

FILM REVIEW

Aiwan Obinyan, director/producer. Adriaan van Klinken and David Ochar, executive producers. *Kenyan, Christian, Queer*. 2020. 20:38 minutes. English and Kiswahili. AiAi Studios, London. <http://kcqfilm.com/>. Price: for institutional one-time use: £50, indefinite use: £100; for churches and community groups, one-time use: £30, indefinite use: £60.

The documentary film *Kenyan, Christian, Queer* is about being gay and at the same time a Christian in Kenya. As the film seeks to humanize the lives and realities of LGBTIQ Africans, it also reveals their everyday struggles in countering the widespread narrative of “African homophobia” and “religious homophobia.” The film explores the intersections of cultural, social, religious, and sexual identities. In an ingenious way, the documentary invites the viewer to think collectively about three aspects that are frequently considered to be incompatible: being Christian and being queer in a country like Kenya. Thus, it grapples with the question: Is it possible to be an African, Christian, and gay at the same time?

The Cosmopolitan Affirming Community (CAC) strongly believes that this is indeed possible. CAC is an LGBTIQ-affirming Christian fellowship in Kenya, which was founded in 2013 by a group of activists who wanted to provide a space for LGBTIQ Kenyans to reconcile their sexuality with their Christian faith. Since its inception, the CAC has developed into the first “gay church” in Kenya, with its own pastors and prophetess. The church seeks to promote an inclusive and progressive form of Christianity, within the context of a rather conservative African society. With the colorful message on its door, “Welcome to the Family,” the church is a place of solace for many gay individuals in the country. This group of gay activists has for a long time been discriminated against not just for their sexual orientation, but also because some of them are HIV positive, both of which carry a heavy burden of stigmatization in Kenya. In their search for spiritual guidance, CAC found Bishop Joseph Tolton, a member of The Fellowship of Affirming Ministry (TFAM) Global, based in the U.S. As a black and openly gay bishop, Tolton brings to the CAC community a theology of “radical inclusivity.” The CAC believes that the so-called biblical “clobber verses,” which address homosexual acts directly (i.e., Leviticus 18:22, 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, Romans 1: 25–27,

Jude 6–7, Genesis 19: 1–38, 1 Timothy 1: 10) have been used to unjustly condemn and discriminate against LGBTIQ persons. For the first time, the CAC has given the LGBTIQ community in Kenya a platform for interpreting the Bible in a way that positively reflects their sexual identity.

Kenya, like many other countries, still has anti-homosexuality laws handed down from colonial times. In 2014, the neighboring country of Uganda passed a law that made homosexuality punishable with life imprisonment. Most Ugandan gays were forced to run to Kenya to seek refuge from harassment and official punishment meted against them. The CAC organization became a site of resettlement for Ugandan gay refugees. Raymond Brian, the Nature Network co-founder, is one of such refugees who came to CAC in 2015. Brian's organization is committed to supporting gay refugees as they settle down in Kenya while they apply for asylum abroad. Apart from teaching their members about sexual health and spirituality, the organization also collaborates with CAC to advance the cause of the LGBTIQ community in Africa. They sensitize their members about the dangers of HIV/AIDS, the need to protect oneself from the virus, and how to live a positive life for those infected with the virus.

Toward the end, the film revisits the story of George Barasa, who attracted media attention in Kenya in 2016 after he re-mixed the song "same love." Barasa changed the lyrics to express the struggle of the queer community in Kenya. The song became popular in the country, and in response the Kenya Film Classification Board banned it. Fearing for his life, Barasa sought asylum in Canada after being humiliated in South Africa for not being "gay enough." Although the video brought gay consciousness to the larger Kenyan society, it still had little impact with regard to convincing the judiciary of the plight of gay Kenyans. In May 2019, the Kenyan High Court upheld the ban on same-sex relationships.

According to the film's website, this documentary is a great educational resource, which could be used for teaching a number of courses, including "African sexualities; religion and sexuality; Christianity in Africa," among others. The story of CAC could be used to educate students at both secondary school and university levels about life as a Queer Christian in Africa. In addition to the film, professionals in education could also educate their students using the three- to five-minute clips that have been adapted to fit within a one hour lesson, making it easier for them to employ the documentary stories in their teaching.

The message that resonates from this documentary is that of the LGBTIQ community in Africa in search of acceptance, compassion, and love within their respective societies. This film is an invaluable resource that adds to the catalogue of homosexuality in Africa.

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