

Queer Liberal Expeditions

The BBC's The World's Worst Place to Be Gay? and the Paradoxes of Homocolonialism

Scott Mills walks through the slum, carrying buckets of water, visiting LGBT+s who live in hiding. Intermittently, Mills expresses his fear of homophobia in Uganda, wondering if he is going to survive at all. His fear of homophobia occurs against the background of his experience in London, where we see a sequence with Mills among his friends talking about how easy it is for them to be gay there. Accordingly, they discuss how the UK has become increasingly open-minded about gay identity. To get an insider view of homophobia, we are taken from London to Portsmouth, Mills's hometown, where the succeeding sequence shows the narrator interacting with a Ugandan gay asylum seeker. The man is described as a persecuted gay man who fled Uganda for the UK in order to protect his life. The Ugandan gay man reveals his travails in Uganda, especially with the police and his family, which disowned him. Comparing his experience to the gay asylum seeker, Mills utters: "This is a million miles away from what I went through." And in the background, we see the Union Jack, waving in the wind. The remainder of the documentary is sprinkled with scenes in which nongay Ugandans, including clergy, politicians, and some members of civil society, express homophobic sentiments. We also see sequences in which homosexuals share their stories about being victims of homophobia and fearing for their lives in the unpredictable climate created for sexual minorities.

—SCENES FROM *THE WORLD'S WORST PLACE TO BE GAY?* (2011)

On May 17, 2014, Bring Us Rights and Justice (BURJ),¹ a local human rights NGO based in Accra, collaborated with the US and Dutch embassies in Accra to celebrate International Day Against Homophobia (IDAHO) for the first time in Ghana.² The event was held at the US embassy, a heavily securitized building located in Cantonments, one of Accra's affluent suburbs. Accorded the responsibility for organizing the event, BURJ received financial support from the US and Dutch

missions in Ghana. IDAHO attracted sexual minorities from across Accra and other parts of Ghana, including constituencies of sasso, some of whom were either partially connected to or fully employed at BURJ.

Eight years before the celebration of IDAHO, in 2006, it was alleged that an unknown international LGBT+ organization had attempted to organize a conference in Ghana's Eastern Region. Knowledge about this alleged conference triggered the indignation of the Ghanaian public. The Ghanaian journalist Haruna Atta dubbed it "the conference that never was"; news about the conference incited a moral panic which drew the attention of the NGOs that now address LGBT+ issues in Ghana. In the journalistic exposé, Atta asks:

So how/where did the story originate to have so gripped the nation as to invite a public statement from the government and condemnation from religious, social and traditional groups? The culprit, it seems, is all of us: the media. Isn't this something worth investigating by the National Media Commission? How could false media reports have created such an [*sic*] panic situation in Ghana at home and in the Ghanaian Diaspora? But true or false media reporting, one thing has been settled unequivocally in this sexual affair: it is now quite clear that Ghanaians do not have the stomach for gays and lesbians!³

Atta's article marks 2006 as a pivotal moment in the public discourse on homosexuality in Ghana by underscoring one of the first public debates on the subject. Politicians, members of the clergy, and civil society leaders were embroiled in the ensuing controversy in ways that amplified anxieties around the subject of homosexuality in the country. This period, arguably, coincided with the pursuit of LGBT+ human rights activism by organizations including BURJ, the West Africa Program to Combat AIDS and STI (WAPCAS), and the Centre for Popular Education and Human Rights, Ghana (CEPERHG).⁴ The celebration of IDAHO in 2014 was anticipated by the shifts caused by the increasingly widespread conversations on LGBT+ human rights pursuits in Ghana.

A centerpiece at IDAHO was the screening of the BBC's *The World's Worst Place to Be Gay*. The documentary first aired on the BBC's Channel Three in 2011 and was released on YouTube in 2012. Focusing on homophobia in Uganda, the documentary features the British DJ and TV personality Scott Mills, who chronicles the "precarious" circumstances in which sexual minorities live their lives. Mills's documentary reinforced what Manthia Diawara (2010) describes as the "humanitarian tarzanism" that underwrites documentaries on Africa, and about Africans, produced in the West. In other words, the film rehearsed representations about Africa immediately familiar to Western audiences, and despite its political tone, trafficked in a form of white saviorism all too familiar in LGBT+ human rights discourses about Africa.

The objective of this chapter is twofold. First, I illuminate how BURJ exemplifies NGOs that arose in Ghana in the last two decades of the twentieth century, providing an ethnographic portrait of the disagreements among BURJ employees in the wake of IDAHO.

Second, I highlight how the screening of *The World's Worst Place to Be Gay?* at IDAHO illuminates the vexed connections between racism and queer liberalism in postcolonial Africa and the nettlesome and conflicting environments in which African NGOs like BURJ reside. On the one hand, these organizations, in their activities and practices, seek to address LGBT+ human rights as an important human rights concern. On the other hand, however, the contexts in which they are nestled are animated by an uncertainty that compels these organizations to veil their pursuit of LGBT+ human rights projects for fear of exposure.

Arguably, BURJ's employees express an amphibious disposition analogous to the self-making practices of the sasso in this book. Not only an LGBT+ human rights organization, BURJ, like many NGOs founded in the late 1990s and early 2000s, began as a human rights NGO with a primary focus on gender issues. Here, it is important to signal a key difference in the politicization of gender in the context of the neoliberal international. In sub-Saharan Africa, the neoliberal wave orchestrated by projects of structural adjustment and economic recovery deployed gender as a political language to mainstream women into the public sphere. Against this backdrop, organizations like BURJ were committed to projects focused on gender mainstreaming upon their founding. LGBT+ human rights is a recent addition to BURJ's list of human rights interventions. Here, I contend with the question: does BURJ participate in homocolonial projects while simultaneously seeking to address the homophobic onslaught faced by queer Ghanaians?

SITUATING BRING US RIGHTS AND JUSTICE (BURJ) IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The rise and eventual prominence of Bring Us Rights and Justice (BURJ) in Ghana did not occur in a vacuum. Like many Ghanaian and African NGOs, BURJ's emergence and eventual prominence can be linked to the increased neoliberalization of Africa in the early eighties, typified by state deregulation. The years that intervened between the waves of independence in Africa to the eighties witnessed a litany of military interventions and governments that crippled the growth of postcolonial African nations. These years were followed by a slew of Western interventions that sought to rescue developing nations. The Ghanaian feminist and gender scholar Takyiwaa Manuh notes that this "long period of militarization and nonrepresentative government and increasing disenchantment with the state contributed to the spread of NGOs and their occupation of the space for independent action" (2007, 131). This period also coincided with the appearance of neoliberal pursuits in Africa in general and Ghana in particular, with the introduction of a wave of colossal political economic programs intended to help African countries recover.

One key feature of the neoliberal apparatus was its investment in state deregulation. To paraphrase the anthropologist James Ferguson, this implied the decentralization of state sovereignty (2006). It is therefore not surprising that neoliberalism reproduced the neocolonial apparatus left in the wake of colonialism's demise.

Of course, former colonial states no longer imposed rules on ex-colonies; non-state organizations and actors with their roots in the West now did the bidding of ex-colonial nations. The transnational organizations that emerged in the late seventies and early eighties expedited the globalization of neoliberalism through various interventions in a postcolonial world that had inherited the excesses of colonization (Ferguson 2006; Ake 1996; Pierre 2013). Organizations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) arose during this period, implementing the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) and the Economic Recovery Program (ERP). The projects executed under these programs demobilized state monopoly over their economies, introducing divestments that created an opening for the establishment of NGOs (Igoe and Kelsall 2005; Ake 1996). In many parts of Africa, development projects during this period coincided with efforts to resolve gender inequality within development itself.

The Latin American feminist and critical development studies scholar Sonia Alvarez describes the magnified shifts in transnational projects on women that required NGO interventions as the period of the “NGO boom” (1999). To be clear, the rise of NGOs in the non-Western world was accompanied, as it were, by intensified neoliberalization. As I have pointed out already, the transnationalization of governance and sovereignty, which required that NGOs compete for power and legitimacy on the stage of global politics, further disenfranchised nations in the so-called developing world.

The NGO boom marked a moment where “gender” entered public and political discourse. As Takiwaa Manuh argues: “The language of gender serves to address some of the imbalances that have come in with or have been accentuated by imported economic and political structures” (2007, 131). For Manuh, NGOs invested in gender advocacy emerged in response to the structural readjustment of violence introduced by projects executed under SAP and ERP. It is unsurprising, then, that the gender mainstreaming movement began in the last quarter of the twentieth century. This shift coincided with the emergence of projects that tackled the consequences that the collusion between neoliberalism and neocolonialism had on women. I maintain that the emergence of gender as a placeholder for women is linked to these ripples.

In Ghana, in particular, the emergence of several feminist and legal organizations, such as the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) and the Women and Juvenile Unit of Ghana (WAJU; now called the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit [DOVVSU]), further mainstreamed gender issues as primarily women’s issues. The founders and members of these organizations not only pioneered advocacy for women but also waged a campaign that addressed the multiple barriers confronted by women and girls as a result of the intersectional challenges induced by their marginal locations in the educational, economic, health, and other sectors. Collectively, these organizations wielded immense pressure on the Ghanaian government to legislate a domestic violence bill, a feat that transformed the landscape for women in Ghana.

The demands by these organizations included the revision of statutes in the national constitution that undercut the rights of women. At the time, human rights efforts predominantly focused on struggles for the rights of women, a cause that brought together women from a variety of backgrounds. Clearly, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the fight for the rights of sexual minorities, unlike women's rights, was invisible in the human rights advocacy agenda. The founder of BURJ, Madam Ama Brew Hammer, together with feminists like Ama Ata Aidoo and later Takyiwaa Manuh, Dzodzi Tsikata, Akosua Adomako Ampofo, and Audrey Gadzekpo, among many others, spearheaded the demand for radical constitutional shifts.⁵

The events generated by the push for the implementation of a domestic violence bill drastically shifted the rhetoric on women's rights, resulting in an outgrowth of NGOs and activist organizations. The confluence of these formations sparked the process that led to the passage of the domestic violence bill. As Takyiwaa Manuh (2007) noted in the United Kingdom's Department of International Development (DFID) report, the "much awaited" Domestic Violence Bill (DVB) was enacted in early 2007, following years of undaunted demonstrations by women across the country. The successful passage of the bill was heralded as one of the most significant legal feats to tectonically shift Ghana's sociolegal landscape, opening up a space for broadening human rights issues into other sociopolitical and cultural spheres.

THE PAROCHIALIZATION OF GENDER UNDER NEOLIBERALISM

Neoliberalism's approach to gender in postcolonial Ghana in particular and Africa in general is distinguishable from its approach to gender in the Global North. In the Global South, neoliberalism advanced a gender campaign that compelled governments to engage in a politics of gender mainstreaming, which amounted to aggressive efforts to include women in the public sphere; a different approach unfolded in the West. In the Global North, gender extended beyond the idea of gender as women to gender as a social construction and an identity existing on a spectrum. Conversely, in sub-Saharan Africa, neoliberal strategies to include women reinforced those violent gender binaries that currently haunt LGBT+ human rights pursuits in postcolonial Ghana. In other words, neoliberalism, the political economic regime that institutionalized gender politics in Africa as a project invested in intentionally incorporating women into the sphere of the political, shaped the contexts in which the current anxieties around LGBT+ human rights pursuits occur.

The passage of the Domestic Violence Bill in Ghana anticipated the founding and establishment of Bring Us Rights and Justice (BURJ) by Madam Ama Brew Hammer in 2008. As a human rights NGO, BURJ has since been involved in addressing human rights issues and social justice advocacy projects in Ghana, ranging from class, access to justice and health, domestic violence, mental health,

gender violence in schools, and workplace discrimination, to mention but a few. In sum, BURJ was conceived in a climate shaped by transnational organizations responding to larger social and economic problems in Africa. It is also important to note that the current anxieties around homosexuality, which defines the terrain in which BURJ pursues its LGBT+ activities, are the consequences of the “whack-a-mole politics of rescue” of SAP and ERP. The desire to rescue women, subsumed under gender mainstreaming, narrowed the focus of gender issues, and the consequences of this parochial approach are evidenced in responses to LGBT+ issues in Ghana (Currier 2012; McFadden 2011; Alexander 2005; Biruk 2020).

INTRODUCING BURJ

By the time I joined BURJ in September 2013, Madam Ama had just been appointed the minister for Gender, Children, and Social Protection. Currently, the organization is known for prioritizing human rights by pursuing legal actions against the violations of and infringements on citizens’ civil rights and liberties by both the state and civil society. Madam Ama’s rise to prominence was helped by her active participation in the late 1990s and early 2000s in feminist and legal organizations that waged multiple advocacy campaigns to compel the government to enact a domestic violence bill. The demands by these movements included the revision of statutes in the Fourth Republican Constitution to address issues of women and gender. Deeply embedded in these activist reformist projects, Madam Ama consolidated herself in the NGO domain and women’s movement as one of Ghana’s most influential activists and lawyers. Madam Ama’s work in wide-ranging areas drew attention to BURJ from both local and global human rights arenas.

Since BURJ began executing programs that cater to sexual minorities, survivors of gender-based violence, people living with HIV/AIDS, and so on, it has received considerable funding from organizations in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Belgium, among other Western nations. The organization’s links to Northern donors, with whom it obviously shares paradoxical relationships, reinforce Ashley Currier’s observation of the messy terrains in which the growth of the LGBT movement in countries like Namibia and South Africa played out. Currier writes: “Donor funding and relationships with international LGBT movement organizations facilitated Namibian and South African LGBT activists’ networks with activists elsewhere in Africa, buttressing their international visibility. Thus, LGBT movement organizations were not entirely beholden to Northern donors and LGBT activists; instead, they were able to use these resources in ways that benefited a growing African LGBT movement” (2012, 20–21).

Similarly, BURJ is embedded in networks that allow activists and staff within the organization to participate, for instance, in international conferences on human rights in general and LGBT+ human rights issues in particular. Additionally, the organization is notable for a popular internship program it runs, which attracts

interns from countries like Australia, the United States and Canada, Europe and parts of Asia, and Latin America. Occasionally, an intern will come from a country in Africa.⁶ The internship program began with the inception of BURJ and has been running in conjunction with foreign missions in Ghana. On BURJ's website, there is a section that directs interested internship applicants to consider interning there. This is accompanied by a full description of the endeavors undertaken by the organization and a monthly internship fee of \$150.⁷ Upon admission, international interns conduct research, write publications, and actively engage in human rights outreach and campaigns and the various projects executed by BURJ.

In the main, BURJ, like many NGOs, especially those that focus on marginalized groups in postcolonial Ghana, illustrates Cal Biruk's observation that "NGO practices serve socially significant functions such as making a person legible through their citation of acronyms or categories like LGBTQI, often through activities that assume Euro-American notions of self as an autonomous thing to be confessed, named, or worked on, in notable contrast to scholarly renderings of African personhood as a state of becoming rather than being, and as ongoing achievement" (2020, 480).

NGOization therefore reinforces Westernization. And like the Christian missionary efforts that anticipated them, these organizations have agents and institutions, both local and nonlocal, that parrot particular notions of modernity. BURJ's LGBT+ human rights projects are subsumed under its "Access to Justice; Social Inclusion; Legislation and Policy Reform; Health; Government Accountability; and Community and Institutional Strengthening" pursuits. Besides the LGBT+ community, BURJ focuses on other target groups that include "persons with disabilities, including mental disabilities, women and girls, and prisoners."⁸ BURJ, therefore, has a wide-ranging mission that, at the time of my ethnography, was expanding.

Claiming to be strictly nonpartisan, BURJ's human rights projects have included addressing socioeconomic inequality, discrimination, domestic violence, women's rights, mental health rights, and sexual and reproductive health rights. The section on sexual and reproductive health rights encompasses projects that focus on access to health for key populations, which include men who have sex with men (MSM), women who have sex with women (WSW), survivors of gender-based violence, female sex workers (FSW), and people living with HIV/AIDS (PLHIV).

BURJ employees are beholden to its vision "to become a respected human rights organization, both within Ghana as well as globally." Thus, the organization has minimal presence in other West African countries like Gambia, Senegal, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. While it is unclear whether it addresses issues affecting sexual minorities in these countries, what is clear is that BURJ's increasing interest in LGBT+ human rights issues and homophobia in Ghana is evidenced by the publication of what is arguably Ghana's first LGBT+ empowerment manual. The publication is intended for sexual minorities such as *sasso*. In the work and

activities for sexual minorities undertaken by BURJ, sasso identities became subsumed under LGBT+. Thus, the “amphibious” pursuit of LGBT+ empowerment programs places the organization on the map of queer liberalism.⁹ It is not surprising that IDAHO was organized under the auspices of the organization because of its prominence both locally and internationally on human rights issues. During preparations for IDAHO, I uncovered that some BURJ employees disagreed with the organization’s increasing interest in LGBT+ human rights pursuits.

Knotted Micropolitics in LGBT+ Human Rights Advocacy

At the top of BURJ’s hierarchy and functions are the director and the executive board, who steer the organization’s major projects and activities. The executive director of BURJ during my time in the organization was Mr. Richard Owusu, a twenty-four-year-old man who took over from Madam Ama Brew Hammer. Born and raised in Accra, Richard, before joining Madam Ama Brew Hammer at BURJ, had earned his first degree from the University of Ghana. It is unclear whether Richard self-identified as sasso, although he secretly disclosed to me and several queer staff, most of whom were interns from Western countries, that he was gay.¹⁰ Before assuming his position as the executive director of the organization, Richard closely worked as an assistant to Madam Ama. Here is an excerpt from a 2013 conversation with him:

Madam Ama entered my life while I was in high school. Or should I say that I entered her life in high school. She has since mentored me by giving me the tools I needed to become a human rights advocate in Ghana. My burning desire to pursue human rights activism in Ghana, which is not limited to gender, LGBT+ human rights, but also includes the working poor, and other vulnerable groups, was all instilled in me by her. Growing up, I never envisioned myself working in an outfit like this; it was only when Madam Ama “adopted” me as part of her family that I became quite involved in activism and to take this human rights topic seriously. I know that as a self-described feminist in Ghana, Madam Ama has a reputation that sometimes endangers her. You know Ghanaians and what they think about feminism. Many think that it is not African and that it was brought here from Europe or America. But Madam Ama, like other notable Ghanaian feminists, resisted that narrative. Founding Bring Us Rights and Justice was definitely part of changing that story, which is why I became so attached to her inclination for social justice and the pursuit of human rights at BURJ.

Richard’s investment in BURJ is inspired by his close relationship with Madam Ama. Following his appointment as the executive director of BURJ, Richard wanted to take the organization to new heights. Several projects occurred under Richard’s leadership, some of which included education, research, advocacy, advisory, and monitoring. BURJ, periodically in 2012 and regularly in 2013–2014, pursued several projects concurrently. These projects spanned gender-based violence (GBV) in schools, a remand prisoners program, LGBT+ human rights, reproductive and sexual health, and access to justice for the marginalized.

These various endeavors are overseen by the director and the technical projects manager of the organization, Amanda Yarney, who was in her early thirties at the time of this ethnography. Like Richard, Amanda obtained her degree in political science at the University of Ghana. Before joining BURJ, she worked with Commission of Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ). Programs involving human rights cases fell under the supervision of the director of BURJ's Human Rights Clinic, Akosua Agyapong, a thirty-two-year-old woman with a degree from Accra Polytechnic (now known as the Accra Technical University). Akosua was not a trained lawyer but coordinated a cohort of lawyers who served as counselors at the clinic. The organization also ran the popular Pro-Bono Lawyer Network (PBLN) program, with participating lawyers offering free legal services to vulnerable populations that lacked access to information about their human rights. These and other various activities run by BURJ propelled the organization into the limelight of human rights advocacy in Ghana.

My presence in the organization lasted for a year. During this period, I observed that the non-Ghanaian interns who were queer and mostly white occasionally asserted their LGBT+ identification without reproach from the organization's nonqueer Ghanaian members. In addition to the white queer interns, there were three other queer Ghanaians in the office, most of whom chose to be discreet about their queerness. However, during projects that focused on men who have sex with men (MSM), it became apparent to me that there were queer Africans in the organization because of how the MSMs interacted with them.¹¹

There was constant dissonance among employees on LGBT+ issues. There were staff members who identified as "allies," thus accepting of interns and staff who self-identified as LGBT+. Also present in the organization were those employees who remained silent on BURJ's commitment to LGBT+ human rights. Some of these employees elected to not participate in projects that focused on sexual minorities, claiming that to be involved in LGBT+ projects would be to accept homosexuality, and such a position was incongruent with their religious affiliation as Christian. The dissension among the organization's staff on LGBT+ issues became apparent when Akosua, the human rights coordinator and staunch ally of the LGBT+, shared the following observation with me in 2014:

I have been working at BURJ for over five years now. During my time here, I have always ensured, as the person in charge of running the human rights unit within the organization, that everybody is recognized as a rights-bearing citizen irrespective of their age, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, creed, class, you list them. Although BURJ started as an NGO that addresses women's vulnerable positions in Ghana, that interest has been widened to include other vulnerable groups. Maybe when Madam Ama established the organization she did not envision that it would grow to address LGBT+ human rights issues. I know that there are some colleagues who do not like the turn we have taken, which is addressing LGBT+ rights. They are the religious ones who claim we are doing something wrong. Their concerns aside, they know they have to survive. They know in order to survive you need a job.

So, if there are grants that are being offered by international LGBT+ human rights NGOs to run LGBT+ human rights projects in Ghana, we apply for them. Those grants bring us the money that sustains them. You can disagree with the fact that we engage in LGBT+ human rights campaigns, but you have to do it because life in Ghana is hard and your job is good. Those who don't like the fact that we understand gay rights to be human rights are free to leave or stay. It is what it is.

Akosua's claims suggest that Madam Ama Brew Hammer established BURJ, first, to address the vulnerable positions of women in Ghanaian society, and then, with the passage of time, added other vulnerable groups, of which the LGBT+ community is the most recent addition. Although LGBT+ concerns have now been incorporated into the human rights framework adopted by BURJ, the pursuit of LGBT+ issues often occurs in tandem with sexual and reproductive health rights. It is within the organization's framework to improve access to health for key populations, which includes men who have sex with men (MSM), female sex workers (FSW), survivors of gender-based violence (SGBV), and people living with HIV/AIDS (PLHIV) that LGBT+ issues are addressed. I speculate that to avoid conflicts, the leadership of the organization subsumed LGBT+ issues within the larger framework of access to health and justice to avert being viewed as an LGBT+ organization in a country hesitant to recognize LGBT+ rights.

Despite the underlying dissension triggered by the place of LGBT+ human rights in the organization, BURJ continued to underscore the importance of improving access to health for sexual minorities. This included men who have sex with men (MSMs), most of whom were *sasso*. BURJ received a large grant from the funding pool called STAR-Ghana in 2013 to conduct research in five regions of Ghana among sexual minorities, most of whom were believed to have limited access to health care.¹² The research, called "Improving Access to Health Care for Key Populations and the Survivors of Gender-Based Violence," was approved by the Ghana Health Service (GHS). It was intended to create better health services for MSM, including *sasso*. I participated as the principal investigator for this project and witnessed the micropolitics among BURJ staff regarding the distribution of funding and the moral implications of offering services to homosexuals. Through these projects, LGBT+ issues were intermittently addressed, much to the dismay of a section of BURJ's staff. The debate about whether queer rights should become integral to BURJ's human rights program, I intimate, was possibly the corollary of the economic suffering caused by neoliberal forces that ran roughshod over Ghanaians and the ascent of a brand of Christianity that seemed to be competing for sovereignty with the nation (Biruk 2020; Quayson 2014; McFadden 2011; Hoad 2007; Gifford 2004).

The research project implementation required that employees work closely with sexual minorities, whether or not they agreed with their sexual dispositions, as well as with other marginalized and vulnerable groups. The project expected BURJ staff to collect data from MSM, female sex workers (FSW), and persons

living with HIV (PLHIV). There were lingering disagreements among staff on the LGBT+ focus of the project.

The dissension engendered by BURJ's pursuit of projects related to the LGBT+ community was one part of the story. But the prevailing contentions and dissatisfaction among employees were also linked to economic disparities between high- and low-ranking staff. It was clear to some employees at the nonmanagerial level that wage gaps existed between them and the managerial staff. Low-ranking officials constantly mused over their measly monthly wages, which they insisted failed to buffer them from Ghana's worsening economic conditions.

Among the employees, in particular those who kept their queer identities a secret, including Kobby, projects that focused on improving access to health for sexual minorities came with benefits that kept them afloat in Ghana's indeterminate and harsh economy. The income from such projects enabled Kobby to support his mother and sister. Largely because of their familial obligations, he had to delicately balance himself between the NGO world, which promoted LGBT+ rights, and a family that espoused heteronormative values. In the process, he faced the scorn of family members, who accepted the financial support despite rejecting what came with that support: the increased visibility of same-sex politics and human rights advocacy for sexual minorities in Ghana.

Similarly, a number of BURJ employees expressed moral objections toward LGBT+ projects, but enjoyed the income generated by those projects. These employees, in a manner akin to the nurses and health workers at the hospitals who vilified sasso, opposed LGBT+ human rights politics and BURJ's pursuit of it. They regularly resorted to citing biblical passages to justify their moral stance against homosexuality. As one such BURJ employee, Clement, once suggested during a meeting to discuss the parameters of a public health project geared toward MSM:

At the very least, we as an organization should know that we live in a country where homosexuality is unacceptable. Ghana is predominantly a Christian nation and our Christian moral values challenge us to be firm in our opposition to vices such as homosexuality. I work in an organization that seeks to bring recourse to the vulnerable and in no way argue that homosexuals need to be penalized. I think the organization's attachment to LGBT+ human rights is coming in the way of my own understanding of human rights, but of course, I can't condemn why we are pursuing it. We just have to understand that it is an illegal thing. It is as simple as that.

Clement's statement stages a crucial scenario, which is the extent of the collision of African Christian and queer liberal modernities in an organization supported and funded by Western donors that fuel queer liberalism. In fact, the expression of these antagonistic moral sentiments and commitments should not only be understood as a consequence of Ghanaians' fear of a dying morality but also be tied to the steady suffering and resignation in this neoliberalized nation. Ultimately, these dissensions, together with other lingering tensions, defined the backdrop against which IDAHO was organized.

Who Attends International Day Against Homophobia (IDAHO)?

With preparations under way for the celebration of IDAHO, BURJ witnessed an exchange of phone calls and e-mails with the two foreign diplomatic missions involved, the American and Dutch embassies. For the purposes of the event, Richard formed a four-member committee, including myself. The other members were two doctoral students from abroad, one of whom was a white intern and the other of Ghanaian extraction. Except for the white intern, all four of us remained surreptitious about our sexual identities, and understandably so, as I have already indicated. As part of the preparation for the event, BURJ held a meeting to discuss IDAHO's logistics. At the meeting, a section of the staff vented their disagreements with BURJ's increasing investments in the pursuit of LGBT+ advocacy.

Moral concerns around homosexuality and low wages were raised by some staff members, several of whom suggested that an NGO advocating for human rights should not financially disenfranchise its staff. For example, there were complaints that the director and the executive board received salaries that were not commensurate with their qualifications. The IDAHO preparatory meeting, therefore, served as the grounds on which staff like the senior technical officer (STO) and the director of the Human Rights Clinic vented their disagreements with BURJ's involvement with IDAHO. These employees shared the view that these diplomatic missions exploited BURJ to promote an LGBT+ agenda, challenging the original goals of the organization, which initially excluded LGBT+ human rights.

The suggested venue for IDAHO was the US consulate in Accra. Richard announced that since the event would be supported by the Dutch and American diplomatic missions, it was BURJ's responsibility as a local organization to mobilize persons and groups who self-identified as LGBT+. Those employees who decided to attend the event, some of whom self-identified as *sasso* and some as LGBT+, were given several responsibilities at the event. Since the event was held to celebrate IDAHO, the term *LGBT+* superseded *sasso*. In fact, never during the program was *sasso* deployed. At the preparatory session, it was suggested that the program begin with the screening of a documentary, which was to be followed by a panel discussion. At this time, the documentary to be screened was unknown to the organization, as it was staff at the US embassy who chose which documentary to show during the celebration.

Some BURJ staff began to question the organization's involvement in the celebration of IDAHO, asking, Is BURJ an LGBT+ human rights organization? Is it the mission of BURJ to secure LGBT+ rights in a country in which same-sex activity is criminalized? Is BURJ not engaging in a crime by clandestinely pursuing LGBT+ human rights, by celebrating IDAHO? The senior technical officer, Amanda Yarney, tabled these questions, which invited disagreements from Richard.

It would be tempting to interpret the differences expressed at the meeting as a mark of homophobia and BURJ employees' irrational apprehension about

IDAHO. I suggest that we look at the disagreements that arose that morning as offshoots, the causes of which are unclear to the outsider. For example, if the wage difference between Richard, who furtively self-identified as queer, and his subordinates were to be considered in the context of employees' objections to celebrating IDAHO, we would read the scenario differently. If Amanda's repudiation is read as the outcome of the employees' grievances and dissatisfaction with BURJ's celebration of IDAHO, then that adds another twist to the dissension. Also, some employees felt that they held the same educational qualifications as Richard, for which they deserved a better remuneration than they were currently receiving. Arguably, this dissatisfaction shaped why BURJ employees responded to IDAHO in the manner in which they did. Akosua Agyapong, the human rights coordinator in charge of running the Human Rights Clinic, had this to say after the IDAHO event:

You know, Richard [the executive director] should remember that we both have the same qualification. So, if he expects us to work on such an event [IDAHO], he better pay us well. If he had a master's degree then maybe I would understand why he gets more than us. But, for now, he holds the same qualification as me. Also, I have no quarrel with IDAHO. No! Far from that! My concern is about the benefits that doing this collaboration with these embassies will bring to us all in this NGO. I think that it is easy for Richard to mobilize us to do this, but he's forgotten that not all of us are like him [by which she means gay and well off]. I think he should know that we will give our consent to participate in these events only if we are also content with how much we get at the end of the month.

To be clear, Akosua's apathy toward IDAHO is connected to her receiving what she regards as a paltry salary not commensurate with her qualifications. Specifically, she said that "my monthly wage is not commensurate with my duties as the human rights coordinator of the Human Rights Clinic at BURJ." Akosua insisted that to participate in the organization of IDAHO "added another line of responsibility to a job for which I get very little compensation." Thus, in her opinion, IDAHO had less to do with her moral position and more to do with the incommensurability of her monthly salary with her college qualifications.

Another reason for the hesitation was the lingering perception among several employees that Richard, who was much younger than his subordinates, was immature and was rude and disrespectful. Richard's age prompted some employees to conclude that he could be their boss, but never their coequal in age. When Richard was out of sight, Kobby would criticize his amateurish behavior by calling him a "square peg in a round hole" who "acts like a child. When we undertake projects and he sees men he's interested in, he acts like a chicken without a head. What kind of human being lives in the world like that? He has to be careful the kind of people he does that with, especially as some of these guys just do it for the money and are also more likely to blackmail you if you fail to give

them what they want. I just hope that he's careful about his proclivities before he loses his job."

Sulley, the office manager, reinforced Kobby's sentiment by suggesting that Richard was clearly not ready for the position. Pointing to the fact that Richard secured the position of the executive director because of Madam Ama, he says:

As a matter of fact, the founder gave him the position because of his bootlicking and sycophantic demeanor. He went and told on the immediate past director, which was why she was fired, for being inefficient and making a mess at the organization. But you know this is not the first time he has done that. He was also the founder's pet, being commanded to do what she wanted to do. So even if we ask for a raise, whenever he goes to see the founder, he cowers before her, failing to put our demands for a raise to her. All he cares about is himself, his friends and consorts. In fact, he is really someone who we can't trust. Because he gets all the money, too, he has become proud and disrespectful. Today he has an iPhone, tomorrow he has a Samsung Galaxy, what kind of human rights are we practicing if the leader is so self-absorbed and cares less about us, his subordinates?

It is evident that employees like Sulley and Kobby complained about Richard's immaturity. However, a select group of BURJ's employees, including the international interns, were of the view that he had the relevant skills and qualifications required to manage the organization. They shared the belief that Richard shifted the orientation of BURJ upon assuming the directorship early by incorporating LGBT+ human rights. Amidst the dissatisfaction and disaffection shown by some of the employees, BURJ's accountant, Vincent, was one of few in the organization who had a favorable view of Richard. For Vincent, "Richard has single-handedly transformed the organization to everybody's surprise. When Amanda was in charge, the interns were so miserable. They would come to the office and sit down idle. They were given no responsibilities. But, as you know, these guys [interns] are paying so much to come and experience doing human rights work in Ghana. But Amanda did not care, and BURJ was just going down the drain. But Richard changed all of that."

To be clear, opinions about Richard wavered. For instance, when knowledge about his sexual proclivities entered the conversation, the views about him became even more hostile. Some staff, aware of his homoerotic engagements, shrouded their knowledge in secrecy. By cordoning off their awareness of the director's queer proclivities, some staff preserved their contract with BURJ, as they feared any exposure of Richard's homosexual leanings might undermine their jobs. In a similar vein, queer Ghanaian employees had to operate under the paradigm of "don't ask don't tell" out of fear of becoming targeted by those BURJ staff who disagreed with LGBT+ liberalization.¹³ These various tactics, adopted by both queer Ghanaians and their nonqueer Ghanaian counterparts, albeit in dissonance with the organization's goal to decriminalize same-sex sexuality, were conducted to safeguard BURJ's stability.

*Unforeseen Entanglements: Amphibious Organizations
and Homocolonial LGBT+ Humanitarianism*

Evidently, amphibious self-making was palpable in the everyday activities of the organization. The queer Ghanaians in the organization navigated BURJ amphibiously. Although Richard would on occasion remind employees that despite their knowledge of his intimate life, he was the person in charge, he carefully navigated his queer identity in ways that did not interfere with his identity as a Christian with strong roots in the church.

Thus, Richard was often wary about the uneasy sexual and cultural climates in which he served as the face of BURJ. The tittle-tattles around homosexuality arose only when employees complained about delays in monthly wages or felt that they were not getting the bonuses promised them by Richard at the end of the year. For them, gossiping about the sexual leanings of the executive director in his absence represented a way of dealing with his “bossiness.” Gossip, for the employees, was a way of asserting power and control, and to also cushion the consequences of working under what some presumed was a despotic leadership style. The deployment of gossip here shows just how homophobia was integral to the mechanics of BURJ. It was part of the latticework of an organization that fought homophobia in its various projects.

The disagreements among the staff on LGBT+ politics were mainly internal. On occasion, some staff explicitly expressed moral sentiments about the projects that focused on sexual minorities. They would sporadically either jocularly or seriously make a laughingstock of Richard. For example, Kweku, the man in charge of information technology at BURJ, knew about Richard’s sexual proclivities without sharing how he came by such information. Having worked in the organization since its founding, Kweku knew a lot about the organization and its entrails. He once hinted at Richard’s homosexuality in a conversation to me as follows: “I think he should be careful not to be caught having sex with a man, because he is the director of a respectable organization, and such an act might bring shame to the organization. If he goes around getting fucked in the asshole if he’s caught in doing so all of us will be fucked up as well. We will lose our jobs and people will know that our boss was getting fucked in the ass.”

Kweku’s homophobic sentiment here privileges the organization’s outward presentation as a respectable entity. He feared that Richard’s sexual proclivities might jeopardize the organization’s reputation as well as the employees working in it. In effect, Kweku expects the executive director to have a “modicum” of respect. While he does not directly share this with Richard, because he is his boss, the fact that he articulates this view reveals the dissonance in the organization about homosexuality and LGBT+ community. Kweku’s concerns form the part of the background against which the disagreements shared before IDAHO were expressed. These various views amplify the fissures in the organization regarding LGBT+ human rights discourse and the organization’s collaboration with the US and Dutch embassies.

In large measure, some employees were of the view that BURJ was either compelled to collaborate or that the executive director could not turn down the offer because of his fear of white people. Some members asserted that projects involving homosexuals contradicted their Christian moral values. On IDAHO, these staff did not show up at the American embassy.

IDAHO: The Event

Thirty members of the LGBT+ community attended IDAHO. Some of the LGBT+ members in attendance self-identified as sasso. In attendance, too, were the chief superintendents from the Ghana Police Service and diplomatic officials from the American and Dutch embassies, among other invited persons. Not all members of the executive board were present at IDAHO. For instance, the STO, the director of the Human Rights Clinic, the accountant, and other low-level employees absented themselves. However, five employees, including Richard and the international interns, were present to coordinate the program. The BBC's *The World's Worst Place to Be Gay?* was the centerpiece of IDAHO, which was followed by a discussion panel constituted by some leading members of Ghana's human rights community.

Audience members had various interpretations of the screening. Asked by the director what they thought about the documentary, most described the situation in Uganda as unfortunate and terrible. One attendee who self-identified as gay made the following remark:

I cannot believe Africans are doing this to Africans. We are doing to ourselves what the colonial white people did to us, because of a religion that was used to punish us and to justify our place as people without culture, without history. I am not sure what else to make of the documentary only to describe how awful Africans treat each other. In Ghana, the situation is no different, but at least we manage to make it work for us as queer people. I think in a way that the documentary tells me that the LGBT+ community in Ghana is better off. My question is: are we going to get better or get worse? I am not sure or certain about that.

The response from this attendee speaks to the uncertainty animating the LGBT+ and sasso community in Ghana. There is evidently a sharp condemnation of Africans, a position that reechoes the documentary's condemnation of Ugandans and their government. Interestingly, however, the statement that Africans' treatment of homosexuals parallels how white colonists treated Africans is quite crucial. This analogy historicizes, in a fundamental way, the layers and intersections of oppression by highlighting how racism and homophobia entwine in rather uneasy ways. That white supremacy is categorically entwined with heterosexual supremacy is explained by the attendee in a way that the documentary itself fails to do.

Immediately after this remark, Anthony, a sasso in the audience, shared his concerns about the lack of historical understanding portrayed in the documentary and the wrongful generalization of African homophobia. Anthony questioned the

veracity of the documentary and whether the BBC had attempted to do any historical research before producing the documentary and releasing it to the public. They also proceeded to ask the director why they thought the documentary was relevant for the celebration, as opposed to an African-centered documentary like *Dakan* (Camara 1997) or *Woubi Chéri* (Bocahut 1998), which refuse the tropes of African homophobia.

I am a little confused about this documentary. It lacks some important historical facts and I also disagree with the idea that Uganda is the world's most homophobic place. Just recently, I read on the internet that a gay couple was brutally beaten in Germany. In South Africa, they are raping lesbians in order to cure them of lesbianism. Can you imagine that? Yet, South Africa is celebrated as one of the most tolerant nations to embrace LGBT+ people but the violence lesbians face there, especially Black lesbians, is unbelievable. This is why I disagree with the documentary on a core level. I mean I don't doubt that homophobia exists in Uganda, homophobia is there. But these white people always want to exaggerate things when they happen in Africa. Why aren't they talking about South Africa? Why aren't they talking about gays in Germany? Why aren't they criticizing sharply the evangelicals that spread homophobic messages? These people [evangelicals] support churches in Ghana too. Why don't they deal with those problems first before they can finally draw the conclusion that Uganda is homophobic? Now I think BURJ should have asked these questions too. They could have even chosen to show *Dakan* by Mohamed Camara or the Ivorian documentary called *Woubi Chéri*, which were all released in the mid-nineties. These two documentaries present a different narrative distinct from this BBC production, which repeats the same story that Africans are terrible people without any historical context. BURJ staff I know why you showed this documentary, but we have to let the white people here in the room understand that homophobia is not just an African problem but a problem for everybody, including them.

Anthony's response to the documentary is informed by his position as a longtime activist in the sasso community with a critical passion for history. At the time of the screening, he was completing a master's degree in African studies at the University of Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah Institute of African Studies, where he was writing a thesis on colonial interpretations of gender and sexuality. Anthony's critique of the documentary thus arises out of his own activist and intellectual work, which have been critical of how international NGOs in Ghana disrupt LGBT+ human rights activities being conducted by local organizations and their constituencies. It is, therefore, unsurprising that he rejected the wholesale description of Uganda as the world's worst place to be gay. In fact, his critique points to the racism embedded in the documentary, and how BURJ is complicit in producing such racism because it is supported by the American and Dutch embassies, respectively. Offering examples of homophobia in places advanced in LGBT+ human rights rhetoric as quintessential meccas for LGBT+ individuals, Anthony undermines that rhetoric by suggesting that homophobia is everybody's problem, thus refusing to racialize it.

Anthony is rather unequivocal in his opinion that the documentary reinforces racist narratives about Africa as backward, dangerous, and primitive while drawing on liberal nomenclature. His reading is critical not just because it reflects the dissonance among the staff at BURJ but because it illuminates those strings and conditions that tie BURJ to the American embassy, the mission whose staff elected to screen the documentary. Evidently, Anthony's observation underscores how NGOs like BURJ have to carefully tread the treacherous landscapes of aid giving and donor support orchestrated by Western-based organizations. Because BURJ is an organization whose activities are occasionally supported by the Dutch and American foreign missions in Ghana—donations that both enable the execution of human rights projects and serve as the source of income for BURJ employees—the organization's existence always hangs in the balance.

BURJ, as an organization, including its staff, is embedded in what I describe as an LGBT+ human rights industrial complex that paradoxically creates opportunities for engaging in queer politics while at the same time constraining local organizations that attempt to carefully tread minefields of uncertainty. That the American and Dutch missions in Ghana, as Anthony's perceptive observation illuminates, pay inadequate attention to local realities and the shifting and nettlesome landscapes in which those realities play out, puts BURJ, its staff members, and its LGBT+ and sasso constituents in a precarious situation. The rigmarole preceding the celebration of a typically Western-originated event like IDAHO invokes the tensions, conflicts, and pressure points that the increased visibility of LGBT+ human rights politics incites. I am of the view that organizations like BURJ, while invested in creating safer grounds for sexual minorities, get entangled in the matrix of the neocolonial and neoliberal apparatuses that reproduces the image of Africa, as I have argued elsewhere, as "the heart of homophobic darkness" (Otu 2017).

Thus, the paradoxical location of BURJ epitomizes the organization's amphibious location within a transnational LGBT+ human rights framework that racializes Africans while claiming to rescue its vulnerable LGBT+ citizens. I argue, then, that *The World's Worst Place to Be Gay?* is a homocolonial trope. It is homocolonial precisely because it calcifies images and representations of Africans by ignoring the complexities that constitute the background against which the LGBT+ communities which are the target of interventions play out. Anthony is, therefore, right to point out that documentaries like *Dakan* and *Woubi Chéri* would have been better suited to the celebration, especially as they are more representative of such complexities.

Despite several debates and controversies that IDAHO brought to the foreground, I acknowledge that organizations like BURJ have created spaces and opportunities where conversations on queer politics and discussions on the future of LGBT+ rights in Ghana have occurred. Although they do not boldly identify as an LGBT+ human rights organization, the fact that they engage in LGBT+ human

rights projects has fostered an environment for new LGBT+ human rights organizations to evolve.

Sasso who formerly worked with BURJ have, since the completion of this ethnography, founded or established LGBT+ organizations, which unlike BURJ focus primarily on liberalizing queer visibility in Ghana. I touch briefly on some of these organizations in the conclusion to this book. Especially notable among these new organizations are Priorities on Rights and Sexual Health (PORSH) and LGBT+ Rights Ghana,¹⁴ both of which share a holistic commitment to all things affecting queer people and nonheteronormative subjects in Ghana. There is also the SOLACE Initiative, “a non-governmental organization committed to working for the promotion and protection of the human rights of all persons specifically Lesbians, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ+) people in Ghana.”¹⁵ Most of these organizations have emerged between the last five to seven years. Their existence is indicative of a rising tide of queer Africans seeking to queer Africa by engaging in activist efforts for queer constituencies arguably more robust and intentional than predecessors like BURJ.