



FESTIVAL INFO No. 6 (22.9.2014)

African Initiatives against Homophobia

Seven films dealing with the “Queer Africa” festival focus were shown over the weekend in Cologne. Three directors from South Africa and Morocco, as well as a human rights activist from Algeria, were invited to discuss the films with audiences. During a detailed closing panel discussion under the direction of **Klaus Jetz**, Director of the Lesbian and Gay Federation in Germany (LSVD)¹, they spoke about “African Initiatives against Homophobia”.

Zanele Muholi, from Johannesburg, works as a photographer and is involved in human rights promotion for black lesbian women. Her film **DIFFICULT LOVE**, presented in Cologne, documents the discrepancy between the comparatively liberal laws relative to LGBTI² individuals in today's South Africa and the realities of life for black lesbian women. She explained that “in the 1990s, it was gay men who were the victims of violence and hate crimes. Today it is black lesbian women in the townships.” She thanked FilmInitiativ for the opportunity to see festival films on the subject, since in South Africa this is not yet possible.

Muhsin Hendricks is the first imam who has openly acknowledged his homosexuality. After his studies in Islamic Theology at the University of Karachi in Pakistan, he became an imam in Cape Town. Today he leads The Inner Circle, an NGO that assists homosexual Muslims as they come out of the closet. In Cologne, he reported on his positive and negative experiences with this work, as well as on a congress of activists that he had just co-organised in South Africa. His film **FITRAH**, which was shown during the festival, documents how Muslim communities and religious leaders deal with the subjects of homosexuality and transsexuality. For it, he interviewed activists from Indonesia, Malaysia, South Africa, and India, who clearly stated on-camera that they were no longer willing to accept hostility in the name of religion.

Writer and filmmaker **Abdellah Taïa** was born in Rabat in 1973 and now resides in Paris. In a 2006 interview with the magazine *TelQuel*, he declared his homosexuality, sparking a scandal and a discussion about the rights of homosexuals in Morocco. In Cologne he presented his feature film **L'ARMÉE DU SALUT**, which is based on his eponymous, autobiographical novel. In it, he describes his experiences as a teenager in Morocco, the sexual taboos and conflicts in his family, his path into exile, and his partnership with a Swiss man, which fell apart due to issues stemming from cultural conflicts and the dynamics of a dependent relationship. His film is calm and poetic, yet it reflects the hard reality that confronts all those in Morocco who do not fit the heterosexual norm. Yet, he says, not disclosing his homosexuality would be as senseless “as a heterosexual person not showing himself as a heterosexual”.

Yahia Zaidi, Co-founder of the Algerian LGBTI organisation Abu Nawas and Co-General Director of the Pan Africa ILGA (the African section of the International Lesbian and Gay Association), reported on initiatives against hostility directed at homosexuals and transsexuals in North Africa and the Middle East. Yahia, who lives and works in Brussels, reported in Cologne on the clandestine “MantiQitna QamB” – the yearly meetings that he organises to give LGBTI and human rights activists from the region the opportunity to network and exchange experiences with one another.

¹ Further cooperation partners for the festival focus: Liberal-Islamischer Bund, Queeramnesty, Amnesty International, Feminale, Rubicon/Baraka, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung

² LGBTI: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex