

## BOOK REVIEW

Ellie Gore. *Between HIV Prevention and LGBTI Rights: The Political Economy of Queer Activism in Ghana*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2024. 187 pp. Illustrations. Note. Bibliography. Index. \$24.95. Paper. ISBN: 9780472057023.

*Between HIV* offers a critical exploration of the intersection between queer activism, global health policies, and local political structures in postcolonial Ghana through four separate but closely intertwined chapters. Its analyses span the first two decades of the twenty-first century and highlight key events, interventions, policies, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). *Between HIV* intervenes in a central theme in Ghanaian social history: “The politicization of homosexuality in [twenty-first century] Ghana” (3). Recent research foci on this theme have included the unnaturalness of homosexuality (Essien and Aderinto, 2009), religious views and perception of homosexuals (Anarfi and Gyasi-Gyamrah, 2019), understanding the status of the LGBT community in Ghana within the framework of existing laws (Atuguba, 2019), and youthful perception of homosexuality in Ghana (Allotey, 2015). Following the conversation, Gore’s book is a timely and thoughtful intervention in the literature on homosexuality in Ghana by moving beyond the questions of solidarity (queer activism) and sexuality rights to uncover the blurred line between “human rights and public health” (1). Thus, *Between HIV* encompasses decades-long stories emerging from postcolonial Ghana and how the dynamics of local politics and global health initiatives have shaped it. *Between HIV* stands out in unpacking and unbundling how global intervention on disease epidemics (i.e. HIV and sexually transmitted infections [STIs]) have impacted “on the lives and political activities of queer activists in the West African country of Ghana” (1).

*Between HIV* draws extensively from an ethnographic survey conducted between 2013 and 2014, providing the author with the opportunity to interact with two key NGOs—Centre for Popular Education and Human Rights, Ghana (CEPEHRG) and Human Rights Advocacy Centre (HRAC)—that have been at the forefront of queer activism in Ghana’s capital city, Accra. Gore’s choice to explore significant cities in Ghana proves vital as it presents a typical picture of the socioeconomic and political reality that best serves the purpose of understanding the nexus between queer activism, global health initiatives, and public health. Beyond engaging in participant observation, the author conducted in-depth interview sessions. Gore provides clarity on the use of language and choices of words to express critical points, considering that the LGBTI discourse is a relatively expanding theme in postcolonial African studies.

*Between HIV* weaves together themes from political economy of queer activism in postcolonial Ghana to sexual health rights and advocacy struggles.


Chapter Two analyzes the evolution of queer activism in Ghana through the perspective of NGOs. Gore argues that queer activism in Ghana has been significantly influenced by NGOs, which have largely shaped the strategies, goals, and funding sources. Gore noted that the “dominance of the sexual health agenda in development ... has reshaped the political and programmatic focus of groups like CEPEHRG” (55). Hence, while NGOs have provided essential resources for queer communities, they have also been transformed into vehicles for diverse neoliberal practices that “emphasized that LGBTI Ghanaians should enjoy the same rights as other Ghanaian citizens, as enshrined in the Ghanaian constitution” (63). Additionally, the politicization of homosexuality in Ghana since the early twenty-first century has posed many challenges, turning campaigns for sexual health rights into a Herculean task.

*Between HIV* not only looks at the question of homophobia and queer activism at theoretical levels. It makes a concrete analysis of these subjects that have yet to be explored at length elsewhere. The book scoops out narratives of queer men, their experiences (including socioeconomic sequestration and social death) and how queer community activism provides succour. Through the lens of global development industry, *Between HIV* interrogates how peer education initiatives geared towards HIV prevention among the LGBTI community, inadvertently exploit queer labour since most of the individuals engaged in queer education were either underpaid or unpaid labourers. The (un)intended consequence of that process is the further subjugation of working queer men to disproportionate economic situations that heighten the risk of homophobic violence in their communities. The situation is worsened by the absence of recognition for those queer men that made sacrifices in serving their queer community through disseminating proper education material against HIV and other STIs.

Even though *Between HIV* is not a work of social movements in contemporary Ghana, it manages to weave itself into narratives of resistance, push-back, and struggle for the existence of the LGBTI community. It highlights some of the challenges the LGBTI community has faced in organizing sexual health interventions. By demonstrating how the community navigates societal repression through peer education and activism, Gore lays bare the details of how queer Ghanaian activists engage with issues of human rights, economic inequality, social justice, collective resilience, and agency. One important component that Gore contributes to the broader discourse is the intersection of queerness, homophobia, and mental health. This area has yet to be prioritized in the context of West African queer narratives. Beyond poverty and feelings of worthlessness, MSM “struggle with suicidality” (103) due to social death and repression from society. Finally, Gore critiques the shortcomings of global health initiatives, which focus squarely on sexual health while neglecting the sociopolitical challenges faced by queer communities in contemporary Ghana.

Essentially, *Between HIV* fills a broad gap in the literature on LGBTI discourse, not just in Ghana but across Africa. It unbundles the linkages between global

development, health initiatives, queer activism, and sociopolitical realities in Ghana and possibly beyond. It is asking scholars and writers alike to reconsider the nexus between sexual health rights and human rights.

Patrick Okpalaeké 

York University, Keele Campus, Toronto, Canada

[pco23@yorku.ca](mailto:pco23@yorku.ca)

doi:10.1017/asr.2025.10034

## References

- Allotey, Naa Motsoo. 2015. *"Perceptions of youth towards homosexuality in Ghana"*. (MA Dissertation: Universitas Bergensis)
- Anarfi, John Kwasi. and Gyasi-Gyamerah, Angela Anarfi. 2019. "Religiosity and Attitudes towards homosexuality: views of Ghanaian university students. *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion* (25): 173–201 [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004272385\\_011](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004272385_011)
- Atuguba, Raymond A. 2019. "Homosexuality in Ghana: morality, law, human rights. *Journal of Politics and Law* 12(4): 113–126 <https://doi.org/10.5539/jpl.v12n4p113>.
- Essien, Kwame and Aderinto, Saheed. 2009. "Cutting the Head of a Roaring Monster": Homosexuality and Repression in Africa," *African Study Monographs* 30(3): 121–135 <https://doi.org/10.14989/85284>.