

Decolonial Homophobia: Is Decolonisation Incompatible with LGBT+ Affirmation in Christian Ethics?

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Abstract

I evaluate the argument advanced in politics and Christian ethics that I term ‘decolonial homophobia’: that decolonisation and LGBT+ affirmation are contradictory because LGBT+ rights are a global Northern phenomenon that is imperialistically imposed on the global South. I suggest one premise of the argument is valid—neo-colonial imposition of LGBT+ rights does happen and should be opposed. However, the overall argument fails because it erases or distorts diverse views and complexities of pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial history, and it tacitly supports ‘homophobic nationalism’ that is oppressive even when advanced in ostensibly decolonial causes. I grant that there are tensions within many current expressions of decolonisation and LGBT+ rights, but argue that Christians should support both decolonisation and LGBT+ rights as intersecting justice issues. I close by suggesting we listen to global Southern LGBT+ activists like Uganda’s *kuchus* on how to navigate this tension and pursue intersectional justice in all societies.

Keywords

Decolonisation, colonisation, LGBT+, homophobia, Uganda, Africa, Anglican Communion, evangelical

Introduction

In 2015, Robert Mugabe told the UN General Assembly that the global North is ‘politici[sing]’ human rights and ‘victimi[sing]’ Zimbabwe by imposing “‘new rights’” ... contrary to [Zimbabwean] values, norms, traditions, and beliefs’ ... adding ‘we are

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not gays!’¹ Pope Francis has frequently criticised LGBT+ rights, and its promotion through global education programmes, as ‘ideological colonization’, part of a ‘world war on marriage’ that ‘eradicate[s] [countries]... traditions, history and religious beliefs’.² These two very different men are both positing a conflict between LGBT+ justice and decolonisation. I call this the ‘decolonial homophobia’ argument or narrative: that LGBT+ rights is a global Northern cause and formerly colonised countries exercising self-determination means opposing LGBT+ rights.

Some Christians who oppose LGBT+ affirmation welcome this narrative as a way to discredit LGBT+ rights. Others choose LGBT+ affirmation over decolonisation, justifying colonial attitudes and racism in the interests of LGBT+ rights. For the rest of us, this narrative presents a moral quandary. We want to support Christians from the global South, and we want to support decolonisation. We also want to love and support LGBT+ people. How do we respond?

I first outline the history of this argument in politics and Christianity, including a prominent political outworking of this argument in Uganda. I then explore what is true about the decolonial homophobia argument: neo-colonial imposition of LGBT+ rights does exist and should be opposed. However, I suggest the overall argument has multiple problems: it erases diverse views and complexities of pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial history, and it tacitly supports ‘homophobic nationalism’ that is oppressive even when advanced in ostensibly decolonial causes. I argue that there are tensions within many current expressions of decolonisation and LGBT+ rights, but that Christian ethicists must support both decolonisation and LGBT+ rights as intersecting

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1. Bil Browning, ‘WATCH: Zimbabwe’s President Tells U.N.: “We Are Not Gays!”’, *The Advocate*, 29 September 2015, <http://www.advocate.com/world/2015/9/29/watch-zimbabwes-president-tells-un-we-are-not-gays>.
 2. Alan Holdren, ‘Pope Francis Warns West over “Ideological Colonization”’, *National Catholic Register*, 20 January 2015, sec. Daily News; Ann Schneible, ‘Gay Marriage Is “Ideological Colonization,” Says Vatican Spokesman’, *Catholic News Agency*, 16 January 2015, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/31301/gay-marriage-is-ideological-colonization-says-vatican-spokesman>; Reuters Staff, ‘Pope Says Gender Theory Part of “Global War” on Marriage, Family’, *Reuters*, 1 October 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pope-georgia-gender-idUSKCN1213KH>; Nicole Winfield, ‘Pope Francis Urges Pastoral Care for Transgender People, Draws Line between Ministry and “Indoctrination”’, *Washington Post*, 2 October 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2016/10/02/pope-francis-urges-pastoral-care-for-gay-transgender-people-draws-line-between-ministry-and-indoctrination/>; Rome Reports, ‘Pope Francis Calls Gender Ideology a Form of “Ideological Colonization”’, *Rome Reports* (blog), 14 October 2022, <https://www.romereports.com/en/2022/10/14/pope-francis-calls-gender-ideology-a-form-of-ideological-colonization/>; Courtney Mares, ‘Pope Francis: Gender Ideology is “One of the Most Dangerous Ideological Colonizations Today”’, *Catholic News Agency*, 11 March 2023, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/253845/pope-francis-gender-ideology-is-one-of-the-most-dangerous-ideological-colonizations-today>; Lisa Zengarini, ‘Pope: Modern Neocolonialism is a Crime and a Threat to Peace’, *Vatican News*, 1 April 2023, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2023-04/pope-modern-neocolonialism-is-a-crime-and-threat-to-peace.html>.

justice issues. I close by suggesting we listen to global Southern LGBT+ activists like Uganda's *kuchus* on how to navigate the tension and pursue intersectional justice.

This article has a narrow and primarily descriptive focus. I aim to refute the decolonial homophobia argument that features in some Christian ethical discussion. I hope this analysis can, in some small way, support Christian ethical discernment and discussion by helping to reduce the unhelpful role this argument sometimes plays. I leave fuller theological ethics of pursuing LGBT+ justice and decolonisation in the world and the church to other enquiries and other authors more qualified than me. The decolonial homophobia argument I examine is largely descriptive and based on broadly sociological assertions rather than developed theological ethical reasoning, and this is also true of much of my critique. I hope to show that the purported inherent conflict between decolonisation and LGBT+ affirmation does not hold, and that it is possible to support both causes as intersecting justice issues, if tensions, complexities, and power imbalances are navigated wisely. That said, normative Christian ethical claims do appear in this article, explicitly and implicitly. It is beyond the article's purview to provide full theological-ethical arguments for my normative commitments, which must therefore remain as assumptions, but I will venture a brief summary.

I affirm that God's mission, reign, and vision for human social life entails good news for the poor and liberation for the oppressed, and opposes imperialism by ancient empires, modern European powers, and more recent neo-colonialists. These forms of domination limit the human flourishing of both oppressed and oppressor and do not respect inherent human dignity, let alone God's preferential option for the poor. God works to liberate people from sinful oppression to live personal and communal lives of justice, freedom, mercy, and divine love, unafraid under their own vines and fig trees. I support an affirming stance towards healthy LGBT+ identities and relationships as the best expression of the trajectory of Scripture, natural law, human flourishing and liberation, and the significance of God's new creation in light of what we know from our experiences within creation and with our Creator.³ I also affirm that interpretation of experience to identify oppression and guide our understanding of human flourishing is a valid, fruitful source of Christian theological-ethical insight. This is true of biblical authors identifying and opposing oppression, contemporary social scientists, and individual oppressed people interpreting their experience—and I later suggest we acknowledge some hermeneutical privilege of the oppressed in analysing social systems that affect them.

3. In this article and in my previous academic work in Christian ethics, I have focused largely on same-sex relationships, and I came across the decolonial homophobia argument in this context. Some theological-ethical arguments I find persuasive on LGBT+ relationships are Karen R. Keen, *Scripture, Ethics, and the Possibility of Same-Sex Relationships* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018); James V. Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013); Jean Porter, 'The Natural Law and Innovative Forms of Marriage: A Reconsideration', *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 30.2 (2010), pp. 79–97, <https://doi.org/10.5840/jsce20103026>; Robert Song, *Covenant and Calling: Towards a Theology of Same-Sex Relationships* (London: SCM Press, 2014).

I hope readers find my analysis and evaluation of the decolonial homophobia argument useful even if they disagree with some of my normative claims. I do note that some opposition to homophobia and acceptance of unchosen gay orientation as not inherently sinful is part of a ‘consensus position’ even among non-affirming Northern Christians in recent decades, and that this generally includes opposition to criminalising LGBT+ relationships and overt hostility towards LGBT+ persons.⁴ I therefore expect agreement with much of my normative position from non-affirming readers and some people whom I challenge for exhibiting elements of the decolonial homophobia argument.

At this point, some comments on terminology and on my own positionality are in order. ‘*Kuchu*’ is a term from Kampala, Uganda broadly equivalent to the category ‘LGBT+’.⁵ I use ‘Northern’ and ‘Southern’ to refer to the global North and South. By ‘LGBT+ rights’ or ‘LGBT+ affirmation’, I mean affirming gay relationships, trans identities, and other gender/sexual minority experiences in church and society, and by ‘homophobia’, I mean opposing these relationships or identities—with or without overt hostility. It is beyond this article’s scope to parse various forms of LGBT+ affirmation and non-affirmation.

I write as an outsider to this topic. I am a straight, white man from Aotearoa/New Zealand, my grandparents’ grandparents were colonists, and the closest I have been to Uganda is Paris. However, I have found this moral issue weighs upon me, as I believe God’s reign supports both decolonisation and LGBT+ justice.

The Decolonial Homophobia Argument

What I call the ‘decolonial homophobia argument’ generally includes (or implies) the following premises:

1. Most people, most places, have been consistently, unanimously anti-LGBT+.
2. Acceptance of LGBT+ identities and relationships has arisen in the global North since the nineteenth century.
3. Recently, in societies and churches, Northerners have been trying to spread LGBT+ rights globally in neo-colonial attempts to ‘enlighten’ what they see as ‘backward’ Southern societies/churches. Southerners resist this neo-colonial imposition.
4. Thus, decolonisation and LGBT+ rights are in conflict. In global church bodies (for example), being decolonial requires rejecting LGBT+ rights, and promoting LGBT+ rights globally means being neo-colonial.

4. Mark Vasey-Saunders, *Defusing the Sexuality Debate: Anglican Evangelicals in Conflict* (London: SCM Press, 2023), pp. 1–37.

5. *Kuchu* is a Ugandan term, broadly equivalent to ‘LGBT+’, used by some (especially Kampala-based) Ugandan sexual/gender minorities to refer to themselves. GayUganda, ‘Kuchu Identities’, *GayUganda* (blog), 25 October 2007, <http://gayuganda.blogspot.com/2007/10/kuchu-identities.html>; Stella Nyanzi, ‘Dismantling Reified African Culture through Localised Homosexualities in Uganda’, *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 15.8 (2013), pp. 958–60.

I suggest these premises and this conclusion contain some truth and some untruth, and that fuller history and other important considerations suggest the conflict narrative is unsatisfactory.

The term ‘decolonial homophobia’ is obviously not used by those making this argument. Three Anglican examples show ways its proponents do express it. First, Ghanaian bishop Victor Atta-Baffoe stated ‘homosexuality is un-African’, criticising “‘pernicious” attempts by Northern governments and churches to pressure the country to accept same-sex marriage’.⁶ Second, when Archbishop Justin Welby criticised Ghanaian, Nigerian, and Ugandan bishops’ support of their countries’ anti-gay laws, global Anglican group GAFCON accused Welby of repeating historical ‘colonisation and patronising behaviour towards ... Africa’.⁷ Third, US theologian Esau McCaulley touches on elements of the narrative without expounding the full argument, criticising neo-colonial attitudes by Northern liberals in relation to LGBT+ rights, and implying LGBT+ rights are a Northern phenomenon.⁸

History and Geography of the Argument

The ‘decolonial homophobia’ argument is particularly prominent in the Anglican Communion, which is bitterly divided on homosexuality especially since the 1990s.⁹ This is because decolonial homophobia is particularly strong in former British colonies, for reasons I explore below.¹⁰ The former British colonies most associated with decolonial homophobia are in Africa, including Nigeria, Ghana, the Sudans, Kenya, and Uganda.¹¹

6. George Conger, ‘Homosexuality is Un-African Says Ghana Diocese’, *Anglican Ink* (blog), 20 August 2015, <https://anglican.ink/2015/08/20/homosexuality-is-un-african-says-ghana-diocese/>.

7. Laurent Mbanda, ‘Gafcon Response to Archbishop of Canterbury’, GAFCON Global Anglicans, 14 June 2023, <https://www.gafcon.org/news/gafcon-response-to-archbishop-of-canterbury>; Harriet Sherwood, ‘Justin Welby Condemns Nigerian Archbishop’s Gay “Virus” Comments’, *The Guardian*, 6 March 2021, sec. UK news, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/06/justin-welby-condemns-nigerian-archbishop-henry-ndukuba-gay-virus-comments>; Hattie Williams, ‘Welby Apologises for Ghana LGBTQ+ Pronouncement’, *Church Times*, 12 November 2021, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/19-november/news/uk/welby-apologises-for-ghana-lgbtqplus-pronouncement>; Stephen Samuel Kaziimba Mugalu, ‘Archbishop Kaziimba Responds to Archbishop of Canterbury on Anti-Homosexuality Act 2023’, Church of Uganda, 9 June 2023, <https://churchofuganda.org/blog/2023/06/09/archbishop-kaziimba-responds-to-archbishop-of-canterbury-on-anti-homosexuality-act-2023/>.

8. Esau McCaulley, ‘Blaming the Africans: Cultural Imperialism and the Meeting of the Primates’, *Covenant* (blog), 16 January 2016, <https://covenant.livingchurch.org/2016/01/16/blaming-the-africans-cultural-imperialism-and-the-meeting-of-the-primates/>.

9. Miranda K. Hassett, *Anglican Communion in Crisis: How Episcopal Dissidents and their African Allies are Reshaping Anglicanism* (Princeton, NJ; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007).

10. Hassett, *Anglican Communion in Crisis*, pp. 24–25.

11. The largest modern African countries covering areas mostly under British imperial control in the nineteenth and/or twentieth centuries are Nigeria, Ghana, Egypt, Sudan and South Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa.

Explicit anti-colonial nationalist opposition to homosexuality was popularised across the African continent in the 1990s¹² by former revolutionaries, now ageing national leaders seeking to hold onto power in Zimbabwe, Namibia, Kenya, and Uganda.¹³ Overt homophobia also increased in reaction to rising gay rights movements in various African countries.¹⁴ It gained importance for Christians with sexuality debates at the 1998 Lambeth Conference¹⁵

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12. One illustration of the recency of prominent religious/moral opposition to homosexuality on the African continent is that, as late as 1994, anthropologists were still having to push against an influential theory that ‘no religious moral value is attached to sexual activity in Africa’. Beth Maina Ahlberg, ‘Is There a Distinct African Sexuality? A Critical Response to Caldwell’, in Rachel Spronk and Thomas Hendriks (eds.), *Readings in Sexualities from Africa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 28.
 13. Hassett, *Anglican Communion in Crisis*, pp. 83–86; Patrick Awondo, Peter Geschiere, and Graeme Reid, ‘Homophobic Africa? Toward a More Nuanced View’, *African Studies Review* 55.3 (2012), pp. 147–48, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0002020600007241>; Basile Ndjio, ‘Post-Colonial Histories of Sexuality: The Political Invention of a Libidinal African Straight’, *Africa* 82.4 (2012), pp. 612–18, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972012000526>; Sylvia Tamale, ‘Confronting the Politics of Nonconforming Sexualities in Africa’, *African Studies Review* 56.2 (2013), p. 39, <https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2013.40>; Kapyra Kaoma, ‘The Paradox and Tension of Moral Claims: Evangelical Christianity, the Politicization and Globalization of Sexual Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa’, *Critical Research on Religion* 2.3 (2014), p. 231, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050303214552571>; Susan L. Haskins, ‘The Influence of Roman Laws Regarding Same-Sex Acts on Homophobia in Africa’, *African Human Rights Law Journal* 14 (2014), p. 399 n. 30; Lovemore Ndlovu, ‘The Anti-Homosexuality Narrative in the Anglican Church in Zimbabwe: Political Diatribe or Religious Conservatism?’, in Ezra Chitando and Adriaan S. van Klinken (eds.), *Christianity and Controversies over Homosexuality in Contemporary Africa, Religion in Modern Africa* (London; New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 99–100, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315571928>; Damaris Seleina Parsitau, ‘Law, Religion, and the Politicization of Sexual Citizenship in Kenya’, *Journal of Law and Religion* 36.1 (2021), pp. 115–17, <https://doi.org/10.1017/jlr.2021.12>.
 14. Adrian Jjuuko, ‘The Incremental Approach: Uganda’s Struggle for the Decriminalisation of Homosexuality’, in Corinne Lennox and Matthew Waites (eds.), *Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in the Commonwealth: Struggles for Decriminalisation and Change* (London: Human Rights Consortium, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London, 2013), p. 381, <https://uolpress.co.uk/book/human-rights-sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-in-the-commonwealth/>; Adriaan S. van Klinken, ‘Homosexuality, Politics, and Pentecostal Nationalism in Zambia’, in Rachel Spronk and Thomas Hendriks (eds.), *Readings in Sexualities from Africa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013), p. 272; S.M. Rodriguez, *The Economies of Queer Inclusion: Transnational Organizing for LGBTBI Rights in Uganda* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019), pp. 28–31, 41–42; Thomas Hendriks and Rachel Spronk, ‘Introduction: Reading “Sexualities” from “Africa”’, in Rachel Spronk and Thomas Hendriks (eds.), *Readings in Sexualities from Africa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2020), p. 9.
 15. Rahul Rao, ‘The Locations of Homophobia’, *London Review of International Law* 2.2 (2014), pp. 191–93; Kevin Ward, ‘The Role of the Anglican and Catholic Churches in

and was further radicalised by Pentecostal Christianity.¹⁶ This has now developed into significant moral panic about homosexuality in some societies.¹⁷ Since 2000,¹⁸ the above countries and others like Burundi, Malawi, Nigeria, and Ghana have increased criminalisation of same-sex sex.¹⁹ These law changes have often been presented as political resistance to colonisation, globalisation, and liberal political elites, in different ways in different formerly colonised nations in Africa and elsewhere.²⁰

Decolonial Homophobia in Ugandan Legislation

Perhaps the most famous ongoing assertion of decolonial homophobia is Uganda's harsh anti-homosexuality legislation, first introduced in 2009 and finally (after multiple attempts) passed in 2023.²¹ The legislation built on existing sodomy laws to outlaw homosexuality, 'aggravated homosexuality', 'promoting homosexuality', and related

Uganda in Public Discourse on Homosexuality and Ethics', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 9.1 (2015), pp. 127–44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2014.987509>; Adriaan S. van Klinken and Ezra Chitando, 'Introduction: Christianity and the Politics of Homosexuality in Africa', in Ezra Chitando and Adriaan S. van Klinken (eds.), *Christianity and Controversies over Homosexuality in Contemporary Africa*, Religion in Modern Africa (London; New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 4–6, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315571928>.

16. van Klinken and Chitando, 'Introduction', pp. 6–9; Kopya Kaoma, *Colonizing African Values: How the U.S. Christian Right is Transforming Sexual Politics in Africa* (Somerville, MA: Political Research Associates, 2012), pp. 2–6, <https://politicalresearch.org/2012/07/24/colonizing-african-values>.
17. Saskia Eleonora Wieringa, 'Postcolonial Amnesia: Sexual Moral Panics, Memory, and Imperial Power', in Gilbert Herdt (ed.), *Moral Panics, Sex Panics: Fear and the Fight over Sexual Rights* (New York; London: New York University Press, 2009), pp. 205–33; Kristen Cheney, 'Locating Neocolonialism, "Tradition," and Human Rights in Uganda's "Gay Death Penalty"', *African Studies Review* 55.2 (2012), p. 79.
18. And, to a lesser extent, between 1990 and 2000.
19. Kaoma, *Colonizing African Values*, pp. vi, 27–28.
20. Rodriguez, *The Economies of Queer Inclusion*, p. 31; Hassett, *Anglican Communion in Crisis*, pp. 86–88; Awondo, Geschiere, and Reid, 'Homophobic Africa?'; Ndjio, 'Post-Colonial Histories of Sexuality'; Stella Nyanzi and Andrew Karamagi, 'The Social-Political Dynamics of the Anti-Homosexuality Legislation in Uganda', *Agenda* 29.1 (2015), pp. 10–11; Kopya Kaoma, 'Who's Colonialist? African Anti-Gay Politics in the Global Discourse', *Political Research Associates* (blog), 1 November 2010, <https://politicalresearch.org/2010/11/01/whos-colonialist-african-anti-gay-politics-in-the-global-discourse>; Kopya Kaoma, 'How Anti-Gay Christians Evangelize Hate Abroad', *Los Angeles Times*, 23 March 2014, sec. Opinion, <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-kaoma-uganda-gays-american-ministers-20140323-story.html>.
21. Patience Atuhaire, 'Uganda Anti-Homosexuality Bill: Life in Prison for Saying You're Gay', *BBC News*, 21 March 2023, sec. Africa, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-65034343>; Parliament of Uganda, 'The Anti-Homosexuality Act, 2023' (2023), <https://www.parliament.go.ug/sites/default/files/The%20Anti-Homosexuality%20Act%2C%202023.pdf>.

acts, prescribing the death penalty and life imprisonment for various offences.²² The legislation's Christian drafters and proponents described it as the people's resistance to 'emerging internal and external threats'—meaning, respectively, Ugandan *kuchu* movements and Northern political, religious, and cultural elites.²³ President Yoweri Museveni spoke defiantly against 'social imperialism' imposing Northern values on Uganda,²⁴ and an MP accused gay people of 'killing our children ... exterminating Ugandans ... want[ing] to come and occupy this land'.²⁵

Northern Christians making the decolonial homophobia argument usually oppose legislation and rhetoric like this—Pope Francis, for example, spoke powerfully against criminalising homosexuality.²⁶ Nonetheless, Francis's own arguments cited above rely on the same premises articulated by these Ugandan politicians: that LGBT+ rights are Northern in origin and being imposed imperialistically on the South.

Decolonial Homophobia as Christian Ethics

While decolonial homophobia is most prominent in politics, it is a Christian ethical argument. Politicians endorse it from explicitly Christian perspectives, as do church leaders, particularly Anglican and Pentecostal.²⁷ Church leaders in many African societies are 'strident[ly] anti-colonial', seeking to reverse Northern Christians' colonial suppression

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22. Parliament of Uganda, 'The Anti-Homosexuality Act, 2014: An Act to Prohibit Any Form of Sexual Relations between Persons of the Same Sex; Prohibit the Promotion or Recognition of Such Relations and to Provide for Other Related Matters', Act No. 4 of 2014 § (2014), <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/530c4bc64.pdf>; Parliament of Uganda, *The Anti-Homosexuality Act, 2014*, 2014.
 23. Nyanzi and Karamagi, 'The Social-Political Dynamics', pp. 2–3, 10–11, 13; Melissa Minor Peters, 'Kuchus in the Balance: Queer Lives under Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Bill' (Doctor of Philosophy, Evanston, IL, Northwestern University, 2014), pp. 77–83, https://www.academia.edu/37072013/Kuchus_in_the_Balance_Queer_Lives_under_Ugandas_Anti_Homosexuality_Bill; Rodriguez, *The Economies of Queer Inclusion*, p. 32; Jjuuko, 'The Incremental Approach', pp. 381–83, 403–405; Kaoma, 'Who's Colonialist?'; Kaoma, 'The Paradox and Tension'.
 24. Jjuuko, 'The Incremental Approach', pp. 402–403; Faith Karimi and Nick Thompson, 'Uganda's President Museveni Signs Controversial Anti-Gay Bill into Law', *CNN*, 25 February 2014, sec. World, <https://www.cnn.com/2014/02/24/world/africa/uganda-anti-gay-bill/index.html>.
 25. Rodriguez, *The Economies of Queer Inclusion*, p. 33.
 26. 'Pope and Protestant Leaders Denounce Anti-Gay Laws', *BBC News*, 5 February 2023, sec. World, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-64532639>.
 27. Some Catholics promote this rhetoric; others resist it. van Klinken, 'Homosexuality, Politics, and Pentecostal Nationalism'; Ward, 'The Role of the Anglican and Catholic'; Adriaan S. van Klinken and Ezra Chitando, *Christianity and Controversies over Homosexuality in Contemporary Africa*, ed. Ezra Chitando and Adriaan S. van Klinken, Religion in Modern Africa (London; New York: Routledge, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315571928>; van Klinken and Chitando, 'Introduction', pp. 2–3.

of their cultures.²⁸ For non-affirming Southern Christian leaders, anti-homosexuality politics represents Biblical Christianity resisting Northern worldly trends, strident and pure faith over against other Christian denominations and Islam, and the rising power of Southern churches in global denominational bodies.²⁹ Pentecostal and evangelical pastors in Uganda, Malawi, Zambia, and Kenya paint this conflict in apocalyptic spiritual terms and urge their parishioners and their governments alike to stay firm to Christian principles even when it is costly.³⁰

Northern Christians, similarly, invoke decolonial homophobia to support a narrative that LGBT+-non-affirmation is 'counter-cultural', bravely prophetic and marginalised when the dominant powers of the North are apparently set on imposing LGBT+ rights, as—allegedly—the Romans were in New Testament times.³¹ Decolonial homophobia lets LGBT+ non-affirming Christians portray their stance as globally counter-cultural, and position it on the side of decolonisation and global justice.

Partial Validity of the Argument: The Reality of Neo-Colonial LGBT+ Advocacy

One premise of the decolonial homophobia argument is valid: some global LGBT+ advocacy is frankly colonial. Sexual and gender minority people have always existed everywhere, but understandings and language about sexuality and gender developed in nineteenth-century Europe have been introduced to the South, often with little attention to local expressions

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28. Ezra Chitando and Tapiwa P. Mapuranga, 'Unlikely Allies?: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) Activists and Church Leaders in Africa', in Ezra Chitando and Adriaan S. van Klinken (eds.), *Christianity and Controversies over Homosexuality in Contemporary Africa*, Religion in Modern Africa (London; New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 174–75, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315571928>.
 29. Kapya Kaoma, 'Globalizing the Culture Wars: U.S. Conservatives, African Churches, and Homophobia' (Political Research Associates, 1 December 2009), <https://politicalresearch.org/2009/12/01/globalizing-culture-wars>; Chet Mitchell Jechura, 'A Pearl of Great Price: Reframing a Queer Critique of Sexual Norms within Postcolonial Uganda', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 83.4 (2015), p. 918, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfv074>; van Klinken and Chitando, 'Introduction', pp. 4–9; Derrick M. Muwina, 'Christianity, Homosexuality and Public Politics in Zambia', in Ezra Chitando and Adriaan S. van Klinken (eds.), *Christianity and Controversies over Homosexuality in Contemporary Africa*, Religion in Modern Africa (London; New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 90, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315571928>; Hassett, *Anglican Communion in Crisis*, pp. 106–11; Timothy C. Morgan, 'Anglican Division over Scripture and Sexuality Heads South', *Christianity Today*, 9 August 2022, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/august/lambeth-conference-anglican-church-global-south-bishops.html>.
 30. Awondo, Geschiere, and Reid, 'Homophobic Africa?', p. 147; Kaoma, 'Who's Colonialist?'; van Klinken, 'Homosexuality, Politics, and Pentecostal Nationalism', pp. 273–74; Muwina, 'Christianity, Homosexuality and Public Politics', pp. 90–93; Parsitau, 'Law, Religion, and the Politicization', pp. 124–26.
 31. Caleb M. Day, 'Is Opposition to LGBTI Claims "Counter-Cultural"?' (paper, New Zealand Association of Theological Schools Combined Conference, Carey Baptist College, Auckland, 28 June 2016).

of gender/sexual diversity, by Northern activists and aid agencies.³² Southern gender/sexual minorities often find these Northern terms poorly describe their identities, though others do find these originally Northern understandings and languages useful.³³

Moreover, powerful nations and organisations do seek to coercively impose LGBT+ rights. Wealthy countries, the World Bank, the IMF, and transnational companies sometimes withhold aid or loans, or implement sanctions, to pressure countries like Uganda to abandon anti-homosexuality legislation.³⁴ These Northern moves apparently had some success in Uganda, causing President Museveni to hesitate to sign anti-gay legislation until 2023 due to foreign policy concerns.³⁵ For those of us appalled by Uganda's legislation, it is tempting to sympathise with using this lever to win global change.

Nonetheless, such coercive interventions for LGBT+ rights are widely criticised by Southern people, both for and against LGBT+ rights.³⁶ Southern LGBT+ activists warn that coercion by donors and governments is counter-productive, provoking resentment, backlash and scapegoating of LGBT+ people, while also impoverishing LGBT+

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32. Tamale, 'Confronting the Politics', pp. 35–36; Haskins, 'The Influence of Roman Laws', pp. 397–98; Rao, 'The Locations of Homophobia', pp. 176–77; Syed Adnan Hussain, 'Response: Civilizational Sexualities', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 83.4 (2015), pp. 969–71, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfv088>; Serena Owusu Dankwa, 'The Imagined Homoconference: "Activism" and the Politics of Indirection', in Rachel Spronk and Thomas Hendriks (eds.), *Readings in Sexualities from Africa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2020), pp. 171–85; Keguro Macharia, 'On Being Area-Studied: A Litany of Complaint', in Rachel Spronk and Thomas Hendriks (eds.), *Readings in Sexualities from Africa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016), pp. 73–75.
 33. Nyanzi, 'Dismantling Reified African Culture', pp. 958–60; Peters, 'Kuchus in the Balance', pp. 75–129; Adriaan van Klinken, 'Queer Love in a "Christian Nation": Zambian Gay Men Negotiating Sexual and Religious Identities', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 83.4 (2015), pp. 952–54, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfv073>; Parsitau, 'Law, Religion, and the Politicization', p. 109.
 34. Rahul Rao, 'Global Homocapitalism', *Radical Philosophy* 194 (December 2015), pp. 38–49; 'US Imposes Sanctions on Uganda for Anti-Gay Law', *BBC News*, 19 June 2014, sec. US & Canada, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-27933051>; Rodriguez, *The Economies of Queer Inclusion*, p. 35; 'Uganda's Anti-LGBT Laws: Man Faces Death Penalty for "Aggravated Homosexuality"', *BBC News*, 29 August 2023, sec. Africa, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-66645740>.
 35. Jjuuko, 'The Incremental Approach', pp. 402–403; Anthony Wesaka, 'Museveni Hints at Plan Not to Sign Sexual Offences Act', *Monitor*, 11 May 2021, Uganda edition, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/museveni-hints-at-plan-not-to-sign-sexual-offences-act-3396024>; Fox Odoi-Oywelowo, 'No, Uganda is Not Making it Illegal to Be Gay (Again)', *Al Jazeera*, 6 June 2021, sec. Opinion, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/6/6/no-uganda-is-not-making-it-illegal-to-be-gay-again>; Africa-Press Uganda, 'Museveni Rejects Sexual Offences and Succession Bills', *Africa-Press*, 18 August 2021, Uganda edition, <https://www.africa-press.net/uganda/all-news/museveni-rejects-sexual-offences-and-succession-bills>.
 36. Rodriguez, *The Economies of Queer Inclusion*, pp. 29–36; Awondo, Geschiere, and Reid, 'Homophobic Africa?', pp. 147–48; Haskins, 'The Influence of Roman Laws', pp. 394–95, 395 n. 7; Nyanzi and Karamagi, 'The Social-Political Dynamics', pp. 10, 12.

people alongside the rest of their societies with sanctions and aid cuts.³⁷ Ugandan scholar Sylvia Tamale objects to the ‘arrogance ... lack of historical knowledge ... patronizing and domineering agenda’, ‘selective conditionality’ and ‘hypocrisy’ of Northern opposition to Uganda’s legislation.³⁸ Hypocrisy was certainly shown by former UK Prime Minister David Cameron whose own inconsistent support for LGBT+ rights did not stop him threatening to use aid to coerce LGBT+ rights elsewhere.³⁹ Cameron’s statements were not well-received in former British colonies and/or among LGBT+ activists. They came in 2011, just eight years after the repeal (without Cameron’s vote) of the UK’s Section 28 which, similarly to Uganda’s legislation, stoked damaging moral panic and outlawed ‘promotion of homosexuality’ from 1988–2003.⁴⁰ Some theorists suggest these Northern interventions serve as ‘humanitarian justification’ for neo-colonialism.⁴¹ They argue that as the North has adopted gay rights, Northern imperialists have increasingly exhibited what they term ‘homocapitalism’ or ‘pinkwashing’: domesticating and co-opting gay rights and using them to justify oppression.⁴²

Many activists also criticise other forms of attempted allyship by Northern activists and media such as evacuating LGBT+ people from Africa or making them more visible, or focusing on litigation and legislation rather than everyday violence and

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37. African Men for Sexual Health and Rights – AMSHeR et al., ‘Statement of African Social Justice Activists on the Threats of the British Government to “Cut Aid” to African Countries that Violate the Rights of LGBTI People in Africa’, African Feminist Forum, 28 October 2011, <http://www.africanfeministforum.com/statement-of-african-social-justice-activists-on-the-threats-of-the-british-government-to-cut-aid-to-african-countries-that-violate-the-rights-of-lgbti-people-in-africa/>; Kaoma, *Colonizing African Values*, pp. 17–18; Jjuuko, ‘The Incremental Approach’, p. 405; Rao, ‘The Locations of Homophobia’, p. 178; Rodriguez, *The Economies of Queer Inclusion*, pp. 35–36, 102; Parsitau, ‘Law, Religion, and the Politicization’, p. 106; Kaoma, ‘The Paradox and Tension’, pp. 238–39.
38. Tamale, ‘Confronting the Politics’, pp. 34–35, 37–38, 41–42.
39. Rao, ‘The Locations of Homophobia’, pp. 177–78; Tamale, ‘Confronting the Politics’, p. 42; Rahul Rao, *Out of Time: The Queer Politics of Postcoloniality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 113–19.
40. Rao, *Out of Time*, p. 129; Johann Hari, ‘Let’s Talk about Sex: Johann Hari Grills David Cameron over Gay Rights’, *The Independent*, 4 February 2010, sec. UK Politics, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/let-s-talk-about-sex-johann-hari-grills-david-cameron-over-gay-rights-1888688.html>.
41. Rao, ‘Global Homocapitalism’, p. 39; Rodriguez, *The Economies of Queer Inclusion*, pp. 55–73.
42. Rao, ‘Global Homocapitalism’; Jasbir Puar and Maya Mikdashi, ‘Pinkwashing and Pinkwashing: Interpenetration and its Discontents’, *Jadaliyya*, 9 August 2012, <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/26818>. Jasbir Puar has usefully and influentially analysed what Rao calls ‘homocapitalism’ and Puar terms ‘homonationalism’, a concept related to but distinct from ‘pinkwashing’. Since I also refer to post-colonial nationalisms below, and since I lack the time to make clear that ‘homonationalism’ refers to capitalist, imperialist white nationalisms, I find Rao’s term more useful here. Jasbir Puar, ‘Rethinking Homonationalism’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45.2 (2013), pp. 336–39; Rodriguez, *The Economies of Queer Inclusion*, pp. 4–8, 11, 75–80.

oppression. They suggest such measures can undermine local *kuchu*-led efforts, separate *kuchus* from their societies, reinforce the misconception that homosexuality is un-African, and endanger LGBT+ people by outing them.⁴³ All these interventions position Northerners as rescuers and Southerners as oppressors and victims—analogous to what Gayatri Spivak called ‘white men saving brown women from brown men’.⁴⁴

Thus, some Northern advocacy of LGBT+ rights globally does involve colonial coercion, arrogance, and Eurocentrism, at odds with the character and life of Jesus and oppressive of Southern people. Christians should oppose these tendencies regardless of our views on LGBT+ rights. Non-affirming theologian Esau McCaulley is entirely right to condemn North American Anglicans’ smug cultural imperialism regarding African Anglicans.⁴⁵ Affirming lesbian theologian Cristina Traina is also right to compare coercing LGBT+ rights to forced conversion during Spanish colonisation, which was immoral, unChristian, and counter-productive.⁴⁶

Problems with the Overall Argument

The full decolonial homophobia argument, however, is that pursuing LGBT+ rights in the South is always inherently neo-colonial. I submit that there are several important reasons this overall argument fails.

I should note that the argument is not actually a substantive ethical reason why some Christian ethicists oppose LGBT+ rights. Christians who oppose LGBT+ rights do so because of their interpretation of Scripture and their understanding of human purposes and flourishing in sex and gender.⁴⁷ People making the decolonial homophobia argument also do not seek to develop arguments that the moral logic of LGBT+ rights inherently requires colonial oppression. It is, rather, a circumstantial argument based largely on who seems to be supporting and who seems to be opposing LGBT+ rights. Ultimately, it is more of a discrediting of LGBT+ rights than an argument against them. Christian ethicists should support Christians to develop substantive moral reasoning on decolonisation and LGBT+ rights. The decolonial homophobia argument is not that.

Nonetheless, the argument does influence Christians’ ethics, and is worth critiquing. I suggest the argument fails on its own terms: the suggestion that LGBT+ rights are Northern and inherently colonial is misleading to the point of inaccuracy. I also show how

43. Rodriguez, *The Economies of Queer Inclusion*, pp. 49–53, 64, 72–73, 80–84, 89–91.

44. Rao, ‘Global Homocapitalism’, p. 39; Rodriguez, *The Economies of Queer Inclusion*, pp. 55–73.

45. McCaulley, ‘Blaming the Africans’.

46. McCaulley, ‘Blaming the Africans’; Cristina Traina, ‘Pope Francis, “Gender Ideology” and Our Colonialist Blinders’, *National Catholic Reporter*, 11 August 2016, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/justice/pope-francis-gender-ideology-and-our-colonialist-blinders>.

47. To provide just one example where this is clear: Stephen Samuel Kaziimba Mugalu, ‘Church of Uganda Responds to Church of England’s Decision to Bless Same Sex Unions’, Church of Uganda, 10 February 2023, <https://churchofuganda.org/blog/2023/02/10/response-to-church-of-englands-decision-to-bless-same-sex-unions/>.

the decolonial homophobia argument tacitly supports dangerous and oppressive homophobic nationalism, which repeats imperial patterns, even in apparent service of decolonisation.

Monolithic Depiction of 'African' Views

Firstly, the argument involves monolithic depiction of African views. Of course, people from African countries have the right to generalise about their continent. But other people from African countries have the right to criticise them for it, and I have the right to criticise fellow Northerners on this count. Africa, the continent with the most human diversity and the most countries, has diverse pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial views on sex and gender. Those making this argument often do not acknowledge varying views. For example, McCaulley rightly criticises liberal Northerners treating 'Africa' as a monolith, but he himself happily assumes people across the continent 'share[] a similar view on human sexuality'.⁴⁸ Failing to acknowledge diversity repeats colonial reification of one monolithic 'African' viewpoint.⁴⁹ Tamale suggests people outside Africa typically only hear the voices of people in African societies who have 'power and platform'.⁵⁰ Anti-LGBT+ Northerners invoking Africa in support of their views typically take elite voices as representing entire societies, which Tamale finds 'lazy' and 'infantiliz[ing]'.⁵¹

People in Southern countries, including Christians, are not uniformly anti-LGBT+. Ordinary Christians are often less invested and less decisive on LGBT+ matters than political and religious leaders.⁵² Theologians and pastors from African countries are often uninterested or undecided.⁵³ LGBT+-affirming African theologians, mostly women, are a growing minority.⁵⁴ The global discussion has become more polarised inside and outside the church since the 1990s. While virulent anti-LGBT+ sentiment is not hard

48. McCaulley, 'Blaming the Africans'.

49. Sylvia Tamale, 'A Human Rights Impact Assessment of the Ugandan Anti-Homosexuality Bill 2009', *The Equal Rights Review* 4 (2009), p. 50; Sylvia Tamale, 'Researching and Theorising Sexualities in Africa', in Sylvia Tamale (ed.), *African Sexualities: A Reader* (Cape Town; Dakar; Nairobi; Oxford: Pambazuka Press, 2011), pp. 12–13; Ahlberg, 'Is There a Distinct African Sexuality?'; Awondo, Geschiere, and Reid, 'Homophobic Africa?'; Nyanzi, 'Dismantling Reified African Culture'; Kapy Kaoma, 'Unmasking the Colonial Silence: Sexuality in Africa in the Post-Colonial Context', *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 155 (July 2016), pp. 49–69; Hendriks and Spronk, 'Introduction', pp. 4–5.

50. Tamale, 'Confronting the Politics', p. 38.

51. Tamale, 'Confronting the Politics', p. 38.

52. Hassett, *Anglican Communion in Crisis*, pp. 90–93; Chitando and Mapuranga, 'Unlikely Allies?'; Ward, 'The Role of the Anglican and Catholic', pp. 138–39; Parsitau, 'Law, Religion, and the Politicization', pp. 118–21.

53. Adriaan S. van Klinken and Masiwa Ragies Gunda, 'Taking up the Cudgels against Gay Rights? Trends and Trajectories in African Christian Theologies on Homosexuality', *Journal of Homosexuality* 59.1 (2012), pp. 114–38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2012.638549>; Chitando and Mapuranga, 'Unlikely Allies?'; Kaoma, 'Globalizing the Culture Wars'.

54. van Klinken and Gunda, 'Taking up the Cudgels'; Chitando and Mapuranga, 'Unlikely Allies?'

to find among Uganda's religious leaders, Uganda also has pro-*kuchu* church leaders, who are increasingly prominent across East Africa.⁵⁵

Diverse Sexualities are Indigenous, Homophobia Colonial

Secondly, the argument ignores how diverse sexualities are indigenous and homophobia is colonial. Most British people are repulsed by Uganda's law, but it was the British who first criminalised homosexuality in Uganda in 1902.⁵⁶ In British colonies, the empire introduced the predecessors of anti-homosexuality laws in mid-nineteenth to early twentieth-century penal codes prohibiting 'sodomy', 'buggery' or 'debauchery'.⁵⁷ Previously, many societies colonised by the British tolerated or socially incorporated sexual diversity; for example, over forty of 200 recorded pre-colonial African societies accepted marriages between two women,⁵⁸ and many understood gender differently to modern Northern binaries.⁵⁹ No African societies have 'singled out same-sex relations as sinful ... except where Christianity and Islam have been adopted'.⁶⁰

55. Hassett, *Anglican Communion in Crisis*, pp. 91–92; Adriaan van Klinken, Barbara Bompani, and Damaris Parsitau, 'Religious Leaders as Agents of LGBTIQ Inclusion in East Africa', *African Affairs* 122.487 (2023), pp. 299–312, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adad012>.

56. Nyanzi and Karamagi, 'The Social-Political Dynamics', p. 13.

57. Some sodomy laws were also introduced by the Dutch, German, and even French empires (notwithstanding France's decriminalisation of homosexuality since 1791), but on far lesser scales. The British laws (and similar Dutch colonial laws) were derived from ancient Roman law codes and re-defined in the nineteenth century for colonial exportation. Human Rights Watch, 'This Alien Legacy: The Origins of "Sodomy" Laws in British Colonialism' (Human Rights Watch, 17 December 2008), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2008/12/17/alien-legacy/origins-sodomy-laws-british-colonialism>; Awondo, Geschiere, and Reid, 'Homophobic Africa?', p. 148; Corinne Lennox and Matthew Waites (eds.), *Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in the Commonwealth: Struggles for Decriminalisation and Change* (London: Human Rights Consortium, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London, 2013); Enze Han and Joseph O'Mahoney, 'British Colonialism and the Criminalization of Homosexuality', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 27.2 (2014), pp. 268–88, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2013.867298>; Haskins, 'The Influence of Roman Laws'; Nyanzi and Karamagi, 'The Social-Political Dynamics', pp. 4–6; Rodriguez, *The Economies of Queer Inclusion*, pp. 19–20; Rao, *Out of Time*, pp. 107–10.

58. Wieringa, 'Postcolonial Amnesia', pp. 210–11; Jjuuko, 'The Incremental Approach', pp. 384–85; Tamale, 'Confronting the Politics', pp. 35–36; Peters, 'Kuchus in the Balance', pp. 51–68; Kaoma, 'The Paradox and Tension', pp. 230–31; Rahul Rao, 'Re-membering Mwanga: Same-Sex Intimacy, Memory and Belonging in Postcolonial Uganda', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 9.1 (2015), pp. 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2014.970600>; Robert W. Kuloba, "'Homosexuality is Unafrikan and Unbiblical": Examining the Ideological Motivations to Homophobia in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Case Study of Uganda', *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 154 (2016), pp. 6, 15–16, 19–21, 25–26.

59. Rodriguez, *The Economies of Queer Inclusion*, pp. 5–7.

60. Stephen O. Murray 1998, cited in Cheney, 'Locating Neocolonialism', pp. 80–81.

The colonial sodomy laws were inextricably intertwined with both patriarchy and racism. Imperialists associated Victorian gender and sexual ideals with ‘civilization and progress’, and suppressed diverse sexual and gender expression they encountered.⁶¹ They reflected white supremacist and misogynistic ideologies depicting both non-white people and women as ‘close to nature’, ‘reducing [them] to the sexual and the biological’.⁶² Colonists both hypocritically condemned and fetishised African women’s sexuality,⁶³ and portrayed black men as ‘violent, lawless, [and] over-sexed’.⁶⁴ In this context, the sodomy laws served the colonial goal ‘to civilise the barbarian and savage natives’.⁶⁵ Rahul Rao traces the ongoing effects, suggesting today’s ‘queerphobias have installed themselves on a terrain structured by racism’.⁶⁶

Today, British colonial history correlates very closely with countries having harsh anti-gay laws.⁶⁷ Colonisation also erased histories of non-patriarchal gender expression and non-heteronormative sexuality.⁶⁸ Pre-colonial gender and sexual diversity are forgotten, ignored, or attributed to outside Arabic influence, producing the view that homosexuality has always been ‘un-African’.⁶⁹ Recovering LGBT+ history in Uganda, India, Canada, Sāmoa, and Aotearoa/New Zealand is important decolonisation work.⁷⁰

Recent Northern Influences and Agency

Thirdly, the argument ignores recent Northern influences on the anti-LGBT+ side that are arguably just as neo-colonial as coercing LGBT+ rights with aid, but far more successful—in Africa and elsewhere.⁷¹ For one thing, just as *kuchus* and other Southern LGBT+ people have adopted language and concepts developed in the modern North, Southern non-affirming theologians adopt modern Northern concepts like gender

61. Wieringa, ‘Postcolonial Amnesia’, p. 205; Kaoma, ‘Globalizing the Culture Wars’.

62. Rao, ‘The Locations of Homophobia’, pp. 182–83.

63. Wieringa, ‘Postcolonial Amnesia’, p. 205; Tamale, ‘Researching and Theorising’, pp. 15–16.

64. Rao, ‘The Locations of Homophobia’, pp. 182–83; Tamale, ‘Researching and Theorising’, pp. 14–16.

65. Tamale, ‘Researching and Theorising’, pp. 14–16 (14).

66. Rao, *Out of Time*, pp. 132–35 (135).

67. This is one of three main indicators; the other two are a Muslim-majority population and low industrialisation. Patrick R. Ireland, ‘A Macro-Level Analysis of the Scope, Causes, and Consequences of Homophobia in Africa’, *African Studies Review* 56.2 (2013), pp. 47–66, <https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2013.41>; Han and O’Mahoney, ‘British Colonialism and the Criminalization of Homosexuality’.

68. Wieringa, ‘Postcolonial Amnesia’, p. 205.

69. van Klinken and Gunda, ‘Taking up the Cudgels’, pp. 125–26; Rao, ‘Re-membering Mwanga’, pp. 9–11.

70. One book on global gender diversity is Serena Nanda, *Gender Diversity: Crosscultural Variations* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 2000).

71. Hassett, *Anglican Communion in Crisis*, pp. 93–95; Kaoma, ‘Who’s Colonialist?’; Kaoma, ‘The Paradox and Tension’; Kaoma, ‘How Anti-Gay Christians’; Jechura, ‘A Pearl of Great Price’, pp. 919–21.

complementarity.⁷² Similarly in politics, US anti-gay policy and rhetoric regarding HIV/AIDS in the 1980s formed the model for Uganda scapegoating gay men for AIDS and introducing earlier anti-homosexuality legislation in 1990.⁷³

The recent growth of overt homophobia by religious and political leaders in the South also has direct influences by Northerners, especially US American evangelicals. Conservative Episcopalians advised and warned African Anglicans about the alleged spread of homosexuality from the North, successfully courting the support of bishops in Southern provinces for 1998's Lambeth Conference.⁷⁴ Similarly, US evangelicals ranging from respected pastor Rick Warren to conspiracy theorist Scott Lively 'globaliz[ed] the culture wars' in the 2000s by promoting their concerns about the 'global gay agenda' in global South countries.⁷⁵ Uganda's legislation, originally introduced by evangelical MP David Bahati who moves in Northern evangelical circles, was specifically shaped by US evangelicals invited to address Uganda's political and cultural leaders in 2009.⁷⁶ The US Religious Right has also provided extensive funding and training to conservative activists in Uganda and elsewhere.⁷⁷

This Northern influence certainly should not be taken to suggest Southern people are innocent, passive, and pliable to Northern manipulation—itsself a racist colonial attitude.⁷⁸ Anti-gay laws are not simply leftovers from British colonisation: some former British colonies have strengthened and widened anti-gay laws while others, in all world regions, have removed them and expanded LGBT+ rights.⁷⁹ Countries without

72. van Klinken and Gunda, 'Taking up the Cudgels', pp. 124–25. On the modernity of gender complementarity as a concept and language, see Caleb M. Day, 'An Unsatisfactory Trajectory: A Critique of Gender Complementarianism' (unpublished course paper, 27 April 2016), https://www.academia.edu/33865814/An_unsatisfactory_trajectory_a_critique_of_gender_complementarianism.

73. Rodriguez, *The Economies of Queer Inclusion*, pp. 25–26.

74. Ward, 'The Role of the Anglican and Catholic', pp. 135–37; Kaoma, 'The Paradox and Tension', pp. 233–34; Hassett, *Anglican Communion in Crisis*, pp. 53–80.

75. Kaoma, 'Globalizing the Culture Wars'; Kapya Kaoma, 'The U.S. Christian Right and the Attack on Gays in Africa', *Political Research Associates* (blog), 1 December 2009, <https://politicalresearch.org/2009/12/01/us-christian-right-and-attack-gays-africa>; Kaoma, 'Who's Colonialist?'; Kaoma, *Colonizing African Values*, pp. 6–13; Kaoma, 'The Paradox and Tension', pp. 232–37; Leah Entenmann, "'Aggravated Homosexuality": US Influence in Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Bill' (Master's thesis, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.26777.67680>; Nyanzi and Karamagi, 'The Social-Political Dynamics', p. 12; Rodriguez, *The Economies of Queer Inclusion*, p. 34.

76. Ward, 'The Role of the Anglican and Catholic', pp. 136–37; Awondo, Geschiere, and Reid, 'Homophobic Africa?', pp. 153–54; Kaoma, 'The U.S. Christian Right'.

77. Kaoma, 'Who's Colonialist?'

78. Tamale, 'Confronting the Politics', pp. 33–34, 37; Rao, 'The Locations of Homophobia', pp. 175–81; Ward, 'The Role of the Anglican and Catholic', p. 128; Rao, *Out of Time*, pp. 110–15.

79. Specifically, some countries formerly under British colonial power have made sodomy laws harsher, more enforceable, and more explicitly anti-homosexual (e.g. Uganda, Nigeria, Ghana, Tanzania, Zimbabwe) and/or widened their scope to also outlaw female same-sex

British colonial history also have anti-gay laws.⁸⁰ Southern politicians and activists on both sides are not passive recipients of Northern influences; they actively embrace and adapt culture and ideas from elsewhere.⁸¹ Resurgent post-colonial homophobia also has local and Southern sources.⁸² Analysis of anti-LGBT+ movements in the South often identifies similar patterns observed in the North—moral panic, tropes of dominant activists victimising and indoctrinating children, scapegoating, backlash, and right-wing populism⁸³—and these are parallel phenomena, not merely the South imitating the North.

Homophobic Nationalism Adopts Colonial Oppression

Perhaps the most directly ethical problem with the decolonial homophobia argument is that it tacitly endorses ‘homophobic nationalism’ that is oppressive and more imperial than decolonial.

Basile Ndjio and S.M. Rodriguez suggest recent decolonial homophobia in Uganda and elsewhere involves local post-colonial elites adopting a colonial ‘project to define

sexuality (e.g. Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Malawi, Zambia), while others have legalised homosexuality and expanded LGBT+ rights (e.g. South Africa, Botswana, Seychelles, India, Hong Kong, Singapore, Bahamas, Antigua and Barbuda, Canada, Fiji, Vanuatu, Aotearoa/New Zealand, Ireland, as well as the four UK countries themselves). Rao, ‘The Locations of Homophobia’, pp. 177–78; Wikipedia contributors, ‘LGBT Rights by Country or Territory’, *Wikipedia*, 20 September 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=LGBT_rights_by_country_or_territory&oldid=1176215604; Muwina, ‘Christianity, Homosexuality and Public Politics’, pp. 89–90; Colin Stewart, ‘68 Countries Where Homosexuality is Illegal [Updated December 2022]’, *Erasing 76 Crimes*, December 2022, <https://76crimes.com/2020/06/05/71-countries-where-homosexuality-is-illegal/>.

80. For example, in Africa, some former French or German colonies have introduced sodomy laws since independence (e.g. Senegal, Chad, Cameroon, Burundi). Rao, ‘The Locations of Homophobia’, pp. 177–78; Wikipedia contributors, ‘LGBT Rights by Country or Territory’.
81. Hassett, *Anglican Communion in Crisis*, pp. 93–94; Kaoma, ‘The Paradox and Tension’; Rodriguez, *The Economies of Queer Inclusion*, p. 34.
82. Rao, ‘The Locations of Homophobia’, pp. 182–83; Jechura, ‘A Pearl of Great Price’, p. 919.
83. Hassett, *Anglican Communion in Crisis*, p. 89; Tamale, ‘A Human Rights Impact Assessment’, pp. 51–53; Tamale, ‘Researching and Theorising’, p. 27; Tamale, ‘Confronting the Politics’; Ndjio, ‘Post-Colonial Histories of Sexuality’, pp. 610, 616–17; Awondo, Geschiere, and Reid, ‘Homophobic Africa?’, p. 152; Jjuuko, ‘The Incremental Approach’, p. p. 393; Rao, ‘The Locations of Homophobia’, pp. 195–96; Rao, ‘Global Homocapitalism’, pp. 46–47; Kapyka Kaoma, ‘LGBTQ Rights – African Politicians’ Biggest Scapegoat’, *Political Research Associates* (blog), 2 May 2014, <https://politicalresearch.org/2014/05/02/lgbtq-rights-african-politicians-biggest-scapegoat>; Peters, ‘Kuchus in the Balance’, pp. 77–83; S.N. Nyeck, ‘Queer Fragility and Christian Social Ethics: A Political Interpolation of the Catholic Church in Cameroon’, and Adriaan S. van Klinken, ‘A Kenyan Queer Prophet: Binyavanga Wainaina’s Public Contestation of Pentecostalism and Homophobia’, in Ezra Chitando and Adriaan S. van Klinken (eds.), *Christianity and Controversies over Homosexuality in Contemporary Africa*, Religion in Modern Africa (London; New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 71, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315571928>; Parsitau, ‘Law, Religion, and the Politicization’, pp. 115–17.

and control African sexuality'.⁸⁴ Heterosexual male elites in post-colonial nations, they argue, react against imperialism by absorbing some of the empire's ideas, such as its Victorian ideals of the family, its fear of African sexual embodiment, and its model of the ideal (male, heterosexual, economically productive) citizen.⁸⁵ Adopting and adapting dominant norms as a strategy of colonised groups is fruitfully read through Homi Bhabha's concepts of 'mimicry' and 'imperial hybridity'.⁸⁶ Post-colonial hetero-patriarchalists wield hybrid post-colonial hetero-patriarchy against the imperial centre, placing LGBT+ rights and often feminism in the cross-hairs.⁸⁷

Rodriguez places this politicised homophobia in the category of 'homophobic nationalism'—bolstering patriotism and supporting political leaders by promoting fear of homosexuality.⁸⁸ Homophobic nationalism was central to British imperialism before it was hybridised by post-colonial leaders, but it was also key to other oppressive regimes long preceding the British empire. 'Homophobic nationalism' is generally part of a broader pattern of patriarchal or hetero-patriarchal nationalism, involving asserting a nation's manly strength through oppressing women and LGBT+ persons and aggressively pushing universal participation in the heterosexual procreative family. This was evident in ancient Israel and the early Roman empire, fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, and societies from Russia to Belize today.⁸⁹ It was certainly part of British colonial

84. S.M. Rodriguez, 'Homophobic Nationalism: The Development of Sodomy Legislation in Uganda', *Comparative Sociology* 16.3 (2017), p. 395; Rodriguez, *The Economies of Queer Inclusion*, pp. 10–11, 17–39; Basile Ndjio, 'Sexuality and Nationalist Ideologies in Post-Colonial Cameroon', in Saskia Wieringa and Horacio Sivori (eds.), *The Sexual History of the Global South: Sexual Politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America* (London; New York: Zed Books, 2013), pp. 126–28.

85. Rodriguez, *The Economies of Queer Inclusion*, pp. 36–38.

86. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2004); Caleb M. Day, 'Imperial Hybridity in the Early Christian "Symbolic Eunuch" Reading of Matt. 19:12' (unpublished seminar paper, 14 April 2016), https://www.academia.edu/31782648/Imperial_hybridity_in_the_early_Christian_symbolic_eunuch_reading_of_Matt_19_12. Kuloba, 'Homosexuality is Unafrikan and Unbiblical', passim, and Rodriguez, *The Economies of Queer Inclusion*, p. 7, both mention hybridity in relation to post-colonial anti-homosexuality.

87. Rodriguez, *The Economies of Queer Inclusion*, pp. 12, 18, 31–36; Kaoma, 'Who's Colonialist?'; Cheney, 'Locating Neocolonialism', p. 90; Tamale, 'Confronting the Politics', p. 40.

88. Rodriguez, *The Economies of Queer Inclusion*, p. 18; Ndjio, 'Post-Colonial Histories of Sexuality'; Ndjio, 'Sexuality and Nationalist Ideologies'; Nyanzi and Karamagi, 'The Social-Political Dynamics', pp. 12–13.

89. On hetero-patriarchal nationalism in ancient Israel, see Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London; New York: Routledge, 1984), pp. 42–58; Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), pp. 37–44; Baruch J. Schwartz, 'Leviticus: Introduction and Annotations', in Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (eds.), *The Jewish Study Bible*, 2nd edn; Kindle edn (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), chaps 17–26; 18:1–30. In ancient Rome, Beth Severy, *Augustus and the Family at the Birth of the Roman Empire* (New York; London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 33–61; Mary R. D'Angelo, 'Roman "Family Values" and the Apologetic Concerns of Philo and Paul: Reading the Sixth Commandment', *New Testament Studies* 61.4 (October 2015), pp. 525–46,

control as well as post-colonialism.⁹⁰ Hetero-patriarchal nationalism, therefore, is wielded both by dominant empires and by oppressed societies. Nonetheless, in all contexts, homophobic and wider hetero-patriarchal nationalism is dominance, not liberation. Hetero-patriarchal nationalism asserts the nation against its real and imagined enemies. It supports heterosexual men in power, even when expressed as decolonial resistance,⁹¹ and women and LGBT+ people suffer as scapegoats and ‘collateral damage’.⁹² Rising homophobic nationalism in societies leads to predictable, well-documented increases in human rights violations and hate crimes.⁹³

Reciprocal Oppressions

Thus, both homophobic nationalism and pro-LGBT+ neo-colonialism oppress colonised LGBT+ people. Moreover, the two processes reinforce each other.⁹⁴ Northerners, newly repulsed by homophobic nationalism, often respond in neo-colonial ways. Today’s Northern liberals often implicitly or explicitly portray Africans as monolithically homophobic, backward, requiring correction.⁹⁵ Thus, the North still seeks to control and enlighten the South, now through imposing women’s and LGBT+ rights, the mirror image of what the British imposed 120 to 165 years ago. Stand-offs between Northern liberals and Southern conservatives in church and society involve circular patterns—misconceptions and misrepresentations justifying misconceptions and misrepresentations—as Northern hypocritical, arrogant coercion justifies anti-imperialist

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S002868851500017X>; Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 85, 122–25; Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, pp. 80, 94–96. In modern India, Paola Bacchetta, ‘When the (Hindu) Nation Exiles its Queers’, *Social Text* 61 (1999), pp. 141–66; Joane Nagel, ‘Sex and Nationalism’, in *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality: Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 140–76; Joshua Gamson and Dawne Moon, ‘The Sociology of Sexualities: Queer and Beyond’, *Annual Review of Sociology* 30 (2004), pp. 55–56, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.30.012703.110522>. In Russia, Belize, and elsewhere, Kaoma, ‘How Anti-Gay Christians’.

90. van Klinken and Chitando, ‘Introduction’, p. 3.

91. Ndjio, ‘Post-Colonial Histories of Sexuality’; Ndlovu, ‘The Anti-Homosexuality Narrative’.

92. Tamale, ‘Confronting the Politics’, pp. 39–42; Kaoma, ‘Globalizing the Culture Wars’.

93. Nyanzi and Karamagi, ‘The Social-Political Dynamics’, p. 13; Cheney, ‘Locating Neocolonialism’, p. 78; Awondo, Geschiere, and Reid, ‘Homophobic Africa?’, pp. 147–48; Haskins, ‘The Influence of Roman Laws’, pp. 399–402; Kaoma, ‘The Paradox and Tension’, p. 240; Richard Lusimbo and Austin Bryan, ‘Kuchu Resilience and Resistance in Uganda: A History’, in Nancy Nicol et al. (eds.), *Envisioning Global LGBT Human Rights: (Neo)Colonialism, Neoliberalism, Resistance and Hope* (London: Human Rights Consortium, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London, 2018), pp. 323–25, <https://uolpress.co.uk/book/envisioning-global-lgbt-human-rights/>; Parsitau, ‘Law, Religion, and the Politicization’, pp. 112–13, 115.

94. Rodriguez, *The Economies of Queer Inclusion*, pp. 12–13.

95. Kaoma, ‘Who’s Colonialist?’; McCaulley, ‘Blaming the Africans’; Rodriguez, *The Economies of Queer Inclusion*, pp. ix–x.

resistance to LGBT+ rights, and vice versa.⁹⁶ Christians seeking to decolonise and love LGBT+ people need to find ways out of this back-and-forth between decolonial homophobia and pro-LGBT+ colonialism.

Christian Liberation from Colonisation and Hetero-Patriarchy

As UK Christians reckon with colonisation and with oppression of LGBT+ people, we should acknowledge that the relationship between these two sets of oppressions is complex. Historically, they are intertwined, though currently it can seem we cannot push for justice in one area without undermining the other. This tension between decolonisation and LGBT+ rights is a historic contingency and an ironic example of colonial chickens coming home to roost. Illuminating this history can help resolve the tension. Nonetheless, it is a real tension that must be navigated sensitively.

We have a responsibility to try to resolve this tension. As citizens of the Reign of God that liberates from all spiritual-social oppression, we must resist choosing one justice at the expense of another. We must challenge those who cynically use the apparent tension to undermine one or the other cause. We follow a God who used a stuttering slave to liberate a nation, a Christ who commissioned demonised and demon-possessed women to preach the gospel, and a Spirit who welcomed the Ethiopian eunuch into God's presence. We must seek decolonisation and racial justice alongside LGBT+ justice and other intersecting justice issues, locally and globally.

I suggest we should acknowledge hermeneutical privilege of the oppressed in recognising how we do this.⁹⁷ This does not mean exclusively listening to religious or political elites or even majorities in poor countries. It means valuing and listening to those doubly oppressed by colonisation and by post-colonial homophobia. We should be led by what they say and what they want and need. We should ask how to effectively and respectfully support them resisting homophobic nationalism, listen to their critiques of neo-colonial LGBT+ advocacy, and support their decolonial recovery of pre-colonial sexual/gender diversity. And we should follow their example pushing for liberation from the intersecting evils of colonisation and hetero-patriarchy to inform our praxis in our own communities.

Kuchus and other Southern LGBT+ people—often committed Christians⁹⁸—challenge dominant cultural values while asserting their national identity and recovering

96. Rodriguez, *The Economies of Queer Inclusion*, pp. 31–36, 112; Kaoma, 'The Paradox and Tension'.

97. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), pp. xi–xiii; Lee Cormie, 'The Hermeneutical Privilege of the Oppressed', *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 33 (2012), <https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/cts/article/view/2912>.

98. van Klinken, 'Queer Love in a "Christian Nation"'; Nelson Muparamoto, 'Enduring and Subverting Homophobia: Religious Experiences of Same-Sex Loving People in Zimbabwe', in Ezra Chitando and Adriaan S. van Klinken (eds.), *Christianity and Controversies over Homosexuality in Contemporary Africa*, Religion in Modern Africa (London; New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 143–56, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315571928>; Lilly Phiri, "'Bom This Way": The Imago Dei in Men who Love Other Men in Lusaka, Zambia', in Ezra Chitando and Adriaan S. van Klinken (eds.), *Christianity and Controversies over Homosexuality in Contemporary Africa*, Religion in Modern

non-heteronormative cultural identities suppressed by colonisation.⁹⁹ LGBT+ Christians in Zimbabwe show how faith inspires resilience amid homophobia, persecution, discrimination, and temptation.¹⁰⁰ Christian organisations responding to HIV/AIDS across Africa resist and reduce societal stigma against LGBT+ people, sex workers, and drug users by emphasising all people as God's beloved image-bearers.¹⁰¹ Christian men who love men in Zambia challenge worldly focus on outward appearances; resist dominant, dehumanising heteronormative norms; subvert patriarchy and heteronormativity that distort how we understand God; reject societal expectations to be procreative; and contest dominant hetero-patriarchal interpretations of Scripture.¹⁰² They invoke God's universal love and good creation against social conventions and laws.¹⁰³ Ordinary Southern Christians often challenge their political and religious leaders—and ours—to practise better solidarity with oppressed LGBT+ people.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

The decolonial homophobia argument validly highlights neo-colonial LGBT+ advocacy, but it fails to paint LGBT+ rights as inherently colonial. Oppressing LGBT+ people, even in the name of decolonisation, is historically and conceptually closer to colonial oppression than to decolonisation. Christians can and should coherently oppose both decolonial homophobia and pro-LGBT+ neo-colonialism. They are intersecting oppressions in complex relation, and decolonial Southern LGBT+ Christians can show us ways to seek justice in both areas. We can learn from their counter-cultural, liberating, faithful praxis in our attempts to decolonise and love marginalised people in all our contexts.


Africa (London; New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 157–70, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315571928>; Chitando and Mapuranga, 'Unlikely Allies?'; Adriaan S. van Klinken, *Kenyan, Christian, Queer: Religion, LGBT Activism, and Arts of Resistance in Africa* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780271085623>.

99. 'Queer African Manifesto/Declaration', AllAfrica, 18 April 2010, <https://allafrica.com/stories/202112020612.html>; Kuchu Times, 'About', Kuchu Times: Our Voices, Our Stories, Our Lives, accessed 1 February 2016, <https://www.kuchutimes.com/about/>; Nyanzi, 'Dismantling Reified African Culture', pp. 958–63; Jjuuko, 'The Incremental Approach'; van Klinken, 'A Kenyan Queer Prophet'; Lusimbo and Bryan, 'Kuchu Resilience and Resistance'.
100. Muparamoto, 'Enduring and Subverting Homophobia', p. 150.
101. Chitando and Mapuranga, 'Unlikely Allies?', pp. 177–79.
102. Phiri, 'Born This Way', pp. 163–68; van Klinken, 'Queer Love in a "Christian Nation"'.
103. Phiri, 'Born This Way', pp. 163–68; van Klinken, 'Queer Love in a "Christian Nation"'.
104. Chitando and Mapuranga, 'Unlikely Allies?'; Ward, 'The Role of the Anglican and Catholic', pp. 138–39. For example, in Kenya, anti-homosexuality religious and political leaders vigorously opposed Kenya's 2010 constitution, but it still passed its referendum with 67% public support. Parsitau, 'Law, Religion, and the Politicization', pp. 118–21.

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