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van Klinken, AS (2018) Citizenship of Love: The Politics, Ethics and Aesthetics of Sexual Citizenship in a Kenyan Gay Music Video. *Citizenship Studies*, 22 (6). pp. 650-665. ISSN: 1362-1025

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2018.1494901>

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This is the final author accepted manuscript, to be published in *Citizenship Studies* (vol. 22, no. 6, 2018).

Citizenship of Love: The Politics, Ethics and Aesthetics of Sexual Citizenship in a Kenyan Gay Music Video

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Article submitted: 16 August 2017

Accepted: 13 December 2017

Abstract

Against the background of the current politicisation of homosexuality and the policing of sexual citizenship in Kenya and other African countries, this article offers an analysis of the Kenyan gay music video *Same Love*, released by the band Art Attack in 2016. Employing the concept of acts of citizenship (Isin and Nielsen 2008), the article foregrounds the political, ethical and aesthetic aspects through which the lyrics and images of *Same Love* perform an act of sexual citizenship mediated through art. It argues that as an artistic intervention, the video interrogates popular narratives of homosexuality as un-Kenyan, un-African and un-Christian and creates a sense of a citizenship that is yet to come: a pan-African, Christian and queer citizenship of love. Thus, the article explores the new possibilities of cultural, sexual and religious citizenship created through popular culture and public space in contemporary Africa.

Keywords: sexual citizenship, Christianity, Kenya, homosexuality, gay rights, music video

On 15 February 2016, a group of Nairobi-based artists under the name Art Attack released a music video on YouTube with the title *Same Love*. A remix of a 2012 song by the American hip hop duo Macklemore & Ryan Lewis, which was a contribution to the campaign for same-sex marriage in the United States, the Kenyan version has new lyrics and new images. In this version, same-sex marriage is not an explicit concern. Art Attack presented its video as ‘a Kenyan song about same sex rights, gay rights, LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender] struggles, gender equalities, gay struggles and civil liberties for all sexual orientations’ (*Same Love* 2016). As indicated by the title, the song is primarily about love between people of the same gender, and about the struggle for this form of love to be recognised. On the one hand, the

lyrics denounce how homophobia has become the ‘new African culture’ and offer a commentary on the role of religion, culture and politics in the politicisation of homosexuality. This is supported by pictures in the video of homophobic headings in a range of African newspapers, and of protest marches organised against gay rights. On the other hand, the lyrics tell the story of a young gay man – starting positively about his experience of falling in love, but ending dramatically when he comes out to his parents and is rejected. This story is supported by scenes depicting a young male as well as a young female same-sex couple having playful and romantic times in outdoor spaces in Kenya, alternated with pictures of a fifth actor who is suicidal, the closing scene being his written suicide note while he collapses on the floor. Even though referred to as a Kenyan song, both the lyrics and the video images speak to broader African realities and to the experiences of African same-sex loving people more generally. The video is further interspersed with footage of political protests in various parts of the world, as well as with images from American films and comedy series. A week after its release, the video was banned by the Kenya Film Classification Board (KFCB). According to the Board, the video ‘advocate[s] for gay rights’ and depicts ‘graphic sexual scenes between people of the same gender’ (Langat 2016). A noteworthy detail here is that KFCB is chaired by Bishop Jackson Kosgey from the Worldwide Gospel Church of Kenya, and thus presents an example of the influence of Pentecostal Christian leaders in controlling Kenya’s public sphere and the policing of sexual citizenship.

Discussing the case of the *Same Love* video, this article makes a critical intervention in the study of religion, sexuality and citizenship in contemporary Africa. This field of study has so far mostly been concerned with the intense politicisation of sexual citizenship, especially in relation to gay and lesbian people, in Kenya and other African countries (Ndjio 2013; Nyeck and Epprecht 2013), drawing attention to the role played by religious beliefs and actors in these dynamics (van Klinken and Chitando 2016). Building on this body of scholarship, the present article argues that religious, in this case specifically Christian, beliefs and symbols are also employed as part of an ‘arts of resistance’ (Obadare and Willems 2014) and inspire active and radical forms of ‘citizenship from below’ (Turner 2002, 269). Employing Isin and Nielsen’s (2008) concept of ‘acts of citizenship’, I demonstrate how the video can be interpreted as an act of sexual citizenship that politically, ethically and aesthetically is construed as African, Christian, and queer. I will argue that the video disrupts the hegemonic norm of heterosexual citizenship promoted by religious and political actors in Kenya and other parts of Africa, and by its framing and representation of same-sex intimacy creates a sense of a citizenship that is yet to come: a citizenship of love. Thus, the article draws critical attention to the new possibilities of cultural, sexual *and* religious citizenship created through popular culture and public space in contemporary Africa (Dolby 2006). It complements studies of popular African video films that negotiate homosexuality out of commercial, sensationalist and/or political considerations (Böhme 2015; Green-Simms and Azuah 2012), by focusing on a music video that was produced by LGBT actors with an explicitly activist agenda.

Following this introduction, the article continues with a section that sets the scene by outlining the current politics of sexual citizenship in Kenya and in Africa more broadly. The following section introduces the concept of acts of citizenship, and discusses how such acts can be performed through art. This analytical frame is then applied to the *Same Love* video, which in three subsequent sections is discussed as an act of African, Christian, and queer citizenship respectively. In the concluding section I briefly reflect on the meaning of ‘citizenship of love’.

Politics of Sexual Citizenship in Kenya

In Kenya, as in many other African countries, sexual citizenship has become deeply politicised in recent years. This process of politicisation has mainly centred on questions regarding the recognition of same-sex relationships and gay rights (Nyeck and Epprecht 2013). An overview of Kenyan public and political debates, court rulings and policies makes it clear that these issues are contested, but that this contestation is more complex and multi-directional than in some other African countries, most notably Uganda and Nigeria. The latter two countries have made considerable effort in producing new anti-homosexuality legislation, with the Nigerian Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act (2013) and the Ugandan Anti-Homosexuality Act (2014) causing international outcry. Comparing these Nigerian and Ugandan laws to some recent enactments of law and policy in Kenya, Keguro Macharia (2013, 286) argues that the latter render ‘in affirmative, positive terms what other forms of legislation elsewhere in Africa ... have tried to render in negative terms’. Macharia’s concern is that Kenyan laws – he specifically discusses the Sexual Offences Act (2006), the Marriage Act (2014), and the new Constitution (2010) – may not be explicitly anti-homosexual but nevertheless promote an invented national heterosexual citizenship centred on marriage and family, while erasing queer bodies, desires and practices from Kenya’s history, present and future. Where these legal texts and subsequent policies seek to do this indirectly, high-profile Kenyan politicians have been much more explicit about this. For example, Deputy President William Ruto has on several occasions made strong anti-gay statements. In May 2015, shortly after the Kenyan High Court had ordered the government to allow a gay rights organisation to register as an NGO, Ruto reportedly stated that, ‘Kenya is a republic that worships God. We have no room for gays and those others’ (NBC News 2015). A few months later, after the US High Court had legalised same-sex marriage, Ruto, while speaking at a church in Nairobi, stated:

The other day you heard that in America the court has ruled about homosexuality but in this country we will defend what is right and what our faith states. ... God did not create man and woman for a man to come and marry another man. We believe in God. This is a God-fearing nation and we will be firm on what is right. (Mosuku 2015)

Two things stand out from these statements: first, the notion of national heterosexuality, or heteronationalism, has developed into an overt form of anti-homonationalism in which gay people are literally excluded from the imagination of the nation – there is ‘no room’ for them in

Kenya (a phrase echoing a statement made by former President Daniel Arap Moi; see Beyrer et al 2011, 88). This follows a common pattern in several other African countries where ‘sexuality has become a political and social landscape of privileged intervention by the post-colonial state seeking to purify the body of the nation’ (Ndjio 2013, 126). In Kenya and elsewhere on the continent, this typically happens within a discourse of African authenticity, in which homosexuality and gay identity are framed as Western inventions and as alien to African cultural traditions. Basile Ndjio captures this dynamic and its effects on citizenship thus:

Sexuality has been made a cultural tool through which Africanity is expressed, and nativist ideologies are dramatized. Moreover, in this part of the world, sexuality is increasingly appearing as a marker of citizenship, and especially a critical mode either for claiming one’s citizen’s rights or denying other people their rights as citizens. This is because, since the independence period, the sexuality of Africans has been developed in an axis of the inclusion of so-called heterosexual citizens and the exclusion of homosexual subjects. (Ndjio 2013, 126)

As much as this politicisation of sexual citizenship is a relatively recent phenomenon, it exemplifies a more deeply-rooted problem of citizenship in Africa revolving around the politics of belonging. As Sara Rich Dorman (2014, 161) points out, ‘political competition in African states is not organized around ideology but around identity politics, which immediately lends itself to definitions of “insiders” and “outsiders”’ – on the basis of ethnicity, religion, and currently of sexuality.

Second, this sexual ideology of the nation and its citizens is presented in an explicitly religious rhetoric in which certain (heteronormative) perceptions about how God created human beings are considered as normative for the socio-political order, with the Deputy President conveniently forgetting that the Kenyan Constitution declares that ‘there shall be no state religion’. Again, this follows a pattern of contemporary politics of homosexuality in Africa. Ruto, a self-declared ‘born-again Christian’, subscribes to a discourse used by many Christian actors within Kenya and beyond. His notion of Kenya as ‘God-fearing’ echoes a popular religio-political imagination of Kenya as ‘a nation born again’ that has emerged in recent decades, especially under the influence of Pentecostal forms of Christianity (Deacon 2015). Indeed, Pentecostalism has heavily contributed to the politicisation of homosexuality in Africa because it has made issues of gender and sexuality, particularly homosexuality, key sites for the realisation of its political project of building ‘Christian nations’ and producing model Christian citizens (van Klinken 2014). An illustration of this is a booklet published by the Evangelical Alliance of Kenya, calling upon God-fearing Kenyans to ‘pray that God would raise up righteous leaders to successfully contend against the encroachments of the homosexual activists upon our nation’s educational system’ (*Kenya Let’s Pray!* 2014, 19).

This section began by suggesting that the contestation over sexuality and citizenship in Kenya is more complex and multi-directional than in some other countries. While Ruto

represents a dominant politico-religious discourse, in fact there is a significant level of diversity of opinions on the issue in Kenya – opinions that are aired openly in the public sphere. Referring to a 2010 anti-gay comment by then prime minister Raila Odinga, Macharia (2013, 273) points out that ‘five years earlier, such a statement would have elicited mainstream silence or approval [but] this time, however, mainstream newspapers published articles challenging Raila’s statement’. Beyond the mere fact of different opinions being expressed in the media, there is a relatively significant visibility of LGBT individuals and communities in Kenya, and an active manifestation of LGBT activists and allies in the public domain. Indeed, according to one prominent activist, ‘Kenya stands out as a leader on LGBTIQ equality within sub-Saharan Africa’¹ (Gitari 2016). Eric Gitari and fellow Kenyan activists constitute the other side of the coin of the dynamics captured by Ndjio in the above quotation, that sexuality in contemporary Africa has not only become the basis for denying certain people their rights as citizens, but also a critical mode for claiming citizens’ rights. With some notable exceptions for Southern African countries (Currier 2012; Lorway 2015), this latter development has received little scholarly attention as yet.

Act of Sexual Citizenship through Arts

With a dominant discourse denying LGBT people citizenship on the basis of their non-normative sexual and gender identities, how do African LGBT activists and communities claim and construe sexual citizenship? Addressing this question, one could look at the ways in which LGBT organisations are involved in sexual diversity struggles, for instance by mobilising against legislation against same-sex practices and LGBT advocacy, by advocating the inclusion of LGBT communities in public health policies, by monitoring and reporting LGBT rights violations, and by delivering mental and public health support as well as providing legal advice to constituents (Currier and Cruz 2013). Such strategies are typical of sexual citizenship conceived as claims to rights concerned with sexual expression and consumption. However, in this article I am not so much interested in these more traditional strategies of mobilisation and intervention. Instead, I focus on creative expressions and claims of sexual citizenship. As has been pointed out,

queer African activists have been displaying incredible agility and resorting to inventiveness and creativity, to a kind of political bricolage that draws from new forms of technological productions and artifacts – the “instant archives” created by websites, social media, blogs, and YouTube videos. (Currier and Migraine-George 2016, 292)

As a case in point, in this article I discuss the *Same Love* video. Yet, before introducing this video in more detail, I address a preliminary question: How can a music video, and artistic productions more generally, be relevant to a discussion of sexual citizenship?

My approach to, and understanding of citizenship in this article is inspired by the work of Engin Isin and Greg Nielsen, who have proposed shifting focus ‘from the institution of

citizenship and the citizen as individual agent' to what they call 'acts of citizenship' (Isin and Nielsen 2008, 2). This shift allows an investigation, not of formal citizenship as a legal status and of the practices associated with it, but of the acts through which subjects constitute themselves as citizens. Importantly, Isin and Nielsen distinguish acts of citizenship from ordinary citizenship practices such as participating in elections and paying taxes. Whereas the latter practices are rather passive and repetitive (although one might argue that this depends on agents, contexts and temporalities), acts of citizenship are 'collective or individual deeds that rupture social-historical patterns' (Isin and Nielsen 2008, 2). This makes the nature of such acts political, but in addition they are also deeply ethical and aesthetical as they are creative interventions and 'create a sense of the possible and of a citizenship that is "yet to come"' (Isin and Nielsen 2008, 4).

In the volume edited by Isin and Nielsen, contributors discuss and examine a whole range of deeds conducted by subjects in different contexts through the analytical lens of 'acts of citizenship'. The most relevant essay, for the purpose of this article, is Erkan Ercel's discussion of the film *25th Hour* by Spike Lee. This film, according to Ercel (2008, 297) presents us with an example of an act of citizenship in the form of an 'artistic intervention', that is, 'an act of citizenship through the mediation of art [which] has the liberty to explore special ethical meanings that move against the habitus of general culture'. Subsequently, he engages in an analysis of the speech and images in the film. Ercel's essay is methodologically relevant because it demonstrates that although acts of citizenship are conceptualised by Isin and Nielsen as being conducted by human subjects, apparently they can be mediated through film and other cultural productions. Adopting this analytical frame, in the following sections I analyse the Kenyan *Same Love* video as an act of citizenship mediated through art, drawing attention to political, ethical and aesthetical dimensions.

Evidently, the video was intended to be an intervention in the politics of sexuality in Africa. As stated by the anonymous rapper of Art Attack in an interview with the Nigerian LGBT platform *Nostrings*:

We wanted it to be a pan-African song, not just a Kenyan song, a song about Africa, a song about Nigeria, Uganda, our neighbouring country that actually has very strict laws on homosexuality and that views gay people in a very very bad light, that is Uganda. (Attack 2016)

The interventionist nature of *Same Love* is further underlined by the rapper's reference to the video as a form of 'artivism'. He employed this term to point out that Art Attack's work is 'geared towards social change' and 'is actually motivated by what we see around in social circles in Kenya' (Attack 2016). The term *artivism* is more widely used in Africa and elsewhere, and has been described as 'a hybrid neologism that signifies work created by individuals who see an organic relationship between art and activism' (Sandoval and Latorre 2008, 82).

Having introduced the concept of 'acts of citizenship' and how it can be methodologically applied to an artistic production such as *Same Love*, the main question to be

explored in the remainder of this article is: What acts of citizenship are mediated through this music video? More specifically, how does the video present us with a creative intervention in sexual citizenship? In the following sections, I will elucidate some of the political, ethical and aesthetic dimensions of *Same Love*, specifically exploring how the video interrogates the earlier discussed nationalist and religious politics of sexual citizenship in dominant Kenyan discourses, and how the video makes a claim towards what I call a citizenship of love which is simultaneously African, Christian, and queer.

Same Love as an Act of African Citizenship

Same Love critically interrogates the contemporary politics of sexual citizenship in Africa. The lyrics of the song explicitly state that homophobia has become ‘the new African culture’. This is illustrated with several images depicting popular mobilisations against homosexuality. At two moments in the video a series of newspaper covers are shown with anti-homosexual headings. These include pictures from the Ghanaian newspaper *Daily Graphic*, with captions reading ‘Homos are filthy’, ‘Gays can be tried’, ‘8,000 homos in two regions’, and of the Ugandan tabloids *Red Pepper* and *Rolling Stone* both of which were deeply involved in what has been called ‘the Uganda homophobia spectacle’, that is, the creation of moral panic around homosexuality to mobilise support for the Anti-Homosexuality Bill (Mwikya 2013). The video also includes a cover from the Kenyan newspaper *Weekly Citizen*, reading ‘Top gays, lesbians list in Kenya out’, announcing the outlet’s publication of a list of names of prominent gay and lesbian Kenyans. It further features a picture of MP Irungu Kang’ata, who is one of Kenya’s politicians most actively opposing LGBT rights, as well as pictures of the Protect the Family March that took place in Nairobi in July 2015, just ahead of the visit of US President Barack Obama. This march was to make clear to Obama, as Kang’ata put it in a speech, that ‘when he comes to Kenya this month and he tries to bring the abortion agenda, the gay agenda, we shall tell him to shut up and go home’ (Malalo 2015). These words echo the idea, promoted by many an African politician, of homosexuality being a Western imposition, informed by the notion of an originally and normatively heterosexual Africa (Msibi 2011). By referring to these illustrations of anti-homosexuality campaigns as expressions of ‘the new African culture’ of homophobia, the video inverts the argument of cultural authenticity by suggesting that not homosexuality but homophobia is new in Africa. The new and ostensibly foreign culture of homophobia², according to the video, has given rise to new forms of discrimination and marginalisation in postcolonial Africa. This is apparent from the opening sentence of the lyrics, which contains the address of the song: ‘This song goes out to the new slaves, the new blacks, the new Jews, the new minorities for whom we need a civil rights movement, maybe a sex rights movement. Especially in Africa.’ The suggestion here is that same-sex loving people are the most recent group suffering from discrimination, and that socio-political homophobia is part of a long history of systemic injustice, along the lines of slavery, racism and the holocaust.

Of particular interest here is the reference to same-sex loving people as ‘the new slaves, the new blacks’, as well as the allusion to the need for a new civil rights movement. These words

call to mind the inhumane history of slavery and systemic racism in the United States of America, and of the struggle for the recognition of the citizenship of African Americans. By evoking this traumatic memory of black history, the video frames the contemporary struggle for same-sex rights in Africa as part of a broader pan-African struggle for equal rights and full citizenship, putting exclusion on the basis of sexuality at the same level as exclusion on the basis of race. This framing is subtly reinforced later in the song, in the phrase stating, 'Luther's spirit lives on'. The suggestion here is that the spirit of renowned African American civil rights activist Martin Luther King lives on in Africans fighting for the rights of sexual minorities. Through these brief references, the lyrics can be read as a poetic act of transatlantic pan-African citizenship, alluding to the possibility of people of African descent being united, not only in their struggle against racial discrimination from outside, but also in their rejection of sexual discrimination from inside their communities.

Second, the video performs an act of African citizenship by creating a sense of continental African identity, solidarity and pride. The populist claims of homosexuality being un-African, represented through the footage of anti-homosexuality newspapers and campaigns, are counterbalanced and decentred in various ways. Directly at the beginning two images appear briefly. First an image of a rainbow flag, which is the internationally recognised symbol of gay and lesbian pride, through which *Same Love* inscribes itself into a modern narrative of sexual liberation and diversity. This is immediately followed by a second image, of the South African flag. Adopted as the national symbol after the end of apartheid in 1994 and designed to represent the country's diverse population, this flag symbolises racial equality in South Africa. Yet, for gay and lesbian people elsewhere on the continent, South Africa also has a more specific meaning. Being the first and only African country that constitutionally protects against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and that has legalised same-sex marriage, the country presents an African version of 'the dream of love to come' (Munro 2012). By including this image, *Same Love* writes itself into a specifically African narrative of liberation: freedom from both racial *and* sexual oppression. The implicit message might also be that in the same way as Africans were in solidarity with black South Africans under apartheid, they should now be in solidarity with gay and lesbian Africans and be united in the fight against homophobia.

Another instance of *Same Love* as an act of African citizenship can be found later in the video. The lyrics here state, 'Shout out to my brothers Binyavanga, Joji Baro/and my lele sisters everywhere in the struggle/always love from your heart/never love from society'. This text is accompanied by images of several prominent LGBT Africans: Binyavanga Wainaina, a Kenyan literary writer who early 2014 came publicly out as gay; George Barasa, a Kenyan openly gay musician also known by his artiste name Joji Baro, who is also the producer of *Same Love*; Ugandan LGBT rights Kasha Jacqueline Nabagesera; and finally the legendary South African bisexual anti-Apartheid singer Brenda Fassie (1964-2004). These are among the most well-known African figures open about their non-heterosexual sexuality, who in the video are presented as the faces of the struggle for sexual diversity on the continent. They are the ones in whom, the lyrics suggest, the spirit of Martin Luther King lives on. Where the struggle for LGBT

human rights in Africa is often framed by its opponents as a Western agenda, *Same Love* claims African agency and frames it as the next step in the struggle for African liberation. This is in line with the African LGBTI Manifesto (a document that came out of an LGBTI activist roundtable session held in Nairobi in April 2010), which states: 'As long as African LGBTI people are oppressed, the whole of Africa is oppressed' (Ekine and Abbas 2013, 52).

Citizenship, among other things, is about belonging to a place, to a land. In this regard, Ruto's above quoted statement that there is 'no room' for gay and lesbian people in Kenya is particularly critical, as it literally dis-places people on the basis of their sexuality and effectively denies them their sense of belonging to the body of the nation and its land, and in fact also to the body and land of the continent because homosexuality is not only framed as un-Kenyan but as un-African, too. Another way of reading *Same Love* as an act of Kenyan and African citizenship thus focuses on the ways in which the video claims a place and space for same-sex loving people, and expresses a sense of belonging to the land. Several series of images in the video are of key interest here. First, at the beginning of the video, the image of the South African flag is followed by ordinary images of peri-urban life somewhere on the continent: a tarmac street surrounded by small, detached brick houses; a female (possibly a transgender) figure coming out of one of such houses; a group of young men playing football; a woman walking on a footway; a child frolicking on a dusty road; a young man cycling through waste land. These images, depicting neither the poorest slums nor the modern upper-middle class neighbourhoods, portray an environment where many urban, lower-middle class Kenyans and other Africans can identify with. They create a peaceful, almost idyllic, peri-urban African landscape, implicitly suggesting that this is the place where in all ordinariness same-sex love happens and same-sex loving people can be found. Second, the video later screens paradisaical images of a waterfall surrounded by lush green vegetation against a blue sky, alternated with images giving a helicopter view over the wide scenery of forested hills with a river streaming down the valley. These scenes of the landscape (shot in Fourteen Falls park, 40 miles out of Nairobi) can be read as a claim to the land, and perhaps also as an expression of love for the land. The message that lesbian and gay Africans are children of the land, too, is subtly accentuated by the image of a rainbow appearing in the waterfall, and more directly by images of a young black male couple having a playful and romantic time in the river on top of the waterfall. While the couple appears in the screen, the rapper starts reciting the lyrics, which tell a love story about the I-figure falling in love with another boy at school. Third, another series of images depicts a young black female couple in the setting of a lush green park. Like the male couple, they present an idyll of love and happiness. The setting of these images is highly significant: it is the Arboretum, a park in central Nairobi, just out of the city centre, and literally the extended backyard of State House, the residence of the Kenyan President. This park is a highly symbolic terrain of cultural and political citizenship in Kenya. Although not allowing any political demonstrations,

The Arboretum is constantly taken over by prayer groups, most often by Pentecostals. Several gospel music videos have been made there. (...) Thus, this park takes part in

interdenominational religious events that correspond to the vague [Christian] national ideology that cements the country. (Maupeu 2010, 402)

By making this park the setting for the expression of romantic same-sex intimacy, *Same Love* challenges the hegemonic politico-religious narratives with which the park is usually associated. The exchange of kisses, and even of rings, between the two women lovers on a bench in the park constitutes an act of citizenship, anticipating a citizenship that is yet to come where same-sex loving Kenyans can freely express intimacy in public, and where same-sex relationships are publicly recognised. The scene directly undermines the idea that there is ‘no room’ for gay and lesbian people, as the lovers *make room* for themselves in a prominent and symbolic public space, claiming the park as their own. This scene is also a claim towards citizenship of love, as it calls for recognition of the citizenship of gay and lesbian people, including their right to express romantic love and intimacy.

Same Love as an Act of Christian Citizenship

Having discussed *Same Love*’s interrogation of the popular narrative of homosexuality as un-Kenyan and un-African, the focus now shifts to the video’s interrogation of the second popular narrative in the politics of sexual citizenship: of homosexuality being un-Christian and therefore at odds with a nation that is being imagined as Christian. The video draws critical attention to the ways in which this narrative is expressed, and to its impact on same-sex loving people.

In the lyrics of the song, when the I-figure comes out to his parents, they tell him that he is ‘the son of the devil’. This response echoes a popular Christian discourse that demonises homosexuality and the people involved in it. This discourse can be found in different parts of Africa, often inspired by Pentecostal eschatological concerns with the “end times” (van Klinken 2013), yet in Kenya it has a particular salience given the country’s long history of devil worship rumours (Smith 2012). Not only well-known Kenyan charismatic Christian figures, such as Reverend David Githii, but also official government reports, such as the one recently presented to the Education Cabinet Secretary, often refer to devil worship and homosexuality in the same breath (Mwangi 2014; Wanzala 2017). The lyrics and images of *Same Love* foreground one critical effect of such a demonising discourse, by showing how it leads parents to rejecting their own children, literally forcing them out of the house. Beyond the domestic sphere, the video foregrounds the effects of this discourse on the body of the nation. The images of the earlier-mentioned Protect the Family March, which was organised by several Kenyan Christian organisations (the Evangelical Alliance of Kenya, the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, and the Kenya Christian Professionals Forum), as well as of several anti-homosexual politicians and media outlets, serve as a reminder that gay people are excluded from society. In the lyrics this is succinctly captured as follows: ‘church rules, street rules/court rules, school rules/hate is the new love’. The point made here is that different spheres of society, including the religious sphere, and different social institutions, including the church, share a common abhorrence of homosexuality and have joined forces in preaching hate. The hatred gay people experience in

society is directed to them ‘in the name of piety’. Religion has become an alibi for the expression of hate, the violation of other people’s dignity, rights and life, and the denial of their citizenship.

Clearly, *Same Love* critiques Christianity for its key role in the politicisation of homosexuality. However, and perhaps more interestingly, the song also explicitly refers to faith in a positive way. An example is how the earlier discussed pan-African framing of the song’s message is expressed in the following sentence of the lyrics: ‘Uganda ... Nigeria Africa ... we come from the same God, cut from the same cord, share the same pain and share the same skin’. These words reflect a religiously-inspired notion of the origin of the African or black race as united in God (a religious version of pan-Africanist thought also known as Ethiopianism, after the country that according to the Bible has ‘stretched out her hands to God’). Directly in the next line, the lyrics of the song refer to Martin Luther King, who was not only a prominent figure in the African-American civil rights movement but also a Christian minister of religion. King’s vision of racial liberation is reclaimed and applied to the struggle for the liberation of same-sex loving people in Africa. Thus, with these two references in the lyrics, *Same Love* adopts an explicitly religious, Christian inspired form of pan-Africanism according to which, in the words of Marcus Garvey, ‘God Almighty created us all to be free’ (Garvey 2006, 29).

Another, more prominent positive reference to faith in the *Same Love* video is at the end, where the outro of the song consists of a slightly paraphrased quotation from the Bible:

Love is patient
Love is kind
Love is selfless
Love is faithful
Love is full of hope
Love is full of trust
Love is not proud
Love is God and God is Love

The paraphrased text comes from 1 Corinthians 13, which is a classic biblical text about love often used in church wedding services. Its inclusion in the song exemplifies the use of the Bible, and of Christian language more generally, in contemporary East African popular culture where the boundaries between the genres of gospel and rap music have become fluid (Kidula 2012, 172-173). It further demonstrates that the Bible is not only used by homophobic African religious and political leaders, but is also reclaimed by gay and lesbian people and appropriated to advocate for the recognition of same-sex relationships.

In the context of the song, this text is a poetic act of citizenship as it anticipates a citizenship of love that is yet to come. This citizenship first and foremost is concerned with romantic love, with same-sex relationships being framed as love relationships. In other words, the video adopts romantic love as a political strategy in the struggle for the recognition of same-sex rights – a strategy in line with how gay and lesbian rights activists in the Western world have

recently advocated for legalising same-sex partnerships and marriage (Grossi 2017). Foregrounding and reclaiming romantic love is particularly critical in African contexts, where same-sex relationships are typically associated with sex, often of a transactional and/or promiscuous nature, rather than with love. On the one hand, there is a silencing of homosexual love within discourses about romantic love in Africa (Thomas and Cole 2009). On the other hand, African discourses about homosexuality tend to reduce same-sex intimacy to the act of having sex, not only in religious rhetoric about the ‘distortion’ of homosexuality, but also in the language of ‘men who have sex with men’ and ‘women who have sex with women’ that has been introduced as part of sexual health discourses. *Same Love* directly interrogates these biases by putting the notion of love at the heart of a music video with imagery depicting physical affection, intimacy and pleasure expressed between two same-sex couples – in other words, by explicitly linking romantic and erotic love.

The modern concept of romantic love that was introduced in Africa with Christianity and Western influence, and which nowadays is spread through popular culture, is usually understood heteronormatively, but perhaps is not intrinsically so. Where African women are said to ‘have often embraced romantic love as a strategy for establishing more egalitarian gender relations’ (Thomas and Cole 2009, 13), the *Same Love* video presents another example of the idiom of love – an explicitly Christian idiom for that matter – being adopted as a strategy to make a political claim of inclusion. The video queers the language of love, liberating it from the confines of heterosexuality and reclaiming it to qualify same-sex relationships. It does so with an explicit reference to God’s love, a reference that can be read as a queer theological statement (Cheng 2011). Not only does the video suggest that the love of God is wide enough to encompass and inspire hetero- and homosexual expressions of human love, but doing so it also subtly dissolves the traditional divide between divine and human love and suggests that God’s love has something to do with – or, to put it more bluntly, might be the source of – the romantic *and* erotic love between human beings.

***Same Love* as an Act of Queer Citizenship**

A possible criticism of the *Same Love* video might be that its adoption of romantic love as a political strategy is not queer enough and reinforces heteronormative patterns. Such a criticism is informed by a particular strand of queer theory, of which scholars such as Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner are exponents. In their influential essay ‘Sex in Public’, these theorists give an account of what they call the ‘radical aspirations of queer culture building’, described as the creation of ‘not just a safe zone for queer sex but [of] the changed possibilities of identity, intelligibility, publics, culture and sex that appear when the heterosexual couple is no longer the referent or the privileged example of sexual culture’ (Berlant and Warner 1998, 548). An alternative term for this project is queer world making and a key instrument in this process are what Berlant and Warner call, counterintimacies: ‘Making a queer world has required the development of kinds of intimacy that bear no necessary relation to domestic space, to kinship, to the couple form, to property, or to the nation’ (Berlant and Warner 1998, 558). Such

counterintimacies could also be called acts of queer citizenship. Berlant and Warner imagine these as being necessarily nonstandard and radically transgressive, disrupting what they describe as the hegemonic culture of heterosexuality in which ‘a complex cluster of sexual practices gets confused (...) with the love plot of intimacy and familialism that signifies belonging to society in a deep and normal way’ and in which ‘community is imagined through scenes of intimacy, coupling, and kinship’ (Berlant and Warner 1998, 554). Compared to the example of a counterintimacy that Berlant and Warner give – a performance of erotic vomiting in a New York leather bar –, the *Same Love* video may indeed appear to be rather vanilla as it subscribes to ‘the couple form’ and follows ‘the love plot of intimacy’. Yet does this necessarily mean that the video does not present a counterintimacy, or an act of queer citizenship, and that it does not contribute to queer world making? I would like to make some counter-arguments, questioning the normative understanding of queerness as being necessarily radically transgressive.

First, the form of gay music video published online, and discussed in Kenyan media and online fora is significant. To use Berlant and Warner’s words, *Same Love* gives a depiction of ‘forms of affective, erotic and personal living’ and makes these ‘public in the sense of accessible, available to memory, and sustained through collective activity’ (Berlant and Warner 1998, 562). In this way, the video can be seen as contributing to the emergence of a queer culture or counterpublic in Kenya.

Second, the video’s ban by the KFCB indicates that, in the Kenyan context, the video is considered as being too explicit, or in the words of the Board, too graphic. The depicted expressions of intimacy were banned precisely because they were perceived as counterintimacies, as a threat to the project of building and defending a culture of national heterosexuality – a project to which the Board is deeply committed, as is demonstrated by its banning of several other productions, including the Kenyan queer film *Stories of our Lives*.

Third, a comparison between the American original and the Kenyan remix version of *Same Love* shows that the latter does lack the emphasis of the former on the virtues of longevity and stability. As much as the Kenyan version depicts intimacy in the context of same-sex couples, it does not actively subscribe to the monogamous life-long couple form. Hence it can be argued to be comparatively less invested in reinforcing a heteronormative culture.

Fourth, as pointed out already, the setting of the performance of intimacy between the same-sex couple in *Same Love* is highly significant, given the meanings associated with the Arboretum in the mind of the Kenyan public. The video does not just create ‘a safe zone for queer sex’ in the privacy of the bedroom; by claiming the Arboretum as a site where same-sex intimacy can be publicly enjoyed it changes, to use Berlant and Warner’s words, the ‘possibilities of identity, intelligibility, publics, culture, and sex’ (Berlant and Warner 1998, 548). In the Kenyan context, where the domestic or private enjoyment of same-sex sexuality is already criminalised, the public performance of such enjoyment is obviously even more offensive. Hence I suggest that the kiss between the two female partners, exchanged in the symbolic setting of the Arboretum, becomes a politically significant act and is, indeed, a

counterintimacy – perhaps even more transgressive than a performance of erotic vomiting in the relatively safe zone of a New York leather bar.

This fourfold response is not to defend *Same Love* against any criticism, but to acknowledge the many different and context-specific ways in which queer world-making takes place, and in which queer sexual citizenship can be claimed and enacted. The video, with its visible expression of same-sex intimacy and its invocation of a Christian notion of love, has, what queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz calls, queer world-making potentialities. These are ‘contained in the performances of minoritarian citizen-subjects who contest the majoritarian public sphere’ (Muñoz 2009, 56). As such, the video performs an act of queer sexual citizenship. Its strategic use of a Christian notion of love challenges secular notions of queer politics and citizenship that dominate Western queer studies literature, while at the same time also challenging popular Christian politics of sexual citizenship in Africa that restrict romantic and erotic love to the context of heterosexual marriage.

Citizenship of Love: A Conclusion

In the foregoing, I have built on Isin and Nielsen’s concept of acts of citizenship, and specifically Ercel’s notion of an act of citizenship in the form of an artistic intervention, to examine how the *Same Love* music video presents us with an act of sexual citizenship mediated through art. Through a close reading of the lyrics and images in the video, I have argued that *Same Love* politically, aesthetically and ethically creates a sense of a citizenship that is yet to come, that is, a pan-African, Christian and queer citizenship of love. In this conclusion I briefly elaborate on the meaning of the concept that I have coined here: citizenship of love.

As Muñoz has argued in his discussion of queer artistic performances: ‘Certain performances of queer citizenship contain what I call an anticipatory illumination of a queer world, a sign of an actually existing queer reality, a kernel of political possibility within a stultifying heterosexual present’ (Muñoz 2009, 49). In order to apply this to the *Same Love* video we have to address the question of the political significance of love. Within the video the invocation of a Christian-inspired language of love serves not only to legitimise same-sex relationships but also to critique the dominant forces in society that oppose such relationships and demonise same-sex loving people. The emphasis on love, specifically the reference to God’s love, directly unmasks what is at the core of religiously inspired socio-political homophobia: hate. With homophobia having become ‘the new African culture’, the implicit political commentary of the song is that this culture is un-Christian as it is defined by hate instead of love. Thus, the video employs love not only as a romantic but also as a political category, calling for a society and a citizenship defined by love. In other words, as much as the video at first sight may give a somewhat sentimental depiction of love, its lyrics allude to the potential ‘radicalism of romantic love’ (Grossi and West 2017). As such the video echoes recent trends in political philosophy, where love has been rediscovered as a political category. See, for instance, Martha Nussbaum’s argument that ‘love matters for justice’ (Nussbaum 2015), and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s argument that ‘love serves as the basis for our political projects in common and

the construction of a new society' (Hardt and Negri 2004, 352). In the latter line of thought, citizenship of love refers to those forms of citizenship where the personal and embodied experience of love – and the experience of relationality and vulnerability inherent to it – feeds into a political commitment to diversity, inclusion, solidarity and justice in society. Importantly, the *Same Love* video frames this argument theologically. The radical and progressive nature of romantic love, the song suggests, is that it is rooted in God's radical love which puts any form of hatred and injustice in society under critique.

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¹ Gitari here adds the I of intersex and the Q of queer to the LGBT acronym.

² It is noteworthy here that anti-homosexuality laws in Africa in most countries were introduced during the colonial period.