

FEMINIST AFRICA



Call for Submissions

**Decriminalisation and (Re)Criminalisation of Same-Sex Relationships in
Africa: Struggles, Successes and the Way Forward**

Deadline for Extended Abstract Submissions: 9th October 2026

All **submissions** and enquiries should be emailed to: **contact@feministafrica.net**
and copy **info@feministafrica.net**

Issue Editors: Amanda Odoi and Audrey Gadzekpo

Background

The last two decades have seen intense debates and attempts to (re)criminalise same-sex loving relationships and the activities of same-sex loving individuals, including lesbian, gay and transgender persons across the African continent (Ako and Odoi 2022; Awondo et al. 2012). Countries such as Nigeria (2014), Uganda (2023), Burkina Faso (2025) and Senegal (2026) have tightened existing laws banning homosexuality by passing harsher legislation (Human Dignity Trust n.d.). Ghana's Parliament followed this trend when it passed the Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Bill in February 2024. The law lapsed when it did not receive presidential assent from then-president Nana Akufo-Addo before the new government took office. On 29 May 2026, a revised version of the bill was passed and will need presidential assent before becoming law. Accompanying these laws are draconian measures that deny LGBTQ+ persons any form of support, even from family members and other critical service providers in the countries.

At the centre of these attempts to (re)criminalise the LGBTQ+ community are existing colonial-era laws that criminalise same-sex loving relationships (e.g., Ghana's Criminal Offences Act, 1960, Act 29) and claims that same-sex loving relationships are alien to African culture (e.g., Odoi 2021). A seeming misunderstanding or lack of knowledge among citizens about the sexual histories and cultures of African societies, aided by fearmongering and misinformation driven by moral entrepreneurs such as religious and political leaders and other opinion leaders, has propelled this belief and the push for draconian laws targeting same-sex loving relationships and transgender persons (Ako and Odoi 2022; Otu 2022; Rodriguez 2026). However, evidence suggests that same-sex loving relationships have been practised on the African continent since before colonialism. Researchers, through anthropological studies among others, have pointed to the sexual fluidity of African societies (e.g., Ako 2023; Ajen 1998; Ambani 2017; Awondo, Murray and Roscoe 1998; Ngweni 2018; Signorini 1973; Tamale 2011; Odoi 2021). The colonial introduction of laws criminalising these relationships can also be viewed as proof that same-sex loving relationships existed before colonialism, and were likely not considered a problem until the introduction of these laws.

Some African countries have, however, decriminalised same-sex relationships between consenting adults, including South Africa (1998), Mozambique (2015), Seychelles (2016), Gabon (2020), Botswana (2019 and 2021) and Namibia (2023). In May 2023, Namibia's Supreme Court even upheld the recognition of same-sex marriages contracted outside the country and involving a citizen. In addition, the foreign spouse of a Namibian is to be recognised and granted the same legal rights as a heterosexual partner who is a foreigner living in the country. In South Africa and the Seychelles, the laws allow LGBT persons the right to adopt and ban employment discrimination based on sexual orientation. While decriminalisation efforts on the continent predate the surge in discourses pushing for (re)criminalisation, there have also been sustained efforts by various groups, individuals, and institutions calling for the (re)criminalisation of LGBTQ+ issues. Sexual and human rights defenders, activists, and advocates have responded to these efforts by countering anti-LGBTQ+ narratives and working to halt the ongoing (re)criminalisation.

In this call, we seek to document ongoing efforts at (re)criminalising and decriminalising LGBTQ+ on the African continent, including debates, activism efforts, and legislation, to gain insights into the challenges and struggles faced by activists and members of the community working to halt criminalisation efforts. We are also interested in exploring experiences that highlight successes and chart the way forward.

We are interested in questions such as: What are the contributing factors to the (re)criminalisation and decriminalisation of LGBTQ+ people on the African continent? What arguments aid or inhibit (re)criminalisation and decriminalisation efforts? What activism efforts shape (re)criminalisation and decriminalisation efforts? How does activism play out across the continent? What are the consequences of LGBTQ+ activism on the African continent? What are the similarities and differences in struggles over the criminalisation and decriminalisation of LGBTQ+ relationships?

Nature of Papers

More broadly, we seek papers that:

- Question the idea that same-sex loving relationships are a Western imposition and engage with LGBTQ+ histories and anthropologies to provide context and centre African sexual lives and histories, as well as to challenge claims that delegitimise the place of queer persons on the continent and their ability to live and enjoy their sexual lives.
- Interrogate institutional responses to LGBTQ+ criminalisation and (re)criminalisation, including papers focusing on responses from the government, legal associations and institutions, religious bodies, the education sector, traditional authorities, and other influential institutions.
- Explore and document activism and strategies employed, including feminist scholarly and activist efforts, to challenge (re)criminalisation activities and push for decriminalisation on the continent.
- Document challenges faced by LGBTQ+ persons and allies amid their activism.
- Explore the contributing factors to the success of LGBTQ+ decriminalisation efforts amid the ongoing (re)criminalisation and decriminalisation efforts on the continent.
- Explore what LGBTQ+ scholarship is missing and what we can do better to address the factors leading to these criminalisation efforts and the ability to push for decriminalisation of LGBTQ+ issues in Africa.

Methodology

We are open to primary data, historicist and doctrinal approaches to data collection and analysis, as well as the roles of feminists in challenging (re)criminalisation and pushing for decriminalisation on the continent. We are also interested in experiences across the continent and encourage papers that explore the lived experiences of the LGBTQ+ community and its allies on and beyond the African continent, addressing the challenges they face and their successes. We seek contributions that provide insights into the undertones of power, misogyny and patriarchy and employ feminist analyses, such as lenses of rights, choice, agency, and decoloniality in highlighting these issues.

Timelines:

- **Deadline for submission of extended abstracts of 1,000 words:** 9 October 2026
- **Notification of selection:** 6 November 2026
- **Submission of full papers:** 19 March 2027

Direct all enquiries and submissions to: contact@feministafrica.net and copy info@feministafrica.net

Please specify that your submission is for “**Decriminalisation and (Re) Criminalisation of Same-Sex Relationships in Africa: Struggles, Successes and the Way Forward.**”

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