Getting a student thesis on the African discourse on homosexuality for review, one expects a vehement critique of homophobia. The thesis of Gabriel du Plessis does not only violate these expectations, but also those regarding what one might reasonably expect from a master student. Drawing on a variety of studies, his thesis brilliantly maps the discourse on homosexuality in Africa and more specifically Zimbabwe, while at the same time deconstructing the notion of homosexuality by contextualizing it. Employing Foucault’s genealogical method, Gabriel du Plessis convincingly shows that not same-sex practices as such, as some African politicians like Mugabe claim, but the concept of “homosexuality” is a Western import, a clear case of a “colonization of meaning” (p.27). The key question of the discourse “Is homosexuality un-African?” is thus not simply answered with “no”, but rejected altogether by complexifying the notion of homosexuality in historical and contemporary African contexts. Following the groundbreaking works of Foucault and Butler, his thesis goes against the grain of liberal common-sense, as Western discourses have a strong tendency to naturalize the notion of homosexuality, to separate heterosexual and homosexual orientations in neat and often biologically determined packages. The conclusion is well balanced, critical of the vocabulary of “homosexuality”, while at the same time acknowledging its historical achievements. On top of that, the thesis is beautifully written, well-structured and argumentatively conclusive. It is hard for me to think of any reasons that would justify not giving Gabriel du Plessis the best grade for his exceptional work. One could argue that his thesis basically consists of a survey of studies in the field and almost exclusively uses their empirical findings as well as many of their theoretical arguments. Nevertheless, the synopsis and criticism provided by Gabriel du Plessis is a great scholarly achievement in its own right which should be published in a shortened version as a journal article. Thus I recommend an “A”, pending on the defense of the thesis.

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