

**“Enemy Collaborators:
Social imaginaries, global frictions, and a gay rights music video in Kenya”**

Introduction

On 15 February 2016, a Kenyan art collective named Art Attack uploaded to YouTube a remix of Macklemore and Ryan Lewis’ “Same Love,” a 2012 Grammy-nominated song that criticizes hyper-masculinity and homophobia in the hip hop industry. Art Attack’s “Same Love (Remix)” uses the chorus lyrics of the original—“I can’t change / Even if I tried / Even if I wanted to”—but updates the verses and the visuals to focus on discrimination against LGBTQ Africans (Art Attack 2016). The video depicts loving relationships between two same-sex couples—one gay, one lesbian—yet ends in tragedy when one of the male protagonists attempts suicide. Perhaps unsurprisingly, considering the subject matter and the video’s racy depiction of gay and lesbian intimacy, the video attracted attention immediately, particularly from the nation’s tabloids, conservative leaders, and cosmopolitan middle-class.

A week after the video’s release, Ezekiel Mutua, CEO of the Kenyan Film Classification Board (KFCB), released a two-page statement condemning “Same Love (Remix)” (Mutua 2016). According to the statement, the video “consists of lyrics that strongly advocate for gay rights in the country, complete with graphic sexual scenes between people of the same gender as well as depiction of nudity and pornography” and it “promotes irresponsible sexual behavior.” The statement also claims Art Attack failed to acquire a filming license for shooting the video in Kenya. Citing both “legal and moral considerations,” the KFCB banned the video from local television and asked Google to block access to the YouTube video in Kenya. The board gave Google one week to abide by its request.

Mutua’s denunciation of the video inadvertently prompted a backlash among Kenya’s vocal Twitter community. After the KFCB announced the video’s ban, several users turned Mutua’s strong condemnation into a subversive promotional campaign. For example, one user tweeted a link to the video with the comment, “Let me help @infoKfcb ban this song. You guys see this song? You need to make sure you don’t watch it. thanks.” Another tweeted a link to a news story about the video, adding: “Do not @YouTube ‘Same Love By Art Attack’ which has been banned by @InfoKfcb.” Several others sarcastically appropriated the KFCB’s ban of “Same Love (Remix)” as the *raison d’être* for sharing the video on social media.

After several weeks, Google informed the KFCB it would not block access to the video or remove it from its search engine, but Google did agree to add the following “warning message” to the beginning of the video: “The following content has been identified by the YouTube community as being potentially inappropriate. Viewer discretion is advised” (Lang’at 2016). Although Google’s response was much softer than what the KFCB had requested, Mutua claimed victory. On 5 May 2016, Mutua tweeted “Google flags inappropriate music video following @InfoKfcb’s sustained campaign,” attaching a screenshot of a news article with the favourable headline “Google bows to Film Board order, flags controversial gay video.” In his tweet, Mutua tagged the cabinet secretary of the Ministry of Sports, Culture and the Arts (@AreroWario) and the Media Council of Kenya (@MediaCouncilK), ensuring that his superior and peers would notice his victory lap.

“Same Love (Remix)” by Art Attack remains on YouTube, accessible within and outside of Kenya. Yet, somehow, everyone involved in the controversy surrounding “Same Love (Remix)” appears to have achieved their original goals. Mutua used the episode to cast himself as a moral crusader who stands up to heathens and transnational behemoths (Lang’at 2016; Mukei 2016). Art Attack was able to attract national and international media attention to the plight of LGBTQ Africans (Agutu 2016; Daley 2016; Lang’at 2016; Ruvaga 2016). Kenyans on Twitter indulged in yet another opportunity to use subversive humour to mock reactionary public officials (Chambers 2016). And YouTube continues to be one of the most popular social media sites in Kenya (Alexa.com 2018). This begs the questions: how is it possible that Art Attack, Mutua, Kenyans on Twitter, and Google—ostensibly enemy combatants in this cultural battle—can all claim victory? Further, what does this episode tell us about global cultural production in the digital era?

In this chapter, I attempt to answer these two questions. First, I outline a framework for studying global cultural production based on social imaginaries and global frictions. Then I discuss each of the four key social actors involved in the controversy surrounding “Same Love (Remix),” exploring the social imaginary of each social actor and the frictions created when these divergent social imaginaries are put in contact with each other. In closing, I consider what this episode reveals about the ongoing tensions between global media giants like Twitter and YouTube and local users and regulators in Africa.

Social Imaginaries and Global Frictions

In Ekdale (2017), I introduce an analytical framework for studying global cultural production that relies on two key concepts: social imaginaries and global frictions. Social imaginaries capture the sense of belonging people feel with those outside their direct proximity (Taylor 2014). As Benedict Anderson argued in *Imagined Communities*, the ability to construct a mental image of a community beyond one’s personal experience is a prerequisite for national identity, “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (1983, 6-7). Not all social imaginaries are circumscribed by national boundaries. Some social imaginaries capture a sense of unity held within a geographic region (Carpenter & Ekdale 2017; Cayla & Eckhardt 2008), while others extend to disparate parts of the world (Darling-Wolf 2015; Steger 2008). These social imaginaries help define who we are by giving us a sense of how we fit with others. Our self-identities as hybridized subjects within social imaginaries, in turn, shape our cultural practices related to media production, distribution, and consumption (Ekdale 2017).

Culture is not merely the product of individualized action, nor are our practices unaffected by the worldviews of those around us. Culture production occurs within social practices involving various people shaped by divergent social imaginaries. Anthropologist Anna Tsing (2005) introduced the concept of friction as one way to make sense of the entanglements that occur between local actors shaped by global discourses. Tsing describes friction as “the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference” (4), arguing that even when groups of people are seemingly working together, there are often significant differences in how these groups approach and make sense of their efforts. Whereas a great deal of scholarship within global media studies focuses on the flow of media and cultural products, friction provides a lens for examining what Gray (2014, 995) calls the “multiple points of contact” that occur between cultural agents. In Ekdale (2017), I extend Tsing’s work to outline

a typology of frictions that occur within cultural production: collaborative frictions, which occur between groups working across difference toward a common goal; combative frictions, which occur between groups positioned in direct opposition to each other; and competitive frictions, which occur between groups with interests that change over time.

This analytical framework allows for the study of global cultural production through two entry points: the construction of social imaginaries among social actors and the frictions that occur between collaborative, combative, or competing groups during the course of cultural production. In the section that follows, I first examine the social imaginaries of each of the four key participants involved in the “Same Love (Remix)” controversy—Art Attack, Ezekiel Mutua, Kenyans on Twitter, and Google—to see how their various social imaginaries shape their social practices. I also consider the frictions that occurred between these four groups that resulted in what seems to be a mutually beneficial outcome.

Cultural Producers and Their Social Imaginaries

Art Attack

Little is known about the origins or membership of Art Attack. Art Attack’s YouTube channel was created the same day “Same Love (Remix)” was uploaded, and the music video is the only item available on the channel. The group’s Twitter account (@therealartatta2), which was launched a few days after the video was released, has been dormant since May 2016. The group does not have a website, Facebook page, or SoundCloud account, nor have they released any other music under the name of Art Attack. In 2014, *The Star* profiled a group of six Nairobi-based painters who worked together at a studio called Art Attack (Waweru 2014), but it is unclear if this group is the same one that released “Same Love (Remix).” The mystery surrounding the group is intentional. After “Same Love (Remix)” was released, the song’s writer and performer claimed that members had gone into hiding after the group received threats of arrest and attacks against their personal safety (Daley 2016). However, the song’s writer/performer, who became the de facto leader and anonymous spokesman for Art Attack after the release of “Same Love (Remix),” was interviewed by a number of national and international media outlets about the music video, as well as the larger issue of discrimination against LGBTQ Africans.

In an interview with a Nigerian podcast, the group’s leader described Art Attack as “Artivists,” stating “most of our stuffs are geared toward social change, and motivated mostly around what we see around the social circles in Kenya” (No Strings 2016). The song’s writer/performer identifies as a cisgender, heterosexual male who said he was inspired to write “Same Love (Remix)” after hearing LGBTQ friends discuss the daily challenges they face because of their sexual orientation (Langat 2016; No Strings 2016). According to him, “we created this video first and foremost because we are artists and also because we were very much alive to the great challenges and tribulations that LGBTQ persons go through in Kenya and Africa as a whole” (Lim 2016). When explaining why he wrote the song, the group’s leader said he wanted to raise awareness of LGBTQ discrimination both in Kenya specifically and in Africa broadly. In his interview with the Nigerian podcast, the writer/performer said most Africans are hostile toward those with non-normative sexual identities (No Strings 2016). He specifically criticized Uganda, whose parliament recently passed a bill that decreed homosexuality a crime deserving of life imprisonment. Even though the bill was later annulled by Uganda’s high court, its passage indicates that LGBTQ discrimination is a political and legal as well as a social and cultural issue in Africa. Not only did Art Attack want to create a song critical of discrimination

in Kenya, “we wanted [the song] to be a pan-African song” (No Strings 2016). As the song’s writer/performer told an interviewer from *OkayAfrica*, “we wanted to bring about a change in attitude toward gay and lesbian people in Africa” (Klein 2016).

The song’s lyrics share this tension of being rooted locally as a Kenyan story while also being connected broadly to the African experience. For instance, the remix opens with a dedication “to the New Slaves, the New Blacks, the New Jews, the New Minorities for whom we need a civil rights movement, maybe a sex rights movement, especially in Africa. Everywhere.” The first verse, then, transitions from this broad decree to a personal story of a young man who grew close to a “male kid in school,” eventually realizing he was “in love with a boy like me.” In the second verse, the protagonist comes out to his mother and father, who respond by telling him to “pack your bags, shameless heathen, and follow the sun.” The final verse broadens again to criticize institutions like the church and the Kenyan constitution, which criminalizes homosexuality, while also condemning “African culture” for embracing homophobia. Visually, the video focuses on two gay couples expressing their love for each other in public, in the home, and in the bedroom. Yet, mixed with this narrative is stock footage of gay pride parades from around the world, images of African newspapers with headlines denouncing homosexuality, photos of famous LGBTQ Africans, and clips of a prominent gay character in the American television show *Empire*. While the lyrics ground the song in Kenya and Africa, the visuals offer a transnational bricolage—depicting the struggle for freedom and acceptance in global, regional, and local settings.

Thus, the producers of “Same Love (Remix)” demonstrate a broad sense of belonging with those who seek recognition and equality regardless of one’s sexual orientation or gender identity. In the social imaginary of Art Attack, the struggle against LGBTQ discrimination is most pressing in Kenya and Africa, but it is informed by the global gay rights movement. As the group’s leader stated in an interview: “Everybody has to have the freedom to do whatever they want to do, marry whoever they want to marry. So we were just trying to raise their voice, create their awareness in Africa” (Ruvaga 2016). For Art Attack, producing and releasing “Same Love (Remix)” was an effort to confront injustice in Kenya, Africa, and beyond.

Ezekiel Mutua and the KFCB

Ezekiel Mutua is no stranger to controversy. Long before the KFCB issued a statement concerning the “Same Love (Remix)” video, Mutua had charted a path toward becoming Kenya’s chief moral policeman (Wasonga 2016). A former journalist turned head of the journalist’s union, Mutua entered government through the Ministry of Information, Communications and Technology and quickly rose through the ranks. In December 2015, Mutua was appointed CEO of the KFCB, a government body created in 1963 to regulate the creation and distribution of films in Kenya by issuing production licenses and rating films. With the passage of the Kenya Information and Communication Act in 2013, the KFCB’s mandate expanded to include the regulation of television content to ensure that no adult programming would be shown between 5am and 10pm daily. For most of the KFCB’s existence, very few Kenyans were familiar with the work of this government body. Under Mutua’s leadership, that has changed.

Since taking over the KFCB, Mutua has waged several public battles that demonstrate a concerted effort to expand the authority of the government body and to elevate his personal profile as a guardian of traditional morality. In January 2016, a month after Mutua became the KFCB’s CEO, the KFCB announced that they would be challenging Netflix’s efforts to expand

into the Kenyan market. In a statement citing “this era of global terrorism,” the KFCB claimed that portions of the streaming service’s library represented a “threat to our moral values and national security” (Barnes 2016; Ochieng’ 2016). Mutua further added that he did not want Kenyans to be misled by Netflix’s rating system because, “the ratings are American, they are not Kenyan, they are not African” (Craig 2016). Further justifying the KFCB’s stance, KFCB Chairman Jackson Kosgei said it was important that Kenya not become a “passive recipient of foreign content that could corrupt the moral values of our children” (Kuo 2016a). Thus, from the earliest days of Mutua’s leadership, the KFCB sought to define itself as a protector of Kenyan morality in the face of foreign contamination.

The KFCB’s public battle with Netflix is just one of Mutua’s many attempts to regulate cultural content that does clearly reside within the KFCB’s mandate. In March 2016, the KFCB shut down a Nairobi party called Project X that advertised itself with the sensational tagline “No one goes back a virgin.” Mutua justified the KFCB’s intervention with an unsubstantiated claim that the party was being organized by an “international pornography ring,” thus, making the party a site of unlicensed film production (BBC News 2016a). A year later, after posters for a Project X² party began to circulate online, the KFCB again pledged to shut down the event and punish its organizers. Mutua claimed the party was part of a wider sex syndicate run by foreign NGOs intended to recruit children into pornographic films that would be sold in foreign countries (Ambani 2017). In April 2016, the KFCB banned a Coca-Cola advertisement from airing on television during daytime hours, because the ad featured a passionate kiss that lasted three seconds (BBC News 2016b). Coke later reedited the advertisement to meet the KFCB’s approval (Taste-the-Feeling 2016). The Mutua-led KFCB also has intervened in other matters, including commercials for alcohol and contraception, a music video he determined to be pornographic, and a sex-positive podcast hosted by two Kenya women. In each of these cases, Mutua and the KFCB defined themselves as necessary advocates for Kenyan children and traditional moral values fighting against pernicious foreign cultural forces.

In October 2016, Mutua proposed changes to Kenyan law that would codify the KFCB’s expanding mandate. The proposed Films, Stage Plays and Publications Act of 2016 would have put the KFCB in charge of regulating films, live performances, stage plays, video games, streaming television services, billboard advertisements, and print publications. The language of the draft legislation was overly broad, leaving open the possibility that the KFCB also could regulate social media content, meaning all Kenyans would need a production license and government approval before taking or posting images online (Itimu 2016). Further, the proposed revisions would have given the KFCB the authority to prevent the production, distribution, and exhibition of any media “that are not reflective of national values and aspirations of the people of Kenya” (Films, Stage Plays and Publications Act 2016). The proposed legislation was met with strong opposition, and Mutua eventually withdrew his support, even though he continues to advocate for revisions to Kenya’s media laws (Openda 2016; Oduor 2016).

The seeds of Mutua’s approach to the media can be found in his 2010 M.A. thesis from the School of Journalism and Media Studies at the University of Nairobi, which he completed while serving as Kenya’s Director of Information and Public Communication. Mutua’s thesis offers a study of how rural radio stations covered the 2008 post-election violence period in Kenya (Mutua 2010). The thesis relies heavily on Social Responsibility Theory, which argues that the press must balance their freedoms with an obligation to provide the public with accurate and comprehensive information (Mutua 2010; Siebert, Peterson & Schramm 1958). According to Social Responsibility Theory, if the press is unable to regulate itself, it may be necessary for the

government to step in to enforce regulation. In his study, Mutua concludes that vernacular radio stations indeed failed their public service responsibility during Kenya's post-election period by practicing "irresponsible journalism" (Mutua 2010, 83). Mutua writes:

The post-election crisis indicated that free and plural media were as much an answer to Kenya's democratic deficits as they are a problem. Thus, the deconstruction of the Kenyan society should be branded to include not only the re-engineering of State institutions but also other social institutions such as the media. (16)

Social Responsibility Theory envisions an active role for government regulators when journalists fail to serve the public, and Mutua's study argues that rural radio stations during the post-election period neglected their public duties. It is therefore unsurprising that after Mutua took over as CEO of the KFCB, he fashioned the government body into an active regulator of media and cultural content in Kenya.

Banning "Same Love (Remix)" and petitioning Google to restrict the video on YouTube is consistent with the KFCB's other actions under Mutua's leadership as well as Mutua's broader views about the relationship between media and the government. Mutua believes government regulation of media content is a social good necessary for the protection of traditional moral values. As Mutua claims in the KFCB statement announcing the ban of "Same Love (Remix)":

The future of our country lies in the collective responsibility of Government institutions as well as the vigilance and support of the parents in keeping children safe online. We reiterate our commitment to work with all stakeholders to ensure the safety of our children. (Mutua 2016)

Thus, Mutua both advocates for traditional values and asserts himself as Kenya's primary cultural defender. Many Kenyans have criticized Mutua for acting as Kenya's "moral policeman" (Madowo 2016; Mwampembwa 2016; Wasonga 2016), but Mutua has relished his moment in the spotlight. That Mutua felt compelled to weigh in on the "Same Love (Remix)" video demonstrates both his political and his personal agenda. In the social imaginary of Mutua, he is the guardian of traditional culture and morality, which he believes must be protected against foreign contamination. Mutua is unapologetic about his political and personal ambitions, as evidenced by a tweet he sent from his personal account on the day the KFCB banned "Same Love (Remix)": "KFCB is a regulator. We don't do what's popular; we do what's legal and right." Attached to the tweet is a photo of himself.

Kenyans on Twitter

Kenyans were one of the earliest adopters of Twitter in Africa, and Kenyans continue to be among the continent's most active users (KenyanVibe 2012; Portland 2015). Twitter has been used by Kenyans to share information about acts of terrorism as well as exchange jokes about an aspirational hero (Ekdale & Tully 2014; Simon et al. 2014; Tully 2013). The social network also has been used by Kenyan public officials looking for innovative ways to engage with their constituents (Omanga 2015; Simon et al., 2014). Many Kenyans view Twitter as a site of "playful engagement," a place where they can use "humor and serious critique...[to] challenge inequality and push development agendas forward" (Tully & Ekdale 2014, 77). These conversations are often facilitated by hashtags, which serve as ad hoc publics that allow users to coalesce around particular topics (Rambukkana 2015). Twitter is particularly popular among Kenya's young, urban elites, those with more cosmopolitan views and aspirations (Ekdale & Tully 2014; Overney 2014). Unsurprisingly, the release of "Same Love (Remix)" by Art Attack

and the KFCB's response to the video produced a lively conversation among Kenyans on Twitter about homosexuality and free expression.

Three days after "Same Love (Remix)" was released on YouTube, one Twitter user posted several tweets critical of the video and homosexuality, appending the hashtag #KenyanGayVideo to his tweets. The hashtag quickly gained traction as a site of discussion about "Same Love (Remix)" and the issues the video raises, attracting hundreds of tweets by the end of the day (Langat 2016). The conversation began among those who view homosexuality as immoral and ungodly, but within an hour, sex-rights advocates and fans of the video began using the hashtag to express more sympathetic views. Tweets using #KenyanGayVideo ranged from critical (e.g., "This is a disease not a right") to violent (e.g., "God, kill em, kill em all") to supportive (e.g., "As a human I totally condemn all acts of homophobia and bigotry") to defiant (e.g., "Just because gays and lesbians are silent does not mean we don't exist"). Several users also noted that the discussion on Twitter inadvertently had drawn further attention to the video (e.g., "just now I was watching the video on YouTube it was at 2k views now it 12K views- guys are really watching").

By the time the KFCB announced its ban—a little over a week after 'Same Love (Remix)' was uploaded to YouTube—the Twitter conversation using the hashtag #KenyanGayVideo had died down. The KFCB ban had the ironic effect of reenergizing the discussion among Kenyans on Twitter and changing the conversation from one about homosexuality to one concerning government censorship. Several Twitter users objected to the KFCB's response, such as one user who replied to a Mutua tweet claiming the video was restricted "on moral grounds" by saying, "This is a joke we are a secular country. Christianity shouldn't be a basis to gauge MORALITY. Just disband please!" Others similarly criticized the KFCB and Mutua for intervening in a cultural issue beyond the scope of the government body's mandate. These tweets reflected the cynicism many Kenyans feel toward their leaders (e.g., "Now that KFCB has banned Same Love by Art Attack. Can we ban the government corrupt leaders") as well as the joy many Kenyans took in watching the KFCB's ban attract more attention to the video (e.g., "The KFCB banned the song 'Same love remix' by art Attack and now I'm more curious to listening to the song").

For Kenyans on Twitter, the release of "Same Love (Remix)" provided an opportunity to have a conversation about LGBTQ rights and morality. Although many of the perspectives shared were discriminatory, they existed in a public forum where they could be challenged by more sympathetic and accepting views. When the KFCB intervened by banning "Same Love (Remix)" and requesting that Google censor the video on YouTube, it prompted a backlash among those who are wary of government censorship. For these Twitter users, open participation and discussion using online platforms is an important element of making Kenya a more cosmopolitan and democratic society (Ekdale & Tully 2014; Tully & Ekdale 2014). The KFCB's overreach represented an attack on these users' values, and they responded by appropriating the KFCB's ban to promote the video.

Google

Social media companies deliberately characterize their products as "platforms," neutral spaces where members of the public can provide, locate, and share information and entertainment (Gillespie 2010). Companies like Google want to be seen as global advocates of free expression who give the public access to open warehouses of participatory content. This discursive project obscures the role proprietary algorithms play in shaping our experiences

online, the compromises technology companies make in pursuit of greater profit, and the fact that companies like Google frequently alter their practices to appease powerful political and commercial entities (Gillespie 2010; Grimmelmann 2009; Seyfert & Roberge 2016). Although Google has complied with the demands of local government gatekeepers in the past, particularly in China (O'Rourke IV, Harris, & Ogilvy 2007), doing so has been harmful to their corporate image, making people question the company's commitment to its initial guiding principle: "Don't be evil." When Google receives requests to censor content, it is in its brand's interests to deny or ignore those requests; yet, it is in its financial interests to avoid lawsuits and restrictions on its business practices. Thus, when the KFCB demanded that Google restrict access to "Same Love (Remix)" on YouTube, the company faced a dilemma: abide by the order and further damage its brand as an advocate for free expression or deny the request and possibly face legal consequences from the Kenyan government.

Interestingly, Google's initial response to the KFCB was bureaucratic. The first request sent by the KFCB was addressed to Google Kenya, Google's subsidiary in Nairobi. Google Kenya responded through a letter, sent by its lawyer, explaining that the subsidiary did not have the authority to restrict access to "Same Love (Remix)." The letter read, in part:

YouTube LLC/Google Inc. and Google Kenya limited are separate legal entities. Google Kenya limited does not administer services on YouTube, nor does it have the capacity to control content that is accessible through them. We, therefore, would like to request you to submit your request electronically [to corporate headquarters]. (Business Daily Africa 2016)

In response, Mutua resubmitted his removal request to Google headquarters and said he was pleased that the review process was on-going: "We have not reached the point of taking [Google] to court for non-compliance but we are building a case that if we will be required to prosecute we will do so" (Murumba 2016). Meanwhile, a spokesman for Art Attack commended Google Kenya for this initial response to the KFCB:

We obviously greatly applaud Google Kenya for choosing to have the video still stay up on YouTube all this time. We deeply appreciate that they didn't bulge and didn't give in to the government threats and orders and decided to do what is right and let people express themselves freely without having to have their rights trampled upon. (Lim 2016)

On Twitter, Kenyans continued to mock Mutua for his efforts to censor the video. After one user noted that Google had failed to abide by the KFCB's one-week ultimatum, another user replied, "They are probably still trying to Google what a KFCB is."

On 3 May 2016, at an event celebrating World Press Freedom Day, Mutua announced that Google had abided by the KFCB's demands. "We are happy that the music video has been pulled down following a request we made to Google," Mutua declared (Kuo 2016c). But Google did not take down "Same Love (Remix)." Kenyans who visit the music video on YouTube receive a warning message that says the video is "potentially inappropriate" and "viewer discretion is advised," but after accepting this message, the video is viewable in its entirety. As a representative from Google Kenya acknowledged, "[Google's response] doesn't mean the video isn't available for viewing in Kenya" (Kuo 2016c). While one article characterized Google's action as a "win for Mutua" (Lang'at 2016), another labelled it a "fail": "[Mutua] is not fooling us, everyone knows that he wanted a total ban on the video" (Kamau 2016).

Ultimately, Google succeeded in minimizing its role within the cultural dispute surrounding "Same Love (Remix)." Google's bureaucratic response both maintained the company's preferred image as a neutral party and allowed it to delay action long enough for the

controversy to subside. The contents of Google’s internal discussion are unknown; the tech giant’s only public statements on the matter came via a spokesperson’s email to the news website *Quartz*, after the KFCB resubmitted its request:

YouTube has clear policies that outline what content is acceptable to post and we remove videos violating these policies when flagged by our users. We review government removal requests when notified through the correct legal processes and in keeping with our company philosophy on transparency and freedom of expression. (Kuo 2016b)

At the time, Google received positive coverage for not “cav[ing] to the Kenyan government's demands for this powerful gay rights music video to be taken down” (*Marie Claire* 2016). On Twitter, several Kenyans characterized Google as a benevolent Goliath being pestered by an overzealous and petulant David (e.g., “Google won’t give a damn about an entity called KFCB. The ramifications would be much bigger if they pulled it down.”). By the time Google added a warning message to the beginning of “Same Love (Remix),” the video had been live on YouTube for nearly three months and the issue of LGBTQ discrimination in Africa had received attention from a variety of national, regional, and international media. Interest in the video had plateaued, while interest in Mutua’s rise as an arbiter of media and cultural content in Kenya was growing. By May 2016, the question was no longer about whether Google would abide by the KFCB’s request to censor a gay rights music video but, rather, about how Kenyans should respond to a government official intent on turning himself into the nation’s cultural gatekeeper (Madowo 2016).

Enemy Collaborators

Months after the release of “Same Love (Remix),” the four key players all had reason to believe they had achieved their goals. Art Attack found a sizeable audience for its art-tivist music video¹ and, more important, the group drew attention to the issue of LGBTQ discrimination in Kenya and Africa. LGBTQ Kenyans continue to struggle for acceptance at home, but the release of “Same Love (Remix)” is now considered a landmark moment on the long road toward equality and acceptance in Kenya (Dubuis 2016). Ezekiel Mutua was able to elevate his status as a protector of traditional moral values in Kenya by getting Google to respond to his request, even if Google’s response was much milder than what Mutua initially sought. By weighing in on the video, Mutua’s KFCB continued to expand its jurisdiction into media and cultural issues beyond the intended scope of the government agency. Many Kenyans used Twitter to voice their opposition to or support for gay rights in Kenya as well as satirize Mutua’s efforts to block access to “Same Love (Remix)” on YouTube. This group, consisting mostly of young, urban elites, see Twitter as an important site for expressing themselves using humour and serious critique, and they balked at Mutua’s attempt to censor content on social media. Finally, Google succeeded at fading into the background. As Google hopes to retain its dominance in global markets, the company seeks to avoid controversy. In its official response to the KFCB’s request, Google managed to stay above the fray through the use of bureaucratic processes, delayed decision making, and a muted response that appeared to appease all those involved.

While everyone had reason to celebrate the outcome of this episode, the long-term ramifications for participating in the controversy reveal the power differentials between the four key players. Art Attack elevated the issue of LGBTQ discrimination, but did so at great personal cost. Following the release of “Same Love (Remix),” the artists and actors involved in the music

¹ As of November 2018, the video has more than 325,000 views.

video became victims of harassment and abuse (Daley 2016). Art Attack is yet to release another song despite the group's stated intentions at the time to continue advocating for LGBTQ rights (No Strings 2016). Mutua, on the other hand, continues to weigh in on cultural matters seemingly outside the scope of the KFCB, and he continues to receive public attention for his efforts. In September 2016, Mutua was invited to California by Google to attend the company's Web Rangers global summit about online safety. Several journalists criticized Google's decision to invite Mutua, who was characterized in the press as an "anti-gay activist" (Thielman 2016) and "one of Kenya's most outspoken anti-gay rights campaigners" (Kuo 2016d). In a bit of poetic justice, after Mutua used Facebook to brag that he was able to acquire a visa for the summit without following the official process, the U.S. Department of Immigration announced they would be revoking his diplomatic passport (Vidija 2016). Kenyans on Twitter took great joy in trolling Mutua for his self-inflicted wound (Maina 2016). Google, for its part, remained silent in the matter, most likely pleased to watch the issue resolve itself without having to intervene.

Tsing argues we should think of collaborations less as smooth partnerships and more as messy and often temporary unions: "Collaborators work with the enemy in wartime. These collaborators are not positioned in equality or sameness, and their collaboration does not produce a communal good" (2005, 246). Thus, it is possible for apparent enemies to collaborate with each other in surprising and unpredictable ways. Using an analytical framework that examines the social imaginaries of those engaged in cultural production as well as the frictions that occur between these cultural producers, we can see how different groups seemingly at odds with each other can all achieve their desired outcomes. These messy interactions and unexpected collaborations are important to study because they "serve as the building blocks of media and cultural production" (Ekdale 2017, 14). Certainly, Art Attack, Mutua, Kenyans on Twitter, and Google would not consider each other partners in cultural production, but through the collaborative frictions that occurred between these four groups, the cause of each was furthered.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I used an analytical framework for studying global cultural production through two entry points—the construction of social imaginaries and the frictions between social actors. Both of these processes occur regularly on social media. On social media, users can connect with previously distant people and ideas (Rainie & Wellman 2012; van Dijck 2013), which can expand social imaginaries as well as create moments of friction. This is evident throughout Africa where an increasingly number of people use social media to engage with others both near and far about topics both mundane and contentious (Bosch 2017; Willems & Mano 2016). Further, social media are helping to facilitate a more democratized era of global cultural production by reducing the barriers to content production, appropriation, and distribution (Burgess & Green 2018; Jenkins, Ford, & Green 2013). In the case of "Same Love (Remix)," Art Attack relied the participatory functionality of YouTube to distribute its video to a local and international audience, while Kenyans on Twitter used the site's interactive features to engage with each other in a conversation about gay rights and Internet censorship.

At the same time, this episode demonstrates the ongoing tensions between local governments and global technology companies. Even though the KFCB easily banned the video from Kenyan broadcast television, the government agency struggled to exercise jurisdictional authority over a social media site that distributes content both within and beyond national borders. Although Mutua claimed victory after Google added a warning message to the "Same Love (Remix)" video on YouTube, he no doubt recognizes his limited ability to challenge

Google and other technology giants. In fact, Mutua’s experience attempting to ban “Same Love (Remix)” on YouTube parallels his experience trying to stand up to Netflix—initial threats and public denunciation quickly gave way to acquiescence and a new target (Barnes 2016; Kuo 2016a). Although many Kenyans have expressed weariness about Mutua’s efforts to serve as Kenya’s “moral policeman” (Madowo 2016; Mwampembwa 2016; Wasonga 2016), they would do well also to remain skeptical of global social media companies. Had Google opted to block “Same Love (Remix)” in Kenya, Art Attack would have been powerless to respond. Were Twitter to change its design and functionality, which it has done several times, Kenyans on Twitter would have to adapt. As long as these social media sites are able to convince users that they are neutral platforms and bastions of free expression (Gillespie 2010), they will continue to have the upper hand against local regulators and users.

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