

Transgender Day of Visibility 2024: A Call to Counter and Challenge Anti-Rights through Intersectionality

"We are normal. We have hands. We have feet. We can walk, we can talk, we have needs just like everyone else- don't be afraid of us- we are all the same!" These were the words of Xolani Nkosi, more widely known as Nkosi Johnson, a young boy living with HIV that left a huge mark in the world raising awareness on HIV. This quote, stated at 13th International Aids Conference in July 2000, reminds me of how dehumanised many of us often are; whether in language used to describe us, pronouns weaponised in the heat of the moment or prejudice-filled approaches to receiving health services. Stigma and discrimination have been the cornerstone of harmful gender norms, othering and denying many people humanity. The homophobia, transphobia and ignorance that often leads to violence confuses me. I question how the fear of a queer person can result in the exertion of power in the form of police harassment, corrective rape or refusing to register a non-governmental organisation. I am yet to understand how our existence threatens those in power and those who benefit from patriarchy.

The worrisome developments in Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia are not unique to global majority countries. We have seen rollbacks in Russia, along with trans and gender diverse related rights in the United States of America and the United Kingdom. These aren't new; however history reminds us that at some point, there were undertones of acceptance, tolerance and respect for civil liberties and human rights. Who these liberties and rights are for, consistently emerges as the elephant in the room in convening spaces, movements, and democracy. These seem to have been replaced with fearmongering, nationalism, and white supremacy – only emboldened by a conservative political landscape and significant resourcing. The gradual decline of diversity and inclusion interventions, recruitment provisions and even positions after the hardest of COVID-19 restrictions signals a shift in incentives. What used to be considered sound business, reasonable and politically correct no longer holds. There are enough public platforms, business relations and systems of oppression to encourage and incentivise perpetuating injustice.

There is a clear wave that isn't limited to politics or corporate sectors. Multilateralism is compromised. The legitimacy of United Nations mechanisms is often questioned as they are perceived to be compromised both by perpetrators and survivors of injustice. This is reflected by developments surrounding the political declarations on Universal Health Coverage in 2019 and 2023 where reproductive, gender diversity and queer rights among others, were contentious. Global majority countries banding together to question the legitimacy of processes and more glaringly, the UN Secretary General invoking a rare instrument on the atrocities happening in Occupied Palestine. These are the signs of decay. Also, the same former apartheid state (South Africa) that questioned the legitimacy of the International Criminal Court when former dictator of Sudan, Omar al-Bashir, had an arrest warrant issued; found itself testing international law – it what would be deemed as in vain. It is no different to the lacklustre responses the African Union and regional economic communities have provided at moments of constitutional crises in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Sudan, and Zimbabwe. These do not occur in a vacuum. I do not see the difference in extractive industry child labour and unrelenting conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo - just as the regression of possibly removing protections from female genital mutilation in The Gambia. This only confirms that no one is safe.

All of these are glaring reminders of how communities are forced to navigate the worst of injustices whilst the world watches, deliberates and moves on from initial shock. The HIV and AIDS response has gradually seen a shift from priority to afterthought. Whether in resourcing, community response structures and political will – the assumption that progress warrants less effort is deeply misplaced. I alluded to this during [World AIDS Day](#), as the many challenges we face become more complex. They

must compete against narrow state budget allocations and rivalling political administrations. They must compete against gaps in reproductive rights, poor education, and eroding infrastructure. As grassroots leaders, we are forced to choose between preventing suicide and facilitating PrEP enrolments. We are forced to figure out rest and social protection against project costs whilst the bulk of unrestricted funding sits with the well-known brands that have assimilated to the system. The development industrial complex has only reflected the capitalist world we live in. As we navigate building business cases around the solutions to our experiences, we are denied of our humanity in fully exploring our creativity and identity.

As we [commemorate](#) transgender day of visibility, I am reminded of all these challenges around me. I am aghast with how normal violence, conflict and exploitation are. Whether its in a home ravaged by defilement, a trans woman being killed for being herself or the extraction and exploitation of Haiti. I am unhealthily heightened to how deeply connected Africans around the globe, people of colour, trans and gender diverse folks and many other marginalised communities are. That my identity card gender struggle at a law enforcement roadblock is tied to colonial history. These shared struggles of oppression, injustice and inequity should not be the only things that bring us together. I believe in the power of love, forgiveness, and solidarity, as expensive as it may be. These are the determinants of unearthing a new reality for our existence. The kind that acknowledges how deep and wide our liberation is interconnected. That we may call for better ways of engaging communities, ideology and addressing conflict. That HIV does not exist in a vacuum and the response should be just as systemic as our worldview. The kind of responses that react swiftly to misinformation, disinformation, and politicisation of our bodies. The kind that devalues neoliberal and linear practices and reporting measurements that deny us of our full humanity. The kind that does not consider my gender outside the binaries, as a statistic, diagnosis, or populist scoreboard. But – the kind that does embrace the notion that: even at a grassroots level, we can extend ourselves to another in whatever way possible and in the spirit of leaving no one behind by 2030.

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