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The Lighthouse and the Landing Pad

Transnational Commodification of a
Global Gay Identity and a Ugandan
LGBTI Rights NGO

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Abstract

This paper reports on field research in 2012 about the perceptions of identity and development that frame the performative practice of members of Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), an indigenous LGBTI rights advocacy NGO and the major voice of resistance to current anti-homosexual legislation in Uganda's parliament. Within the context of NGO institutionalality, I examine how SMUG appropriates and defines 'gay identity' in relation to anti-gay sociopolitical sentiment to effect development as a tool for achieving sociopolitical change. I conclude that SMUG's modern, savvy employees publicly ally themselves and their organization with an identity of 'gayness' perceived to be universal and inalienable, which allows SMUG to organize its practice through the language of development and human rights on an international scale and accrue social capital to exchange with transnational partners for political and economic aegis. The performance of a global gay identity provides SMUG the standing to (inter)act politically on international and local scales. However, in demarcating themselves as 'gay,' SMUG's membership assumes sociopolitical minority status within Uganda, limiting their ability to affect sociopolitical change on national and local scales. While more field research is necessary, this introductory analysis concludes SMUG may achieve greater success in Uganda by highlighting, rather than eschewing, local constructs of minority sexualities.

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We¹ all sat quietly working in our respective offices, the lights off but the windows open, allowing a cool, diffuse lambency into the one-story home on a quiet residential street in the Kampala suburbs. The cool of the cement house that served as our NGO headquarters supplied me adequate refuge from the late morning's dry heat, provided I did not move much. Beatrice's² strong voice broke the daze, rippling from tiny room to tiny room, inquiring of her coworkers if the exchange rate for Ugandan Shilling (UGX) to Swedish Krona (SEK) was still 351 UGX to 1 SEK. Her question elicited an instantaneous response from inside the open doors of each office that today, the rate was actually 356 UGX to 1 SEK. Not one of my colleagues had looked up the current rate on their laptops or had telephoned a bank; they all knew it off the tops of their heads. I was soon to learn that this was not an uncommon occurrence at the offices of Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), an unregistered³, umbrella human rights NGO incorporating seventeen indigenous LGBTI⁴ rights and health organizations in Kampala, Uganda's capital and largest city.

A few days later, another employee, John, was discussing with a few coworkers if it would be more financially advantageous to exchange Ugandan Shillings for foreign currencies here in Kampala or if they might get better rates for United States Dollars, Kenyan Shillings, Swedish Krona, and Euros from France in their respective countries upon arrival. I had with me some Kenyan bills from my last East African venture and was looking to trade them in for Uganda's national currency. I asked John if he had a ballpark idea of what I might get for my few hundred Kenyan notes. The exchange rate, he told me without so much as a blink, was slightly less than 29 UGX to 1 KES. He even knew if banks or extralegal 'street' moneychangers, and which ones in particular, would yield me the best proverbial bang for my buck. Later on, Peter, under whom I worked directly in SMUG's Research Department, demonstrated the same skill by converting the Euro to UGX in his head without having to first check the exchange rate. While managing and dispersing NGO funds is only one SMUG's myriad obligations⁵, my coworkers'

¹ I acknowledge and disclose in my epistemological approach to this ethnographic work was and is that of an activist anthropologist as well as researcher; as a queer man, I possess a strong desire to produce work that is "useful and relevant" to my non-heteronormative informants (Speed 2007:3).

² All names have been changed to help ensure their owner's security.

³ At the time of writing, SMUG had previously attempted to register as a NGO with the Ugandan government, but, due to the organization's focus on sexuality and the subsequent stream of invasive questioning regarding individual members, SMUG withdrew its application. SMUG is in the process of registering with its government as a company, Ltd., which would allow its employees to pay taxes and support Uganda's social security program while affording the organization some legal status and protection.

⁴ LGBTI is the collective acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex peoples employed by SMUG.

⁵ Between making calls to get people legal help or find secure and clandestine housing options for its membership, SMUG diligently and relentlessly engages Ugandans and the government on behalf of 'the community,' from negotiating with police to

spontaneous ability to calculate between international currencies was a result of their exposure to foreign capital in Uganda and frequent international travel. SMUG's fantastic access to foreign capital was rooted in the seemingly simple fact it is comprised of and run by gay activists under Western political and financial aegis⁶. But few local gay rights groups in the global south have succeeded at harnessing such a monumental, transnational network of patronage, so how had SMUG become so integrated in (Western) developmentalist human rights policy and programming that every employee save the cook could quote offhand that day's exchange rates with an alacrity and coolness akin to reciting their own names?

Though I did not realize it at the time, on my first day with the organization, I was given a window into just how inextricably integrated SMUG was in the market of the transnational development apparatus. My supervisor Peter had picked me up at my hotel and taken me to meet Alice and Henry, two LGBTI Kampalans who each worked with one of SMUG's seventeen member NGOs. Together, the four of us traveled across the city to conduct a pair of filmed interviews for a research project sponsored by a Canadian university that aimed to document human rights abuses against LGBTI Ugandans. On the return trip to the Secretariat⁷, we made a brief and unannounced—to me, anyway—detour. When questioned, Peter vaguely responded that this was just a “stop” at a lordly, two-story walled compound not too far southeast of the city center. After passing the security checkpoint, this unarticulated visit resulted in Alice, Henry and I sitting silently for a few minutes while Peter dipped into a corner office, exchanged jocular and familiar greetings with the office's occupant, and shut the door behind him. Pamphlets and posters announced this well-appointed office building as the international headquarters of Agency for Human Rights (AHR)⁸, a multinational African human rights NGO. I was to later learn from Beatrice that AHR, since it was legally compliant and registered in-country, frequently operated as a “third party” middleman for financial transactions between SMUG and its multitude of foreign benefactors, whose funds were channeled through a Western bank account with offices in Kampala. Beatrice, a straight LGBTI ally heavily and proudly engaged in activism, explained that the sympathetic foreign governments, Western universities, private donors, and transnational human rights NGOs who

secure the release of unlawfully arrested LGBTI persons to assuring LGBTI people in hospitals receive proper and indiscriminate care.

⁶ I believe Chasin is correct in noting that, “while a very few gay people might make money from this market, there is no reason to think that their financial profit amounts to either economic or political betterment for the whole identity group” (2005:217).

⁷ The Secretariat is SMUG's organizational term for its offices and physical headquarters.

⁸ Like the names of my coworkers and informants, I have given this NGO a pseudonym to protect it from political retaliation, since the Ugandan Ministry of Ethics and Integrity has in the last year actively sought to revoke the operating licenses of any registered NGO suspected of aiding or abetting LGBTI causes.

now⁹ finance SMUG's operations all "feel safer giving out their funds" to AHR due to the greater transnational financial security and decreased risk of hurting their domestic public images. Because most international bodies prohibit themselves from allocating funds directly to an unregistered NGO, trust from operating "responsib[ly]" is essential for SMUG to secure and receive funding, however indirectly. However, Beatrice elucidated, once SMUG receives capital, the executive director of SMUG "can just call and tell" us to use funds for this or for that. In other words, the current channels of capital transactions permit the very lack of accountability that they were established to prevent.

After we had been waiting for a few minutes, Peter emerged from the spacious office with a manila envelope in lieu of an explanation, and subtly tucked the envelope securely into his backpack. Later that afternoon, I accompanied Peter and his superior James down the unpaved dust roads to the new, pristine shopping center near the Secretariat. James and I waited in his car while Peter ran in to the bank to exchange one of many 100 Euro¹⁰ notes from the envelope into a plethora of Ugandan Shillings for his boss. While we waited in his car, James explicated that much of their donors' funds must be exchanged into locally fungible denominations. Of course the bulk of international funds went to funding organizational activities, programming, legal fees, and salaries, but no donor organization had any real control over to who or for what purposes the funds were used. This paradox of 'proper' NGO behavior availing the potential for decreased accountability is more or less moot since the actual trust SMUG acquires, this social capital they earn on the international stage, is not a product of enacting the most efficacious and transparent economic practices. Rather, this social capital is derived from simply but successfully *acting like a 'real' indigenous NGO*. By respecting donors' financial and publicity concerns of operating in the 'undeveloped wilds' where 'gays' struggle to survive, SMUG was reproducing foreign expectations of 'proper' NGO institutionality.

Based on fieldwork in 2012¹¹, I posit that SMUG employs a globalized vocabulary of international

⁹ For a number of years following its inception in 2004, SMUG's operations and programming received little to no funding, either from foreign or domestic sources; the consensus of a number of informants is the bulk of SMUG's current international financial support is directly due to the global notoriety that Uganda's anti-gay legislation has brought to their cause.

¹⁰ This amount is more than most Kampalans earn in a month.

¹¹ To date, I have conducted nine semi-structured interviews and more than two hundred hours of participant observation over six weeks in June and July of 2012 in my role as an intern in the Research Department of Sexual Minorities Uganda, or SMUG, at its Kampala office. My field research centered on SMUG's eight employees, along with some of their professional affiliates and social connections, since they run one of the leading LGBTI rights NGOs in Uganda and focus on attaining equal legal rights, legislative protections, and social acceptance through civic education. Admittedly, this is a relatively small sample size, but nonetheless one composed of highly emblematic figures in Kampala's LGBTI development community. Furthermore, my research has included not only reviews of extant literature, but, since their projected identity to local and global audiences is

development, human rights, and inalienable freedoms in its attempt to negotiate with and win over domestic, anti-gay proponents in Uganda. The organization's goal is to establish community-wide juridicolegal protections as well as individual socioeconomic and health security. I suggest that Kampala's LGBTI development activists' performance¹² of 'gayness'¹³ both appropriates internationalized queer influences and simultaneously reflects their own, unique notions of sexual identity that are particular to the chronotopic context (Butler 1988). I contend that the transnational influences on the political economy of Kampalan 'gay' identity formation in the development arena were made possible by the apparatus of international development and the principles of human rights (Nesbitt 1997). In connecting local, often disenfranchised groups of people to larger regional, national, and even international apparatuses of power, NGOs expose local peoples to specific models of power that have largely proven to be prosperous formulations in the West (Mertz and Timmer 2010). Such exposure invariably has impacted SMUG's channeling of foreign gay rights groups, whose success stories in other nations can serve as models for the gay rights movement in Uganda. Thus, SMUG and similar indigenous LGBTI rights NGOs in Kampala embrace a 'global gay' identity¹⁴ as modern, forward-thinking, and educated global players (Altman 1997; Jackson 2009; Schmitt 2003). What makes Kampala's queer development community particularly unique from those in other contexts, or even from other non-heteronormative Kampalans who do not participate in development, is that SMUG and its compatriots actively eschew any aspect of their identity that might reveal their queer positioning to be uniquely Ugandan or locally influenced. Instead, specifically internationally-focused LGBTI developmental

key to understanding performative production, I have observed my informants' speech and profiles on Facebook, Twitter, Soundcloud, Instagram, and news media interviews for over twelve months.

¹² The majority of my observations come from the time I spent in a professional setting with my informants, rather than in purely social settings, and thus my analysis reflects on my informants' professional positionalities and should not be presumed to carry over into more casual, 'off the clock' environments. Therefore, my observations are specific only to LGBTI Kampalans actively engaged at least part time in transnational developmental schemes. Their livelihoods and local social statuses are heavily imbricated with their positionality and performativity as cosmopolitan 'developers' and human rights activists, and should not be considered at all to be the experience of the majority of Ugandans who practice or identify with non-heteronormative sexualities and genders (cf. Melissa Minor Peters, forthcoming; Tsing 2009). Even among the LGBTI community participating in development, the notion of a unified community is not an "unproblematic or utopian" whole (Rushbrook 2005:200). Although it is perhaps the most vocal and publicized LGBTI rights and health NGO in Uganda, SMUG is only one of dozens of organizations, both indigenous and Western-based, operating in Kampala. SMUG is unique among these organizations, according to a number of members and employees of these other organizations, because it was consciously established in part to assume the public face of the Ugandan LGBTI movement abroad.

¹³ This use of quotation marks around the term *gay* signifies that Kampala's developmental activist community publicly considers transgender and intersex peoples to be part of the 'gay' community, even though their sexual identities may not be homosexual. Though many trans and lesbian members of Kampala's LGBTI communities adamantly resent the appellation 'gay,' many of Kampala's transnational LGBTI activists employ the term *gay* interchangeably with the term LGBTI because the activists perceive these two markers of identity as more or less equivalent with regard to expressions of non-normative sexual subjectivities.

¹⁴ A full analysis of the development of this 'global gay' identity, which would involve a deep exploration of transnational media and social networking as well as developmental schemes is well beyond the scope of this paper.

activists ally themselves with a commodified identity of global gayness (Chasin 2000) that they assert is universal and inalienable.

The paradox between local Ugandan and global conceptions of sexuality and belonging reveals the discursive and situational understandings of this supposed ‘universal’ concept. This incongruity gives rise to a disconnection between the global discourse SMUG uses and the local audiences it attempts to reach and convince of its plight. SMUG’s employees and fellow activists perform a ‘global gayness’ by acting as Western LGBTI activists and participating in the apparatus of development through NGOs. In doing so, SMUG accrues social capital on an international stage, which it can then exchange with these transnational partners from the global north for financial and political resources¹⁵. However, SMUG is subsequently confined in its ability to use these funds and political backing on the ground in Uganda because the organization and its membership are branded by their adversaries as possessing ‘foreign’ (sexual) identities that are alterious and un-Ugandan: SMUG is thus pigeonholed and stymied by the very hearts it seeks to change and the minds it desires to broaden.

SMUG desires for its LGBTI membership the legal protections and the judicial security guaranteed to and (supposedly) experienced by the nation-state’s heterosexual majority¹⁶. It is not surprising, then, that SMUG’s emphasis on human rights extends beyond its own target demographic of LGBTI Ugandans. The LGBTI movement in Uganda, articulated Timothy, a lanky and soft-spoken SMUG employee, is actively “advocating equal rights for all people.” Time and time again, SMUG’s employees reiterated this philosophy, such as when Samuel declared that the principles of civil liberties must be “embraced in all sectors,” explaining this is why SMUG often participates in other NGOs’ campaigns, such as promoting the rights of children, women, or sex workers, regardless of whether or not those groups have any direct connection with Ugandan or LGBTI people and causes. Because “SMUG is part and parcel” of the goal of human rights and equality for all citizens, remarked the ever-optimistic Samuel, the Ugandan LGBTI developmental activists believe their objectives of equal recognition, access to services, and protections are desirable not just for some citizens, but for all citizens: the LGBTI community’s access to rights is most obtainable when all people have access to those rights.

¹⁵ The general process of this commodity chain is hardly unique to LGBTI persons or Uganda.

¹⁶ Despite the existence of colonial era penal codes that prohibit sodomy between two males, Article 29 of the Ugandan constitution, one of my informants with a legal background was quick to point out, protects citizens’ rights to freedoms of speech, association, assembly, belief, conscience, joining political and/or civic associations, non-violent demonstration, expression, religion, movement, and thought.

SMUG even extends its jurisdiction as an activist organization beyond the territorial boundaries of Uganda. One aspect of my role in the Research Department at SMUG was to intercalate SMUG's goals and actions with both those of LGBTI and more general human rights movements the world over. Three weeks after my arrival, I spent a day drafting a speech for a SMUG employee to deliver at a conference in Finland. The speech was explicit in its regard of 'the' (supposedly singular) gay rights struggle in Russia as a duplication of gay rights movements in Sub-Saharan Africa, and thereby gay rights movements everywhere. Even if this practice is not an embodied being and instead a rhetorical strategy, the fact nonetheless remains that SMUG's practices as a transnational NGO are founded on the homogenization of local movements under a unilateral discourse of global gay rights.

Discursively limited in Uganda, SMUG presents itself as a human rights activist organization, removed from influences of local culture and politics, with the attendant epistemology of 'elevating' Ugandans out of 'their (local) culture' through civic education and engagement¹⁷ on LGBTI issues, health, and rights. In addition to the supposed universality of its members' global gay experience, SMUG counters its opponents'¹⁸ arguments by equating the realization of LGBTI rights, legal protections, and specific health needs (all of which it delineates in terms of Western achievements) with being more culturally informed and 'developed.' In essence, SMUG seeks to receive *hoi polloi* from Hegelian alienation through a "discourse of enlightenment" and edification (Abu-Lughod 2005:43; Meskell 2012). SMUG actively avoids any claim that their plight and mission are issues of local culture, economy, or politics. This "positioning of 'human rights' as an antonym to 'commodities'" reifies the inherent politicality of subscribing to an identity of global gayness and the employment of human rights discourse (Bakker 2007:433). Yet the performance, let alone marketing, of a 'gay' identity is inherently political (Chasin 2005). As Meskell's (2012) work in South African national parks explicates, the notion of culture as the genesis of rights and geographic claims complicates actions to resolve these human and territorial rights issues because culture is perceived as fundamentally decisive and politically charged; the realm of the natural, however, is mistakenly seen as neutral and apolitical. It is in this 'natural' etiology and

¹⁷ Peter noted that the vast majority of on-the-ground work is deployed through the member organizations, and that SMUG itself rarely engages on the local level aside from public court appearances as well as television, radio, and print media interviews and debates.

¹⁸ Through the lens of international LGBTI rights, SMUG views its opponents, comprised of an 'uneducated' general public, the church, and self-interested politicians and religious leaders, as portraying Uganda's LGBTI struggle simply as a clash of cultures and citing "the norms of Christianity, 'our African traditions,' or simply normality" as justifications (Ferguson 2006:142). The church here refers both to the domestic Ugandan Anglican Church as well as transnational American evangelical political and religious influences.

subsequent production of an irrevocable queer identity that SMUG situates its inalienable, panhuman rights.

However, in working toward achieving community safety and respect for their bodily and socioeconomic sovereignties as a non-national imagined community (Anderson 1983), developmental activists' performances of global gayness is nonetheless a "vision of political being" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009:118; cf. Smith 1986). In phrasing its mission outside the 'vulgar' realm of politics, SMUG is locating Uganda as 'less evolved' on a hierarchical scale as compared to 'fully developed' and prosperous (Western) nations. Epitomized in Samuel's words, SMUG's membership asserts LGBTI Ugandans are unable to be "full" or 'true' (global) gays under current, draconian, and domestic political and social pressures, and therefore they are unable to be fully functional and participatory 'developed' citizens. SMUG consequently promotes LGBTI acceptance as essential to (neoliberal) state formation: as Samuel averred, "LGBTI issues *are* developmental issues." In declaring the realization of gay rights as a vehicle for national progress and prosperity, SMUG is linking its juridicolegal recognition, as well as the ability to express LGBTI identity without socioeconomic penalty, to Uganda's ability to 'achieve modernity' as a nation-state. Thus, SMUG, as a global gay organization, fruitfully frames the entirety of its mission and brands its queerness in a developmentalist discourse that is authentic and legible to, and therefore able to be consumed by, their political economic partners in the global north.

To inculcate this international legibility, SMUG incorporates its membership into globalized frames of gayness by framing non-heteronormative Ugandans as indexical to global ones, as if they were counterparts. Indexicals, from the developmental language of 'human rights' and 'individual' 'freedoms' to traditionally Western gay iconography such as an adoration of Whitney Houston, designer clothing, and an insatiable sexual appetite, code the context-specific systematicity between commodity and identity (Hanks 2000:124; Chasin 2000). Branding intrinsically involves demarcations of ownership and authenticity, as well as expectations of these ontologies (Nakassis 2012), and thus adherence to specific discourse and terminologies effectually "stabilize[s]" and entrusts understanding in the audience (Tsing 2009:11).

The performance of global gayness by SMUG and its membership produces an identity of "'educated connoisseurship'" of human rights discourse and developmentalist practice (Silverstein 2003:222). This performance affects a process of resignification (Watts 2001) through which social capital can thereby

be exchanged for monetized and political capital via the apparatus of international development. An adequately genuine production of global gayness has “performative efficacy” in yielding social capital since it is “a demonstration of the strength of one’s network” and networking technique while simultaneously authenticating this “success through immediate redistribution” of commodities such as financial and political capital (Newell 2012:97). SMUG’s social capital is thus not derived from veracity so much as it is from performative verisimilitude¹⁹ (Newell 2012:243; Butler 1988).

The bounds of economic relations cannot be restricted to a pure ideal of isolated exchange “simply determined by the form of economic transactions,” but are rather heavily imbricated in sociopolitics (Cattelino 2008:112). Carrier’s exegesis of Marxist theory recognizes that not only objects, but non-corporeal phenomena, ideas, and relationships can nonetheless “be appropriated and used for commercial gain” (2010:674; Rushbrook 2005). A commodity is simply the production of use value for consumption (Appadurai 1986:9); the marketplace establishes commoditized “personalities” specific to consumer identities in people just as it does to products (Skover and Testy 2002:224). In his ethnography of urban aesthetics and socioeconomics in Côte D’Ivoire, Sasha Newell (2012) convincingly demonstrates performative acts to be immaterial commodities: this ‘bluffing’ is in essence a commodification of social relations through the standardization of a performative identity. The bluff is part and parcel of capitalism, and performing global gayness, as one of myriad commodified identities, is a bluff²⁰ (Newell 2012). Due to the performative aspect inherent in bluffing, SMUG’s employees thus operate in a Weberian practice of politician-as-vocation (1958) in their adherence to a branded identity (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). The extrapolation of the concept of commodity to fungible intangibles reveals an understanding of SMUG’s identity performance to professional relations in terms of commodity production for exchange and in return receiving monetary capital. This blurry existence (Appadurai 1986) of the commodity reflects the perpetual mobility and malleability of capital exchange.

To harness capital for its agenda, SMUG in essence wields the global gay identity as a lighthouse for flagging down and directing capital toward it (Ferguson 2005). Smith’s (2010) concept of the ‘see-saw’ movement of capital describes in part the movement of capital back and forth, to and from areas of underdevelopment and developedness. Inextricably amalgamated in this is the rise of a Western-

¹⁹ This is not to suggest Kampala’s transnational LGBTI activists’ identities are inauthentic or not earnest, since all identity is authentic *because* it is performed.

²⁰ This is regardless of the fact that in Kampala, unlike Newell’s Abidjan, bluffing a global gay identity is not solely performative, but embodied and inextricable from the gay identity performed by SMUG’s membership.

centered “gay and lesbian market” in the early 1990s, which has since only witnessed continued “growth” and “opportunities for participation” as an international center for capital accumulation (Chasin 2005:213). The escalation of a global gay identity as a commodity has experienced a concomitant magnetism for public attention, as both embraced and criticized, the world over (Altman 1997; Chasin 2000; Rushbrook 2005).

Every commodity has multiple localities of value production, with value frequently shifting through each localized, relational usage (Appadurai 1986; Cook 2004). SMUG bridges disparate “regimes of value,” exploiting the global gay commodity’s flexible and situational value (Appadurai 1986:15). SMUG then conjugates the goals and positionalities of Kampalan and Western-based rights organizations by assimilating a heterogeneity of Kampalan non-heterosexualities into a unified fraternal product that is recognizable to, and therefore easily consumed by, Western-based developpreneurialism (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). SMUG is able to redirect capital, which had previously passed over the non-heteronormative Kampalan demographic, to relocate and land in their coffers (Ferguson 2005). Capital “hops” over ‘unusable Africa,’” grounding itself only on commodity-rich landing pads, which are then rendered socioeconomically disparate from the majority of the impoverished continent²¹ (Ferguson 2005:380). In formulating Kampala as a site where every ally to the global LGBTI movement experiences *human* rights—not just the gay rights of Kampalans, but those of all people, gay or straight, Ugandan or of the global north—SMUG collars a transnational fraternity, further establishing (their existence in) Uganda as part of *l’afrique utile* (Ferguson 2005). In other words, SMUG’s ability to locate political and economic capital as a NGO is premised on reframing the social sphere in New York or Paris so that Western gays, human rights activists, and development practitioners view the struggle of Uganda’s gays as mirrored in their own. For instance, one of SMUG’s transnational Western partners, Benetech²², recently revised a context-specific SMUG-produced victim report form in order to make local collection and data analysis methodologies legible and consumable to the internationalized development community. It is via such standardizing initiatives (Scott 1998) that Kampala’s global gay activists establish themselves as possessing the “status” of international human rights victims (Dove 2006:194; Fairbairn 2005; Howe 2002). This enables them to perform a developmentalist identity of global

²¹ Unfortunately, this relative accumulation of wealth is premised on the very social inequality which SMUG seeks to disperse (Comaroff 1987).

²² Benetech is a non-profit social entrepreneurial scheme developed by Beneficent Technology, Inc., a California-based not-for-profit corporation that seeks to employ technology to enact positive social change. Benetech is a key partner of SMUG and has been instrumental in helping it recognize the importance of establishing a Research Department, and providing SMUG with the resources to do so.

gayness that renders any invective against Ugandan gay rights as a direct affront to the rights of New Yorkers or Parisiens. Violations against global gayness tug on the heartstrings of the global north and frame the directionality of their financial and political patronage, thus fetishizing the global gay commodity as a form of ethical consumption (Carrier 2010:672).

To understand this shared sense of identity, it is useful to adopt the film industry's concept of "world-making," which describes the social process of rendering legible an identity—as from one film and storyline to its sequel—through forcing the audience to recognize a sociopolitical linkage across space and time (Igoe 2010:337). These fused "interconnections" allow the contrivance of an imagined community that is "coherent enough so that each story feels like it fits with the others" (Igoe 2010:337; Anderson 1983; Tsing 2005). This international "economy of appearances" (Tsing 2005:57) is fundamentally premised and dependent on a consummately performed and received identity bluff (Igoe 2006; Newell 2012). Thus, SMUG can be seen as having mastered the concordant employment of "image and dramatic performance to conjure spaces for effective conservation interventions cum profitable investments" (Igoe 2006:377).

Just as Carrier (2010) essays to expand Marxist concepts of alienation and commodity to include more ethereal forms, I endeavor to dilate Debord's analytical concept of the spectacle to include immaterial and not solely visual images. By this, I mean it is possible to conceive of image beyond the sense of sight, that image is a systematic concatenation of characteristics that shape the performance and reception of sociopolitical appearance. Taken thus, an internationalized identity is therefore a spectacle, an alienated signification of self for the producer and an automarketing image fetishized by the consumer (Igoe 2006). The image-dependent performance of global gayness accrues social capital and is an incarnation of spectacle, which Debord emphasized is more than simply "an assemblage of images:" it is "the mediation of relationships between people by images" (2006[1967]:1). The spectacle allows for locally produced capital to transform "into 'more convertible and globally ramifying' forms" (Igoe 2010:376). As a spectacle, the internationalized global gay identity obfuscates the gritty and heterogeneous realities of capital exchange and value production inherent in the plethora of identity performances/productions, instead reifying them as having a homogenous and consolidated 'natural'

existence. The “regime” of international human rights²³ (Anker 2005:105) and the global gay identity encompassed within it are premised in a “particular kind of identity created, named, and rewarded” (Miller 2005:137). The concept of human rights is a highly alienated commodity: the mere presentation of human rights as illimitable, unsurrenderable, and natural for all people equally and extensively obfuscates the very production of those locally specific sociopolitical constructs.

Liberalist discourse of inalienable individual rights first gained traction on an international stage following WWII but did not truly flourish until the end of the Cold War, where, in “the void left by the grand political narratives for social change, ‘rights’ became the terrain on which virtually all movements for social justice and equality were waged” (Speed 2007:25). The burgeoning discourse of human rights have compounded the negative effects of national economic austerity plans. Neoliberal globalization, as the root of “endemic ‘state failure’ by governments supposedly too poor, corrupt, or inept to manage” themselves (Bakker 2007:430), took a hefty toll on Uganda’s economy starting in the mid-1980s with the imposition of IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programs (Mawa 2002). Nation-states increasingly must provision heterogeneous populations within their borders because social movements of imagined communities, “abetted” by transnational NGOs, usurp political discourse at the national and international levels (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009:47). In the 1980s, a series of revolutionary United Nations and International Labor Organization declarations and policies repositioned institutional focus to protecting cultural claims, promulgating and aggrandizing individual human rights as a sociopolitical force (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). The “articulation and acceptance” of human rights as paradigmatically universal is largely rooted in refugee law and asylum, with the attendant notion that some nations cannot adequately provide for and (equally) protect all their citizens (Anker 2005:109). Meanwhile, beginning in the global north, gay rights groups worked with human rights organizations in the 1980s and 1990s to publicize their cause (Fairbairn 2005; Nesbitt 1997) and ameliorate the plight of gay asylum seekers from ‘intolerant’ lands (Miller 2005). Many of these activist organizations “gained support” and, consequently, operational and institutional modeling from extant “mainstream,” large-scale transnational NGOs and government agencies (Bakker 2007:438).

Under the political and financial sponsorship of international development, social manifestations of non-normative sexualities, specifically gay identities, have in many ways become a “transnational

²³ Much of human rights legal and policy frameworks are codified under the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, a body primarily responsible for human rights definitions and their (lackluster and uneven) enforcement (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009).

commodity” (Hoad 2007:69 Jackson 2009; Rushbrook 2005). Queer rights “circulate as a form of access to international donor capital for local human rights activists and as career-making capital” for internationalized and transnational activists, who secure “agency in local victimage” (Hoad 2007:69; Fairbairn 2005). In Kampala, this commodification of specific sexual identities (Chasin 2000; Rushbrook 2005), engendered by the apparatus of development and its language of human rights, not only exposes LGBTI Ugandans to the ‘freedoms,’ agencies, and expressions concurrent with ‘being a gay,’ but reinforces those ideas as natural and inextricable from a (global) gay subjectivity. It is no wonder that the rise of a global gay identity is coetaneous with the rise of queer activism outside of Euro-America (Altman 1997). Indeed, “as the rights discourse of internationalism is extended” across manifold, culturally disparate settings, gay activists in the global south are increasingly producing their own sociopolitical agendas (Altman 1997:419). Kampala, where conceiving of gay rights as human rights²⁴ is a recent phenomenon, is no exception.

The concept of LGBTI rights is intrinsically yoked to the concept and practice of development in Uganda. Developmental schemes for social, economic, and political betterment has gained traction across Uganda over the course of the last three decades. Following the overthrow of Idi Amin and the subsequent years of civil war that destroyed the national economy, the National Resistance Movement, the political party that still to this day dominates Ugandan politics, released its Ten Point Programme for its vision of national progress. This monumental policy outlined many development strategies and economic restructuring that would allow the ingress of foreign capital and reverse Amin’s nationalization of many of Uganda’s industries (NRM 1986). In 1995, Uganda unveiled a new national constitution, which established a legally “recognizable place for human rights and freedoms” (Mawa 2002). It is atop this foundation that social justice and human rights groups further established themselves in Uganda. When coupled with increasing Internet access exposing Kampalans to images and media that exhibit global gay constructs of sexuality, developmentalism’s involvement in the rise of a LGBTI activist identity-as-spectacle in Kampala seems almost teleological.

Although performing an explicitly ‘gay’ identity, global or otherwise, is relatively novel in Uganda, SMUG

²⁴ LGBTI rights can be viewed as a recent attempt to bestow “social specificity to the universalizing human rights legacy of the European Enlightenment” (Hoad 2007:xxi). The idea that gay identity could be conceived as a human rights issue began in the early 1990s in the West (Miller 1993). In 1991, Amnesty International promulgated it would “take up the situation of gay prisoners of conscience” (Miller 1993:364). A year later, a gay Argentine man achieved refugee status in Canada after he alleged to have “been raped and tortured by the country’s federal police[,]... marking the first time on the North American continent that another country’s antigay policies were recognized as a basis for political asylum” (Miller 1993:364).

and its local allied NGOs argue that, contrary to their adversaries' allegations, same-sex sexual practice and relationships have long been present in Uganda and have existed long before colonialism²⁵ (Murray and Roscoe 1998; Hoad 2007; Aldrich 2003; Epprecht and Clowes 2008; Tamale 2007). Samuel, the jovial and gregarious gay SMUG employee, informed me that sexual relations between two males or two females has 'always' been "there in our history, in our culture." However, it is the equation of same-sex relationships or sexual acts with a 'gay' identity that leads SMUG to speak of a transhistorical *gay* presence in Uganda. These roots, which allow the Kampalan LGBTI development community to lay claim to their geography, are necessary for SMUG and its allies to efficaciously fight their anti-gay opponents, who argue that homosexuality renders LGBTI people inauthentic Ugandans. SMUG counters these claims dialogically in terms of decolonization, citing their ties to the land are not in spite of, but *because* of their sexuality.

Publicly, SMUG proclaims its queer universality exists evenly across the nation as it does the globe. However, performances of global gayness "flourish primarily but not solely in urban areas" (Boellstorff 2003:227; Schiltermandl and Toplu 2010) and "remain... largely an urban-oriented" phenomenon (Miller 1993:xvii). My ethnographic data from Kampala reveals strong similarities to other observations from other geographic contexts in that most same-sex sociosexual behaviors occur between people who do not associate with a gay community or identify as gay (cf. Altman 1997). The cosmopolitan, gay male Kampalans working in development whom I spoke with drew sharp contrasts between themselves and their poor, rural counterparts. Notably, same-sex sexual relations occur just as frequently in socioeconomically destitute and rural areas without the moniker 'gay,' which many informants assured me does not exist as an identity in places such as Karamoja in the northeast of Uganda, where Human Development Index ratings are severely low and there is little infrastructure, financial security, or literacy. In 'far-off' places such as these, claimed Samuel and John one sunny afternoon, manufactured "lube" (sexual lubricant) does not exist, and the "primitive," "traditional" Ugandans, along with the vast

²⁵ European encounters culminated in the United Kingdom chartering Uganda territory to the British East Africa Company in 1888; the British crown later claimed Uganda as a protectorate in 1894, which it retained until Uganda's independence in 1962 (Tamale 1999). Under colonialism, gender roles were highly codified and standardized to Western types, including the imposition of gender hierarchy, in part achieved through state decree, such as the establishment of anti-sodomy penal codes (Hollander 2009), and political economy through the establishment of the discrete family unit (Tamale 1999). In many contemporary postcolonial contexts, subjectivization is rooted in pre-colonial and colonial understandings of sexuality and gender roles, which often manifested as entirely different cultural interpretations of meaning (Murray 2006). There is at least a tacit understanding in the general Ugandan populace that same-sex sexual relationships existed prior to British colonial or any Western involvement, since one of Uganda's most-observed national holidays is Martyrs Day. Martyr's Day, many informants explained, celebrates the piety of 22 Baganda who, following their conversion to Christianity soon after European involvement, were executed by the king of Buganda in the late 19th century for refusing to engage in (homo)sexual relations with him.

majority of poor rural Ugandans, employ “natural fruits:” avocado or, if none is available, ripe banana. To further punctuate their (urban, internationalized) gay identity in contrast to the ‘backward,’ non-gay-identified same-sex practitioners in Karamoja, Samuel recounted the story of how he tried to educate a man in a rural area who had sex with men and who was beginning to identify as gay. In Kampala, Samuel chuckled impishly, the gays know what lubes and condoms are and how to use them properly, but in the rural areas where this ‘new’ gay lived, gay men did not know how to be gay. Samuel had given the man a packet of lube, only to find out later that the man, being unfamiliar with the product’s intended application, had spread the gel on bread and eaten it like jam.

Not that the rural man needed the lube, anyway, Samuel assured me with a laugh, since anal intercourse simply “doesn’t hurt” in rural areas. Rather, sex is only painful for the self-identified (urban) gays, who love to chatter loudly about “how much sex hurts the bottom²⁶,” intimating the plethora of sexual acts they have experienced as purportedly licentious and insatiable homosexuals; similarly, many (urban) gays in the US exaggerate or play up the pain as a sign of their legibility and authenticity as a gay man. Thus, in branding themselves as gay, SMUG’s members “adhere to a distinctly modern invention, namely the creation of an identity and a sense of community based on (homo)sexuality” (Altman 1997:423). As demonstrated by the distinctions between urban and rural Ugandans, “the central paradox of global gay rights discourse is that it can be exclusionary,” rendering some men who practice homosexuality dubbed gay while others are not (Siddiqi 2011:2).

Furthermore, this anecdote illustrates the strong ties Kampala’s LGBTI community and gay men in particular have to capitalist markets. The purchase and application of sexual aids is perceived as essential to preventing the pain that gay men experience. Additionally, gay men are obligated to use condoms in order to be a responsible member of the community by doing one’s part to arrest the transmission of disease. Global gay identity results not just from a desire to locate sociocultural commonalities in order to establish a sense of social belonging and community, but from “the intersecting influences of both national and transnational forms of capitalism” as well (Jackson 2009:387). Indeed, the “private and intimate” societal views of sexuality and sexual practice do not come to fruition “outside larger social, economic and political structure” (Altman 2006:265). SMUG employs the commodification of same-sex experience to position LGBTI Ugandans as capitalist

²⁶ ‘The bottom,’ as compared to ‘the top,’ refers to a commonly used, English language term for the receptive partner in anal sexual intercourse.

producers and consumers necessary to the success of the national economy (Ong 1999), its employees going so far to be model citizens as to set up a tax scheme so that they may pay into the government's social security fund. Global gay identity in Kampala is rooted in particular conceptions of modernity, urbanity, and capitalist progress derived from Western models but simultaneously unique due to local semiotics, even though they are often veiled.

Identifying as gay in Uganda is very much an urban phenomenon, according to many of my informants in the capital, and is strongly linked to concepts of development, progress, and modernity. In Kampala, one consequence of (Western) development and the comparably wealthy foreigners who come to practice it has been the heightened importation of, and exposure to, Western media and pop culture. The exportation of global gay—in particular Western English-language—terminology from LGBT novels and, perhaps more importantly, community organization literature, has been augmented by the presence of development agencies and projects (Miller 1993). For example, perhaps the most obvious aesthetic distinction inside the Secretariat is the rainbow of brightly-colored posters from the Western world-over that adorn SMUG's office walls, reminding the organization's employees and visitors alike of the dangers of unprotected sexual acts, the schedules of past queer film festivals in the global North, and myriad other queer-specific community announcements of didactics and entertainment. The research libraries at the Secretariat and the Icebreakers Uganda²⁷ office are stocked almost exclusively with Euro-American pamphlets, guides, brochures, and non-fiction texts²⁸. According to a number of informants, this exposure to Western constructs of gay identities was exacerbated wildly with the advent of the Internet in Uganda. The World Wide Web, Samuel told me, enabled near effortless connectivity between the “fully” realized gays of the West and the ‘inchoate’ queerness burgeoning in Uganda. The onslaught of image-producing technologies are constantly becoming more portable and more affordable to the point where now many people the world over can gain access to personal production, distribution, and consumption of increasingly interactive images (Igoe 2010: 377). Because access to transnational media, primarily via the Western images and development schemes in the Ugandan context, occurs in areas with more elaborate and extensive infrastructure, media exposure is obviously more ubiquitous in urban Kampala than in rural locales, which are often held as less politically

²⁷ Icebreakers Uganda, or IBU, is a rights and health NGO for gay men in Kampala and one of the member organizations that comprise SMUG. It bears no affiliation to the UK-based organization of the same name.

²⁸ Despite the reality that this is due to a comparative lacuna of Ugandan or even African publications on the subjects of sexuality, governmentality, or rights, the fact still remains that access to this knowledge is available to Ugandans almost solely through a Western lens.

and economically significant to the Ugandan nation-state (Schultermandl and Toplu 2010).

In coalescing its members' queerness with that of the West, SMUG circumvents the tendency in international development to situate the local recipients of development as indigenous. Notions of indigeneity are, on this international level, widely conceived as inherently local, and any comprehensive understanding of their 'natures' is therefore perceived to be inextricable from their specific chronotopic context. In practice, SMUG flouts top-down assumptions of autochthony, actively evading any signification of indigeneity of the non-heteronormative sexualities and genders it purports to represent (Dove 2006). For instance, in the professional environments I observed, the LGBTI developmental activists never once used the term *kuchu*²⁹, which was supposedly, in other queer circles in Kampala, a common neologism (Melissa Minors Peter, forthcoming). When pressed for a definition at the office, the consensus of a number of my informants was that *kuchu* refers equally to the entire "alphabet soup" (Parker 2009:xx) of minority sexualities and genders. Although *kuchu* exists and is employed internally within Kampala's LGBTI communities, no one at SMUG seemed to have any desire to embrace the term in public dialog, either domestically or abroad. Every LGBTI developmental activist in Kampala with whom I spoke was solely interested in identifying with the concept of global gayness, which highlighted their bonds to (Western) global gays. In Kampala, any effort to signify a uniquely Ugandan gay identity would "undermine this assumed solidarity" with a 'universal' global queer subjectivity (Altman 1997:419). For SMUG and the rest of Kampala's LGBTI development activists, the embraced global gay identity is very much a fetishized resource in the form of social capital. Carrier (2010) recognizes the fetishization inherent in capitalist consumption may not simply be a failure to observe and comprehend the mode of production, but often can implicate an active ignoring or denial of a product's origin.

Eliding the social histori(citi)es particular to Kampala's non-heteronormative peoples, SMUG brands their diverse subjectivities under the homogenized umbrella of a global gay identity. The heterogeneity and "fluidity" of the performances of queer sexualities is rendered "frozen," uniform, and bound into a dichotomous relationship opposite the sociopolitical hegemony of heterosexuality (Miller 2005:138). Global gayness, which SMUG positions as inalienable and universal, is premised on their politically-efficacious commodification of this identity. In an adaption of Nakassis' concept of the "aesthetics of brandedness" (2012:704), the Kampalan LGBTI development community's gayness can be seen as a

²⁹ Lacking an intrinsic positive or negative connotation, *kuchu* has a fairly neutral and context-dependent meaning, and is employed much more frequently by queer Ugandans than heteronormative ones.

relational affiliation to globally commodified queer identities (Rushbrook 2005). If performed adequately (Newell 2012), this globalized identity can accrue social capital that is fungible for tangible resources. As an activist NGO, SMUG is able to exchange its acquired social capital for tangible resources from transnational NGOs (for instance the Thiel Foundation, Rotary International, Rafto Foundation for Human Rights, and Benetech) and empathetic foreign governments, like Canada. Indeed, SMUG's overall operational budget is in fact almost exclusively funded through international donations, awards, prizes, and grants.

There exists a constraining converse to these benefits: in branding itself as a global gay organization, SMUG loses ground domestically, since branding can "carry preinscribed limits" to ontology (Hale 2002:521). By affiliating itself with what many heteronormative Ugandans conceive as sociopolitical neocolonialism—demonstrated, for example, by the ability of human rights' legal frameworks to undermine state political sovereignty—SMUG forfeits access to much of its potential domestic support. SMUG's association with what its adversaries claim is a foreign, hegemonic alterity subverts its claims of LGBTI indigeneity to Uganda. The Kampalan LGBTI development community's production of gayness is rooted heavily in a Liberalist conception of boundless human rights, which command a "potential to limit... concepts of human sexuality" (Miller 2005:137). Since rights discourse is fundamentally rooted in issues of ownership of the subject as a citizen and as an autonomous individual (Watts 2001), subscribing to and performing global gayness furthermore impinges upon SMUG's relationships with the government, from the Minister of Ethics and Integrity, who closes down their meetings and workshops, to the Parliament that attempts to enact legislation to imprison and even execute³⁰ SMUG's constituents. By branding themselves specifically as a global gay organization, SMUG effectually prevents the formation of relationships with the very people and institutions that would be able to guarantee the human rights SMUG so anxiously seeks and deserves.

Despite SMUG's valiant efforts at veraciously performing an internationally legible identity and securing the finances and a political platform to oppose the Ugandan government on a national level, it is possible alternative methodologies could have permitted SMUG to affect a greater degree of social change. It is telling that many of my informants in Kampala's LGBTI development community assert that

³⁰ SMUG has been one of the major voices of domestic opposition to proposed punitive anti-gay legislation. The Anti-Homosexuality Bill, which was first introduced in Uganda's parliament in autumn of 2009 by Member of Parliament (MP) David Bahati, was tabled in May of 2010, and subsequently reintroduced in February of 2012 only to once again be tabled at the close of the legislative session (Strand 2011; Cheney 2010; Muhumuza 2012).

same-sex sexual relations have always existed in this part of the world, but that any hatred and intolerance of these practices did not exist until those acts were circumscribed as homosexual and the participants labeled as gay. Given that non-heteronormative marginalization is frequently “reinforced through the deployment of strategies based on the commodification of difference” (Light et al. 2008:300-301), it is no wonder that, in declaring their uniqueness, both in terms of identity and how it supports that identity politically, SMUG’s anti-gay opposition efficaciously demarcates Uganda’s gays as resulting from foreign (Western), neo-colonial cultural imposition. From the perspective of the government, the animosity seems to be derived not just from the fact that SMUG and similar organizations represent a LGBTI community, but because they do so through the apparatus of international development, which fundamentally questions state sovereignty. Both Newell (2012) and Smith (2010:144) asseverate that the nation-state, though still highly functional and relevant in terms of political utilitarianism, is “economically obsolete,” in large part due to the increasing presence of transnational vehicles, such as the developmental industrial complex, for the flow of capital. The fungibility of transnational social capital reveals the concomitant political legibility, and limitation, of SMUG’s actions. SMUG is inherently “constrained” at home by the very discourse and identity that liberate them abroad (Miller 2005:137).

The locally specific practices and conceptions of gender and sexuality do not and cannot assimilate to “McGay’ accounts of a homogeneous global queer culture,” in which neoliberal globalization is viewed as a universalizing phenomenon, often equated with ‘Americanization’ (Jackson 2009:362; Grewal 2005). The existence of Uganda’s LGBTI movement refutes the commonly assumed dichotomous model that the socioeconomic processes that shape subjectivities are either imposed and top-down or creative and desired bottom-up processes (Ong 1999; Trouillot 2003). This is because developmental LGBTI Ugandans are actively pursuing a ‘top-down,’ globalized replica of sexual identity. Unlike minority sexuality subject formation in most other non-Western localities, among Kampala’s transnational LGBTI activists, there is no “deemphasis of Euro-America” in its LGBTI identity (Boellstorff 2007:63); quite the contrary, these particular gay Kampalans skirt the local, denying any Kampalan-specific configuration of their identity, and embrace Western stereotypes of gay men, such as insatiable partying, licentiousness, and cattiness. The adoption of internationalized sexual politics is essential to Kampala’s LGBTI developmentalist identity, and, although they are adamant about being recognized as upstanding citizens of Uganda and the ‘global community,’ these transnational activists do not appear at all interested in (per)forming a uniquely Ugandan gay identity (Altman 1997). Indeed, global gay

Kampalans would most likely argue that it would be counterproductive for them to disenfranchise themselves from the ideal of a global gay, as their links to transnational funding, sociopolitical support, and media coverage depend on gays all over the world seeing themselves mirrored in the gays of Uganda.

Many scholars and laypeople alike presume Neoliberalism to be a political economic force that inherently usurps local, 'underdeveloped' agency and replaces it with the apparatuses of corporate, non-humanist interests (Bakker 2007). While anthropology has long recognized an etiology in which local agency perdures and even blossoms under neoliberalization schemes, anthropology still exhibits a relative lacuna of bottom up, localized appropriations of neoliberal entrepreneurship as an active form of harnessing and capitalizing on the very forces which are supposedly rendering these 'undeveloped' locals the cogs of frontier capitalism (Tsing 2005). Anthropology has long recognized cases in which Roseberrian resistance to hegemonic forces (1994) in the local contexts of transnational development have persevered in maintaining local identity and habitus; this is often achieved through a kind of 'gaming the system,' in which the recipients of development programs actively assume the 'identity of the underdeveloped' in order to increase sociopolitical maneuverability, such as in the case of Li's (2007) 'developing' peoples of the Sulawesi highlands, Nguyen's (2010) Ivorians who practice an 'AIDS identity' to secure resources, or Ong's (2003) Cambodian-American refugees who assert victimization as a way of accessing state health care. What is relatively novel in the case of Kampala's gay development practitioners is that there was no LGBTI rights apparatus prior to their creation of it; indeed, SMUG and its founding member organizations established a LGBTI development apparatus, one that nonetheless echoed a globalized top-down discourse of Western developmentalist elitism, for their own purposes in Kampala.

Likewise, under neoliberal globalization, local economies are anything but a simplified microcosm of international global transactions: since meaning is interpreted and value is produced in very unique and context specific ways in the local economy, it operates in confluence, with but not as a strict function of, global economic forces (Newell 2012). The neoliberal embrace of, rather than opposition to, human rights discourse as a transnational commodity reflects the inherent economic potential of this market (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009; Hale 2002). Indeed, the uniform application of human rights to all contexts over the last two decades have led to a commodification of these rights by transnational corporations and NGOs as a form of 'good business' (Carrier 2010; Paone 2004). Performing a global gay

identity is thus a marrying of local values and semiotics with an international bluffing of globalized legibility that is premised on SMUG's understanding of what and how transnational entities consume products (Newell 2012).

To bluff a performance of identity, therefore, is potentially not only a methodology of securing greater socioeconomic access, but a way of refuting current hegemonic sociopolitical structures, not by denouncing frameworks of power in the vein of an anarchist, but by aligning with alterity and embracing the 'better of two evils' (Newell 2012:140). Imitation and replication, contrary to majority suppositions of history, can and indeed do occur in a bottom-up or 'trickle-up' fashion, harnessing hegemonic structures, such as development, for subaltern sociopolitical or economic gain (Newell 2012). However, despite SMUG's economic and publicity successes, instead of being a product of destabilization to dominant and hegemonic political economic forces, the organization's efforts are ultimately ones that inadvertently promote the stability of extant power structures in Uganda (Foster 2007:720). An obvious demonstration of this in Uganda occurred last summer, when the Minister for Ethics and Integrity, Reverend Father Simon Lokodo, shut down and revoked the operating licenses of 38 NGOs, some temporarily, others permanently, because he suspected³¹ them of aiding SMUG and similar LGBTI organizations in-country. Lokodo exclaimed that, "on the pretext of humanitarian concerns, these organisations [sic] are being used to promote negative cultures" via the 'importation' of homosexuality (Smith 2012). It was precisely because SMUG and its organizational affiliates so actively championed a global gay identity and did so through the apparatus of international development that the government sought and was able to thwart SMUG's programming and operations. As Peter Uvin (1998) all too accurately observes in his etiology of the Rwandan genocide, international developreneurial schemes often have inadvertent but elemental effects on local sociopolitics.

In conclusion, following the introduction of Anderson's (1983) imagined communities and Appadurai's 'scapes' (1996) in the last few decades, notions of belonging to a transnational identity rather than to a physical, geographical space is far from a novel concept (Chasin 2000; Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). Beginning in the 1980s, capitalist accumulation breached a new avenue for capital accumulation as it opened up international development as a 'frontier' (Tsing 2005). Contemporaneously, non-normative sexuality and gender identities are increasingly becoming "an object of consumption" the world over

³¹ Lokodo was not solely targeting LGBTI organizations, but many women's rights and land tenure rights organizations as well, though claiming these organizations abetted pro-LGBTI causes was the most politically permissible avenue to bar their existences.

(Rushbrook 2005:199), as deviations from dominant sociocultural norms have often presented themselves in recent history “as an opportunity for niche marketing” (Light et al. 2007:301; Chasin 2000). When developmental LGBTI activists in Kampala speak of universal human rights and the transnationality of gayness, they are expressing a vision of themselves as members of the transnational gay community, or “a queer diasporic imaginary,” in which its Ugandan LGBTI membership is credible to and indistinguishable from other internationalized gays (Gopinath 2003:275).

The politics of recognition and the commodification of human rights have enabled the Kampalan LGBTI development community and in particular SMUG to brand itself with the perpetuating spectacle of global gayness, which elides locally-constructed and performed (sexual) identities. I contend that Kampala’s LGBTI development activists publicly perform a minority sexual identity of global gayness that they perceive to be analogous to a Western gay identity, even if their practices within their community differ, and suggest that gay subjectivity in Kampala is sociohistorically unique. This is not to profess that Kampala’s local cultural context does not inform LGBTI identity formation, or that Uganda’s ‘gay’ identity can “be reduced to a pale imitation of some Western standard,” but rather that some ‘gay’ men and women in Uganda’s capital disregard the notion of a uniquely Ugandan gay identity in favor of a global gay identity (Ong 1999:23). As Samuel remarked, many LGBTI Ugandans feel they must “choose to behave Western or behave African” and that it is “tricky to be African and to be gay.”

Likewise, although the context-specific semiotics of development, progress, and freedom are employed differently by various sociopolitical actors and in disparate sociocultural contexts, SMUG’s branding of identity in terms of an internationalized, developmentalist discourse of human rights is a strategy that secures resources and furthers organizational operations. SMUG’s alignment with a global gay identity renders their otherwise chronotopically-specific performances of sexuality legible to a global audience (Howe 2002). This process leverages their transnational positionings in particular ways to serve as a lighthouse for the accrual of social capital. The authentic performance, or bluff, proves fungible on the international development market, acting as a cornucopian conduit for tangible financial and political aegis. Adhering to an identity of global gayness is not only an earnest avenue to ‘do good’ (Li 2007), but also to secure resources and attend to personal sociopolitical agendas, including accreting personal wealth and status. These Ugandan activists employ an explicit and internationalized performance-production of ‘LGBTI rights’ to condemn specific conceptualizations of tradition, governmentality, and sociocultural taboo they aver as specific to the ‘developing’ Ugandan state. Unfortunately, SMUG’s

assertions of human rights are enabling internationally but, conversely, are disabling in the local context, where it engenders a tension between SMUG's ability to enact change under the Orwellian vigil of the Anglican and Catholic Churches as well as Uganda's national government. While this exploratory analysis would unquestionably benefit from further study, one thing is clear: similar to Murray's (2006) prescription for Caribbean gay rights movements, sexual minorities in Uganda might have greater success at achieving their organizational mission by modeling their movement's methodologies after local constructs of justice, equality, and respect, and perhaps seeking domestic sources of political and economic capital. Conversely, SMUG may be able to maintain international financing while not furthering the its domestic image of being a foreign import if it is able to merge global discourses into meaningful play with local concepts of value, authority, equality.

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