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## YouTube closes African channel promoting televangelist's violent 'conversion therapy'

In response to our enquiries about TB Joshua's controversial exorcisms, YouTube terminated his channel. Facebook says it has removed certain posts, but some remain

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16 April 2021, 4.04am



Screengrab from YouTube: Mary Okoye (centre) watches while TB Joshua strikes her partner

**P**astor TB Joshua, the controversial Nigerian televangelist, hits Mary Okoye's head and she falls to the floor. When she gets up, he hits her again and tells her to call her "second", another woman he refers to as Okoye's "wife".

Joshua slaps and pushes Okoye and the unnamed woman at least 16 times and tells Okoye: "There is a spirit disturbing you. She has transplanted herself into you. It is the spirit of woman."

This scene, which appears in a video uploaded to YouTube in April 2018, then changes to events a week later. Okoye, accompanied by her mother and two sisters, testifies before Joshua and his congregation that "the spirit of woman" had been destroying her life. But now, thanks to Joshua's intervention, she has "no affection whatsoever" for her "second" and "now I have affections for men".

The video has been watched more than 1.5 million times on TB Joshua Ministries' YouTube channel. It appeared first on [Emmanuel TV](#), a television station owned by Joshua's megachurch in Lagos, The Synagogue, Church of All Nations (SCOAN).

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Between 2016 and January 2020, the channel posted at least seven similar clips showing the charismatic Christian televangelist engaging in violent exorcism to 'cure'

gay and lesbian congregants of their sexual orientation by casting out “the demon of homosexuality”.

YouTube closed the channel, which had more than 1.8 million subscribers, on 12 April after openDemocracy contacted it to ask whether this content violated the platform's community guidelines.

“YouTube's Community Guidelines prohibit hate speech and we remove flagged videos and comments that violate these policies. In this case we have terminated the channel,” a YouTube spokesperson told openDemocracy.

YouTube says it “prohibits content which alleges that someone is mentally ill, diseased, or inferior because of their membership in a protected group including sexual orientation”.

“It is great to see social media platforms take a greater role in tackling these harmful practices by banning accounts spouting hate speech and promoting conversion practices,” said Daina Rudusa, spokesperson for OutRight Action International, the global LGBTIQ human rights organisation.

“So-called conversion therapy is neither therapy, nor does it result in conversion” and it has been recognised as being “tantamount to torture”, said Rudasa.

OutRight's Yvonne Wamari, who manages a project fighting 'conversion therapy' in Africa, said that research among the LGBTIQ community in Nigeria found that almost half of the respondents had undergone similar rituals, mostly conducted by religious leaders.

## **Some Facebook posts still up**

The TB Joshua Ministries Facebook page has more than 5.6 million followers. Unlike YouTube, which terminated the ministries' entire channel, Facebook says it has “removed a number of pieces of content from this page for violating these policies”.

"We don't allow attacks against people based on their sexual orientation or gender identity, including content promoting conversion therapy services," said a Facebook company spokesperson. "We take attacks on the LGBT+ community incredibly seriously and encourage people to report this kind of content when they see it so we can investigate."

Facebook's [hate speech policy](#) "prohibits attacks against people based on their protected characteristics, which include sexual orientation and gender identity". This includes "content promoting conversion therapy services which aim to change someone's sexual orientation or gender identity".

But at the time of publication, this [16-minute video](#) in which Joshua claims that a young man, Eugene Monama, "is a man with a woman inside him" was still available on the ministries' Facebook page. openDemocracy had flagged this post in correspondence with Facebook.

During their exchange, Joshua describes Monama as walking and talking like a woman, while slapping and punching him numerous times. The pastor then says he is casting out the "spirit of woman" and claims Monama is "free". Later, Joshua's officials cut off Monama's dreadlocks and the young man says he is no longer attracted to men.



**TB Joshua Ministries**

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Facebook post: TB Joshua mocks Eugene Monama, claiming that he is effeminate

Emmanuel TV is broadcast throughout Africa by DStv, which is owned by the MultiChoice Group, an entertainment company based in South Africa. MultiChoice did not respond to openDemocracy's query about whether Emmanuel TV's content violated the country's constitution, which prohibits discrimination against people on the basis of their sexual orientation.

openDemocracy also asked TB Joshua Ministries to comment on its pastor's actions towards LGBT people, and on its YouTube channel being terminated for hate speech. The ministry did not respond. However, it has launched a social media campaign to contest the YouTube decision, which it claims was "made in haste".

## 'Prosperity gospel' meets homophobia

TB Joshua, a Nigerian pastor in the "prosperity gospel" mould, is said to be one of the 20 richest preachers in the world. In 2015, he was reported to have bought a \$60m Gulfstream jet via a front company.

In 2011, Forbes estimated his net worth at \$10–15m. In 2006, Joshua and his wife, Evelyn, were named in the Panama Papers as having incorporated a company called Chillon Consultancy Limited in the British Virgin Islands, according to Nigeria's Premium Times. However, Joshua denied this.

Hanzline Davids, who works with the Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM), a pan-African network that champions LGBTIQ rights in religious organisations, says that Joshua promotes the notion that LGBTIQ people are "bad spirits" blocking prosperity.

"Parents from poor communities bring their children that are LGBTIQ-identifying to Joshua's services, in the hope that their 'bad omen' child will be turned into something good, and they will start to have 'good luck' and prosperity," says Davids, who is a former reverend with the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa.

For the people taken for these 'conversions', said OutRight's Wamari, "these practices have a long-term negative impact on every realm of life, causing deep, lasting trauma, which contributes to internalised homophobia, depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation and substance abuse as a coping mechanism. In a number of instances, individuals have taken their lives."

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