

Interview Transcription – *Call Me Kuchu*

What Is Call Me Kuchu About

In your own words, what is *Call Me Kuchu* about?

Call Me Kuchu basically tells the story of the last year in the life of the first openly gay man in Uganda, David Kato. We started filming with David and the rest of the community pretty soon after an anti-homosexuality bill had been introduced in Uganda's Parliament. And we basically followed him as he worked to fight that bill and other forms of homophobia in Uganda. But one year into our filming David was actually murdered so the film has become this document of the last months in his life.

Attraction to Issue

How did you get to meet David and how did you find out about the anti-homosexuality bill and the movement that was being done? And what made you want to do a documentary about it?

There were various things at play, one was that Malika, who comes from a journalism background, was writing some things about transgender issues and thinking more broadly about how those issues were playing out in places abroad where they might not be about marriage equality but about much more fundamental human rights issues like the right to live. And one of those places where things like that were happening was Uganda. So we started thinking about how it was playing out specifically in Uganda. There was a transgender man names Victor Mukasa who had won a case in the high court in Uganda. He had brought the attorney general to court after a vicious raid in his house and he thought that his right to privacy had been not fairly realized and he decided to do something about it. So he took the attorney general to court and ended up wining his case. So that was a landmark victory for someone within the LGBT community especially in a place where you also have sodomy laws on the book with sentences like life in prison if you are convicted of sodomy. So we were interested in how we could have a place where those two things were happening concurrently. Shortly after, the anti-homosexuality bill was tabled in Parliament. We had been following the issue in the news and talking to various human rights groups about what was going on. We had heard that it might be the case that this bill would be put forth in Parliament and as soon as it was we realized that we should act quickly and get over there. So we just bought plane tickets and went to find out what was happening.

Which Characters To Follow

Now you had some very strong characters to follow and to tell this story. How did you get to know them?

Actually David was the first person we spoke with both in the research process while we were in New York by phone and then when we got to Uganda he was the first person we met with. He sat down and gave us contact details for everyone in the community that he thought we should meet and who's story he thought we might want to tell. Ultimately that was one of the most valuable connections to have especially because getting the introduction through David of course brought with it

a sense of trust. So that was how we met most of our characters. The Bishop, this 80-year old Anglican Bishop who's been very supportive of the LGBT community in Uganda, we actually spoke with before we went but pretty much everyone else David put us in touch with which was amazing. Initially we really thought of him as this fixer and this person who was just helping us understand the situation and helping us find the right stories and then slowly we started to realize that he was probably the main character of the film himself partly because he understood what we were doing and understood what parts of his life we would want to film even if it was just him sitting around talking he understood why we needed that. Also on the other hand he was the most prominent activist in Uganda and the guy doing the gutsiest and most courageous stuff of the whole community, there were many people in the community who were really courageous, but David in many ways really took the lead.

Knowing Characters

What was it like for you to learn about their experiences, and given the charged nature of their lives, how did you feel when you got to know them and then decided to put that on film?

A lot of meeting them came from the initial shoot, we filmed with anyone that would allow us to put the camera on them so we filmed morning, noon, and night; interviews because we were just trying to get a sense of who had what aspects of the story to tell of the wider story of LGBTI rights in Uganda. So we met with everyone and often times we didn't know much about their story until we started filming with them. That was a very personal learning process for us, real time while we were filming because they were kind enough to invite us into their homes and they would start divulging all these details about their background. We felt very privileged to have such a sense of trust with them so quickly. As Malika said, I think it was because David trusted us and he indicated that they should also and that ended up working really well and we became really close with them. We ended up living with Naome while we were there; eating dinner with them, drinking beer with them and hanging out with their kids and families. Mostly we felt really privileged, it was a wonderful experience for both of us to be getting such intimate access because that's what we wanted as filmmakers but also because that's what made us feel comfortable as outsiders coming into a community that we weren't otherwise a part of; they really welcomed us with open arms.

Living With Naome

Living with Naome for so long during our shooting created an interesting dynamic. On the one hand, it meant we knew what was going on and it really helped us become part of the community in some ways. A lot happened at her house especially after David died, so it made a lot of sense both in terms of our emotional relationship and also in terms of logistics of filming. One interesting thing that kind of happened as a result was for all three shoots we did in Uganda we didn't think Naome was a character. We sometimes just wouldn't really film much with her because we were like she doesn't really work, there were various reasons why it didn't feel like she made sense as a character in the film. It wasn't until we were

editing the film that we slowly realized that there were all these key ways that Naome connected our other characters to each other. There were a number of characters that never interacted, in our footage with each other; even though they are great friends within that community we never actually filmed them together. So Naome actually became that central person in some ways even though she hadn't been the biggest character in our minds, but it soon became clear that she was actually one of the four or five people through whom we'd be telling this story. So that was a really interesting lesson for us somehow was going from thinking someone wouldn't be in the film at all to begrudgingly being like yea, maybe she is really part of this story which was great as well because she meant so much to us that it was awesome to really share her character with the world.

Letting Go Of Characters

In including her [Naome] as one of the main characters we also had to let go of one of our other main characters, so that was a little bit saddening for both of us because we both really loved him and the footage of him is just really beautiful, he's so charismatic in a really subtle way on screen, he has a nice story to tell, a nice philosophy, he's great but it just didn't work in terms of overall narrative structure. It's frustrating as a filmmaker when you have to balance out things that are both of great importance to you but for whatever reason, given the greater film, it just didn't make sense to include him. We did want to keep it around 90 minutes so it was a bit of that but it was also you have to bring your audience somewhere with each character there has to be some kind of a progression or an arc and we already had Stosh who had less than that. David, Naome and Long Jones all had clear progressions but Stosh didn't really, so we already felt like we had one of those characters. Then we had another guy who's in it very quickly, Fred who tells his story of being thrown in jail. It was a matter of how many of those can you handle and how much does it end up feeling really random like you aren't getting to know these people well enough. So that was another setback was in losing Andrew we lost some of the power in one of our most pivotal scenes which is the drag show right before David's death. It's actually Andrew that wins the drag show, so you see a person like oh how nice for that person, but it's not quite as heavy or as powerful as it would have been had you grown to love Andrew like we did, like you would have had we included those other scenes of him.

Master Plan

Is there any advice that you can offer to other filmmakers or potential filmmakers about covering a story as sensitive as this?

Yea, so one interesting consideration for us as we started making the film was that we were aware we wanted to follow what was happening to the LGBT community in Uganda and we knew we wanted to follow one or two of the characters within the community itself. There was definitely a point where we had to make a decision of to what extent we wanted to follow the authors of this anti-homosexuality bill, the pastors that were pushing for it whether American Evangelical pastors or Ugandan pastors. Eventually we reached a decision that ultimately the story that hadn't already been told or extensively covered at that point was the story of what the

LGBT community was doing on the ground. We would go there to shoot and come back to the U.S. and what was interesting was the issue of the American Evangelicals was getting covered a lot. Some journalists had done some really great work to really try and look at the American Evangelicals who were pushing for this kind of legislation in Uganda and elsewhere. But one thing that never seemed to be covered was these activists, who from our experience in Uganda, were actually doing an incredible amount of work to draw attention to this issue. But every time we'd read about it or see the news about it on CNN or New York Times the story always used to be mostly be like look at these poor gay people and what's happening to them. And there seemed to be very little coverage of the fact that there were these incredible activists within that community who were doing amazing work. So we realized that in order to do that any justice we needed to really focus on following a number of characters within that community. That said, of course it was really important to also give voice who were working on the other side of the issue, like the MP David Bahati who wrote the bill, like Giles Muhame the editor of Rolling Stone newspaper which was outing members of the community. We did those interviews and we realized that the point wasn't for us to challenge them it was really to give them an opportunity to explain their motivations and their reasoning behind these things. Ultimately, from our point of view, they hang themselves in those interviews and we really didn't need to do much to get them to do that. But it was kind of important to us that we include their voices even if we had decided not to follow them in detail to at least hear their reasoning as well because it's important to understand how their reasoning for these decisions and how their even persuading congregations or members of the Ugandan populations that this is the big most evil thing ever. So that was the decision process we went through. Of course if we met an American Evangelical working on this who was the most incredible character ever we might have decided differently, but we just were really keen to focus on the story that seemed to be untold at that point and that seemed to be receiving little attention in Europe and the U.S.

I think it also goes back to what I was saying earlier which is it's really easy to cherry-pick really hateful, violent calls for action against the gay community and point the finger at them and say look how much destruction they are causing with these vicious statements. But that ultimately I don't think is going to be a very successful strategy given the wide breadth of audiences that we hope the film plays for. For us we chose instead to let these nemesis figures to arise organically from within the narrative and especially if we are trying to make a film that really humanizes the issue the nemesis figure also has to be humanized and has to come up organically from that story. So that's why someone like Giles ends up taking a large part in the film because of the court case that David and the others had brought against him which made a direct connection between him and one of the main characters of the film and therefore a very logical reason why we would film him. And why the audience would be more invested in what he had to say and what kind of harm or good he was causing because it was an indirect relation to the people you've spent so many minutes of the film learning about and growing to care about.

Media & Gay Community

Do you feel like media in Uganda was more of an instigator of what was going on or a result of the people's mindset?

The most interesting thing is the media in Uganda is really mixed so on the one hand the Rolling Stone obviously played such a big role in the situation for LGBT people in Uganda and we show that in the film. But on the other hand we also show David appearing on TV news to talk about the issue, to talk about what he was fighting for. There were other newspapers that we didn't have space to include in the film who were writing more supportive articles or publishing op-eds in support of the LGBT community. So a lot of this was a result of this pretty strong sense of a free press and a pretty diverse press in Uganda actually. That being said, what Giles was publishing was definitely contributing to the situation. Publishing pictures and saying hang them was an assignment ultimately. He knew the power he had which was the most disturbing thing, even more disturbing was the fact that he seemed mainly focused on selling newspapers and writing whatever was necessary to sell them.

I had some hesitations about letting him stand in for the entire anti-gay movement. I think it's quite easy, especially with films like this that sort of take one side, it's quite easy to find some vicious soundbites from the other side and that kind of deflates the issue and all of its complications and ultimately isn't going to play well for audiences that might be on the fence or a little bit anti-gay but maybe not so ferociously it isn't going to play so well if that's the way you've done your job. For me, I feel like we were fair in making that decision was because that's the exact power of someone in Giles's position has. He's writing these articles, he's wiring these headlines, choosing the photos that are most horrible and printing them and thousands and thousands of people are reading that and that's their only source of information about that subject matter. That sort of legitimizes him as standing in for that whole movement because that's exactly what he, as a powerful man of the media, is doing. That's why it's so problematic, especially in a place like Uganda. I definitely think that kind of journalism is partially responsible for what the gay community is going through.

The Rolling Stone

I was really taken aback because the Rolling Stone seemed like a legitimate newspaper not a tabloid, sensationalist publications. It was a newspaper for the news of what's actually going on.

Well it's a bit of both. [laughter] Giles even says that – it's a newspaper but we made it look like a tabloid so that it's spicy and sizzling and sexy and oozing color.

I've always found that statement so intriguing. Before that, Giles worked at another tabloid newspaper that also outed members of the community called the Red Pepper which still exists. It always kind of blew my mind that he was making this distinction that inside of the newspaper they were marketing it as a tabloid and ultimately it was a tabloid newspaper. Another thing we found fascinating and we felt really important to include in the film was that he has this very sophisticated way of talking about media and the role of the journalist and the responsibility to do public good as a journalist which we found intriguing to hear someone talking in

those terms but about the fact that you've got to get rid of all homosexuals and encourage the death penalty to be put in place.

Investigative Journalism

With your background in journalism, what did you think about meeting a fellow journalist like that?

I don't know. (Laughter) In some ways...he was really a tabloid journalist. I don't know. I guess he'd kind of done some investigative journalism, he believed he was an investigative journalist. I guess, like I said before, it was really intriguing to hear him and kind of fascinating to hear him use these terms and phrases that we would use such as integrity and responsibility; there's one point in the film where he talks about trumping the right to privacy in order to inform the public of what is going on and that's in the context of why he thinks it's okay to start raiding people's houses. It was just remarkable, that was the most interesting thing; he had the vocabulary and concepts of good journalism down, but he was talking about it in the context of doing everything he could to get rid of the LGBT community. The other intriguing thing was that the Rolling Stone existed for about 2 years. So it started just after we started working on the film. There was always a bit of suspicion about it because it didn't have any ads in it, it seemed to publish op-eds by the same one or two ardently anti-gay Pastors so there was a general thought that it was actually funded by some of these anti-gay Pastors and they were using it as a vehicle to get their message out there maybe because they didn't think the other tabloids were doing a good enough job. David kind of mentions that during the court scene in the film when you see David and some of the other activists taking Giles, the managing editor of the newspaper for violating their Constitutional right to privacy and he says at one point - look these anti-gay Pastors have come to this court case so I think that shows they are the ones backing this newspaper. So it was also an interesting topic to explore because the concept of using media especially newspapers as a vehicle for a political ideology or message has been around forever and it was interesting to see that play out. The newspaper no longer exists, it folded pretty soon after the court case, so I think all of that seems to point to the fact that it was actually more of a vehicle or loudspeaker for these anti-gay Pastors than anything else. Giles, kind of wasn't, but I think it probably was.

Evangelical Pastors

What was it like for you to hear the involvement of the Pastors in the newspaper and specifically the Western influence in terms of promoting Christian Fundamentalist beliefs in the community and it causing this much trouble for the LGBT community.

It's funny, when you were asking Malika what she thought about being confronted by a journalist like Giles given her background, I started thinking about how it was easier for me to confront someone like Giles than it was some of the other people we confronted. I think partially it's because he's so giggly and weird that it was easy to cast him off as not being genuine even though I knew what he was doing was incredibly problematic and detrimental and things like that and in real time, empirical reality it was easier to kind of put it off as him being loopy and saying

these oddball things. What was much more scary for me to be confronted by was, we couldn't film it because he wouldn't allow us, but we went to one of the most anti-gay Pastors sermons which was like this 6 hour long event in this huge auditorium. That for me was – the only thing I can liken it to even though I've certainly never been to one of these was a KKK rally, just incredibly fueled by hate and advocacy of violence, so rife with misinformation. Yet you had 300-400 people in the audience just sopping it up without any sense of questioning because these are people how are very faith-based people who don't question the words of their Pastor's as they shouldn't. The Pastor is someone that you trust, a vehicle for the word of God. So when he's saying things like this community is out to destroy you and your sense of family, they are raping your children at school, giving them cell phones so that they'll come over to their gay team and things like that is just an incredibly powerful mechanism. And to watch that happen right before your eyes was really disheartening and scary.

Religion & LGBT

One thing that was important to us was to not make another liberal documentary that was very anti religion because the LGBT community in Uganda is quite religious. Almost all of them self identify as Christian and they lead good Christian lifestyles and they want to continue that and they want to go to church on Sundays and they are being prohibited from doing that. For a lot of them, people like Bishop Sanyojo and their parishes are a great support for them and we wanted to be able to document that too and show that it's not either or; not secular and LGBT versus religious that somehow we needed to find a way for all of those things to coexist. So that was also something that was very important for us from the get go to try to get across.

Issues In Community & Filming

Do you think that as far as your presence in Uganda goes, could it have potentially been compromised because of the subject of your film. If so, do you felt like you got some sort of protection by being with this community of activists?

Not really. I was kind of surprised by how easy it was to film in Uganda and really not get much hassle at all. We had to get media accreditation but that was kind of a formality just in case anyone ever asked for our papers. When we had to interview politicians they would ask for them but that wasn't a major factor. Other than that it was pretty easy to access, beyond having to being willing to make repeated phone calls and go and try and meet someone and wait a few hours for them to be available but in terms of actually getting the meeting in the first place it wasn't that difficult. They are pretty used to dealing with media and foreign media in Uganda and they also have a pretty strong sense of freedom of the press. It was interesting that we really kind of never had any hassle; even standing in the street with a camera didn't seem to draw that much attention. In terms of the community, the anti-homosexuality bill was receiving a lot of international attention but it wasn't something that the people pushing for it were ashamed of it was something they were proud of and they were very proud of the fact that they were pushing for it despite the fact that former colonial influences didn't want them to do it. What's

interesting is the issue of LGBT rights in Uganda is more an issue that people want to debate rather than really get very aggressive over, for the most part in terms of our experience there as people from the U.S. and U.K. So when we'd sit down to an interview with a MP like David Bahati who was the author of this bill, he was just happy to have the debate and tell us that he thought we were wrong. In that sense there wasn't that much of a sense of our security being threatened. But that said, after David died, basically we went straight back to Uganda after hearing of his death definitely everything had been turned upside down. The community hadn't expected anything like that to happen; it was such a violent and brutal act. There was a general sense in the community of not knowing what could happen next and not knowing what David's murder meant. Given that we were staying with Naome that was probably the first moment when we started to wonder how safe we were, but ultimately it turned out that things went on as they did before to a certain extent.

Uganda Screening

Has the film screened in Uganda and how has the reception been given the two sides that you presented?

It's been great from the LGBT community. The film had its world premiere at the Berlin Film Festival back in February and we brought Naome to Berlin to be with us for the premiere. It was really important to us that given all these people were really involved in helping us make the film it was really important they should be involved in the distribution especially because it's way more impactful for an audience to see a character from the film come up for the Q&A afterward rather than just us two and people respond to that really well and it's also important for the character to experience that audience response to their story. I guess Naome was the first person to see it but then after that we gradually shared it with main characters in the film either by inviting them to key screenings or by sharing an online link with them when they were traveling in Europe when there was a good enough internet connection. Then back in June the community did a screening of the film as part of the first ever Uganda Pride there and that really meant a lot to us that they thought the film was the most appropriate thing to launch there and the communities response from what we hear was fantastic. We've basically given the film to the activists there and asked them to make the judgment as how best to screen it and where to screen it because we feel obviously they are a better judge than we are of how and when and whom it should be played in Uganda. As for David Bahati and Giles I've no idea if they've seen it. They've probably heard about it but I don't think they've seen it.

Future Screenings

Now what's the next big thing for the film? When's your next screening and where? At this point we are screening all over, a lot, all sorts of regional festivals and human rights festivals, at Universities and stuff. If you go to our website callmekuchu.com you can see a list of our screenings. Next up is the New Orleans film festival and after that...The film has actually just come out in cinemas in Germany, we were just there. It'll be coming out in theatres across the U.K. starting November 2nd. We'll be having

U.S. theatrical at some point but the details of that are yet to be decided. Beyond the realm of film festivals, we are also keen to start utilizing the film as much as possible for advocacy and outreach so we are just in the midst of forming partnerships and formulating strategy and what it's all going to look like; doing things like educational packets and figuring out the best way to start putting the film to use. Over the next few months we'll have a much clearer idea of how all that is looking. All that information will also be available on our website: callmekuchu.com or Facebook: Call Me Kuchu.