

Who is a Homosexual? Rhetoric and the Construction of Ugandan Gay in Selected Ugandan Op-Eds

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Abstract

Leading scholars of media and public discourses such as Nancy Frazer (1992) and Michael Warner (2002) have variously argued that the media cannot be neutral when the issue under debate is an explosive subject such as sexuality, race, or gender. Deploying textual analysis, I apply Frazer's and Warner's point that the media advances particular points of view to a collection of op-eds that discuss homosexuality in one Ugandan newspaper and one news magazine – *Daily Monitor* and *The Independent* – to uncover the image of this subject that emerged from these texts between December 2013 and June 2014. My textual analysis concludes that while most of the op-eds allegorised homosexuality in order to comment on 'larger and more important' issues affecting the Ugandan polity, some texts depicted homosexuals as either pariahs or perverts.

Keywords: Homosexuality, op-ed, pariah, perverts, newspapers, news magazines.

Introduction

Ugandans have utilised podiums for public discourse such as the media, political rallies, churches, village

bazaars, and lecture rooms to debate homosexuality since it morphed into a topical issue around 2009. Given the polarisation that homosexuality engenders; it is plausible to imagine

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that public discourse platforms like the media should ‘build bridges’ between the different public perspectives on topics in the country. Unfortunately, the media, especially the tabloid newspapers, have instead exacerbated the polarisation.

This is particularly true of the *Redpepper*, a tabloid newspaper, which has elevated homosexuality to an existential threat. This point has been illustrated by *Redpepper’s* publication of names and pictures of Ugandans that it accuses of not only being gay, but also of recruiting children into same-sex sexuality. *Redpepper’s* sensational coverage of homosexuality gives the impression that the Ugandan society is besieged by a sexual orientation that poses an existential threat. Relatedly, while the tabloid media sensationalises same-sex sexuality, the legacy press allegorises homosexuality for other important problems facing Uganda. Nonetheless, I argue that op-eds published in Ugandan newspapers of record depict gays as either pariahs or perverts, which renders them scapegoats in the morality battles in the Ugandan public sphere.

While (Nabutanyi (2019), Sara Namusoga (2017), and Celilia Strand (2012) have variously explored the depiction of homosexuality in Ugandan Uganda’s media, there is paucity of critical analysis of how op-eds – an analytical/intellectual/opinionated section of a news publication – have been utilised to debate this topic. This paucity underlines the central question of

this article, namely, what kind of image of homosexuals emerges out of Uganda’s legacy publication? This question reminds us of (Tamale’s (2009) and Sandgrove’s (2012) arguments that homosexuality has been framed as a “threat to public morality and national sovereignty” in the Ugandan media (Sadgrove 2012: 103).

The key argument that the above scholars underline is the conflation of a sexual practice with morality and sovereignty in public discourses. This conflation has created moral panics around homosexuality that complicates rational and balanced engagement with the topic in public discourses. While we expect op-eds in legacy news publications to offer rational and balanced analysis of important issues in the polity, I posit that these texts emerging out of Uganda’s legacy media largely simplify and allegorise a sexual practice to underscore different points about the topic in the Ugandan society.

While there are five Ugandan news publications of record – *New Vision*, *Daily Monitor*, *Observer*, *Bukedde*, and *The Independent* – I use *Daily Monitor* and *The Independent* as my samples for several reasons. First, I note that the *Daily Monitor’s* and *The Independent’s* relentless and consistent coverage of the topic of homosexuality in the form of hard news and opinion pieces means that they have built a usefully substantial archive on the subject. Second, *Daily Monitor* and *The Independent* are some of Ugandan

Uganda's legacy newspapers that aspire to provide a platform for impassioned debates as eloquently argued in their respective editorial philosophies and exemplified illustrated by their respective tag lines "truth everyday" for *Daily Monitor* and "You get the truth, we pay the price" for *The Independent*.

The veracity of the above observation is underscored by the two publications' positioning of themselves as platforms for intellectual and independent critical inquiry and debate. This argument is perhaps best captured in Andrew Mwenda's (2013) — the managing editor of *The Independent* — claim in his resignation letter from *Daily Monitor*. He claimed that he resigned because the management of *Daily Monitor* attempted to gag free expression and debate. Mwenda moved on to found *The Independent*. The notion of free expression and debate that Mwenda foregrounds in his resignation letter echoes a similar call made by the founding fathers of *Daily Monitor* in 1992 (Javuru 2013:360). While it is ironic that a newspaper founded on the ideal of free speech is accused by one of its employees of gagging freedom of expression, it is noteworthy that the genesis of both news publications conceptualised the role of a news publication as a champion of freedom of speech and debate.

The *Daily Monitor's* and *The Independent's* aura as independent news publications providing platforms to

debate important issues in Uganda informs my selection of their op-eds in my exploration of the image of homosexuals that circulate in Uganda's media. My selection and textual analysis of op-eds published in these news publications coincides with my two core contentions in this article. First, is the point that the authors of the op-eds in these publications have the freedom to debate any subject including homosexuality. Second, is the point that the diversity of opinions that free expression and independence engenders allows these news publications to advance different images of Ugandan homosexuals.

Methodology

My core focus in this article is to establish the image of people involved in homosexuality that emerges out of Uganda's legacy news publications' op-eds. My analysis relies on textual analysis of selected op-eds in a legacy newspaper and news magazine that debated homosexuality and homosexuals in the period between December 2013 to and June 2014. My hypothesis is that while some op-eds allegorised homosexuality for others important issues in the Ugandan's socio-political imagination, others depicted people involved in homosexuality as either pariahs or perverts.

My textual and close analysis that seeks to unearth the image of a Ugandan homosexual is narrowed down to 6 op-eds published in a period of six months in *Daily Monitor* and *The*

Independent between December 2013 and June 2014. From *Daily Monitor*, I read Fred Sheldon Mwesigwa's "Adoption of Anti-Homosexuality Bill by MPs is Citizens' Voice" and Peter Mulira's "Homosexuality is Regarded as a Genetic Condition." From *The Independent*, I explore Yoweri Museveni's "Responding to HE Obama's Statement on Homosexuality," "The Way Forward on Homosexuality", Andrew Mwenda's "AHA: A Reply to Christian Critics", and "How Obama Played Museveni's Hand."

I argue that the 6 op-eds variously provide us with insight into the image of a Ugandan homosexual that circulates in the Ugandan's public sphere. The six months are significant to my analysis because it was the time of heightened and concerted debates on the topic in the Ugandan's public sphere after the passing and signing of the Anti-Homosexuality Act into law. Given that homosexuality became a buzzword at this time, it is unsurprising that 50 out of 56 articles sampled in the course researching this article allegorised homosexuality. They centred the controversy associated with a 'private-sexual' practice to comment on important questions affecting the Ugandan polity such as the hypocrisy of the donor community and the dysfunctionality of the Ugandan state. This article, therefore, proposes to unveil the image of a person involved in homosexuality that is shaped and circulated in the selected op-eds. It also seeks to uncover instances

when homosexuality is allegorised in the critique of 'important' Ugandan issues.

The Ugandan Homosexuals: A Metaphors for Other Issues?

While I explored six op-eds for this article, I noted that 50 used homosexuality as a metaphor of for contemporary issues affecting the Ugandan polity. Consequently, I use seven op-eds (four in *Daily Monitor* and three in *The Independent*) to demonstrate how Uganda public intellectuals allegorise same-sex sexuality for national issues. The case in point is Daniel K. Kalinaki who foregrounds homosexuality in his Thursday, 26 February 2014 article to flag and condemn the fickleness of the Ugandan public. He argues that the Ugandan public that seemed to pay attention to alleged 'violation' of the rights of gays are complacent with the general decay and malaise of the Ugandan state.

Similarly, Allan Tacca on Sunday, 2 March 2014; Anthony K. Mbonye Wednesday, 26 February 2014; Betty Olive Kanya on 23 January 2014; foreground homosexuality to highlight and denounce either the in(actions) of the government or the double standards of the donor community. For example, Kanya foregrounds the fact that sodomy laws were introduced in Uganda by British colonialists and the principle of the separation of powers to underscore the hypocrisy

of the donor community and reclaim Ugandan sovereignty and agency.

The thread that links Kalinaki, Mbonye, Tacca, and Kamyia is the fact that they allegorise same-sexuality in order to critique other important Ugandan issues such as a dysfunctional state, a gullible public and a hypocritical donor community. Their op-eds tell us nothing about the people involved in homosexuality and/or what homosexuality means to Ugandans. They above-mentioned authors exploit the controversy and topicality of homosexuality to underline the shambolic state of affairs in Uganda in the case of Kalinaki and Tacca; or to assert Ugandan sovereignty and highlight donor hypocrisy in the case of Kamyia and Mbonye.

The use of homosexuality as an allegory for other Ugandan issues is replicated in *The Independent* op-eds of the same time. For example, Joseph Bossa; Morris Komakech and Kalundi Serumaga use the news value of the occasion of the signing into law of the Anti-Homosexuality Act to comment on the inequities within the Ugandan polity. Serumaga notes about the Anti-Homosexuality Act that while the “native’s concern might be more with public display of sexuality across the board and not simply same- sex ones,” (2014:np) they have the agency to determine how to express their sexuality and should not be dictated to by donors.

It can be argued that Serumaga is foregrounding the agency and

independence of Ugandans in matters of sovereignty and morality. In spite of their differing political shades of opinion, these writers use their op-eds to reassert Ugandan sovereignty and/or condemn the double standards of both the Ugandan state and the donor community. While such op-eds do not offer us useful insights into the people involved in homosexuality, they nonetheless demonstrate how combustible the topic is in the Ugandan public sphere and how op-eds can be mobilised to debate this issue.

Although homosexuality is incidental to what the writers consider to be more important themes in the Ugandan’s public sphere, the different authors use its topicality to comment on important issues in the Ugandan Uganda’s polity. In what follows, I apply textual analysis to six op-eds (two from *Daily Monitor* and four from *The Independent*) to attempt to answer the question: who is a Ugandan homosexual? Is s/he a pervert or a pariah?

The Ugandan Homosexual: A Pervert?

The first question that I answer is whether a Ugandan homosexual is a pervert? To answer this question, I place Yoweri Kaguta Museveni’s two op-eds in *The Independent* in conversation with Fred Sheldon Mwesigwa’s “Adoption of Anti-Homosexuality Bill by MPs is Citizens’ Voice” in the *Daily Monitor*. The op-eds demonstrate how the two authors

frame a sexual practice as a disease and homosexuals as perverts. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni's "Responding to H.E. Obama's Statement on Homosexuality;" and "The Way Forward on Homosexuality" as well as Mwesigwa's "Adoption of Anti-Homosexuality Bill by MPs is Citizens' Voice" ferociously attack homosexuals and people like President Obama, who are alleged to be their supporters.

The articles claim that people involved in homosexuality and their supporters are attempting to impose an unacceptable sexuality on Ugandans. Even when Museveni and Mwesigwa call for societal tolerance of a certain kind of gay sexuality, their language and, consequently, the image of gays they construct and circulate in their op-eds skilfully utilises the image of contagion to depict gays as perverts.

The texts portray homosexuals as a contagious disease that has infiltrated the Ugandan polity, and whom the Members of Parliament and the President of the Republic have courageously confronted and defeated in various ways. For example, the passing of the Anti-Homosexuality Act by the Members of Parliament (Mwesigwa) and the singing of the bill into Law (Museveni), the op-eds suggest that the contagion has been arrested.

The above argument is evident in Museveni's letter to President Obama about the Anti-Homosexuality Act. Museveni makes three significant

arguments about homosexuality in Uganda. First, that although he is not against homosexuality, a certain display of gay sexuality is offensive to many Ugandans. Second, that there is scientific proof that homosexuality is a learned behaviour that can be unlearned.

Third, that Uganda is sovereign country that has the right to enact whatever laws it wishes without foreign interference. Underneath this rhetoric, the op-eds describe people involved in homosexuality as perverts. It is important to note that while the tenor of the article seems to be confrontationally, condemning gay sexuality, the language and images of this subjectivity they unveiled are subtle and nuanced.

The subtlety of the reaction to homosexuality is underscored by Museveni's opening declaration: "before I react to Obama's statement, let me, again, put on record my views on the issue of homosexuals (*ebitiingwa, ebisiyaga* in some of our dialects)" (2014: np). This statement underlines Museveni's mastery of the local idiom and rhetorical craftsmanship. For example, the verb "react" significantly underlines his status as an equal to Obama.

It is unreasonable, therefore for Obama to seem to order his equal not to sign the offending Bill into law. His assertion of sovereignty projects him as the warrior and hero – a man who can stand up to homosexuals, their supporters and the powerful American leader. His stature as a reasonable,

but uncompromising leader on an existential threat to the Ugandan way of life is signposted by the noun “on record” and the preposition “again.” These verbs powerfully demonstrate that Museveni, has explained on many occasions, his and Uganda’s views about gay sexuality to the world. This begs the question, who is a Ugandan homosexual?

As if anticipating this question, Museveni spends the rest of his statement explaining two categories of Ugandan homosexuals. He starts by acknowledging that homosexuality exists in Uganda. This is subtly infused in the italicised statement “(*ebitiingwa, ebisiyaga in some of our dialects*)” (2014: np). The nomenclature for gay sexuality is subversive because it acknowledges the existence of homosexuality in Uganda.

However, he uses it to underscore the point that its existence did not translate into acceptance, on the one hand. On the other hand, given the people involved in homosexuality kept their sexuality a secret because all types of sexuality were a private matter, Museveni underlines the Ugandan way of dealing with sexuality. If Ugandan sexualities were private and people did not parade their orientations in public, it is reasonable to understand Museveni’s and Mwesigwa’s ire at what they call ‘designer’/‘exhibitionist’ homosexuality.

Museveni, for example, argues that “promotion of homosexuality in Uganda must be criminalised or rather should continue to be criminalised

because the British had already done that; those who agree to become homosexuals for mercenary reasons (prostitutes) should be harshly punished as should those who pay them to be homosexual prostitutes” (2014: np). Similarly, Mwesigwa praises the passing of the Bill on account that the criminalisation of homosexuality will protect Ugandan traditional family values under threat from “the sexual revolution in the West [that] began long ago that homosexuality in Uganda is a harbinger of. Other versions like nudism, sex change, sadomasochism, bestiality, which is legal in some European countries will soon be on the cards” (2014:np).

In the above passages, Museveni and Mwesigwa conflate a sexual practice with moral imperialism and criminality. They seem to congregate focus on the point that exhibitionism of homosexual behaviour must be punished because it is not only forbidden to publicly exhibit any sexual conduct, but it acts as a harbinger of moral decadence in this part of the world. Note Mwesigwa’s use of Armageddon imagery fused in the word “harbinger” that equates homosexuals to marauding locusts that are meant to destroy the Ugandan society.

It is significant that in the above passages, Museveni and Mwesigwa deflect Uganda’s credentials as a homophobic society. By deflecting criminalisation of gay sexuality to British colonial rule and arguing for the protection of the “unadulterated African cultural, Islamic and Christian

heritage,” (Mwesigwa 2014: np) their op-eds propose a segregation between acceptable and unacceptable homosexuality in a manner that resonates with the Ugandan public. Here, the diction places homosexuality within the realm of prohibited sexuality. It is reasonable to argue that the caveats placed on homosexuality are applicable to heterosexuality in Uganda as well as any other part of the world.

Furthermore, these are caveats and restrictions, which are also common practices in Western countries where deviant sexuality such as paedophile and prostitution are criminalised. It should be noted that the op-eds differentiate between criminal homosexuals who procure themselves or others (especially children) to engage in homosexuality for money, exhibit gay practices in public and promote it to vulnerable Ugandan children and those “who are born like that.” The simple diction and criminal imagery are a discursive strategy that effectively distils a certain brand of homosexuality as an aberrant sexuality and its practitioners as exploiters of children who are innocent (especially) of sexual knowledge.

The thrust of Mwesigwa’s and Museveni’s articles is that people involved in homosexuality are perverts because they engage in and/or display their sexuality in a society where sexuality is a private matter. This argument is extended in Museveni’s second op-ed considered in this article. In “The Way forward

on Homosexuality” Museveni reiterates his position that some homosexuals are criminals and that they are abnormal. Museveni’s argument coincides with Mwesigwa’s framing of homosexuality as a form of ‘sickness’ or ‘abnormality.’

This is underlined by phrases like “born like that,” which evoke divine explanation of gay sexuality. It circulates an image of homosexuals as abnormal individuals whose abnormality is the mysterious working of God. By claiming that homosexuals are abnormal, Museveni appropriates the common register in a largely Christian society that evokes God’s mysterious ways of creation to condemn a sexual practice. The above point is underscored by his exploitation of the Ganda socio-relational and etiquette proverb “*enyomunyumba tebi totohwa,*” (private issues are not discussed in public?) (2014: np).

This proverb cautions his “abnormal gays” to desist from displaying their sexuality. By asking them not to ‘wash’ their dirty linen in the ‘public,’ Museveni adeptly others a certain type of homosexuality. The proverb’s claim that dirty linen is not exposed in public underpins the claim that sexuality, including homosexuality is a private matter that must be kept private at all times both at an individual and national level.

This thrust of their argument in the op-eds ostracizes gays by labelling them arrogant, sadistic and mercenary. The argument is fortified

by the statement “[these are gays] who are homosexual out of choice and conviction – they are not coerced; they are not after money” (2014: np). The above observation conspiratorially places Museveni and Mwesigwa discursively with their audience.

This strategy works because it portrays Museveni, like any other ordinary Ugandan, as someone who cannot understand somebody who chooses to be gay or connives with ‘foreigners’ to lure and recruit children into this form of sexuality. This is suggested by the passage “if you say that foreigners are “luring” our children into homosexuality” (2014: np). The dastardly dangerous actions of gays by choice – foreign or local – are highlighted by the adjectives “foreign” and “orphans” and the verbs “recruit” and “lure.”

I argue that these words are deliberately chosen to arouse anger and condemnation of mercenary homosexuals. For example, Museveni uses the verb “lure” three times in the above quotation. If one were to argue that repetition is often used for emphasis, what else does the repetition of this verb achieve? The term ‘lure’ underscores the point that not only is homosexuality by choice and conviction wrong, but also that this group arrogantly supports it aware that it is considered a crime and immoral by some Ugandans.

It is also important to note that the verb ‘lure’ carries the connotation: to entice deliberately with a promise of

a reward. It follows that you lure or entice someone who is not into the kind of sexuality you practice. This implicitly suggests that criminal gays are using money to induce young Ugandans into ‘a wrong kind’ of sexuality.

It is also important to note how Museveni deploys another emotive term “childhood” to intensify the anger against mercenary gays. Childhood is an elastic term in the Ugandan context. Although it is legally defined as anyone below 18 years of age, in the Ugandan context its meaning is stretched to mean either a member of a particular generation or a clan/family member irrespective of the person’s chronological age.

Museveni uses the importance of childhood to clan/family/country – a child is a future of these social groups – to criminalise some homosexuals. His op-ed implicitly suggests that homosexuality jeopardises the productive and procreative roles that childhood is expected to play in the country. This makes gay recruiters anti-Ugandan individuals – people working against the welfare of not only the country, but also the individual children they introduce to an allegedly criminal sexuality.

That someone could put the future of a nation and its children in jeopardy is incomprehensible to Museveni as his claim “they are just attracted to fellow men or fellow women, according to what they say, difficult though it is for me to imagine. This is a group we need to handle,” indicates

(2014: np) underscores. This passage also allows for another conspiratorial moment between Museveni and the Ugandan reader of his article. By putting himself in this reader's shoes, he makes the case against gays engaged in luring Ugandan children into homosexuality.

The rhetorical significance of the above claim is that it authorises the portrayal of gays as abnormal people who do not know 'right from wrong' or 'normal from abnormal.'. Although in everyday usage these terms are innocent, used the way Museveni and Mwesigwa have used them and in these particular contexts, they assumed additional meaning. The connotation that these phrases assume resonates with the public being addressed.

A related point that validates Museveni's and Mwesigwa's perspective and ensures that one category of homosexuals is demonised is their effective deployment of childhood. The argument that homosexuals should be banned because they recruit children into a wrong form of sexuality relies on a discursive framework that conflates childhood, sex and defilement to evoke anger towards anyone who is seen as exploiting children. Using specific registers and imagery, Museveni and Mwesigwa, therefore, succeed in depicting homosexuals in selected op-eds as perverts.

The Ugandan Homosexual: A Pariah?

The other recurrent image of homosexuals in Uganda's public sphere is that of a pariah. If one were to take the common definition of a pariah as any person who is not accepted by a social group because of who they are rather than what they do, then, Andrew Mwenda's (2014) argument makes that point. In that article "AHA: A Reply to 'Christian' Critics" and "How Obama Played Museveni's Hand" as well as Peter Mulira's (2014) "Homosexuality is Regarded as a Genetic Condition" can be read as op-eds that depict Ugandan gays as pariahs in a society characterised by polarised discourses on homosexuality.

Mwenda's and Mulira's opinions pieces about homosexuality reminds us of Teun van Dijk's (1999) concept of positive self-representation. He argues that "positive self-representation and negative other presentation" (1999:542) are discursive strategies that work through the attribution of positive qualities to a group whose interests are being advanced and the demonisation of its opponents. I argue that Mwenda and Mulira succeed in their discursive project of describing Ugandan gays using a positive and sympathetic lexicon.

The register that they have chosen presents Ugandan gays as pariahs is particularly effective in Mwenda's article "AHA: A Reply to 'Christian' Critics." His discursive

strategy in this article is anchored on negative representation of the anti-homosexuality camp in Uganda by attacking their claim for moral authority. For example, Mwenda sarcastically states "... some people claiming to be Christians have usurped God's power and sentenced me to hell" (2014: np).

The discursive effectiveness of this statement lies in how it exposes Ugandan gays as victims of a self-righteous Christian lobby. This description of the ferocious attacks on homosexuals as Mwenda elaborates, indicate societal toxicity towards gays. This point is specifically accentuated by Mwenda's subtle questioning of the group's assumed moral authority. His use of the words "claim" and "usurp" show how this lobby's actions, including the condemnation of gays, are un-Christian.

This allows Mwenda to characterise Ugandan gays as scapegoats of a homophobic majority in society. Selective use of Biblical passages to argue a case is a common and effective rhetorical technique in a largely Christian and conservative society like Uganda. This is perhaps why Mwenda extensively quotes Jesus Christ's teaching to underscore the point that gays are sinners like anyone else in need of Christ's forgiveness and love.

He goes on to accuses leading campaigners against same-sex relationships like Pastor Martin Ssempe of abdicating "their responsibility as Christian shepherds" and failing

or refusing "to help homosexuals find salvation" (2014:np). He goes on to remind those condemning homosexual people that "Jesus said he came to earth to save sinners, not to dine with the holy" (2014:np). His core argument in the above passages is to show that unlike Jesus Christ who preached love and forgiveness, the Christian lobby in the Ugandan homosexuality debate are prejudiced hypocrites.

The Biblical allusions are strengthened by anecdotes, which are aimed at in humanising Ugandan gays, are characterised as pariahs in society. The first story is that of a stigmatised Ugandan gay, who is frightened by the homophobic preaching in his local church. Mwenda quotes this "young Ugandan Christian homosexual":

I had to find an anchor on which to pin my hope. Such an anchor I thought I had found in church. I can see the look on your face: 'What, a Christian homosexual?' [...] I have suffered more pain in a place where other people go to find healing. Each time a preacher walks up the pulpit my heart jumps into my mouth waiting for him to drop the bombshell: "homosexuality is the unforgivable sin", or "all homos will burn in hell." I would walk away feeling like my fate had been sealed. If it had not been for my tough faith, I would have quit church long ago but I stayed. I stayed not because I had no choice – no! I stayed because I knew then as I know now that God's grace was sufficient for me too.

The positive and dignified depiction of the young man in the anecdote attempts to achieve empathy for the young man and Ugandan homosexuals. Mwenda paints a Ugandan gay as a scared, albeit honestly God-fearing person. The seemingly paradoxical statement: “Christian homosexual” underlines this depiction. The popular image of a Ugandan homosexual that emerges from Museveni and Mwesi-gwa attitude is that of an outcast in society.

The passage quoted by Mwenda suggests that homosexual people are pitiable because of a sexual practice that is outside their control. This is an argument that Peter Mulira makes in defence of Ugandan homosexuals when he argues that homosexuality is a genetic phenomenon (2014: np). In the above passage, Mulira concludes that Ugandan society ostracises a sexual orientation whose members are helpless to resist or reject.

Mulira’s observation that the American Psychiatric Association has removed homosexuality as a mental disorder from its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual becomes a discursive counter to the prevalent homophobic rhetoric in the Ugandan public sphere. The homophobic register – “homosexuality is the unforgivable sin”, or “all homos will burn in hell” – that Mwenda’s article foregrounds coheres with Mulira’s assertion that homosexuality is “a human characteristic that is formed in early life and is resistant to change” (2014:np) to reclaim the agency of Ugandan gays.

A direct appeal by a Ugandan Christian homosexual to other Ugandan Christians and the provision of scientific proof of their sexual orientation can effectively sow seeds for future tolerance, if not acceptance. In spite of one’s views about homosexuality, this young man’s passionate demand for acceptance, on the one hand and his apprehension and fear of stigmatisation on the other hand, arouses empathy for those engaged in gay sexuality. The image of a homosexual that readers take from this passage is that of a courageous person who regularly attends a church whose members stigmatise and condemn his lifestyle.

Mwenda’s second article titled “How Obama Played Museveni’s Hand” is a condemnation of the naïve, arrogant and hypocritical Western lobby in support of homosexuality for unwitting complicit in the suffering of Ugandan gays. Mwenda argues that their intervention does more harm than good to Ugandan gays in spite of their good intentions. Granted, there is no doubt that homosexuality as a lifestyle that can be publicly exhibited is a new phenomenon in Uganda.

If Ugandans are at the worst outraged, and at the least baffled by any exhibition of any form of sexuality, I argue that it will take some time for them to accept homosexuality, let alone its public display. This is perhaps why I agree with Mwenda’s core argument in this article is that there is need for patient engagement and subtle discussion for

acceptance of homosexuality to occur rather than threatening Ugandans and their president.

Mwenda's article succeeds in portraying gays as an ostracised group in the country. He achieves this by condemning the internal and external pro-gay lobbies. He argues that the lobbies use threats (cutting off aid) and intimidation (diplomatic pressure) to force Ugandans to accept their brand of homosexuality unaware or oblivious of the subtleties of its basis in Uganda. Mwenda's anger in the passage underscores the vulnerability of gays in Uganda. He depicts them as innocent scapegoats of this naïve, but well-meaning group.

This is because Western lobbyist's misunderstanding and/or disrespect of African values harm the advocacy agenda of gays in a country like Uganda. If one can argue that Obama's letter forced Museveni's hand into signing a law that proposed to sentence gays to life imprisonment for "being who they are," (2014:np) then Obama is a worse threat to Ugandan gays than Uganda's homophobia. This is because Obama's actions inadvertently alienated a man whom he should have courted. Mwenda's article faults the naivety of the pro-homosexuality lobby for the various forms of suffering endured by Ugandan homosexuals.

Conclusion

I have argued in this article that selected public intellectuals and experts use the op-ed medium in

legacy news publications to comment on homosexuality. My textual analysis of selected opinion pieces has unearthed three patterns that emerge in debates about same-sex sexuality in Uganda's public sphere.

First, a group of public intellectuals are seen to have taken advantage of the topicality of homosexuality to use this sexual orientation as a metaphor for important issues in the Ugandan polity. Second, one group – represented by Museveni and Mwesigwa in this article – manipulate indigenous discursive idioms to label homosexuals as perverts in society. Third, progressive commentators, like Mwenda and Mulira foreground the argument that gays are pariahs in the Ugandan society.

It is plausible, therefore, to argue that public intellectuals have utilised Ugandan newspapers to distil convincing images of homosexuals in the public sphere. For example, the images of a homosexual that Mwesigwa, Museveni, Mulira and Mwenda construct and circulate in the Ugandan public sphere define a Ugandan homosexual.

The respective authors name Ugandan gays as either pariahs or perverts. In spite of these polarising frames – cultural contamination, protection of children from exploitation, upholding of human rights – Ugandan discourses on homosexuality underline the topicality of same-sex sexuality.

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