BOOK REVIEW

Review of *The Economies of Queer Inclusion: Transnational Organizing for LGBTI Rights in Uganda,* by S.M. Rodriguez. Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Lexington Books, 2018.

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The Economies of Queer Inclusion interrogates the politics of international LGBT activism and its effects on the *kuchu* (LGBTQIA) people in Kampala, Uganda. It deconstructs Western ideas about Uganda, using counter-storytelling from an anti-racist, decolonial, feminist and queer people of color perspective, merging historic discourse analysis, qualitative sociology and various ethnographic forms such as autoethnography.

By positioning themselves as US-based Black, Caribbean lesbian community organizer, Rodriguez marks their positionality, analyzing their embeddedness within structures of Western privilege and racialized oppression. They connect the anti-black sentiment towards the people of Uganda to the anti-black sentiment prevalent within the queer-friendly spheres of the US, where transnational efforts to "save Ugandan LGBTs" emerge. This complicates Western hegemony, dismantling the very impetus of American superiority and benevolence to its *Other* as on aspect of the same anti-Black structure that continues to negate the lives of queer African Americans by portraying Blacks as uncivilized homophobes.

The book opens with the Western outcry about the proposal of Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Bill (AHB) in 2009. Based on factual errors and cultural stereotypes, Western media presented it simultaneously as a new phenomenon and as a result of an African-innate homophobia. American sentiments, according to Rodriguez were already inscribed in the legislation itself, as part of the colonial legacies such as the British penal code and Western conceptualizations of citizenship as well as being a reaction to American exceptionalism.

Pointing to the colonial and postcolonial anti-imperialist legacies, Rodriguez further dismantles Western ideas about African homophobia by understanding homophobic nationalism and homonationalism as reciprocal processes that both rely on racialization processes intended to strengthen their respective nations. While anti-blackness motivates American homonationalism, Ugandan nationalism uses homophobia to further anti-Western discourses.

Both nationalisms follow Western concepts of gendered, sexualized and racialized citizenship and the nation, distributed through colonialism (including the British anti-sodomy legislation) and its aftermath. Uganda continues the colonial project of sexual restraint, scapegoating homosexuality in order to remove the image of black licentiousness, Rodriguez argues. It is part of a sexual citizenship project that supports state control over its citizens and simultaneously creates the illusion of national cohesion by propagating a collective fear of homosexuality.

Analyzing the history of homophobic nationalism within parliamentary records from the 1990s onwards, Rodriguez deconstructs the common idea that evangelical internationalism spearheaded by US actors introduced homophobia to Uganda. They argue that the historic anti-sodomy legislation, as well as the AHB, resulted from an interplay of nationalism with postcolonial anxieties

and as reaction to developments in the West such as the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1990s and its aftermaths as well as the introduction of gay marriage in the 2000s.

Analyzing the effects of transnational support for the development of the local *kuchu* communities, Rodriguez highlights that the Western visibility- and identity-based efforts created unwanted attention that led to heightened violence. Moreover, Western allies created celebrity victims among the *kuchus*, and a hierarchy among the oppressed. Importantly, Rodriguzes shows the myopia of allied efforts such as the 'evacuation' campaigns. Such projects diverted funds from more sustainable and *kuchu*-led ideas, furthered unwanted visibility to vulnerable people, and incited a nationalist backlash. Additionally, they were based on unrealistic ideas about the US and other Western countries, which were not welcoming to most Africans, even before the current actual *de jure* travel bans. Moreover, *kuchus*' pleas for asylum were often denied, because they could not 'prove' the queer sexuality or gender along the white, Western norms of queerness.

Rodriguez argues that the presence of foreign governments and transnational NGOs in Uganda increased nationalist fears of neo-imperialism. The economic support for local NGOs did not only create a bureaucratic machinery that diverted the energies and capacities from community work to its own sustaining but also created a hierarchy among the community members. These dynamics produced a regime, which in turn became the scapegoat for homophobic nationalism. Most importantly, their goal of liberalized rights did not benefit the majority of *kuchus*. Considering their economic situation, Rodriguez argues that instead of redirecting the movement toward liberalized, rights-based work, transnational support should supply the community with poverty relief that the *kuchu* movement needs and demands.

The last chapter offers examples of community-based and -oriented forms of activism useful for transnational mutual support between the black diaspora in the US and people in Uganda. Yet, all of their examples stem from the context of the US, which implicitly supports the idea of the North/Western superiority and Southern passivity. This implicit bias concerns Rodriguez' analysis of *kuchu* activism in general. Their criticism of the damaging and violent effects of Western activism are much appreciated, yet it seems that the role and agency of the Ugandan activists are one-sidedly represented. Are there no other forms of how local activists appropriate foreign funding and support other than complete compliance to the Western models? What strategies are used by those activists that are not supported by transnational organizations? Could none of their strategies be useful to transnational solidarity alliance-building?

Rodriguez importantly points to the Western bias against religion and faith. Arguing that not religious or innate homophobia, but a phobia of individualism might be the core of the anti-imperialist nationalism, they analyzes homophobic nationalism as a tool to reestablishing the communal sensibilities of the Ugandan citizen. Here, in this African criticism or rejection of Western individualism Rodriguez might have missed an opportunity to further their argument of how to build transnational alliances that do not perpetuate North/Western superiority and hegemony.

In conclusion, *The Economies of Queer Inclusion* is an important and timely contribution not just to the understanding of transnational solidarity efforts to support *kuchus* or East African LGBTIQAs, but transnational queer support in general. It invaluably highlights that in order to effect change for the safety of LGBTIQAs worldwide, international advocates must avoid quick power plays and thoroughly analyze local histories and contexts as well as globalization.