

Real Africans only like the Missionary Position!
Uganda's homophobic laws

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Real Africans should not engage in oral sex because like homosexuality, it comes from the outside a.k.a. the evil West with its wayward ways and rampant unnatural forms of fornication. Whether it's the iPhone or ice cream, apparently nothing good can ever be indigenous to Africa and now even oral sex is an exotic import according to President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda.

On first reading his speech of 24 February, 2014, delivered while he signed yet another homophobic law, I thought to myself, this speech must be satirized! But then I thought, how can I satirize what is already satire? Do African presidents have speechwriters or do they just produce this parody on their own?

I remember when George "Dubya" Bush was ruling the American Empire and satirists Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert had virtually no work to do. They just played the tape of his buffoonery because what was the point of trying to expose his failings to make him look even more ridiculous and inept when he was already doing such a stellar job himself?

In a similar vein, let's just dwell on Museveni's own words and then let's ponder the...logic, for lack of a better word, and the profound and deadly inconsistencies that underlie his assertions about how to be a real African:

"Since Western societies do not appreciate politeness, let me take this opportunity to warn our people publicly about the wrong practices indulged in and promoted by some of the outsiders.

One of them is 'oral sex'. Our youth should reject this because God designed the human being most appropriately for pleasurable, sustainable and healthy sex. Some of the traditional styles are very pleasurable and healthy. The mouth is not engineered for that purpose except kissing. Besides, it is very unhealthy. People can even contract gonorrhoea of the mouth and throat on account of so-called 'oral sex', not to mention worms, hepatitis E, etc.

The Ministry of Gender and Youth should de-campaign this buyayism imported from outside and sensitize the youth about the healthy life style that is abundant in our cultures.”

Thankfully, Museveni wants to be polite but he must react to this buyayism (unbecoming, un-Ugandan, un-African thuggish behavior) coming from outside with precise descriptions of the dangers of so-called oral sex. Even more graphic and lurid details of homosexual practices come from his Minister for “ethics and integrity,” Simon Lokodo, who apparently thinks it is dignified to say things like, “Excretion is through the anus, like the exhaust of an engine... They’re twisting nature the wrong way... [homosexuality] will destroy health because the backsides will not hold.”

Lokodo is a former Catholic priest and Museveni describes himself as a born-again Christian but whilst they protest sexual practices which supposedly come from the impolite west, they seem to have no problem with Christianity which actually *does* come from the West. Christianity came to Africa as part of the Colonizing Mission, brought by missionaries who wittingly and unwittingly helped further the European imperial project. This is fact. Should we presume that before Christianity violently penetrated traditional African societies, the real Africans only practiced healthy missionary-position-style sex?

Too often, in the name of so-called African culture, conservative African factions accuse anything that they disagree with as coming from the outside. They usually like to make these accusations from a pulpit, however, with no apparent awareness of the irony. (I am not sure whether a self-satirizer can appreciate irony.) Of course, there is a range of sexual practices in every society and heterosexuals also have anuses and can use them as they please. Before the arrival of the missionaries, there were indeed same-sex relations, even in Uganda, as Thebe Ikalafeng brilliantly makes clear with actual historical examples (<http://www.iol.co.za/sundayindependent/coming-out-for-sake-of-humanity-1.1654822#.UxNfE17VGpI>).

But whether homosexuality is indigenous to Africa or not, and whether it is the result of nurture or nature which was one of the factors Museveni contemplated before signing into law draconian measures, is in fact besides the point. This battle over homosexuality is mere camouflage, a fatal displacement because Museveni is

hypocritically and opportunistically using gay Africans as a prop to assert his autonomy and refute his image of being a western-backed dictator. Hence, a good part of his speech was directed to the West which is why the speech begins with an apparent non-sequitur, "It seems the topic of homosexuals was provoked by the arrogant and careless Western groups..." You see, this speech was part of the never-ending waltz that African governments are dancing with Western aid donors and there is a constant struggle over who will lead and who will follow, who will twirl and who will be twirled.

It is true that the West expediently uses the rhetoric of human/gay rights to geopolitically contain countries from China and Russia (think Sochi Olympics) to Uganda, threatening to cut off aid at times but not arms sales. The West is of course hypocritical and selective in its invocation of "universal" human rights (can I just say Guantanamo, renditions, Iraq etc.) but standing up to the West should not translate into oppressing people in your own country. So when Museveni says, "I am not able to understand the logic of the Western Culture. However, we Africans always keep our own opinions to ourselves and never seek to impose our point of view on the others. If only they could let us alone," why can't he extend this logic to his own people? Why must he impose his (British colonial missionary education/American evangelical) Christian point of view on Ugandans who want to love someone of the same gender? Why can't he just let them alone?

Why has he, instead, introduced a law in which promoting gay rights or same sex marriage carries a penalty of five to seven years in prison, in which those found "guilty" of a first offence of homosexuality face up to fourteen years in prison and the sentence for "aggravated homosexuality" is life imprisonment?

Worse: The day after this law was passed, a Ugandan tabloid published a list of 200 suspected homosexuals which means that homophobes may seize this opportunity as a veritable "license to kill." When Ugandan gay rights activist, David Kato, was battered to death in his home in 2011 after a local paper published his name and address, the world assumed it was an anti-gay mob but the police report blamed his lover. Incendiary laws make it all too easy to dispense of an enemy by opening the door to potential violence and making it difficult to ascertain the facts in the ensuing confusion. Women who are listed may be assaulted or "treated" with "corrective rape" - a common occurrence in South Africa - which is when suspected lesbians are gang raped

by a group of men with the noble goal of “curing” them of lesbianism and teaching them how to love men. Because there is nothing like wielding your penis as a weapon to make a misguided woman come to her senses, right?

Rape is an actual problem: why can't African countries be known for their anti-rape laws? What value system is the Ugandan government really promoting? Is it really Christian to promote such hatred? Is it really African to treat your fellow Africans like this?

It should be reiterated that the word African is derived from Latin. It was the Latin-speaking Romans who named our continent and we have taken that name. Like Christianity, it is something that has come from the outside to shape Africa and Africa's relationship to the world. When the governments of Nigeria, the Gambia, Zimbabwe, Uganda etc. vilify gays as un-African, it is merely crude demagoguery but sadly, it gains them support from populations who are struggling in a Western-dominated world economy. Be that as it may, attempts to whip up and legally sanction homophobia must be refused by all Africans. The courage of David Kato, Kenyan-Ugandan author Binyavanga Wainaina who publicly declared himself a homosexual earlier this year and the fearless efforts of GALZ (Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe) are just a few positive examples of some real Africans standing up for what is right but also for what is African and what is ultimately human.

When Museveni and his conservative cohorts conflate African tradition with Christianity, they are setting a dangerous precedent. Why are they allowed to police the borders of Africanness, picking and choosing what they want to embrace from the outside? Museveni was named after the number seven “in honor of the Seventh Regiment of the King's African Rifles, the British colonial army in which many Ugandans served during World War II” according to his official bio. Like his very name, an African identity is a hybrid construction, historically conditioned but not foreclosed upon the future.

We must struggle to ensure that going forward all Africans have the right to thrive and flourish and love as they choose.