KITO, JUNGLE JUSTICE AND THE RULE OF LAW: VIOLENCE AGAINST SEXUAL MINORITIES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This article examines "kito", the Nigerian term for schemes in which people, most often gay and bisexual men, are lured through social media or dating applications into meetings where they are assaulted, filmed, robbed and blackmailed, and in some cases killed. It places kito within the wider Nigerian phenomenon of "jungle justice". The study is a desk-based, qualitative inquiry that combines doctrinal legal analysis with ethical and theological reflection. It draws on the 1999 Constitution, the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act 2013 and regional human rights instruments; reports by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the European Union Agency for Asylum; investigative journalism and police statements; documented cases; and Nigerian and international scholarship. It conducted no interviews, located no court judgments on kito, and treats unproven accounts as allegations. The article argues that kito combines moral vigilantism with organised crime; that it is sustained by a criminal-law environment that deters victims from reporting, by social stigma and by financial incentives; and that it cannot be defended on legal, ethical or religious grounds. It does not defend any sexual lifestyle. It defends human life, due process and the rule of law. It recommends that police should investigate kito as ordinary crime and separate the reporting of a crime from any inquiry into the complainant's identity; that legislators address mob violence and review the breadth of the Act; that researchers build reliable national data; and that religious leaders publicly reject violence, entrapment and extortion.

Keywords: Kito, jungle justice, Nigeria, human dignity, rule of law, Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act.

1. Introduction

Nigeria presents a complex social and legal environment regarding same-sex relationships. Across much of the country, same-sex intimacy is not only legally prohibited but also socially condemned. Cultural, religious and moral narratives strongly shape public perception and often frame same-sex relationships as foreign, immoral or contrary to societal values (Human Rights Watch [HRW], 2016). This creates a layered challenge. On one level there is legal prohibition. On another there is intense social stigma, which manifests in rejection, discrimination, extortion and violence. Country-of-origin research compiled by the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA, 2025) describes discrimination against sexual minorities by both

authorities and society as pervasive, and records barriers in access to healthcare, justice, employment and housing.

Nigeria also has a long-standing pattern commonly called “jungle justice”, in which individuals or crowds take the law into their own hands. It typically arises where people believe that the formal justice system is too slow, too weak or too corrupt to deliver an outcome they accept. Amnesty International (2024) documented 363 incidents of mob violence in Nigeria between 2012 and 2023 in which 555 people were killed, and linked the pattern to failures of law enforcement to prevent violence, protect victims, and investigate and prosecute perpetrators. Jungle justice has most often been associated with suspected theft or other alleged crime. A more recent and disturbing variant targets people because of their real or perceived sexual orientation. This variant is widely known as “kito”.

Kito involves the deliberate entrapment of individuals, usually through social media or dating platforms, followed by violence, humiliation and extortion. Victims are lured to private spaces under false pretences, then beaten, recorded and threatened with exposure. In some cases the violence ends in death. The Initiative for Equal Rights (TIERs), a Nigerian civil society organisation, recorded 84 kito incidents against LGBTQ+ people in 2024, and the EUAA (2025) cautions that the real figure is probably much higher. Within an already tense context, kito represents a dangerous escalation: it moves beyond social disapproval and legal sanction into planned violence carried out by private persons. Its perpetrators often speak the language of morality, yet they act entirely outside legal and ethical boundaries.

It is important to state what this article is not written to defend any sexual lifestyle. It is written to defend human life and to ask whether violence, humiliation and killing can ever be justified as tools of moral correction. The argument advanced is that, whatever one’s moral or religious convictions about sexuality, violence of the kito kind undermines both human dignity and the rule of law, and that in trying to “correct” perceived wrongdoing it produces deeper injustice.

Four questions guide the discussion. What is kito, and how does it operate? Which legal, social and economic conditions sustain it? What do Nigerian law, international human rights norms and ethical-theological reflection say about it? And what responses are warranted? The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 explains the sources and limits of the study. Section 3 conceptualises kito. Section 4 situates it within Nigerian jungle justice. Section 5 analyses the structural conditions that enable it. Section 6 reviews documented cases and data. Section 7 examines kito under Nigerian and international law. Section 8 offers an ethical and theological

analysis. Section 9 considers consequences and civil society responses. Section 10 addresses objections, Section 11 makes recommendations, and Section 12 concludes.

2. Sources, Method and Limitations

This is a desk-based, qualitative study that combines doctrinal legal analysis with ethical and theological reflection. It draws on five kinds of material: (a) legal texts, namely the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended), the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act 2013 (SSMPA) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights together with resolutions of the African Commission; (b) reports by human rights bodies and country-of-origin research, including HRW, Amnesty International and the EUAA, which in turn relies on TIERs' 2024 human rights violations report; (c) investigative journalism, including work by openDemocracy, the Thomson Reuters Foundation's Context service, the Mail & Guardian, and BBC Africa Eye as reported by PinkNews; (d) police statements as reported in the press; and (e) scholarship on Nigerian law, mental health and public theology.

The limits of this approach should be stated plainly. First, the author conducted no interviews and located no court judgments dealing specifically with kito, so the study cannot say how often kito suspects are prosecuted or convicted. Second, Nigeria has no official national dataset on kito. The figures cited here come from civil society documentation, which depends on victims coming forward and is therefore likely to understate the problem (EUAA, 2025). Third, several accounts rest on one victim's testimony or on a suspect's own confession and had not been tested in court so far as the author could establish. Such accounts are presented as allegations, and the names of accused persons are withheld. Fourth, counting periods and methods differ between reports, so figures from different years should not be compared as trends. Finally, the study relies on English-language sources. Although kito affects gay and bisexual men most often, transgender women and queer women are also affected (EUAA, 2025); following the original title, the article speaks of "gay people", but the analysis applies to LGBTQ+ people generally.

3. Conceptualising Kito

3.1 Meaning and usage

"Kito" is Nigerian internet slang whose origin is uncertain. The Mail & Guardian (2020) reported that nobody is sure where the word comes from, and defined a kito as a person who pretends to be queer on social media and dating applications. The EUAA (2025) uses the same

definition and adds that the encounter is not genuine but a scheme designed to extort money, inflict physical harm or otherwise exploit the person targeted. In everyday speech the word therefore does triple duty: it names the perpetrator, it names the practice, and in the passive ("to be kitoed") it names the experience of the victim. This article uses "kito" for the practice and "kito gangs" or "perpetrators" for those who carry it out.

This usage corrects a common shorthand, found even in some secondary sources, that treats kito simply as the act of threatening to expose gay men. The documented core of kito is entrapment: the perpetrator approaches the victim on a platform where queer people seek companionship, builds trust, arranges a meeting and then springs a trap. Exposure, or the threat of it, is one weapon among several. The Mail & Guardian (2020) also observed that after 2014 queer Nigerians increasingly sought community online, and that, as the community went digital, so did those who prey on it. Kito is thus, in part, a product of the very spaces in which queer people sought relative safety.

3.2 The anatomy of an operation

Accounts from different sources describe a recognisable sequence. The first stage is the approach: a fake profile on a dating application or social network, sometimes sustained over days or weeks. The second is the meeting, usually in a private or semi-private place such as a home or hotel room, which isolates the victim. The third is the ambush, in which a group of people, sometimes including the "date" and sometimes arriving after he has left the room, assault the victim. The fourth is recording: victims are filmed during or after the attack. The fifth is extortion, in which the video, the victim's phone or the victim's family is used as leverage.

Reporting on a BBC Africa Eye documentary illustrates the pattern. In one account, a man who had met his attacker on a dating application was beaten by a group of men who burst in while he was showering; the attackers filmed the assault and posted it online. Another victim was filmed, forced to withdraw 500,000 naira from his bank accounts and tortured with an iron. Most of the men interviewed in the documentary lost their jobs when the blackmail videos were published (PinkNews, 2023). These accounts show why recording matters. In a society where same-sex identity carries heavy stigma and criminal exposure, the threat of publication can be as coercive as physical violence, and publication itself inflicts lasting social harm.

The organised character of kito is also visible in police reports. When Nasarawa State police dismantled a six-person gang in July 2022, their statement described a scheme in which the suspects used a gay dating application to arrange dates with members of the public from different parts of the country, lured them to a hideout, assaulted them and robbed them (Within Nigeria, 2022). One account of the same case adds that victims were forced to surrender their ATM codes (Metro Weekly, 2022).

3.3 From "correction" to enterprise

Kito is sometimes defended, or at least explained, as informal moral punishment. The record does not support the view that moral enforcement is its only or even its main driver. Attackers in the mob violence documented by HRW (2016) described their conduct in the language of moral cleansing; three victims reported attackers saying they were "cleansing the community of gays". In kito proper, by contrast, the accounts repeatedly involve robbery, forced bank transfers and ransom demands. The Nasarawa suspects reportedly admitted to luring eight victims and to obtaining about 1.36 million naira from them (Within Nigeria, 2022). Available evidence therefore points to mixed motives: humiliation and punishment, robbery and blackmail often occur together, and financial gain is prominent.

This has an important analytical consequence. If kito were only a clumsy attempt at moral correction, one might argue about its excesses. Because it is also a profit-making crime that exploits fear of exposure, the moral vocabulary attached to it functions largely as cover. Over time kito has come to include physical assault and torture; kidnapping and unlawful detention; extortion and ransom demands; non-consensual recording and blackmail; and, in extreme cases, murder. What may have begun as an attempt at moral enforcement now operates as an underground economy of violence, and the community it targets is the one least able to seek help.

4. Jungle Justice in Nigeria and Its Anti-Gay Variants

4.1 The wider pattern

"Jungle justice" is the Nigerian term for punishment imposed by a crowd or vigilante group, without trial and often with extreme cruelty. Amnesty International's 2024 report, titled "Instantly killed!", examined mob violence in Nigeria and concluded that failures by law enforcement, including failures to prevent attacks, to protect victims and to hold perpetrators to account, help to sustain it (Amnesty International, 2024). Reporting by the International

Centre for Investigative Reporting likewise links the culture of mob justice to public distrust of institutions and to impunity (ICIR, 2024). The practice thrives where people expect that the formal system will not deliver justice, and where they expect that they will not be punished for taking it into their own hands.

4.2 Early signs: Gishiri, Abuja, 2014

The anti-gay form of this violence predates the term kito. On 12 and 13 February 2014, weeks after the SSMPA was signed, attacks took place in Gishiri village in Abuja. According to a communication sent to the Nigerian government by United Nations special procedures, five men were attacked on 12 February, and on 13 February about 40 men, allegedly mobilised by a religious leader, stormed the houses of 14 men. The communication also reported that police had not investigated the attacks (United Nations Special Procedures, 2014). Press reports at the time said that the mob described its aim as "cleansing" the neighbourhood and that no member of the mob was arrested. HRW (2016) later reported rising incidents of mob violence against people perceived to be gay since January 2014. One victim told HRW that his attackers shouted "Jungle justice! No more gays!". The case matters for this article because it shows that the vocabulary of jungle justice was explicitly applied to sexual minorities within weeks of the SSMPA coming into force, and that the state's response, then as now, was marked by inaction.

4.3 How kito differs from, and resembles, classic jungle justice

Kito shares the defining features of jungle justice: punishment without trial, the presumption that the victim deserves what happens to him, public or semi-public humiliation (often now through video), and a high likelihood of impunity. It also differs in ways that matter for law and policy. Table 1 sets out an analytical comparison. It is the author's own synthesis of the sources reviewed rather than a finding of any single report.

Table 1. Classic jungle justice and kito compared (author's analytical synthesis)

Feature	Classic jungle justice	Kito
Trigger	Public accusation of theft or another alleged crime	Victim's real or presumed sexual orientation, discovered or exploited through online contact
Planning	Often arises on the spot	Planned: fake profile, arranged meeting, ambush
Setting	Typically public (street, market)	Typically private (house, hotel room), later made public by video

Motive	Punishment, retribution, deterrence	Mixed: punishment, humiliation, robbery, blackmail
Victim's access to police	Victim usually seen as a suspect, often killed before police arrive	Victim fears prosecution or exposure if he reports
Shared features	No trial; presumption of guilt; humiliation; impunity	No trial; presumption of guilt; humiliation; impunity

5. Structural Conditions Enabling Kito

5.1 The criminal-law environment

The SSMPA was signed into law on 7 January 2014 (HRW, 2016). Its stated purpose is to prohibit marriage between persons of the same sex, but its scope is much wider. In summary, it voids and criminalises same-sex marriages and civil unions, with a penalty of up to 14 years' imprisonment; it bans cohabitation between same-sex partners and any "public show of same sex amorous relationship"; and it provides for 10 years' imprisonment for anyone who registers, operates or participates in gay clubs, societies and organisations (HRW, 2016). For overviews of the Act's provisions see Chukwu (2015), and for an analysis of how it treats foreign same-sex marriages in private international law see Nweze and Amucheazi (2025). HRW concluded that the Act effectively criminalises the lives and associations of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, building on older colonial-era criminal and penal code provisions against same-sex sexual acts (HRW, 2016).

Other layers of law add to the exposure. The EUAA (2025) reports that those found guilty of same-sex relationships face up to 14 years' imprisonment under federal law, and that 12 northern states impose the death penalty for same-sex activity under Sharia-based penal codes. It notes press reports that a Sharia court in Bauchi State sentenced a man to death by stoning in May 2024. Supporters of the SSMPA present it as an expression of prevailing religious and cultural values, and the existence of such values is not disputed here. The point for present purposes is that its breadth creates tensions with constitutional and regional guarantees of association, expression and privacy (HRW, 2016), and that its real-world effects extend well beyond formal prosecutions. HRW found no evidence that anyone had been prosecuted or sentenced under the SSMPA at the time of its research, yet it documented arbitrary arrests, extortion by law-enforcement officers and rising mob violence, and heard from interviewees that the Act had created opportunities to act out homophobia with brutality and without fear of legal consequence (HRW, 2016).

5.2 Reporting barriers and policing

The most consequential effect of this environment for kito is that victims are deterred from reporting. The EUAA (2025) records that LGBTQ+ victims often avoid reporting or seeking help because of stigma, fear of being outed during investigations, fear of exploitation by the police, or concern that law enforcement might prosecute them rather than their attacker. TIERs documented 89 cases of extortion, 118 incidents of harassment and more than 20 unlawful detentions of LGBTQ+ people by law-enforcement officials in 2024 (as cited in EUAA, 2025). When the police are themselves a source of extortion and detention, a rational victim may conclude that reporting increases rather than reduces risk.

The Nasarawa case shows the same dilemma from the police side. After the arrests in 2022, police urged users of the dating application who might have been victimised to come forward, but a police spokesperson told the BBC that the police commissioner would decide whether victims would be prosecuted, and no amnesty was confirmed (PinkNews, 2022). A victim weighing whether to testify was therefore asked to risk prosecution under the very laws that make him vulnerable to extortion. The state also failed to act in the Hilary Emereole case discussed below: as of April 2026, openDemocracy (Kazeem, 2026) reported that no arrests had been made, and police officials in several jurisdictions told the outlet they had received no recent complaints connected to the incidents circulating online.

5.3 Social stigma and religion

Social stigma reinforces the legal environment. The EUAA (2025) reports that hate speech against LGBTQ+ people is common, that religious and societal norms influence homophobic attitudes, that religious institutions reportedly promote homophobic messages, and that LGBTQ+ people face harassment from passers-by, “area boys” and neighbourhood vigilante groups. It lists deadly incidents, including the death in August 2024 of the TikTok personality Ifeanyi Orazulike, known as “Abuja Area Mama”, who was found dead with signs of a beating, and the killing in July 2025 of two students at a Kano boarding school by senior classmates who accused them of “unnatural offences”. Stigma reduces public sympathy for victims, creates an environment in which violence is ignored or even applauded, and lowers the social cost of attacking them.

5.4 Economic incentives

Kito is also sustained by money. What may once have been presented as moral vigilantism has become, for many perpetrators, a way of making money. Documented sums are not trivial: 500,000 naira from one victim in a BBC account (PinkNews, 2023), and about 1.36 million naira from eight victims in the Nasarawa case (Within Nigeria, 2022). The perpetrators' calculation is straightforward. The victim is unlikely to call the police, the public is unlikely to sympathise, and the police are unlikely to investigate. Reward is high, and the risk is low. Kito persists, therefore, not only because of prejudice but because it pays.

6. Documented Cases and Patterns

6.1 Hilary Ikechukwu Emereole, Port Harcourt, 2025

The best-known recent case is that of Hilary Ikechukwu Emereole, a 23-year-old man from Owerri. According to openDemocracy, he travelled about 100 kilometres to Port Harcourt to meet a friend at a hotel and later told close friends that the meeting was a trap. After the two went to a room, the friend left to fetch drinks and returned with several other people. Emereole was assaulted and thrown from a window of the building (Kazeem, 2026). He died of spinal injuries (Zikoko, 2025). Reports differ on the date of the attack: openDemocracy places it in August 2025, while a complaint reported in early 2026 gives 24 July 2025. Extortion demands were reportedly made to his family during the ordeal (Linda Ikeji's Blog, 2026). These details come from reports of allegations, and none has been tested in court.

The activist Jide Macaulay announced Emereole's death on 24 October 2025 and described it as the second reported kito-related death in Nigeria in two weeks (Zikoko, 2025). Amnesty International joined calls for justice (Zikoko, 2025). In February 2026 the Rivers State police spokesperson said the suspects were on the run (Linda Ikeji's Blog, 2026), and in April 2026 openDemocracy reported that no arrests had been made and that the investigation had met delays (Kazeem, 2026). The case drew public attention to impunity and to the reluctance of victims to seek police protection, for the reasons discussed in Section 5.2. It also prompted other survivors to describe their own experiences and to name alleged attackers online, a development discussed in Section 9.

6.2 Nasarawa State, 2022

On 31 July 2022, according to a police statement, officers from the Masaka Division of Nasarawa State raided the hideout of a gang in a sting operation, after which six suspects were arrested; the BBC reported that they were four men and two women (The Star, 2022). The police stated that the suspects had used a popular gay dating application to arrange dates with members of the public from different parts of the country, and had lured, assaulted and robbed them. They also said that the suspects confessed to luring eight victims and making about 1.36 million naira, and that 150,000 naira collected from a victim who had travelled from Imo State the day before was recovered (Within Nigeria, 2022). The case is significant for two reasons: it is one of the few reported cases in which police acted against kito-type perpetrators, and it shows how the law deters victim cooperation (PinkNews, 2022).

6.3 Nanka, Anambra State, 2020

In March 2020, two brothers were arrested in Nanka, Anambra State, in connection with the death of a man who had travelled from Owerri after contact on Facebook; the case was investigated by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (PinkNews, 2020; The Guardian Nigeria, 2020). The principal account in circulation is the suspect's own, given on video after his arrest, in which he claimed that the victim had pressed him for sex and that he had killed him. That account is self-serving and was not tested in court so far as the author could determine, and the case cannot be classed with confidence as kito. It is included because it shows how digital contact can lead to fatal violence, how the public narrative may be shaped by a suspect's confession rather than by evidence, and how reporting that repeats such accounts without scrutiny can reinforce stigma. The earlier draft of this article described the case as an Owerri robbery and killing; the reports reviewed indicate that the killing occurred in Nanka and that the motive was disputed.

6.4 What the data show

Systematic data are limited, but TIERs recorded 84 kito incidents in 2024, in addition to the extortion, harassment and unlawful-detention figures noted above, and the EUAA (2025) cautions that actual figures are probably much higher, especially among queer women, who face particular stigma. The documented cases span several parts of the country: Port Harcourt in Rivers State, Nanka in Anambra State, and Masaka in Nasarawa State, with victims travelling from Imo State and elsewhere, and with the Gishiri attacks in Abuja showing that anti-gay mob violence has long been present in the Federal Capital Territory. The consistency

of the pattern, rather than the number of reported cases, supports the conclusion that kito is a recurring, organised form of extrajudicial violence rather than a series of unrelated crimes.

7. Kito under Nigerian and International Law

7.1 The Constitution

Chapter IV of the 1999 Constitution guarantees rights that kito violates in practice. Section 33(1) protects the right to life and provides that no person shall be deprived of life intentionally except in execution of a court sentence for a criminal offence. Section 34(1)(a) provides that no person shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment. Section 35 protects personal liberty, which unlawful detention by private gangs defeats. Section 36(5) presumes every person charged with a criminal offence to be innocent until proved guilty. Section 37 guarantees the privacy of citizens, their homes and their correspondence. Outside Chapter IV, section 17(2)(b) lists among the state's social objectives that the sanctity of the human person shall be recognised and human dignity maintained and enhanced.

Chapter IV is primarily addressed to the state, and so a victim cannot simply sue a private gang for breach of section 34. The state's duties are nonetheless engaged. It is obliged to protect life and to investigate and prosecute violent crime without regard to the victim's identity, and its failure to do so is itself a breach of those duties. The presumption of innocence under section 36(5) is a rule of criminal procedure, but it states a principle that applies more broadly: a person's guilt is to be decided by a court, not by whoever is able to overpower him.

7.2 Ordinary criminal law

The SSMPA does not authorise private enforcement. It prescribes penalties to be imposed after trial. The conduct that constitutes kito, namely assault and grievous harm, unlawful confinement and kidnapping, extortion, robbery and murder, is criminal under the Criminal Code Act and, in the northern states, the Penal Code, whatever the victim's sexual orientation. None of these offences contains an exception for victims who are suspected of violating the SSMPA or the older sodomy provisions. Provisions of the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act 2015 on identity fraud and cyberstalking may also be relevant to the online stage of kito; the author has not reviewed case law applying them. A person who lures, beats, films and robs another commits the same offences whether the target is gay or straight. What differs is the likelihood that the offence will be reported, investigated and prosecuted.

7.3 Regional and international law

Nigeria ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and gave it domestic effect through the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Ratification and Enforcement) Act, now Cap A9 of the Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004. The Supreme Court held in Abacha v Fawehinmi (2000) 6 NWLR (Pt 660) 228 that the Charter forms part of Nigerian law, although it ranks below the Constitution. Article 4 of the Charter protects life and Article 5 protects human dignity and prohibits torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. In 2014 the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights adopted Resolution 275, which condemns violence and other human rights violations committed against persons on the basis of their real or imputed sexual orientation or gender identity, including by non-state actors, and calls on states to end such violence and to ensure effective investigation and prosecution (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, 2014). Nigeria is also a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which protects the right to life (Article 6) and prohibits torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment (Article 7), although the Covenant has not been domesticated by legislation.

8. Ethical and Theological Analysis

8.1 Human dignity

From an ethical perspective kito is a serious violation of human dignity, which affirms the inherent worth of every person regardless of identity or conduct. Through assault, public humiliation and psychological abuse, victims are treated as objects of punishment rather than as persons. This is not merely a secular claim. The Christian doctrine of the imago Dei, rooted in Genesis 1:26–27, holds that every human being bears the image of God. Genesis 9:6 grounds the seriousness of killing in that image, and James 3:9 applies the same idea to ordinary hostility, rebuking those who curse people made in God's likeness. A recent Nigerian study argues that the doctrine, rightly understood, affirms the equality and worth of all human beings and challenges social arrangements that dehumanise people (Awoshiri, 2025). On this view, dignity does not depend on agreement about sexual ethics; it is anterior to it.

8.2 Justice and vengeance

Biblical ethics draws a firm line between justice administered through accountable processes and vengeance exacted by private persons. Leviticus 19:17–18 forbids vengeance and grudge-bearing against fellow members of the community, and commentators read the passage as

requiring direct, honest dealing rather than covert retaliation (Milgrom, 2000). Deuteronomy 16:18–20 charges judges and officials with administering justice impartially, and Deuteronomy 19:15–21 requires more than one witness and a careful judicial inquiry before a person is condemned. Romans 12:17–21 forbids Christians to repay evil for evil and leaves vengeance to God, while Romans 13:1–4 assigns the coercive power of punishment to governing authorities; commentators commonly read the two passages together (Moo, 1996). Kito inverts these principles. It replaces witness and inquiry with deception and ambush, and it replaces accountable authority with a gang.

Kito also relies on deceit, since the entire operation begins with a false identity. Scripture treats false witness as a grave wrong (Exodus 20:16), and Proverbs 6:16–19 lists lying witnesses and hands that shed innocent blood among the things the Lord hates. A scheme that fabricates a relationship in order to harm the person who trusts it is difficult to reconcile with any reading of these texts.

8.3 The narrative of John 8:1–11

The narrative of the woman brought to Jesus by a group demanding her stoning is often invoked in discussions of mob justice, and with good reason. It shows a crowd, an accusation about sexual conduct, a demand for immediate punishment and a refusal to supply it. Two cautions are necessary. First, the passage concerns an accusation of adultery, not same-sex conduct, and so it is used here by analogy and not as direct commentary on sexual orientation. Second, textual critics note that the passage is absent from the earliest manuscripts of John and treat it as a later insertion, even though it has long been received in the church's tradition (Metzger, 1994). With those cautions, the narrative is instructive for the argument of this article because it combines two things that the debate often assumes to be incompatible: it refuses the mob's violence, and it does not pretend that moral standards do not exist. One may hold firm convictions about sexual ethics and also hold that no one is entitled to beat, humiliate or kill another in their name. That is the position this article defends.

8.4 Does violence correct?

Defenders of vigilante violence assume that force produces moral reform. The evidence reviewed in this article points the other way. It documents fear, concealment, loss of employment and distress among those attacked (PinkNews, 2023; Oginni et al., 2018), and no source examined here shows that violence changes convictions or conduct. Violence may

silence people, but it does not persuade them, and it teaches observers that force is a legitimate way of settling moral disagreement. In this way the harm of kito extends beyond its victims to the society that tolerates it: when private violence is accepted as a tool of moral enforcement, the difference between justice and revenge collapses, and the same tools can be turned against other groups.

8.5 The responsibility of religious leaders

Religious institutions occupy a pivotal position. The EUAA (2025) reports that religious institutions have reportedly promoted homophobic messages, and the United Nations communication on the Gishiri attacks alleged that the mob had been mobilised by a religious leader (United Nations Special Procedures, 2014). The same Nigerian study that affirms the imago Dei observes that many Nigerian churches have underemphasised social justice in favour of personal piety and prosperity (Awoshiri, 2025). Religious leaders are therefore not neutral bystanders. They can inflame or restrain. A teaching ministry that holds a traditional sexual ethic while condemning violence, entrapment and extortion without qualification would offer congregations a coherent alternative to jungle justice.

9. Consequences and Civil Society Responses

9.1 Psychological and social harm

The consequences of kito extend beyond physical injury. Research on sexual minority men in Nigeria shows elevated depression linked to stigma. In a study of 81 gay and 81 heterosexual male students at Obafemi Awolowo University, depression prevalence was 16 per cent among gay students and 4.9 per cent among heterosexual students, and perceived stigma and internalised homophobia were associated with depression among the gay students (Oginni et al., 2018). That study was not about kito and it did not measure violence, so it cannot establish the psychological effects of kito. It does show a baseline of vulnerability on which kito acts. Victims quoted in journalism describe feeling insecure and mentally harmed (PinkNews, 2023). Studies that measure kito-specific outcomes such as post-traumatic stress, anxiety and social isolation are needed; until they exist, claims about those outcomes should be treated as plausible but unproven. The social consequences are better documented: job loss after videos are published (PinkNews, 2023), rejection by family, and a need to hide or flee. The EUAA (2025) also records that some families subject LGBTQ+ relatives to forced confinement, starvation or other abuse in attempts to change their orientation.

9.2 Civil society and community self-help

Civil society organisations, notably TIERs, document abuses, advocate and run programmes including mental health initiatives (EUAA, 2025). Communities have also developed their own defences. Platforms such as Kito Diaries collate images, locations and accounts of alleged attackers (Mail & Guardian, 2020), and one sting operation, organised by community members to catch a kito suspect, was reported by Context (2024). Survivors are increasingly naming alleged attackers on social media, which warns others but, as openDemocracy (Kazeem, 2026) notes, also outs and endangers the survivors themselves. These measures are understandable responses to the absence of police protection, and the article does not condemn them. They do raise a difficulty: allegations circulated online are untested, may be wrong, and risk reproducing in digital form the mob logic that kito embodies. The long-term remedy is a justice system that victims can safely use, not a more efficient system of private exposure. Activism alone, however committed, cannot address the legal, social and structural conditions that sustain kito.

10. Objections and Replies

Objection 1: The law reflects society's values, so hostility towards gay people is legitimate. Even if one accepts that the SSMPA reflects widely held moral convictions, it provides for penalties to be imposed by courts after trial. It does not delegate enforcement to private persons, and it does not authorise assault, kidnapping, extortion or killing. A legal prohibition on a type of conduct is a reason to prosecute that conduct in court, not to attack the person.

Objection 2: Victims of kito are themselves lawbreakers. Even a person who has broken a law retains the right to life, to freedom from torture and to a fair trial. The presumption of innocence applies to persons charged, and most kito victims have not been charged with anything. The Nasarawa police themselves treated the gang as criminals, which confirms that the law treats kito as crime and not as law enforcement.

Objection 3: Online naming of attackers is also jungle justice. This is a serious objection and it should be acknowledged. Naming alleged perpetrators without evidence or process carries risks of misidentification and retaliation. Its prevalence, however, is largely a result of institutional failure: where police do not act, survivors seek alternatives. The proper response is to make legal channels safe and effective, not to blame the survivors.

Objection 4: The evidence is too thin to speak of a pattern. The data are indeed incomplete, and this article has tried to say so wherever relevant. However, documentation by civil society,

police statements, investigative journalism and the EUAA's synthesis point in the same direction, and under-reporting is itself a feature of the problem. The conclusion is not that the exact scale is known, but that the pattern is well enough documented to require a response.

11. Recommendations

The analysis supports five sets of recommendations.

Law enforcement and prosecution. Police and prosecutors should treat kito offences as the ordinary crimes they are, namely assault, kidnapping, extortion, robbery and murder, and should investigate them irrespective of the victim's real or presumed sexual orientation. The police should adopt written protocols that separate the investigation of crimes committed against a complainant from any question about the complainant's own conduct, so that reporting a crime does not itself invite arrest. The unresolved Emereole case is an obvious test of institutional will.

Legislation and policy. The National Assembly and state legislatures should consider legislation specifically addressing mob violence, in line with Amnesty International's call for stronger legal and institutional responses (Amnesty International, 2024). Legislators should also review the breadth of the SSMPA in light of Nigeria's obligations under the African Charter and Resolution 275, in particular the duty to protect people from violence by non-state actors (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, 2014).

Digital platforms. Operators of dating and social platforms used in Nigeria should adopt safety features that help users verify identities, report suspected entrapment and receive safety guidance, and should cooperate with lawful requests relating to violent crime. Users should be given plain advice about meeting strangers: meeting in public places, telling a trusted person, and verifying profiles.

Civil society and research. Funders and researchers should support systematic, ethically supervised data collection on kito, including studies of its psychological effects, so that policy can rest on evidence and not on anecdote. Legal aid and psychosocial support for survivors should be expanded, and documentation standards should distinguish verified incidents from allegations.

Religious and community leaders. Churches, mosques and traditional institutions should state publicly and repeatedly that violence, entrapment and extortion are unacceptable whatever

one's views on sexual ethics, should refrain from mobilising or excusing mobs, and should teach that justice is administered through lawful processes. Theological colleges should include the ethics of vigilante violence and the doctrine of human dignity in their curricula.

12. Conclusion

Kito, as examined here, represents a profound ethical crisis within contemporary Nigerian society. It is not merely an expression of prejudice against people perceived to be in same-sex relationships. It is, more significantly, a reflection of the erosion of legal order and moral reasoning. When violence is framed as a legitimate means of correction, the foundations of morality are distorted: moral language is used to justify harm, and the most vulnerable are made to pay twice, first at the hands of attackers and then at the hands of a system that deters them from seeking redress. From an ethical standpoint, kito fails every basic test of justice. It violates human dignity by treating persons as objects of punishment. It undermines the rule of law by replacing due process with private violence. It rests on a flawed assumption that force can produce moral transformation, when the evidence reviewed here points to fear, concealment and social fragmentation. And it is, in many of its forms, simply a crime for profit, carried out in the knowledge that victims are unlikely to complain and that officials are unlikely to act.

Beyond its immediate effects, kito signals a dangerous shift in how justice is understood. When individuals assume the right to enforce moral standards through violence, the distinction between justice and revenge collapses, and a broader climate of insecurity follows. A society that permits such practices risks normalising violence in other areas and widening the scope of injustice.

The way forward requires a recommitment to basic principles. Respect for human dignity must be upheld without exception. The rule of law must be strengthened so that justice is administered through proper channels and so that all victims of crime, whoever they are, can safely report it. Public education is needed to challenge the normalisation of jungle justice and to promote non-violent engagement in the face of deep moral disagreement. Religious and cultural leaders, who hold great influence, must affirm the value of human life and reject violence as a means of correction. No society can sustain justice when violence becomes an accepted tool of moral enforcement. If Nigeria is to move towards a more just and stable future, it must reject all forms of extrajudicial violence and reaffirm its commitment to dignity, law and humanity.

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