

## The Illiberal Turn:

### Aid Conditionality and the Queering of Sexual Citizenship

**ON MARCH 5, 2014**, Sweden's Minister for International Development Cooperation, Hillevi Engström (from right wing ruling party, Moderaterna), declared that Sweden would withhold their aid to Uganda because of the country's new anti-gay law, denoting that "repeated homosexual acts" can bring life imprisonment (*Svenska Dagbladet* 2014).<sup>1</sup>

The Netherlands had, directly after Uganda's president Yoweri Museveni had signed the anti-gay bill into law on February 24, 2014 (Morgan 2014), announced that they would freeze aid, while Denmark and Norway said they would redirect its bi-lateral aid to non-governmental organizations and human rights groups. In a poll linked to a feature on the Ugandan law, conducted by the Swedish gay-magazine *QX* on February 27, 2014, a majority (65 %) of *QX*'s readers voted to stop Swedish aid to Uganda immediately, whereas 28 % wanted to stop only the bi-lateral aid (*QX* 2014). Only 3 % believed it was the wrong way to go. That states threatens or chooses to cut aid, to push for LGBT rights, is not something new.

Already in late 2011, both the British Prime Minister David Cameron and the U.S. Foreign Minister Hillary Clinton declared that British and U.S. aid to countries that do not recognize LGBT rights would be suspended. However, Cameron and Clinton's threats resulted in that many African political leaders, after the statements, made it clear that they would not allow themselves to be dictated by foreign powers in this

matter. Government representatives in countries like Ghana, Nigeria, and Uganda said that aid donors could keep their money.

The response from African organizations working with LGBT people was swift in the form of a statement signed by more than 50 organizations. The African activists' main argument was that the withdrawal of aid would cause a violent reaction against LGBT people, causing a rift between LGBT organizations and other social movements. The activists' statement also affirmed that the reduction of aid would negatively affect LGBT people, an already highly vulnerable social group. Lastly, the statement emphasized that the affected population should have been previously consulted, and that Western governments should seek more respectful ways of working with the African continent (Abolafia Anguita 2012, 11).

After Cameron and Clinton's declarations on aid conditionalis, RFSL and ILGA organized a public discussion during Stockholm Pride on August 2, 2012, with the then Minister of International Development Cooperation, Gunilla Carlsson (also from right wing ruling party, Moderaterna). The program was called "How does Sweden conducts its aid policy when it comes to LGBT rights? Is it a good idea to threaten withdrawal of aid to countries that do not respect the rights of LGBT persons? Is Sweden conducting gay-imperialism?" (Stockholm Pride program 2012). The right wing minister Gunilla Carlsson then said that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not condition aid in this matter. Neither RFSL, nor ILGA, in this discussion, thought aid conditionalis was a good idea, directly referring to the opinions on their sister organizations in Africa.

So, one can consider that there may be a hidden agenda behind Sweden's and the new Minister for International Development Cooperation, Hillevi Engström's, sudden declaration to freeze aid to Uganda in the spring of 2014 (apart from fishing for votes among the Swedish LGBT community). In the history of same-sex sexuality Western governments and states have not voluntarily promoted LGBT rights, unless being pressured from below. Therefore, I will start this paper with examining how conditional aid to protect LGBT rights has been discussed in the

LGBT movement in Sweden. I will then move on to discuss the problematic universal homosexual citizen, and continue with problematizing the illiberal<sup>2</sup> turn when using aid conditionalis to promote "queer" citizenship. Doing so I will apply the concept homotransnationalism – a modification of Jasbir Puar's concept homonationalism (Puar 2007).

### **Aid Conditionalis in Swedish LGB History**

The first notice on aid conditionalis appears in the Swedish gay liberation magazine *Revolt* as early as 1971.<sup>3</sup> Under the heading "Short Notes" it is announced that the Danish activist group *Vennen* [The Friend] for the first time ever has made a foreign policy statement, a protest against the Danish Government's plans to "let Fidel Castro and Cuba get part of Denmark's development aid". This is due to the fact that the Castro regime persecutes gays and "thousands are interned in special camps for 'vice' rehabilitation treatment" (*Revolt* 1971, 2). We then have a huge leap in time before the next announcement in April 1992 (using data from RFSL's archives, that is). The Swedish Minister of International Development Cooperation was then contacted by Tobias Wikström, the President of RFSL, 1991–1993, to discuss conditions for homosexuals in Cuba.<sup>4</sup>

Wikström seems to have worked to establish aid conditionalis as a strategy. In a letter to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Margaretha af Ugglas (from right wing party, Moderaterna), in October of the same year, he also discussed Nicaragua's then newly passed law against homosexuality. The ban, Wikström said, should "be included in the assessment of the extent to which Nicaragua meet the democracy conditions that Sweden's aid policy is now based on".<sup>5</sup> From April 1992 to May 2010 there are 70 documents with the keyword \*aid\* preserved in RFSL's foreign policy archives. In the second half of the 1990s RFSL's lobbying for a broader homosexual citizenship (including fundamental rights such as decriminalization of homosexual acts, the right to organize, etc.) in aid recipient countries, expanded and focused on countries in Africa. Their ears in the parliament were members of the liberal party (Folkpartiet). The liberals pushed the issue that aid would be conditional to promote

rights for "gays and bisexuals". The Social Democratic Party (Socialdemokratiska Arbetarpartiet), the Left Party (Vänsterpartiet), and the Green Party (Miljöpartiet) argued instead that Sweden should be more active in various supranational forums to bring lesbian and gay rights into international conventions.<sup>6</sup>

In Africa, RFSL focused on Swedish aid recipients, such as Namibia, South Africa and Uganda. It all began with Namibia's President Sam Nujoma expressing strong condemnation of homosexuals, which made RFSL contact the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. As Namibia was a country that received Swedish aid, the Government had to investigate the repression of homosexuals in Namibia and make it very clear to the Namibian Government that persecution of homosexuality "is an unacceptable violation of human rights".<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, RFSL's magazine *Kom Ut!* sent out a press release to the Swedish media with the same opinion, and with the addition that Sweden gave 112.5 million SEK in aid to Namibia, in 1996.<sup>8</sup> Ministers from the then ruling Social Democratic Party (which for years had supported both Nicaragua's Sandinistas and SWAPO in Namibia – the latter then lead by Sam Nujoma – before and after they won their liberation wars and became the ruling parties in new established democratic parliaments), said that the promotion of human rights was in fact going on in Namibia, and that the aid would not be withdrawn.<sup>9</sup>

Both the socialist and liberal parliament bills referred to the Declaration of Human Rights, in particular to the first paragraph: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. People should not have to subordinate because of their innate sexual orientation. The right to privacy was also an important argument. The Committee on Foreign Affairs replied to the bill proposers that the Swedish foreign policy was to protect the rights of homosexuals and, in dialogue with partner countries, emphasize the application of international conventions, and to provide support for civil and legal communities to improve the chances that human rights will be respected.<sup>10</sup> In particular, the Committee's report stated, it was important to assist developing countries with few or no rights for LGBT persons, with an understanding that

strengthened their human rights and freedoms. Measures had therefore been allocated for studies, seminars and publications with the purpose to promote such perspectives.<sup>11</sup>

After the gay liberationists applaud in *Revolt* in the 1970s it seems like it has been the liberals in RFSL and their peers in the parliament (Folkpartiet) that have pushed for illiberal strategies to win sexual rights for practitioners of same-sex sexuality internationally. They have targeted authoritarian communist states or socialist ruled states, whereas the left and greens in the parliament have brought up discriminations in Uganda – in the 1990s an authoritarian one party-state backed up by militaries – or pushing for the respect of human rights in dialogue with state leaders and authorities in aid receiving countries.

As we have seen, at least since (and perhaps earlier) the 2010s, RFSL have revised their earlier illiberal policy, for one responsive to their peer organizations in the targeted region.<sup>12</sup>

### **Queering Homosexual Citizenship**

Researchers and activists from the South and the North have highlighted that the demand of conditioned aid results in a set of problems. One initial problem with the requirement that practitioners of same-sex sexual acts should be subject to universal rights and obligations protected by an internationally widespread homosexual citizenship, is that it creates beliefs of the existence of a universal homosexual, and a universal political solution for this individual.<sup>13</sup>

The homosexual world citizen will thus, by definition, become a carrier of a universalizing idea that can be traced to a biologist view of sexuality as essential. But sexual identities cannot simply be translated and applied over time, geographical distances, or between different cultures. Universal claims of equal citizenship (that are broad enough to include for example sexuality, gender and ethnicity) must recognize and acknowledge differences (the particular), as well as spatial and temporal differences. Demanding rights for LGBT persons in areas where sexual practices have been organized in other ways than by the hetero-homobinarism, is to assume an already imagined transnational heterosexual-

ity that excludes all other kinds of desires, practitioners, possible identities or communities.

If we see gendered and sexual categories as representations that are constantly negotiated and shifted and, among other things, receive (normative) contours by being included or excluded in the terms of citizenship, the demands of conditioned aid based on the level of the recipient country's LGBT rights, becomes part of the representation processes that stabilizes and normalizes sexual categories – such as lesbian, gay, bi, and trans. To globalize LGBT rights also contributes to constitute and universalize the European-American derived *political* rights requirements tied to the representations. Sexual freedom and sexual rights is a part of the image of a Western sexual modernity that includes sexual freedom and openness. This picture can be compared with the image of the *Other's* sexuality that is surrounded by tradition, silence and restrictions. Historically, this modern–tradition binary has established various opposites. When, thirty to forty years ago, it was illegal to practice same-sex sexuality in parts of the U.K. – and anything other than the heterosexual missionary position in the U.S.A. – African sexuality was seen as promiscuous. As a reflection of the image of the South as bound by tradition in sexual matters it can be mentioned that of the four countries that have inserted sexual rights in their constitution, three are from the South, namely South Africa, Fiji, and Ecuador. Portugal is the only country from the North.<sup>14</sup> And in spring 2014 Argentinian Congress passed the perhaps most progressive gender identity legislation in the world, fully recognizing the rights of trans people (IGLHRC Blog 2014).

Discussions on aid conditionality are not new among Northern organizations. Since 2008, a specific group of activists and representatives of NGOs has been working on the issue, and meetings have been organized that have included the participation of African activists who have shared their point of view on conditionality (Abolafia Anguita 2012,10).

Strong and sharp criticism towards aid conditionality in general, has been delivered by a wide range of feminist umbrella organizations in the South and in the North.<sup>15</sup> The feminist (as well as socialist) criticism of conditionality increased during and after the International Monetary

Fund (IMF) and the World Bank's implementations of Structural Adjustment Programs in the 1980s and 1990s. The feminist take on it is that aid conditionalis undermines another right, namely the right to development. In this feminist perspective, the idea to condition development aid in respect for the human rights of LGBT people, risks limiting all peoples – including LGBT peoples – participating in, contributing to, and enjoying economic, social, cultural, and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized (Dede and Sandoval 2008).

Since the aggressive Structural Adjustment Programs in the 1980s and 1990s even the World Bank has changed its policy. The increase of poverty among large parts of the populations in states exposed to structural adjustment programs is today seen as a security risk. The risk is counter-productive to free trade and consumption according to the World Bank. Today the World Bank promotes projects to heal the heteronormative family promoting caretaking parents (Bedford 2009). (And here the Bank opens up a possibility for demanding homonationalist equal rights for LGBT people such as the right to same sex marriage, adoption and IVF.)

### **Queering the Illiberal Return of Aid Conditionalis**

An emerging queer movement in Africa is engaging in combating homophobia, but not from the point of view of gay rights, but from a framework of queer liberation. Queer liberation here means the attempts to dismantle the binary notions of gender and sexuality and heteronormativity, and instead talk about sexual pluralism and complexity. This movement seeks not to separate same-sex sexuality issues from the broad spectrum of issues that affect all Africans, including queer Africans. This implies that what affects Africans negatively is indeed bad for queer Africans, but also, and critically, that the reverse holds strong (Abbas 2012).

Furthermore, aid conditionalis in the Ugandan respect has an ironic reverberation for this article. On July 29, 2014 – in the midst of the by media well watched Stockholm Pride-week – the Swedish Govern-

ment made clear that bilateral aid to Uganda will not be given during the upcoming five-years aid period, mainly on account of laws that restrict LGBT rights. Instead, aid to Uganda for the period 2014-2018 (approximately 1.35 billion SEK) will be disseminated to civil society and mainly support the maternal and child health, including sexual and reproductive rights, as well as to economic cooperation with focus on sustainable growth and employment. In addition, initiatives to strengthen the respect for human rights, *inter alia*, for LGBT people, will be in focus. Here it should be noted that only circa one per thousand of the Swedish aid goes to LGBT activities (whereas the Swedish organizations working for sexual and reproductive rights – SRHR – estimate that 10 % is in need). The irony is that the withdrawn bilateral aid has mainly aimed to strengthen Uganda’s legal system (Sida 2014). Paradoxically, it was this very legal system that on August 1, two days after the Swedish announcement of the declined bilateral aid, nullified the anti-homosexuality law. A constitutional court decision ruled it out because parliament had passed it without the two-thirds majority required in the house in order to pass a bill (Al Jazeera 2014). Apparently a 10 % increase of the aid to SRHR activities would have benefitted queers in Uganda more than contra productive cuts in bilateral aid.

Jasbir K. Puar uses the term homonationalism to describe how LGBT people usually relate their demands for new sexual norms to nationally recognizable values that simultaneously contain and reproduce heteronormativity. Examples of homonationalist demands are the right for same-sex couples to get married, and parenting rights – these homonationalist demands are based on traditional, national heterosexual role models. In other words, they reproduce heteronormativity. Homonationalism also implies a historical contemporary local production of norms for practitioners of homosexual acts. European-American LGBT liberation, and the work for equality or struggle for rights are forms of homonationalist politics that operates in regions with similar pasts of oppression and resistance.

Homotransnationally – a modification of Puar’s term – similar requirements can be made, i.e. that the law of a given nation shall be



harmonized with the demanding nation's laws bilaterally. In the latter case, a local understanding of sexual subjectivity and identity in, for example, a Clinton's, or a Cameron's, or a Swedish MP's context can be used to make demands in a region that has a different understanding of sexual subjectivity and identity. And if these demands are not met, the given country is threatened with withdrawn aid. Aid conditionalis can thus be seen as an expression of homotransnational politics. Swedish and other MPs' recent sudden usage of illiberal *political* demands on aid conditionalis (aid conditionalis is also about demanding that aid receivers buy technology, skills or products, i.e. economical demands, from the aid giving state) to push for LGBT rights and citizenship, appears in this light more of an authoritarian neo-colonial take – announced in mainstream media as promotions of human rights, encompassing gay and lesbian citizenship, tolerance and Western democracy.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, while we know that rights for LGBT people do not protect practitioners of same-sex sexualities or transgender people from violence in countries where these identities are used and legally protected (as in Sweden and Norway, for example), the conceptualization and production of LGBT identities in some other parts of the world can, paradoxically, rather lead to greater stigmatization of same-sex sexual practices. The discourse on aid conditionalis with references to restricted LGBT rights is also a part of these conceptualizations.

All in all – demanding global rights for LGBT people with aid conditionalis among other tactics must continually be debated, discussed, and decided together with different sorts of movements for human and sexual rights in aid receiving states. Otherwise, the so called support risks enforcing universalist and homotransnationalist norms and standards on sexual relations, as well as acting directly contra-productive for the queers in question instead of supporting and expanding the space for local gender identities, embodiments, and sexualities.

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Her research circles around how that which seems to be self-evident in present time has been established historically, and further what political consequences these establishments have had and has for different groups of people. Laskar's main research interest focuses on studies of sexuality, gender, class and race, as well as their intersections in time and space. Her thesis, *Ett bidrag till heterosexualitetens historia: Kön, sexualitet och njutningsnormer i sexhandböcker 1800–1920* (2005), deals with the ways heterosexuality was established as a self-explained and natural entity, and studies the consequences this had for the regulation of new social orders and populations. Laskar is currently finalizing two anthologies: *Sexualpolitiska nyckeltexter* (2015) (together with Klara Arnberg and Fia Sundevall) and *Anti-Ziganism: What's in a Word?* (together with Jan Selling, Markus End and Hristo Kyuchukov) (2015).

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## NOTES

1. My paper here can somewhat be seen as part of an ongoing negotiation which takes place between academics and politicians/activists on the relations between essentialist or stabilized gendered and sexualized categories, and the political strategies and discourses developed by LGBT organizations in which globalized sexual rights are linked to human rights. See also Matthew Waites (2009) for a lengthier discussion on this. I would like to thank participants at two conferences where I have presented parts of this paper for fruitful comments: "Thoughts as Action," University of Bergen, Norway, August 16–18, 2012, and "Soma technics," Linköping University, Sweden, June 17–19, 2013. I am also grateful for comments from the *lambda nordica* editors.
2. In this paper I will use "illiberal" as a concept for the paradoxical trials to keep up liberal rights by using authoritarian methods.
3. *Revolt* was the continuation of another magazine, *Viking*, issued by IHWO, International Homosexual World Organization. *Revolt* can be regarded as a part of gay liberation, and mixed radical gay liberation texts and analysis with gay pornography, even what can be considered child pornography. (The data here is part of a forthcoming study on *The Rights of Homosexual, Bisexual, and Transgender Individuals as Human Rights?: A Study Based within the History of Science and Ideas*, financed by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond. Laskar, forthcoming)
4. RFSL's Archive, Foreign Documents (RAFD): 1992-04-03. Letter to Swedish Minister of International Development Cooperation, on Cuba.
5. RAFD: 1992-10-20. Tobias Wikström to Margaretha af Ugglas.

6. See RAFD: 1999-09-30. Parliament bill 1999/2000:U606 by Yvonne Ruwaida, et al. (the Green Party); RAFD: 1999-10-01. Parliamentary question 1999/2000:38 by Tasso Stafilidis (the Left Party) to Minister for Foreign Affairs Anna Lindh (Social Democratic Party) on human rights in Uganda; RAFD: 1999-10-13. Answer from Minister for Foreign Affairs Anna Lindh (Social Democratic Party) on question 1999/2000:38 on human rights in Uganda.
7. RAFD: 1996-12-18. To Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs on Namibia.
8. RAFD: 1996-12-18. Press release on Namibia.
9. RAFD: 1997-01-29. Answer from Ministry for Foreign Affairs on Namibia. (SWAPO = South West Africa's Peoples Organization.)
10. RAFD: 1997-11-25. The Committee on Foreign Affairs' report 1997/98:UU2 on homosexuals human right in the aid policy (bill U 205).
11. RAFD: 2000-11-21. The Committee on Foreign Affairs' report 2000/01:UU2 on international aid.
12. More research has to be done to track down the context/s for this turn.
13. My discussion on sexual citizenship and universalism is inspired by Diane Richardson (2000; 2004), as well Grewal and Kaplan (2001), Lister (2011), and Hearn, Oleksy, and Golanska (2011).
14. There is a vast production of texts on the matter, see for example Hoad (1999), Bell and Binnie (2000), Wilson (2002), Binnie (2004), Currier (2010), and Lind (2010).
15. For example Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) South Africa and Canada, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), International Gender and Trade Network (IGTN), and Women in Development Europe (WIDE).
16. See also Anna-Maria Sörberg's essay on homonationalism (Sörberg 2014), which critically discusses the homonational promotions of LGBT identities as a part of a tolerant West/Europe.

## SAMMANFATTNING

Under våren 2014 deklarerade biståndsminister Hillevi Engström att Sverige skulle dra in biståndet till Uganda med anledning av landets då nylagstiftning som kan ge livstids fängelse för upprepade homosexuella handlingar. Mitt under mediebevakade Stockholm Pride förkunnades att det bilaterala biståndet dragits in. I den här artikeln menar jag att detta, av flera LHBT-personer applåderade beslut, i själva verket fungerar direkt kontraproduktivt för Ugandas queera befolkning.

Genom att lyfta fram olika argument diskuterar jag emot idén om vill-

korat bistånd. Dels lyfts den anti-koloniala nationalism fram, som villkoren väckt bland olika afrikanska ledare, dels presenteras afrikanska queera personers kritik, och konsekvenserna, av att givarländer inte för en dialog med de utsatta. Eftersom den svenska regeringen historiskt sett inte agerat i LHBTQ-frågor utan tryck underifrån, undersöks även hur den svenska rörelsen respektive riksdagspolitiker ställt sig till villkorat bistånd i det förflutna. Material har i denna del använts från RFSL:s dokumentarkiv, samt texter från tidningen *Revolt*.

Vidare studerar jag utifrån tidigare forskning idégrunden för föreställningar om ett universellt homosexuellt medborgarskap och drar slutsatsen att den vilar på föreställningar om en universell heteronormativitet och könsbinaritet, liksom på en västcentrerad politisk universalisering av liberala (sexuella) rättigheter.

Därefter granskas den illiberala vändning som villkorat bistånd innebär och det senare beskrivs som en opportunistisk auktoritär och nykolonial metod. Här bygger diskussionen på underlag från aktivister och intellektuella från Afrika och här visas att det indragna bilaterala stödet till Uganda fungerar direkt kontraproduktivt för landets queera befolkning. Dessutom introduceras begreppet homotransnationalism (en modifiering av Jasbir Puar's begrepp homonationalism) i analysen av villkorat bistånd. Homotransnationellt kan villkorat bistånd kopplas till en globaliserad syn på vissa LHBT-rättigheter och identiteter där föreställningar om friheter lyfts och skuggar det illiberala nyauktoritära exporterandet av västerländska föreställningar om sexualitet och kön och dess organisering.

Slutligen berörs vikten av dialog mellan queera från Syd och Nord, liksom vikten av att inte generalisera eller universalisera queera identiteter, behov eller strategier.