

Beyond Binary: Navigating Non-conformity

Introduction

Definitively, people who do not adhere to society's gender norms may describe themselves as gender non-conforming if they do not conform to how their gender is expressed, presented, acted upon or perceived (Fournier). I am one such person living outside the bounds of what is perceived as 'normal'. This essay is an experiential canvas of my life in non-conformity.

A life in non-conformity

Legally, Kenya espouses universalized legal protections, including those guaranteeing the right to life, equality and freedom from discrimination (under Articles 26 and 27 of the 2010 Kenyan Constitution) for all its citizens. However, Kenyan laws fail to recognize and protect non-conforming persons; sometimes, the law is a conduit of discrimination. Contextually, Kenya's Penal Code explicitly prohibits and makes punishable same-sex conduct (Section 162 of the Kenyan Penal Code) (Kenya Law Reports). Realistically, the rights of non-conforming persons are constantly under threat, as seen by the sexual assault and killing of non-conforming lesbian Sheila Lumumba (Wepukhulu).

Socially, non-conforming people face overt and clandestine discrimination; their needs are often either neglected or gaslighted as invalid. In extreme cases, some are subjected to conversion therapy in the form of churches to "cast the demons away" or ostracized from family and society as pariahs. As a masculine-presenting woman, I was at a family gathering when my older cousins prevented their children from coming close to me, asking if I was a boy or a girl as if my non-conformity was contagious. One of them told me I was tainting their children's minds by presenting how I was, telling me, "Dress like a girl for once".

Intrinsically, non-conformity has been an ardent journey towards healing and self-acceptance.

Conclusion

What would the world look like when our sins become virtues and our lives are celebrated rather than demonized? I hope to see the day when we, non-conforming persons, realize our Kenyan birthright of equality, equity and inclusion.

Recommendations

- Legal activism to repeal discriminatory laws, like Section 162 of the Kenyan Penal Code.
- Embellishing gender-sensitive language into Kenyan statute.
- Gender sensitivity training for society.

References

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