CALL ME QUEEN

EIN FILM VON **EMILY ATEF**



DISCUSSION GUIDE & THEMES

A conversation starter

for screenings, film clubs, classrooms and community gatherings

How to use this guide

This guide is a starting point, not a script. Choose the themes and questions that fit your group and leave the rest. You don't need to be an expert, only curious and willing to listen. Plan 45 to 60 minutes for the conversation after the screening.

About the film

Nairobi, 1999. Queen Achungo, a determined single mother, convinces Anna, an Irish journalist, to hire her as a housekeeper. A friendship grows between two very different women, and Queen shows Anna a reality that rarely makes it into the news: the AIDS epidemic shaping everyday life around them. Queen is HIV-positive. With Anna's help she gets treatment and survives, while friends and neighbors do not. Her survival changes everything. Together with her community, she starts to fight an unjust system in which life-saving medicine exists, but access remains out of reach for millions, held back by patents, prices, trade interests and political inaction.
Inspired by true events. Directed by Emily Atef, with Eliane Umuhire and Denise Gough.

Before you begin

- Content note: The film deals with HIV/AIDS, illness, death and stigma. Some people in your group may have personal experience of this. Mention it before the screening and make clear that anyone can step out or choose not to participate. If the film brings up difficult feelings, local HIV counselling and health services can offer support.
- Create a safe space: Invite everyone to speak from their own experience, listen without interrupting and accept that there are no right or wrong answers.
- Give the film a moment: After the credits, give everyone some time to process or start with a round of first impressions.

Introduction & Background Information

Health and access

Health means more than not being ill. It is a human right that is defined as the state of physical, mental and social wellbeing. Access to healthcare means that the care you need exists, that you can afford it, reach it, and use it without fear or shame. In the film, the medicine exists, but access does not because Queen's friends and neighbors cannot pay for it.

HIV and AIDS

HIV is a virus that attacks the body's immune system. Without treatment, it can develop into Acquired immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), the stage at which the body can no longer fight off illness. HIV is passed on through blood, semen, vaginal and rectal fluids, through unprotected sex, shared needles, and from mother to child during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding. It is not passed on by touching, hugging, kissing, sharing food or cups, or working and living together. Today, condoms, regular testing, PrEP (a preventive medication), clean needles and treatment during pregnancy protect against infection. Daily medication (antiretroviral therapy) allows people to live long, healthy lives and prevents them from passing on the virus. In 1999 almost none of this was available to most people in Kenya. In the film, Queen is HIV-positive, and without medication she is expected to die.

The AIDS epidemic and the world of 1999

AIDS was first recognized in the early 1980s. From 1996, combination therapy changed everything in Europe and North America: people with HIV could survive. Yet in December 2000 antiretrovirals were priced globally at $10,000 - 12,000 a patient a year, far beyond what most families, or governments of sub-Saharan countries where most affected people live, could pay. Kenya was among the heavily affected countries and declared AIDS a national disaster in 1999, the year in which the film is set.

Patents and generics

A patent gives a company the exclusive right to produce a medicine for many years, which allows it to set high prices. Generics are cheaper copies made once that exclusivity does not apply or is overridden. When generic producers entered the market in the early 2000s, and after years of pressure from activists, prices fell dramatically and treatment reached millions more people. In the film, Queen takes on pharmaceutical companies, trade interests and political inaction.

Stigma

Stigma means judgement, blame and shame attached to a person or an illness. With HIV, stigma leads to silence, isolation and delays in testing and treatment, and people fear speaking up. In the film, even among friends, HIV is hard to talk about.

Intersectionality

Different forms of discrimination, such as racism, sexism, classism, xenophobia and others can overlap and reinforce each other. The term intersectionality was coined by the scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw. Queen lives at several of these crossings at once. She is a Black woman, a single mother, poor, HIV-positive, and a Rwandan migrant living in Nairobi.

Privilege and Allyship

Privilege means advantages a person has without having earned them, such as money, a passport, skin color or access to information. Allyship means using that privilege to support others: listening, following their lead, and not putting yourself at the center. Anna's friendship with Queen invites us to ask what good allyship looks like, and where it falls short.

Grassroots movements

A grassroots movement starts with ordinary people in their own communities rather than with governments or companies. Queen's struggle grows from a personal fight into a collective one, a pattern that also shaped real campaigns for access to HIV treatment.

Sources

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https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2011/november/20111123doha

https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/07-hiv-human-rights-factsheet-stigma-discrmination_en.pdf

https://academic.oup.com/jhrp/article-abstract/1/1/14/2188684?redirectedFrom=fulltext

Themes & Questions for Your Conversation

Suggestion: Use one warm-up question, two themes and one closing question.

Warm-up (choose one)

- What is staying with you after the film? Is there a moment or an image?
- What does the film resonate with inside you?

Health as a matter of justice

The medicine exists, but not for everyone. Who decides who gets treatment?

- In the film, the medicine exists, but Queen's friends don't have access to it. Where do you see similar gaps today, in healthcare or elsewhere?
- Who should decide who gets treatment, and who should make sure everyone does?

Stigma and silence

What happens when a topic is too taboo to talk about?

- At first, even Queen's friends find it hard to talk about HIV. What makes certain topics taboo in a community?
- What helped Queen and the women around her break the silence? What helps in your own experience?

Friendship across privilege

Can a friendship be equal when power and resources are not?

- Anna pays for tests and medication, but the film also shows her privilege. What does this friendship give each woman, and what does it ask of them? Can such a friendship be equal and what would it take?
- What does good allyship look like in the film, and where does it fall short? Where do you see it in everyday life?

Community and collective action

Queen's fight becomes a shared one. What makes people organize together?

- Queen demands medication for everyone and doesn't stop just because she happens to know someone who can pay. Why does that difference matter?
- What would it take to start a movement where you live? What grassroot movements can you think of?

Whose story, whose gaze

Who tells stories like this, and whose voices are heard?

- Whose perspective guides this story, and what does that change? Why does it matter who tells stories about Africa and about women like Queen?
- Which stories from your community, region or family are rarely told?

Then and now

What connects 1999 to today?

- What parallels do you see between the past in the film and the present as you experience it?
- How does the film relate to political and social change in Kenya and across Africa today?

Closing (choose one)

- What do you take with you from this conversation?
- Who would you like to watch this film with?
- How does the film inspire change, and what would that look like for you?

Take Action

Share

- Let us know how your conversation went and post your thoughts with #CallMeQueen and tag @call_me_queen_film.

Pass it on

- Invite someone who should see this film.

Support

- Find organizations in your area working on HIV, access to healthcare and women's rights.

Host

- Want to organize your own screening? Find more under "Get Involved" on the film's website https://callmequeen-film.com/involved#organise-a-screening