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The Empire Speaks Back: Zambian Responses to European Union LGBTI Rights Diplomacy

Adriaan van Klinken and Emmanuel Phiri

a.vanklinken@leeds.ac.uk

emmanuelphiriphd@gmail.com

Abstract

This chapter critically examines Zambian responses to European interventions with regard to the human rights of sexual minorities in the country. It specifically focuses on one particular incident, occurring in 2013. The chapter, first, discusses the background and context of this incident, which emerged after the Delegation of the European Union (EU) to Zambia launched a call for funding proposals specifically mentioning the promotion of LGBTI rights. This is discussed in relation to wider EU involvement with Africa, especially in the area of politics of sexuality. Second, the chapter discusses the way in which Zambian political and religious leaders responded to the EU call for proposals, providing a critical analysis of the discourse of "Zambian Christian values" and "traditional beliefs", as well as the invocation of democracy and human rights, by prominent spokespersons. We conceptualize the Zambian response in a postcolonial framework as a case of "the empire speaking back", while drawing critical attention to the ambiguity of this.

Key words

Zambia, European Union, Christianity, LGBTI rights, postcolonialism

Introduction

Those readers familiar with postcolonial literature will realize that the title of this chapter is inspired by the book *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, first published in 1989. In this book, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin examine how the experience of colonization and the challenges of postcolonialism resulted in an explosion of new writing in English, from regions as diverse as Africa, Australia, India and the Caribbean, through which these regions and cultures creatively asserted difference from the imperial center, Britain, and resisted its cultural as well as its economic and political hegemony. Although the present chapter is not concerned with postcolonial literature,

it adopts the trope of "writing back", which is a powerful one, not only for cultural production but also for many other spheres in which the (former) empire of previously colonized regions resist hegemonic structures and relationships in our seemingly postcolonial yet still unequal globalized world.

As this book volume as a whole demonstrates, Europe – more specifically: Western European nations – has come to believe that it sets an example for other nations and continents, not at least in relation to issues of homosexuality or sexual diversity. This discourse of a "homoinclusive Europe" (Kulpa 2014) has also shaped the dynamics of the European Union, both internally and externally. The European Union and some of its individual member states, such as Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, have engaged in various forms of "LGBTI rights diplomacy", using soft power to advocate for the rights of sexual minorities in other parts of the world, most notably in Africa where many countries still have the colonial anti-sodomy laws as part of their Penal Code, and where some countries – most notably, Uganda and Nigeria – have recently sought to adopt new anti-homosexuality legislation. This "soft power" has included the threat to cut development aid to countries that refused to adopt liberal or progressive stances on sexual diversity and that instead implemented laws to curtail sexual freedom and to violate sexual minority rights. Other diplomatic tools that have been used include economic sanctions, public engagement activities, silent diplomacy, and the support of domestic NGOs (Wahman and Drury 2018). In this chapter, the focus is not on European LGBTI rights diplomacy as such, but on how it is resisted by those who are on the receiving end of it – how are they writing or speaking back? As a case in point we focus on Zambia, examining one particular incident in which European diplomacy was rebuked by local political and religious actors. We use this case study in order to throw deeper light on the question how "Europe is seen from Africa" (Mailafia 2014), specifically in relation to issues of sexuality.

The Context of Zambia

The case study under consideration critically looks at the Zambian response to the European Union's (EU) call for proposals for funding civil society organizations engaged in supporting LGBTI rights in Zambia. By Zambian response is meant the responses from the Zambian government, political actors and religious leaders. But before looking at the Zambian response to the EU, hereunder is brief background information on Zambia.

Zambia, a country in Southern or South-Central Africa, currently has a population that is estimated by the United Nations to be over seventeen million (Worldometers 2018). Formerly Northern Rhodesia, she gained her independence from her British colonial masters and assumed democracy on 24 October 1964. During the reign of the first post-independence president, Kenneth David Kaunda, in 1972 a system of one-party democracy was introduced, under which the country was governed by Kaunda's United National Independence Party (UNIP). Growing opposition against UNIP's monopoly on state power led to multi-party elections in 1991, which were won by opposition leader Frederick Chiluba of the Movement

of Multi-party Democracy (MMD). The electoral victory of Chiluba, who identified as a born-again Christian and was supported by the fast-growing Pentecostal movement in the country, culminated in the President's declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation in December 1991 (Gifford 1998; Phiri 2003). In 1996, this declaration was enshrined in a preamble to the Zambian Constitution and has remained there ever since, rendering Zambia the only country on the continent that constitutionally is Christian. The declaration reflects, and has constituted, in Amos Yong's words, a sense of "Pentecostal nationalism" (Yong 2010, 9), which has considerably shaped Zambian public and political culture, including the politics of sexuality (Van Klinken 2014).

Despite transitioning from a colonial state to an independent republic, and from a one party state to a multi-party democracy, Zambia still maintains a significant amount of colonial heritage. Among this heritage is the penal code, which is still based on the British colonial laws. A key example of this is the penal code's criminalization of same-sex activity, modelled after the 1931 colonial anti-sodomy law (Couvaras 2013, 11, 30). According to this law, found in sections 155 and 158 of the Zambian Penal Code Act, it is an offence to have sexual relations against the "order of nature".

Despite the law against homosexuality having been part of the penal code since the colonial period, public discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation only came to the fore in 1998. The occasion was an interview with Francis Yabe Chisambisha, published in Zambia's largest newspaper, *The Post*, in which he openly professed his gay sexual orientation, and the subsequent launch of the first Zambian LGBT organization, the Lesbian, Gays, Bisexual and Transgender Persons Association (LEGATRA). These actions reportedly caused "a mammoth scandal", with the media, the political and religious establishment, and the general public all expressing their disgust (Long, Brown and Cooper 2003, 35). President Chiluba, at the symbolic moment of Independence Day celebrations, stated that "homosexuality is the deepest level of depravity" and is "unbiblical and abnormal", and he suggested that those championing it do so for financial favors from foreign donors (Long, Brown and Cooper 2003, 40). In the aftermath of the controversy, Chisambisha was expelled from his studies at Chipembi College and he later fled Zambia and sought asylum in South Africa (Couvaras 2013, 26-27). This was the first time that homosexuality sparked public debate in Zambia, and it marked the beginning of an intense politicization of homosexuality and LGBTI rights in the country. This process culminated in the period 2011-2013, beginning with the campaign for the presidential elections in 2011, during which the opposition candidate, Patriotic Front leader Michael Sata, was associated with a pro-homosexuality standpoint by sympathizers of the ruling MMD party. When, in spite of this smear campaign, Sata did win the elections, the issue came up again soon after his inauguration. In February 2012, United Nations General Secretary, Ban Ki-moon, paid an official visit to the country, and in his address to the Zambian Parliament he called upon the country to uphold the "highest standards of human rights and protections for all people – regardless of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability" (Ban 2012). His call fell on deaf ears, with politicians and religious leaders publicly resisting it and framing it as a direct threat to Zambian and Christian values. Some even went as far as labelling Ban as an "agent of the devil" (quoted in Van Klinken 2013, 527) trying to corrupt the integrity of Zambia as a

Christian nation, while others referred to him as an "ambassador of colonialism" (quoted in Couvaras 2013, 33) seeking to undermine Zambia's political sovereignty. Ever since then, cases of discrimination against, and persecution of LGBTI people have escalated, and a "general hostility toward homosexuality" has been increasingly manifested (Kapembwa 2018, 1). Wahman and Drury (2018, 14) report that at least eight arrests have been made against persons that identify as LGBTI in the period 2013-2018. Over the same period, the United States Department of State, in its annual human rights reports, also has consistently cited acts of violence, discrimination and other abuses based on sexual orientation and gender identity as a major category of human rights violations in Zambia (*Zambia Human Rights Report 2017*, 21-22). Although President Sata, during his time in office (2011-2014), kept a relatively low profile on issues of homosexuality and LGBTI rights, his illness and frequent absence for medical treatment in 2013-2014 created a power vacuum in which other government ministers and politicians used the issue to build their public profile and gear up for the succession battle.

The EU Call for Proposals

In this context of political instability and politicized homosexuality, on 21 March 2013 the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Zambia published an advert in the newspaper *Zambia Daily Mail* calling for proposals from Zambian civil society organizations for funding of projects that seek to protect the human rights of various groups of people, including LGBTI persons. The funding call was part of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), which had been adopted by the European Parliament and the European Council in December 2006 and had entered into force on 1 January 2007 (replacing a previous scheme with a similar objective). According to the more detailed online guidelines for grant applicants, to which the advert referred,

> Gender identity and sexual orientation continue to be used as justifications for serious human rights violations around the world. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) people constitute a vulnerable group and continue to fall victims of persecution, discrimination and gross ill-treatment, often involving extreme forms of violence. In several countries, sexual relations between consenting adults of the same sex are considered a crime and punished with imprisonment or with the death penalty. In Zambia homosexuality is proscribed by the Penal Code and anyone found guilty is liable to imprisonment. This makes LGBTI people vulnerable and a target for discrimination (*Delegation of EU to Zambia* 2013, 2).

One of the specific objectives guiding the EU's call was "to support and strengthen the human rights defenders and civil society interventions, notably in the area of support and promotion of the rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender [and] Intersex (LGBTI) people" (ibid). The EU funding call exemplifies one of the diplomatic strategies through which European and Western foreign policy in recent years has sought to intervene in the politics of sexuality and LGBTI rights in Africa: the support of domestic NGOs with a view to local capacity building.

The seeming advantage of that strategy is that "domestic voices cannot as easily be shrugged off as promoting 'Western values'" (Wahman and Drury 2018, 6). Yet it turned out that this advantage did not occur in this case, as it was undermined by the very public nature of the EU advert in a national newspaper, which incited an equally public and vocal opposition from local political and religious leaders.

Before discussing this response, we may want to pause and ask: Why does the EU engage in LGBTI rights advocacy in Zambia in the first place? Exploring the question, "Why does Europe intervene in Africa?", scholar of international relations, Catherine Gegout, discusses various motives for EU military interventions in Africa over the past three decades, ranging from past relations (with former colonies), economic interests, security concerns, humanitarian concerns, and prestige (Gegout 2017). Beyond military intervention, some of these motives can also be observed in the European use of soft power mechanisms, such as the EIDHR. Under the EIDHR scheme, since 2007, hundreds of millions of Euros have been spent on a wide range of projects in over eighty countries, with the overall objective of "strengthening the role of civil society in promoting human rights and democratic reform, in facilitating the peaceful conciliation of group interests and in consolidating political participation and representation", with particular attention being paid to the rights of minorities including persons that belong to the LGBTI community (Shoraka 2010, 24). Humanitarian concerns about human rights violations may well be part of the motivation for the EU to fund projects in this area. Yet as with military intervention, diplomatic intervention may also have less altruistic motives. Of particular relevance for LGBTI rights advocacy is the motive of prestige, which works both internally and externally. Internally, this form of diplomacy might, explicitly or implicitly, aim to foster respect for the European Union among EU citizens, along the way reinforcing the EU's legitimacy, while externally, it might aim to build a positive reputation with other states and bodies such as the United Nations, which share similar cultural and political values (Gegout 2017, 40). In times of homonationalist narratives about a "homoinclusive Europe", EU foreign LGBTI rights diplomacy also allows for a new manifestation of a deeply rooted colonial tendency, in which Africa as the Other serves as a site for the West to assert its own identity (Mbembe 2001, 2). Thus, from this perspective, intervening in "homophobic Africa" enables Europe to develop its self-image as liberal and progressive. Yet perhaps different from the colonial past, the empire now speaks back.

Local Opposition

The EU's call for proposals prompted responses from a range of Zambian government officials and church leaders. In this chapter, we focus on two representative responses: one from the political establishment, the then Minister of Home Affairs, Edgar Chagwa Lungu, and another from the religious establishment, Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia's Executive Director, Rev. Pukuta Mwanza. Lungu's response is particularly worth examining because after the death of Sata and the following by-election in January 2015, he was elected as President and has remained in that position to date. Mwanza's response is significant because he represents a highly influential umbrella organization of evangelical and Pentecostal churches and

organizations in the country, which is hugely invested in defending Zambia's constitutional status as a Christian nation.

Responding on behalf of government, Lungu expressed his disappointment and disgust with the EU's call for proposals. Referring to same-sex relationships, he reportedly stated: "This is unZambian; it is not part of our culture. I know some money-hungry civil society organizations will fall for the money but we are waiting to see which Zambian will get the money and start championing same-sex marriages" (*Zambian Watchdog* 2013). He further suggested that the EU was wasting its money and time and could better "take the fight for gay rights to Europe", claiming – correctly so – that even in European countries, including EU member states, the issue is still contentious. His unsubtle response must be understood in the political context of the time, with the PF government being under pressure of the opposition to make clear it did not want to decriminalize homosexuality. Lungu was perhaps also trying to outbid another government minister and possible contender for the future PF leadership, the Minister of Justice, Wynter Kabimba, who had used similar rhetoric. Some weeks after publication of the EU advert, Kabimba expressed a more general concern about foreign funding, rhetorically asking: "Why should some institutions want to import this homosexuality and try to influence others to practise it?" He continued by stating that, "as Zambians, we declared that we are a Christian nation and there is no way we can allow this un-Zambian culture. I want to urge all Zambians to rise and denounce this vice" (*Lusaka Times* 2013).

This kind of rhetoric may come across as a recent phenomenon, but it may be worth providing some historical background. In the 1970s, during the first decade of Zambian independence, President Kaunda and his party (UNIP) launched a moral regeneration campaign, inspired by their philosophy of Zambian Humanism. Although homosexuality at that time was not an explicit concern, the campaign did seek to curb "immoral and un-Zambian media and behaviour" (Gordon 2012, 165) and had a major focus on issues of sexual morality, for instance the publication of nude pictures in the media. Interestingly, the rhetoric used to oppose such "immoral" behaviors follows a similar strategy as the contemporary discourses about homosexuality. Kaunda, in his 1975 Watershed Speech, explicitly stated: "This is Zambia with its own way of life and not Europe" (quoted in Gordon 2012, 165). This example shows that since Zambia's independence, sexuality has been a terrain to claim and defend Zambian sovereignty vis-a-vis Western influence and interference – one significant difference being that Kaunda's philosophy of Zambian Humanism was not explicitly Christian, while the current rhetoric is very much framed in the discourse of Zambian Christian nationalism (Van Klinken 2018).

Following the Zambian government's response, on behalf of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia (EFZ) Rev. Mwanza also expressed his concern about and discontentment with the EU's call for proposals. In his open letter to the leader of the EU's delegation in Zambia, Mwanza articulated the "very firm and uncompromising stand" of his organization against "homosexuality, lesbian and transgender practices":

> We firmly support the position that has been taken by the Zambian government in rejecting this inhuman and unnatural practice. It is unlawful in Zambia to engage in homosexual acts and therefore you are promoting a way of behavior that is at variance with the law of this country and unacceptable to our society. We urge our Zambian government not to succumb to your pressures in seeking to interfere with the internal affairs of our sovereign nation by promoting the so-called 'human' rights that are contrary to our fundamental Christian values and our rich African and traditional beliefs and practices which abhor those practices you are seeking to promote. (Mwanza 2013)

Interestingly, Mwanza not only makes it clear that same-sex practices are illegal in Zambia and that homosexuality in particular is "inhuman", "unnatural" and "un-Christian"; he also suggests that the EU, by making this call, is not respecting the democratic sovereignty of Zambia. Subsequently, he applauds the Zambian government for its opposition against the EU's action, while simultaneously calling upon the government not to give in to any foreign pressure.

The responses from these political and religious leaders reflect a broader tendency within African postcolonial discourse to represent homosexuality and LGBTI rights as a foreign Western imposition. This discourse reflects, in the words of Basile Ndjio (2013, 128), a "moral economy of alterity which cultivates homogeneity and dramatizes authenticity", in which "homosexuality and other transgressive desires have been denounced as influenced by neocolonialist forces attempting to realienate or reacculturate the minds that African nationalists set free of such burdens and 'purified'". Thus, where in recent decades, sexuality has been appropriated by the West to build its own prestige and self-image, it has also been appropriated by postcolonial African politicians and opinion leaders to contest Western influence and claim African identity vis-à-vis a liberal and secular Europe. As a result of these dynamics and of the growing sense of African independence and sovereignty, politicians such as Lungu, and religious leaders such as Mwanza, do not hesitate to strongly resist European interventions that seek to promote LGBTI rights in their country. As far as Europe is still seen as the "colonial master", it no longer is seen as a benign benefactor and as a "guardian of the standard of civilisation" (Mailafia 2014), but as a direct threat to Zambia's ability and right to shape its own civilization. In other words, the EU is seen as a neo-colonial imperialist power not respecting Zambian sovereignty.

A closer examination of the exact arguments used in these responses is revealing. The idea of homosexuality as "un-Zambian" follows the strategy of inventing an authentic Zambian and African sexuality, which is thought of as strictly heterosexual. Obviously, this claim is at odds with the historical and ethnographic accounts from southern and central African regions including neighboring Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to the north, and Zimbabwe to the south. These accounts, dating back to the pre-colonial era, suggest that African societies tolerated, and in some cases embraced, same-sex sexual relations, usually within a so-called "culture of discretion" (Epprecht 2004, 37). This is buttressed by prehistoric cave paintings, oral history, and literary reconstruction from these societies (Epprecht 2004; Morgan and

Wieringa 2005). Extrapolating this evidence, Couvaras (2013, 45-47) posits that it is likely that also precolonial Zambian societies knew, and somehow were accommodating of, homosexuality. Paradoxically, the current Zambian laws that criminalizes homosexuality were only introduced in Zambia (then Northern Rhodesia) by the colonial masters in 1931, as part of a deliberate colonial project of constructing and policing an "exclusively heterosexual African sexuality" (Epprecht 2008, 6). Before that time, there is no record of discrimination against sexual minorities or criminalization of homosexuality. Thus it seems ironic that Lungu and Mwanza refer to homosexuality as "un-Zambian", and suggest that opposing the practice is a true act of Zambian patriotism. This reflects an obvious example of "postcolonial amnesia", with "the memories of certain sexual practices, cultures, or norms" being deliberately forgotten, which in turn fuels moral panics when these issues appear in present-day society (Wieringa 2009, 205).

The idea of homosexuality as "un-Christian" is also apparent in the above-discussed responses. The moral economy of sexuality, as conceptualized by Ndjio, in the Zambian case appears to frame sexuality as a key site not only of "African authenticity", but also of "Christian integrity". This demonstrates how Christianity as a public religion directly feeds into the nationalization of sexuality in Zambia (Van Klinken 2014, 2017; Muwina 2016). In Mwanza's response, both the canons of religion – "our fundamental Christian values" – and of culture – "our rich African and traditional beliefs and practices" – are invoked to oppose the threat posed by the EU, which echoes Chiluba's earlier quoted opposition against homosexuality because of its "un-biblical" and "un-Zambian" nature. A noteworthy fact here is that Christianity itself, of course, is not original to Zambia and has not always been part of local cultural values. Christianity was only introduced in the land currently known as Zambia by European missionaries, most famously the British missionary and explorer David Livingstone, who came to the region in the mid-nineteenth century. There is strong historical evidence suggesting that negative attitudes against non-heterosexual persons were introduced to the African continent by western missionaries, who were stunned by attitudes of toleration that where exhibited by indigenous Africans towards persons that engaged in sexual relations with members of the same sex Epprecht, for instance, posits that "dogmatic revulsion against same-sex behavior, acts, relationships, and thoughts was introduced into the region by European colonialists and preachers" (Epprecht 2004, 225). It is thus ironic that Lungu and Mwanza, among other political and religious leaders, resist the efforts by the West to curb homophobic tendencies, by employing homophobic rhetoric in the language of Christianity and Bible, introduced by the West in the first place alongside the other Cs of colonialism – civilisation and commerce.

Two further ironies can be observed in the Zambian responses to the EU's call for proposals. These are most obvious in Mwanza's more elaborate response. First, Mwanza (2013) appears to employ a democratic argument, writing that "in a democracy, the interest of the majority must be respected. The interests of the minority groups to pursue unacceptable practice and behavior cannot supersede the interests of the majority." Just like the case with Christianity, democracy has not always been part of the Zambian political culture. Democracy was only introduced in Zambia in 1964 with the gaining of independence, and multi-party democracy was only re-installed in 1991. In the period of one-party democracy under Kaunda (1972–1991) and also in more recent years (specifically, under the current Lungu administration), the EU

and several Western countries have expressed their concern about the state of democracy in Zambia, and have actively supported the building of a democratic culture and relevant institutions. Mwanza's deployment of the language of democracy thus presents another example of him using the same language first introduced by the West in order to resist the new Western concern with LGBTI rights. He explicitly insinuates that in fact the EU is acting undemocratically as it "tamper[s] with the will of the majority [of] Zambians" and uses its money for "arm twisting methods" to violate the Zambian constitution. Needless to say, he interprets democracy in a particular way, basically as a form of majority rule, ignoring the tradition of political thought about liberal democracy as a system in which the rights of minorities are constitutionally safeguarded.

Second, Mwanza invokes the language of human rights – again a discourse deeply associated with Western liberal socio-political agendas. Here he accuses the European Union of "promoting the so-called 'human' rights that are contrary to our fundamental Christian values and our rich African and traditional beliefs and practices". By putting the word "human" between inverted commas, he signals his disagreement with the idea that LGBTI rights are human rights. Indeed, later in his letter he explicitly refers to homosexuality as an "inhuman" practice. Further elaborating on this while speaking at a 2015 symposium on the church and human rights in Zambia, Mwanza argued: "Gay rights are ungodly because homosexuality is contrary to God's creative (sic) order of human beings. Human beings are not supposed to exercise a right in an area that God has forbidden" (Mwanza 2015). From this religious perspective, criminalizing homosexuality might even be seen as a way of safeguarding human rights, as it serves to prevent people engaging in dehumanizing activities and thus to protect their human dignity. Possibly with the EU incident still on his mind, Mwanza continued by stating: "We see wealthier governments in the West standing up to defend homosexuality as a critical factor of human rights and governance system. This is showing a double standard in the enforcement of these rights everywhere" (Mwanza 2015).

Speaking Back as Catachresis

Mwanza's use of the language of Christianity, democracy and human rights illustrates the irony in Zambian anti-LGBTI rhetoric: it resists Western pressure by using arguments and modes of thought appropriated from the West and adapted to serve local agendas. It is a fascinating exemplar of the "empire speaking back" to its former colonial masters in language introduced by, and associated with these masters in the first place. Where the use of the cultural argument exemplifies a case of postcolonial amnesia, the use of the arguments centered on Christianity, democracy and human rights can be seen as a form of postcolonial *catachresis*. In postcolonial studies, the concept of catachresis refers to the process by which the (formerly) colonized people "take and reinscribe something that exists traditionally as a feature of imperial culture" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2007, 30). As an example of this, Gayatri Spivak discusses the claims made by postcolonial societies to the discourse that is part of the legacy of the European Enlightenment, such as about citizenship, constitutionality, nationhood, self-determination and sovereignty. Such claims, she writes, "are catachrestical claims, their strategy a displacing and seizing of a coding of value"; these claims "show that the alternative to Europe's long story –

generally translated as ‘great narratives’ – is not only short tales (*petit récits*) but [also] tampering with the authority of storylines” (Spivak 1990, 207).

One major site in which processes of catachresis can be observed is the area of religion, gender and sexuality (Hawthorne and Van Klinken 2013). Many of the issues in this field have become highly symbolic in the postcolonial contestations over value-coding; the controversies about homosexuality and LGBTI rights in contemporary Africa serve as a key exemplar. It may be tempting, especially for liberal-minded academics like ourselves, to take issue with Mwanza’s invocation of the language of Christianity, democracy and human rights, and to enter into a debate about his understanding of these concepts and the traditions of thought they represent. Yet resisting that temptation for now, we conclude this chapter by noting that the EU vs Zambia controversy examined here illustrates a critical point about the complex and ambiguous dynamics of global sexual politics in the postcolony. The great narrative that is being undermined – or tampered, in Spivak’s words – by the Zambian response to the EU call for proposals is the Western liberal narrative in which modernity is equated to the progressive advancement of LGBTI rights, and in which nations which do not acknowledge LGBTI rights are pre- or anti-modern. Political homophobia in Zambia, as in other African countries, is a manifestation of postcolonial modernity itself, albeit an ambiguous one. It is ambiguous because it inscribes into colonial and missionary rhetoric and legislation regarding sexuality, while simultaneously expressing decolonization through resistance to contemporary forms of Western hegemony, specifically European ideological intervention. Jasbir Puar (2007) has analyzed how in American and European forms of homonationalism, queerness is split: certain forms of “acceptable” (typically white, middle class, homonormative) queerness are incorporated in nationalist and imperialist politics, while other forms are disguised as the nation’s Other and framed as a threat to national security. Complementing this analysis, Rahul Rao (2014, 184) has suggested that homophobia in Africa and elsewhere has “a plasticity and versatility analogous to that attributed to queerness in Puar’s argument, enabling its conjunction with both imperial collaboration and anticolonial nationalism”.

To conclude, European foreign LGBTI rights diplomacy uses sexuality as a site to assert its own identity and build prestige vis-à-vis a “homophobic” Africa. Doing so, it adds another chapter to a long tradition of the Western othering of Africa, the difference being that postcolonial Africa has engaged the same site to resist such efforts, and indeed to claim its own identity vis-à-vis a secular and liberal Europe. The empire now speaks back.

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