



## TRANSCRIPT

# "THE GLOBAL SEXUALITY FRONTIER"

*A Conversation With Mark Gevisser*

*Moderator: Daniel Wolfe*

### **ANNOUNCER:**

You are listening to a recording of the Open Society Foundations, working to build vibrant and tolerant democracies worldwide. Visit us at [OpenSocietyFoundations.org](http://OpenSocietyFoundations.org).

### **DANIEL WOLFE:**

Hi, everyone. My name is Daniel Wolfe and I'm the director of the harm reduction program. And I'm pleased to welcome you and especially pleased to welcome Mark Gevisser who's our-- speaker today. Mark is an acclaimed journalist and has published-- in venues as various as the *New York Times Foreign Affairs-- South African* and *Rand Daily Mail--* is that where you--

(OVERTALK)

### **MARK GEVISSER:**

The *Mail and Guardian* and-- yeah, yeah.

### **DANIEL WOLFE:**

The *Mail and Guardian*?

### **MARK GEVISSER:**

Yeah.

---

---

## DANIEL WOLFE:

*The Nation*, the *Village Voice* back when the *Village Voice* was a paper of substance in New York. (LAUGHTER) He is an accomplished biographer, most notably-- of the former South African President, Thabo Mbeki. He is a great cultural critic and analyst.

He is an activist-- and more recently and to the point, he is an OSF fellow. And-- we are going to hear from him today about some of his work that looks at sexuality, particularly bisexual, lesbian and gay sexuality and gender particularly-- what we would call, "transgender," although I think he might complicate that a little bit for us, and the intersection of local policy and practice and-- what we, in public health, might call, "international vectors." Although it sounds ominous and contagious and maybe Mark would call them, "flows," but basically global flows, whether that's of ideas and ideologies, for example, human rights, or whether that's a people-- for example, mass migration and urbanization or whether that's-- information, for example through the-- the-- the Internet age.

And-- obviously these are questions that touch a lot of us in our general work at OSF-- and I see representatives from various-- programs around the room. I don't think we'll take time to introduce everyone now but-- there will be a time for question and answers.

And it would be helpful, I think, for Mark and for the rest of us if you could-- when asking questions-- sort of state where you're coming from-- you know, what program at OSF you're working with. So-- I propose that we structure this as a conversation for-- like 15 or 20 minutes and then open it up for questions.

And I guess the first question from me has to do with one of the global flows that-- where we are most-- engaged or implicated which is about human rights on the one hand and particularly-- gay rights. There has been a lot of attention to-- what is attention particularly in Africa around sort of the export of evangelical right wing ideology and homophobia on the one hand.

And on the other-- what you have somewhat naughtily called, "the missionary position," of-- (LAUGHTER) gay rights advocates who are seeking to export a kind of universal norm of what gay rights should look like. And then, of course, there are the people in Uganda or in-- Senegal or other places who are sort of in the middle, making sense of this.

For those of us who are older, this is sort of reminiscent of the culture wars of the '80s but-- but-- but-- on a sort of global scale. And I know that you're framing it particularly with an eye toward what it means for sexuality. So what does it mean? (LAUGHTER)

## MARK GEVISSER:

Okay. I mean, maybe what-- the-- maybe th-- the best way into this is to tell

---

you about this document that I just distributed. So this is a summary of a very important meeting that happened in Oslo yesterday, in preparation for the Human Rights Council, the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva in June.

And it's part of a process of something that's been happening-- at the United Nations-- around-- getting specific-- about the protection of the rights of LGBT people-- within-- within the United Nations and-- by the universal declaration of human rights specifically to LGBT people.

And it's a process that has-- a kind of thr-- three year history-- and that began-- with an initiative by South Africa and Brazil which is very interesting because it didn't come from the global law, from the global West even though it must be said that a lot of strong arming was done behind the scenes by-- the United States and particularly Hillary Clinton and Susan Rice.

And it was an initiative to say, "We need to look at-- specifically-- protection of LGBT people." And that led to a report of the-- High Commission of Human Rights-- and led to an historic debate last year-- at the Human Rights Council, again c-- hosted by South Africa and Brazil-- saying, "We need to do something about this."

And now there's a possibility that there's gonna be a special rapporteur on violence against LGBT people appointed-- by the Human Rights Council. And this was-- this was a preliminary meeting of sort of friendly nations to strategize how to go-- go about doing that at the U.N. Now this p-- there-- there's a kind of counter force to that which is, at the same time that this has been happening, like if you like, using the cul-- using the-- culture wars analogy, in the blue states-- it is the blue states, right? The blue states are--

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

Blue states are--

**MARK GEVISSER:**

--are democratic?

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

Or us. (LAUGHTER) Sorry. Not that-- not that--

**MARK GEVISSER:**

No. But I'm gonna get-- I'm gonna get into the (UNINTEL PHRASE) in a minute because-- we are player-- we are players in these culture wars. So at the same time as-- as that-- that's happening in the blue states, something's happening in the global

---

red states, led by Russia.

And this is a movement to declare that-- traditional values and-- cultural sovereignty must limit the rollout of human rights; that these have to be taken to-- into account very seriously. And there was a counter-resolution at the Human Rights Commission which passed.

So you ha-- got these two resolutions that passed in the last year at the Human Rights Commission which are in opposition to each other, led by these two groups of nations. Obviously-- obviously the ramp of the red states is-- is the Islamic world.

But Russia playing its own sort of new Cold War games has decided to lead this movement. And-- and you-- I said, "new Cold War," advisedly because I think it is possible to understand what's happening as a kind of cul-- firstly as the culture war's gone global but also as a kind of new sort of Cold War style proxy war that's playing out-- between these two sides, sort of on the terrain, on the battlefield, on the bodies of people in the global (UNINTEL) I think it's-- I think it's-- it's a way to start but I think we need to complicate the--

## **DANIEL WOLFE:**

So I guess what--

## **MARK GEVISSER:**

--which is hopefully what I'm-- I'm-- what I'm gonna do here. But-- but just to finish the sketch-- these two-- these two sides have sh-- have shock teams. And-- the shock teams of the red states are Scott Lively-- the-- the people who are promoting family values, the American Christian Right, who-- who pretty much wrote the law in Uganda, the bill in Uganda, the anti-gay law that you all know about. But we are the shock team on the other side and-- and you particularly.

## **DANIEL WOLFE:**

We-- we, OSF, we the human rights community?

## **MARK GEVISSER:**

We, the Human Rights Commission community but-- but-- but, we/you specifically, OSF, given that OSF has an LGBT rights campaign, has a sharp-- has all these pro-- has all this programming that is-- it's very deliberate-- along with, you know, the Nordic countries and-- and organizations like HiVuS along with-- with-- with other foundations that do philanthropic work.

Is-- it's very doggedly and specifically setting up, if you like, or-- or en-- or-- or-- or

---

enabling kind of human rights outposts in these countries-- where-- where these conflicts have begun-- by capacitating-- human rights defenders and human rights advocates. So-- so this is-- a kind of a global-- dynamic that I think is really important to understand and I think that we can complicate in-- in-- in-- in many ways and hopefully we will today.

## **DANIEL WOLFE:**

So one complication or question-- because in that story of the sort of clashing global actors, the global South or-- or you know, I don't know how-- what you wanna call it but af-- I know that you have been, for example, in the course of your fellowship, already to Philippines, to India, to Senegal. And unfortunately, Sharpe and like Michael is not with us and Sharpe also has-- oh-- oh, Sharpe has a competing event but actually we have a representative from Sharpe here who works specifically on-- trans rights-- issues and health issues.

But I guess the question is-- I-- I don't think that-- many of our partners would like to be portrayed just as passive recipients of these-- clothes that wash over them and they are empty vessels waiting to be filled by our insights or that of the red team?

## **MARK GEVISSER:**

Right.

## **DANIEL WOLFE:**

I don't know how much-- or-- chance you've had to reflect on kind of the local-- interaction with these forces and sort of local agency.

## **MARK GEVISSER:**

Right. I mean, I was-- I was deliberately saying that-- crudely because that is, of course, how-- how the-- the red team sees us and that's how we see the red team. And-- and perhaps I can answer that question by-- by-- reporting back on a-- a meeting that I convened in Washington D.C. for OSF together with the human rights campaign and the Coalition for Global Equality which does lobbying work on LGBT-- issues-- in the American government.

And this is a meeting called, "The Global Export of Homophobia." And it was-- specifically a convening of-- of anybody who worked in-- in the field of looking at how the American religious right is exporting homophobia to the developing world.

And we sat in this meeting. The person who led this meeting is an extraordinary man, a Zambian cleric by the name of Kapya Kaoma who works for Political Research

---

Associates and who's written some-- who-- who's basically-- who's broken the story on how the American Christian right is-- fomenting homophobia in-- in sub-Saharan Africa, written two very powerful-- reports that I urge you to read.

One is called-- "Globalizing Culture Wars." The first one is called, "Globalizing Culture Wars," exactly this theory. And-- and-- and-- and Kapya's-- Kapya, as an African, as a-- as a non-homosexual African, speaks very powerfully about homophobia (SIREN)-- about how homophobia is a Western import, imported out through two waves of missionary activity.

The first being the sort of late Victorian-- 19th century colonial missionary activity. And the second way, of course, being what we're experiencing-- the likes of (UNINTEL) Lively. And there were some African participants at that meeting, pe-- LGBT human rights defenders who live and work in Africa who took great exception to the sketch and who said-- "This-- this kind of sketch denies us our own agency. We c-- we are capable of our own homophobic actions in Africa. We have had homophobic action-- actions way before-- the advent of colonial-- even though-- it was-- it was colonization that brought the penal code and the anti-sodomy legislation, there have been ways that (UNINTEL PHRASE) people have both been accepted and rejected in pre-colonial societies all over the world. Accept that."

And-- and-- and-- one of the participants, a man named-- Joe Amana who is-- a recipient of-- of OSF funding said, "If-- if you're going to say that Pastor Martin Ssempe," who was the most homophobic Ugandan preacher, "is nothing but an agent or a puppet-- or right wing Americans," then you could say exactly the same thing about me because you know, I learnt so much of what I know by working for IGLHRC, the International Lesbian and Gay Human Rights Council.

But I've taken that and indigenized it, you know? We are all-- we are Af-- all Afro-politan. We are all global citizens. We all work with (UNINTEL) Let's not be a socialist about this. And I think that that agency point is a-- is a really important one to understand.

But I think what's also important to understand, if one's going to accept that point, is-- is the way the-- well, this is maybe a little bit more contentious but I think really important is the-- is the way the LGBT paradigm is a Western paradigm that emerges out of a very specific set of economic and political circumstances going back a decade.

And-- we can talk about-- I'm sorry, not a decade, excuse me, a century. And we can talk about that. So there has always been homosexuality in all cultures. There has always been gender non-norm activity in all cultures. This notion of sexual minorities, of people claiming rights on the basis of an identity rather than a behavior, is something that can't-- that has developed-- through capitalist society and through liberal democracy.

And therefore, whether one is Joel Manna himself, whether one is-- whether one is somebody who is from the global Southeast countries in-- in places other than-- than North America or western Europe or whether-- or whether it's us, there's-- there's--

---

one needs to understand the implications of that.

I mean, it-- it doesn't mean to say that the notion of human rights are foreign to Uganda or the Philippines but there is a whole-- there is a whole kind of cultural, economic, political-- genealogy-- that needs to be understood if-- people are gonna be able to claim the-- their rights as-- as they want to and as we want to.

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

So a question about the indigenized version because I mean, one thing that you're saying is that-- actors who identify as-- and-- I mean, and the example used as, "gay," but I assume as L or G or B or T--

**MARK GEVISSER:**

Well, very few people (UNINTEL PHRASE) B but--

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

I know. B is a separate question and perhaps we will-- should bracket that-- that into--

(OVERTALK)

**MARK GEVISSER:**

And we're not even talking about I. (LAUGHTER)

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

I know. And we've left off I. But-- I wonder if-- if you have, in your travels, encountered-- groups that constitute themselves around the sexual identity that actually isn't the Western series of initials but is something-- I don't wanna say, "in between," but just not on that grid? So you know that people like-- the author of *Desiring Arabs*--

(OVERTALK)

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

Joseph Massad has been very critical of what he sees as the rush to force people actually into kind of-- identities that are-- focused on single-- object choice. Like you know, you have to be-- "You're either gay or you're-- straight," or you-- there are

---

people who I might identify as something on the trans continuum that wouldn't identify as trans because of their cultural context. I know that you have been traveling. Are you--

## **MARK GEVISSER:**

Yeah. I mean, this is something I'm-- I'm particularly interested in understanding and-- and perhaps this is-- is-- is most interesting to track in the Asian context where there's a tradition of gender fluidity. So-- so I can give a few examples.

For me, one that's clearest in my mind because I've been-- the most recently is I-- I was in the Philippines-- where there's an-- something extraordinary political happening at the moment. There's-- the Philippines has-- has a very-- after the People's Power revolution that-- that in the '80s-- has a constitution and a electoral system which allows you to vote twice.

The first time you vote in the district. And the second time you vote for a special interest group-- in a proportional representation system. And traditionally those special interest groups have been women, agrarians, taxi drivers, ethnic minorities.

But the LGBT movement there ha-- applied for the right to-- to be-- to form a political party so that they could also be a special interest group. They-- they were denied that right by the electoral commission be-- for moral reasons. But they (UNINTEL PHRASE) the Supreme Court.

They won-- their contestant selection in a campaign that-- the party's called Ang Ladlad which means, "coming out." They're-- they're like-- they will definitely win one seat. First-- first elected LGBT representative in the world on a purely LGBT ticket at a national level so--

## **DANIEL WOLFE:**

They might-- one question-- are they-- identify themselves as an LGBT ticket?

## **MARK GEVISSER:**

LGBT.

## **DANIEL WOLFE:**

That's their--  
(OVERTALK)



---

**MARK GEVISSER:**

LGBT. Very much so. This is part of my story. (LAUGHTER) And-- and the woman who will-- the woman who will go-- who-- who will go to Congress definitely is a transgender woman, who calls herself transgender and she is a woman. Her name is Bens Benidita (PH). She's very impressive.

Watch the space. She's going places. There may well be two gay men who also get elected alongside her 'cause she'll definitely get elected. Now in the Philippines, there's this category called, "bakla," which for those of you who know southeast Asia is kind of equivalent to why would call, "waria" in-- in Indonesia or, "catri," in-- Thailand. I forget the term in Malaysia but there's a similar term in Malaysia. Now I am bakla. Daniel is bakla.

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

I beg your pardon. (LAUGHTER)

**MARK GEVISSER:**

But so is a-- somebody who pres-- somebody who has breasts and may or may not have a penis and wears women's clothing. It's-- it's-- it's a fluid continuum. And we are all bakla. And we can choose where in that continuum we want to put ourselves.

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

Wait. When you say, "We are all bakla?"

**MARK GEVISSER:**

We are all bakla. Excuse me.

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

What-- who-- who-- who is, "we?"

**MARK GEVISSER:**

(LAUGHTER) You're quite-- thank you. Anybody who-- but this is what's interesting. It mixes up sexuality and gender. Anybody who is non-normative in terms of their gender, any male who is non-normative in terms of his-- his sexual agenda and any male who is non-hetero normative in terms of the sexual behavior is bakla.

---

But now that these categories, LGBT, and the Ts as-- as-- or-- or-- or the bakla at the one end of the continuum who-- have access to the Internet and have access to an international human rights community are beginning to understand themselves as women.

They're women. They're not-- a third gender or some mix up of genders. They are women. And it's very important for them to be recognized and identified as women-- whether or not they carry male genitals. And the-- the-- the LGBT organization in the Philippines, a really dynamic organization called STRAP, has an agenda of helping young bakla pass through their false consciousness of thinking that they're bakla and accept themselves as women. This is having-- this is going to have a profound impact on Filipino society. Let's not judge it. Let's not put a value judgment on it but things are changing. And we c-- I could give a similar example in India. Should-- should I?

## **DANIEL WOLFE:**

Sure.

## **MARK GEVISSER:**

Yeah. So-- so-- so-- you know, India has for-- for-- you-- you know, one might say millennia had-- a culture of so-called, "units of Hijras"-- a separate caste of people who because they-- possibly because they are gender non-conforming or-- or possibly for other reasons that have to do with complicated social stuff, kind of leave their heterosexual home communities and join an alternative community of Hijras or units where they-- where they formed these alternative sets of relationships in a system called a, "Jamaat system," where-- where-- where b-- because you've basically been cast out of your family, because you're gender non-conforming and you can't rely on the state-- you are looked after by an older Hijra who becomes your-- your guru, your hachela (PH). And there's this whole alternative structure which sets up, which accommodates-- Hijras who-- who cannot go to their families anymore. But this-- but part of being a Hijra means ultimately getting castrated--

## **DANIEL WOLFE:**

Getting castrated?

## **MARK GEVISSER:**

Castrated-- and presenting in a very particular way as when-- publicly. And I'm sure you've-- you've all seen films about Hijras. Now there are some really interesting things that are happening in India around this. The first thing that's happening is the human rights movement-- which again is-- is enabling more middle class transgender

---

people to understand themselves as transgender rather than Hijra.

But-- but-- but also as people who can claim rights on their basis of-- on the basis of the gender non-normativity so there's a whole human rights movement which-- which has-- which has emerged particularly in the south of India which-- is providing a severe threat to the Jamaat system.

Because as you realize the they can kind of be yourself and practice your personal autonomy as a transgender person, you are-- you're going to think about things you could do other than sex work and begging and getting all-- everything you earned from sex work and begging to a mean older Hijra who's gonna beat you up anyway.

So a bunch of-- younger transgender people are defining themselves outside of the Jamaat system and are sort of striking off on their own. The result of which is that there's-- this-- this has been researched by a really interesting organization in Bangalore, a kind of spike in transgender suicides.

Because you're no longer in one community, the Jamaat system, but you-- you-- you're kind of alone in society. Your family hasn't reaccepted you back either. So I-- I-- while I was in India, I'm really-- because I'm interested in global flows, I'm really interested in-- in the role that the multinational corporations are playing in a coun-- in countries like India and the Philippines-- specifically the business processing organizations, the call centers, which are known to be sort of hotbeds of homosexuality.

And in the Philippines, it's a particularly interesting story, less so in India because you know, when you're at a call center talking to somebody in the United States, if you want to be she rather than he and you have a female voice, you can actually live-- (OVERTALK)

## **MARK GEVISSER:**

--out your life as-- as a female. But-- but I interviewed several transgender women who got jobs in-- the call centers and none of them have been able to keep their jobs. And they're kind of in this limbo phase. They're-- it-- there's a kind-- there-- it-- it-- society is not yet accepting of them as-- as-- transgender people now that they have left what-- because-- because in the Hijra system, you will find many middle class people, many middle class people who-- who may-- and may even have gone all the way to university. But because they are cast out by their families, they've gone to get jobs, they-- they'll end up working in sex work and begging anyway.

## **DANIEL WOLFE:**

I mean, the way you're describing in a way reminds me of accounts of the emergence of gay identity sort of as people were aggregated in urban centers and freed from the confines of their family. In a way, the Jamaat system just sounds like another proxy

---

family.

**MARK GEVISSER:**

Family. Absolutely.

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

I guess-- so that brings us to-- because this is pretty out there for OSF. Like we're not necessarily spending a lot of time in like gender variance and things. And much more of our work is often focused on rights, power and-- and sort of flows of-- of people and politics.

So the world questions with regard to that: one is actually about international power and money, something that we are quite interested in. You know, I w-- have been present at in-- in a number of countries where faxes or-- or emails arrived from Hillary Clinton's office, advising, for example, the Vietnamese foreign ministry to please articulate and advise on their policy toward gay marriage.

There was also, you know, the famous U.K. conditionality discussions around-- aid to-- say, the homophobic-- Ugandan state and sort of what countries needed to pledge to do or not to do prior to receiving support. What do you think about-- this exercise of, you know, blue team power but-- as expressed by-- sort of-- money and politics? Like how do you think it will play out? What-- are you for it? Are you against it?

**MARK GEVISSER:**

It's so complicated. Let's look at the example of Malawi and my colleague-- (UNINTEL PHRASE) which is wonderful and-- and-- 'cause he-- runs LGBT program in the southern Africada out of Johannesburg for those who-- who don't know him. So he might have some things to say about this too. In fact--

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

Well, I should hope so. (LAUGHTER)

(OVERTALK)

**MALE VOICE:**

He will have some things to say. (LAUGHTER)

---

**MARK GEVISSER:**

You know-- there was-- there was-- I'll tell you the Malawi story very quickly and correct me if I've made some mistakes in it. And because I think it-- it-- it-- it's very emblematic of a lot of dynamics. So-- there's these signals that are in the atmosphere that basically neither we nor the red team have any control over, you know? It's-- Facebook. It's Grindr which is one the big gay hookup sites. It's *Will and Grace*. It's--

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

Are Grindr and *Will and Grace* interna-- (LAUGHTER) (UNINTEL PHRASE)

**MARK GEVISSER:**

*Will and Grace*, certainly. (LAUGHTER) I wouldn't know about those. (LAUGHTER)

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

(UNINTEL PHRASE)

**MARK GEVISSER:**

It's-- it's-- it's s-- South African sitcoms, every single one of which has a gay character and an empowered gay character. It's news that-- that same sex people can get married in countries like South Africa or in countries like Britain. And-- and that this-- this intelligence permeates whether you like it or not.

So there's a couple living-- it's a very working class, ordinary couple living in-- Malawi who-- one of whom is a man and the one of whom identifies as a woman that is male-born biologically. And they decide, "Well, you know, let's get married."

And the way they decide to do it is they decide they're gonna procreate-- traditional customs around engagement that-- from Malawi-- I forget the actual ethnic group-- and-- Chichewa, right? Chichewa. And-- they hold this engagement ceremony, having got the idea-- not-- not-- not part of any rights movement, they hold this engagement ceremony and the media finds out about it and it's, "Hey, it's a great story." I mean, who wouldn't cover it?

So the media goes and covers it in-- in a relatively-- non-judgmental way, relatively non-judgmental way, the media covers it, as a result of which somebody wakes up in the criminal justice system and says, "Hey, we have a law forbidding this kind of thing. This is not allowed in our society." So these two people are arrested. They're sentenced to-- is it like 14?

---

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

Fourteen.

**MARK GEVISSER:**

Fourteen years imprisonment and as a result of which-- and-- and-- and-- and thrown into jail, terrible circumstances, really, really quite brutal. You can imagine their-- the inmates in jail weren't so pleased with them. There's-- there's a global solidarity campaign that has a whole lot of different-- permutations.

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

Were they both put in the male side of the--

**MARK GEVISSER:**

I don't know.

**MALE VOICE:**

Stephen was but Tiwonge which is a female name-- it was a negotiation between OSF and the prison authorities and Tiwonge ended up in the VIP jail (LAUGHTER), just a new concept for us to--

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

It's not new for us here in the U.S.

(OVERTALK)

**MALE VOICE:**

Which came with its own challenges because in the VIP jail, you don't get federal. So we managed to make-- to-- to move Tiwonge from the male prison relation which she was really in great danger. But then we had two other (UNINTEL) place to make sure that she had, you know, three daily meals, et cetera, et cetera.

**MARK GEVISSER:**

But I mean, note-- note En's use of the word, "we," and thank God for you. And--

---

and-- and whether it was the work that En was doing or-- or the work that-- Soros' economic advisors were doing when they went and had later-- one on one meetings with-- with the New Zam-- with the new Malawian government.

There were-- there-- there was-- I mean, that-- that was later. Sorry, I should put this into a continuum. So-- so the kind of advocacy that happened around that time, a key part of that advocacy was-- is that Malawi is signatory to-- well, Malawi received some aid that comes directly from the U.S. Congress and they-- and there are governance-- conditions attached to that aid.

And through some sort of dialogue between activists in Washington D.C. and Malawi and LGBT actions on the ground, it was seen that this could be used as a lever to get these people released. And it was very effectively used as a lever. These two people were released, Tiwonge. Stephen decided-- I think after they were in jail for what, 18 months?

## **DANIEL WOLFE:**

Yeah.

## **MARK GEVISSER:**

Stephen decided to stay in Malawi. Tiwonge has now received asylum on the basis of her-- transgender identity in South Africa. And that story ended happily-- and you-- there-- there-- there were-- the-- the-- the president died. There's a new president, Joyce Banda, who-- has been very explicit.

And-- and it was with Joy-- Joyce Banda that George Soros' advisors went to meet-- to talk about aid and democracy, of course. And Joyce Banda has been-- very proactive about changing Malawian law. Now both-- the-- the activities have been very smart in that they're not single issue but that's an-- a whole other story because there's a whole lot of laws in Malawi that need to change.

But the point is that-- that-- that the activism has been very effective and the activism from-- Washington down, you know-- through-- through to the OSF, through to activism by-- by-- by local Malawi and LGBT-- and their allies. But this cannot but-- promote, all of this cannot but promote a discourse which says that this is a Western agenda.

And breaking that deadlock is very difficult. And one of the things I really respect about the-- (UNINTEL) of LGBT Rights program is that it's-- it's actively looking for ways of breaking that deadlock by promoting African narratives, by-- by-- by finding ways to enable-- African people or to help-- or to-- to support African people as they tell their own stories.

So that these-- this-- these-- interventions are seen less and less to be interventions of a West imposing its near lib-- it's neocolonial, neoliberal agenda on people whose

---

cultural sovereignty and traditional values are being trampled on yet again by the United States. Now it doesn't help when a kind of cack-handed-- official at the Pakistani-- American embassy decided to host an LGBT-- a Paki-- the first ever Pakistani LGBT pride in Islamabad like not weeks after Osama bin Laden was assassinated. (LAUGH)

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

You mean-- you mean the American-- an American?

**MARK GEVISSER:**

An American.

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

Embassy employee, yeah?

**MARK GEVISSER:**

State's official, embassy employee, decides to host LGBT pride-- following a directive that came from, you know, from Washington. But I don't think he was interpreting that directive particularly-- in a particularly savvy way. And the-- the-- and the-- the effect on the LGBT activists in Pakistan was-- was very negative, as you can imagine. I mean, this is the last thing they need.

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

Okay. I'm gonna stop you there because there is much expertise in the room and because-- we want to have time for questions and things. I think let's just open it up-- and I'll take the first question from Dave Scamell. And if-- if you could-- again, for those who came late, if you wouldn't mind just explaining what program you work with so that the rest of the room can get a sense.

**DAVE SCAMELL:**

So I'm-- Dave Scamell with the Sexual Health and Rights project. And I just actually wanted to add-- sort of-- a new (UNINTEL) to the nor-- the Malawi-- example. And-- particularly at the (UNINTEL) level, it was positioned as a gay marriage issue. There was-- and the advocacy was very targeted towards it being gay marriage and trying to get support for them, sort of global actors and international LGBT movement was



---

very much around positioning it that way and-- and ignoring the fact that this wasn't specifically around two men.

It was actually-- an issue of-- of-- a trans woman and-- and her partner being denied the right to marry. And so that's-- it's-- it's interesting and how that (UNINTEL PHRASE) force is sort of then piped back into the country and-- and (UNINTEL PHRASE) discourse in that way.

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

No. And that's an interesting point because, of course--  
(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

Oh, so for those-- I don't know if you-- you guys could hear-- but Dave was making--  
(OVERTALK)

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

Did you hear?

**MARK GEVISSER:**

No. (UNINTEL PHRASE)

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

No?

**MARK GEVISSER:**

No. Please repeat the question.

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

Sure. It was more of a statement than a question. It was just pointing out that the way that the narrative played out internationally about the Malawi case was one of gay marriage rather than marriage between a trans woman and her partner.

And I think Dave's implication was that the gay marriage frame which is actually

---

familiar to us, for example, in the U.S. in which though he didn't say this, Hillary Clinton's constituents are particularly invested in, et cetera-- that the gay marriage story kind of overshadowed the trans issues which were-- probably the way the people in question would have framed it. So-- I want to--

**MARK GEVISSER:**

Can I-- can I just respond to that?

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

Yes.

**MALE VOICE:**

I mean, let me complicate that a little bit further, Dave. (LAUGHTER) But-- okay. I've interviewed Tiwonge and it's-- it's clear to me that Stephen and Tiwonge got the idea to do this because they had been reading about gay marriage. And this is my point about the continuum.

**MALE VOICE:**

And can you face the microphone? Sorry.

**MARK GEVISSER:**

Oh, so-- yeah. (LAUGHTER)

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

(UNINTEL) face your question-- (LAUGHTER)

(OVERTALK)

**MARK GEVISSER:**

Is this some kind of-- a terrorism strategy?

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

---

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

I have children. (LAUGHTER)

**MARK GEVISSER:**

So-- so this is complicated because-- there's-- there's a whole-- there's a movement in the LGBT movement to really understand T as something separate from-- from LGB and there's a lot of reasons for that. But people often understand it themselves as a continuum.

And that's not necessarily because they have false con-- false consciousness as the act-- as the good activists of Strap in Manila might believe. There-- there is a con-- there is a continuum between-- sexual orien-- sexual orientation identity and-- and gender identity that is very complicated and is not-- it's not as simple as-- as we might like to believe it is. But nonetheless, I think that-- that-- that you're absolutely right, that-- one needs to understand it outside of our narrow frame about gay marriage.

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

So I want to-- give our colleagues in London and D.C.-- because you are most distant from us physically-- I wanted to give you the first chance to ask a question if you had any. You're not required to have any. But--

**MARK GEVISSER:**

Yeah. Yep. Yeah. (UNINTEL PHRASE)-- from the Global Drug Policy program here in London. Thanks a lot, Mark. I don't know if this question is too self-serving or off base and you-- I'll withdraw it if you don't want to deal with it but-- it's of interest to me that so much has happened around LGBT rights and not only in the U.N. but in the particular confines of the Human Rights Council.

And I think especially the effective use of the universal periodic review which is a more public kind of process than the old treaty value processes and so on-- whereas many of us have been-- have been laboring around issues where we think there might be a parallel to LGBT such as-- the rights of people who use drugs or have drug addictions and not getting that kind of traction, I wonder if you know how-- how strategically it came about that the movement, such as it is, decided to try to use the Human Rights Council and UPR, in particular, and what it is about the effort that has managed to mobilize the, "blue states," as you put it-- where we haven't on other issues with a, if you like, "cultural dimension," have not had that kind of success?

---

## MARK GEVISSER:

I think it's-- I think there's-- thank you. I think it's a very good question. And it's-- it's worth pondering and I would-- I would invite others around this room to share their thoughts on it too. I think it's a combination of things. I think-- it's-- it's-- it's the result, in part, of an extraordinarily effective NGO based in Geneva called ARC International, ARC International, and I urge you all to go to their website. And the-- the-- the really smart way they've managed to-- lobby-- the missions but also mobilize the NGO community. That's one.

I think the big story though is the United States, Susan Rice and Hillary Clinton and the decision by-- the State Department to lead on this particular issue. And we can talk about why that is. We can talk about whether that was because there's a domestic agenda and this fitted in really well with the domestic agenda.

We can talk about whether certain individuals saw this as a legacy issue and after taking some sort of tentative steps, saw how well it was serving them politically-- how much kudos they were getting. And we could also talk about very effective operators in the State Department.

And I'd like to mention specifically a man named Dan Baer who's an assistant Secretary of State who has responsibility for LGBT issues and is the highest ranking LGBT person in the Department of State, B-A-E-R, and-- and the work that he did. I think it's-- it's all of those things.

So-- so I-- let-- let me just give you-- a minute on-- on the story of how this resolution came about which is that South Africa had, in fact, initially-- proposed a real shrilly shallying wishy washy resolution-- because it was trying to position itself as the kind of-- the spokesperson for the African states.

So South Africa had proposed a resolution saying, "We need more dialogue on this matter. It's un-- it's unclear." And basically-- there were-- there two groups of people who put a lot of pressure on South Africa to change its position. The one was-- was a-- was a group of-- of human rights advocates within South Africa who-- who-- who-- who sought and obtained meetings-- with South African officials up to the highest level, saying, you know, "We have this in our constitution. What do you mean we need-- we need more dialogue on this?"

It's like, "We have same sex marriage in this country. No more dialogue is necessary-- God damn it." And-- and they were heard. But there is no question that the Amer-- and I know this-- from interviews-- that the Americans in New York and in-- Geneva did some serious arm twisting and said to South Africa, "Look, you know, this is-- your are one of the countries in the global South that is a leader here. If you want to be part of a global club of human rights-- you've gotta be part of this."

And I don't-- they might have other been-- some other discussions like South Africa has-- this is-- this is conjecture. This is pure conjecture but South Africa has-- has aspirations to be permanently on the U.N. Security Council. I don't know what Susan Rice was promising the South Africans in terms of support but South Africa did a 180

---

degree about face. And-- and when you speak to the South Africans and you speak to other people in Geneva, American pressure had a lot to do with it.

## **DANIEL WOLFE:**

So since Ian is with us-- I wanted to give him a chance to talk about any-- I mean, any issues raised but obviously a lot h-- intersects with your own portfolio so--

## **IAN:**

Just to add to Mark's last point, I do think that the South African activists were really good at naming and shaming that home which is probably another reason why there was this dramatic turnaround in-- in the-- the (UNINTEL) of the South African government.

It was very interesting that last year when we met with the South African mission in Geneva, for instance, around transgender, how for people migrating from their countries into South Africa because it's safe and they can actually access services, it was the first time that South Africa engaged in the conversation about providing health services to transgender people from other-- from people from other countries in the region. So-- so it's clearly a conversation that's moving forward.

I just wanna come back to the Stephen and Tiwonge issue quickly because it shows how very-- how very rapidly things move. Stephen and Tiwonge had lived as a couple in this village for many years. Everyone knew that Tiwonge was-- female bodied-- very well respected, had a good job, was supported by their families and their communities.

And all of that changed overnight when they were identified as two gay men, rather than what they were. And I think they too didn't really have the language to-- to set that right. And I mean, it's today that Tiwonge identifies-- very comfortably as a transgender woman. But at the time of arrest, she didn't have that language.

## **MALE VOICE:**

What language did she have?

## **IAN:**

She-- there was no language. I mean, there's-- there's the traditional language that-- that's being used that truthfully isn't probably the most-- affirming language that there is. But that is all she had. And the truth is that in her community, things were fine.

So it was only once there was this great-- interest from the media and-- and they

---

became two gay men and-- and government was interested in-- when we went back to talk to the-- the village elders because we were (UNINTEL) with-- Tiwonge had first tried for Canadian-- status, for refugee status and Canada before South Africa.

And when we thought that Canada wasn't going to happen and we weren't quite sure where Tiwonge was going to go, we tried to see what the possibility was of getting her integrated back into her community. And it was amazing how once you use the-- the local languages, the-- then how community leaders were much more accepting of the whole idea.

But two gay men was clearly a Western idea that they-- that was foreign to them. While Tiwonge actually had lived all her life as a woman, dressed as a woman, name they used, Tiwong-- the name-- Tiwonge was a female name. That, to them, was much more acceptable.

And so I do think sometimes it has to do with how issues are packaged and how very wrong the media, both domestically and internationally, can get it sometimes. I mean, I think it was a missed opportunity for us because we had the choice, when we were sitting and drafting the legal strategy-- for the lawyers that were presenting Stephen and Tiwonge in court, there was a question, "Are we going to introduce transgender issues into a Malawian court?" The room was as many people as-- as we have in this room and-- and everyone gave us a blank stare because transgender issues had absolutely no meaning. So it was very clear that with the timeline that we had, it made no sense sort of introducing it. But I still think it was a missed opportunity.

## **MARK GEVISSER:**

Can I say something about that, not having (UNINTEL)?

## **DANIEL WOLFE:**

Sure.

## **MARK GEVISSER:**

So let me give you another example which I find very interesting. And this is-- this is why the language is so important and why LGBT is so important despite all the kind of cautionary notes-- notes I've given-- so there's-- there's a really fas-- really wonderful-- I'm sure whether they're grantees. They might be-- organization-- at Makerere in Uganda called the, "Refugee Law Project."

---

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

Oh, right. They-- they--

**MARK GEVISSER:**

They are grantees.

**MALE VOICE:**

Grantee, yeah.

**MARK GEVISSER:**

Okay. And-- and they-- they provide-- assistance to refugees seeking asylum in Uganda and Uganda's a tra-- tr-- transitional place to-- to other countries and has a huge refugee population coming from the kind of war-torn areas to its-- west and to its north.

And-- the-- the-- the officials at the refugee law project noticed that there was-- a significant number of people coming in who were gender non-conforming-- and who, when you listen to their narratives because seeking asylum is all about storytelling, of course-- telling the story of your life, it was clear that-- the reason-- well, the primary reason why they had to flee was because they were gender non-conforming or that was-- a key part of-- of-- what they were fleeing from particularly in areas where sexual violence was-- a significant consequence of political destabilization or tool for political destabilization.

And-- and the-- the-- the-- the-- the case workers started talking to this group about-- and trying to understand themselves as transgender. And that was strategic and-- it was because you can get asylum in Canada or South Africa or the United States if you're transgender.

But something really interesting happened to this group-- in the process is is that people who did not have a collective identity-- on the basis of their gender non-normativity and who understand that gender non-- non-normativity solely through the word, "sex worker"-- developed identities as transgender people and have-- have formed a really strong affinity group at the Refugee Law project called, "The Angels."

And with that has come not only the possibility of-- resettlement-- but also-- according-- I have not yet been to Uganda on my travels. I haven't yet done these interviews but according to-- the case workers-- a much strong sense of self in the world. So I think that's an interesting story.

---

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

No, and I mean, to a certain extent, Ian's story or the story you just told, is the story of politicization generally. Like it's-- you know, the narrative, "Everything was fine but w-- as long as it wasn't articulated and then someone came along and messed it up and then we had to re"-- like this is a familiar story for many political groups and-- and identities. Okay. So I know that there was a question over here and-- and--

**BETTY APPLE:**

I-- I did (UNINTEL) Hi, I'm Betty Apple from the Justice Initiative. Thanks for-- sorry I entered late so you may have-- you may have addressed this already but I'm-- I'm interested in not only the ways in which the media or the international community comes-- comes in and has an impact but the ways in which the movement itself, as it's currently configured, has an impact.

And we talk about an LGBT or an LGBTI or an LGBTQQII or the, "alphabet soup"-- as some people have described it, of the movement or movements. And I'm curious to know if you can-- if you can project out a little bit based on your experience?

Where's this all going, given the fact that it started with LG, LGBT and now it seems to be this c-- it's-- it's expanding into a continuum and we may not have the initials. (LAUGHTER) So I'm curious to know your thoughts about that.

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

And maybe we should take actually a number of questions because-- as time gets more compressed, that way you can sorta weave it together. Other questions or comments? Just-- yeah.

**MARK GEVISSER:**

I--

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

Oh, sorry.

(OVERTALK)

**MARK GEVISSER:**

Go ahead.



---

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

Was that Joanne or someone--

**FEMALE VOICE:**

DC.

**MARK GEVISSER:**

This is DC.

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

Oh, DC.

**FEMALE VOICE:**

Hi.

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

Hi, DC. (LAUGHTER)

**FEMALE VOICE:**

Hi, this is Giselle at the LGBT Rights Initiative in DC. I'm just wondering if, Mark, I you can speak a little bit about pink washing. It was explained in the email the was sent out and the-- we haven't heard about that yet so maybe you could talk about that (LAUGHTER) (UNINTEL PHRASE)

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

Okay. And one more question here?

**LIVY:**

So my name is Livy. I work in the fellowships program but I used to work for UNHCR and I interviewed Senegalese. I interviewed Ugandan, always gay men-- and some transgenders. But especially in the Middle East and in East Africa, we always

---

interviewed a lot of inter-sex individuals.

It's very prevalent, a lot of inter-marriage. And I know that-- and it kind of plays off of the question with the alphabet soup but do we sometimes leave off that, "I," because it's so much more understandable that this is a genetic thing, that, "Oh, this poor child had nothing to do with it," because-- even amongst the Somali population, people were like, "No, this is normal," "It's not his fault," whereas we still look at being lesbian or gay or transgender and to some degree as a choice.

## **DANIEL WOLFE:**

Okay. So we have the LG-- where's this all going and par-- with particular attention to the initials at the end of LGBT, I, QQI, whatever. And we also have-- the pink washing and Israel question that we're--

## **MARK GEVISSER:**

So let's-- let's talk--

## **DANIEL WOLFE:**

--tantalized with in the email and are-- (LAUGHTER) are not leaving until we hear about it. (LAUGHTER)

## **MARK GEVISSER:**

Let's-- let's start with pink washing. I attended a-- I'm in New York to-- I w-- I attended a conference last week which was called, "Homo-Nationalism and Pink Washing," and was-- organized by the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies at CUNY.

And-- was-- was w-- functioned in several ways. But one of the ways it functioned was as a kind of rallying cry for-- the sort of nascent Palestinian queer movement and for the boycott, divest and sanctions movement-- the global boycott, "Divest in sanctions against Israel," movement.

And pink-- pink washing is a term that is-- that-- that has-- been developed as part of that movement-- to explain Israel-- a strategy that Israel has-- is-- is quite clearly (and the evidence is absolutely clear has) that-- that is-- that the Israeli state is adopting to brand itself as-- LGBT friendly-- by funding programming-- that-- that involves LGBT agendas and people so as to say, "Look how democratic we are. We are-- we are a beacon of-- of civilization and human rights and democracy in the Middle East-- compared to these homophobic savages just across the border."

And-- that campaign has been called or that project has been called, "pink washing," by its opponents because it pink washes Israeli's real-- Israel's real human rights

---

record. And-- and it comes from the term, "green r-- green washing," way some corporations kind of do stupid carbon footprint things to green wash the fact that they're killing the environment. (LAUGHTER)

So that's the root of it. And it's-- it's very powerful and very interesting. And it's-- it's a concept-- I-- I suppose-- my understanding of it is-- is complicated and has been complicated by the research I've been doing. And I'm on my way to Palestine and Israel so I'll report back at my next brown bag in more detail by a couple of things. Firstly--

## **DANIEL WOLFE:**

You only get one brown bag. (LAUGHTER)

## **MARK GEVISSER:**

Firstly-- well, there're two things that I think are interesting-- to pool out from that. The first is is that-- there has been a very effective progressive-- progressive within the Israeli context, LGBT rights initiative-- movement in Israel that has fought for these rights and won these rights and has-- has had to fight for these rights within the Israeli context.

I'm sort of sticking within the borders of-- of-- 1948. And the Israeli state and its publicity agents such as APAC, are piggybacking onto that campaign, on that-- on those successes which I think puts both Israeli and Palestinian queer people in a very difficult situation .

And-- and the-- the-- the way it puts Palestinian queer people in a difficult situation is, I think, worth exploring further. It's-- there-- there's a very interesting Palestinian queer rights movement which-- which has emerged and which is, I understand, also-- OSF grantees and particularly a movement-- an organization called, "Al Kous," which means, "the rainbow," in-- in Arabic.

And All Kous has a couple of really strong positions. And one of its really strong positions is that it is first and foremost a member of the Palestinian Liberation Movement. And it's dealing with Na-- with-- national identity before sexual identity.

And that's-- I mean, that's very familiar to me as a South African. We-- we had that moment too. But they also have a really interesting critique on-- on the things we've been talking about, on the-- on different modes of sexual identity and what's-- what sexuality and gender identity means in different societies.

And I think because LGBT has been used so sharply against their people, they have a particularly sharp reading of how the paradigm, the sexual identity paradigm, might not be appropriate in a non-Western and in their instance, specifically a Palestinian or Arab context.

And-- and-- and that critique is very interesting and I think very important. But also

---

potentially quite limiting because it doesn't-- necessarily-- and this is a question I have rather than-- than-- and-- and an-- analysis I have taken to account-- so-- so what that analysis says is like, "We don't come out. We stay with our families. We stay with our liberation movements. We're queer and we find-- we need to find ways of integrating our queerness into all our other identities because like Tel Aviv is not an option for us," right? But what that doesn't necessarily take into account is that Tel Aviv might not be an easy option or a comfortable option but it's there.

And the signals that are sent from Tel Aviv are received in Ramala and in Yemen and in Jericho. And there are LGBT people who want to act on their LGBT identities in those places. And this is a dynamic that is, I think, really important to understand globally.

There-- I was at an-- I was at a confer-- and ILGA, which is International Lesbian and Gay Association, conference in-- ILGA Europe conference in Dublin-- last year and I was really struck by the speakers from the former Soviet Union where, as you know-- there is a lot of trouble using these anti-propaganda laws as a way of-- as part of-- general campaigns against democracy as ways of controlling-- LGBT activism.

And one of the things that all the activists said-- is that-- well, not all of them but I thought the sharpest ones and I'm thinking specifically of a brilliant young woman from the Ukraine who's also one of your grantees. She said-- "You know, the problem is that society's just moving more quickly than-- than we can handle, than-- than we, as activists, can handle. We-- we-- we're playing catch up with what our constituents want and need."

And in a way, that's a little bit of the Stephen Tiwonge story, you know? There's nobody saying, "Go slowly. We need to do this and do the"-- well, the-- the message of saying, "Go slowly. We need to do-- sort of first put this in place," you know, the-- the mess-- somebody from Serbia said to me-- "You know, I started off as a rights advocacy organization and I'm now-- I'm now a social worker because I told all these kids to come out and they've come out and they've been chucked out of their homes." So anyway, that-- sorry-- a long and-- a way of avoiding the inter-sex question.  
(LAUGHTER)

## **DANIEL WOLFE:**

But now the time has come. (LAUGHTER) And it wasn't just about inter-sex, it was about--

## **MARK GEVISSER:**

No, no. But it's about the soup.

---

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

This-- the soup and also this question of whether or not it's useful or necessary to call out identities when-- when they'd be--

**MARK GEVISSER:**

I mean--

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

--better left alone.

**MARK GEVISSER:**

I-- I-- I-- I'm still struggling with-- with these questions myself and I-- and I can't begin to-- to give strong-- str-- strong opinions or advice on them. I mean, I use the word, "sexual minorities"-- rather than LGBT QI, QQQ. And-- and-- but that's-- that's using a very-- liberal, democratic notion of what a minority is. And it's a notion that comes out of-- I mean, why do queers have power in the United States? It's because they're constituted themselves as a political minority and this is a system that works by cobbling together coalitions of-- whole bunches of minorities so that you can get elected. And that doesn't necessarily (LAUGH) work in countries that don't work democratically the way the United States works. I'm uncomfortable with-- with the LGBTQ thing.

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

Well, Q, just for clarity can sometimes mean queer and sometimes meaning questioning.

**MARK GEVISSER:**

Questioning.

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

And I mean, this is--

---

**MARK GEVISSER:**

Yeah. But-- but what I think is interesting about the way the alphabet soup expands is the way it becomes-- it becomes a redactor annum certum which I actually think is quite useful. (HORN HONKS) So you know-- so I was at-- I was-- at this pink washing-- conference. I was in-- I was in a seminar where we all had to introduce ourselves. And as is the norm now, we had to say what our names were and what pronouns we would like to be used. So I said, "I'm Mark, he." Somebody else said her name, she. Somebody else said his name--

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

He?

**MARK GEVISSER:**

The-- no, then somebody else said their name, they. And then somebody else said-- and I don't know whether he, she, they was being ironic or not (LAUGHTER) but he, she, they said, "My name is nomad, he, she, they." (LAUGHTER) And it's like (LAUGH)-- and part of me was like--

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

Where is that going?

**MARK GEVISSER:**

"This is really-- this is not helpful. (LAUGHTER) Tell me what you want me to call you and I'll call you that." And part of me was like, "Right. You're showing me how stupid this all is in a way." (LAUGHTER)

**MARK GEVISSER:**

I-- I-- I taught a class in a place where people were, "it."

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

I mean, you know, and-- and, "they," is quite a common-- I mean, even though to me, a sort of old school to-- if someone who wants to be called, "they," it sounds like you're more than one person and that is supposedly like from where I used to sit-- standing, that's not good. But clearly, like people wish to exercise these choices in

---

different ways.

**MARK GEVISSER:**

So-- so to your inter-sex question, I mean, I think you raise a really-- I-- I-- I-- I'm not actually-- even though-- even though it says that I'm doing LGBTI, in my own work, I'm not doing I.

**MARK GEVISSER:**

Yeah. I-- I noticed it wasn't a (UNINTEL PHRASE)

**MARK GEVISSER:**

Yeah. And-- and--

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

But you got the fellowship with the I. (LAUGHTER)

**MARK GEVISSER:**

I suppose it's the-- what's-- I mean, the way those LGBTIs are-- are defined-- is that-- I mean, on the one-- on the one hand, you've got what you had from Somalis saying, "This is-- this is something you're born with. This is-- this is-- a biomedical condition. It's-- it's-- it's"-- so it's kind of outsi-- it-- it's outside of stigmatization.

But-- but I suppose the way the I's have become part of the soup is by the way that they have shown how they are stigmatized and how they're often stigmatized using the labels that are applied to LGBs and Ts. And I'm thinking specifically of the example of Castor Semenya in South Africa-- you know, who was accused of being a man and you know, that--

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

Can you say who she was for those of us who--

**MARK GEVISSER:**

Oh, Castor Semenya was the-- the-- is the extraordinary South African athlete who-- who was disqualified-- from participating in international athletics because she had

---

too much testosterone. According to the test, she identifies as a woman but there's-- there was a whole discourse about whether she's transgender, female or inter-sexed.

And it-- it appears that she is inter-sexed but that she identifies as a woman. But she was struggling with what, in a spectrum, what-- what LGBT people struggle with. So it makes sense to understand her as part-- as a sexual minority in that way. But I-- but I think it's really growing. I mean, I think understanding of inter-sex is-- is growing as-- as inter-sex advocates-- find their voices within the LGBTI movement.

## **MARK GEVISSER:**

(UNINTEL PHRASE) I is enormous. I mean, so you have three chromosomes. You have just a variety of different hormonal issues. I mean, it-- it's-- it's not-- it's its own--

## **MALE VOICE:**

There's all these subsets within I.

(OVERTALK)

## **DANIEL WOLFE:**

And you know, just-- not to send us too far in that direction but-- I mean, in the U.S., the actual-- the Inter-sex Society of North America kind of had a s-- made a strategic decision actually to retreat a little bit from the LGBTI frame and to go toward a more medicalized frame and started identifying, in some cases, as people born with inter-sex condition-- in an explicit appeal to the-- the kinds of things you're talking about as opposed to an identitarian-- sort of political organizing frame. And obviously people, again different people who are inter-sex may make different choices about how they wanted to affiliate. So other questions and thoughts? And I realize I've had my back to some of you so I apologize if there are questions here that haven't been answered.

## **MALE VOICE:**

I have one question, to add another (UNINTEL) issue. Mark had feelings in the-- the (UNINTEL) Photography project-- Moving Walls. What about the A, asexuals?

## **DANIEL WOLFE:**

So for those who are-- who might not have heard-- Felix added the question, "What about A, asexuals?"



---

**MARK GEVISSER:**

Felix, what about them? (LAUGHTER)

**MALE VOICE:**

A-- exactly. Well, I-- I'm a friend-- of a director that did a documentary called, "Asexual." And the main character in the film is an activist who-- basically along with-- the movement, asexual movement, has been, in some ways, trying to align themselves with the LGBT, become part of the-- the alphabet. So I-- I'm-- was just wondering like if you had any thoughts on-- or in-- part of your studies or your research, that it--

**MARK GEVISSER:**

No.

**MALE VOICE:**

It's (UNINTEL PHRASE)

**MALE VOICE:**

People who make (UNINTEL PHRASE)

**MARK GEVISSER:**

Yeah. It-- it hasn't-- it-- I mean, I'm-- I'm aware that there's-- an asexual movement. And I'm aware that-- there is a-- a movement to put, "A," into the-- into the sort of chain of letters. I suppose what I'm looking at is how people-- no. I-- I-- I'm looking at how-- what the connection is between identity and rights. And-- and I don't think there is enough of an asexual rights movement globally for it-- for it to come onto my radar.

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

Other questions?

**MALE VOICE:**

I-- can I just add something to the pink washing?

---

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

Please. (LAUGHTER)

**MALE VOICE:**

I--

**MALE VOICE:**

(UNINTEL PHRASE) (LAUGHTER)

**RICHARD DUKAME:**

I'm Richard Dukame (PH). I'm the executive writer of *The Nation* and (UNINTEL PHRASE) So-- so I just (UNINTEL) the first LGBT delegation to Palestine last year which (UNINTEL PHRASE) question, stories about. (LAUGHTER)

**MALE VOICE:**

We're all waiting for the documentary which seems to be still in process.

**RICHARD DUKAME:**

Oh, really? I didn't-- and-- so you know, as I was-- as I was leaving Israel-- you know, I was in Tel Aviv and-- and it had just been announced the city had been-- named the best LGBT city in the world-- (LAUGHTER) by some like travel website.

And-- (LAUGHTER) and then like within like three hours, there was like a parade in downtown Tel Aviv-- in-- to-- sort of gay pride parade. And-- and then later when I was leaving the-- the country and was detained in security for a very long period a time-- you know, they asked me what I was doing there.

And-- and-- and-- and the-- the-- the border agent was like, "Oh, you know that we won this-- we're like the best LGBT (LAUGHTER) (UNINTEL PHRASE) in the world." So-- so I just-- I just say that to-- to-- to one, to say-- say that like it's clear that pink washing is kind of a real thing and that it-- it names a set of state and economic activities that are invested in-- tourism and-- and also the promotion of a certain kind of Israel.

At the same time, you know, I-- I think the term-- is a dangerous one when it-- is used beyond that-- to just name and shame like any sort of self-pride and interest in--

---

in-- in gay rights in Israel. And-- and a lot of Israelis I met also, you know, tell the story of-- which is one of democratic yearning, right?

That, "This is-- this is a society that we created and we're excluded and we sort of mobilized these institutions and identities and-- and got these rights." And that's true. And where that sort of democratic yearning goes, I think, is a very open question and could also extend past the-- the green line or it could not. And-- and so, you know, to me, the term is useful when it-- when it means-- a very concrete set of state and economic activities and not-- not when it's used sort of indiscriminately.

## **MARK GEVISSER:**

I think you're saying much more articulately what I was trying to say which is that-- which is that one needs to understand-- the internal dynamics of-- of a movement and of a democratize in society-- within Israel together with the state policy and not throw the baby out with the ba-- with the-- baby out with the bathwater.

I mean, there was-- at this Homer Nationalism conference I was-- I was attending, pink washing was sort of used metaphorically-- to describe movements in other countries. So we heard about pink washing in the Nordic countries. We heard about rainbow washing in South Africa.

The-- the-- the-- the-- these various ways-- I mean, you could speak about how the United States is involved in a pink washing project as well-- with-- with this-- with the foreign policy objectives. But-- but-- but-- but was-- what was worrying to me is-- is where-- what-- what Richard has just articulated is is that-- that it has the effect of negating the advocacy of human rights defenders in these environments where one understands the state when-- when-- when the state, as actor, overpowers civil society as actor or seem to overpower civil society as actor.

## **RICHARD DUKAME:**

Thanks.

## **DANIEL WOLFE:**

So-- any other questions? And if not, I mean, we only have about five minutes left. I will-- ask you just as a teaser before the next brown bag to reflect a little bit, since you mentioned it, on-- thoughts. And I know this is always a sort of dangerous way to end but-- particularly around the boycott divestment sanction-- arguments given that you are a South African and that those-- that that strategy is actually obviously-- I mean, though Richard said he was part of the first LGBT delegation, of course, there was another famous visit by South Africans to look at some of these pink washing questions. And-- a lot of this discussion around boycott or divestment has been very infused with South African-- opinions or insights. And just curious for your own--

---

**MARK GEVISSER:**

So I've made the decision not to come out as-- personally, not to come out as a supporter of the BDS movement until I go to Palestine myself. And that's a kind of personal, ethical decision I've made. But what I do know is that-- I mean-- and I'm also-- I get very angry with people who get angry with the word, "Isr"-- with the word, "apartheid," used to describe Israel because it's so clearly appropriate. And-- it's absolutely clear--

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

We'd like to end on a-- (LAUGHTER) on a soft note. (LAUGHTER)

**MARK GEVISSER:**

(UNINTEL PHRASE) You asked the question. (LAUGHTER)

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

Well, our time is up. (LAUGHTER) No, sorry. Didn't mean to interrupt.

**MARK GEVISSER:**

No. But there's no question that the-- the-- that the sanctions movement was-- was a very significant part. Oh, so what I was gonna say is is while I get angry about-- about that-- and sorry, that was personal 'cause I'm thinking of people in my family. (LAUGHTER) I'm Jewish as well.

I-- I do-- I'm very cautious about making direct comparisons between Israel, Palestine and South Africa. They're very different places. They're very different times. They're very different places. They're very different places. But there's no question that the boycott sanc-- boycott sanction divestment strategy played a very significant role in-- moving South Africa towards democracy.

And the way it played that role was because over the course of the 1980s, white South Africans got to see that the cost was too high. So they did a cost benefit analysis and realized that something had to shift. And there were many-- triggers, partly was the-- the increased violence, increased militarization, more and more kids dying on the borders defending the war.

But also the fact that you couldn't watch the sport you wanted to watch. You couldn't-- see the culture you wanted to see and the South Africa economy was really beginning to suffer particularly after the comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act was

---

passed here in the United States in 1986 or '7-- in-- in '87, I think and South Africa lost its credit rating in a whole lot of banks. Now I don't-- like for me, boycott divestment-- sanction strategy is only gonna work in Israel if Israelis are receptive to those messages. And--

(OVERTALK)

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

And if, in fact, there's enough, I mean--

**MARK GEVISSER:**

Proof.

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

Setting aside the question of whether I think it's a good idea, whether enough people are doing it for the-- for the messages to even be relevant.

**MARK GEVISSER:**

Exactly. But even if enough people were doing it for the messages to be relevant, would they be heard? And I mean, the evidence is not great on that score at the moment. I mean, I-- I-- what's-- Israel seems to be sort of in a kind of suicidal mode that I find difficult to understand and that white South Africans weren't in. But-- I don't think I want to say much more before I go. (LAUGHTER)

**DANIEL WOLFE:**

Okay. Well, we will-- we will await the report back. Thank you very much. Obviously-- much to think about. I will say also personally that-- there is not as much discussion of sort of sexuality and gender identity at OSF as at some other places I have been. So it's particularly refreshing to-- hear you talk about it and for us to think about it and looking forward to the next installment.

**MARK GEVISSER:**

Great. Thank you. (APPLAUSE)

\* \* \*END OF TRANSCRIPT\* \* \*