



Beyond Borders, Beyond Norms: The Role of Queer Kinship and Chosen Families in Reshaping Pan-African Unity

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Background and Problematic

Rise in criminalization and hostility towards LGBTQ+ individuals across the African continent forces many to flee their country of origin (McKay & Angotti, 2016; Kitunguu, 2023)
e.g. *Anti-Homosexuality Bill 2023 in Uganda*

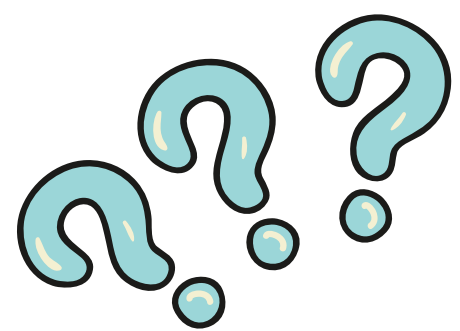


- anti-homosexuality laws
- human rights abuses
- social marginalisation
- hate crimes, abuse, violence, threats, murders
- sexual violence and “corrective” rape
- institutional neglect and violence
- job loss, evictions, denial of healthcare services, etc.

(Human Rights Watch, 2024; Chapter Four Uganda, 2023)

- leave loved ones and life behind
- continued persecution, hostility, human rights abuses
- neglect by institutions and police
- new barriers to institutional support, public services, documentation, housing, employment
- restricted movement (refugee camps)
- intersecting marginalizations compound (refugee + queer)
- barriers to resettlement

(Amnesty International & NGLHRC, 2023; Equaldex, 2025b)



Research Question

How do subversive practices of kinship-building and mutual aid in East African queer refugee communities lay the prefigurative groundwork for an inclusive Pan African movement?

Methods

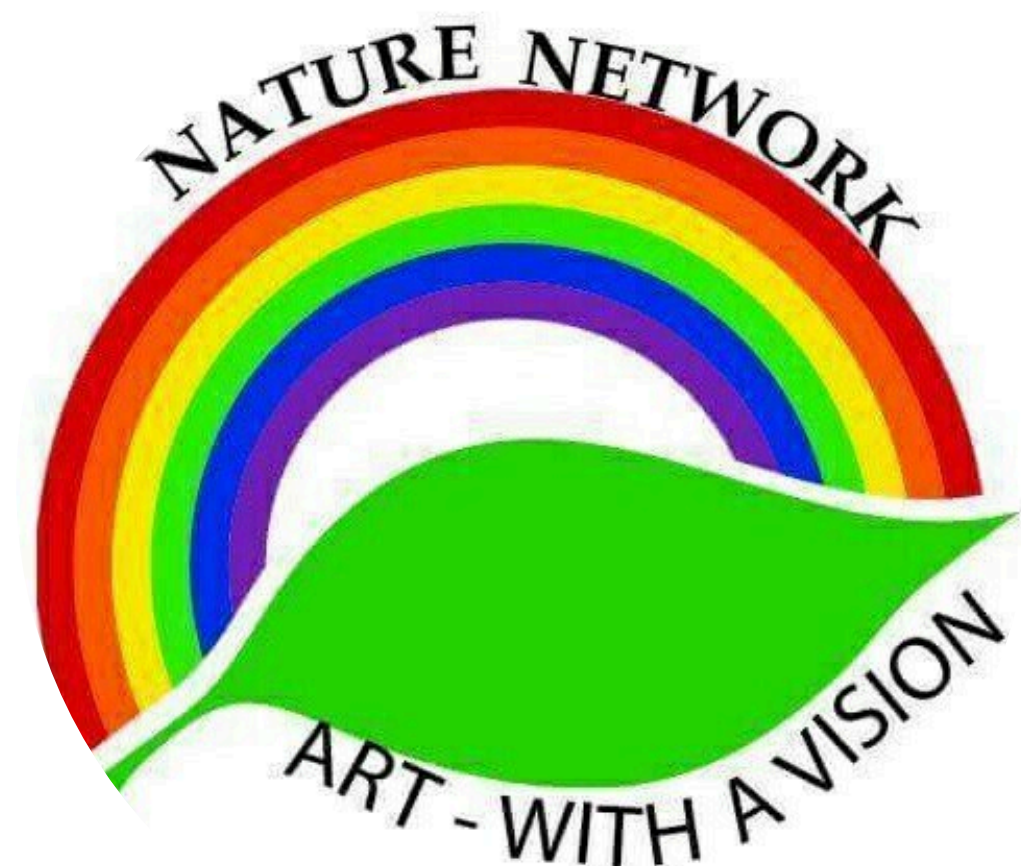
Through a reflexive thematic analysis of interviews with community members affiliated with the queer refugee-led organization *Nature Network* in Nairobi, this research explores how queer refugees organize, build kinship, and create local and transnational Pan-African solidarity networks. *Queer African Studies; Queer Pan-Africanism; Queer Kinship; Mutual Aid, Prefigurative Politics*

Findings

- 🌱 Queer refugees build subversive grassroots systems of collective care
- ✂️ Nature Network facilitates local communal mutual aid that is needs-based and adaptive; and challenges Western NGO models, through e.g. everyday practices of care and healing, chosen family structures, shelter networks, joint economic initiatives, and safety corridors
- 🏠 Queer kinship structures reimagine personal, political and cultural relations and belonging
- 👤 Transnational queer kinship and mutual aid are grassroots Pan-African practices
- 💡 Queer Pan-African practices are examples of *prefigurative politics* – living the future in the present
- 🚧 Structural barriers limit the success and scope of Pan-African organizing

Conclusion and Implications

- Sustainable and effective LGBTQ+ aid must prioritize locally defined goals, adopt intersectional approaches, and avoid rigid, bureaucratic funding structures rooted in Western priorities
- Shift needed in humanitarian and development aid: from a top-down model of service provision to one that centers grassroots knowledge, refugee leadership, and autonomy
- Local organizations are best positioned to understand and respond to their communities' unique needs
- The criminalization of queerness, prevailing marginalization and hierarchies within queer and refugee communities, and donor-driven constraints limit the reach and sustainability of this Pan-African movement



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