Mozambican "tolerance" toward homosexuality: Lusotropicalist myth and Homonationalism

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Abstract: In this article, the result of ethnographic research on the LGBT community over the last five years in Mozambique, I will deal theoretically with a hegemonic elite discourse alleging tolerance of homosexuality in this country. I will review previous scholarly works on this theme and analyze the recurrence of this discourse among certain elite groups, such as local activists, journalists, and politicians. I conclude that this discourse is reminiscent of the Lusotropicalist myth transformed into a new kind of homonationalism and that it explicitly reverberates in the current political strategies of LGBT activism in Mozambique.

Keywords: Mozambique; LGBT activism; tolerance; Lusotropicalism; homonationalism

Introduction

Given my previous ethnographic research experience with Cabo Verdean LGBT activism, a historian approached me some years ago to write an encyclopedia entry about this archipelagic country in light of a "global LGBTQ history" (Miguel 2019a). The encyclopedia's chief editor for Africa then asked me to explain in my entry the Afrobarometer data (Dulani, Sambo, and Dionne 2016), which indicated that Cabo Verde is the African country with the greatest "tolerance" of homosexuality. He also asked me to explain whether such a good placement in the rankings had to do with Portuguese colonization. I did not have enough space to delve deeply into the issue, so I will do so here. In this article, following a post-structuralist anthropological perspective, I will take the content of my interlocutors' discourses, their rationality, and their political effects seriously and not be willing to judge their truth or untruth. Although this theme has already crossed my research in Cabo Verde, I will focus mainly on the Mozambican case.

The fieldwork in Mozambique consisted of three periods: an initial visit in June 2017 to meet with my potential interlocutors and listen to their research needs and rules; the

second stay of six continuous months, from March to September 2018, in Maputo and Matola cities; and the third visit in February 2022, when I was able to travel to the rural interior of Maputo Province to interview local LGBT people. I conducted forty-four formal interviews with LGBT people and non-LGBT people, including whites, Blacks and mestizos, Mozambicans and foreigners, activists, scholars, artists, urban workers, and anyone willing to talk with me. The research for my Ph.D. degree (Miguel 2019b) included the analysis of historical archives, including colonial documents, literature, and press media. Finally, I could follow, in a more systematic way, not only the day-to-day administrative work of LAMBDA—the leading LGBT organization in the country—but also the daily lives of some of its community agents and LGBT beneficiaries of their work on the outskirts of the city. I could also attend some of their parties and religious services, get to know some of their families, and visit their homes. It was mainly in these ethnographic experiences that I realized the strength of the discourse that Mozambique is a "tolerant" country toward homosexuality.

The pieces of "evidence" on Mozambique's tolerance toward homosexuality

A survey by Dulani et al. (2016) that covered thirty-three African countries found that 74 percent of Cabo Verde's population would like or not mind having homosexual neighbors. The report's authors translated it as "tolerance" toward homosexuality throughout the document (Dulani et al. (2016). When one looks at the rest of the study's findings, one finds that Mozambique comes in third, at 56 percent, and São Tomé and Príncipe comes in sixth, at 46 percent. These three independent African countries are former Portuguese colonies[1]. In terms of other Southern African countries, South Africa comes second on the list regarding tolerance toward LGBT people in Africa, at 67 percent (demonstrating the much-talked-about South African exceptionalism). Botswana (43 percent) and Swaziland (26 percent), which respectively occupies the seventh and eighth positions, are the last countries ranking above the average (which is 21 percent). Neighboring Mozambique, one finds Lesotho (16 percent), Zimbabwe (10 percent), and Malawi (6 percent). Uganda takes the antepenultimate placement, due to only 5 percent of its population would like or not mind having homosexual neighbors. The lasting positions are occupied by Guinea (4 percent) and Senegal (3 percent) (Dulani et al. 2016,

[1] Other former Portuguese colonies in Africa, such as Angola and Guinea Bissau, were not surveyed.

12).[2]

In addition to all the possible biases involved in the process of obtaining such numbers (Freude and Waites 2022), one should always be cautious, considering that merely liking or not minding having homosexual neighbors does not necessarily mean the individual is actually being tolerant of anything. However, opinion polls like this can provide important data, as they do manage to extract the socially acceptable discourse on a given theme even if such popular discourse is not really effective in everyday practice. Therefore, both in Cabo Verde and in Mozambique, regardless of whether these are countries with "tolerant" populations when it comes to "homosexuality," the numbers do indeed indicate that the discourse of tolerance (on sexual issues) seems to be a politically correct one. This is valuable data by itself, and it can become relevant mainly when compared with the discourses found in the populations of the other countries surveyed, which are perhaps franker and less tolerant.

In a recent publication, Dionne and Dulani (2020), taking Mozambique as an example, suggested that the decriminalization of homosexuality and positive elite rhetoric (both political and religious) would bring better tolerance rates for it. Also, making use of the Afrobarometer data analysis, Freude and Waites (2022) found some relationships between tolerance for foreigners and homosexuals in Mozambique. However, by the end of their text, Dionne and Dulani (2020) suggest that "future analysis could examine the potential follow-on consequences of this growing positive rhetoric for public attitudes toward homosexuality" (20). Thus, the authors state that further studies must be carried out to understand the structural causes of the greater or lesser acceptance of homosexuality in certain societies.[3]

The media have also reported the supposed tolerance toward homosexuality in Mozambique. In 2016, the local newspaper *Notícias* reported that Mozambique was ranked sixth among 52 countries that should be visited in 2016, according to The New York Times. The text mentioned the fact that the country is considered "open-minded", and it is ranked as one of the most "tolerant" countries in terms of "sexual minorities' rights", also mentioning LAMBDA and the fact that Mozambique decriminalized

[2] For a critique of the problematic performativity of this type of ranking, see Rao (2020, 38).
[3] These studies will be discussed in the next section of the current article. Overall, it is striking how many activists and academics, myself included, are "intrigued" by the levels of "tolerance" of former Portuguese colonies in Africa when it comes to LGBT-related matters (Costa 2021, 154).

homosexuality in 2015. Among the fundamental themes, the image of the country abroad and a certain production of singularity—when compared to most countries on the continent that have little tolerance for homosexuality—is the focal point.

Recreio e Divulgação Segunda-feira, 11 de Janeiro de 2016 not

SEGUNDO O "NEW YORK TIMES"

Moçambique um dos países "a visitar obrigatoriamente"

MOÇAMBIQUE ocupa a sexta posição, numa lista de 52 lugares propostos pelo jornal norte-americano "The New York Times" como um dos lugares a visitar "obrigatoriamente" durante o ano 2016.

O país surge à frente de 46 lugares numa lista liderada pela cidade do México. Deles encontramos cidades como Washington DC (EUA), Abu Dhabi (Emirados Árabes) e Dublin (Irlanda), destacando aqui que Moçambique é o país africano que lidera a lista e o único na CPLP.

Moçambique é visto como um país com uma costa sensacional, destacando-se aqui a praia da Barra, em Inhambane.

"O país oferece uma mistura fantástica de sabor e praia. A costa tranquila de Moçambique continua a atrair visitantes, de todos os tipos, em busca de opções turísticas. Em 2016, Intrepid Travel inicia uma incursão de quatro dias à ponta da Barra e a outros lugares históricos de

O país é visto, ainda pelo "The New York Times", como sendo de pessoas com mentes abertas. Está em franco desenvolvimento e acima de tudo a ser um dos poucos países mais tolerantes de África em matéria de Direitos das Minorias Sexuais, com destaque para LAMBDA – organização de cidadãos moçambicanos que advogam pelo reconhecimento dos direitos humanos das pessoas, LGBT (lésbicas, gays, bissexuais e transexuais) e pela descriminalização da homossexualidade e do aborto em 2015.

"Moçambique tem uma visão de futuro, terra de líderes africanos. Em Julho tornou-se uma das poucas nações africanas a descriminalizar a homossexualidade", sintetizou o jornal norte-americano.

SOURCE: "Segundo o 'New York Times' Moçambique um dos países 'a visitar obrigatoriamente'" [According to New York Times, Mozambique [is] one of the 'must visit' countries], Notícias, January 11, 2016.

Two years later, Víctor Madrigal-Borloz, an independent UN expert, was sent to Mozambique to assess the LGBTQ situation in the country. According to the Deutsche Welle report,[4]

> Víctor Madrigal-Borloz noted, however, that the absence of massive, systematic, or flagrant physical violence against that social group in Mozambique makes the country an inspiring example. "It seems that there is a tacit social agreement not to attack these people as long as they hide their true nature," says the expert. [5]

[4] https://www.dw.com/pt-002/comunidade-lgbt-em-mo%C3%A7ambique-%C3%A9-discriminada/a-46703995.

[5] The idea of Mozambique as "an example of inclusion and protection of sexual minorities" is also found in the current Portuguese scholarly (Garrido and Sá 2019, 1086).

One could interpret this and other media reports (Author *forthcoming*) as a Mozambican *mise-en-scène* for the international community or what Puar (2013b) called a "human rights industrial complex" (338).[6] The episode of former President of Mozambique, Joaquim Chissano, publishing a letter calling Africans against sexual orientation discrimination for developmental reasons, after his own government had not legalized LAMBDA, would reinforce such argument.[7] But the discourse of tolerance is broader than just an assessment of international relations, tourism marketing, or "homocapitalism" (Rao 2020).[8] It seems to be rooted in the colonial political culture of Southern elite people in Mozambique.

It seems evident that one cannot credit the discourses (whether more or less tolerant of the LGBT issue) that are to be found in Africa today to a single variable such as which empire colonized this or that African country, given the huge internal cultural diversity, as pointed out by Dias et al. (2009). However, colonialism should be also understood as a "cultural process" (Macagno 2019). In Lorenzo Macagno's (2019) words, "colonialism as a cultural process does not mean communing with positions that emphasize its more idyllic or milder aspects; on the contrary, it implies taking seriously the fact that the most brutal and violent processes are also mediated by structures of meanings" (25; author's translation). Especially in the Portuguese colonial imagination,

> tolerance and violence go hand in hand. One of the poles contributes to promulgating a supposed family vocation in the patriarchal and slave-owning context, the other to drawing attention to the disciplinary imperative of tutelage. This patriarchal self-perception, which is halfway between violence and cordiality, accompanied, with varied nuances, the entire [Portuguese] colonial

[6] "The neoliberal accommodationist economic structure engenders niche marketing of various ethnic and minoritized groups, normalizing the production of, for example, a gay and lesbian tourism industry built on the discursive distinction between gay-friendly and not-gay-friendly destinations" (Puar 2013b, 338). And this would not be anything new in Mozambique. The idea of the country as a destination of sexual liberality for homosexuals and interracial couples can be seen in several sources since the colonial period (Power 2008; Miguel 2021d; Araújo 2022).

[7] 'An Open Letter to Africa's Leaders – Joaquim Chissano, former President of Mozambique.' The Africa Report, 14 January, 2014. https://www.theafricareport.com/4886/an-open-letter-to-africas-leaders-joaquim-chissano-former-president-of-mozambique/

[8] Rahul Rao (2020) defends the use of "homocapitalism" instead of "homonationalism" to deal with places in which "homonationalism has not (yet?) succeeded in drawing recalcitrant societies into their embrace or, worse, has aroused their antipathy". According to the author, the former tends toward hegemony; the latter tends toward dominance (151). Despite agreeing with the author's conceptualization in the comparative analysis between the UK and India, in the case of Mozambique, I perceive the occurrence of both phenomena simultaneously. I will discuss these concepts in the next sections.

narrative. (Macagno 2019, 127; author's translation).

It is also due to this ambiguous narrative of "tolerance and violence" that Portuguese colonial narratives somehow seem to have survived in the postcolonial Mozambican elite. Moreover, in this sense, even if the variable "colonizer" cannot be the only one that accounts for postcolonial cultural heritage, it is certainly a variable to be still considered (Santos and Waites 2019, 1; Costa 2021, 167).

At a certain point in our conversation, one nationally famous Black Mozambican writer did attribute this greater tolerance in Mozambique to the Portuguese settlers, whom he qualified as an "adventurous people," who were "proud of miscegenation," and who "celebrated masculinity." When talking about the challenges for LGBT activism in Mozambique, one of the white precursors of LAMBDA emphasized the greater tolerance that characterizes Mozambique when compared to other African countries. This, for him, could even be considered a problem, as it would make it difficult to define the object to be fought by local LGBT activism:

> Vieira (V): I get the feeling that when we discuss a little bit what the role and the future of LAMBDA is, things get a little complicated because … In my childhood, I remember reading a book that contained a phrase. This phrase got stuck in my head, although it would take many years for me to realize its meaning: "You can't cut something that doesn't offer resistance." If something doesn't resist you, you cannot cut it. Wow, you can only cut something that offers resistance, right?? It goes like that. You are doing activism in a context that is increasingly permissive, right? There's nothing to fight against.
>
> Author (A): Such was the dilemma in Cabo Verde …
>
> V: You see, that doesn't mean that in Mozambique things are going really well, but I think that when I look at countries like Zimbabwe, Uganda, or Zambia … it is very easy for them to define …
>
> A: To define the enemy, to define what one should fight against … ?
>
> V: Exactly. And to define the mission to be accomplished.
>
> (Interview with Vieira, Maputo, July 9, 2018; author's translation)

Mozambique's supposed higher tolerance toward homosexuality—mentioned by both gay and heterosexual subjects, by activists and non-activists alike, and by rulers and the governed—should always be considered in relation to another reality. And, as in this narrative transcribed above, this "other" for Mozambicans is usually the former British colonies, many of them neighbors of Mozambique. However, there is clearly a double bind here. While cities such as the neighboring Johannesburg, in South Africa, were described by several activists as being more libertarian on the gay issue, their capital, Maputo—in their eyes—was the locus of much less violence toward LGBT people. In any case, the self-comparison of supposed national tolerance seems to be a clear update of Portuguese colonial discourses, which were mainly used by the Portuguese colonizers to compare themselves with British colonizers (Macagno 2019, 126).

When analyzing academic works that have aimed to either compare the Portuguese and the British empires, which colonized almost all countries neighboring Mozambique or to analyze one or the other, it is noteworthy many authors who have emphasized significant differences between these two colonial experiences (Aldrich 2003; Dabhoiwala 2013; Epprecht 2004; Fry 2003; Han and O'Mahoney 2014; Hyam 1991; Garrido and Sá 2019; Santos and Waites 2019; Tabengwa and Waites 2020; Rao 2020). When drawing on my own ethnographic experience in Cabo Verde and Mozambique, I observed, with regard to sexual liberality in general, the persistent presence of local hegemonic elite discourses, at least in these two countries—with each of them reaffirming a local exceptionality. [9] The focus on the difference between the two colonial experiences and my own ethnographic data, considered together, should not lead one to defend that old and dangerous Luso-tropicalism, the colonial ideology that lent itself to legitimizing Portuguese rule over African territories, defending that Portugal was a unique colonial empire, marked by tolerance and non-racist assimilation. [10] The accumulation of knowledge produced by historiography does not allow for the argument that Portuguese colonialism was marked by tolerance and non-racist assimilation. I will clarify my point later.

[9] I agree with Jasbir Puar when she argues that "exceptionalism is used not to mark a break with historical trajectories or a claim about the emergence of singular newness. Rather, exceptionalism gestures to narratives of excellence, excellent nationalism, a process whereby a national population comes to believe in its own superiority and its own singularity—''stuck,'' as Sara Ahmed would say, to various subjects" (Puar 2017, 4–5).

[10] On "Lusotropicalism", see Freyre (1946). For critical perspectives, see Cahen and Mattos (2018) and Koster (2022).

Previous scholarly works on this issue

Without committing the mistake of considering Portugal and the United Kingdom as if they were historically monolithic and permanent institutions—but also acknowledging that there are certain permanences (Fry 2003, 281; Trajano Filho 2003, 3)[11]—I seek to understand the differences that social scientists have observed between these two colonial experiences. In this sense, some authors interested in the topic of sexuality have approached the issue through the lenses of a certain British exceptionality, pointing to its greater rigor in terms of the control of sexuality:

> Through a fanatical Purity Campaign, sexual opportunity was from the mid-1880s gradually reduced, first at home, and then, in Edwardian times, overseas. The result was that in the British empire after 1914, outside the fighting services, almost no sexual interaction between rulers and ruled occurred. In this it differed not only from its own nineteenth-century practice, but also from every other European imperial system. (Hyam 1991, 1)

The British employed greater rigor in the control of homosexuality in particular. According to Aldrich (2003), "efforts to control 'pederastic' activities seem not to have been very intensive in the French Empire. (The British attitude towards homosexuality, as will be seen in the following chapters, was considerably harsher)" (19). Tabengwa and Waites (2020) have recently reaffirmed the same (205). Notably, according to Adam (2019), "the criminalization of same-sex relationships is particularly prevalent in nations of the former British Empire" (2).

Specifically with regard to former British Southern Africa[12], Epprecht (2004) compared it to former Portuguese Africa. Making use of Howes (2000), Epprecht (2004) argues that while Portugal abolished its anti-homosexuality laws as early as the middle of the nineteenth century, the British maintained such laws even in the second half of the twentieth century (135). In fact, by the end of the eighteenth century, some countries such as France (1791) and Prussia (1794) had already removed the crime of "sodomy"—or related terms—from their penal codes and statutes. The exceptions were the United

[11] For an excellent discussion on places' relational and temporal dimensions, see Rao (2020, 47).
[12] However, it is essential to acknowledge that the British were not the only colonial influence in South Africa, which was historically marked by rival white nationalisms.

Kingdom and the Netherlands. These two empires not only failed to decriminalize sodomy, but they also intensified the scope of their policy of persecuting sodomites (Bleys 1995, 68). But it is also true that while Portugal legalized sodomy in 1852, it made it illegal again as late as 1920, by enacting an ambiguous and yet efficient piece of legislation—the Mendicity Law—that equated homosexuality with vagrancy (Correia 2017). Thus, Portugal would maintain "vices against nature" as a crime in the Metropolis until the implementation of its new penal code, enacted in 1983. Meanwhile, in England, sodomy had already been decriminalized in 1967.

As for South Africa, even though such legislation had been abolished in the twentieth century, after the beginning of apartheid, official repression against white homosexuals grew enormously—it included mass arrests and deportations (Epprecht 2004, 147). In Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), another former British colony neighboring Mozambique, homosexuals were banned from entering the country in 1954, and ten years later transvestism in the country was criminalized (Epprecht 2004, 149). There were no such interdictions in Mozambique.[13]

In a recent article comparing the colonial anti-homosexuality laws of the British and Portuguese empires—taking as its object of analysis the colonial experiences of Kenya and Mozambique—sociologists Santos and Waites (2019) conclude that while both empires did use certain formulations codifying homosexual practices as something "against nature," there were nonetheless clear differences between them. "Firstly," they write, "the most immediately striking difference is with respect to the dates of legal prohibitions. In Mozambique and other Portuguese colonies, Portugal's law against the 'vice against nature' was only extended to colonies in 1954." Meanwhile in Kenya, the British empire had already criminalized the "carnal intercourse against the order of nature" as early as 1897 (Santos and Waites 2019, 22–23).[14] The authors also see a significant difference not only in the form and implementation of these laws but also in the official religions of each of these empires:

> But if we look beyond ideology to practices, the British missions worked through

[13] For a picture of the capital's gay scene in the colonial era Mozambique, see Araújo (2021).
[14] There were actually police harassment of Indigenous people for practices of "sodomy" and "homosexualism" as late as the 1940s in Mozambique (Miguel 2021c). There was even a case of Indigenous men caught in the act of committing an offence: having sex with American sailors at the port of Lourenço Marques.

> education (including Bible-reading) to achieve "civilisation"; whereas the Catholic Church (responsible for indigenous school education from 1940) focused on "civilisation" through labour, in accordance with Portuguese colonial governance. Therefore there seems to have been more effective moral regulation within the British colonies (Santos and Waites 2019, 23).

Regarding Christian influence on homosexuality in Africa, Alava (2019) has pointed out that "individual priests have used their pulpits for hate speech, although perhaps the most important contribution of the [Catholic] church toward LGBTQ minorities has been the heteronormative silencing of their existence" (331). [15] I would add, based on data I collected in Maputo, that the Roman Catholic Church, by stipulating celibacy for its priests, ended up attracting young homosexual subjects into its ranks. Once, the career of a Catholic priest was a prestigious escape strategy used to get out of heterosexual marriage—one valued in many societies, including that of Southern Mozambique. According to one of my gay interlocutors:

> [Catholic] priests themselves are [homosexual]! … There are many. … The priest himself who is celebrating *missa* [Catholic religious service], who is there preaching, is with men. The Catholic Church doesn't have a problem [with that]. I, [in] my parish, have no problem"
>
> (Interview with Paula, Matola, April 30, 2018).

In my fieldwork, I became aware of Mozambican Catholic priests who are also beneficiaries of LAMBDA's HIV/AIDS projects, and to them, condoms and lubricating gel are offered to protect them in their secret (homosexual) sexual intercourse (Miguel 2019b). Such narratives seem to reify the popular and scholarly perceptions of the Catholic Church's complacency with homosexuality (Bleys 1995; Moodie and Ndatshe 1990), consequently reinforcing the more general discourse of historical tolerance that would exist in a majority-Catholic country as Mozambique is imagined.

In Mozambique, the hegemonic elite discourse—incorporated even by activists from the local LGBT movement and by external observers such as Bagnol (1996) and Souza

[15] Van Klinken (2014) has emphasized that in Zambia, "the [local Catholic] church [different from the local Pentecostal churches] appears to be concerned about the harsh and violent language and hate speech used in discussions about homosexuality." (267) In Uganda, a Rao's interlocutor states that "Catholic Baganda were best placed to offer queer-positive interpretations" (2020, 98).

(2015)—argues that in practice homosexuality was never really penalized by the state, even if there were laws against it—neither before nor after independence. Similarly to the aforementioned UN expert report, Bagnol (1996) and Souza (2015) also argue that the problem of oppression in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity in the country occurs much more within the family and society at large, and it occurs in a veiled way, mostly without reports of physical violence. However, many researchers have denounced a series of concrete cases of physical, sexual, and emotional violence against Mozambican homosexual and transgender people (Chipenembe 2018; Mugabe 2019; Gamariel et al. 2020; F. Miguel 2019b, among others). In my doctoral dissertation, I demonstrated that the "no-violence-toward-homosexuals" narrative is not entirely based on historical facts, as indicated by the documents and testimonies I collected for my research (Miguel 2019b). The documents I and other researchers collected demonstrate that there was some discreet state repression, at least in the late colonial period (Miguel 2021c; Santos and Waites 2021). Testimonies also show that after independence, the authorities pursued a policy of hiding the homosexual identity of prominent figures in the Mozambican political establishment—albeit in a subtle manner (Miguel 2021c). However, as I will discuss later, anthropology teaches us that historical facts will not always defeat mythical narratives, such as the Luso-tropicalist discourse of tolerance.

Luso specificity is an issue in Mozambique, and scholars usually take the path of explaining the fundamental difference between Portuguese and British rules by means of pointing to the former's assimilation policy—as opposed to the latter's segregation policy (Fry 2003, 273; Santos and Waites 2019, 23). I interviewed one particular Black senior Mozambican official (from a local non-governmental organization) who affirmed such a cultural difference. He had done so while he complained about a certain international partner that was trying to replicate a successful Kenyan project in Mozambique. He stated:

> Sometimes we look at Kenya, and we think that in Mozambique things will work as they do in Kenya. Mozambique is Africa, yes! But it is a Lusophone country, it is not an Anglophone country. So, the culture and everything else are elements that can, in a way, affect (positively or negatively) any given project (author's translation).

This speech not only reaffirms a cultural difference based on the former settlers'

influences and perhaps some current cultural exchanges with other Lusophone nations, but also invites us to better understand how my Mozambican interlocutors have been approaching the issue.

My LGBT interlocutors' points of view

The Luso specificity is ambiguous even for local intellectuals. In conversation with me, a gay white Mozambican journalist and forerunner of LAMBDA elaborated on the subject. He sometimes equated Portuguese and British societies, while at other times he highlighted a certain ambiguity in the former—and it is because of such ambiguity, he argued that there is greater tolerance on the side of Portuguese culture in relation to homosexuality:

> But I don't really know whether Portuguese society was very different from others. … This thing about acts against nature … but the law itself never quite defined what they were, right? I think it was implied that it included everything from bestiality to … yeah. Meanwhile, the British were much more specific, it was sodomy, right? A funny thing: I lived in England at a time when homosexuality had not yet been fully decriminalized. Sexual intercourse between women was not a crime, though. In the Victorian mind, women do not have a sexual desire of their own, so it was not possible … It was not possible for a woman to have any sexual activity in the absence of a man (laughs). … But do you see? So, it also shows how British conservatism was exactly like this … like, you know, focused on sodomy among men. Sodomy between men and women was also not allowed. It was unnatural. So maybe the Portuguese picture was … maybe a more neutral picture. I don't know, actually. I would love to understand.
>
> (Interview with Vieira, Maputo, July 9, 2018, author's translation)

When I asked the then LAMBDA president, a Black Mozambican citizen, whether he perceived any relationship between Portuguese colonization and the country's current sexual culture (when compared to the legacy of the neighboring British colonized countries), he confirmed emphatically that he did perceive this to be the case. Furthermore, he later explained to me that such "tolerance" lies precisely in the Portuguese dubiousness pertaining to sexuality, including the writing of its laws. I started

the conversation by asking him about the issue:

> Author (A): Do you think that today there is something different about Portuguese colonization regarding sexuality (when compared to the neighboring countries of English colonization)?
>
> Lauro (L): There is …
>
> A: It seems to me that the LGBT movement agenda in Mozambique is somewhat different from Malawi, from Tanzania …
>
> L: Uh-huh. Sure. Yes, it's different! While comrades from Malawi, Tanzania, Botswana are talking about criminalization issues, right? … Prison … We are talking about social acceptance here. Our prison here is our homes. Our prison here in Mozambique is our community. It is not the state. It is not the state prison. It is the prison we have in our homes. The discussion here, if you notice, is … all of our actions are much more focused on accepting, on respect, acceptance. They are not so much focused on the state. Of course, we have public health issues and whatnot. But we really invest in the issue of changing [people's] conscience.
>
> (Interview with Lauro, Maputo, July 26, 2018; author's translation)

From his narrative, two matters are important to my argument: 1) the self-comparison with other African nations, based on the ideas of "criminalization" and tolerance; 2) his organization's priority in raising popular awareness and "acceptance", not focusing their energies into the "state", but into their "homes".

Four years later, on my last trip for fieldwork in Mozambique, I interviewed one of the new directors of LAMBDA, a trans Black man who had taken up the office two years earlier. At one point in our conversation, during our discussion on sexual health policy for LGBT people in Mozambique, he spontaneously brought up the comparison of his country with other African countries.

> Carlos (C): Mozambique is a country that fortunately or unfortunately … Fortunately, I can say that, there is a lot of progress in terms of social perception. People already look at homosexuality quite differently. [It is] much more normalized than in the past. There is not so much physical and psychological

violence. Yes, there is. We have to work with that, but it is not comparable to our neighbors, South Africa, Swaziland, Malawi … We have an environment that is a little more conducive to the free expression of sexual orientation.

A: And also the gender identity…?

C: Also [that]. And this is visible on the street, in the daily life of the homosexual. It may not be transformed in terms of policies, documents that make life easier for the person, but it is not as heavy as in other countries.

(Interview with Carlos, Maputo, February 16, 2022; author's translation)

This last interviewee seems to emphasize a more recent historical process of acceptance of homosexuality in the country, but in doing so, he has the same comparative horizon as his countrymen. He not only reaffirms Mozambican national tolerance comparatively but also insinuates that legal rights won by LGBT people in foreign nations (South Africa, specifically, as we shall see) do not necessarily produce the effect of greater social tolerance. All of my interlocutors seem to converge in supporting the narrative of a greater sexual tolerance in the national scenario that sprung from the Portuguese empire[16]. The serious situation in Brazil pertaining to hundreds of murders of LGBT people (Green and Quinalha 2018), however, should inhibit any Luso-tropicalist temptation that such analyses could suggest. Thus, I do not intend here to apply the Luso-tropicalist theory to positively affirm a greater tolerance toward homosexuality in the former Portuguese colonies in Africa. But I do intend to demonstrate how the Luso-tropicalist myth works as a framework and seems to survive in the postcolonial period through a process of being updated that, as I will show later, even results in a critique of Portuguese colonialism.

The myth of Lusotropicalism as a colonial legacy and the current homonationalism

Based on Macagno's (2019) analysis of Portuguese colonial policy, I argue that the current "myth" of Mozambican exceptionalism in terms of tolerance toward homosexuality may involve a persistent Portuguese colonial heritage in postcolonial

[16] An empire that was quite severe in punishing sodomy in the courts of the Holy Inquisition (Mott 1998; Miguel 2021c).

minds. Regarding Luso-tropicalism, Macagno (2019) argues,

> Nor is it enough to debunk the myth. Rather, it would be better to ask and answer: why did the myth of exclusivism, and the supposed Portuguese "singularity," manage to be so perennial, so persistent? The perpetuity of the myth arises from the logic by which it operates—not so much through a predisposition that is completely permeable to evidence, but through its selective appropriation. Or, to put it in Levi-Straussian terms—reproduced in the epigraph—"a mythical model belied by experience does not simply disappear." Therefore, the key to the persistence of the Luso-tropicalist narrative, and its multiple versions, lies in the fact that it works not so much as a simple ideology that Machiavelli masks, but, above all, as a mythology that operates through a selective empiricism or, so to speak, of a non-complacent empiricism (109; author's translation).

The typical Mozambican tolerance-for-homosexuality discourse, as a "myth" in the anthropological sense (Macagno 2019, 109), sometimes disregards everyday cases of local homophobic violence, while at other times, it minimizes its importance. Both scenarios, however, favor a nationalist comparison between the contexts of the supposedly worst and widespread homophobia cases occurring in other (African) countries and that of a relative (state) respect for sexual diversity that would characterize Mozambique as a nation. This reflects the pride and power of the weak, inherited from the Portuguese late colonial narratives in Africa. Trajano Filho (2004) states that

> "weakness (especially in relation to the lack of material means) and an open but ambivalent attitude of humility for then indigence and pride for past glories have characterized the discourses on Portuguese pretensions in Africa, elaborated since the beginning of the nineteenth century in the most varied specters of colonial society" (24; author's translation).

Trajano Filho (2004) goes on to demonstrate "the forms of etiquette that prescribe humility and smallness, and the exemplary stories in which the arrogance, outrage, and brute force of foreigners are fought with the subtlety, wit, and finesse of the weak" (26; author's translation).

For Mozambicans of varied backgrounds, but especially from the national elite, violence against LGBT people occurs in other countries in a very serious way, through media

defamation, political persecution and aggression, imprisonment, "corrective rapes,"[17] and murders. According to most Mozambicans from the elite, such state, media, and even social homophobia do not occur on Mozambican soil (or at least not to the same extent).[18] The then national director of Human Rights and Citizenship (a secretariat linked to the Mozambican Ministry of Justice) once said that it was better not to touch on the LGBT issue so that Mozambique would not run the risk of "becoming Uganda". That is, he assumed that interrupting the silence on the topic could lead to the transformation of an alleged current peaceful scenario—pertaining to homosexuality in the country—into a scenario of generalized social and state persecution.

Identity formation dynamics in the Global South are not different from their counterparts from the North in certain aspects. In the Global South, [19] whether by individuals, groups, or nations, there is also the human impulse for classification, hierarchization, and processes of othering including, at times, doing it through civilizational/progress frameworks, as shown by Puar (2013a, 32), Van Klinken (2014, 270), Meiu (2020, 586), and Rao (Rao 2020, 70).[20] I want to demonstrate how the Luso-tropicalist myth has been updated for a southern African country's specific kind of exceptionalism and homonationalism.[21] Like in America, "marked through or aided by certain homosexual bodies" (Puar, 2017, 4).[22] But unlike the United States, the homonationalism in postcolonial Mozambique was developed by a national elite that perceives itself as historically isolated within its own region by colonial language (and now by regional

[17] For more on the use of "corrective rapes," see Bhana (2019).
[18] There is empirical evidence to support this elite perception. However, there is also what Rao called the elite's anxiety "to break away from what used to be called the Third World." (2020, 39).
[19] And in Mozambique specifically (Meneses et al. 2019, 15).
[20] Rao (2020) states something essential on this matter: "[…] decolonisation promises only a more democratic way of making decisions; it does not presuppose that those decisions will necessarily have emancipatory outcomes." (69)
[21] The concept of homonationalism "has already undergone substantial reformulation from its original conception" (Winer and Bolzendahl 2021) and has traveled to analyze other geographical contexts, including those in the Global South (Puar 2013b; Van Klinken 2014; Lazar 2017; Domínguez-Amorós and Freude 2021). I agree with Aleardo Zanghellini (2012, 370) that "the literature on homonationalism has a crucial role to play in sensitizing us to the possible unintended, and sometimes intended, exclusionary consequences of lesbian and gay political activism and legal recognition." Following Puar's suggestion, this article "note[s] the divergences and differences that create multiple kinds of homonationalisms" once it contextualizes homonationalism historically and culturally in a specific postcolonial nation. (Puar 2013a, 32).
[22] And this is not an accusation. "[N]on-Western people who identify as homosexuals through a homonational narrative or through the consumption of homonational products are not somehow "inauthentic." They are markers of the reality that we live within a world that is increasingly connected through the movement of people, capital and information yet increasingly stratified across class and political lines." (Mikdashi 2011).

Anglophone LGBT activist networks) and material conditions.[23] A type of homonationalism that is neither imperial, anti-immigration, nor intends to save their foreign Others; but produced by those members of national elites who need to compete for scarce resources in the precarious market of the Global South, as is clear from the examples previously brought from the Mozambican newspaper cases. Particularly, it is also a postcolonial adaptation of the Luso-tropicalist myth that even adds an anti-colonial critique of Portuguese colonialism. This a criticism that seems less to regret the colonial phenomenon by itself and more to regret a colonial practice that is inefficient in leading to progress. According to my interlocutor Lauro:

> Mozambique has always been somewhat isolated from the world … regarding the issue of organizations, the issue of human rights … It is very much dominated by the Anglophone world. And Mozambique, being a Portuguese-speaking country … despite the influence of the countries around it—in this matter it has always been very isolated. And if you look at it, even the LGBT movement here in Mozambique—a movement, that is… LAMBDA and its actions… We are somehow insulated from the largest movements that we have at the regional level. The issue of language, the evolution of civic mobilization, the history of civic mobilization… While in Mozambique, civic mobilization during the one-party period, you know, it was very much repressed … These political rights were heavily repressed. And in the other countries—despite being under the influence of apartheid or under the influence of the Ian Smith regime—civic mobilization was something that had already come about… it is much older than ours. Mozambique, even in terms of the Mozambican independence struggle… While Uganda, in the 1950s or 1940s, was already starting to discuss independence, Mozambique was not even there yet. The question of training, the question of intellectuality, counted for a lot. The Portuguese regime was one of the worst regimes ever. Not that there is such a thing as a good regime, but it was the worst

[23] Mozambique is the ninth least developed country in the world, ranking 181 in the HDI (UNDP 2020, 2). However, Mozambican case does not seem to support the postmaterialist thesis, applied by Mathisen (2018), that economic underdevelopment would lead to worse rates of tolerance for homosexuality: "On the other end there is Mozambique and the island nation of São Tomé and Príncipe, which despite low economic affluence is among the least homophobic countries. … In a few cases, such as Tanzania and Mozambique, the relationship is actually opposite: The respondents with higher living standards report more homophobic attitudes than people at lower levels. This is quite surprising, and could be difficult to explain with existing theory" (47–53).

> of them all. Because it didn't encourage people a civic conscience.
>
> (Interview with Lauro, Maputo, July 26, 2018; author's translation)

The precariousness (and delay) of the Portuguese occupation in some areas of Africa, in the demographic, economic, religious, and educational senses (including the "civic conscience" mentioned by my interlocutor) can be consulted in the historiography of Portuguese colonialism (Harris 1958; Trajano Filho 2004; Cahen and Ferraz de Matos 2018; Costa 2021; Santos and Waites 2021; Newitt 2017). Trajano Filho (2004) highlights that

> too weak to impose itself militarily, excessively dependent on the 'cooperation' of the other colonizing nations, without resources to implement what it idealized as its century-old civilizing mission in the world, the fragile Portuguese colonial empire was strong enough to construct, maintain and inculcate in its colonial subjects an image derived from its look at itself" (57).

But it is important to point out that there are at least some dissenting voices regarding the hegemonic discourse of tolerance in Mozambique (Santos and Waites 2021)—as the very notion of "hegemony" presupposes. A Black trans activist and LAMBDA dissident, in an interview with me, also strongly criticized this kind of discourse. As people from the working classes usually do, she is more engaged in denouncing the domestic violence situation than engaged in international comparative analysis:

> Many of those people who say that Mozambique is a tolerant place for LGBT people are people who don't know what the reality is. Looking for the superficial, right? And they do not seek to understand, in essence, after all, how LGBT people live here in Mozambique. Do you understand? They are content with superficial speeches and fail to do … deep work, to really try to understand the real situation of these people. How can you … look at Mozambique as a tolerant country if the police, who perpetuate violence, is the first to say that "No, we help, we continue investigations [on allegations of homophobia or transphobia]." And these people are content with these approaches. And they fail to hear the community in the first person. Of course … If every time these people, you know, who say that Mozambique is a tolerant country, you know, continue to sit with the wrong people, continue to listen to the wrong people, and leave the community aside,

> hey … the approach will be this: that Mozambique is a tolerant country. But Mozambique is not a tolerant country.
>
> (Interview with Lauane, Maputo, February 16, 2022).

Although working-class LGBT people I spoke with rarely engage spontaneously in international comparative analysis of tolerance or intolerance towards homosexuality, nor do they even seem interested in the possible historical reasons for the current situation, they were often more likely to recognize the violence they experienced as an "African" issue. When they describe their experience as an LGBT person for foreign people like me, they usually converge in the same sentence the terms "Mozambique" and "Africa," employing them sometimes as a metonym and sometimes as a synonym. But some working-class LGBT people often insisted on narratives demonstrating relative social tolerance of their sexual orientation and often claimed, for example, never to have suffered physical violence[24]. It was also not uncommon to find relatives or neighbors of homosexuals who coexist in a friendly way with them[25].

Given that the Mozambique-is-not-tolerant discourse is still very minor in the Mozambican elite, the alleged scenario of tolerance of homosexuality in Mozambique has already been attributed, whether in literature or in informal conversations, to other several historical causes: the Tsonga's peaceful political tradition (Junod 1975, 48); the dubiety and poor enforcement of Portuguese colonial laws (Costa 2021); Catholicism and its greater focus on evangelization through work (as opposed to the Protestant focus on rigour in terms of sexual morality) (Santos and Waites 2021); the little power to advocate against homosexuality that both Christian and Muslim religious institutions had in the post-revolutionary period; postcolonial political leaders' lack of interest in persecuting or punishing homosexuals (some of them and their closest friends were homosexuals themselves); the liberal ideology that has marked Mozambican journalists since the 1980s (Author forthcoming); the recent decriminalization of homosexuality; Mozambicans' receptivity to foreigners (Dionne and Dulani 2020); Mozambicans' unfamiliarity with the theme (Miguel 2021b, 952); lesser influence of English-language homophobia in a

[24] "Physical [violence], luckily, no. But I believe psychological offense hurts more than physical offense. Because I prefer that the person slaps me and then forgets about the situation. But when the person lives with this prejudice, it ends up being an inconvenience for me..." (Interview with Joao, Matola, April 13, 2018).

[25] See, for example, the episode about the situation of homosexuals in Mozambique on the Mozambican TV show *Contacto Directo*, broadcast on April 15, 2015, by *TV Miramar*.

Portuguese-speaking nation like Mozambique (Tabengwa and Waites 2020); and the well-done work of LAMBDA in constantly convincing Mozambican society to respect sexual diversity (Garrido and Sá 2019).

Similarly to Puar in the United States of America (Puar 2017, 11, 14), I am not interested in evaluating whether Mozambique is indeed a tolerant country for homosexuals or not. As advanced, I am not interested in pointing out the truth or falsity of this discourse, but its rationale.

In my work, I have been demonstrating how "tolerance" and the building of a local LGBT movement (that aims, first and foremost, to "inform" and "educate" the wider population, especially people's families) are discursively claimed as Mozambican specificities (Miguel 2020)[26]. Here, I argue this discourse is based, among other sources, on a persistent colonial myth called Luso-tropicalism and which, like any myth, has an empirical basis for support (as the opinion surveys brought above, among other sources). This colonial myth has been updated by different Mozambican and foreign actors in a kind of contemporary homonationalism, common to many experiences in the Global South, that is based on a feeling of pride.[27] A pride in the distinctiveness that can raise them (or some of them) to prestige in the global arena, marked by Western hegemony. It is a particular pride, different from Puar's US case (2017) because it is voiced by those who perceive their nation as small, weak, and isolated. Also, Mozambican nation-building discourse—different from the US' one—engage here in the process of othering toward a perceived "closer" (historically, culturally, and racially) Other to them, such as African neighboring nations. And it is because this discourse is one of pride and of empowerment in the face of certain unequal global dynamics and Anglo-Saxon cultural and economic hegemony that it continues to make sense to many people, despite all the evidence of local homophobic and transphobic violence.

Conclusions on Political consequences

The myth has implications for current Mozambican LGBT activism. In the speeches of

[26] Although Mozambican activists consider a local specificity, the same strategy has been reported in other national contexts, such as in South Africa (Thoreson 2013, 648), Singapore (Lazar 2017, 434) and other places (Lazar 2017, 439).
[27] Something similar to what Marcia Ochoa (2014) found about the beauty pageants in Venezuela.

Mozambican LGBT activists, we can clearly see their opposition, for example, to the strategy of the South African LGBT mainstream movement. According to Mozambican activists, South Africans imposed "top-down" rights, such as those introduced by the post-apartheid constitution, which, among other things, legally recognized same-sex unions. The political strategy of including civil rights via the state, even before a broad organic understanding had arisen in the society itself, the Mozambican activists argue, unleashed in that neighboring country a much more serious and homophobic outbreak of violence than that which occurs in Mozambique.

The Mozambican activists assume that there might be fewer legal guarantees and there are no LGBT pride parades in Mozambique, for example (what one could interpret as a sign of them not being "modern" enough)[28]; To respond to that prejudiced interpretation, they claim that there are also fewer murders, beatings, corrective rapes, or other violent acts (which would make them not "barbarians"). It is the same Portuguese "etiquette" already described by Trajano Filho (2004, 26). This politics also seems to carry over some colonial legacy from the Portuguese colonial assimilationist narrative. According to Macagno (2019), "one language gives way to the other, despite the fact that both share the same civilizing grammar" (198). Moreover,

> there would be a fundamental idea, according to which legal (individual) assimilation would have an artificiality bias, while evolutionary (group) assimilation would lead to real integration of individuals into the new society. […] For Gonçalves Cota [a Portuguese jurist and anthropologist from the late colonial period] and his followers, legal assimilation must be the result of a moral evolution of a given individual able to exercise their civil rights, independently of state tutelage. This attribution of rights does not imply a definitive certainty, but a temporary presumption that this individual will be able to integrate into "civilization" (Macagno 2019, 159; author's translation).

Mozambican LGBT activists are investing most of their efforts in awareness-raising in society, and not rights talk, not only because of their "pragmatic resistance" (Lazar 2017,

[28] This Mozambican perspective of political action is similar to what Lazar called "a tactical discourse of pragmatic resistance" (Lazar 2017, 439), "a form of tactical politics within illiberal state structures" (427). For a debate around the pros and cons of the rights talk in LGBT struggles in the African continent, see Thoreson (2013) and Tabengwa and Waites (2020).

439) but also because they are embodying part of their colonial heritage.[29] After reading my dissertation, Lauro commented on his public Facebook page:

> Francisco, you cannot imagine the horrors we have to hear because of this strategy. The most 'advanced' [people] think so, without even looking at the difference between our contexts. Over these years, I have seen several experiences fall flat on their faces because they did not know how to read the context.
>
> (Lauro, Facebook, May 21, 2020).

The different critiques presented by Lauro, Lauane, and other Mozambican interlocutors in this research, paraphrasing Otu (2021, 11), complicate the trope of Africa as a site in need of critique by repositioning Africa also as a site that furnishes critique. In rejecting part of their colonial heritage and criticizing neocolonialism, some African intellectuals concerned with the lives of LGBT people, but also with the imposition (in their respective countries) of an exogenous "epistemology of the closet," (Sedgwick 1990) seem, curiously, to defend the same Mozambican political strategy of not focusing on rights talk. Even with their different inspirations and historical backgrounds, they are all concerned with the outbreak of violence against LGBT people that would supposedly ensue from it. And, with good intentions, they are experimenting with other forms of political action. As Rao (2020), "I hope this might unsettle both the supremacist narratives of orientalism and the revanchist impulses of a postcolonial nativism that mark global conversations about queer rights today." (220). I hope the Mozambican case, particularly when analyzed in its intra-African international relations and focused on the diverse voices within Mozambique (and not just between the Global North and South as usually done), can contribute to refreshing these debates with their historical and cultural specificities.

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[29] The same can be said for the continuous preference of LAMBDA to communicate to their audiences only in the Portuguese language, despite the existence of several local languages (Miguel 2021a).

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