

WATCHDOG



youth coalition

FEATURED ARTICLES

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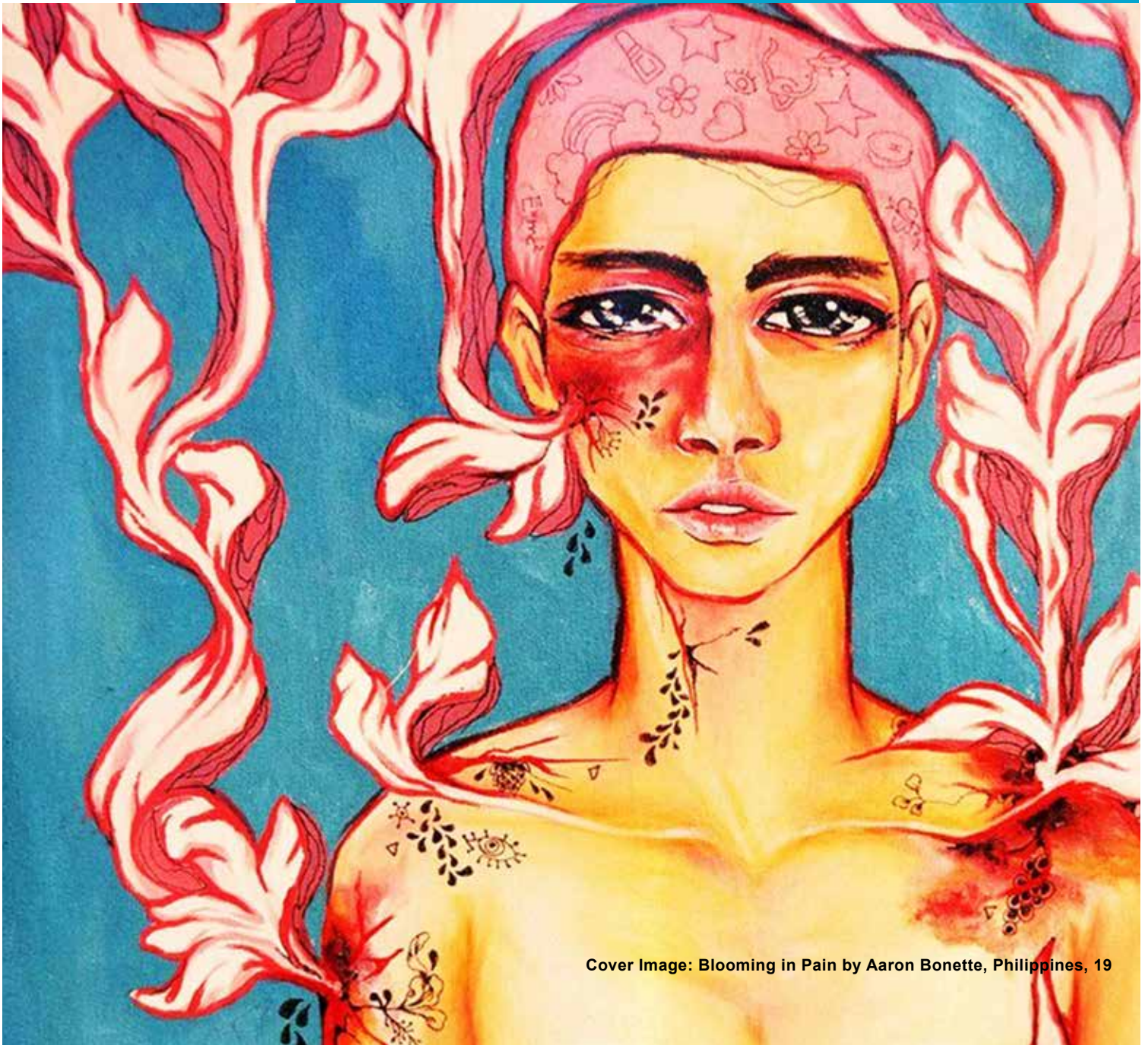
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Cover Image: *Blooming in Pain* by Aaron Bonette, Philippines, 19

Some Men have Vaginas

Nathan Rose
24 | Australia



Free Your Mind
Rand Jarallah, Palestine, 22

There is not a single explanation to what this portrait is about because I want each individual to project her/his feelings onto it. It could be used as an art piece for projective technique, to understand what each one of us thinks and feels. Furthermore, I think it's appropriate for showing that LGBT rights are human rights, because from my point of view, its colors and the way they glide together and how they are spread encourages the person to free her/his mind and to share their colorful/creative way of thinking and expression.

I don't remember a time in my life where I thought to myself, Well hey, you know what? I'm trans. Being trans per se never came into it. I'm simply a guy.

I also don't remember a time in my life where I ever identified as female. I once tolerated being called female, but internally, I hated the concept.

I was an active, imaginative kid. I wasn't interested in playing with girls unless it was kiss chasey, of course. Before the age of ten, most of my friends were boys. We'd explore paddocks around town, throw cow pats at each other, gross out the girls by pretending to eat bugs and chase them with cicada shells.

At home, I spent most of my time in my room or in the backyard. Television never interested me, though books did. I used to mainly read fantasy novels, true crime and encyclopedias. I loved to learn. I remember getting my first set of encyclopedias at the age of six. There was nothing about gender identity in them, I remember that much. From one page to the next, writing is the thing I am now most passionate about. I can be as mindful and self-aware as I please, but writing connects the mind, body and soul on levels that I otherwise cannot do to the same extent.

When I hit puberty, I thought the developing lumps on my chest were related to my weight (none of the girls at my school developed as early as I did), so I shrugged it off and carried on with life. But, the boys started treating me differently. I was getting bullied on a daily basis, even by most of the girls. Only the "weird ones" accepted me. This group was mainly made up of "tomboyish girls;" They all had short hair, wore baggy clothes and were interested in the same things I liked. They saw me as one of them. I saw myself as a boy rejected by my own kind.

In terms of gender? I have learnt that you don't need to be a woman to be kind hearted, sensitive and humble. I don't see personality traits as being masculine or feminine, they just are. There is no gender binary in my eyes. Nobody is the epitome of what it is to be a woman, nor a man. The spectrum does not exist; spectrums have two end points. To me, gender is more of a circle. Never ending, completely equal yet quite intense in its variations. I've never felt the need to try and force myself to be a woman because I've never been one. I laughed in the faces of those who told me to grow up, stop wearing men's clothes and don a dress for once. It was all so ridiculous. I have never had an issue with the fact that I am a man.

The clincher? My body. I despise my breasts (I'm not afraid to call them what they are), my menstrual cycle and my hips. I'm okay with my vagina; I think a man having a vagina is the best thing since sliced bread! Vaginas are also quite simple to conceal from the binary-minded society we live in. The hips and the breasts? Not so much.

It's not even just because others can see them, - I - can see them and it sends my brain into a spasm. I want to look like the man I see myself as and he most certainly does not have breasts or hips. He does have a vagina, though.

Homophobia: Africa's Imperialism

Rashidi Williams
28 | Nigeria

African claims of the respect and recognition of homosexuality as foreign and an insult of its traditional values is indeed laudably laughable. But Africa is quick to forget its own history of what discrimination does to the social development of any particular society; from apartheid in South Africa to genocide in Rwanda, as a continent we are quick to forget our discriminatory past. The question that Nigeria's and indeed Africa's newest legislative zealotry poses is the impact of these laws on the lives of young people. Readily, the impact is felt in the arena of health and safety and security.

For the sexual reproductive health and rights of young people to be fully met, the discourse on expression of sexualities is sacrosanct. This is especially true with the current prevalence rate of HIV amongst key affected populations, with gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men accounting for 17.2% in Nigeria (UNAIDS, 2012). It poses the rationality that the major drive of transmission is stigma related with homophobia at the top. Thus, to overcome the burden of HIV amongst this population, we must address our homophobia, through dialogue on sexualities and its expression. It is improbable that we will successfully achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) while discriminatory and repressive laws continue to exist side by side a constitution that is supposed to guarantee basic fundamental rights.

The current anti-LGBT legislative piece is a national call to violence on people who are non-hetero or suspected not to be. Place this in the context of health, especially in HIV programming, young people with these orientations are forced into silence with detriments on their health. Just immediately, after the passage of the law, the news of a young gay men

whose parent threw him out on knowing his sexual orientation and later finding out his HIV status sent shock down my spine on learning of his death. Apparently, he had committed suicide. These are the implications of the law; violence with far more implications for young people.

What Nigeria witnessed in the aftermath of the introduction of the law by Senator Domingo Obende in 2011 was sexual assault, inclusive of rape that was meted out to three university undergraduates by their colleagues on account of their sexual orientations. The constitutional right to dignity of the human person is thus inflamed by homophobia. I question the rationality of the Justice Ministry because of their fear of the progresses made in the West and South America. The issue is for the Nigerian nation to confront the fact that we are diverse and that part of this diversity is found in human sexuality.

Put it to Africa, homophobia is corruption of the cherished values of Africanity. Homophobia is corruption of the diversity upon which our continent is built. Homophobia is the new imperialism with which our leaders shut us up and devour the land. Young people who identify as LGBT must be free to express their sexuality without a fear of societal demand. It is an essentiality for their development. So today, we stand in gap for Africa's homosexual population, calling for an end to homophobia and a shift to dialogue and education on sexualities and for the needs of sexual minorities.

Pink Rhino

Samuel Njuguna
29 | Kenya

Among them he stands
Just like any other rhino
But he is different one
By far and everything

Eats like one and drinks the same
Fights and survives
Breeds and dies
Yet its color is different

What makes it differ?
It speaks and listens
Deep within it's not a rhino
Yes it is not

Hunted by many
Wall hangings and its uniqueness
Many wonder why its spirit is high
It's somehow proud of itself

There can never be two
It boasts its audience and space
Many years its stays indoors
Comes out when mature and ready
Many talk about it
Some thirst for its blood and flesh
Some say it's not African
Yet we know rhinos have been there all the time

It's calm and generous
Hides for its shy
Its eyes are sparkling
Its skin delicate and soft

Pink rhino wonders alone
But finds friendship with the brave and the most feared
It's marked for death anytime
Yet it lives the longest and breeds many

Homophobia in Africa

Joy Muthoni
22 | Kenya



Circle of Pain

Babirye Leilah Burns, Uganda, 29

The art shows the experience of psychological pain and the pain I feel when I am discriminated against. I want to try to represent pain on a wider scale when groups of people are oppressed for being who they are. I use materials that are thrown away as rubbish or unwanted because discriminated people are looked at this way in society; by using found objects, I create beautiful art works to show how worthy this "rubbish" really is.

The culture in Africa is stifled with hostility, with respect to the realities of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) community. This often translates into blatant hatred and violence against this community under the umbrella of laws enacted to criminalize LGBT people. This is the case in a majority of African countries in all sectors of life including health access. In many African societies, this community "does not exist" hence are not entitled to any rights. Their basic rights including the right to life, the right not to be discriminated against and the right to health are inexistent.

For example, in Kenya, which has been ranked fourth in HIV and AIDS prevalence worldwide has an estimated 15% of new infections of HIV and AIDS occurring amongst men who have sex with men (MSM). This figure is only an estimate as many do not report since Kenya has criminalized homosexuality. It attracts a penalty of fourteen years imprisonment. Other countries like Uganda have laws that establish life sentences for any form of penetration or sexual stimulation of a person of the same sex, as well as for "aggravated" homosexuality, which would apply to "serial offenders." It also makes it an offence to "promote homosexuality" which is an affront to freedom of expression. This provision will also affect organizations that promote the welfare of the LGBT community including those that provide healthcare to them.

Members of the LGBT community have raised various concerns regarding access to medical treatment. They cited harassment, especially in public health facilities, where if suspected of any gay activities, they would be publicly shunned and shamed by the very medical practitioners.

The enactment of laws that perpetuate homophobia is in contradiction to the recognition of the inherent dignity of the human person and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human race. Human rights defenders who dare to speak out on the issue are routinely harassed and persecuted for "promoting homosexuality" or for "inciting" the public to take part in "immoral activities." Country leaders make homophobic comments against the lesbian, gay,

bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) community by calling them "cockroaches" or the "worst form of depravity." Such homophobia from our policy makers and homophobic laws force members of the LGBTI community into hetero-normative relationships so as to "fit into" the community and avoid hate crimes.

More needs to be done in Africa to end government-approved homophobia. The devastating consequences of this as a continent cannot be overstated. In some extreme cases persons suspected of homosexual conduct have been torched to death in the presence of young children to serve as a lesson to other members of the society of what will befall them if they engaged in such 'evil' activities. Such policies and homophobia lead to LGBTI persons suffering from hate crimes, enduring blackmail due to the actions of either state or non-state actors, or even to committing suicide for lack of being able to live their lives freely and express themselves as they are.

The duty of a state is not to entrench prejudice and bigotry driven by intolerance and fear of diversity. It must affirm the self-fulfillment and personal happiness of each citizen. The government should ensure the safety of all its citizens regardless of their vast diversities. The recognition of the rights of LGBTI people in Africa and the assurance of non-discrimination against minorities are critical to a tolerant, healthy society and to ensure the happiness and wellbeing of all citizens.

¹ Article 26 (2) of the Kenyan Constitution

² Kenya AIDS epidemic Update 2011, published by National Aids And STI Control Programme

³ Daily Nation. Gay Debate Affecting Fight Against HIV, Macharia Says. See <http://www.nation.co.ke/news/Gay-debate-affecting-fight-against-HIV-James-Macharia-says/-/1056/2225564/-/12yk4viz/-/index.html>

⁴ LGBTQ Nation. Prominent Gay Rights Activist Tortured, Killed in Cameroon. See <http://www.lgbtqnation.com/2013/07/prominent-gay-rights-activist-tortured-killed-in-cameroon/>



All Together
Arnaud Gauthier, France, 23

Homophobia in the Digital Age: The Virtual Fight and The Very Real Consequences

Christopher Vincent Reid
26 | Belize

In Belize, the war against homophobia and transphobia is being fought in a third world country on fourth and fifth generational technology. A call to arms has resounded for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, tran, queer, intersex, asexual (LGBTQIA) community to stand and serve in what may be one of the biggest human rights movements of this generation, and we have chosen to fight this fight the same way we, the now generation, live our lives: virtually, abstractly, conceptually. We decry the violations of our families, our friends, our allies in articles on Tumblr blogs, to be shared and liked and commented on our Facebook pages and re-tweeted and #hashtagged on our Twitter feeds. This mouse is my rifle, this keyboard my gun, with a post and a like, we'll have this war won. We revel in our abilities to contribute to saving the world and ourselves from discrimination with a few mere clicks from the bunker of our terminals, our tablets, our cellphones, unaware that the buffer of the media we wear as flak jackets also separate us from the people we believe we're helping. We forget, or choose to forget, or worse, completely ignore, that unlike our shares and our comments and our reblogs, the casualties of the ignorance of the big, bad world are real.

The fates of the Caribbean LGBTQIA community hang in the balance as what may become a precedent-making case in Belize, a constitutional challenge is being deliberated against the Section 53 act of the Criminal Code, which is popularly interpreted to mean the criminalization of homosexual behaviour.

In the near year since the case was heard, the tense, silent wait for a verdict has only been punctuated by the media

coverage of violence, particularly against the transgendered community (an attack of a transgendered person varying in degrees of brutality was circling the rumor mill only hours prior to the writing of this article). In all those circumstances, the responses were done through the pseudo-activism afforded by digital means. Online groups were formed to create a compendium of local and international news, to give a forum to the outrage and hurt and frustration at the injustices, to send unheard, unfeared condolences to victims and praise to advocates. Yet, we blandish at actually putting ourselves out there: there was scant attendance actually onsite at the courts to lend support. You will find few stories about helping hands picking up the broken pieces, or organizing rallies. When the chips are down our few champions stand along enemy lines as lone sheep amongst the wolf packs and the persecuted suffer under bell jars with so many with them and yet none beside them.

The Belizean plight mirrors the global challenge. The young people of the globe know the power afforded by the impersonality of technology, and misguidedly feel that it can supplant the real, corporeal power of being present. It is evident in the way that even as our technologies advance and evolve, our intrinsic problems remain the same. Technology is only a means, not an end.

The challenge of the youth of the world fighting for the human rights of the LGBTQIA in today's technologically inclined world has become one of knowing how to exploit our technology toward the guarantee of human rights while not losing touch with the reality of our lives and that of those we are affecting.

The Sexual Rights of LGBT Persons in India

Ankit Gupta
21 | India

On 2 July 2009, the Delhi High Court decriminalized homosexuality in a landmark judgment by reading down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). This judgment was a defining point in the lives of young lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer people (LGBTIQ) as it provided a sense of self affirmation and acted as a significant legislation that acknowledged their right to dignity.

While most countries around the world are passing legislation to guarantee the rights of LGBT persons, in a recent judgment in 2013, the Supreme Court of India re-criminalized homosexuality and upheld the constitutional validity of Section 377 IPC. The judgment referred to LGBT persons as a 'miniscule minority.' The Supreme Court's judgment denied LGBT people the right to equality, to a life free of discrimination and the right to privacy and dignity of all citizens.

The sexual rights of young people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (SOGI) are intrinsically

linked to the right to self-expression. Working as one of the chief coordinators for a youth collective in Delhi (QueerCampus) for 3 years, I often came across stories of young people forced into marriages by families, harassed and tortured for being in public spaces with their chosen partners and many other severe forms of violence and discrimination.

In a recent case in New Delhi, India, a video of a young student being bullied went viral on YouTube. The person was bullied for being 'feminine.' Homophobia and transphobia put young people's lives and their right to live violence free at risk. When laws legitimize homophobia, young people who transgress traditional gender identity and sexual orientation boundaries are at a greater risk of being bullied in schools, colleges and workplaces. Their right to education is put in danger.



Diaries of Transition
Anirban Ghosh, India, 26

The artwork takes inspiration from the classic mythological motif of the Ardhneshwara – the union of Shiva and Shakti in a single body – an identity embraced by sexual minorities from the sub-continent, especially by the hijra and transgender community.

For young people, especially in the South and South East Asia region, there is also a major lack of policies around comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), and most of the existing curricula are highly heteronormative and promote gender binaries. Such laws further limit any discussion around sexuality. This restricts young people's right to information and awareness on issues relating to sexuality and sexual and reproductive health and rights in a sex positive, rights based manner, denying many important tools for living healthy lives.

The narratives presented in Court by LGBTIQ human Rights defenders highlighted the instances of gross homophobic and transphobic violence and injustice in the form of blackmail and extortion faced by young LGBT people, men who have sex with men (MSM), hijras and kothis, very often at the hands of police and state actors. Laws such as Section 377 have also led to illegal detention and attacks on human rights defenders of LGBTIQ persons.

India is signatory to the 1994 International Conference on Population Development (ICPD) Programme of Action (PoA), which recognizes reproductive rights as human rights and urges governments to protect the right of young people to a life free from violence and coercion. 20 years later, the ICPD beyond 2014 Global Review Report has demonstrated that persons with diverse SOGI in parts of the world suffer from the risk of harassment and physical violence.

India and governments in the South and Southeast Asia Region must repeal laws criminalizing homosexuality and safeguard the human rights of LGBT persons. Governments need to realize that no sustainable development can be achieved when any group of people, including those with diverse SOGI are deprived of their human rights.



Sunrise over Sleeping Couple by Nou Thao, USA, 22

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The Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights aims to ensure that the sexual and reproductive rights of all young people are respected, guaranteed and promoted, and strives to secure the meaningful participation of young people in decision-making that affects their lives, by advocating, generating knowledge, sharing information, building partnerships and training young activists with a focus on the regional and international levels.

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ON THE COVER: *Blooming in Pain* | Aaron Bonette, Philippines, 19 | *The portrait is of a boy who is gay and still in bloom. Even though he suffers the violence of homophobia and bullying, no matter how prejudice society is, he still has himself and the people who accept and love him for who he is. He can fix himself and show true and inner beauty and stand for what he believes in and for his rights.*

FINAL IMAGE: *Sunrise over Sleeping Couple* | Nou Thao, USA, 22