What Mugabe Said: Homosexuality in Africa and the Problem of Context

Master’s Thesis

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I hereby declare that this thesis I submit for assessment is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Date: ________________________________  Signature: ________________________________
ABSTRACT: African heads of state have a mutual penchant for claiming that homosexuality is un-African. Whilst it has become increasingly popular in Africa to claim that homosexuality is a Western export, there is a worrying lack of specificity when making these claims. ‘Homosexuality’, in particular, is often understood and applied unreflectively and without context when addressing same-sex practices in Africa. Moreover, all same-sex practices and desires are understood and articulated qua ‘homosexuality’. Whilst homosexuality may act as a convenient marker, it, nevertheless, often misrepresents and limits the nuances of same-sex experiences. This thesis upends this commonplace yet unreflective use of homosexuality by both those for and against the claim that homosexuality is un-African. Homosexuality is not just a behavioural fact. It is interpreted and given meaning. Particular attention is consequently also paid to how and why this particular descriptive term has come to be used in the context of Africa. This thesis therefore both examines and problematizes the use of ‘homosexuality’ as a means of articulating same-sex practices in Africa. This is done to enables a more comprehensive understanding of a claim in desperate need of clarification.

Keywords: Homosexuality, Africa, Homophobia.
In the moment of crisis, the wise build bridges and the foolish build dams. ~ Nigerian proverb
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.

A dangerous and discriminatory narrative dominates discourse on African sexuality. It glorifies heterosexuality as the African ideal, whilst condemning homosexuality as its aberrant negation. There is near unanimity among African leaders, whatever their ideological position on other issues, that homosexuality is not only aberrant, but ‘un-African’. The premise of the claim, however, is neither as simple nor as concrete as it is commonly presented. For the most part, it disassociates homosexuality from specificity and context. For Foucault, as Downing (2008) notes, “all forms of knowledge are historically relative and contingent” (p.vii). The given cultural and historical context in which the current knowledge of homosexuality in Africa was established, however, remains deceptively absent from most narratives condemning homosexuality as un-African.

For the president of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, homosexuality is a “scourge planted by the white man on a pure continent” (Mwaura 2006). According to the former president of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, homosexuality is “unnatural, ungodly, and un-African” (Msibi 2011: 61). During a presidential address in 2013, the president of the Gambia, Yahya Jammeh, asserted that,

Homosexuality is anti-god, anti-human, and anti-civilization. Homosexuals are not welcome in the Gambia. If we catch you, you will regret why you are born [sic]… Allowing homosexuality means allowing satanic rights. We will not allow gays here (Benett-Smith 2013).

Statements, such as these made by the presidents of Nigeria and the Gambia, fuel hatred of homosexuals by suggesting that homosexuality is anathema to the values of African society. Moreover, by juxtaposing a pure, untainted Africa with homosexuality qua polluting threat of African values, violence against homosexuals is not only permissible, but essential, if the continent is to be saved.
Whilst homosexuality is negated in terms of African culture, the knowledge that has lead to this specific articulation of homosexuality remains relatively obscure. Most worryingly, all same-sex practices and desires in Africa are understood vis-à-vis homosexuality. This is not only evident in terms of proponents of the claim that homosexuality is un-African, but also those who oppose the claim. Historians, anthropologists, and writers in other fields predominantly address the claim through the supposed evidence of ‘homosexuality’ on the continent. To merely look at the claim through well-worn and accepted Western interpretations of sexuality, however, is to appreciate only a partial view of same-sex practices in Africa. Moreover, it imposes a simplified and somewhat crude analysis that mostly belies the complexity of the claim.

1.1: Research Problem

The present articulation of sexuality in Africa is far more complex than is currently presented by both sides of the argument. The locus of my concerns, regarding the claim that homosexuality is un-African, is centred on the unreflective use of the term ‘homosexuality’. Our commonsense assumptions about the ‘facts’ or ‘truth’ of sexuality are neither ahistorical nor fixed (Foucault [1976] 1990; Downing 2008). Our current understanding of same-sex practices qua ‘homosexuality’, as Michel Foucault notes, is a relatively new construct and specific to the West (Foucault [1976] 1990; Engelke 1999). Critiques of the claim that homosexuality is un-African are often, nonetheless, marked by historical examples of homosexuality in Africa. By providing evidence that homosexuality existed prior the colonisation of Africa, the claim that homosexuality is un-African is somehow invalidated. Yet, this does not address nor explain how the current knowledge of homosexuality in Africa came to be. Instead, the descriptive term is simply applied and understood as ahistorical, fixed, and universally applicable.
In this thesis, I shall address the crusade against those who engage in same-sex relations in Africa. I shall do so, through the critical analysis of the claim that homosexuality is un-African. Whilst the intimidation of and violence against homosexuals is unjustifiable and wrong, it is imperative that the claim is taken seriously. Labelling proponents of the claim that homosexuality is un-African as ignorant and homophobic, is neither fair nor constructive. This is not to say that homophobia is not present in Africa. It evidently is. Nor does it imply that same-sex practices are alien to African societies. Approaching the claim under the banner of ‘homosexuality’, however, is a complicated move at best. I am thus not concerned with the validity of the claim per se. Instead, I wish to upend the commonplace yet unreflective use of homosexuality by both those for and against the claim. I thus endeavour to call into question the ‘truth’ of homosexuality in Africa. It is only when we begin to pay more attention to how and why people have come to understand homosexuality in Africa as it is currently articulated, that we may begin to address the claim more comprehensively. This thesis therefore examines and problematizes ‘homosexuality’ as a means of articulating same-sex practices in Africa. In so doing, it potentially enables a more comprehensive understanding of a claim in desperate need of clarification.

1.2: Outline

I first introduce and identify the existing literature that addresses my key concerns. This is followed by an outline of the methods I have used to address this topic, after which I present three related analytical chapters. The first chapter crucially unsettles the deceptive simplicity of the claim that homosexuality is un-African. I do so by addressing the limitations of homosexuality as a descriptive term. To situate my critique of the unreflective use of the term ‘homosexuality’, it is also helpful to first contextualise the term. Adopting Foucault’s approach to history, vis-à-vis his ‘archaeology’, I examine the discursive traces left by the
past to enable a more comprehensive understanding of the present (Foucault [1966] 2002, [1969] 1972). I thus examine the necessary conditions that enabled the current articulation of homosexuality in Africa.

The second analytical chapter draws lessons from previous research on the need to interrogate the silences around homosexuality in Africa. In this chapter, it is argued that, contrary to Foucault’s critique of the ‘repressive hypothesis’, homosexuality often remained unarticulated in certain non-Western contexts. Particular attention is consequently paid to the discursive silence that reigned over homosexuality. It does so by investigating how and why homosexuality was silenced. Whilst this chapter predominantly focuses on 'indigenous' discourses in regards to such silence, the chapter concludes by showing how colonial and Western discourses have historically contributed to the rendering invisible of homosexuality in Africa.

Considering the scope of this analysis, in the remaining chapters I focus specifically on Zimbabwe. This country provides a particularly revealing history from which to draw upon and further address my key concerns. Moreover, doing so enables specificity whilst avoiding unnecessary generalisations.

For Foucault, “discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (Foucault [1976] 1990: 101). Discursively, homosexuality in Zimbabwe serves all of the above. In the third chapter, I juxtapose competing discourses in Zimbabwe: one marked by silence and discretion in regards to sexuality and the other marked by a Western, public naming of sexual acts and identities. I draw on the controversy surrounding the request
of the organisation, Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ), to be included at the 1995 Zimbabwe International Book Fair (ZBIF). By explicitly and publically articulating homosexuality at ZIBF, GALZ rendered both the homosexual act and the homosexual identity potentially discursively visible. Through this identification, a point of resistance could be enabled, i.e. as homosexuals, Zimbabweans demanded to have their identities recognised and respected. This also, however, provided the president of Zimbabwe with the means to further legitimise his authority. The President made it clear, for example, that the inclusion of GALZ at the ZIBF threatened Zimbabwean norms and values, i.e. a culture and discourse marked by silence regarding matters of sex. The President qua ‘protector of society's moral values’ could thus be seen as defending Zimbabwe and its people from the social and cultural threat represented by homosexuality. In this chapter, I address both discourses and explores how the ensuing potential that resulted from these two discourses, one marked by silence and the other marked by a Western, public naming of sexual acts and identities, have come to define Zimbabwe’s current articulation of homosexuality.

I conclude my paper by suggesting that understanding homosexuality contextually enables a more comprehensive understanding of homophobia in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in Africa. It is necessary to upend the commonplace assumptions about homosexuality on the continent. It is imperative that we address what is meant by ‘homosexuality’ and what has led to such an articulation. Moreover, a deafening Western monologue on the issue of homosexuality is neither constructive nor responsible. In fact, it only further complements the already popular claim that homosexuality is un-African. What is needed, instead, is a dialogue marked by specificity and a concerted effort to understand the knowledge that has led to the current articulations of homosexuality in Africa. In so doing, we may hope to provide a sensitised and more comprehensive understanding of a subject that is worryingly misunderstood.
CHAPTER 2: THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I begin by providing a brief outline of the existing literature and key debates concerning homosexuality in Africa. I address what has been written, identify areas of controversy, raise questions and, most crucially, identify key areas that need further research.

2.1: Providing Evidence of ‘Homosexuality’ in Africa

Homophobic narratives seem to persevere despite overwhelming evidence against the claim that homosexuality is un-African (Msibi 2011). Critical historians, anthropologists, and sociologists have repeatedly shown the claim to be both false and misleading (on evidence of homosexuality in Northern and Western Africa, see Rubenstein 2004; Morgan and Wieringa 2005; Larmarange 2009; on homosexuality in Central and Eastern Africa, see Karp and Molnos 1973; Mushanga 1973; Needham 1973; Tamale 2007; on homosexuality in Southern Africa, see Moodie 1988; Achmat 1993; Donham 1998; Epprecht 1998). Moreover, evidence suggests that African homosexuality, on the contrary, is “neither random nor incidental”. In fact, it is a “consistent logical feature of African societies and belief systems” (Murray and Roscoe 1998: iv). To thus claim that homosexuality is un-African is not to protect African traditions and values, but to distort them (Achmat 1993; Moodie 1998; Msibi 2011).

Listening to the narratives of Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe and Olusegun Obasanjo, the former president of Nigeria, homosexuality is meant to be understood as a foreign export and, most crucially, un-African. For the aforementioned scholars and activists, however, homosexuality still undeniably occurred in Africa before European colonisation. Homosexual intercourse was practiced amongst the Pangwe people of present-day Gabon and Cameroon (Tessman 1913; Epprecht 2008). Showing striking similarities with the pederasty of ancient Greece, warriors of the Zande tribe of Sudan have a long history of marrying younger boys
(Evans-Pritchard 1971; Murray and Roscoe 1998; Msibi 2011). As anthropologist, EE Evans-Pritchard (1971) notes:

Homosexuality is indigenous. Zande do not regard it as at all improper, indeed as very sensible for a man to sleep with boys when women are not available or are taboo. .. Some princes may even have preferred boys to women (P.183)

In Benin, same-sex practices amongst boys are still considered a rite of passage. Amongst the Fon, for example, “boys are allowed to enjoy close sexual friendships among each other to ease the sex drive” (Msibi 2011:66). Moreover, same-sex unions amongst women existed in several African societies such as Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa (Amadiume 1987; Murray and Roscoe 1998; Oyewumi 2004; Morgan and Wierenga 2005; Msibi 2011). In fact, the presence of homosexual practices can be traced back thousands of years. The rock art of the San people, considered the oldest inhabitants of Zimbabwe, explicitly depict same-sex acts amongst men (Epprecht 1998).

Seminal anthologies like Boy-Wives and Female Husbands (Murray and Roscoe 1998) and monographs such as Hungochani: The History of a Dissident Sexuality in Southern Africa (Epprecht, 2004), are important examples of an academic endeavour to address the claim that homosexuality is un-African. These works and relatively new works produced on the topic, such as African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality, and Globalization (Hoad 2007) and Heterosexual Africa?: the History of an Idea from the Age of Exploration to the Age of AIDS (Epprecht 2008), provide an important counternarrative to popular claims against homosexuality in Africa. The research to date tends to focus exclusively on the presence of homosexuality in Africa. To refer to all these practices as ‘homosexual’, however, is somewhat problematic. The locus of my concern, in terms of sexuality in Africa, is centred on why the analysis of same-sex practices and attraction, vis-à-vis homosexuality, is problematic. By addressing this concern, I hope to provide a much-needed sociological
contribution to current research on same-sex practices and attraction in Africa. In terms of my approach, the work of Michel Foucault will play a considerable role.

In the seminal study, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Foucault ([1976] 1990) notes that the current understanding of sexuality is only about a century old, specific to the West, and certainly not fixed. Homosexuality consequently has a history of its own. Moreover, Lisa Downing (2008) notes:

> An erotic practice or ‘preference’ has not always, everywhere, been assumed to have the same significance; rather behaviours and choices that today we would understand as ‘sexual’ *means different things at different periods and in different locations* (P. 86, emphasis added).

Whilst the current literature provides compelling evidence against the claim that homosexuality is un-African, it far too often fails to consider the latter statement. What is considered ‘sexual’, “means different things at different periods and in different locations” (Downing 2008: 86). Africa is a vast continent with thousands of ethnic groups and nationalities. Considering its cultural diversity, it is only natural that there would be “variations in African sexual experience and practices” (Essien and Aderinto 2009: 124). In a limited sense, argues Engelke (1999), “Mugabe and his fellow Africans can at least serve as reminders of this” (p. 296).

Homosexuality, however, is not just a behavioural fact. It is contextually interpreted and *given* meaning. Through the important work done by academics such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990), Judith Butler (1990), and David Halperin (1989), the situated and performative nature of homosexuality is brought to light. The universal application of terms such as ‘homosexual’ and ‘homosexuality’ is exposed as inadequate or least not fully representative of sexuality’s multivalence. Halperin’s work, for example, argues amongst a
social constructionist paradigm by suggesting that homosexuality is merely a construction or invention. Before the ‘invention’ of homosexuality, argues Halperin (1989), “sexual evaluation” was determined vis-à-vis sexual acts and not their sexual orientation. Before the Victorian age, for example, people did not see homosexuality as a “distinct identity, but rather thought of all sexuality within the framework of heterosexuality” (Sullivan 2003: 3). Whilst all cultures may have had individuals that harboured homoerotic feelings, the articulation of such feelings are strictly contextual. In his seminal study on homosexuality in Renaissance England, the British historian and gay rights activist, Alan Bray (1995), thus argues as follows:

There is no linear history of homosexuality to be written at all, any more than there is of ‘the family’ or indeed of sexuality itself. These things take their meaning from the varying societies which give them form; if they change it is because these societies have changed” (P. 104).

The works of Neil Miller (1993), Gilbert Herdt (1997), and Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe (1998) reflect this constructionist paradigm. They use this paradigm, however, to specifically unsettle homosexuality within non-Western contexts. Miller’s seminal text, Out in the World: Gay and Lesbian Life from Buenos Aires to Bangkok (1993), underscores multivalence by addressing the plethora of articulations and cultural attitudes towards same-sex practices and attraction. Along similar lines, Gilbert Herdt’s Same Sex, Different Cultures (1997) examines how sexuality is understood and organised in cultures without Western descriptive markers such as ‘gay’, ‘lesbian’ and ‘homosexual’. Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe’s Boy-Wives and Female Husbands: Studies of African Homosexualities (1998), moreover, provides a perspicuous and much-needed analysis of the various expressions and articulations of sexuality in Africa. These works are crucial additions to the literature on sexuality in Africa inasmuch as they question the predilection for extending historically and
culturally specific ideas, such as ‘homosexuality’, to the study of sexuality in non-Western contexts.

In my thesis this constructionist paradigm will also extend, perhaps somewhat paradoxically, to the use of Foucault. In *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Foucault ([1976]1990) provides a groundbreaking rereading of the ‘repressive hypothesis’, i.e. “the hypothesis that power relations bearing on sexuality always take the form of prohibition, censorship, or non-recognition” (Biesecker 1992:353). Foucault reinterprets the meaning of censorship by interpreting it not as the ban or repression in regards to talk about sex. Instead, censorship acts as a “mechanism for the production of a virtual explosion of discourses on sexuality” (Biesecker 1992:353). For Foucault ([1976] 1990),

> what is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadowy existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as the secret” (P. 35).

For Foucault, censorship, unlike what was commonly held, does not, in fact, impose a silence on matters concerning sex. Instead, as Mark Cousins and Althar Hussain (1984) word it, the repression of sex “sustains the inquisitiveness about sexual matters, creating an eager audience for yet another revelation about sex and yet another programme for a healthy and liberated sexual life” (p. 207).

Whilst Foucault’s critique of the ‘repressive hypothesis’ provides a necessary reinterpretation of sexuality in the West, it does not necessarily follow that this critique applies to sexuality in non-Western contexts. Foucault ([1976] 1990) is particularly critical, for example, of the totalising narrative that suggests that during the Victorian age, the “conjugal family took custody of [sexuality]” (p.3). For Foucault ([1976] 1990), the emphasis on reproduction, *vis-à-vis* the “conjugal family”, does not provide a full or comprehensive understanding of sexual
discourse during the Victorian era (p. 3). This critique, however, does not reflect or apply to the reality of sexuality in Zimbabwe. Whilst the connection between sexuality and reproduction has been mostly severed in the West, the emphasis on family and reproduction remains intimately linked with sexuality in Zimbabwe (Bunting 2010). Discourse on sexuality, particularly in Zimbabwe, was, and remains to be, defined in terms of fertility and reproduction. Moreover, in terms of Zimbabwe, contrary to Foucault’s reading of sexuality in the West and critique of the ‘repressive hypothesis’, sex was, and predominantly still is, “repressed...[and] condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence” (Foucault [1976] 1990: 6). The seminal work done by Marc Epprecht (1998), for example, addresses how discourse on sex in Zimbabwe is marked by discretion, secrecy and silence. Even in the rare occasions when homosexuality is articulated, it is done through carefully selected euphemisms and metaphors. The explicit and public acknowledgement of sexuality, especially homosexuality, is consequently not part of traditional Zimbabwean narratives. The ‘transformation’ of sex into discourse, as asserted by Foucault, is thus articulated differently in a country like Zimbabwe. This discursive dissimilarity, however, emphasises the importance of context in regards to the use of a term like ‘homosexuality’. Yet, this is an awareness that still remains surprisingly absent in analyses of homosexuality in Africa. For my thesis, I provide this much-needed contextualisation of homosexuality in Africa. I do so by addressing the specific knowledge that led to the current articulation of same-sex practices and attraction in Africa, particularly Zimbabwe, qua ‘homosexuality’.

In a well-worded critique of the claim that homosexuality is un-African, the Oxford scholar and writer, Eusebius McKaiser (2012), notes, “It would be strange for basic human experiences to be so highly relative that same-sex attraction was time- or place-bound”. McKaiser (2012) then adds, “There is no anthropological evidence that homosexuality first
occurred in Africa after colonisation began”. I quote McKaiser to draw attention the crux of my concern. McKaiser asserts that it unlikely that same-sex attraction only occurs in certain places and at certain times. However, he then continues to conflate same-sex attraction with homosexuality. Homosexuality is understood in the context of being interchangeable with same-sex practices. This exposes a major flaw in the critique against the claim that homosexuality is un-African. Homosexuality is not understood as a means of understanding same-sex practices that are context-dependent. Instead, it simply articulated and understood as a behavioural fact. Moreover, it is exclusively interpreted and understood vis-à-vis homosexuality. A major problem with this kind of application, and what I hope to make explicit in this thesis, is that the term 'homosexuality' is not universally applicable (Halperin, 1989; Sedgwick, 1990; Miller, 1993; Butler; 1997; Herdt 1997; Murray and Roscoe, 1998). In fact, it limits and often misrepresents the sexual idiosyncrasies of individual cultures. ‘Homosexuality’, as a descriptive term and particular means of understanding sexuality, has its origin in Europe (Foucault [1976] 1990, Sullivan 2003; Sullivan 2008, Msibi 2011). It consequently denotes a very particular understanding of sexuality that does not necessarily reflect an African reality.

The constructionist paradigm and the work of Foucault ([1976] 1990), Sedgwick (1990), Butler (1997), Halperin (1989), and Murray and Roscoe (1998), to name but a few, have crucially unsettled the facticity of homosexuality. Homosexuality is approached, for example, as a constructed and particular means of understanding and articulating sexuality. What I have drawn from reviewing literature thus far, however, is that despite the awareness homosexuality’s limitations and specificity, homosexuality is still far too often unquestionably applied to non-Western contexts without addressing local articulations of same-sex practices and attraction, especially when critiquing the claim that homosexuality is
un-African. This unreflective use of the term homosexuality, when applied to an analysis of sexuality in Africa, raises important questions and identifies a key area which needs further investigation, which this thesis consequently intends to address.

In the foreword to the seminal text, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Foucault (2002) asks,

> What historical *a priori* provided the starting-point from which it was possible to define the great checkerboard of distinct identities established against the confused, undefined, faceless, and, as it were, indifferent background of differences? (P. xxvi)

This posed question provides the starting point from which I shall uncover the history of the knowledge that has led to the current articulation of homosexuality in Africa. Adopting Foucault’s ‘genealogical’ approach, I address and search for “instances of discursive production…the production of power and the propagation of knowledge” which makes possible a “history of the present”. (Foucault as cited by Sullivan 2003: 1). Apropos history, however, I echo Foucault by remaining cautious of “grand narratives” and “seismic shifts”. Instead, I focus on the “small and multiple changes that lead to alterations in trends of thinking and operating” (Downing 2008: 15). My contribution to the field of sociology is thus grounded in the ‘genealogy’ of the knowledge of homosexuality, particularly that of Zimbabwe. Whilst remaining in conversation with Foucault throughout my analysis, I shall remain acutely aware of the local, social, and cultural lexicons of Africa, in particular that of Zimbabwe. If the claim that homosexuality is un-African is to be fairly and comprehensively addressed, it is crucial that sociologists are sensitive to local articulations of same-sex practices and attraction. Whilst seminal texts have been written on different articulations of same-sex practices and attractions, few of the works on homosexuality in Africa are primarily concerned with the knowledge that led to these articulations of homosexuality in Africa. This then, is the precise gap that this thesis will fill.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The focus of this thesis is to examine and contextualise the knowledge that has led to the current articulation of homosexuality in Africa. This chapter describes the exact methods undertaken to address my key concerns. First, I shall elaborate on and discuss the data used to address my research problem. I then describe how these data were analysed and justify my means of analysis. I conclude by briefly addressing the limitations of the approach I have chosen to take.

3.1: Collected Data

I draw on a qualitative analysis of data collected from newspaper reports, lesbian and gay activist initiatives, and recorded speeches of various African leaders. In addition, I also draw on the seminal ethnographic, anthropological, and historical works that have investigated, or are currently investigating, the claim that homosexuality is un-African. I follow the general social constructionist premise that knowledge is not an objective reflection of reality. Truth is a discursive construction inasmuch as what is true and what is false is determined by “different regimes of knowledge” (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 13). I chose my data, in light of this, as a means of specifically addressing such ‘regimes of knowledge’. My collected data was chosen specifically for this purpose as it represents different and often competing discourses. Moreover, it represents discourses with particular historical rules that have determined, in terms of homosexuality in Africa, what can and cannot be said, what is true, and what is false.

Newspaper reports, lesbian and gay activist initiatives, and recorded speeches of various African leaders provide a means of situating homosexuality as per its current articulation on the continent. By examining speeches by the president of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, for
example, I am able to address the most common, official narratives on homosexuality in Africa. By contrasting Mugabe’s speeches with the responses and counter-narratives of activist groups, such as Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ), however, I am able to show the various versions of ‘truth’ when it comes to homosexuality in Africa and the discourses involved. My means of analysis is also greatly influenced by Jeffrey Alexander’s (2011) approach to culture, inasmuch as I do not confront homosexuality as a “pristine neutral social fact” (p. ix). This would be a complicated move at best since, as Downing (2008) notes, what we “understand as ‘sexual’ means different things at different periods and in different locations” (p.86). We are therefore perpetually confronted with an articulation of homosexuality that is context-dependent and not universally applicable. My choice of data not only reflects this concern, but also provides necessary and salient evidence of the multivalence of homosexuality in Africa.

I also draw on ethnographic, anthropological, and historical works that have, or are currently investigating, the claim that homosexuality is un-African. These sources provide rich data to substantiate and further strengthen my analysis of the current articulation of homosexuality in Africa. Through examples of ethnographic, anthropological, and historical studies addressing sexuality in Africa, for example, I am able show how the common narratives on homosexuality in Africa have a long, and predominantly Western, history. My choice of data is also particularly valuable in terms of my use of Foucault throughout this thesis. With particular reference to Foucault’s (1980) genealogical approach, I shall not treat agents and structures as primary categories. I shall focus, instead, on power. I shall not address power, however, as exclusively belonging to particular agents, for example the Zimbabwean government or Robert Mugabe. Instead, echoing Foucault, I interpret power as “spread across different social practices”. Moreover, rather than simply being oppressive, it is productive
inasmuch as it constitutes “discourse, knowledge, bodies and subjectivities” (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 13). Foucault (1980) defines power as follows:

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it does not only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. (P. 119)

For Foucault, power consequently provides the “conditions for possibility for the social” (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 13). By comparing data collected from ethnographic, anthropological, and historical works with more contemporary data in the form of newspaper reports, lesbian and gay activist initiatives, and recorded speeches of African leaders, I am able show how the various, and sometimes competing, ‘productions of knowledge’ apropos same-sex practice and attraction produces particular ways of articulating homosexuality.

In this chapter, for example, I address the competing articulations of homosexuality in Zimbabwe and the potential of these articulations in contemporary Zimbabwe. The research conducted by the historian, Mark Epprecht (1998), on the silence that dominates discourse on sexuality in Zimbabwe, for example, is used to contextualise the more traditional narratives on sexuality in Zimbabwe. By using ethnographic, historical, and anthropological data from the 18th, 19th and 20th century, moreover, I am able to address the knowledge produced by the West on homosexuality in Africa. Newspaper reports, activist initiatives, and recorded speeches from leaders such as Robert Mugabe, are then used to situate these competing, and sometimes overlapping, discourses. My choice of data for this thesis thus potentially enables a more comprehensive understanding of the knowledge that has led to the current articulation of homosexuality in Africa.
3.2: Method of Analysis

The claim that homosexuality is un-African tends to be approached in terms its validity, or lack thereof. Whilst such an approach emphasises several inaccuracies and contradictions associated with the claim, it does not fully address or explain what ‘homosexuality’ means to the addressed cultures, nor why it is currently articulated as it is. This underscores the need to facilitate the grounds for a more nuanced discussion on homosexuality in Africa and consider homosexuality contextually within its intellectual and cultural framework. In light of this blindspot, I draw heavily upon queer theory. Queer theory is a “distillation” of postmodern feminist thought and subaltern studies that, crucially, makes explicit the “connections between sexuality, discourse, and the political economy” (Epprecht 1998:633). Whilst these connections may seem obvious, they often tend to be unacknowledged in more conventional feminist and Marxist analyses. Queer theory will thus serve as an important component of my analysis by addressing these important connections.

In addition to queer theory, my main influences include feminist methodology and discourse analysis. In terms of feminist methodology, Karl Manheim (1936) provides a useful introduction to its methodological function:

Persons bound together into groups strive in accordance with the character and position of the groups to which they belong to change the surrounding world of nature and society or attempt to maintain it in a given condition. It is the direction of this will to change or to maintain, of this collective activity, which produces the guiding thread for the emergence of their problems, their concepts and their forms of thought (P.4).

Feminists are one such important group. As a group, they have used their newly acquired visibility in Western societies to turn public what was formerly understood as the private troubles of women. Their experiences of oppression have provided a rigorous methodological analysis and critique of oppressive structures and dominant ideologies. Several important comparisons can be made between the feminist movement and the ‘turning public’ of
homosexual identities. Like feminism, homosexuality often challenges a status quo. Moreover, the increased visibility of both groups is often met with increased hostility. A feminist methodological approach, therefore, provides a methodological precedent and a means of sensitising oneself to the data analysed. Manheim’s observation is of importance here, however, as women, in terms of the feminist approach, are far too often presented as one singular collective or group. As the Nigerian anthropologist, Oyeronke Oyewumi (2004), observes, “In one fell swoop, they assume both the category ‘woman’ and her subordination as universals” (p.1). Gender, however, is a socio-cultural construct according to our chosen social constructionist paradigm. As the starting point of our research, we cannot therefore simply take as given what is investigated. Whilst seminal work of Western feminists should not be disregarded, the work of anthropologists like Oyewumi (2004) serves as a reminder that “we must question the social identity, interests, and concerns of the purveyors of such knowledge” (p.1). I remain acutely aware of the incongruity between key tenets of feminism and African epistemologies. Being aware of such incongruities, however, I am able to emphasise the importance of contextually situating a term such as ‘homosexual’. This has been a major contribution of third-wave feminism in general, and is a critique I shall draw upon extensively.

In the first of my three analytical chapters, for example, I use the research and data collected by the Nigerian anthropologist and feminist, Ifi Amadiume, (1987) on the Igbo of present-day Nigeria, and the work done by Hugh McLean and Linda Ngcobo (1994) on gay sexuality in the townships of Johannesburg, South Africa, to address the common mistake of applying Western gender norms to an analysis of sexuality in Africa. Both examples provide insight into societies where gender is differently understood and performed. This exposes the limitations of homosexuality as a descriptive marker in Africa. Moreover, it crucially
unsettles the facticity of homosexuality and its use as a transdiscursive and universally applicable means of articulating same-sex desire and attraction.

The design of my thesis is also informed by the insights and methods of discourse analysis, as such analysis suggests that all “communicative events ... constitute a particular way of talking about and understanding the world” (Griffin 2005: 91). For Foucault, discourse is defined as follows:

>We shall call discourse a group of statements in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation […] Discourse is made up of a limited number of statements for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined. Discourse in this sense is not an ideal, timeless form […] it is, from beginning to end, historical – a fragment of history […] posing its own limits, its divisions, its transformations, the specific modes of its temporality (Foucault [1969] 1972: 117).

This definition provides valuable insight into the current articulation of homosexuality in Africa, especially since underlying the discursive approach is a resistance to objectivity. Instead of understanding terms such as ‘homosexual’ and ‘homosexuality’ as fixed and ahistorical, emphasis is placed on how and why homosexuality has come to be understood as per its current articulation. As Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) assert,

>The aim of [discourse] analysis is, therefore, not to uncover the objective reality, for example, to find out what groups society ‘really’ consists of, but to explore how we create this reality so that it appears objective and natural (p.33).

It is not “objective laws” that categorise and divide society into specific groups. Instead, groups are the result of political, discursive processes (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 33). Discourse has the effect of “constructing social identities, structuring relationships between people and legitimizing systems of knowledge and belief” (Fairclough as cited in Macleod 2002: 7). It is thus imperative that homosexuality in Africa is also analysed and understood discursively. I use discourse analysis in this context as pivotal framework for understanding homosexuality in Africa. I do so, by tracing the discursive processes that have led to the
current articulation of homosexuality in Africa, in so doing, providing valuable insight into its current articulation.

3.3: Limitations

Among the limitations of my methodology is the subjectivity of my research. Generally, it is a limitation of the whole method of discourse analysis, since it is difficult to avoid such subjectivity in highly specific work with different texts. I shall try to overcome this limitation through my rigorous methodology. Considerable emphasis is also paid to transparency by extensively quoting the sources I critique and draw upon, in so doing, potentially allowing the reader to make alternative conclusions.

It should also be stressed that Africa is not a country, but a continent. Whilst this is an obvious truism, it must, nevertheless, be reiterated. Africa is the second largest continent in the world with an estimated 3000 spoken languages (Epstein and Kole 1998). To therefore analyse ‘homosexuality in Africa’, is not only counterproductive, but wholly contradictory in light of my concerns. To avoid generalisations and essentialisms, the majority of my thesis will thus focus on Zimbabwe. I do so, as the country has a particularly rich source of data to use and analyse. Through the commendable analysis and research of Marc Epprecht (1998, 1999, 2004, 2005, 2008), Matthew Engelke (1999), and Thabo Msibi (2011), among others, I have a wealth of data to draw upon and compare. Moreover, the president of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, is one of the most well-known opponents of homosexuality in Africa. As a result, the President is quoted and critiqued extensively by Western media. I am able to both use and analyse these speeches. In addition, the accompanying criticism of Mugabe, particularly by the Western media, provides valuable means of addressing the various and often unacknowledged discourses that mark critiques of the claim that homosexuality is un-
African. By specifically focusing on Zimbabwe, I shall thus hopefully avoid the common mistake of essentialism and generalisation when it comes to addressing one of the most important social issues in Africa today.
CHAPTER 4: HOMOSEXUALITY IN CONTEXT

For certain thoughts to arise, for us to ‘know things’, particular conditions must be in place (Foucault [1966] 2002). Even a priori knowledge could be understood as paradoxically dependent on specific preconditions. In fact, it could be argued that all forms of ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’ are simply the successful version of events that has “succeeded in merging from the perpetual struggle of ideas and ideologies that characterizes our way of interacting” (Downing 2008: 13). Had the outcome of certain historical power struggles been different, our understanding of ‘truth’ would very likely have been much different.

Foucault’s assertion is particularly relevant in terms of the current articulation of same-sex practices in Africa. It aptly addresses a major gap in the critique of the claim that homosexuality is un-African. Those that critique the claim often fail to explain what is meant with ‘homosexuality’. The descriptive term is simply represented as fact or the ‘truth’, without considering the particular conditions that led to the current understanding of same-sex practices. I begin the chapter by questioning this ‘truth’ of homosexuality with the suggestion that sexuality is not natural but, rather, discursively constructed. It is “constructed, experienced, and understood in culturally and historically specific ways” (Sullivan 2003: 1). Moreover, homosexuality, as a descriptive term, provides a limited and restrictive understanding of sexuality. These crucial components of the current understanding of homosexuality in Africa are still ignored. Discourse on sexuality in Africa consequently remains both marked and marred by an unreflective and ineffective use of the term ‘homosexuality’. To enable a thorough critique of the claim that homosexuality is un-African, it is therefore important to first unpack the ‘truth’ of homosexuality, and situate the term in a geographical, temporal, historical, and social context.
4.1: The Facticity of Homosexuality

Homosexuality, as a descriptive term, was coined in 1869 by the Swiss doctor, Karoly Maria Benkert (Sullivan 2003; Sullivan 2008). It initiated an important shift, in terms of the representation of same-sex practices and attraction, as, prior to this, sexual preference was not considered a determining feature of one’s identity (Sullivan 2008). Whilst same-sex practices existed before the origin of the term, it now provided a means of addressing same-sex desire and practices by identifying both the act and person. As Foucault ([1976] 1990) observes:

The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. It was consubstantial with him, less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature. … Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species (P. 48, emphasis added)

The notion that sexual preference is a determinant of one’s personal identity is commonly presented as a truism. This, however, is a modern European view¹. The behaviours and choices that we generally understand and classify as sexual, mean “different things to different people” (Downing 2008: 86). The term was constructed and framed within a very specific historic, cultural, and temporal context. It is therefore not accurate to claim that homosexuality, as a means of understanding same-sex practices, operates “in all cultures at all times” (Sullivan 2003: 1). For the academic and activist, Thabo Msibi, Africa is an important example of this. In fact, for Msibi (2011), the term ‘homosexual’ has no meaning in Africa.

¹ In the next chapter, this claim will be dealt with in depth.
Homosexuality, however, remains to be used as the dominant marker for same-sex practices in Africa. The former President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, claims that homosexuality is “unnatural, ungodly, and un-African” whilst the president of South Sudan, Stealva Kiir Mayardit, asserts that “equality, democracy, and justice do not extend to those who are homosexual” (Aken’Ova 2010; Report 2013, emphasis added). These statements are mostly understood and criticised in terms of being an African rejection of same-sex practices qua homosexuality, i.e. all same-sex experiences are homosexual. However, are all same-sex practices really included in the term? If, as Downing asserts (2008), sexuality means “different things to different people”, surely we should at least question the inclusivity of homosexuality (p.86). David Halperin (1989) succinctly addresses this concern when he asks:

Does the ‘paederast’, the classical Greek adult, married male who periodically enjoys sexually penetrating a male adolescent share the same sexuality with the ‘berdache’, the Native American (Indian) adult male who from childhood has taken on many aspects of a woman and is regularly penetrated by the adult male to whom he has been married in a public and socially sanctioned ceremony? Does the latter share the same sexuality with the New Guinea tribesman and warrior who from the ages of eight to fifteen has been orally inseminated on a daily basis by older youths and who, after years of orally inseminating his juniors, will be married to an adult woman and have children of his own? Does any one of these three persons share the same sexuality with the modern homosexual? (P.46)

What these examples draw attention to, is the remarkably varied ways same-sex practices have been constructed, understood, and expressed. Whilst these examples are not African, there are several salient examples of the multivalence of sexuality in Africa as well. Hugh McLean and Linda Ngcobo (1994), for example, conducted several interviews in South Africa of people engaging in same-sex practices that similarly defy the modern descriptive confines of homosexuality. I include and quote two of these recorded experiences:

*Martin* [from Soweto, South Africa]: My male lover is not gay, he’s just heterosexual. I am always the woman in a relationship. (P. 166)

*Lucky* [from Soweto, South Africa]: My boyfriend didn’t know I was a gay man for five months. You can see I’m a little bit fat so many boys don’t know if I’m a woman
or a man. My boyfriend is Mbuso. He lives with me at my home. He loves my mother. I think he got curious when he saw my friends. He would ask me many funny questions, like: ‘Why are you friends with these people?’ Then my mother told him I was a boy. He was very surprised but he told me it didn’t matter, he was in love with me. He was very curious at first but I would never let him see my privates. Even when I bathed, he would stand outside and wait. I thought, if he sees me he won’t love me again. He is straight (P. 165, emphasis added).

What is evident in the testimonies of Martin and Lucky, is that these relationships are not regarded as unequivocally homosexual. In both cases one partner, for all intents and purposes, is not male. In South Africa, at least historically, this particular understanding of same-sex practices is not uncommon. Donham (1998) notes that amongst black men, sexuality was usually categorised and understood in terms of gender. Supported by Reid (2006), Donham argues that effeminate men were usually seen as being a third sex, neither man nor woman. These effeminate men, known as Skesanas, would have intercourse with men considered ‘real men’ (Msibi 2011). Moreover, same-sex relations were mostly defined in terms of the sexual role during intercourse (Donham 1998; Msibi 2011). In same-sex relations, the receptive partners were Skesanas. Men were free to have intercourse with Skesanas, without having a homosexual identity attached to such relations, since Skesanas were not considered male or female (Donham 1998; Msibi 2011).

Likewise, in the case of the people of pre-colonial Igbo and Yorùbáland, the utilization of homosexuality, as a descriptive marker, would denude the multivalence of their same-sex practices. Unlike Western distinctions, these societies were marked by a different understanding of gender and sex (Amadiume 1987; Oyewumi 2004; Msibi 2011). Their societies were dominated by “goddess worship, matrilineality, dual sex systems, gender flexibility in social roles and neuter linguistic elements or systems” (Rubenstein 2004:351). Terms such as husband and wife depended on one’s role and position in society and not the biological sex of an individual. Amongst the Igbo, for example, women were either
considered *ozo* or *ekwe*. The former referred to females who were titled men, whilst the latter were females who were titled women. For the Nigerian anthropologist, Ifi Amadiume, the fluidity of such a gender construction enabled females in these societies to be ‘female husbands’ as long as they had “acquired the same amount of status and wealth as a male” (Divani 2011). To secure this status, women considered *ozo* would often take on several wives. As a consequence, same-sex unions were quite common in these societies.

Whilst homosexuality may act as a convenient marker, it, nevertheless, often misrepresents and limits the nuances of same-sex experiences. Some same-sex experiences and practices simply do not have an exclusive expression in homosexuality. The testimonies of Martin and Lucky, for example, point to the “multiple ways in which sexuality and gender are situated in South Africa” (Engelke 1999: 297). In another example, receptive partners (*Skasanas*) were considered neither male nor female. Having intercourse with *Skasanas* did not alter the identity of the active partner. Their sexual acts were thus not strictly considered homosexual. Moreover, the gender flexibility in social roles and the neuter linguistic elements for the people of pre-colonial Igbo and Yorùbáland, unsettle a unified, immobile articulation of sexuality *vis-à-vis* the categories homosexual and heterosexual. Yet, almost all discourse on same-sex practices in Africa is understood and framed in terms of homosexuality. If, as Msibi asserts, homosexuality has no meaning in Africa, nor able to articulate a fair representation of same-sex practices, how and why is homosexuality still the dominant means of understanding same-sex practices in Africa?
4.2: The Colonization of Meaning

Colonialism was the dominant conduit through which Africa’s current articulation of same-sex practices was established. For Msibi, the colonial influence was such that it served to “erode truth in Africa” (Msibi 2011: 68). This ‘erosion of truth’ was facilitated by the fact that African societies were made up out of predominantly oral cultures and the tendency to keep sexual matter private (Swidler 1993). As a result and degree of the disruption, the amount of time that has passed, and the scarcity of well-informed written documents during this period, it was relatively easy to supplant African accounts and attitudes towards same-sex practices with those of Europe (Dlamini 2006). This becomes particularly evident in terms of the Western representation of Africa as a continent free of homosexuality, the condemnation of homosexuality on religious grounds, and the legal approach to homosexuality in Africa.

In their seminal study of the origin of current perceptions of homosexuality in Africa, Murray and Roscoe (1998) observe that, “among the myths Europeans have created about Africa, the myth that homosexuality is absent or incidental in African societies is one of the oldest and most enduring” (p.xi). For Europeans, Africans embodied the ‘primitive man’. Africans were associated with nature, driven by instinct, and considered culturally unsophisticated. Their “sexual energies and outlets [were seen as] devoted exclusively to their ‘natural’ purpose – biological reproduction” (Dlamini 2006:132). As such, homosexuality was considered to be absent in African cultures. Murray and Roscoe (1998) trace the first mention of this perceived absence of homosexuality in Africa to the comments of Edward Gibbon. In a study published in 1781, Gibbon notes that he hopes and believes that “the negroes, in their own country, were exempt from this moral pestilence [i.e., homosexual vice]” (as cited in Murray and Roscoe 1998:xii). Several ethnographers gave credence to Gibbon’s claim. Murray and Roscoe (1998) cite Sir Richard Burton (1864) who claimed “the negro race is mostly
untainted by sodomy and tribalism” (p.xii). This perception of African society was further perpetuated by ethnographers who claimed that homosexuality is un-African and a ‘sodomy-free zone’ in an effort to prepare “public opinion for [the] abolition of [the] slave trade… and [buttressing] negative attitudes towards homosexuality in Europe” (Epprecht 1998:645). The idea was that by presenting Africa as a continent ‘free’ of homosexuality, people would look at slavery less favourably. To encourage an anti-slavery sentiment, Africa was consequently represented as a pure continent that has not been tainted by most of the vices of the West. Historically, at least in terms of a Western representation of Africa, homosexuality was thus mostly presented as absent from African cultures.

In terms of religion, the colonial role in the current articulation of homosexuality is also unmistakable. A common narrative against homosexuality in Africa is that homosexuality is against African morals and values. Those who condemn homosexuality on such grounds, however, usually do not consider the context of these morals or values. Having examined the relationship between traditional African religions and same-sex practices, Swidler (1993), for instance, argues that African religions, on the contrary, often associated spiritual power with sexuality. Certain tribal groups in pre-colonial South Africa and Burkina Faso, for example, saw lesbians as traditional healers and astrologers. In Cameroon and Gabon, certain tribes considered homosexuality to have medicinal powers. For these groups, homosexuality consequently had mostly positive connotations (Tendi 2010). Swidler thus disagrees with the suggestion that homosexuality is anathema to all African religions. For her, however, we know very little about the relationship between traditional African religions and homosexuality, since pre-colonial African religious approaches have all but been obliterated.
European dominance in Africa irrevocably changed the indigenous social and religious spheres of African societies. A key tenet of the colonial ideology was to view African cultures and people as devoid of any important values and norms. As such, they were considered “prime candidates for the civilising mission of Europeans” (Dlamini 2006: 130). This was often done, with remarkable efficacy, by Christian missionaries. Whilst missionaries provided education, including literacy, it was predominantly done as a means of inculcating “Christian values and standards of behaviour, including prohibitions against homosexuality” (Dlamini 2006: 131).

This is particularly evident in the condemnation of homosexuality in Africa. When leaders, such as Robert Mugabe (Zimbabwe), Daniel arap Moi (Kenya), and Yoweri Museveni (Uganda) publically condemn homosexuality, they tend to do so by invoking a Christian moral framework. During an agricultural show in Nairobi in 1991, the then president of Kenya, Daniel arap Moi, stated that “It is not right that a man should go with another man or a woman with another woman. It is against African tradition and Biblical teachings” (Reddy 2001: 85, emphasis added). The former Prime Minister of Swaziland, Prince Bhekimpi, also an important village chief, has, on occasion, threatened to evict homosexuals from his community. His means of justifying this threat is revealing: “homosexuality is regarded as satanic in Swaziland. Therefore I am forced to evict all gays and lesbians in my area” (Reddy 2001: 85, emphasis added). Christianity, in both cases, lends validity to their rejection of homosexuality, particularly through its premise that homosexuality is unholy (satanic) and prohibited by the Bible (Sullivan & Wodarski 2002). For Msibi (2011), Christianity is consequently one of the principal means of silencing indigenous same-sex practices.
In addition to this, the criminalization of same-sex relations in most African countries enhances the already overwhelmingly negative discourse on homosexuality. According to the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual Association (ILGA), 78 countries in the world criminalise homosexuality (ILGA 2013). Of these 78 countries, 38 are in Africa. This means that almost half of all the countries in the world that criminalises homosexuality are in Africa. In addition to this, homosexuality is punishable by death in Mauritania, Nigeria, Sudan, and some parts of Somalia (European Parliament Resolution 2013). Whilst draconian, these laws tend to be presented as a necessary means of protecting Africans from dangerous foreign influences and vices. However, most, if not all, of the laws that criminalize same-sex relations in Africa were first introduced through colonial penal codes (Cowell 2010; Msibi 2011). In fact, most of these African countries merely kept such laws.

In February 2014, the Ugandan president, Yoweri Museveni, signed into law a bill imposing some of the harshest penalties against homosexuality in Africa. As a result of the bill, same-sex practices can now be punished with up to life in prison. After signing the bill, Museveni stated that, “There is now an attempt at social imperialism, to impose social values. We're sorry to see that you [the West] live the way you live but we keep quiet about it” (Biryabarema 2014). The irony of this claim appears to be lost to Museveni.

Ludovica Laccino (2014) notes that “all the laws criminalising homosexuality in Uganda originates entirely from legislations “introduced by the British colonial administration in 1902 and 1950” (International Business Times). The new law is simply a modification of the previous colonial laws imposed on Uganda. Moreover, the initial aim of these colonial laws was to modify the unacceptable behaviour in the ‘native’ populations and a means of protecting colonialists from the ‘moral infection’ of by the ‘native’ environment (Laccino
The president is therefore not only merely adapting previous colonial laws, but using the very same reasoning, albeit inverted, as the colonialist used to justify their actions.

Similarly, the president of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, describes homosexuality as a “scourge planted by the white man on a pure continent” (Mwaura 2006). The anti-sodomy laws on Zimbabwe’s statute books, meant to protect Africans from this ‘white scourge’, like Uganda, were also initially created and implemented by the same colonial powers now accused of exporting homosexuality (McKaiser 2012). Like Museveni, Mugabe is seemingly unaware of his contradictory approach to ‘African’ values. Both invoke a foreign lexicon to articulate and condemn homosexuality. Its connotations, it seems, remains firmly rooted in the historically Western representational, moral, and legal negation of same-sex practices.

I introduced this chapter with Foucault’s suggestion that for us to ‘know things’, particular conditions must be in place (Foucault [1966] 2002). All forms of knowledge are “historically relative and contingent” (Downing 2008: vii). Our knowledge of sexuality is certainly not an exception. Sexuality is neither immobile nor universal, yet it is far too often presented as such. The aim of this chapter was consequently to unsettle the facticity of homosexuality and to situate it in its temporal, historical, and social context.

Approaching all same-sex experiences under the banner of homosexuality is a complicated move at best, because we too often forget to challenge our assumptions about the meaning of complicated terms like ‘sexuality’, even in cross-cultural contexts. This chapter certainly does not suggest that pre-colonial Africa was liberated from any repressive sexual norms. What the contradictions of leaders such as Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe and Yoweri Museveni of Uganda should bring to the fore, however, is the construction of same-sex
practices by colonial powers. The past inscribes the present, but such inscription, in terms of homosexuality, is almost exclusively Western. Europe neither introduced nor exported same-sex practices. It did, however, introduce to Africa the representational, moral, and legal means to negate and articulate same-sex practices, vis-à-vis homosexuality. As a result, same-sex practice and attraction is still articulated through a foreign lexicon, *qua* homosexuality. In so doing, both misrepresenting and limiting the full gamut of sexual experiences in Africa.
5. LOUD SILENCES IN ZIMBABWE

Same-sex practices in Zimbabwe have been present since time immemorial (Epprecht 1998). Evidence of such relations has been found in San rock paintings, for example, dating back to over a thousand years (Epprecht 1998). Whilst such examples provide evidence of same-sex practices in Zimbabwe, it does not necessarily imply a discourse that is favourable to homosexuality. In fact, research suggests that same-sex practices were generally considered in negative terms and that sexuality in Zimbabwe was carefully confined by socio-cultural norms and the demands of a pre-modern political economy (Epprecht 1998). To relegate the denunciation of same-sex practices in this context as simply homophobic, however, is to impose a simplified, crude, and unhelpful means of understanding homosexuality in Africa.

The previous chapter endeavoured to unsettle the facticity of homosexuality. It also emphasised the foreign origin of the term homosexuality and the role of colonialism in the current construction of discourse on same-sex practices in Africa. The role of Christian missionary groups and colonial policies and penal codes undoubtedly contributed to the current articulation of homosexuality. However, these are only some of the elements that contributed to how African sexuality would come to be understood. Drawing on the work of Foucault, I wish to next focus on the “rules that determine which statements are accepted as meaningful and true” in regards to homosexuality in Africa (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 13). I adopt, in particular, the argument that “truth is a discursive construction” (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 13). If the current articulation of homosexuality in Zimbabwe is to be better understood, it is crucial that the discursive construction of meaning and ‘truth’ is addressed and acknowledged. Echoing Foucault, I thus next address the rules in Zimbabwe that determine, particularly in regards to sexuality, what is meaningful and ‘true’.
5.1: A Functionalist Approach to Homosexuality

During a political rally in 2013, the President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, was recorded as saying, “If you take men and lock them in a house for five years and tell them to come up with two children and they fail to do that, then we will chop off their heads” (Report 2013: 37; Politi 2013). His speech, whilst disturbing, is particularly indicative of the interests that underlie discourse on sexuality in Zimbabwe.

The “serious function of reproduction”, to adopt Foucault’s phrase, is a pivotal element in the discourse of sexuality in Zimbabwe (Foucault [1976] 1990: 3). Foucault critiques the totalising narrative that suggests that, during the Victorian age, the “conjugal family took custody of [sexuality]” (Foucault [1976] 1990: 3). Foucault is not suggesting that the Victorian age did not place particular emphasis on reproduction, merely that this was only half the picture (Downing 2008). This is not necessarily the case, however, with Zimbabwe. Sexuality and reproduction have mostly been severed in the West (Bunting 2010). The decision to have sex and the decision to have children are mostly two very separate decisions. In most parts of Africa, however, one’s identity as either a man or women is intimately bound up with fertility. Traditionally, marriage and the social definition of men and women depends the “appearance of fertility” (Epprecht 1998: 634). The idea of a sexual relationship “de-linked from producing children” is consequently perceived as unnatural” (Bunting 2010). Amongst the Mashona, for example, a married person, unable to produce children, was, and often still is, made an object of ridicule and considered a disgrace (Bullock 1912; Epprecht 1998).

This emphasis on reproduction played an important role in the success and survival of communities for several reasons. Progeny justified the acquisition of land by young men.
Children played a crucial part in the success of people’s livelihood, as children were mostly responsible for collecting water and firewood, weeding, and herding (Epprecht 1998). Girls were also a key source of income in the form of lobola or bride’s price. Moreover, progeny ensured future security, as children were expected to take care of their parents in their old age.

The emphasis on fertility and reproduction became even more pronounced during the colonial period. In times of economic hardships, children were generally imperative for the economic survival of families. The dominant role of chiefs, traditionally responsible for the redistribution of wealth, was challenged by the ever growing dominance of colonial rule. The role of children, in terms of supporting the family economically, thus became more important. In addition, as Epprecht (1998) observes:

Capitalist-minded male peasants…were given market incentives to increase the labour available to them through polygamy. Many wives gave them access to additional fields, while many young children could work the lands for profit. Adult children could [also] earn cash in town to provide inputs for agricultural improvements (P. 634).

In postcolonial Zimbabwe, children remain a key source of social security. Due to a lack of social welfare, for example, parents often still find themselves dependent on their children in their old age. Emphasis thus remains to be placed on fertility and reproduction.

This traditionally ‘functionalist’ approach to sexuality is evident in public discourse. Homosexuals are unable to procreate. As such, they serve no function. This sentiment is reflected in several statements made in the Zimbabwean parliament. In 1995, for example, a member of parliament made the following assertion:

We have asked these men whether they have been able to get pregnant. They have not been able to answer such questions. Even the women who are engaging in lesbian
activities, we have asked them what they have got from such practices and no one has been able to answer (Zimbabwean Parliamentary Debates 1995: 2518).

Sexuality’s interpretative repertoire is focused on fertility and reproduction. Nothing that is not ordered in terms of generation or transfigured by it, to paraphrase Foucault ([1976] 1990: 4), can consequently be sanctioned. Because of this, it is discursively “driven out, denied, and reduced to silence” (Foucault [1976] 1990: 4).

5.2 Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell
What becomes evident is that only a “single locus of sexuality” is consequently acknowledged (Foucault [1976] 1990: 3). It is a utilitarian and fertile one, confined to an almost exclusive focus on reproduction. The rules that determine which statements are meaningful and true, in regards to homosexuality in Africa, is determined by a discourse that emphasises fertility and reproduction. Everything that fails to comply with its status quo is to remain vague or discursively silenced. Whilst critical of this interpretation of sexuality, in terms of Victorian Europe, Foucault’s ([1976] 1990) critique cogently encapsulates the traditional approach to sexuality in Zimbabwe:

Nothing that was not ordered in terms of generation or transfigured by it could expect sanction or protection. Nor did it merit a hearing. It would be driven out, denied, and reduced to silence. Not only did it not exist, it had no right to exist and would be made to disappear upon its least manifestation -whether in acts or in words (P.4).

This silencing of any manifestation that deviated from the sexual reproductive norm is evident in Zimbabwean culture. Same-sex practices was ‘made to disappear’ both through acts and words. In terms of acts, custom provided a particularly salient means of reducing same-sex practices to silence. This provides valuable insight, however, into how the ‘meaning’ and ‘truth’ of sexuality in Zimbabwe was sustained.
Inevitably, some men were not able to adequately follow the dictates and expectations of their society, be it vis-à-vis impotence or a lack of sexual attraction to their wives (Epprecht 1998). The emphasis, however, was placed on appearances, i.e. being perceived as successfully following the dictates of one’s community. Through several customs, however, it became possible to avoid ostracism, ridicule and disgrace. Through the custom of *kupindira* or *kusikira rudzi*, for example, men would make a secret arrangement with a male relative to have intercourse with his wife, in so doing impregnating the wife. As the wife bore children, the appearance of producing children was kept. Moreover, the custom of *lobola* or *roora* (bride price) also extended to children born through extra-marital relations, as these children still belonged to the husband. Whilst extramarital relations, on the part of the wife, were not necessarily favourable, it did, nevertheless, provide the husband with children through such means. For Epprecht (1998), this consequently meant that “men who felt sexually attracted to males did not need to fear that this feeling would compromise the socially-necessary performance of heterosexual virility” (p. 634). Homosexuality was thus silently accepted, but only if men were still perceived as heterosexual and virile.

This emphasis on the “appearance of conformity to a fecund heterosexual norm” meant that same-sex practices mostly remained unarticulated (Epprecht 1998: 635). This is especially prevalent among Zimbabwean men who would marry, have children, but still engage in casual homosexual relations. Even today, lesbians and gays that ‘come out’, still tend to marry, have children, and live a perceived heterosexual lifestyle (Epprecht 1998). In addition, the “narrowness of the dominant conceptions of sex” further denudes homosexuality of any explicit meaning (Epprecht 1998: 637). In a seminal study conducted by K. Limakatso Kendall (1999), Zimbabwean women were interviewed in an effort to better understand same-sex practices in the country. Kendal (1999) reports that some women acknowledged,
albeit hesitatingly, that same-sex practices among women, including kissing, genital touching and even oral sex, were present in their communities. However, for the women in Kendall’s study these acts were not sex, since no penile penetration was involved (Epprecht 2005). However, sex amongst Zimbabwean men was also not considered sex. These acts were, instead, merely “play”, “accidents”, or “teasing” (Epprecht 2005: 139). A common ‘defence’ used by men charged with sodomy during the early colonial era, for example, was that these acts were merely ‘playing’. Even today, this “conceptual narrowness” means that married men who ‘play’ with other men consider themselves neither bisexual nor homosexual (Epprecht 1998). As such, it often remains difficult to discern who is homosexual, since such identities have no explicit meaning and are mostly incorporated into a ‘heterosexual lifestyle’.

Discussing sexuality and sexual matters was, and still is, considered taboo. When a family member was accused of incest, for example, or a patriarch accused of abusing a child, a strict code of silence was imposed in an effort to prevent it from becoming public (Epprecht 1998). In situations like these, purification rituals would usually be performed, but only in secrecy. For Epprecht (1998), this emphasis on secrecy and discretion also extends to general “discussions of the mechanics of sex between men and women” (p. 636). Wives, for example, are not expected to look at their husband’s genitals. Men, in return, are not supposed to express curiosity about those of his partner. Interestingly, as one transgender women observes in a study conducted by Hugh McLean and Linda Ngcobo (1994), this also means that biologically born men who identify, is perceived, or dress as women, are able to have relations with other men without these relations being questioned. Men either do not know, or could at least claim, that they were unaware of the sex of their partner (McLean and Ngcobo 1994: 172).
An open and free discourse on sex is thus disallowed as it is considered too direct, crude, and coarse. As one Zimbabwean observes:

Yes, traditionally it [homosexual orientation] was there but it was never talked about. Never! As a child you would be told to stay away from the hut of a man who was known by the elders to be that way. But you were never told why. Only after you were grown and you gave those same elders much beer, perhaps, they might be coached to say something. But it took a lot of beer (as quoted by Epprecht 1998: 636). This emphasis is also reflected in parliament. Border Gezi, for example, informed members of the Zimbabwean parliament that his rural constituents are well aware of the fact “that there is homosexualism and lesbianism going on”. For them, however, “if homosexualism and lesbianism is to go on, it should be done privately” (Zimbabwean Parliamentary Debates 1995: 2518). It is thus not that same-sex practices and desire were never present in Zimbabwean society. It evidently was and is. It is not, however, publically acknowledged and consequently reduced to silence.

5.3: The Unsaying of Homosexuality

Such distaste for naming homosexuality publically is evident in the 1995 parliamentary debate on ‘homosexualism and lesbianism’ (Epprecht 1998). During the debate, the idea of openly discussion homosexuality caused one MP such discomfort that he moved the debate be stopped immediately. The MP justified his discomfort as follows:

If this was to be talked about in rural areas where we hold our meetings people will run away from such meetings. It is really disgusting and humiliating Even in this hon. House no hon. member will dare go out and tell his constituency that they have been discussing about homosexualism and lesbianism. ...Even if we are to stand up and discuss such sexual indulgences, we will not be taken as people in their proper senses (Zimbabwe Parliamentary Debates 1995:2520).

In Zimbabwe, acknowledging homosexuality in public discourse, as the quote suggests, is taboo. In fact, talking about homosexuality is humiliating. Moreover, as previously discussed, emphasis is placed on the fecundity of sexual relations. As the open discussion of
homosexuality is considered taboo and homosexuality is perceived as serving no function, limitations are placed on its possibility for meaning. It is consequently incomprehensible to speak of homosexuality. As the MP asserts, “if we are to stand up and discuss such sexual indulgences, we will not be taken as people in their proper senses” (Zimbabwe Parliamentary Debates 1995:2520, emphasis added).

Even when same-sex practices do enter discourse, it usually remains carefully veiled through euphemisms and secret codes. This is evident in the indigenous spoken languages of Zimbabwe. In Shona, the first language of an estimated 80 percent of Zimbabweans, there is no word to directly refer to homosexuality or homosexual acts (Epprecht 1998, Engelke 1999).² Same-sex practices are carefully hidden in euphemisms such as tsvimborume. The word, directly translated, refers to someone who possesses a knobkerrie, but does not have anywhere to put it. The knobkerrie is a weapon in Zimbabwe, but also a euphemism for the penis. There is also the Shona word sahwira, which refers to an “intimate male comrade” (Epprecht 1998: 637). As no direct meaning is given to homosexuality, it is mostly discursively rendered invisible.

What all these examples show is that, whilst same-sex acts were historically present in Zimbabwean culture, it predominantly remained unarticulated. Zimbabwean society placed considerable emphasis on fertility and reproduction. Same-sex practices, however, served no reproductive function. As such, it had neither an economic nor social meaning. When same-sex practices were acknowledged, they were often not considered explicitly sexual acts.

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² There seem to be some disagreement about this. For Matthew Engelke, the Shona word ngochani actually refers to homosexuality explicitly. However, ngochani is a relatively modern descriptive term for homosexuality, thus enforcing the idea that homosexuality is not part of ‘traditional’ Zimbabwean culture (Epprecht 1998; Engelke 1999).
Instead, they were confined to being ‘playing’, ‘accidents’, or ‘teasing’ (Epprecht 1998). In addition, same-sex practices were subject to a culture of discretion, secrecy, and euphemisms regarding matters of sexuality. Sexual and public discourse was thus marked by a silence that rendered homosexuality invisible and without explicit meaning.

5.4: Western Silences
The discursive silence that marked Zimbabwe’s indigenous cultures was almost certainly condoned and probably enhanced by early Western discourse of sexuality. This is particularly evident in terms of Christian missionary propaganda. In fact, Epprecht (1998) notes that for most missionaries, “talking about sex of any kind seems to have been considered equivalent to advocating it outside of marriage - a sin in all the Christian dogmas” (Epprecht 1998: 637). Moreover, as the previous chapter emphasised, ethnographers, travellers, and historians tended to perpetuate the silence that marked discourse on same-sex practices. Charles and David Livingstone (1865) allude to the tacit discursive agreement between missionaries and ‘native’ Zimbabweans in regards to sexuality. In their description of the Kolo (Balozi) people, they note:

> By pointed enquiries, and laying oneself out for that kind of knowledge, one might be able to say much more; but if onebehaves as he must do among the civilised and abstains from asking questions, no improper hints ever will be given by any of the native[s] (P.284).

In fact, Epprecht (1998) observes that descriptions of same-sex practices in ‘traditional’ setting comprises a total of two paragraphs “in the entire voluminous body of published works in and about colonial Zimbabwe between 1890 and 1979” (p. 638). As Murray and Roscoe (1998) note:

> [R]ather than dispel the myth of African sexual exceptionalism, anthropologists have often reinforced it by not seriously investigating same-sex patterns, failing to report what they do observe, and discounting what they report (p. xii).
Evans-Pritchard, arguably one of the most respected authorities on indigenous African cultures, neither included nor acknowledged male same-sex practices in his classic study of the Azande of Northern Congo. He similarly failed to mention male same-sex practices amongst the Nuer of Southern Sudan in his seminal study of that people (Dlamini 2006). It was only decades later, that he finally acknowledged that he was, in fact, aware of same-sex practices amongst the Azande. In 1957, in a relatively unknown journal, and then in 1970 and 1971, in more accessible venues, Evans-Pritchard related how Azande warriors would marry boys “who functioned as temporary wives” (Dlamini 2006: 133). Evans-Pritchard is certainly not the exception. For Dlamini (2006), there was a noticeable “tendency among some anthropologists in Africa and elsewhere, to deny or dismiss the presence of homosexuality, even when they have observed it” (p. 133). A salient example of this is the anthropological observations of Gelfand (1979) who seems to not only dismiss the presence of homosexuality, but actually commend indigenous Zimbabwean cultures for their visible absence of homosexuality. According to Gelfand (1979):

The traditional Shona have none of the problems associated with homosexuality [so] obviously they must have a valuable method of bringing up children, especially with regard to sex relations, thus avoiding this anomaly so frequent in Western society (Gelfand cited in Murray and Roscoe1998:xiii).

Even when same-sex practices were acknowledged, the possibility of same-sex desire, of a person interested in and enjoying same-sex practices, was effectively denied. Examples of this include Heskovits’ study of African tribes in the 1930s. His study implies, for example, that Dahomey youth of present-day Benin, who engaged in same-sex relations, merely did so because it was situational and opportunistic:

[When] the games between boys and girls are stopped, the boys no longer have the opportunity for companionship with the girls, and the sex drive finds satisfaction in close friendship between boys in the same group [...] A boy may take the other “as a woman” this being called gaglgo, homosexuality (as quoted by Murray and Roscoe 1998: xiii).
The possibility of the desire for, an interest in, same-sex practices is neither acknowledged nor suggested. Instead, same-sex relations only occur because of a lack of women. These are also predominantly not permanent or lifelong sexual relationships. Its relevance and cultural significance is thus relegated to a short-lived adolescent phrase. Moreover, in terms of the emphasis on discretion and silence regarding same-sex practices, foreign and indigenous discourses, rather than compete for meaning, seem to have complimented and enhanced each other.

The meaning ascribed to same-sex practices is not universally applicable. It does not transcend, for example, culture, society, and traditions. In fact, as this chapter endeavoured to explain, Zimbabwe was, on the contrary, marked by an absence of explicit meaning for same-sex practices. Sexuality in Zimbabwe was marked, instead, by an emphasis on fertility and reproduction. Heterosexual virility was the referent in terms of appropriate sexual and social conduct. In addition, indigenous discourse, in regards to sexuality, was marked by discretion and silence. The open discussion of sex and sexuality was, and mostly still is, considered taboo. For Epprecht (1998),

The African cultures of Zimbabwe unquestionably disapproved of open homosexual behaviour. They were, however, prepared to tolerate or turn a blind eye to discreet, eccentric or 'accidental' homosexual acts provided the proper compensations and social fictions were maintained” (p. 645).

These social fictions were maintained through customs such as kupindira or kusikira rudzi. Moreover, as Epprecht observes (1998), there is no word in Shona that explicitly refers to or describes homosexuality explicitly.

In terms of Zimbabwe, discourses, both indigenous and foreign, placed considerable emphasis on unsaying, silencing, and dismissing same-sex practices. Rather than compete for
meaning, these discourses complimented each other in terms of their mutual emphasis on silence and discretion. This is not to say, however, that Zimbabwe does not have any competing discourses in terms of same-sex practices. So far, I have argued that discourse of same-sex practices in Zimbabwe was marked by a silence that limited the meaning of homosexuality in Zimbabwe. The next chapter, however, will address a discourse that explicitly names and addresses same-sex practices in Zimbabwe.
CHAPTER 6. THE ZIMBABWE INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR

Homosexuality is not an immobile, concrete term. It does not have “one general system of meaning”. Nor is homosexuality understood through a single discursive locus. Instead, there is a series of discourses, with meanings that can differ, depending on the discourse (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 12). For Foucault ([1976] 1990), moreover, “discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (p.101). For my final chapter, I compare and address two important discourses and explore how the ensuing potential that resulted from these discourses, one marked by silence and the other marked by a Western, public naming of sexual acts and identities, have come to define Zimbabwe’s current articulation of homosexuality.

6.1 The Homosexual as Species

For Foucault, Carl Westphal’s seminal 1870 article on “contrary sexual sensations” stands as the birth of the “homosexual as personified” in the West. Foucault ([1976] 1990) notes that,

Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species (P. 43, emphasis added).

In Europe, this initiated a discursive shift in regards to same-sex practices whereby both the act and the individual was now coded vis-à-vis homosexuality. However, as Western, colonial, and indigenous discourses effectively silenced same-sex practices in Zimbabwe; homosexuality and the ‘homosexual as species’ were simply not part of any social lexicon. This was all to change, however, during the late 1980s.
The silence that dominated sexual discourse in Zimbabwe was broken by the emergence of a discourse that both openly referred to homosexuality and incorporated the ‘homosexual as species’. Through events such as the Jacaranda Queen contest—Zimbabwe’s first drag queen competition—alternative identities began to be expressed more openly in Zimbabwe. In addition, Zimbabwe’s first Lesbian and Gay organisation, Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ), was established in 1990 (GALZ 2013). The organisation placed particular emphasis on “the recognition and respect of LGBTI people's rights in Zimbabwe” (GALZ 2013). The emphasis became evident in 1995, when the organisation attempted to display their educational material at the Zimbabwe International Book Fair. This would come to be a landmark moment for several reasons. It is the largest book fair in sub-Saharan Africa and annually draws more than 30 000 people from all over the world (Engelke 1999). If ever there was an event to bring homosexuality out of the closet and into public discourse in Zimbabwe, this would certainly have been it. In fact, in many ways, argues Engelke (1999), GALZ came to “represent what it means to be a homosexual in Zimbabwe because of what has happened at the book fairs” (p. 298, emphasis added).

GALZ’s request to be included in the book fair caused an outrage throughout most of Zimbabwe. Previously hegemonic discourses marked by silence, discretion and secrecy, now potentially competed with discourses that explicitly and publically gave meaning to homosexual acts and a homosexual identity. In this regard, the reaction towards GALZ’s request to be included in the Zimbabwe International Book Fair remains particularly illuminating, especially in terms of the discursive struggle which ensued.
According to Foucault, argues Jørgensen and Phillips (2002), “discourses contribute centrally to producing the subjects we are and the objects we can know something about” (p.14). In this regard, GALZ’s request to be included in the Zimbabwe International Book Fair remains particularly illuminating. In light of this, I next address and analyse the ways in which two competing discourses, one marked by silence and the other marked by the public acknowledgement of homosexuality, presented their particular versions of reality (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 14).

6.2: The ‘Truth’ about Homosexuality

The possible inclusion of GALZ at the event signalled the possibility for a radical discursive struggle, inasmuch as homosexuality would now be explicitly articulated. Moreover, it would be done publically. This was both a dramatic alternative and challenge to a public discourse which emphasised silence, discretion and privacy in regards to matters of sex. Interestingly, this challenge was understood quite literally. Mugabe chose to open the 1995 book fair—in front of distinguished guests, news agencies, and foreign dignitaries—with the following speech:

Let me give you an obvious and perhaps in some cases embarrassing example of a taboo here, but one which is also universally recognised. While between a married couple sexual relations are not only permissible [sic], but such relations should however never be seen to occur in public or in streets or public parks. …This is because we all accept that the intimate nature of such relations demands privacy. Supporting persons who believe that the denial of their alleged right to have sex in public is a violation of their human rights formed as association in defence and protection of it and proceeded to write booklets and other forms of literature on the subject of their rights. Is any sane government which is a protector of society's moral values expected to countenance their accessions? (Van Breda 1995, emphasis added).

GALZ has never claimed that it was fighting for ‘the right to have sex in public’, and consequently vocally opposed the claim. In response, they made the following statement:

It should be pointed out that GALZ wished purely to advertise and promote its’ counselling service and the fact that gay rights are human rights at the Book Fair. At
no time was it suggested or intended to display phonography [sic] or the like. At no time was it suggested or implied that homosexuals wished to have sex in public or that it was their right to do so (Van Breda 1995).

Yet, this was how the president wished their inclusion to be understood. Homosexuals, for Mugabe, are demanding the right to have sex in public. At first, this particular emphasis may seem nonsensical. Taken literally, it may come across as that. Discursively, however, it is certainly not. The discretion that marked, and predominantly still marks, discourse on sexuality in Zimbabwe is deliberately emphasised, and for good reason. Mugabe asserts that it is embarrassing to even comment on their inclusion. Sex must remain private. In fact, it demands privacy. To include GALZ at the Book Fair, following this logic, is to therefore challenge said privacy. To ‘countenance their accessions’, using Mugabe’s words, is to condone sex in public. More specifically, it is to make sex public, i.e. it is the transformation of sex into public discourse.

‘Public’, in the context of GALZ’s inclusion at the Book Fair is best understood as explicitly acknowledged and visible homosexual identities and acts. Underpinning Mugabe’s claim is the fact that homosexuality, in a Zimbabwean context, is threatening to become a public phenomenon. The act of publically acknowledging and naming same-sex practices should not be underestimated. Judith Butler (1997) notes that the public articulation of homosexuality has a remarkable, almost magical, power. For Butler,

[the words “I am a homosexual,”] do not merely describe; they are figured as performing what they describe, not only in the sense that they constitute the speaker as a homosexual, but that they constitute the speech as homosexual conduct (P. 107).

The threat posed by GALZ is not determined by the concern that they would literally have sex in public. However, echoing Butler’s (1997) assertion, sex would be publically displayed and embodied through visible and articulated homosexual identities. Sexuality, for the members of GALZ, is a matter of identity. Moreover, contrary to traditional narratives,
homosexually now had the potential of becoming more than just a discreet and silently tolerated practice. For example, GALZ, requested to be allowed to “express themselves through their own gay and lesbian culture” (GALZ 1995). This is a radical and discursively challenging statement inasmuch as it is an “overt insistence on equality” and not, as Zimbabwean culture have maintained for so long, a “covert satisfying of desire, accommodated by social norms and traditions” (Gevisser 2010).

This public naming and acknowledgement of sex and sexuality is represented as a threat to the Zimbabwean way of life. Shortly after the controversy of the 1995 book fair, for example, the Women’s League of Zimbabwe employed a similar argument:

We are Zimbabweans and we have a culture for Zimbabweans to preserve. As mothers and custodians of our heritage, we stand solidly behind our president and leader on his unflinching stand against homosexuality. Human rights should not be allowed to dehumanize us. (cited in Dunton and Palmberg 1996: 12, emphasis added)

Homosexuality is represented as anathema to Zimbabwean culture. It threatens the Zimbabwean way of life, their heritage. However, such an interpretation is perhaps somewhat oversimplified. The threat to Zimbabwean heritage is not necessarily homosexuality per se. Instead, it is the explicit naming and embodiment of homosexuality. The real outrage at GALZ’s inclusion at the Book Fair is neither the act nor the sexual choices of these men and women. Rather, it is the lack of discretion. By publically acknowledging and naming homosexual acts and identities, discourses marked by discretion, silence and sexual taboos are visibly and discursively transgressed.

The theme of the Zimbabwe Book Fair in the year of the incident was, rather appropriately, ‘Human Rights and Freedom of expression’. GALZ wanted to advertise their counselling service for gays and lesbians and, in light of that year’s theme, emphasise that “gay rights are
human rights” (GALZ 1995). Whilst the latter motivation may come across as self-evident, it is necessary to further contextualise homosexuality in Zimbabwe. In the social lexicon of Zimbabwe, the assertion that ‘gay rights are human rights’ suggests a perceived contradiction. To better understand this contradiction, it is necessary to first look at what the Women’s League possibly meant with the statement “Human rights should not be allowed to dehumanize us” (Dunton and Palmberg, 1996: 12).

For Foucault, discourses are “relatively rule-bound sets of statements which impose limits on what gives meaning” (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002: 13). Moreover, truth is the result of particular discursive developments. The majority of the members of the Women’s League are native Shona speakers (Engelke 1999). In terms of human rights, the closest word to ‘human dignity’ or ‘humanity’ is unhu. In Shona culture, to be human is to be a social being and to be part of several social relationships (Engelke 1999). Moreover, it differs from a Western understanding of personhood inasmuch as in Shona culture, “one’s humanity is acquired, not given” (Engelke 1999: 301). What is problematic for the Women’s League is that homosexuality disables important social relationships, for example ‘traditional’ marriage and reproduction. As such, if women were to marry women and men were to marry men, they cannot be considered fully human (Clark, 1996; Epprecht 1999). In regards to ‘humanity’, homosexuals are thus discursively rendered meaningless since they cannot make the important social connections associated with Zimbabwean personhood. Homosexuality, in terms of human rights, from this perspective, is also perceived as dehumanizing inasmuch as it challenges “the integrity of the social fabric, the coherence of the cultural heritage, and the very idea of humanity itself” (Engelke 1999: 301). GALZ’s response to this claim, however, is particularly revealing:
Regarding the cultural issue that homosexuality is un-African...In any democratic state where every individual is guaranteed the inalienable rights to freedom of expression, gays and lesbians must also be permitted to express themselves through their own gay and lesbian culture (GALZ 1995).

GALZ invokes an incompatible discourse that ascribes a different meaning to homosexuality. However, rather than challenging the claims made by the Women’s League, statements such as these perpetuate and enforce an incommensurable distinction between ‘traditional’ Zimbabwean culture and homosexuality qua foreign import. Homosexuals in Zimbabwe have a right to express themselves through their own gay and lesbian culture. One can either be Zimbabwean or homosexual. To be both, however, is impossible.

Mugabe frequently represents same-sex practices as a Western, and consequently foreign, articulation of sexuality. He thus explicitly distinguishes homosexuality and traditional values of Zimbabwe. To a country hungry for certainties, this distinction is very attractive. Epprecht (1998) notes that,

Imported stereotypes of gays and lesbians are seductive in this context precisely because of their power to give cathartic focus to a heterosexual society in crisis: gay men spread disease (not us), they prey on small children, they sell sex to the highest bidder, they mock patriarchal dignity, and so on (Epprecht 1998: 648).

Monica Mbaru, the head of the Africa programme at International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, concurs with Epprecht’s analysis. Mbaru, who has extensively monitored the current controversy concerning gay rights in Africa, notes that for opportunistic politicians, homosexuality has become a particularly easy target (Howden 2010). Homosexuals have become a national and political scapegoat for all the social ills of the country. In addition, Mbaru notes that politicians have increasingly been more than “willing to use a component of society as a sacrificial lamb in order to cast themselves as society's saviour” (Howden 2010). The negation of same-sex practices qua homosexuality, therefore, not only provides a means of diverting attention from serious problems in the
country such as social inequality, corruption, and massive inflation, but also represents Mugabe as the protector of Zimbabwe’s norms and values. Robert Mugabe’s explicit and public condemnation of GALZ’s inclusion at the Book Fair could thus be understood as a shrewd political manoeuvre that exploited the discursive silence that marked discourse on sexuality in Zimbabwe. In this way, homosexuality’s connotations in Zimbabwe have consequently become a powerful, political tool to legitimise his authority.

I have, thus far, suggested that sexuality is not natural but, rather, discursively constructed. Homosexuality is consequently “constructed, experienced, and understood in culturally and historically specific ways” (Sullivan 2003: 1). In light of this, this chapter specifically addressed different ‘discursive constructions’, in regards to sexuality, and their respective potential. Discourse can be “both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (For Foucault ([1976] 1990:101). For Epprecht (1998), Zimbabweans mostly turned a blind eye to “discreet, eccentric or 'accidental' homosexual acts”. Provided, however, that “the proper compensations and social fictions were maintained” (p. 645). Zimbabweans, nonetheless, unquestionably disapprove of public homosexual behaviour. GALZ’s request to be part of the Zimbabwe International Book Fair, on the other hand, represented a competing discourse that went against the censuring of public homosexual behaviour. Instead, it was perceived as publically naming and acknowledged homosexuality. This provided a potential “point of resistance” for those who wished to articulate and have their sexual practices and attraction recognised and respected (Foucault ([1976] 1990:101). Mugabe, however, deliberately emphasised the public aspect of this discourse. This provided the President with an opportunity to represent GALZ as a threat to a culture marked by silence and discretion. This was further enabled by the fact that the new naming and public acknowledgement of
homosexuality predominantly depends on a foreign lexicon, vis-à-vis descriptive markers such as ‘gay’, ‘lesbian’, and ‘homosexual’. As a consequence, Mugabe is able to legitimize his authority qua protector of Zimbabwean culture. It is this particular meaning of homosexuality that remains an extremely important component in the claim that homosexuality is un-African.
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

In early 2013, a Somali boy, accused of being homosexual, was publically condemned and stoned to death. Throughout the stoning, villagers were forced to watch as a means of discouraging further homosexual ‘deviancy’ (Garcia 2013). In 2009, the body of a Senegalese man, Madieye Diallo, was exhumed, desecrated, and unceremoniously dumped at the house of his elderly parents (Lewis and Marshall 2012). The angry mob reportedly refused to have the man’s body near those of their deceased family. The bereaved mother of David Kato—a murdered Ugandan LBTQ activists—could do nothing when Ugandan pastors decided to deliver vitriolic sermons on her son’s gravesite (Nathan 2013). In 2008, Eudy Similane, a well-known football player and respected Lesbian and Gay activist, was gang raped, beaten, and stabbed 25 times in the face, chest and legs (Kelly 2009). Whilst these are examples of some of the more disturbing acts of violence against homosexuals in Africa, they are not the exception.

Homophobia remains incredibly potent and widespread throughout most of Africa. Sociology, however, potentially enables a valuable means of addressing homophobia in Africa. Through the scientific study of human social behaviour, sufficient knowledge could be gained to adequately equip those who wish to see an end to the disturbing rates of violence against homosexuals on the continent. According to a particularly illustrative Nigerian proverb, however, ‘in moments of crisis, the wise build bridges whereas the foolish build dams’. Whilst sociology remains a perspicuous means of understanding human social actions, such endeavours must respect specificity and context. We need to allow alternative meaning to emerge and should neither ignore nor marginalise alternative, local same-sex practices and attractions that fail to adhere to the Western confines of homosexuality.
The approach to the claim that homosexuality is un-African is far too often relegated to a simplistic analysis of a very complex social issue. The claim is reduced to an easily digestible and clear cut conflict between homophobic narratives and the rights and dignity of homosexuals in Africa. It is marked by a Universalist approach, however, that often fails to address local understandings of the issue. Moreover, it frames the issue in the context of a Western understanding of sexuality vis-à-vis ‘homosexuality’. Donald Donham surmises it best, however, when he notes that, “[i]nstead of sexuality in the Western sense, it was local notions of sexed bodies and gendered identities . . . that divided and categorized [sexuality]” (1998: 7). This does not imply that same-sex practices were not historically present prior to the colonisation of Europe. Same-sex practices have been observed in both Western and non-Western contexts. What is certainly different, however, “across both time and space (African and otherwise), are the ways in which such practices have been, are and will be understood” (Engelke 1999: 297). Homosexuality, as a descriptive term, has its origin in “specifically historical and political Western experiences” (Msibi 2011: 57). It is thus not same-sex practices that is un-African, but rather the current articulation of same-sex practices qua ‘homosexuality’ that is, to use the popular parlance of African leaders, a ‘foreign import’.

For sociologists to better understand homosexuality in Africa, local articulation(s) of same-sex practices must be acknowledged. To enable a more comprehensive understanding of the claim that homosexuality is un-African, those who wish to address the claim should, therefore, ideally define ‘homosexuality’ in “relation to particular cultural communities, and by the standards of those communities” (Engelke 1999: 293). This is not to say that the popular counter-narratives against the claim that homosexuality is un-African, should be abandoned in its entirety. Critics of the claim can strengthen their case against these
assertions immeasurably, however, by paying closer attention to the sensitivities and the anxieties associated with societies, like Zimbabwe, marked by considerable change (Epprecht 1999). The focus, therefore, should be on specificity. Accusing and confronting those who argue in favour of the claim that homosexuality is un-African without understanding its context is counterproductive and only exacerbates an already contentious issue. By simply condemning their assertions and labelling those in favour of the claim homophbic, for example, the situation is considerably worsened since the West, in this context, is seen as imposing their morals and values on Africa. The claim should be approached, instead, with meticulously researched arguments without the convenient, albeit “uncritical extrapolation of Western ideals” (Epprecht 1998: 651).

For Foucault, “discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (Foucault [1976] 1990: 101). Despite my critical stance towards homosexuality as a descriptive term, it would be foolish to claim that nothing positive has come from homosexuality in regards to its particular way of understanding same-sex practices. As this paper endeavour to make clear, the term homosexuality provides a means of addressing same-sex desire and practices by identifying both the act and person. In light of this, the vitriolic speeches, tightening of laws, and violence against homosexuals in Africa, may not be a sign of failure, but of success. According to Graeme Reid, director of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights Programme at Human Rights Watch, the violence and discrimination perpetuated by state actors—for example members of the police force—and ordinary persons (non-state actors) is all a backlash against the increasing visibility of homosexuals. Over the last 25 years there's been an unprecedented growth of LGBT movements across sub-Saharan Africa” (Smith 2014). The wave of homophobia in Africa
could thus be argued to be a reaction to homosexuals visibly asserting their political rights and identity. In terms of a “homosexual identity”, Edwin Cameron, a South African constitutional court judge, and one of the first public figures in Africa to come out as gay, similarly argues that:

The most interesting thing … is what I call an 'unstable transition'. It explains the force of the backlash just as African gays and lesbians are starting to come out. It releases hatred and rage, but what is happening is irreversible. Gays and lesbians are coming to consciousness, organising themselves and speaking out” (Smith 2014).

Even though homosexuality has a specialized contextual meaning, this example shows that it, nevertheless, also enables a means of asserting sexual rights in Africa. The term homosexuality is used as a means of articulating their identity and a model to account for the subordination and oppression of those who engage in same-sex practices.

I am not arguing against the adoption of a homosexual identity per se. I am however, critical of adopting and using such an identity unreflectively. The term still operates within a normative framework. Both Reid and Cameron is correct, the term homosexual enables a means of identifying, organising and resisting discrimination against same-sex practices. However, the current articulation of same-sex practices qua homosexuality remains problematic, regardless of its emancipatory potential, since this particular articulation predominantly depends on a foreign lexicon. Epprecht (1998) notes and encapsulates the problematic use of a term like ‘homosexuality’ best:

The bulk of words used today which name homosexual acts and identities come from the West. It has an effect, however, like that of foreign terminology, of 'proving' that local people cannot conceive let alone engage in homosexual feelings and practices except when taught by corrupt foreigners (P. 637).

Articulating same-sex practices vis-à-vis homosexuality perpetuates the idea that homosexuality is ‘foreign’ and ‘un-African’. African heads of state, like Robert Mugabe, are thus able to present homosexuality as examples of Western cultural infiltration and
imperialism (Essien and Aderinto 2009). Understanding and articulating same-sex practices through homosexuality is, therefore, problematic as it frames same-sex practices and desires through a Western understanding of sexuality and tend to enforce the commonly held belief that homosexuality is un-African.

What should become evident, finally, is my considerable emphasis on contextualisation. In fact, it is through such emphasis on contextualisation that I hope to provide the most valuable sociological contribution. Drawing on the work of Foucault, Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) note that “truth is a discursive construction”. Most importantly, “different regimes of knowledge determine what is true and false” (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 13). I applied Foucault to the analysis of the claim that homosexuality is un-African, as I wanted to investigate and contextualise the different regimes of knowledge as per the various articulations of homosexuality in Africa, particularly Zimbabwe. There are “innumerable statements that are never uttered, and would never be accepted as meaningful” (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 13). The historical rules of a specific discourse, however, determine what has meaning and what has not, what is true, and what is false.

Discourses, for Foucault, as Jørgensen and Phillip (20002) notes, are a “relatively rule-bound sets of statements which impose limits on what gives meaning” (p.13). Echoing Foucault, I argue that truth is created discursively. The locus of my key concern and most important sociological insight, regarding the claim that homosexuality is un-African, is centred on this premise. Using this premise, I have been able to address homosexuality’s limitations as a descriptive term. Moreover, I addressed the various ‘truths’ of homosexuality as per its discourse. Focusing on Africa in the first chapter, I was able to address the dominance of Western discourse of sexuality in Africa. The ‘truth’ of homosexuality, was, and mostly still
is, defined by foreign Western discourses. Focussing on Zimbabwe in the final two chapters, I analysed two dominant discourses with competing meanings and ‘truths’ in regards to homosexuality. What I predominantly wish to bring to the fore, however, is the importance of specificity and context. Truth is created discursively whilst discourses also imposes limits on what gives meanings and what does not.

This thesis provided a rigorous discursive contextualisation of same-sex practices qua homosexuality. It was motivated, however, by an interest in starting a much-needed conversation on the unreflective use of homosexuality when addressing the claim that homosexuality is un-African. The severity of the homophobia in Africa should not be underestimated. Emphasis should still be placed, however, on contextualising the claim. What, for, example, is meant by homosexuality when the term is used? All same-sex practices and desires, moreover, are far too often exclusively understood and articulated qua ‘homosexuality’. Whilst homosexuality may act as a convenient marker, it, nevertheless, often misrepresents and limits the nuances of same-sex experiences. I thus encourage those interested in better understanding discrimination and violence against homosexuals in Africa, to similarly critically examine and unsettled the deceptively simple use of ‘homosexuality’ as a means of articulating all same-sex practices in Africa.
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