Issues of same-sex relationships and gay and lesbian rights are subject of public and political controversy in many African societies today. Frequently, these controversies receive widespread attention both locally and globally. The Anti-Homosexuality Bill currently pending in the Ugandan parliament is a well-known example, but many other examples could be given. In the international media, these cases tend to be presented as revealing a deeply-rooted homophobia in Africa fuelled by religious and cultural traditions on the continent. But so far little energy is expended in understanding these controversies in all their complexity and the critical role religion plays in them. This book volume seeks to address this gap and to enhance such an understanding, exploring issues of religion and homosexuality from various disciplinary perspectives, including religious studies, anthropology and theology, informed by critical social and cultural theory such as postcolonial and queer perspectives.

As editors we share, on the one hand, a concern about the apparent rise of anti-homosexual rhetoric and politics in African contexts, and on the other hand about the image of a generally homophobic Africa that is popular in the West (Awondo, Geschiere & Reid 2012). Through this book project we aim to explore how and why issues related to homosexuality recently have become so central in public and political debates in Africa, examining the trajectories of the ‘politicisation’ of the issue (Awondo 2010) in different countries in relation to both global discourses and politics and local social, cultural and political factors and developments. The project particularly examines the role of religion (religious beliefs, worldviews and sensitivities, sacred texts, religious leaders and organisations, faith communities, faith-based activism, etcetera) in these dynamics—a role that most likely is more ambiguous and multifaceted than often is suggested. We propose a focus on the notion of ‘public religion’, as this enables an analysis of the conflation of religion with politics and public life that is characteristic of the configuration of religion—specifically the major religions, Christianity, Islam and traditional or indigenous religions—in contemporary African societies (Ellis & Ter Haar 2007; Englund 2011) and that is clearly reflected in the debates about homosexuality. Not only does the notion of public religion mean that religion in Africa is highly visible in public and political spheres, but also that it relates in dynamic and complex ways to secular regimes of knowledge, power and politics both nationally and globally—something that is particularly relevant to the contemporary debates about issues related to homosexuality in Africa (Van Klinken 2013; Togarasei & Chitando 2011).
We envision this project as contributing, on the one hand, to the critical analysis and deconstruction of the various myths and popular perceptions—both in Africa and in the West—concerning homosexuality and religion in Africa, and of the local and global dynamics of power in which African debates on the issue are entangled, and on the other hand, to the rethinking of issues of homosexuality from African religious perspectives in relation to broader questions of human rights and social justice (Epprecht 2013).

As editors we solicit papers that either present case studies on public religion and controversies about homosexuality in specific African countries, or explore key themes and perspectives relevant to the understanding of dynamics and debates concerning religion and homosexuality in Africa more generally. We consider young African scholars as important contributors to the proposed debate and would like to encourage them to submit a proposal.

The book is likely to be published in the new Ashgate series Religion in Modern Africa edited by Professor James L. Cox (University of Edinburgh) and Professor Gerrie ter Haar (Institute of Social Studies, The Hague).

Submitting a proposal

Proposals for contributions can be submitted to the editors (see email addresses below) until 31 October 2013. Proposals should include the title, an abstract (400-500 words) and a biographic statement indicating the author’s affiliation, research interests and key publications (100 words).

Authors will be informed about acceptance by November 2013. The deadline for full versions of articles will be July 2014, after which they will go through a process of review and revision.

The editors

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Bibliography


