Sexual and gender diversity and belonging: A decolonial research agenda

2018 HSRC Social Sciences Research Conference “Social Innovation and the Promotion of Social Science Research”

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Belonging

• Ubuntu, ‘I am because I belong’, essential human need embedded in shared humanness, commitment to actualising values of justice and equality (Mbiti 1969)

• Belonging as ‘bondedness’, based on recognition of the intrinsic worth, recognition and respect for difference of every human being (Sindima 1991)

• In many African societies, conforming to normative sexuality and gender not a criterion for belonging
“Hidden histories”
Ideologies of exclusion

Belonging implicated in practices of inclusion and exclusion, based on sexuality and gender

"There is no African word for homosexuality"
- Jomo Kenyatta
Sexual and gender rights

Queer persons “written into citizenship, [but] excluded from belonging”, particularly along lines of race/class (Van Zyl 2009)
Contemporary ‘LGBTI’ research

When the focus is homophobia:

• 61% “homosexuality should not be accepted by society” (Pew Research Centre 2014)

• 80% “sex between two men or two women is always wrong” (Roberts & Reddy 2008)

• Cultures of qualified acceptance - publicly "acknowledge cultural norms of gender, kin, and African identity" (Sigamoney & Epprecht 2013:103)
Contemporary ‘LGBTI’ research

When the focus is belonging:

• 50% would accept a family member who was openly attracted to someone of the same sex

• 50% would support their child should he/she be attracted to someone of the same sex

• 85% stated “people who are attracted to members of the same sex and live in this township are part of the community just like anyone else here” (Sigamoney & Epprecht 2013)
Decolonial citizenship (Kamugisha 2007; Taylor 2013):

• Citizenship still raced, classed, gendered, (hetero)sexualised

• Human rights only ➔ human rights with dignity

• Universality ➔ diversality (pluriversality)
  o Disrupt imagined template for ‘sameness’, equal citizenship
  o Beyond multi-culturalism to an ontology of difference
  o The Other penetrating hegemonic
  o Transform vulnerabilising contexts
  o “African cultures are rich in alternatives and complementary spaces for the imagination of queer belonging” (Nyeck 2016)