Museum,_Benin.jpg.

A statue in King's Square, Benin City depicts a Benin warrior standing over defeated colonial soldiers, Photograph by unknown photographer, Statue of a Benin Warrior at the King's Square in in Benin City, Edo State, 2024, Wikimedia commons.
accessed April 18, 2025, https:// commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Statue_of_a_Benin_Warrior_at_ the_King%27s_Square_in_B enin_City_Edo_State.jpg.

"African Postcards" by Zachary Warthan

Ragazza Abissina. Photograph taken by Scozzi Attilio. Taken by 1900. https://www.loc.gov/ item/2020760349/.

Africa Orientale - Ragarre bilene. Taken by 1900. https://www.loc.gov/item/2020760355/

COLONIA ERITREA - Madama abissinia. Taken by 1925. https://www.loc.gov/item/2020760352/.

Africa Orientale - Amatir e Unese tipi abissini. Photograph taken by M. Decamerè Taken by 1936. https://www.loc.gov/item/2020760354/.

Zanzibar Beauty. Photograph taken by A.C. Gomes & Son. Photograph taken before 1900. https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda (Schreiber.2018)/2018/06/10/614361414/the-surprising-history-of-old-timey-swahili-postcards.

"Outdated Laws or an Outdated Mindset?" by Rhian Mehlbauer

Photograph taken by Hassan Kibwana, A Woman in a Red Shirt is Holding a Flag, 2024, Unsplash. accessed April 17, 2025,
https://unsplash.com/photos/a-woman-in-a-red-shirt-is-holding-a-flag-Q3A3En_7HM4

Photograph taken by John Ochieng, Demonstrators hold placards and chant slogans during the protests in Nairobi, 2022, Getty Images Archive Photos.

Mau Mau suspects are rounded up by police outside a camp in Manyani, Kenya, Photograph taken by Authenticated News, Mau Mau Suspects at Manyani in Kenya, 1955, Getty Images Archive Photos.

Photograph taken by Nell Freeman, Anthony, a volunteer at Ishtar, 2012, Gov.uk. accessed April 17, 2025,
https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/world-aids-day-2012-tackling-stigma-and-discrimination-in-kenya

"Evangelism, Draconian Laws, the AIDS Crisis, and Homophobia in Uganda" by Joseph Martindale

Map of Uganda, 2025, Mappr. accessed April 17, 2025, https://www.mappr.co/location/uganda/.

"Between Ancestors and the State: A Lesbian Sangoma Challenges Western Gender" by Jack Wallace

Photograph of Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde. https://www.goodreads.com/photo/author/2860318.Nkunzi_Zandile_Nkabinde

Image of the cover of the book, “Black Bull, Ancestors and Me: My Life as a Lesbian Sangoma,” written by Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde. https://images-na.ssl-images-amazon.com/images/S/compressed.photo.goodreads.com/books/1328691813i/6294845.jpg

Photograph of Refiloe Letuma, an African healer. https://mg.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/5ae4c319-gogolanga_8898-1068x1140.jpg

A gay pride event held in Cape Town, South Africa https://cdn.aaihs.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/shutterstock_1385514719-scaled.jpg

"Fictions of the Past" Christopher Morris

Image of Yonne Vera taken in her garden in Bulawayo, Photo taken by Eric Beauchemin, 2004. Eric Beauchemin, CC BY-SA 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>, via Wikimedia Commons

Front cover of first edition of Butterfly Burning by Yvonne Vera, 1998.

"How Violence Makes a Man" by Samuel Carter

Achebe at home in Annandale-on-Hudson. Photograph by Steve Pyke, 2008. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/05/26/after-empire

Cover Designs by Susan Yuran for the African Trilogy commissioned by Penguin Press.

A map of the Igbo-speaking community within Nigeria and within Africa by NuclearVacuum, 2013. https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Igbo_Community_in_Nigeria_and_Africa.svg

"THE AIM [OF MY SCHOLARSHIP] IS TO ENSURE THAT EUROPE'S COLONIZATION OF AFRICA IS NOT TUCKED AWAY AS PART OF A DISTANT RECEDING HISTORY BUT INSTEAD VIEWED AS A LIVING REALITY AND LEGACY."

SYLVIA TAMALE

"THERE IS IMPORTANT WORK DONE AND TO BE DONE IN DETAILING THE DARK AND LIGHT SIDES OF WHAT I AM CALLING THE 'MODERN COLONIAL GENDER SYSTEM.'...I MEAN TO BEGIN A CONVERSATION AND A PROJECT OF COLLABORATIVE, PARTICIPATORY, RESEARCH AND POPULAR EDUCATION..."

MARIA LUGONES