

LET THE DOOR OPEN: A DIALOGUE WITH HETERONORMATIVE TRADITIONS IN MOHAMED CAMARA'S *DAKAN*.

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ABSTRACT

*The prevailing discourse on same-sex sexuality in West African societies is characterized by a complete ban on the issue. Despite an always growing number of gays, lesbians, and trans, most West African countries tend to make invisible the lives of thousands of people by cutting them from their fundamental rights. To make matters worse, the common stereotypical understanding of sexuality borrows from traditions which, not only claim to be essential but which are mainly predicated on heteronormative praxes. In his 1997 feature film, *Dakan*, Mohamed Camara, a Guinean filmmaker, constructs on the love of two young men, Sori and Manga, in order to deconstruct sociopolitical discourses that markedly cripple the existence of the LGBT community. In this essay, I explore Camara's cinematic dexterity to show that West-African social and political rejection of same-sex sexuality is constructed and based on linear assumptions.*

KEYWORDS

Heteronormative, linear assumptions, LGBT, sexuality, sexual hierarchy

1. INTRODUCTION

Among the many revolutionary actions that occurred within the West African sub-region since the acquisition of the independences, the 1997 release of *Dakan* by Guinean filmmaker[1], Mohamed Camara, marks a turning point that deserves a serious scrutiny. Indeed, for the common westerner who is not aware of the prevailing political and social literature on LGBT in the region, Camara's *Dakan* is just an African movie on homosexuality in Guinea and West Africa. The reality is rather different, compelling, and intensely dramatic for hundreds, and even thousands of people who still have to remain silent, become transparent or come to grips with their societies in order to be assertive of their true identity. For many of the LGBT youth in West Africa, the social and traditional fabric, which claims a *legacy of puritanism*, is characterized by the antipathic language of ostracization, rejection and death.

Many battles, relative to social issues, which range from female genital mutilations to schooling children and the transformation of rural mentalities to urban ones were thought and won or are on

the verge of being won and classified. However, one battle still remains to win and that is the battle that centers on diversity, the acceptance of difference identities and the provision of equal rights to LGBT people. In his report entitled “Being LGBT in West Africa”[2], Philip Rodenbough posits that:

The US State department has incorrectly reported in the past that there are no laws against homosexuality. It, further, reports that there have not been any prosecutions under this law, although the Guinean government recently created a special investigation unit dedicated to moral offences including homosexuality. Guinea has anti-discrimination laws on the books, but they do not apply to the LGBT community. (34)

Rodenbough’s assertion proves that there may be a lack of true knowledge concerning the conditions of LGBT in West Africa despite the enormous efforts to unveil the reality. It shows that the various studies on LGBT in the region should not be limited to the laws and different texts voted to address diversity. It, therefore, invites the researcher to evaluate other types of archives.

As such, an important element that requires attention is the voting of the penal code, in Guinea, one year only after the release of Camara’s *Dakan*. The penal code reads in its article 325 that “Tout acte impudique ou contre nature commis avec un individu de son sexe sera puni d'un emprisonnement de 6 mois à 3 ans et d'une amende de 100.000 à 1.000.000 de francs guinéens” ‘Any unseemly act or crime against nature committed with an individual of the same sex will be punished by six months to three years of imprisonment and a fine of 100,000 to 1,000,000 Guinean francs’[3]. Although the law of 1998 was already harsh for LGBT people, it was reread, and a new penal code was passed in 2016[4]. The new code made things worse by dehumanizing LGBT sexuality. It states in its article 274 that “Tout acte impudique ou contre nature commis avec un individu de son sexe ou avec un animal est puni d'un emprisonnement de 6 mois à 3 ans et d'une amende de 500.000 à 1.000.000 de francs guinéens” ‘Any unseemly act or crime against nature committed with an individual of the same sex or with an animal is punished by six months to three years of prison and a fine of 500,000 to 1,000,000 Guinean francs’ (90). The intention of the Guinean lawmakers is transparent. First, it bears an anti-LGBT stance by punishing the Guinean homosexual, denying, de facto, an identity to thousands of people and establishing heterosexuality as the norm for them. In addition, the law declares a repression against the LGBT community and that repression is conducted by government forces that normally should be the guarantor of public and individual freedom. Second, lawmakers vilify the LGBT community and as such do not address the social inequalities and fears of the LGBT but rather worsen their relations within their societies.

It is in a repressive context that Mohamed Camara shot, edited, and released *Dakan* in order to make public an issue that is prevailing in most West African countries. *Dakan* is therefore not just a movie but beyond its cinematic materiality, is an ideology that tries to reconstruct by deconstructing the contemporary African epistemology about same-sex relations. As we will see in the following lines, Sub-Saharan African contemporary epistemology on homosexuality does

not consider the preexistence of same-sex relations throughout the continent. Consequently, Camara's narrative on Sori and Manga's love may seem to be at odd with traditions. Henceforth, the aim is to deconstruct such a misconception in the Butlerian understanding of the term[5], which suggests that "to deconstruct is not to negate or to dismiss, but to call into question" (165). Unquestionably, Judith Butler's analysis of postmodernism and her interrogation of the notion of "woman" calls for the reassessment of the modes of interpretation. Drawing from Butler, we see that knowledge is built from plurality. As such, there is an urgent need to question older African epistemologies that sadly predicate their comprehension of sexuality on a monolithic heteronormative construction.

Camara mainly focuses his setting in the realm of the family and there is a reason for such a decision. The relationship that ties each member of the family as well as the weight of tradition in the family determines the failure of getting out of the closets in most sub-Saharan countries. Thus, my analysis uses *Dakan* as a pedestal to portray the difficult life of LGBT in Africa, and sides with Camara on the need to reconsider the political and social discourse about homosexuality. This analysis is then both a counter-power to the sociopolitical conceptualization of LGBT and a counter-stereotypical reading of traditions. Therefore, the objective of this paper is not to put forward the abundant literature about LGBT which already circulates in Western countries, but more importantly to view Camara's *Dakan* as a simple interrogation of traditional stances on homosexuality.

2. AN OUTSTANDING FIRST ATTEMPT

Dakan by Mohamed Camara was first released in 1997, a moment when gay rights were being openly denied in sub-Saharan countries. The movie evolves around two young men, Manga and Sori, who love each other in a society that still rejects same-sex love. Each of the young men are confronted with their families that don't agree with the relationship based on cultural and social beliefs.

Most reviews agree that Camara's film is the first West African film to deal with homosexuality. Indeed, *Dakan's* portrayal of two men who love one another remains a new storyline in West African cinema. And the reasons behind the fact that filmmakers before Camara did not dig the matter is mainly predicated on the social and political reality that characterizes the West African region than the nonexistence of LGBT and LGBT organizations. What Camara does with success is to publicly talk about a social truth that most governments and tradition holders in Africa would like to deny. In his review of *Dakan*, nostringsng.com writes that "The drama film *Dakan* is a proof that homosexuality has always been an issue in the African society; yet, none can deny the surety of love and the sincerity of what same sex couples feel, which is as genuine, prone to trials and can stand the test of time just like any heterosexual love"[6]. Homosexuality, *being* an issue, poses a crucial problem of modernity in African societies. Not only African societies want to embrace development, be modern, have infrastructures as seen in each modern country, but at the same time they reject the rights of an important part of their societies in the name of tradition. In her analysis of the movie, Thérèse Migraine-George emphasizes the inscription of Camara's

Dakan into the larger global stigmatization of LGBT while substantiating the particularities of African societies[7]. Migraine-George's reference to the global and the particularities of Africa reminds about the coexistence modern/tradition. When such paradigms mainly entail a diverging standpoint on almost any notion. Camara successfully shows that in current day Africa they go hand in hand. Thus, Camara's choice of two families – one still relying on traditional African values and exteriorizing signs of a basic African middle class family and the other one being rich with a tendency of seeing the world in terms of business and profit but which can't fathom a gay child because of the social gaze– allows the viewers to fully grasp the extent to which tradition keeps the door closed to homosexuality. *Dakan* therefore makes visible a social issue whose existence is at a certain degree concealed and denied. Camara offers through his movie the possibility to West African societies to interrogate their beliefs and culture in light of what constitutes the basic human rights and the search for a modern society.

The opening scene – where Sori and Manga embrace and kiss – sets the tone for the movie and goes beyond the simplicity of what constitutes an embrace scene. It places same-sex love as the focus of the movie and creates a dialogue with the African spectator by informing him/her that homosexuality is to be made visible and is then central in the movie. As such, Camara's film is not an address to a Western audience as many African films do. It is shot and edited for an African viewership in order to have a transformative action on the general mentality of the continent. As Kenya's Chief Justice[8], Willy Mutunga, states “We need to bring together the opposing viewpoints in the movement on this issue for final and conclusive debate” (Gathogo and Phiri 145). Willy Mutunga's statement powerfully summarizes Camara's idea on same-sex sexuality by clearly indicating the need for a talk that can lead to a final resolution of the homosexual issue in African countries. Willy Mutunga's open suggestion reflects an open mind that champions for human rights for all. He asserts that “The other frontier of marginalization is the gay rights movement. Gay rights are human rights” (145). It is then inconceivable that the debate on human rights that is unfolding in Africa, sets the gay rights as undebatable and therefore keeps the door closed for thousands who are still stigmatized by their own brothers.*Dakan*'s first scene keeps the door open for a discussion about what must be considered in the new social and political debate in West Africa; the fact of accepting to challenge what tradition denaturalized through time.

The opening dialogue Sori has with his mother exteriorizes the weight of tradition and cultural beliefs on homosexual love. In his insistence to understand the conception surrounding his love for Manga, Sori abruptly opens to his mother, giving her the ability to settle what constitutes a serious problem to him. The mother represents, from that specific moment and for the rest of the movie, the guarantor of the tradition and the person with whom a very important part of the cinematic deconstruction of heterosexuality is conducted. Sori expresses the need to talk “Is it bad to be attracted to another boy?” The simplicity that guides Sori's opening to his mother depicts a possibility of dialogue without a real confrontation. His mother also calmly replies, though one could easily notice how embarrassed she is, “it never happens, since time began it's never happened”. The mother's reply sets the “never happens” as the normal but also makes it a

natural trait of love. Heterosexuality for her tradition appears natural as if it is inscribed in the human's genes. She cannot realize in her own son a constitution that refutes the naturalization of heterosexuality.

It is crucial, here, to mention an important link between Sori's sexual orientation and what the heterosexual constitution that the traditions hold as natural. Camara directly represents Sori as a young man; he hardly uses flashbacks to show his childhood and education and the type of relationship he had within his family. However, the dialogue shows that Sori is a loved son for whom the mother sacrificed much of her own freedom. This entails that Sori was educated in the ways of the mother since he was a child. He benefited from the teachings of his mother's heterosexual tradition. How then has Sori grown to naturally be attracted by a man when his education was supposed to be deeply hetero-oriented? In *Masculine Domination*, Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of masculinity within the Algerian Kabyle society demonstrates how traits and behaviors such as masculinity, which were thought to be natural in many societies, were in fact constructed since childhood[9]. Bourdieu assumes that "it is clear that in these areas one must above all restore the paradoxical character of *doxa* while at the same time dismantling the processes responsible for this transformation of history into nature, of cultural arbitrariness into the *natural*" (2). The natural, therefore, may sometimes be but the representation of a historical practice which lost every trace of historicity to appear existential. Drawing from Bourdieu, it is clear that the effort Sori's mother and the society in general are deploying to present heterosexuality as natural is counterbalanced by the naturalness of the sexual orientation exteriorized by Sori. Bourdieu adds, talking about his anthropological analysis, that "this detour through an exotic tradition is indispensable in order to break the relationship of deceptive familiarity that binds us to our own tradition" (3). He, therefore, equates familiarity to tradition. Drawing from Bourdieu, we see that what constitutes the traditional praxes are just a set of familiar actions and activities that rooted themselves in a society's consciousness under the form and name of tradition.

Dakan theorizes homosexuality through a tradition that fails to justify its heterosexuality. That failure expressed here by the mother's "boys don't do that! That's all there is to it" offers no convincing explanation to its naturalization of heterosexuality. Heterosexuality, then, fails to justify its hold on society since it cannot give the evidence according to which "boys don't do that". This state of lack of argument that can instruct the African viewers on the interdictions it purports is subsumed by the final irritation and loss of calmness of the mother. African hetero-oriented culture does not also provide an archive that sustains its assertions and its codification of sexuality. As we saw, it presents heterosexuality as a natural practice, while Camara proves the contrary by his portrayal of Sori who was raised in a well-educated, tradition-oriented family that considers social behaviors and actions as an emanation of nature.

3. SEXUAL HIERARCHY AND LINEAR ASSUMPTION

Sori's mother's misconception about sexuality hinders her understanding of her child's sexual orientation. Such a misunderstanding is shared by a big number of people within the African

continent. Talking about the common interpretation of sexuality, Gayle Rubin writes,[10] “It is often easier to fall back on the notion of a natural libido subjected to inhumane repression than to reformulate concepts of sexual injustice within a more constructivist framework” (150). Gayle Rubin’s assertion goes beyond the Western geographical space since it also voices the African representation of sexuality when it comes to notions of natural libido, natural heterosexuality, etc. Sori’s mother does not “reformulate” her conceptions on sexuality even when she could start questioning them from the perspective of her son. She fails to question her culture and remains trapped by the sexual hierarchy that was passed on to her by her society. Gayle Rubin highlights such consideration by underlying that “Modern Western societies appraise sex acts according to a hierarchical system of sexual value. Marital, reproductive heterosexuals are alone at the top erotic pyramid” (151). The mention of the modern western society does not limit the appraisal of sex to western societies only. It also applies to African societies to which sexuality and sex are solely conceptualized through procreation. Nonetheless, African traditions don’t just hierarchize sex and sexuality by setting heterosexuality at the top of their pyramid. They hold heterosexuality and its reproductive capacity as the only form of sexuality. Sori’s mother reacts to that by telling him that “we were men and women” before adding that “you have to give us children”. Her approach on sexuality underscores her effort to divert her son’s from being with Manga. She attempts to have him reconsider homosexuality by aligning the binary men/women and the fact of having children.

In *masculinities in Theory: An Introduction*, Todd Reeser expounds on the relation between sex, gender, and sexuality[11]. He explains the misconception that typifies common understanding of sex, gender, and sexuality in what he names *linear assumptions*. Such assumptions create a causal metamorphosis that Reeser summarizes:

The issues of sex and gender are also frequently taken as causal or linear: we imagine that sex is accorded from very early on in a child’s life (before birth even) and that gender follows from that. A child may be a boy in the womb, then a baby boy, and his maleness or his boyness emerges from his sex. Because he is a boy, he throws baseballs, or he likes to wrestle. Then, later on desire follows from there: he notices girls, dates girls, has sex with them, marries one, etc. (72-3)

However, such a *Three-part trajectory* does not reflect reality. The object of sexual desire is not determined primarily in an opposed trajectory that unites boys to girls and girls to boys. That is, unfortunately, the traditional image that guides Sori and Manga’s parents’ reactions. As Sori’s mother states, there is men/women and from that naturally given sex there is a desire that should lead to the birth of children. Linear assumptions, which are tailored in a traditional and naturalized view do not open to same-sex love. Worst by inscribing itself as a traditional way of life, it rejects any other sexual expressions.

4. PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND THE GAZE OF THE COMMUNITY

The general understand therefore lies on what heterosexuality means for Sori's mother and her society. Like her, Manga's father rejects his son's identity and sexual orientation. The arguments Camara uses in Manga's case differ from the one we studied in Sori's. Manga's father's reaction is built around his business and his legacy to his son. Unfortunately, he does not grasp the hopes and wishes of his son but rather focuses on his own experience. By doing so Manga's father tells his life as if the recounting of his past sufferings and efforts to emerge from the poor economic condition he lived had anything at all to do with his son's identity. He observes that:

20 years, if you want to know. 20 years I was a mason, a garbage man, a carpenter. At night, I worked the docks, unloading boats at the port. All those hardships, I bore so that you wouldn't know any. Now that I run an empire and reap the fruit of having a gifted son, you tell me you're homosexual and want to live with a man?

Manga's father, therefore, exteriorizes a selfishness that is built solely around his own objectives. As such he is comparable to the society, he lives in. His society wants to police people's life, set the paths for everyone and does not tolerate any different ways than the ones it establishes and predicates on linear assumptions. There is, then, a huge implication of the community gaze that represents a power comparable to that of tradition. Though Camara does not really lead the viewer to scenes where the community determines the path to follow, he reveals it through the heated dialogue unfolding between Manga and his father. After his dad tells his story and his wishes for his son and the legacy he built, in the hope that he could pass it, Manga offers a heartfelt remark "It's what I am that matters". Manga's remark subsumes Camara's film. It substantiates the real question of gender identity and sexual orientation in West Africa by providing evidence that the society does not consider "what matters" for others. Manga's father is symbolic of this new Africa that is still trapped in traditions and hopes to thoroughly experience modernity. Despite the short and trenchant remark his son made, the father does not abdicate and offer his support to his son. He rather goes on by offering a picture of what his society is and how they will feel "do you realize what this means? The whole town, our family, will be scandalized, horrified. Especially my friends." The irony, here, is that the father does not try to understand how his son feels, but mainly cares about what the town feels. The grip of the society is not just on the son, the father fears for his reputation as well as the future of his business. He maintains that "it will be worse for me. The company I run will fall to pieces if..." However, he does not stop at the depiction of the feelings of the town and the family. He, also, gives a repressive picture of the treatment Manga may face from the society by stating that "the whole country will treat you as outlaws, criminals".

The dialogue between Manga and his father indicates that gender and sexual orientation are regulated. The mention of the society and the family, of how they feel about an issue that mainly constitutes a personal matter, their proneness to violence when a person does not comply to their hetero-oriented beliefs, exemplifies the control exerted by the society over people's life. Camara presents that regulation through Manga's father's assertion that "when you were born, I traced out

the path that I intended for you to follow.” Thus, the regulation starts since birth and is materialized through a path that should be followed. Being born within the African society means being regulated from the very first moment one comes to life. We may think of regulation in form of a policing done by powerful structures such as the police, the law and other tangible forces that are institutionalized. Butler, however, calls to our attention the fact that the institutions are not themselves officially institutionalized[12]. She holds that:

It would be a mistake, I believe, to understand all the ways in which gender is regulated in terms of those empirical legal instances because the norms that govern those regulations exceed the very instances in which they are embodied. On the other hand, it would be equally problematic to speak of the regulation of gender in the abstract, as if the empirical instances only exemplified an operation of power that takes place independently of those instances. (40)

The problem, as portrayed in *Dakan*, is that the regulation comes from either sides and is even stronger when it is not through an instance that constitutes a legal power. Tradition is not a legal instance; it is also not an institution that can speak for itself through an establishment of a regulating staff as we observe in the sharia governed societies. Sori’s mother showed it in her incapacity to provide an adequate answer to her son. It is a power that exists without a shape, without a place where it dwells and without headquarters. It is a pervasive system that is deeply rooted in the African mentality and operates as such everywhere, anytime and without any other form of legal process that can establish innocence. Worse, it is a power that should be obeyed and not questioned.

5. “BEST” AND NORMALITY

In *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America, 1880–1940*, Julian Carter scrupulously examines the notion of normality and how it came to be used as a measure of race and sexual identity[13]. Carter’s analysis presents the archives of heteronormativity in America by expounding on the process that drew the parallel between heterosexuality and the normal. He holds that “from its inception, then, modern ‘normality’ involved both a positivistic claim about the pure neutrality of facts, and a distinctly eugenic element of judgement about which human bodies and behaviors were best” (4). What retains the attention in Carter’s assertion is the notion of “best”. Under that notion of “best” resides the naturalization of what can be a social imposition and the dehumanization of what is natural. Carter shows how that notions of “best” and normal derived from the representation of Norma and Normman in the 1940s. thus, the symbols of normality were not only human made but they directed the human mentality to the exclusion of part of the society. In his movie, Camara addresses what may be thought to be the physical “normality” in the choice of his actors and the way they dress and behave. The common theory in the West African mentality on homosexuality is the shape of the body, the use of make-up and the lack of masculine traits. Camara does not provide such traits in his movie and presents Manga and Sori bodily shapes as the African society conceptualizes normality. He keeps the common traits that reminds heterosexuality to prove that normality is not a matter of sexual orientation or

identity. Camara, therefore, challenges such misconceptions, and by doing so, refutes an important part of the African idea on normality.

The imaginary of normality in *Dakan* is also portrayed in the reactions that followed Sori's opening to his mother. Sori's mother and uncle changed their opinion on Sori because he was not exteriorizing the signs of normality according to their conceptions. For them loving another man was a sign of being ill. The mother equates her son's love to craziness by declaring to the uncle that "your nephew has gone crazy." She goes further by assuming that "no one in the family has ever been mentally ill". Unlike his parents, Sori feels well and is upset "je ne suis pas fou, je ne suis pas fou" 'I am not crazy, I am not crazy'. Of course, as usual, people who think themselves normal also monopolize the right to judge others or carry out actions on them. Sori's family's decision to bring him back to normality by "taking him to Samba" denotes a complete misunderstanding of sexual orientation in West Africa. Within the framework of equating homosexuality to illness, an entire traditional ritual is carried out. Nostringsng.com, citing Mohamed Camara, affirms that for him "Africans had always sought to cure homosexuality". An endeavor which, of course, yielded no satisfactory results but the traumatism it inflicted.

6. QUESTIONING TRADITIONS

The context in which Camara directed *Dakan* demands a respect to his courage and a praise of his work. It is true that the movie is mainly family based and serious questions pertaining to the African political framework were not discussed. In addition, though Sori's and Manga's family epitomize the normal African family and social life, the viewers only grasp part of the traditional involvement in the question of homosexuality. An interrogation of traditions on the preexistence of homosexuality in Africa before colonial times could redirect the ongoing debate that Camara wants to lead.

In an Article published in *The Guardian*, Bernardine Evaristo, who is from Nigerian origins, challenged the question of nonexistence of homosexuality[14]. She presented a series of peoples and tribes that presented homosexual practices prior to the arrival of the colonizers. Evaristo writes that "One of the most ridiculous myths about it is that homosexuality did not exist in the continent until white men imported it." What Bernadine Evaristo wants to make clear in her writing is the falsity that justified the repression of gays, lesbians and trans throughout the continent. That falsity has also become part of tradition and is vehiculated alongside the belief that homosexuality is wrong. There is, therefore, that image of the homosexual who does not abide by the African culture, who espouses the foreign culture of the foreign former oppressor. This discourse that predicates itself on the nonexistence of same-sex sexuality is not only a lure but is, also, seriously detrimental to the existence of the homosexual in sub-Saharan Africa. Indeed, presenting homosexuality as a foreign behavior or import legitimizes, at a certain extent, the repression that is prevailing in the continent. In addition, it legitimizes the actions of mobs who kill and oblige homosexuals to an underground life. Also, Within the framework of that nonexistence of homosexuality and the fact that African traditional life is exempt of it, numerous violations of LGBT rights were committed and are still committed. In their article, "Envisioning

Global Human Rights”, Adrian Tjuuko and Monica Tabengwa makes it clear that those violations have been institutionalized and have the regulatory instances as the main providers of hatred against homosexuals[15]. They state that:

In 1990, Uganda increased the punishment for ‘carnal knowledge against the order of nature’ from 14 years’ imprisonment to life; in 1998, Botswana expanded the criminalization of same-sex conduct to apply to women. Then, in 2005, Uganda introduced a constitutional amendment expressly prohibiting same-sex marriages, a recriminalization trend which rapidly spread to Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Cameroon, Malawi, Kenya, Tanzania and the Gambia. (63)

The institutionalization of the oppression against LGBT communities accentuated the social repression that was latent. In several countries, people think it is their right to deal with homosexuals directly. Tjuuko and Tabengwa add that:

Harassment, violence and other human rights violations continue to escalate with some states actively persecuting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex (LGBTI) persons and their communities. This is a big departure from the status quo in Africa before 1990, where homosexuality was mostly not discussed and arrests for same-sex relations were largely unheard of. (64)

Tjuuko and Tabengwa study conjoins the previous analysis of Camara’s *Dakan* in the understanding of the contemporary rise of violence. While homosexuality was considered under a traditional perspective, violence against gays, lesbians and those considered “not normal” because of their sexual preference was limited to the obligation of treatment and traditional rites – as noticed in Sori’s family. However, when the political gained more prevalence and power in the codification of people’s life in Africa, it fostered the discontent and turned it to a fatal repression. Bernadine Evaristo points to the discourse of politicians like Robert Mugabe, former president of Zimbabwe, as cause of the contemporary repression. She puts that “Robert Mugabe is one such propagator, calling homosexuality ‘un-African’ and a ‘white disease’”. The obligation to address the many violations of LGBT rights starts with the political. A change in the political discourse and a control of politicians themselves can help decrease the growing hatred against the LGBT community in Africa.

In West Africa, things are no better. In Burkina Faso, for example, there is no law protecting or against the LGBT community. This does not mean, however, that the LGBT community does not face repression. In 2016, many homosexuals were driven out of a neighborhood in Bobo-Dioulasso and when Bassératou Kindo[16], the journalist went on spot to report on the incident, some young people angrily replied that “Si c’était à refaire, nous allons le faire encore et encore” ‘if this was to redo, we would do it again and again’. In front of the agitation, the local authority did not react. The targeted homosexuals left the city for other destinations. In the capital city, the mayor wanted a protective text that would guaranty the rights of the LGBT community. Unfortunately, as Cheik Traore, of 226info.net writes it[17], “le projet a été interprété comme une

volonté masquée des autorités burkinabé d'entamer une marche sournoise du Burkina Faso vers la légalisation de l'homosexualité" 'the project was interpreted as concealed desire from the Burkinabe authorities to start a sneaky march towards legalizing homosexuality'. In Mali and Senegal, religion joined the protest against homosexuality and the efforts of the governments to provide a protection for gays and lesbians as well as sexual education at school met a popular rejection. In Mali Mahmoud Dicko, president of the High Islamic Council rose against a text that was only meant for sexual education at school. According to Radio France Internationale[18] "le président du Haut Conseil islamique du Mali a pris la parole, haussant le ton et laissant clairement entendre que les documents de travail font l'apologie de l'homosexualité" 'The President of the High Islamic Council of Mali took the floor, raising his voice and clearly suggesting that the work documents are an apology for homosexuality'. Not only, Mahmoud Dicko voiced against the text requesting sexual education at school, but he also gathered several thousand people in a march against it. Consequently, the government backed up.

7. BACK TO CULTURAL PRAXES

The wide repression does not mean, however, that homosexuality, in anyway, is new in Africa as some people want to make us believe. Homosexuality and transgenderism are not imported. They are practices that are rooted within the cultural reality in many African tribes. It is, therefore, surprising to see the tumult surrounding it today when we know that the archives describing homosexuality as part of the African cultural everyday life still exist. It is therefore crucial to demolish the misleading belief that homosexuality is new or was an import from the colonizers.

Still in her article published in *The Guardian*, Bernadine Evaristo gives a few accounts of the preexistence of homosexuality in Africa. She writes that:

Transvestism occurred in many different places, including Madagascar and Ethiopia. Among the Pangwe people of present-day Cameroon and Gabon, homosexual intercourse was practiced between males of all ages. It was believed to be a way to transmit wealth. The Nzima of Ghana had a tradition of adult men marrying each other, usually with an age difference of about 10 years. Similar to the pederasty of ancient Greece, Sudan's Zande tribe had a tradition of warriors marrying boys and paying a bride price, as they would for girl brides, to their parents. When the boy grew up, he too became a warrior and took a boy-wife. In this same tribe lesbianism was practiced in polygamous households. In the 18th century the Khoikhoi of South Africa used the word *koetsire* to describe men considered sexually receptive to other men, and *soregus* was the word they used for a friendship which involved same-sex masturbation.

Thus, same-sex experiences were rituals carried out throughout Africa and were sometimes perceived at a standard that surpasses the casual need of pleasure to symbolize the achievement of a higher social standing or a passage to an elderly position. The reasons that sustain the dehumanization of homosexuality today are, therefore, not to be found in tradition. Pierre Bamony, from Burkina Faso, after conducting a study of his own tribe establishes that "Dans la

perspective d'une telle analyse, nous pouvons dire qu'il doit y avoir des comportements homosexuels chez les Lyéla. Même s'il est formellement impossible de montrer des actes copulatoire homosexuels avérés" 'From the perspective of such an analysis, we can say that there must be homosexual behavior among the Lyélas. Even if it is formally impossible to show evidence of homosexual copulation'[19]. Part of Bamony's findings are situated since he witnessed some of the accounts he retells. Nonetheless a big part of his analysis – that he borrows from other researchers such as Blaise Bayili – and which depicts the women's rituals and behavior during the death of a very important person of the tribe, certainly support his assertion. His telling of women becoming men for a given period, dressing like men, talking like men, commanding and who are obeyed exactly as if they were real men surely derives from a tradition that was not completely hetero-oriented. Bamony offers the following conclusion :

En définitive, à défaut de montrer l'existence réelle de mœurs homosexuelles chez les Lyéla, nous pouvons au moins la présupposer pendant la période de l'adolescence, même si l'onanisme semble plus répandu à cet âge : c'est une pratique courante chez les jeunes gens avant le mariage. Il se pourrait que dans les villes, des Lyéla, comme d'autres individus subsahariens, qui ne craignent plus d'afficher leurs mœurs homosexuelles, désormais libérés de la tutelle des traditions, fassent montre de façon manifeste de leur homosexualité" 'In the end, if we fail to show the true existence of homosexual mores among Lyélas, we can at least presuppose it during the period of adolescence, even if the onanism seems more widespread at this age: it is a common practice among young people before marriage. It could be that Lyélas, like other sub-Saharan individuals, who are no longer afraid to display their homosexual mores, and now freed from the guardianship of traditions, would clearly show their homosexuality.

Bamony's conclusion invites the Africans to rethink alterity through their real cultural background. Such studies are crucial to oppose the lies that are purported throughout the continent and which dehumanize sexuality.

8.CONCLUSION

Camara's *Dakan* served to carry a brief analysis of the reception of homosexuality and how the African political and cultural discourse shapes it. By proving that politics and the politicians are the main reasons why homosexuals are a target and by showing the preexistence of homosexual practices in Africa unlike the common conception that thinks it nonexistent, we believe there are more arguments to use so that the doors may be open for a real debate. Sori and Manga, as portrayed by Camara in *Dakan* allow the African humanity to rethink the vision they have for diversity and social integration. The fact that not only *Dakan* remains the only featured film by Camara and the neglect of its legacy –filmmakers did not continue Camara's effort – demonstrates the extent to which the debate on LGBT is voluntarily silenced. When we observe a timid opening in countries like Gabon, which recently provided more rights to the LGBT community, we also realize that the use of tradition and politics to completely prevent any interrogation is still vivid in most Sub-Saharan countries. Nevertheless, the question that

continually demands attention is to know until when heteronormativity will hide behind tradition to claim its legitimacy.

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