As Africans, we stand for the celebration of our complexities and we are committed to ways of being which allow for self-determination at all levels of our sexual, social, political, and economic lives…We are specifically committed to the transformation of the politics of sexuality in our contexts. As long as African LGBTQI people are oppressed, the whole of Africa is oppressed.

(African LGBTQI declaration, 18 April 2010, Nairobi, Kenya, Tamale 2011, 182)

Sexuality in Africa is a multifaceted domain, deeply material (visceral, embodied, and politicised) and, like gender, informed by interlocking political, social, class, religious, cultural, and economic interests. “Sexual politics” undergirds the circuits of power informing the shape, architecture and patterns of African lives because the gendered hierarchy is sexualised by powerful men and states, anchored in patriarchy, and in turn circumscribed by heteropolar regimes of gender that make sex dangerous for sexual minorities. Therefore to be other than heterosexual in Africa is to be in effect constrained and regulated by the “heterosexual matrix” (Butler 1999), “the straight mind” (Wittig 1992) and the “compulsory heterosexuality” (Rich 1980) that informs the hegemonic order of heterosexuality. Sex and gender variance in Africa is similarly constricted by compulsory gender binarism, patriarchy, and heterosexism.

This chapter addresses LGBTQI+ experiences in Africa as a contribution to Pan African Studies. African countries vary very considerably in the ways that gender and sexuality are constructed, with postcolonial and neo-colonial relations, anti-racist struggles, local subjectivities, traditionalist patriarchies, and nationalist homophobias intertwining with human rights frameworks and activist interventions (Zabus 2013, Thoresen 2014, Mwangi 2017). Within these countries, lived and embodied experiences of genders and sexualities are highly diverse, whilst cross-cutting themes are apparent concerning the formation and operation of power structures (Tamale 2011). The chapter focuses on the African continent, whilst acknowledging the importance of scholarship about LGBTQI+ identities in the African diaspora (see for example Asanti 2010).

The chapter begins with an overview of the literature, then provides a snapshot of key historical issues. The issue of LGBTQI+ categories is discussed and other approaches,
including those rooted in spiritual heritages, are discussed. The chapter then addresses the many ways in which LGBTQI+ Africans are subjected and persecuted, with a specific small section on intersex, as intersex people are often overlooked in discussions about LGBTQI+ in African contexts. Lastly, we discuss human rights frameworks and activism about LGBTQI+ issues in Africa.

Overview of the literature


Less literature exists about lesbians in Africa than about gay men; exceptions include Lewis (2016), Currier and Migrane-George (2017) and Matebeni (2012). Scholarship about other marginalised identities is also developing, notably bisexuality (Stobie 2007, 2011, Lynch and Maree 2013, Khuzwayo and Morison 2017) and intersex (Gross 2011, Kaggwa 2011). Each different grouping within the LGBTQI+ umbrella faces different challenges, although patriarchy, gender binarism, and heteronormativity profoundly structure the lives of these and others in African (and other) contexts. For instance, Lynch and Maree (2013) recount the ways in which bisexual women are highly affected by discourses about heterosexual marriage, and discusses the importance of including bisexuality when examining the operation of heterosexism as a political force. Across the LGBTQI+ umbrella, sexism shapes people’s experiences. For example Corey-Boulet (2017) provides testimony from queer women living in West and Central Africa about the many negative effects that sexism has on their life-possibilities; these women face “multiple layers of discrimination.”

The history of sexual and gender diversities in Africa

A substantial literature exists documenting the history of same-sex sexual practices and gender diversities (Murray and Roscoe 1998, Epprecht 2006, 2013a). Zabus (2013) found names for same-sex desire in 50 African pre-colonial societies. Same-sex relations have been present since ancient times as a natural part of the social fabric in some African societies (see for example Nkabinde and Morgan 2006). Same-sex sexualities and gender diversities exist across the continent (Currier and Migrane-George, 2017, Hawley 2017). For instance, in Gambia, several local terms for sexual/gender diversity are in place. For example, the term
"ibis" denotes men who tend to adopt a feminine presentation and the term "yoos" is used for men who take the insertive role in sex and who do not identify as homosexual. Sexual relationships exist between women but in secret, although historically lesbianism has been associated with families who have powerful women ((Nyanzi 2013b).

Historically, sexual diversities in Africa have been inaccurately represented, for example Epprecht (2006) argues that historically, anthropologists minimised, exoticised, or suppressed evidence of African people engaging in both same-sex and opposite-sex sexual practices. Authors such as Lewis (2011) and Epprecht (2013b) trace the construction of ideas of African sexualities, using postcolonial critiques of the stigmatising ways in which sexual and gender diversities were misrepresented during colonial times, and discuss the widely-documented imposition of colonial homophobia, racism, and other prejudices, which became entrenched via legal and other institutions. Notions of sexuality and gender were manipulated by colonialists to serve their interests in relation to gender regimes, as well as those of race and sexuality, with continued negative effects. It is worth pointing out that there are differences across countries in the ways that colonialism was exercised and impacted on sexuality and gender discourses; these differences can be traced back to the trans-Saharan slave trade (Gaudio 2014) and Roman colonialism (Haskins 2014), and then to European colonial rule, and they are mapped out unevenly in relation to Islam and Christianity (Gaudio 2014). Another important issue is that some traditional forms of same-sex gender relations may serve to uphold social norms, for example: “...unlike other societies, women to women marriages in Igbo land [Nigeria] were not contracted in response to the sexual emotions or attractions of the couples, but simply an instrument for the preservation and extension of patriarchy and its traditions” (Nwoko 2012, 69).

Understanding LGBTQI+ categories in Africa

The terms lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex plus (LGBTQI+) are western-originated. We use these terms here, but recognise that for some authors and activists, they are associated with neo-colonising and other problematic practices that further contribute to their invisibility and stigmatisation. For example, Seckinelgin (2009) argues that “internationally recognized categories of LGBTI and men who have sex with men (MSM) for the local voices of activists in India and sub-Saharan Africa...can silence difference as well as articulate it.” Zabus (2013) explains that exclusive homosexuality would not have been (and is still not) practical for many Africans, because of the way that inequalities prevail, and the manner in which wealth is distributed through [heterosexual] marriage, and also that notions of sexual orientation can be problematic because active/passive sexual roles can be more important than the gender of a partner. Other terms such as MSM and sexual orientation and gender identity expression (SOGIE) groups could also be used. It should be noted that, in African contexts, intersex is often uncritically included alongside and often subsumed within the LGBT nomenclature. In some African languages, there is slippage between “intersex” and non-heterosexual, for example, Hames (2018) explains that the word “sta-bane” describes an intersex person in isiZulu vernacular but in isiXhosa it is a derogatory term to describe a lesbian or gay person.

The term “ queer” is used by some non-heterosexuals and gender diverse people in Africa (see for example Matebeni et al. 2018). Whilst the idea of “ queer” can be used to destabilise rigid sex/gender categorisations, debates about the meaning and utility of the term also exist. As Matebeni (2014) points out, the term “ queer” can hide diversities between groups of people. The idea of “ queer” has been criticised by some other African scholars, who see it as
a neo-imperial concept (see Nyanzi 2014) whilst other African scholars have embraced and worked with it (Matebeni 2014, Nyanzi 2014). Other non-heterosexual and/or non-gender binaried identities are common at local and country-specific levels in Africa (see for example Tamale 2007). These may conflict with “LGBTQI+” categories, and there is a tendency for terms such as “LGBTQ” to overlook the diverse concerns of some groups such as bisexuals and transgender people (see Matebeni 2014). However, local non-heterosexual and/or gender-variant identities exist, these can themselves be contested and under debate.

**Ontologies and sex/gender diversities in Africa**

It is important to avoid imposing Western-originated ontologies onto African contexts. Dominant Western ontologies rest either on hard science, and/or on Abrahamic religions. Whilst Christianity and Islam are the dominant religions in African countries, there are wide divergences in the actual belief systems that underpin social relations. Authors such as Izugbara describe the importance of spirituality and the supernatural in African contexts; practice and belief in these can sit alongside adherence to the religions of Christianity and Islam. “Beliefs about the paranormal are … regularly invoked for a diversity of purposes in Africa [sic]. They not only drive a diversity of political systems, economic practices and array of sexual behaviours, but also have serious implications for development and other activities on the continent” (2011, 534–35). Pan-African understandings of sexual and gender diversity can be enriched by attention to spirituality, in its wide range of manifestations across the continent and in the diaspora (Amadiume 2015, Conner 2013, Murray and Roscoe 1998, Otero and Falofa 2013, Stobie 2014). For example, Ololuwase (2018) foregrounds everyday and periodic rites of passage among the Ogu-speaking people of Southwestern Nigeria. He contends that the rites are mediated by human communicative interactions that blur, and in some cases, reverse, sexual roles while sometimes investing humanity with gender neutrality and hermaphroditic orientations, regardless of more popular affirmations to the contrary on the African continent.

The incorporation of a spiritual element in the modelling of sex, gender, and sexuality challenges discreet notions of male and female. For example, some African deities are ungendered, or have more than one gender or sexuality, or are intersexed, or homosexual, whilst others have human or non-human sexual partners and subvert gender lines (see Izugbara 2011). For instance, “Although popularly imagined as female, [the popular deity] Mami Wata does not really have a familiar sexual orientation; rather, she claims human spouses indiscriminately, regardless of their gender” (Izugbara 2011, 543). There are of course great variations in the ways that sex and gender are conceptualised across and within different African countries; this extends to the spiritual realm. Contemporary sangomas (traditional healers as they are known in South Africa) can also be non-heterosexual and/or gender diverse (Izugbara 2011). This is linked to ancestral, pre-colonial practices by authors such as Nkabinde and Morgan (2006), who document the traditional, institutionalised ways in which African female sangomas in South Africa engage in same-sex relations. Nkabinde (2008) also describes the way in which many South African sangomas have same-sex relationships and rationalise these as being directed by their ancestors. However, evidence also shows that historically, lesbianism was linked with a malevolent witchcraft in some African societies (for example the Zande, see Evans-Pritchard 1937, 1970 in Izugbara 2011). Also, as indicated further on, people expressing same-sex love can be persecuted because of spiritual beliefs in contemporary African societies. The terrain of spiritual non-heterosexualities and gender diversities is therefore a contested one overall.
Persecution

In their countries of origin, LGBTQI+ people are exposed and subjected to discrimination, persecution, exclusion and violence, murder, and rape at the hands of state and non-state agents. Same-sex intimate activities are criminalised in 38 of 54 countries in Africa. Gender-diverse people also face discrimination and persecution (for example Vilane (2018) reports on the difficulties facing trans people in Swaziland and Camminga (2019) on the status of transgender refugees in South Africa). Discrimination against LGBTQI+ persons is endemic in most African countries. The bias against LGBTQI+ persons is often supported by discriminatory legislation for example in Nigeria and Uganda (Rudman 2015, 241). Penalties for same-sex and gender-diverse related activities and associations range from fines to death (see PASSOP/Leitner Centre/Open Society Foundation for South Africa Mkhize et al. 2010, 2013). In many African countries, criminal charges are laid on people simply for expressing their sexuality or gender identity. The material realities confirm that in African contexts the restraining power exerted over LGBTQI people is revealed both by criminalisation and vocal public denigration (especially naming and shaming). In this sense, LGBTQI+ people continue to be represented as abject figures over which governments and cultural institutions exert a great degree of control.

Active hostility towards gender-diverse and non-heterosexual people in Africa is still pervasive, and deliberate, sustained stigmatising and prejudiced expressions are evident realities for the majority of African LGBTQI+ people. There is systematic anti-gay sentiment: for example, a study conducted by the Centre for Development of People revealed that 34% of gay Malawian men were denied basic social services like healthcare and 8% had been beaten by police or other officials because of their sexual orientation (see also PASSOP 2012; Other Foundation & HSRC, 2016). In some African countries, even where homosexuality is not illegal per se, “… community attitudes and the church’s stance have led to many LGBTQ people being arrested by the police. Some of those interviewed were harassed and others arrested because of their gender identity or sexual orientation in their home country” (PASSOP 2012, 11). As Ekine reports:

The moral panic against homosexuality across the continent is systemic and indicative of an instrumentalised, well-organised campaign which exposes the cozy relationship between religious and cultural fundamentalisms asserted though vigorous nationalist political agendas. Nigeria, Uganda, and, to a lesser extent, Malawi have been at the centre of this anti-queer movement, repeatedly driving state homophobia though recurring legislations.

(Ekine 2013, 78–79)

It is not possible to properly describe the different forms of persecution across the different African countries in this short piece. One example comes from the Gambia, where homosexuality has been denounced at the highest political levels, including a threat to behead homosexuals by President Jammeh in 2008. Homosexuality is presented as haram [taboo] in this Islamic country, and religious reasons are given for discrimination against those who engage in same-sex sexualities and/or are gender diverse. The existence of homosexuality is often denied, and/or it is discursively linked with foreigners and the West (Nyanzi 2013b). Another example comes from South Africa, where so-called “corrective rape” of lesbians continues (see also Mkhize et al. 2010); and according to Mwambene and Wheal (2015) this practice is linked to the perceived threat that these women pose to patriarchy and heteronormativity, where women’s bodies are demarcated as men’s property. Bisexual women as well
as lesbians are at risk of violence (Lynch and Maree 2013). Other examples of persecution of LGBTQI+ people across Africa are reported in various sources such as the People Against Suffering, Oppression and Poverty (PASSOP report) (2012). For example:

There was nowhere to go because in Congo if you go to the police you could be arrested or stoned. The police are not trained about it [homosexuality]. Being gay is taboo in Congo.

(Gay asylum seeker, Congo)

PASSOP (2012, 10) reviews journalistic coverage of increasing homophobia in many African countries, including beatings, death threats, assassinations, and rape. Other key issues are rejection by family and friends, forced marriage or subjection to unwanted ritualistic procedures. Indicative quotes from this report reveal these realities:

My partner was killed and his house was burned. We lived together in the same house. If I had been there that day, there is no doubt I would have been killed also.

(Gay asylum seeker, Uganda)

My mother and my sisters took me to church for exorcism because they assumed that I was a man possessed by supposed evil supernatural force that led me to debauchery…

(Gay asylum seeker, Democratic Republic of Congo)

Persecution is spread unevenly across people with varied sexual and gender identities, and can take place between different groups subsumed under the “LGBTQI+” umbrella. For instance, discrimination by gays against transgender people sometimes occurs (Mbugua 2013). Violence against LGBTQI+ people does not only take place by heterosexuals; for example Sandfort et al. (2015) document forced sex between women in Southern Africa. Despite multiple hardships, LGBTQI+ people in African countries exercise agency in a variety of ways. For instance, ORAM (2013) documents the importance of social networks and access to information for LGBTQI+/sexually and gender non-conforming (SGN) refugees. There are many places in Africa (including Tanzania, Kenya, and Nigeria) where homosexuals, bisexuals, transgender people are at a high risk of death and therefore have no option but to flee often to South Africa. Camminga (2017) reports specific challenges faced by transgender refugees in the South African asylum system.

To understand LGBTQI+ issues in Africa, it is necessary to address the “intersecting causes of political persecution that are unique to individuals and communities in the region, including gender, class, religion, ethnicity and sexuality” (Devji 2016, 353). Currier (2019) analyses the way that “politicized homophobia is a strategy used by African political elites interested in consolidating their moral and political authority” (2017, 1). Homophobia is used to discredit or silence critics and divide social movements, affecting not only LGBTI rights movements but also others such as women’s movements and movements supporting the rights of those with HIV and AIDS. Another key issue is that homosexuality, bisexuality, pansexuality, transgender, and other non-normative sexed and/or gendered identities are still essentialised in terms of culture. That is to say, LGBTQI+, in its perceived “unAfricanness,” still signifies excess and promiscuity to many African people (see Nyanzi 2013a). LGBTQI+ lives are viewed by African homophobes, biphobes and transphobes as acts and behaviours that should not be accorded status as identities with citizenship rights. However, pleasure,
celebration, affirmation, and the positive expression of erotic desire prevail despite ongoing pathologisation, marginalisation, and persecution.

Intersex

Intersex people (who are born with atypical chromosomal, gonadal and/or anatomical characteristics) face particular challenges on the African continent. This includes homicide due to prejudice against intersexuality, for example British intersex activist Hayes-Light documented the homicide of a 17 year old Kenyan intersex person, Muhadh Ishmael, by his hostile family (Monro personal communication 3.04.2017). It also includes widespread infanticide of intersex infants in countries including Kenya and South Africa. For example Behrens (2018) documents the routine murder of intersex infants by birth attendants in South Africa. Intersex activist Sally Gross further demonstrated the levels of xenophobia against intersex people in some quarters (Muthien 2013).

Julius Kaggwa (2016), Executive Director of the Support Initiative for People with atypical sex Development (SIPD Uganda) directs attention to and highlights a violent feature unique to the African experience of intersex experiences that responds to a perceived spoiled identity under a medical gaze (heightened by cultural prejudice, secrecy, and shrouds of silence). Any attempt at “coming out” that could result in an intersex pride is negated and withdrawn, resulting in further invisibility and sustained heteronormality among the intersexed population. Whilst issues of survivability are pertinent for many Africans who are non-normative in terms of gender and sexuality, they are critically important for intersex people in some countries:

In Uganda, the traditional way of dealing with perceived sex development differences, often perceived as “abnormalities”, has largely been staying silent – and wishing them away through various kinds of traditional rituals, which often meant killing the intersex infants in question. This was, for decades, considered to be both the best and normal way to handle intersex births. Normally, just being a girl or a boy in Uganda and the East African region generally – without any sex development differences – comes with more than enough cultural, religious, and political expectations, demands, impositions, and prejudices. Prejudices that form most of the gender inequities and human rights issues we still battle with. The indeterminate state of sex that defines intersex people therefore creates even more complex cultural and religious prejudices. The initial treatment of an intersex birth in Uganda will often be silence and secrecy. The family will isolate the child from the general public. In most cases, the mothers of such children will be frowned upon. Usually, superstitions loom large as their families consult witchdoctors, mediums and traditional healers for a solution. In many instances, the mother will work with either a traditional medicine practitioner or some other ally to kill the child.

In trying to fix the appearance of children’s genitals, grave mutilations have occurred, which have left these children scarred and dysfunctional for life – for most with no chance of ever getting these errors corrected. This is because there is overwhelming pressure at all levels (family, community, spiritual, cultural, and political) to have a child with a body that conforms to the normative “male” or “female” body. A pressure so overwhelming that parents will often kill their intersex babies or surrender them to harmful mutilations.

The approach that is used by the “elite” is a concealment approach where an intersex child will be hidden and “offered” up for surgery without warranting them, and without proper surgical or psychosocial support facilities.
There is a specific issue for intersex people about medically unnecessary interventions, which are widely criticised by activists internationally. Surgeons in West Africa revised Western treatment norms to account for the limited medical facilities available; whilst they still operated due to a perceived need to impose male genital norms on children with hypospadias, in practice these are less serious and damaging interventions than those carried out in the West. Behrens (2018) argues that some level of surgical intervention may help to avoid the infanticide of intersex infants in Southern African contexts. However, the pressing issues of infanticide, homicide, bigotry, and damaging non-essential medical interventions remain.

Human rights and policy interventions to protect LGBTQI+ people

At an international level, a number of the key legal instruments and human rights frameworks are in place to protect African LGBTQI+ including the 2007 Yogyakarta Principles and the recent Yogyakarta Principles +10. Other recent developments include Human Rights Council Resolution 17/19 on Human Rights, Sexual Orientation, and Gender Identity (adopted June 2011) that expresses grave concern about violence and discrimination against people because of their gender identity and sexual orientation, and the Human Rights Council Resolution 32/2 Protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (adopted June 2016). These international instruments place obligations on individual states to protect people against homophobic and transphobic violence and torture, cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment. There is also human rights provision at a regional level across Africa. For example, the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights (adopted June 1981) stipulates rights to non-discrimination, equality before the law, life, and integrity of the person, dignity and freedom from torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. “Sexual orientation” and “gender identity” are not explicitly criteria for distinction, but the rights stipulated are specified as belonging to “every individual” (Rights in Exile 2016). Taken together, these directives and instruments constitute a substantial human rights framework that should protect LGBTQI+ people. LGBTQI+ African people’s rights could also be supported by the African Commission; Jonas (2013) contends that it has a crucial role to play in protecting rights, appealing for decriminalisation of homosexuality in those countries which still criminalise it, and conducting research in this area.

At the level of individual states, post-apartheid South Africa has taken an internationally pioneering role in supporting LGBTQI+ rights. It was the first country in the world to constitutionally guarantee non-discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in 1996 (Gunkel 2010). South Africa has subsequently played a leading role in LGBTQI+ rights agendas on an international and domestic level. There are a number of domestic laws underpinning rights regarding sexual orientation, including the Employment Equity Act (1998), the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (2000), the Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred based on Sexual Orientation (2000), and the Civil Union Act (2006). Whilst post-apartheid South Africa has progressive human rights frameworks, difficulties with implementation of human rights in this area have been noted.
Activism

As Ndasehe (2013) explains, different African countries are at various stages in terms of activism about LGBTQI+ issues. Whilst homophobia (and transphobia, biphobia, and intersexphobia) are still strong, various activists, stakeholders, and organisations are prepared to challenge these forms of prejudice. Whilst these might tend to be either pan-LGBTQI+ or gay male-dominated, there are some that are specific to strands within the LGBTQI+ umbrella. For example, intersex activist Kaggwa (2016 n.p.) writes about efforts to mobilise, unsettle paradigms and ensure change: “My own outreach to religious leaders promises that if we are relentless in our educational work, to change hearts and minds, we will make incremental and lasting attitudinal changes concerning differences in sexual development.”

Very broadly speaking, there are some recent developments in African countries that support sexual and gender diversity. The impact of pan-African, international, and country-specific activist movements (see earlier) should not be underestimated. A large number of initiatives have also taken place under the umbrella of public health initiatives and/or the need to fulfil international treaty obligations (Epprecht 2013a). Internationally-fuelled interventions can be problematic, for example the way that foreign aid is tied to agendas to tackle homophobia is criticised by activists who state that African LGBTQI+ movements cannot operate effectively when this type of foreign interference – that takes no account of the legacy of colonialism – is happening (Anon 2013, 92). However, at a continental level, there are also changes afoot. For example, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the development Agenda 2063 (begun in 2013 by the African Union) provides a new development pathway for Africa, with “important opportunities for linking continental LGBTI advocacy to the sustainable development enterprise” (Poku et al. 2017).

Activism to support non-heterosexuals and gender diversity is found amongst some African Christian movements. For example, the House of Rainbow church in Lagos proudly welcomes LGBT people (Izugbara 2011). “Muslim community leaders from several African countries including Sudan, South Africa, Kenya, and Senegal have recently begun to defy official Islamic homophobia, leading to movements in Islam that now accept and consider homosexuality as normal and natural” (Izugbara 2011, 552). Likewise Epprecht (2013) documents the emergence of South African black religious leaders who are opposing the way in which archbishops from across Africa joined forces with conservative American religious leaders to condemn homosexuality. Izugbara (2011) argues, therefore, that faith and religion have a role in promoting sexual well-being and respect in African contexts.

There are a range of other key developments. African scholarship about gender and sexual diversity appears to have had some impact in broadening minds about the issues and in supporting activism (see Epprecht et al. 2019). An important flowering of cultural forms is taking place, including art (see for example Matebeni 2014, Lewis 2016), and literature (see Stobie 2007, 2011, Sheik 2015). Sports has also, to an extent, been a vehicle for change in the area of intersex rights following the mistreatment of athlete Caster Semenya (Cooky and Dworkin 2013). Legal change has resulted from activist endeavours, notably in South Africa (Reddy et al. 2009) including not only LGBTQI+ rights but also intersex rights (Dworkin et al. 2013). The movement towards more rights and inclusion for people with non-heterosexual sexualities and non-normative genders is linked with cultural changes in some places. For example McAllister (2013) argues that the “tswanarisation” of gay culture that is taking place in Botswana is a useful activist strategy in tackling the dangers of framing same-sex sexualities as “unAfrican,” and that similar strategies may be useful in other African countries. Another key issue is the overlaps in the agendas, strategies, and tactics used by
African feminists and those advocating for LGBTQI+ rights. For example Okech (2013) analyses the ways in which African feminist spaces are amendable to queer organising – feminism and queer politics both challenge normative ideas of heterosexuality, but there are reports of homophobia amongst some African feminist groups, and African feminisms also face a range of challenges.

Concluding notes

This chapter has provided an overview of the origins and current manifestations of LGBTQI+ and other non-normative sex and gender diversities in Africa. It has reviewed the literature, and has provided some analysis of the reasons for the ongoing persecution of LGBTQI+ people on the continent. Same-sex sexualities and gender diversities have been shown to be historically present in African countries, dating back to pre-colonial times, and can be claimed as a feature of Pan-African identities and studies. Prejudice against LGBTQI+ people appears to have varied roots; it is primarily a colonial import but more recently is fostered by the strategic formation and manipulation of nationalist discourses by homophobic state leaders, as well as fundamentalist religious perspectives. Prejudice located in both Christianity and Islam are restrictive factors, although progressive Islamic and Christian movements concerning LGBTQI+ people are also emerging. African LGBTQI+ people are shown to be agentic actors in a wide variety of ways, including political activism to support LGBTQI+ rights and the creation of a wide range of cultural resources that celebrate African sexual and gender diversities.

Acknowledgements

This chapter draws on materials from the Introduction and Chapter 8 of the edited collection Queer in Africa: LGBTQI identities, citizenship, and activism. London and New York: Routledge. The authors would like to acknowledge and thank those who contributed to the Collection.

References


Camminga, B. 2019. Transgender Refugees and the Imagined South Africa: bodies over Borders and Borders over Bodies. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.


