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How Context Matters: Change and Persistence of Homophobic Attitudes among Cameroonian Migrants in Switzerland

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Abstract: Debates on human rights in recent years have brought to the fore stark fault lines between African countries, where societal intolerance towards homosexuality is prevalent, and Western countries, which hold more tolerant views towards homosexuality. As contention rages around African identity and homosexuality, one interesting question calls for attention: how do the attitudes of Africans towards homosexuality evolve—or not—when they migrate from their home context to a more open society where homosexuality is widely accepted? This study draws on Herek's 'attitudes toward lesbians and gay men scale' (ATLG) to investigate homophobia among Cameroonians at home compared to Cameroonian migrants in Switzerland and uses in-depth interviews to understand the reasons for any change in or persistence of attitudes. Survey data shows that Cameroonian migrants in Switzerland portray significantly less homophobia compared to Cameroonians living at home. Qualitative analysis identified four factors that contributed to change in attitudes among Cameroonian migrants: (i) experiencing racial prejudice and xenophobia prompted self-reflection about their own prejudices towards others; (ii) witnessing, first-hand, the huge infrastructure and development gap between their host and home country exposed anti-homosexuality politics back home as a needless distraction from actual development priorities; (iii) greater opportunities to meet and interact with gay people in the host country challenged long-held home-grown stereotypes about homosexuality; and (iv) non-discrimination standards and codes of conduct in the workplace in the host country encouraged conformity and shifts towards greater tolerance.

Keywords: homophobia; homosexuality; attitudes; acculturation; un-African; institutions; immigrants

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1. Introduction

The year 2000 was a watershed moment for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) rights. The Netherlands made history by being the first country in the world to adopt legislation granting marriage and adoption rights to same-sex couples. By closing what was seen as the last vestige of unequal liberties that deprived same-sex couples of privileges that were commonplace for heterosexual couples, the legislation demonstrated that legal egalitarianism for same-sex couples was possible. Importantly, it signaled that what is possible here is probably possible elsewhere. In this sense, the law was a formidable boost to advocates of gay and lesbian rights worldwide. Over the past 22 years following this landmark legislation, rights for nonconforming sexual minorities have increased in several countries. In 2011, the United Nations Human Rights Council gave further impetus to global advocacy for LGBTQ rights by passing a landmark resolution that expressed "grave concern at acts of violence and discrimination, in all regions of the world, committed against individuals because of their sexual orientation and gender identity" [1] (p. 1). To date, after the Netherlands, 31 other countries have followed suit and enacted laws recognizing same-sex marriage [2]. In addition, many countries in Europe have also put in place legislation that prohibits discrimination based on one's sexuality. Public information campaigns on 'freedom and equality' geared towards underscoring LGBTQ rights are also commonplace in many large European cities. Such progress in addressing inequality

through the expansion of rights of sexual minority groups is, however, unequal across the world.

Africa stands out as a region where homosexuality remains criminalized in several countries (32 of Africa's 54 countries outlaw same-sex sexuality), with South Africa being the only country on the continent that has legalized same-sex marriage. In addition to being unlawful, societal intolerance or contempt towards homosexuality is rife in many African countries [3], notably driven by legal prohibition, politicization of the discourse on homosexuality, and religious conservatism [4–9]. With such extreme polarized positions on homosexual rights between African and Western countries at the aggregate level, Africa has become the new frontline where pro-gay activists, on the one hand, and anti-gay proponents on the other hand, converge for a showdown. Increased advocacy from human rights groups and efforts by Western countries "to lure Africa into legalizing homosexuality and same-sex marriage through economic and political pressure, threats and sanctions" have been met with strong pushback [10] (p. 152). In several countries, the increased public discourse around homosexual rights seemed to provoke an upsurge in public condemnation of homosexuality and its crackdown by law enforcement officials [11]—including, but not limited to, Cameroon [12], Uganda [13], Nigeria [14], and Zambia [15].

In Cameroon, for instance, in 2011, two men were arrested on grounds that their dressing was effeminate. They were subsequently sentenced to five years in prison on suspicion of being gay and only released two years later following a successful appeal of the ruling. In another case, a man, Roger Jean-Claude Mbédé, was arrested and sentenced to three years in jail for sending a text message to another man saying he loved him very much. Mbédé would later die after his early release two years later from a hernia that he developed while in prison and for which he got no treatment. In Uganda, anti-homosexuality rhetoric reached a crescendo in 2009 when a member of Parliament (David Bahati) tabled a bill—notoriously dubbed the "Kill the Gays" bill—that sought to further outlaw same-sex sexuality by introducing the death penalty for homosexuality. That same year in Burundi, where no legislation existed against same-sex practice, President Pierre Nkurunziza signed a new law—following national assembly approval—that criminalized homosexuality. Meanwhile, in Nigeria, the national assembly approved an antigay bill in 2013 that further tightened criminal sanctions against homosexuality and which President Goodluck Jonathan signed into law the following year. These developments received significant attention and condemnation in Western media as violations of human rights, portraying Africa as a hub of homophobia.

The argument put forward and especially touted by African leaders for the pushback against gay rights consists of three interrelated facets, namely that homosexuality: (i) is 'un-African'—meaning, it is alien to African cultural and historical practices, (ii) is 'unnatural'—it is a cultivated vice that is against the order of things or habitual sexual practice, and (iii) is a form of 'cultural imperialism' from an immoral West [16–20]. Several researchers have critically examined these assertions, which have, as a central theme, the issue of African identity or 'Africanness'. Under scrutiny, these claims have been rebuked as flimsy scaffolding that prop podiums of discrimination and hate.

Murray and Roscoe [21], Epprecht [22,23], and Tessman [24] have established that same-sex sexuality existed in traditional African societies. These findings demonstrate that the claims of Africanness as an identity 'pure' of homosexual practice are as false as they are spectacular. Furthermore, several studies have underscored that laws criminalizing homosexuality were introduced by Western colonial powers into African societies that were tolerant towards nonconforming sexualities [25–27]. M'Baye [28] (p. 123) explains that "it is not *homosexuality* but rather homophobia that was a colonial imposition", and this has "produced the denial of the Africanness of homosexuality that we see in contemporary Senegal". With conservative Christianity playing a strong role in fanning antigay attitudes in Africa, Jaji [29] (p. 2) queries that "it is puzzling how African Christians question the "Africanness" of homosexuality without questioning the "Africanness" of Christianity". This is indeed puzzling as Christianity was both a tool and product of the colonization of

Africa, and is the appropriated value system against which many Africans now judge the unnaturalness of homosexuality.

Castigating the un-African argument even further, Tamale [30] underlines that the claim is based on a reductionist and inaccurate assumption that there exists a monolithic and homogenous African culture that is heterosexual. She points to a common pattern in some sub-Saharan African countries where leaders who sought to consolidate their stay in power exploited these assumptions for political gain. Specifically, they used homosexuals as scapegoats; presenting them as a menace to African moral values and identity in a bid to divert the attention of the electorate from real development challenges that the government has failed to address. Further to this, Msibi [31] explains that in the highly patriarchal African context, homosexuality is seen as a threat to men's position of power. In this sense, the misleading claims of same-sex behavior as un-African are in fact sexist efforts aimed at asserting or preserving men's dominant role and image in society. This argument especially resonates when one observes that homosexuality is not the first target against which conservatives in Africa have waged war by deploying the 'un-African' construct. Other targets include feminism [32], contraception and family planning [33,34], and abortion [35].

The large body of existing research works that critically examine the argument of homosexuality as un-African have cleared the air on this issue quite abundantly. This is much appreciated as it allows for this paper to prioritize a different and less researched dimension, namely, how are the attitudes of Africans towards homosexuality affected when they move from the restrictive political and sociocultural African context to a more permissive Western setting, where there is greater tolerance towards homosexuality? What factors influence the change in or persistence of attitudes towards homosexuality?

Empirical research on homophobia among Africans has predominantly focused on how the cultural and political context in African countries influences how home populations—'Africans living in Africa'—perceive homosexuality [36–39]. Very few studies have attempted to explore how the attitudes of Africans are changed by the experience of living in the diaspora—Doyal et al. [40] are among the few who have investigated how African gay men living in London deal with the tensions of being African and being gay. How living in the diaspora (specifically outside the African continent) affects the attitudes of Africans toward homosexuality remains a neglected issue. With due recognition that Africa is a diverse continent, including in terms of state laws around homosexuality [41], this study contributes towards filling the above research gap by analyzing attitudes towards homosexuality among Cameroonians living at home vis-à-vis Cameroonians living in Switzerland. The article adopts Picken's [42] (p. 44) definition of attitudes as "a mindset or a tendency to act in a particular way due to both an individual's experience and temperament". The opinions people express are used as a proxy for understanding their attitudes towards homosexuality.

2. Method and Hypotheses

Cameroon and Switzerland were selected as case studies based on purposive sampling, considering the exploratory nature of the study. Purposive case selection makes "an important contribution to the inferential process by enabling researchers to choose the most appropriate cases for a given research strategy" [43] (pp. 295–296). Investigating how change in context matters in shaping attitudes can be adequately accomplished through a selection of cases that represent 'typical examples' of the two very different contexts under study—namely, the restrictive socio-political context towards homosexuality in Africa and the more permissive context in the West. In addition, data accessibility considerations, notably the feasibility of gathering data through large surveys (n = 100 and higher), were a complementary factor for the case study choice.

In Cameroon, homosexuality is illegal, and the law criminalizing same-sex behavior was promulgated in 1972 (Section 347 of the penal code). The penalty for homosexual acts includes a prison sentence ranging from six months to five years and a fine of XAF 20,000–200,000 (USD 35–355). The law was seldom enforced by the state or evoked as an issue

of public debate. However, this changed in 2005 when the Archbishop of Yaounde, Monseigneur Tonyé Bakot, pointedly condemned homosexuality in his Christmas Eve sermon, and in January 2006, when three newspapers published lists of presumed homosexuals in government and other sectors in Cameroon [44]. The highly controversial publications, which were essentially void of evidence, thrust homosexuality into the limelight of public debate and stoked a hornets' nest of rumors, stereotypes, and public condemnation of homosexuality, as well as a rise in the prosecution of suspected homosexuals. The strong influence of Christianity [45] and widespread myths that view homosexuality as witchcraft and an occult practice [46] worked to create a context of highly negative attitudes towards homosexuality in the Cameroonian public. Anti-homosexuality sentiments were also reinforced by media framing of homosexuality as a transactional sexual practice used by morally corrupt government officials to gatekeep who gets access to professional opportunities [47].

While Cameroon has criminalized homosexuality for 50 years and counting, Switzerland decriminalized homosexuality in 1942 [48], and it passed legislation recognizing same-sex registered partnerships in 2007, following a referendum [49]. Furthermore, annual gay pride marches are a common practice in major Swiss cities, with planning typically carried out in coordination with the police who accompany the parade to facilitate smooth conduct and security if needed. More recently, in 2020, legislation prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation was passed after a referendum, in which 63.1% of voters approved [50]. In September 2021, Switzerland joined the fold of countries that legalize same-sex marriage following a referendum where two-thirds of voters (64%) voted in favor [51]. Many politicians and leaders at different levels of the Swiss government are openly gay, unlike in Cameroon, where coming out as gay would be political suicide and would elicit considerable social stigma.

The Swiss context presented here in no way implies an absence of homophobia within Swiss society. In a survey conducted among 897 heterosexual high school students in the Swiss canton of Aargau, 47.7% percent of respondents indicated that they had "called someone they did not like a fag, a queer, or gay during the previous 12 months" [52] (p. 139). No society is free of homophobia; homophobia takes many shades and even in societies where homosexuality is legal, other more subtle shades of homophobia might persist [53]. That said, Switzerland is tremendously open towards homosexuality when compared to the repressive Cameroonian context, thus making the selected case studies suitable for testing the hypotheses on how change in context affects attitudes.

The study used a survey to test the following null hypothesis (H0) and alternate hypotheses (H1 and H2):

Hypothesis 0 (H0). *Cameroonian migrants in Switzerland portray similar levels of homophobia as Cameroonians living in Cameroon.*

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Cameroonian migrants in Switzerland portray significantly less homophobia compared to Cameroonians living in Cameroon.*

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *Cameroonian migrants in Switzerland portray significantly higher levels of homophobia relative to Cameroonians living in Cameroon.*

The questionnaire used in the survey was based on Herek's [54] attitudes toward lesbian and gay men (ATLG) scale, which is one of the most popular tools in literature for measuring homophobia. Herek's ATLG scale, which consists of 20 questions, has proven suitable for investigating attitudes toward gay men and lesbians in different contexts [55–57]. The questions touch on the key issues of contention that characterize debates about homosexuality, such as the criminalization of same-sex sexuality, gay marriage, adoption rights for homosexuals, discrimination in work, etc., thus, making it a good tool to tease out people's attitudes. The respondents were asked to express their views on each

question against a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree (Appendix A).

For reasons of feasibility, the survey conducted in Cameroon was delimited to the two English-speaking regions (Northwest and Southwest regions), and in Switzerland, the survey focused on Cameroonian migrants living in Geneva for at least the past three years. Acknowledging that time is an important factor when it comes to attitudinal changes within a given context, the study assumed that three years was sufficient time for Cameroonian migrants to have been well exposed to the context around homosexuality in Switzerland. A total of 400 questionnaires were completed in Cameroon, and 100 questionnaires were completed among Cameroonian migrants in Geneva since Cameroonian migrants in Switzerland constitute a smaller population when compared to Cameroonians at home. Both surveys targeted respondents aged between 21 and 60 years old, with purposeful efforts to achieve a measure of gender balance (a 52% male and 48% female ratio among the home-based Cameroonians and a 54% male and 46% female divide for the Cameroonian migrants in Switzerland). The survey participants in both contexts were highly diverse and included people from various professions and sectors of society, such as education, health, public administration, and the private sector, to list a few. This diversity helped to mitigate issues of selection bias in the sample.

The questionnaires were either self-administered or administered by the researcher, depending on the preference of the participants. Prior to handing out or administering questionnaires, the researcher reassured the participants that their responses would be handled with absolute confidentiality. The respondents were requested to participate in the study on the condition that doing so posed no risk to them. The participants were identified using purposeful sampling and snowballing, whereby an initial diverse group of selected respondents were asked to provide contact information for other people within their social network who could be approached. While such non-random sampling has drawbacks in terms of wide generalizability of the research findings, they are appropriate for research that is exploratory [58,59]. Non-random sampling is therefore useful in the case of this study where the objective is preliminary testing of hypotheses that can subsequently be examined with larger probabilistic sampling.

The survey data were complemented with in-depth interviews conducted among some Cameroonian migrants in Switzerland. This provided rich qualitative data to understand the factors and processes implicated in the change or persistence of attitudes towards homosexuality. Combining quantitative and qualitative approaches (mixed method research design) brought forth "different strands of knowledge" [60] (p. 275) that complemented each other to fully answer the research questions. A total of nine semi-structured interviews were conducted (with four females and five males), and the interview candidates were drawn from among those survey respondents who had indicated they would be interested in further discussing their views on homosexuality. The participants selected for the interviews included a mix of survey respondents, who had expressed positive views, negative views, and a middle-ground stance on homosexuality. The interviews were analyzed through an inductive process that entailed identifying common codes or themes in the qualitative data. Following this, four of the nine people interviewed (three males and one female) were invited for a focused group discussion. The focused group discussion was moderated by the researcher in an informal setting. This encouraged a lively debate among the participants that was "suited to examine, correct, and develop" the interpretations drawn from the coding analysis [61] (p. 8). The focused group discussions, together with key theoretical premises on context and attitude change that are summarized below, served to support analytical interpretation of the themes drawn from the semi-structured interviews—and by so doing supported internal validation of the findings.

3. Theoretical Frameworks on How Context Affects Attitudes

Perhaps the greatest project that humans have ever embarked upon in the construction of societies, is the shaping of attitudes, from which behaviors, actions, and outcomes

emerge. Attitude theorists, Prislin and Wood [62] (p. 672) argue that "all attitudes are social in the sense that they develop, function, and change in a reciprocal relation with a social context". Similarly, Pickens [42] (p. 45) notes that "our attitudes are influenced by the social world and our social world is influenced by our attitudes". Understanding, therefore, how change of social context influences attitudes may provide useful insights upon which researchers can opine about approaches, circumstances, and processes that could be effective in changing attitudes and constructing fairer societies. Thus, it comes as no surprise that a great deal of research attention has been directed towards theorizing about how change of context matters in shaping attitudes.

Acculturation theory, for instance, proposes a set of premises that seek to explain the intercultural influences that occur "when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact" [63] (p. 149). Berry's [64] model of acculturation is particularly useful as it provides a clear overview of the types of outcomes to expect when individuals move from one socio-cultural context to another where they are the minority. It argues that an individual who moves to a new cultural context faces four possible options in terms of their attitudes and interactions, namely (i) assimilation: they decide to completely change their cultural views in preference of the new culture, (ii) separation: they decide to hold on to their original culture and refuse to embrace the new culture, (iii) integration: they decide to mix both cultures, maintaining certain aspects of their original culture while embracing some aspects of the new culture, and (iv) marginalization: they lose their cultural values and norms but do not take up the new culture, due to exclusion or discrimination that isolates them in the new context.

What form acculturation or adaptation takes in the new culture depends on how well individuals manage the emotional and mental conflicts—known as acculturation stresses—associated with balancing between the contradictory values, norms, and rules that make up the two cultures [65]. Acculturation theory points to important factors (including age, gender, religion, education, and the level of difference between the two cultures) that could affect the degree of adaptation to a new culture. However, it does not clarify the dynamic interpersonal processes through which attitude shaping occurs. Dynamic social impact theory, championed by Latané [66], provides additional perspective in this regard that assists analysis of qualitative data in this study.

Dynamic social impact theory posits that individuals in close proximity exchange information continuously through social communication and by so doing, they influence each other's beliefs and attitudes. It argues that the extent to which an individual adopts the beliefs, values, and norms of others with whom they are in close proximity is proportional to their closeness, the regularity of contact, and the strength of the communication. Furthermore, people in close proximity will become more and more similar in attitudes to each other than to people far away. This will eventually result in a reduction of diversity in the given context as more people with minority views will be pressured to join the dominant view. That said, Latané also notes that some minority views will inevitably endure because when "people become committed to a position, they may exhibit little change in response to social pressure until the force to change outweighs the force to stay" [66] (p. 22). Therefore, while presenting a somewhat optimistic view of the influential role of social communications on attitude change, dynamic social impact theory also sounds a word of caution–that this ability to influence has its limits when attitudes are deeply embedded or highly institutionalized.

This word of caution is pertinent to this study given the focus on Cameroonian migrants in whose minds the home context would have played a strong role in embedding negative attitudes towards homosexuality. Institutional theory, which generally defines institutions as the collection of rules, norms, and cultural values that structure social action [67,68], shares the guarded view that institutionalized beliefs are stable, persistent, and resistant to change [69,70]. While being resilient to change, institutions can change, moving individuals and societies in directions that they previously would have thought inconceivable or inappropriate, as some Africans might believe about homosexual rights.

Changes in the rules, norms, and values that an individual identifies with sometimes come about abruptly due to a crisis [71] or a "stressor" if one relates back to a similar viewpoint from acculturation theory. Most of the time, however, institutional change happens incrementally [72].

DiMaggio and Powell [73] (p. 149) argue that institutional change occurs through institutional isomorphism, "a constraining process that forces units in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental condition". Such isomorphism or homogeneity takes place through three mechanisms: (i) coercion: where formal and informal rules dictate behavior, (ii) mimicry: where some units in the given context imitate the practices and values of others, and (iii) normative influence: where units in the population are socialized into the prevailing traditions, practices, or codes of conduct, such that these become part of their identity. Though inspired by research at the level of organizations, this analytical framework of institutional change can be transposed to micro-level analyses at the individual level since "it is at the level of individuals that norms, rules, habits, conventions and values exist" [70] (p. 603). Institutional isomorphism, like dynamic social impact theory, suggests a likelihood that Cameroonian migrants living in Switzerland would be acculturated to adopt less negative attitudes towards homosexuality. With these theoretical perspectives in the backdrop, and considering that "attitudes are windows on identity" [74] (p. 89), lets now turn to the empirical data to see what it tells us about how living in a more gay-friendly society influences the attitudes of Cameroonian migrants.

4. Survey Results

As a first step in analyzing the survey data, an average attitude score was calculated for each respondent on a 1–5 scale based on the responses they provided to the 20 questions in the ATLG questionnaire. An average individual attitude score of 1 represented high tolerance towards homosexuality, while a score of 5 denoted high intolerance. XLSTAT was then used to generate histograms and boxplots from the two datasets (home-based Cameroonians and Cameroonians in Switzerland), permitting an astute comparative visualization of the distribution of attitudes in the two contexts (Figures 1 and 2).

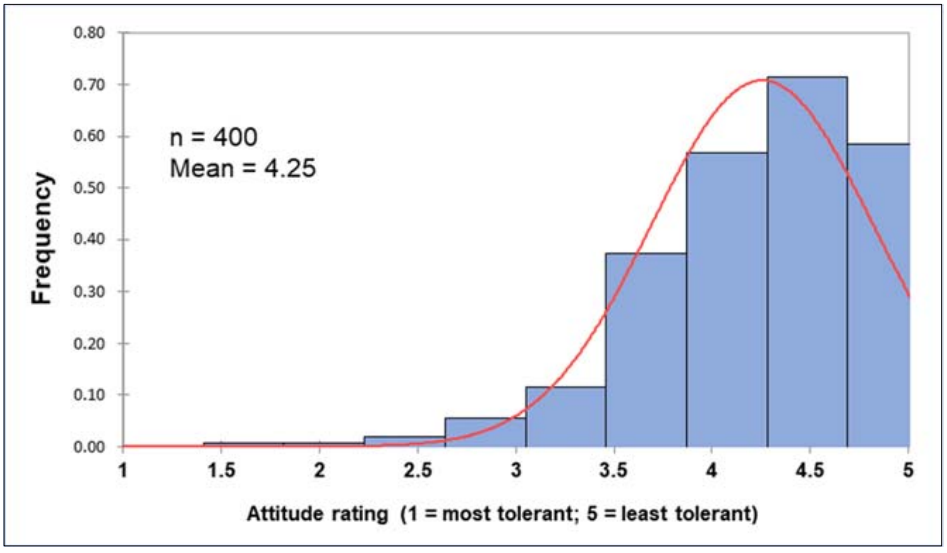

Figure 1. Attitudes among home-based Cameroonians.

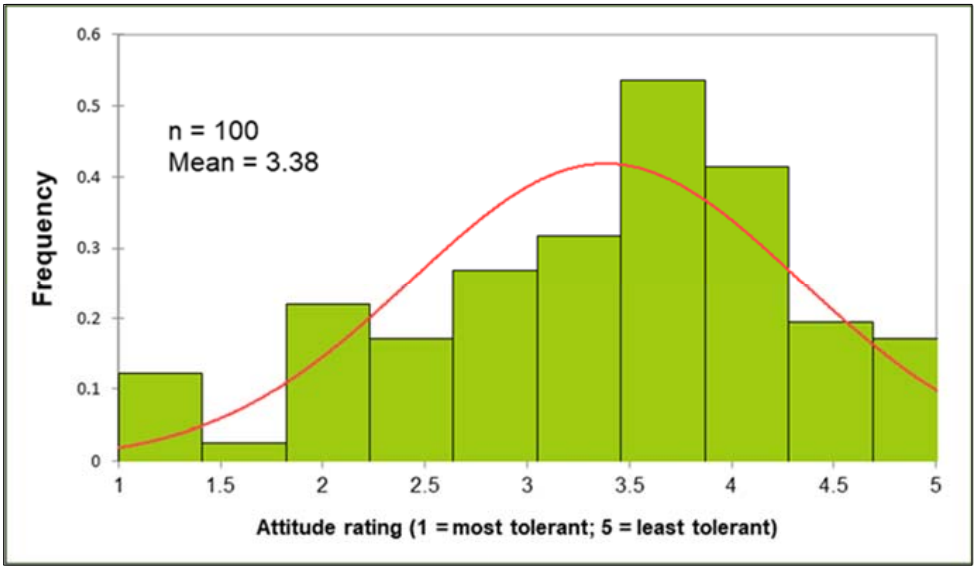

Figure 2. Attitudes among Cameroonian migrants in Switzerland.

The histogram distributions show that, among home-based Cameroonians, attitudes towards homosexuality are highly skewed towards intolerance (Figure 1). In this group, the mean attitude score is 4.25 on the 5-point scale—equivalent to a homophobia ratio rating of 0.85. This finding comes as no surprise. A survey conducted by the Afrobarometer Project in 2014 among a randomized sample of 1200 Cameroonians showed that 80% of the respondents would "strongly dislike" having homosexuals as neighbors, while 5% reported they would "somewhat dislike" this [75]. Additionally, numerous qualitative studies, as previously highlighted, have argued that the prevailing socio-cultural and political context in Cameroon breeds strong negative attitudes towards homosexuality [44,45,76,77]. The quantitative findings in this study corroborate and complement these studies and provide a benchmark against which attitudes among Cameroonian migrants in Switzerland can be compared. The histogram for Cameroonian migrants in Switzerland shows a more symmetrical and balanced distribution of attitudes towards homosexuality (Figure 2), with a lower mean attitude score of 3.38 on the 5-point scale, which equates to a lower homophobia ratio rating of 0.67.

Analyzing the datasets with boxplots further brings out the differences between the two sampled groups. The boxplot for the home-based Cameroonians shows a high level of homogeneity or congruence in negative attitudes (Figure 3), with 50% of the respondents falling between attitude scores of 3.95 and 4.70—which represents an interquartile range (IQR) of 0.75. The respondents' attitudes are so clustered in the region of intolerant views that the whiskers of the boxplot only span between the attitude scores of 3–5, with positive attitude scores appearing as outliers. This high level of homogeneity in attitudes within the home-based group points to a strong influence that the home context has in producing and sustaining commonly shared views against homosexuality. In comparison, the boxplot for Cameroonian migrants in Switzerland shows a greater heterogeneity in attitudes, as evidenced by the interquartile range of 1.33 (Q1 of 2.73 and Q3 of 4.06), which is almost double that of the home-based group. Greater heterogeneity in attitudes within the diasporic group is further demonstrated by the boxplot whiskers, which span the full range of attitude scores from 1–5, as opposed to the shorter whiskers for the home-based group.

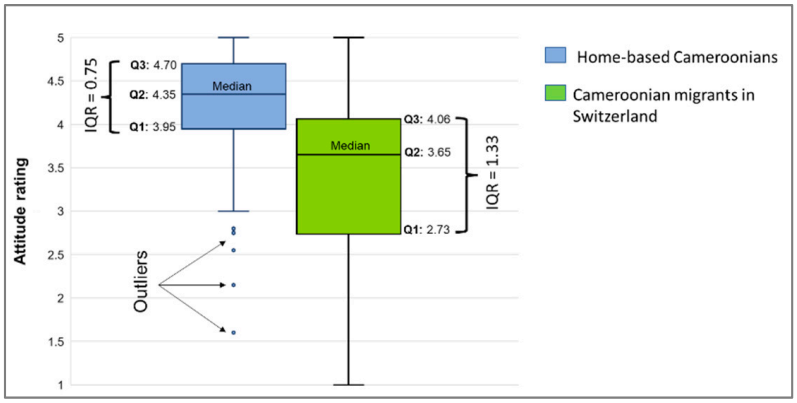

Figure 3. Boxplot analysis of attitudes in the home-based and diaspora groups.

To test whether the difference in the mean attitude scores (between the home-based and diaspora groups) is statistically significant, a *t*-test was computed automatically using XLSTAT at a 95% confidence level ($\alpha = 0.05$). The calculation returns a *p*-value of 0.0001 (i.e., less than α), thus rejecting the null hypothesis (H0), which held that Cameroonian migrants in Switzerland portray similar levels of homophobia as Cameroonians living in Cameroon. The alternate hypothesis, *H1: Cameroonian migrants in Switzerland portray significantly less homophobia compared to Cameroonians living in Cameroon*, is thus confirmed as being correct (*t*-test calculations and descriptive statistics for the histograms are provided in the Supplementary Material). The comparative survey analysis discussed here suggests that acculturation might be at play in the diasporic group, with shifts in attitudes happening due to new influences from the Swiss context. To shed more light on this speculation, let us turn to evidence from the qualitative interviews conducted among the diaspora group.

5. Discussion: Understanding Attitudes among Cameroonian Migrants

5.1. Change of Homophobic Attitudes

Attitude formation and change come about through a variety of processes that may include emotions, conscious choices, unconscious biases, explicit rules, and implicit cues [78]. Within this rather complex terrain of elements that influence attitude formation, an important common denominator is the individual's experience—be it in the form of information the person is exposed to, directives they are influenced to follow, or ways in which they are treated. Consequently, when attempting to understand attitudes in a given context, it is vital to pay attention to peoples' accounts of their experiences, as this provides clues about the factors and processes that contribute to shaping or changing attitudes. In this study, the qualitative interviews among Cameroonians living in Switzerland focused on eliciting rich 'stories' about the interviewees' lives and experiences in the diaspora. The qualitative data from these stories were analysed through process tracing, which allows causal inference to be drawn by identifying the mechanisms through which a particular experience or action produced an outcome [79,80]. The following four points stood out in the interviewee stories as factors that strongly influenced a shift in attitudes towards greater tolerance of homosexuals: (i) experiences of racial prejudice and xenophobia in the diaspora, (ii) greater exposure to the huge development gap between the West and Africa, (iii) opportunities to meet and interact with gay people, and (iv) requirements to conform to non-discriminatory codes of conduct in the workplace.

(i) Experiences of racial prejudice and xenophobia in the diaspora

Interview respondents noted that, upon migrating to Switzerland, they quickly became conscious of their minority status as 'black African foreigners', at whom a variety of negative stereotypes were directed, such as being illegal, poor, uneducated, dirty, desperate, drug dealers, violent, dishonest, lazy, etc. These stereotypes manifested in repeated instances of racist and xenophobic treatments that ranged from frequent document checks

by the police, verbal abuse, disproportionate difficulties in securing rented accommodation, difficulties in finding employment for which they were qualified, and discrimination in school and in the workplace. These experiences prompted some of them to self-reflect and query the prejudices they harbored towards others, including towards homosexuals. One respondent notes: "*being discriminated upon as a black foreigner in Switzerland made me realize how much we Africans and Cameroonians discriminate against our own people for different reasons including sexuality*". Another respondent remarks: "*given how I was treated in Switzerland because I happen to be born elsewhere or because I look different made me rethink how I treat people who are different from me*".

As host country of several international humanitarian organizations, including the headquarters of the United Nations in Europe, Switzerland enjoys a reputation on the world stage as the global capital of peace, tolerance, diplomacy, and human rights. This reputation is also supported by the longstanding Swiss policy of neutrality in world politics. Behind this reputation, however, there exists anti-immigration sentiments both in Swiss politics and within the local population that predispose foreigners, especially Africans, refugees, and undocumented migrants, to overt and subtle discrimination experiences. Michel [81], for instance, notes the widely circulated racist sheep cartoon of the Swiss People's Party (SVP) in 2007 that carried the slogan "For greater security" and depicted three white sheep standing on the Swiss flag, one of which was kicking out a black sheep with its hind legs. In 2019, a European Commission report on Switzerland noted that "institutional and structural racism continues to be a problem in the police", and this manifests as "racial profiling and identity checks targeting notably persons with itinerant ways of life and black persons" [82] (p. 7).

Importantly, interviewees' stories repeatedly highlighted that being at the receiving end of racial prejudice and xenophobia profoundly affected them emotionally. One respondent explains that these experiences "*deeply affected*" her, with each incident of discriminatory treatment evoking memories of past ones, thus, compounding her distress. Another respondent recounted his accommodation search experiences, wherein each time he showed up to view an advertised room in a shared flat, he was told the room was no longer available. When he was running out of options and was almost homeless, a young white woman accepted him as a flatmate. Incidentally, the outgoing tenant of the vacant room he was inheriting was a gay person. He remarked that difficulties he experienced due to prejudice and the woman's attitude of tolerance "*marked*" him and predisposed him to empathize with the struggles and anguish that other victimized groups like homosexuals face.

Some experiences activate emotions in people, and emotions, as Albarracin and Shavitt [83] (p. 3) note, act as strong "forces that form and transform existing attitudes". The respondents' stories show that a change in attitude among some Cameroonian migrants was an emotive response resulting from their exposure to different forms of minority discrimination in the Swiss context. Ironically, the prejudices they experienced in the Swiss context are not so different from the prejudices they strongly held against homosexuals prior to moving to Switzerland. This irony holds lessons for Africans who jump on the bandwagon and subscribe to the popular condemnation of homosexuals without considering that the tools of discrimination deployed against LGBTQ people are often very similar to those mobilized in racism and xenophobia.

(ii) Greater exposure to the huge development gap between the West and Africa

It is common knowledge that African countries, like Cameroon, lag behind Western countries like Switzerland, in terms of development. This is unequivocally conveyed in the World Bank terms 'developing' and 'developed' nations that, respectively, refer to the two contexts. While aware of this development divide prior to moving to Switzerland, some interview respondents highlighted that they were still "*struck*" with awe when they experienced first-hand how advanced the Swiss context was in terms of infrastructure and quality of social amenities. Realizing how far Cameroon lagged behind in comparison

motivated them to question the level of importance they, as individuals, and the wider Cameroonian society, place on homosexuality. One respondent observed that development is constant in Switzerland to the extent that even when a road is still in good shape, the Swiss "*fix it and make it great*". Another respondent remarks, "*why do we focus on homosexuality as an issue in Cameroon? We have other problems and there is so much to do, from infrastructure, to education, to healthcare, and addressing poverty*".

The relative levels of importance that an individual attaches to different issues or values contributes to shaping their attitude [84]. People's value priorities are, themselves, subject to influence from the prevailing opinions in their society and from agendas advanced or manipulated by powerful voices and actors in the society. The dominant public discourse in Cameroon that frames homosexuality as a threat to a cherished African identity elevates the level of importance that Cameroonians at home place on homosexuality as an issue of social concern. This explains the high levels of homophobia and the homogeneity in views observed in the analysis of the survey data among home-based Cameroonians. Some of the interviewed Cameroonian migrants in Switzerland noted that, prior to migrating from Cameroon, they agreed with the mainstream anti-gay discourse and were strong in their opinions against the decriminalization of homosexuality. However, such views were no longer tenable when they witnessed the high level of development in Switzerland and realized how misplaced it was for Africans to be concerned about what happens in the bedrooms of consenting adults when so many real development priorities remain unaddressed in African countries. To one respondent, for instance, the continued focus on criminalizing homosexuality seems like "*nonsense*" when one awakens to the real magnitude of the North–South development gap and the arduous economic challenge at stake for Africa. With such an awakening, some Cameroonian migrants identified with the often-ignored position that anti-gay statements by African leaders are "blatant attempts to distract attention from national problems such as rampant corruption, insecurity, and poor public service delivery" [85] (p. 9).

(iii) Opportunities to meet and interact with gay people

The intolerant legal and social climate towards homosexuality in Cameroon forces gay people to live closeted lives for fear of being found out, harassed, reported to the police, imprisoned, or worse. While survey data show high levels of homophobia in Cameroon, the vast majority of people who hold these strong negative views have never actually met or interacted with a gay person. In other words, the homophobia in Cameroon (and in many other African countries) is directed at faceless and nameless people whom the heterosexual majority consider worthless in society. Hate flourishes when the people exercising it are very detached from the people or group at who their hate is directed.

Living in Switzerland provided some Cameroonian migrants with an opportunity to meet, interact, and socialize with gay people for the first time, for instance, in university, at work, or socially as friends of their friends. These social interactions allowed them to see the 'humanity' in gay people, which dispelled the stereotypes they initially held, such as the infamous myth of homosexuality as an occult practice that is prevalent in Cameroon. Some respondents noted that, in the workplace, they found their gay colleagues to be competent, friendly, supportive, and empathetic, sometimes even more so than their heterosexual colleagues. One respondent, for instance, notes, "*I had certain reservations about homosexuality when I was in Cameroon. Here in Switzerland, I became very good friends with someone . . . even though he is homosexual. We have become so close like brothers*". Several other studies have reached the conclusion that heterosexuals who have contact or interaction with gay people show more tolerance toward homosexuality than those who have little or no contact [86–89].

One interview respondent, Eric (pseudonym) recounted the story of his Cameroonian friend, Fred (pseudonym), who came out as gay in Switzerland. Eric explained that Fred was a gentle and kind-hearted person who frequently helped others. Although they had been friends for several years, Eric had no idea Fred was gay until they both migrated

to Switzerland. Fred's coming out as gay dramatically changed Eric's attitude towards homosexuality as he realised his good friend lived an unhappy life in Cameroon. Eric remarked that, following this realization, he could no longer agree with "*a law that would put such a kind-hearted person [like Fred] in prison*". This case raises hopes that perhaps increased visibility of gay people in Africa could gradually succeed in getting Africans to see—and hopefully accept—the fact that homosexuals are not distant, faceless, and nameless people. In late November 2021, social media in Cameroonian circles buzzed wild with leaked lesbian sex videos involving the former captain of Cameroon's female football team, Gaëlle Enganamouit. As highly regrettable as this incident was, perhaps there is some consolation in its revelation that the homosexuals so hated by Cameroonians could be a sister, a brother, a close friend, or a figure of national pride, like Gaëlle Enganamouit, who was forced by an outdated law to live in the shadows.

The increased visibility of homosexuals in Africa has increased homophobia [5,90]. This could suggest that the social context for some homosexuals in Africa might have been better if they remained hidden and silent. However, such thinking would be flawed as the increased visibility is important for Africans to see and begin to acknowledge that homosexuals are inherent in their community. Like Wysor [91] (p. 125) asserts, "homosexuals are all around. They're not just somewhere "out there". They are in one's own family—they could be one's doctor, one's minister, one's friend, husband, wife, whatever".

(iv) Requirements to conform to non-discriminatory codes of conduct in the workplace

For Cameroonian migrants in Switzerland, the workplace is a space of significant intercultural interaction given the considerable time they spend at work weekly, engaging with diverse people. Some respondents noted that behavior in their workplace is regulated by clear codes of conduct enshrined in values of non-discrimination and respect for others. A breach of these rules holds serious risks of dismissal, especially for those working in international humanitarian organizations. These codes of conduct and their associated risks of sanction influenced Cameroonian migrants to conform to the expected practices of non-discrimination against homosexuals. One respondent explains, "*in my organization, you can't be discriminatory towards other colleagues. There is zero tolerance for such attitudes. I found myself aligning my personal views more and more with the organization's codes of conduct on diversity and non-discrimination*".

Change of attitudes towards tolerance also came about through emulation of practices in the workplace and a desire to fit in the community of professionals in the given organization, as DiMaggio and Powell [73] argue in their processes of institutional isomorphism. One respondent notes, "*it is hard to work with people every day over several years and not be influenced by their behaviors or thinking on certain issues. I have learned tolerance towards others by seeing how people in my organization work together despite their different backgrounds*". For some Cameroonian migrants, following non-discrimination rules in the workplace progressively influenced them to appropriate these values as part of their personal opinions. In other words, 'practice makes permanent' was the mechanism through which change in attitudes occurred. For others, however, the rules remained a motion that they followed out of necessity. In private, these Cameroonians maintained their contempt for homosexuality, hiding it behind professional distance and polite smiles in the workplace. Despite being quite integrated into Swiss society in other aspects and despite having direct and regular contact with gay people in the workplace, their negative attitudes towards homosexuality persisted.

5.2. Persistence of Homophobic Attitudes

Institutional theory's argument that deeply embedded norms and values are stable and resistant to change provides good context for understanding the persistence of homophobic attitudes among Cameroonian migrants. Qualitative analysis identified two main factors

implicated in this persistence of negative attitudes: (i) continued attachment to religious beliefs and (ii) high in-group socialization among Cameroonian migrants.

(i) Continued attachment to religious beliefs

Religious practice is a prominent feature of the Cameroonian society. This is evident in the high religious service attendance in the Catholic, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches and in the tremendous rise of Pentecostal churches across the country. The Swiss context is profoundly different in comparison, with very low church attendance and "with services of churches increasingly sought only for baptisms, funerals, and weddings" [92] (p. 4). In effect, there is a trend of dwindling religiosity in Western European countries while places of worship are mushrooming in African countries [30,93]. Like in many other African countries, this rise in religiosity contributes significantly to antigay sentiments among Cameroonians.

For some Cameroonian migrants, religious beliefs continued to influence their attitudes towards homosexuality, even though they had moved to a context where religiosity was a marginal phenomenon. A respondent explains, "*my religious background defines my views about homosexuality. As a Christian, I completely dissociate from it*". Many Cameroonian migrants held on to their religious beliefs while in Switzerland by socializing in churches popular among the African diaspora and by remaining in close touch with their Pastors or religious mentors back home via social media platforms like WhatsApp groups. Through these platforms, they regularly received recorded sermons and bible scriptures, as well as religious messages from their Pastors aimed at motivating them in their 'hunt' for fortune in the diaspora ('the bush'). Given these close connections with their religious networks back home, they remained, to some degree, 'home while away from home' in terms of their religiosity, which explains the persistence of their negativity towards homosexuality. This case demonstrates that the definition of 'distance' and 'neighbor' as conceptualized in dynamic social impact theory and acculturation theory can in effect be blurred by technological innovations in communication, which bring people close even though long distances separate them.

(ii) High in-group socialization among Cameroonian migrants

In the qualitative interviews and in the comments section of the surveys, the research participants frequently used the phrase "we Africans" when sharing their personal views about homosexuality. This way of thinking about themselves as belonging to a bigger whole with shared values of solidarity and reciprocity reflects the strong sense of community that is a key feature of African identity. While social life in African countries is highly communitarian, the European context is more individualist [94]. The interviews showed Cameroonian migrants have a low sense of belonging in the individualist Swiss society and a sense of nostalgia for the communitarian way of life in Africa. This penchant for communitarianism led them to develop more frequent social interactions with their fellow Cameroonians and Africans (in-group socialization) than with Swiss people or other Westerners (out-group socialization). Cameroonians in Switzerland particularly value in-group socialization as it provides them the social structure to raise their children in the African way of life. They find this vital as it helps them manage the identity crisis their children face growing up in the diaspora.

These frequent in-group interactions among Cameroonian migrants reproduced and sustained the same types of taboo and shame around homosexuality that are dominant in African communities back home. The 'un-African' argument against homosexuality prevalent among home-based Cameroonians featured prominently in the data collected from research participants in Switzerland. Explaining her opposition to homosexual rights, a respondent for instance stated, " . . . *there is much propaganda about homosexual rights. As Cameroonians, [as Africans], we need to be faithful to who we are, and to our religious beliefs; we need to remain faithful to our core*". From the statement, one can observe the implied yet clear

thesis of the 'un-African' argument that makes it pernicious in promoting homophobia: the brazenly annoying thesis that 'bona fide Africans do not endorse homosexuality'.

6. Conclusions

Set against the backdrop of the lively debate about homosexuality as 'un-African', this exploratory study embarked on a journey to examine whether the attitudes of Cameroonians change when they move from their home context, where homosexuality is criminalized, to a more gay-friendly society like Switzerland. Using survey data, the study demonstrates that Cameroonians in Switzerland hold significantly less homophobic attitudes when compared to their peers living in Cameroon. Four main mechanisms were found to contribute to the change in attitudes among the diaspora population, namely: (i) strong emotional impact from experiencing racism and xenophobia in the diaspora, which predisposed them to reconsider their own prejudices towards minority groups like homosexuals; (ii) a front row appreciation of the huge development disparity between Europe and Africa, which pushed them to change the value priority they placed on homosexuality as an issue of social concern; (iii) encountering and directly interacting with gay people in the Swiss context, which enabled them to see the 'humanity' in this minority group against whom they harbored insensitive and rash stereotypes; (iv) the existence of non-discrimination codes of conduct in the workplace, which socialized them into practicing tolerance and subsequently appropriating more tolerant values themselves. While attitudes changed somewhat among some Cameroonian migrants, negative views towards homosexuality endured in others. The persistence of anti-gay attitudes was primarily due to two factors: (i) the continued attachment to religious beliefs even while living in Switzerland, where churchgoing or religious practice is a marginal phenomenon when compared to the Cameroonian context, and (ii) high in-group socialization, which reproduces and sustains the negative stereotypes of homosexuality that are predominant in the home context.

While acknowledging the imperative to exercise caution in generalizing the above findings across all sub-Saharan Africans, this exploratory study raises interesting perspectives that might resonate with migrants from other African countries living in Europe—given the similarities in the politicization of homosexuality in African nations. The study invites other researchers to examine these findings through research on the diaspora of other African countries, using random data samples where possible. As researchers, we should take this to task, lest those who employ simplistic assumptions to make sweeping claims about the 'un-Africanness' of homosexuality now charge us of being unbalanced, undisciplined, and unreliable in our assessment of the change in and persistence of Africans' attitudes towards homosexuality.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at: https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/sexes3040038/s1, Table S1: Descriptive statistics for histogram on attitudes among home based Cameroonians.; Table S2: Descriptive statistics for histogram on attitudes among Cameroonian migrants in Switzerland. Table S3: *t*-test calculations in XLSTAT.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: This study was approved as appropriate in the context of doctoral research at the University of Basel specifically at the Graduate School of Social Sciences (G3S). Separate ethical approval was not necessary as all participants were briefed about the objectives of the research and agreed before participating (informed consent). Participants were assured of confidentiality and the presentation of data from the research was anonymized in this paper.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study. In addition, interviewee responses are anonymized in the article.

Data Availability Statement: Data for this study are available upon request. The data are not made publicly available because participants were assured of confidentiality.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Adaptation of Herek's ATLG Scale in Cameroon.

Questions		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	Lesbians just can't fit into our Cameroonian society					
2.	A woman's homosexuality should not be a cause for job discrimination in any situation					
3.	Female homosexuality is bad for society because it breaks down the natural divisions between the sexes					
4.	State laws against private sexual behaviour between consenting adult women should be abolished (that is cancelled)					
5.	Female homosexuality is a sin					
6.	The growing number of lesbians in Cameroon indicate a decline in morals					
7.	Female homosexuality in itself is no problem unless society makes it a problem					
8.	Female homosexuality is a threat to many of our basic social institutions					
9.	Female homosexuality is an inferior form of sexuality					
10.	Lesbians are sick					
11.	Male homosexual couples should be allowed to adopt children the same as heterosexual couples					
12.	I think male homosexuals are disgusting					
13.	Male homosexuals should not be allowed to teach in schools					
14.	Male homosexuality is a perversion (it is abnormal)					
15.	Male homosexuality is a natural expression of sexuality in men					
16.	If a man has homosexual feelings, he should do everything he can to overcome them					
17.	I would not be too upset if I learned that my son were a homosexual					
18.	Sex between two men is just plain wrong					
19.	The idea of male homosexual marriages seems ridiculous to me					
20.	Male homosexuality is merely a different kind of lifestyle that should not be condemned					

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