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Africa's rich LGBTQ+ history has long been suppressed & activists are taking a stand

Diverse sexual orientations and gender identities have existed within African communities for centuries, yet many still believe it is a Western import.

By Elvis Kachi Saturday, October 28, 2023

<https://www.lgbtqnation.com/channel/lgbtq-history/>





Photo: Shutterstock


In a world that is becoming increasingly aware of the importance of embracing diversity and acknowledging the stories of marginalized communities, Nigeria stands as a complex backdrop. Despite a long history of anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment and legislation, the country has seen the emergence of organizations like Obodo Nigeria, which is dedicated to celebrating and conserving Africa's queer history. "We are an organization that uses art and technology as a medium for advocacy for LGBTQ+ rights in Nigeria," Matthew Blaise, founder of Obodo Nigeria tells *LGBTQ Nation*.

Nigeria, like several other African nations, has been caught in the grip of anti-LGBTQ+ hostility. The Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act, passed in 2014 by former president Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, is a testament to the stigma LGBTQ+ endure, as it criminalizes same-sex relationships and activism. This legislation not only infringes upon the basic human rights of LGBTQ+ individuals but also perpetuates a culture of fear and secrecy, making it difficult for queer individuals to express themselves openly.

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Kuwasi Balagoon was a New Afrikan Anarchist who viewed Black Americans as a “subjugated nation” that deserved to resist the conditions forced onto them.

But for centuries, diverse sexual orientations and gender identities have existed within African communities, contributing to the vibrant tapestry of African cultures. However, the pervasive stigma, discrimination, and criminalization of homosexuality have silenced these narratives for far too long.

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One of the many facets from which homophobia stems is the idea that homosexuality is very much a Western import. Amidst these challenging environments and narratives, Obodo Nigeria has positioned itself as an avenue to educate folks on the history of homosexuality in Africa through the lens of art.

Obodo, which means “village” in several Nigerian languages, embodies the idea of inclusivity and community. The organization employs various artistic mediums – including art, literature, music, and theater – to tell the stories of African LGBTQ+ individuals who have often remained invisible.

Earlier this year, Matthew Blaise and their team organized an exhibition called *Awa Ni Bi*. It spoke to how homosexuality did not originate in the West.

“A few months ago, we held this exhibition called the *Awa Ni Bi* exhibition, where we showcased the works of artists, like Rachel Seidu, Alexandra Obochi, Yagazie Emezi, Daniel Obasi, and a host of others,” Blaise says. In order to achieve this, they used the three-day event to host exhibitions, panel discussions, intimate gatherings, and zine workshops, which contained ancient contexts of queerness and its longstanding relationship with the African continent. One of these panels, for example, discussed the *Orishas*, ancient gods from the western part of Nigeria that were largely non-binary.

Art is a powerful tool for social change and activism, and Obodo Nigeria utilizes it to challenge prevailing stereotypes and misconceptions surrounding LGBTQ+ individuals in Africa. By showcasing the artistic talents of queer Africans, the organization not only provides a platform for self-expression, but it also fosters a sense of pride and unity within the LGBTQ+ community. In presenting these stories in an accessible and relatable manner, the organization encourages empathy and understanding, gradually breaking down the walls of prejudice and discrimination.

Acknowledging and celebrating Africa's queer history is not only an act of social justice, but also an essential step towards a more inclusive and accepting society. "The LGBTQ+ community has always existed within African communities, contributing to the continent's cultural wealth," Blaise shares, "and by silencing our stories, they're depriving themselves of a deeper understanding of our own history and diversity."

Organizations like Obodo Nigeria remind us that queer Africans are not a recent import but rather a vital part of our shared heritage. Embracing this history allows us to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity, challenging harmful stereotypes and fostering an environment where all Africans can live authentically. In a nation where anti-gay sentiments have often overshadowed the voices of LGBTQ+ individuals, Obodo Nigeria serves as a catalyst for change. The organization stands as a testament to the resilience and strength of the LGBTQ+ community in Africa.

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MORE IN LGBTQ HISTORY



New series depicts a dark moment in queer history & shows how oppressors manipulate the oppressed (<https://www.lgbtqnation.com/2023/10/new-series-depicts-a-dark-moment-in-queer-history-shows-how-oppressors-manipulate-the-oppressed/>)

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Alongside the love story in "Fellow Travelers" lurks a more insidious tragedy.
Friday, October 27, 2023



America's first out elected officials were two civil rights warriors you've probably never heard of (<https://www.lgbtqnation.com/2023/10/americas-first-out-elected-officials-were-two-civil-rights-warriors-youve-probably-never-heard-of/>)

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Before there was Harvey Milk, Barney Frank, or Danica Roem, there was Jerry and Nancy.
Thursday, October 26, 2023



We'll learn how to win: HRC's first leader says history proves LGBTQ+ folks can take on the right (<https://www.lgbtqnation.com/2023/10/well-learn-how-to-win-hrcs-first-president-says-history-proves-lgbtq-folks-can-take-on-the-right/>)

(<https://www.lgbtqnation.com/2023/10/well-learn-how-to-win-hrcs-first-president-says-history-proves-lgbtq-folks-can-take-on-the-right/>)

"There is little doubt in my mind that we will overcome this," said Victor Basile. "How much time that takes, I don't know."
Wednesday, October 25, 2023



'Bury them in fruit jars.' A gay mass murder and the cover-up that followed (<https://www.lgbtqnation.com/2023/10/bury-them-in-fruit-jars-a-gay-mass-murder-and-the-cover-up-that-followed/>)

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Fifty years after the deadly fire at New Orleans' Up Stairs Lounge, new perspectives consider the atrocities that occurred after the blaze.
Wednesday, October 25, 2023



To hide our history is to deny our existence: Kids must learn what queer folks have given the world (<https://www.lgbtqnation.com/2023/10/to-hide-our-history-is->

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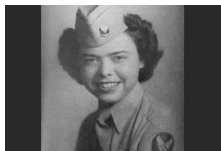
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(https://www.lgbtqnation.com/2023/10/01/why-hide-our-history-is-to-deny-our-existence-kids-must-learn-what-queer-folks-have-given-the-world/) **to deny our existence kids must learn what queer folks have given the world/)**

Queer people gave us computers, the Mona Lisa, and "Where the Wild Things Are." LGBTQ+ youth deserve to see that they aren't alone.

Tuesday, October 24, 2023



A lesbian WWII vet was renowned for standing up to Eisenhower. Was it all a lie? (https://www.lgbtqnation.com/2023/10/a-lesbian-wwii-vet-was-revered-for-standing-up-to-eisenhower-was-it-all-a-lie/)

(https://www.lgbtqnation.com/2023/10/a-lesbian-wwii-vet-was-revered-for-standing-up-to-eisenhower-was-it-all-a-lie/) Johnnie Phelps may have fabricated the story, but she was still a pioneering lesbian advocate.

Monday, October 23, 2023



This bisexual Black anarchist escaped from prison twice in the name of radical revolution (https://www.lgbtqnation.com/2023/10/this-bisexual-black-anarchist-escaped-from-prison-twice-in-the-name-of-radical-revolution/)

(https://www.lgbtqnation.com/2023/10/this-bisexual-black-anarchist-escaped-from-prison-twice-in-the-name-of-radical-revolution/) Kuwasi Balagoon was a New Afrikan Anarchist who viewed Black Americans as a "subjugated nation" that deserved to resist the conditions forced onto them.

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Unexpected allyship: How a California church became "the midwife of the modern LGBTQ movement" (https://www.lgbtqnation.com/2023/10/solidarity-in-unexpected-places-the-church-that-became-the-midwife-of-the-modern-lgbtq-movement/)

(https://www.lgbtqnation.com/2023/10/solidarity-in-unexpected-places-the-church-that-became-the-midwife-of-the-modern-lgbtq-movement/) Before the Stonewall Riots, there was the Vanguard Sweep. And it all started at the Glide Memorial Church.

Tuesday, October 17, 2023



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