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Increased expressions of homophobia in Africa are not only a reaction to the "personified" and visible homosexual identity, but also a tool for sexism, an attempt to solidify men's position in society.

The Lies We Have Been Told: On (Homo) Sexuality in Africa

Thabo Msibi

In this paper, I explore the waves of homophobia that seem to be sweeping the African continent. I present evidence that homophobia is not only publicly approved by African leaders, but relies on unsubstantiated claims of an imposed homosexual identity, contradictory ideas on morality, and the use of outdated laws. I argue that these claims represent a façade that serves to entrench patriarchy and heteronormativity as legitimate and fixed in African societies. I show that the key difference between the West and Africa is not the presence or absence of same-sex desire, but its different social construction. Finally, I argue for an intersectional approach, which recognizes the intersections between sexism and homophobia, and assert that the situation calls for more focused organizing by Africans themselves in addressing the recent increase in expressions of homophobia.

Introduction

This paper addresses the increased crusading against those who engage in same-sex relations in Africa. It pays particular attention to the ways in which homosexuality has become more virulently opposed, contested, and denounced, particularly by political leaders, as un-African, with the potential of destroying African traditions and heterosexual "family values." Recognizing that such contestation is not new (Reddy 2001), the paper argues that the renewed efforts to label same-sex desire as un-African represent a façade that conceals neoconservatism and a resurgence of patriarchy, coated in the constructs of religion, nationalism, and law. The paper holds that it is both "anxious masculinities" (Stein 2005) that drive this agenda—with masculinity being reconstituted because of an array of social changes questioning the patriarchal authority—and support the rise of notions of the "homosexual" as "personified" (Foucault 1980). African societies have never historically had a "gay" identity or a pathologized "homosexual" category; however, same-sex sexual attraction and expression were known to occur, but in usually hidden but sometimes even culturally accepted ways (Epprecht 2004). I argue, therefore, that the wave of human rights that has swept through Africa

has permitted many to claim a "gay" identity, thus aggravating the already heightened fear of the "anxious" man. This has ultimately resulted in draconian responses, often using colonial antisodomy laws, directed against those who claim a "gay" identity, or at least those assumed to be gay, as being witnessed in many African countries today.

The paper has three related parts. The first part uses newspaper and Internet reports[1] to explore the waves of homophobia that are sweeping the African continent, often leading to the imprisonment—or, at worst, death—of those who engage in same-sex relations. In this part, I trace the rise of homophobia in specific African countries and the arguments being used to justify this homophobia. The second section problematizes the now long-standing assumption of a "sodomite-free" Africa and uses Foucault's concept of genealogy to challenge the notion that same-sex desire is a Western imposition. The final part of the paper explores the ways in which we can begin to understand these homophobic waves in Africa and how to respond to them better.

Terminology and Concepts

Before engaging with the arguments of this paper, it is important to clarify two important terms which often get used perhaps unreflectively in labeling those who engage in same-sex relations. The words *homosexual* and *gay* often get used with no sense of clarity as to their meaning and contextual relevance. These terms evolve out of a specific cultural history, and they cannot be assumed to mean the same thing to everyone in the same way. Homosexuality is a concept that does not come out of Africa. The invention of the "homosexual role" developed around the nineteenth century in the West to denote a kind of sickness for those attracted to the same sex: "the creation of a specialized, despised, and punished role of the homosexual keeps the bulk of society pure in rather the same way that the similar treatment of some kinds of criminals helps keep the rest of society law-abiding" (McIntosh 1968:184). Homosexuality was therefore a term initially introduced in the West to control social relations, while labeling those engaged in same-sex relations as deviant.

The "gay" category similarly comes from a specific history, with its own politics and struggles. "Gay" is a political identity, which comes from Western struggles for civil rights in the 1960s. Gamson calls it a movement for a "public collective identity" (1995:391), noting that this movement has its own cultural and political institutions, festivals, neighborhoods, and even its own flag. Stein and Plummer note that this movement is "among the most vibrant and well-organized social movements in the United States and Europe" (1994:179). The gay identity focuses on an identifiable, visible, individual who engages in same-sex relations. Even in the West, the "gay" identity has not always existed: instead, it is a "product of history and [has] come to existence in a specific historical era" (D'Emilio 1983:102). The rise

of capitalism, with its free labor system, was intricately linked with the rise of men and women in claiming a "gay" identity. Both the concepts of "homosexuality" and "gay" have no meaning in Africa, as they come from specifically historical and political Western experiences.

This paper strays from using "gay" or "homosexual" in defining those who engage in same-sex desire: instead, it uses the term *same-sex-desiring individuals*. It does so to present a more reflective analysis of same-sex relations in Africa. In keeping with Deborah Amory's approach, the use of *homosexuality* in this paper acknowledges that "same-sex erotics, practiced by many people in many different historical contexts, do not always necessarily lead to the emergence of a ["gay"] identity" (1997:5).

Victimization, Rape, Imprisonment, and Murder: Being "Gay" in Africa

Sexuality and sexual activity, regardless of the society, are intricately linked with the exercise of power (Foucault 1980). For many societies around the world, sexuality continues to be highly controlled and heavily policed. This is because sexuality is a "highly value laden terrain" (Nel 2009:36). In many African countries, such control is evident in the way in which same-sex desire continues to be closeted and silenced. While many countries in the Western world have begun to address the draconian and outdated laws leveled against individuals who engage in same-sex relations, most African countries continue to lag behind, oppressing—some even executing—those who engage in same-sex relations: "by maintaining a tight grip on certain activities, and silencing the voices of those individuals and groups that engage in them, the patriarchal state makes it extremely difficult for these individuals to organise and fight for their human rights" (Tamale 2007:18). One can therefore argue that one of the reasons for the oppression of individuals who engage in same-sex relations in Africa is that of silencing same-sex sexualities.

In thirty-eight of the fifty-three African states, it is illegal to engage in consensual "gay" sex. Countries like Nigeria, Malawi, Senegal, and more recently Uganda have imposed the harshest of treatments against individuals convicted of engaging in same-sex relations (Blandy 2010). The punishments used to discriminate against those who engage in same-sex relations in Africa largely arise from antisodomy laws left over from the colonial era, when colonial authorities were keen on regulating sexuality. These laws remain largely unchanged in postcolonial Africa today. Exactly how harshly has homosexuality been treated in African countries? A brief analysis of four African countries (Malawi, Uganda, Nigeria, and South Africa) answers this question. All four of the countries to be discussed are former British colonies, and, apart from South Africa, all of them have retained the penal codes imposed through colonialism.

Malawi

In 2010 in Malawi, Tiwonge Chimbalanga and his partner, Steven Monjeza, were arrested and sentenced for publicly celebrating their engagement—a locally illegal action (*The Times* 2010). The magistrate, Nyakwawa Usiwa Usiwa, when handing down the sentence, believed that his actions would deter other people from claiming or publicly demonstrating a homosexual identity. He declared "I will give you a scaring sentence so that the public [will] be protected from people like you, so that we are not tempted to emulate this horrendous example" (*Mail and Guardian* 2010b). After saying this, he imposed on the couple a fourteen-year term of imprisonment at hard labor, the maximum sentence allowed. It is clear from the magistrate's sentence that, for him, same-sex desire was a gross immoral act, worthy of the worst punishment available.

The sentencing of the two men sent shock waves around the world, with leaders from the United Nations and many countries in the West publicly deploring the arrest and sentence. South Africa, as the only country in Africa where the right to sexual orientation is constitutionally protected, immediately joined the chorus of disapproval through its civil-rights leaders; however, only after prompts from a member of the opposition party did President Jacob Zuma condemn the sentence, breaking African leaders' silence on the matter.

The swift international response forced the Malawian president to grant amnesty to the couple on "humanitarian" grounds. When informing the public of the men's release, the president of Malawi noted, "These boys committed a crime against our culture, our religion and our laws" (Gevisser 2010), thereby also declaring his agreement with the sentencing of the men. It is important to note the three factors he emphasizes: first the argument of culture is used to justify the arrest (with the central tenet of this argument being that same-sex desire is un-African); second is the argument of religion (representing morality as communicated through presumably Christianity); finally is the argument of the law. Later, I show how these three arguments are common with most incidents of homophobia in Africa, and how each of them is not only false in its assumptions, but inherently contradictory in its logic.

Uganda

The second case I explore is that of Uganda as it concerns the proposed Anti-Homosexuality Bill. Under the bill, homosexuality would become punishable even by death, and neighbors and friends would have the responsibility to report individuals suspected of engaging in same-sex relations (Bunting 2010; Ewins 2011). In addition, the bill would see Ugandans outside the country being extradited back to Uganda for engaging in same-sex relations. Although the bill may not be passed (a commission appointed by President Museveni to investigate the viability of accepting the bill has recommended that it not be passed, and there are suggestions that the opposition parties

may prevent a vote on the bill), the bill has nevertheless presented significant challenges to individuals engaging in same-sex relations in Uganda: they have been forced into hiding for fear of victimization, personal harm, and even murder (Wilkerson 2009).

The backlash against those who engage in same-sex relations in Uganda has largely been driven by political, cultural, and religious fundamentalisms. The bill, for instance, notes that "same-sex attraction is not an innate and immutable characteristic," and wishes to "protect the cherished culture of the people of Uganda, legal, religious, and traditional family values of the people of Uganda against the attempts of sexual rights activists seeking to impose their values of sexual promiscuity on the people of Uganda." Such fundamentalisms are obvious in the role played by evangelical organizations in pushing for the bill. Evangelical organizations, which are thriving throughout Uganda, have been instrumental, not only in initiating homophobic sentiments, but also in spreading them (Evans 2009; Ewins 2011; Xie 2010). Of course, the influence of the church is not at all new to Uganda; missionary presence in Uganda predates the arrival of colonial authorities: "in colonial and post-colonial Uganda, organized religion has [always] played a critical role in national politics. . . . [The only difference now is that] religious institutions appear more significantly in the present than in the past" (Jones 2005:499–500). The noted significance is evident in the way Pentecostal churches and organizations influence every sphere of public life in Uganda. From villagers and government members being "born again" to asking "international religious organizations to carry out development work alongside evangelism" (Jones 2005:501), the impact of Pentecostalism is glaring. The effect of this is evident in the way in which American evangelical ministers have influenced Ugandan leaders by pushing for the silencing of individuals engaging in same-sex relations.

The immediate results of the bill have been a witch-hunt, approved publicly and supported by the state and the media. In 2009, *Red Pepper,* a tabloid newspaper from Uganda, published fifty names of individuals suspected of engaging in homosexual activity, together with four photos (Lauer 2009). Not only did this revelation place the concerned individuals at great risk, it forced other individuals who engage in same-sex relations to go into hiding, in fear of their lives. More recently, a gay-rights activist, David Kato, was killed in Uganda after *Rolling Stone,* a Ugandan newspaper, published names and photos of those, including Kato, it claimed were gay (BBC 2011).

Nigeria

Another country where violence against individuals engaging in same-sex relations has been prevalent is Nigeria. At the Lambeth Conference in 1998, clerics from African and Asian countries led by the Right Reverend Emmanuel Chukwuma, Bishop of the Enugo Diocese, tried to exorcise the Reverend Richard Kirsher of Britain in public for his progay and prowoman stance. Rubenstein (2004) shows the depth of hate against individuals who

engage in same-sex relations among Nigerians. She cites another Nigerian bishop, the Most Reverend Peter Jasper Akinola, who has publicly called for a "defrocking of women priests, [referred] to gay and lesbian clergy as an 'abomination,' and suggested that all gay and lesbian people should have millstones tied around their necks" (2004:343–344), to support her claims and highlight the connection between sexism and homophobia in Nigeria.

Rubenstein is not the only scholar who has noted the connection between homophobia and sexism in Nigeria. Izugbara (2004:2) notes that sexuality and sexual conduct in Nigeria are

> socially produced and fed by oppressive patriarchal subjectivities and ideologies that try to instill a sense of what is normal sexually-speaking, for us all. . . . These are oppressive, male-biased discursive subjectivities[, which] have three familiar traits: They are, (1) homophobic (i.e. support the hatred and fear of men who step out of or challenge traditional male roles), (2) penis-centred (i.e. glorify and idolize traditional imageries of masculinity and male sexual prowess and encourage the objectification of women and their body), and (3) male-privileging (encourage the ideology of [a] double standard[, in] which males feel morally and physically edified by multiple sexual encounters while women are held as morally and physically tarnished by the same).

The issues highlighted by Izugbara are most evident in the way in which individuals who engage in same-sex relations experience their lives in these contexts. People who engage in same-sex relations are often viewed as sick, subhuman, and dangerous. As Izugbara adds, engaging in same-sex relations in Nigeria is associated with "witchcraft, magic and possession of diabolic powers" (2004:6).

As with Uganda and Malawi, homophobia in Nigeria is directly supported by the laws, culture, and religion. In the twelve states of the Islamic North that practice Sharia law, engagement in same-sex activity is punishable by death, while in the rest of the country the punishment is fourteen years of imprisonment (Aken'Ova 2010). In 2006, a piece of legislation known as the "Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act" was proposed with full support of religious—Islamic and Christian—leaders. The legislation was meant to "impose five-year sentences on same-sex couples who have wedding ceremonies, as well as on those who perform such services and on all who attend" (*New York Times* 2007). The introduction of this bill caused similar problems for same-sex desiring individuals in Nigeria as did the Uganda bill. Individuals who engage in same-sex relations were attacked, and their lives were threatened. The bill did not come to a vote, but a similar bill was passed in the lower house in 2009 and then referred to parliamentary committees for study and public consultation (Human Rights Watch 2009). The public reacted strongly in support of the bill,

with many religious leaders even questioning the reasons behind giving individuals who engage in same-sex relations an opportunity to comment. The bill has not received much attention since May 2009, and it may not be passed.

As in Malawi and Uganda, Nigerian homophobia is state sponsored. The former foreign minister, Ojo Maduekwe, informed the United Nations that there were no individuals who engaged in same-sex relations in Nigeria. Similarly, former President Obasanjo stated on national news that "homosexuality is unnatural, ungodly, and un-African" (Aken'Ova 2010). These acts display extreme intolerance of same-sex desiring individuals and reveal the unwillingness of African leaders to challenge a violation of the dignity of those who engage in same-sex relations.

South Africa

The examples given above cannot be representative of the whole African continent, but I would argue that most African countries are similar with regard to the waves of homophobia. Perhaps the best case to demonstrate this would be South Africa, Africa's most progressive country when it comes to the rights of gay and lesbian individuals.

In South Africa, homophobia has taken different forms compared to other parts of Africa. This has largely been owing to the constitutional protection offered to those who engage in same-sex relations. Unlike other African countries, where expressions of homophobia are institutionally, socially, and individually permitted and endorsed through the law, homophobia in South Africa operates in violation of the law. As elsewhere, homophobia in South Africa has gendered undertones, with women being "correctively" raped so as to make them become "real" and "proper" women (Msibi 2009; Nel and Judge 2008). An unpublished study by the Forum for the Empowerment of Women found that of forty-six lesbian women who participated from Johannesburg townships, 41 percent had been raped, 9 percent had survived rape, 37 percent had been assaulted, and 17 percent had been verbally abused (Nel and Judge 2008). At least thirty-one lesbian women have been murdered in South Africa since 1998 (Meises 2009).

The above figures are exceptionally high and demonstrate the extent of gendered homophobic violence in South Africa, where "gays and lesbians continue to be denied cultural recognition and are subject to shaming, harassment, discrimination and violence. Violence against women is increasing and there is a particularly vicious edge to some lesbian attacks" (Cock 2003:41). This violence is largely driven by gender, with men asserting their authority over women, and over other men. For example, those who perform these violent acts not uncommonly excuse their behavior by stating that the women were trying to be "like men," and they therefore deserved to be punished through rape and violence (Mufweba 2003; Nel and Judge 2008; Reid and Dirsuweit 2002; Reuters 2004; Special Assignment 2004). Similarly, men who engage in same-sex relations in South Africa have found themselves on

the receiving end of horrific forms of violence, ranging from sexual violence to physical harm (Nel and Judge 2008).

Homophobic expressions in South Africa have not been state-sanctioned, but similar arguments have been used to argue against same-sex desire as those in other African countries. Jacob Zuma, while still deputy president of the ruling African National Congress, declared that same-sex marriage was a "disgrace to the nation and to God," and that when he was growing up, a gay man would never have stood in front of him, as he would "knock him out" (Ismail and SAPA 2006). Zuma has apologized to the "gay" community for these statements, but his views continue to be held by many people, even in government today. Lulu Xingwana, the former minister of arts and culture in South Africa, walked out of an art exhibition portraying affectionate lesbian women; her reasoning was that the exhibition was immoral and went against nation building and social cohesion (van Wyk 2010). Similarly, Jon Qwelane, a self-proclaimed homophobe, equated homosexuality to bestiality in his column in the *Daily Sun* newspaper; his arguments again went to issues of morality and culture. He was appointed by the Zuma administration to be the South African ambassador in Uganda—the very country that has been in the midst of controversy with its homosexuality bill (*Mail and Guardian* 2010a). Qwelane's appointment appears to be a tacit condoning of his attitudes and a concession to Ugandan homophobia.

Having explored the high levels of homophobia, I now move on to challenge the arguments used to justify this homophobia. The arguments concern African tradition and culture, religion, and (except in South Africa) law. These arguments are not only often flawed, but also inherently contradictory.

"Sodomite-Free" Africa

One element of the prevalent discourse about same-sex desire in Africa is the idea that homosexuality—same-sex desire—is a Western import. African leaders seem intent on freeing Africa from this dreadful Western disease. These sentiments have been legitimized by leaders from Namibia, Zambia, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and, as shown above, Malawi and Uganda. For example, President Robert Mugabe has described individuals who engage in same-sex relations as "worse than pigs and dogs" and has continued to describe homosexuality as "a scourge planted by the white man on a pure continent" (Mwaura 2006). In Kenya, President Daniel arap Moi made it clear that "Kenya ha[d] no room or time for homosexuals and lesbians," noting that "homosexuality is against African norms and traditions and even in religion it is considered a great sin" (Mwaura 2006). In South Africa, President Jacob Zuma has communicated similar sentiments (*Mail and Guardian* 2006). It is never explained how homosexuality was imposed on Africa, and exactly when such an imposition took place.

It is worth exploring here the validity of the claims that same-sex desire is un-African, against African religions and against African laws. I

begin this discussion by exploring the validity of the myth of a "sodomite-free" Africa. I contextualize this discussion around the countries already discussed in Western, Eastern, and Southern Africa, as well as in Senegal and among the Zande people.

The Genealogy of Same-Sex Relations in Africa

African men do have, and have always had, sex with one another; the same can be said about women. The assumption that same-sex desire among Africans is a "Western disease," as stated by Mugabe and various African leaders, flies in the face of studies stating the contrary (Achmat 1993; Donham 1998; Epprecht 1998a, 1998b; Moodie 1988): "African homosexuality is neither random nor incidental—it is a consistent logical feature of African societies and belief systems" (Murray and Will 1998:iv). In fact, it was European ethnographers who first declared that homosexuality was un-African, arguing that Africa was a sodomy-free zone; this argument was "useful to preparing public opinion for abolition of [the] slave trade . . . and [buttressing] negative attitudes towards homosexuality in Europe" (Epprecht 1998b:645). The claim of a homosexuality-free Africa is further rebuffed by colonial ethnographer Evans-Pritchard, whose informants left the Europeans "shocked, incredulous and confused" (Murray and Will 1998:2) after seeing the level of same-sex engagements among African people.

Using Foucault's notion of genealogy, supported by Epprecht's and Murray and Roscoe's influential works on same-sex desire in Africa, the ensuing section traces some hidden forms of power and discourse through a brief African history of sexuality so as to trouble notions of same-sex desire being un-African and to provide further explanations of the growing homophobic sentiment in Africa. Foucault's work has been most useful in understanding human sexuality and in deconstructing structuralist conceptions of knowledge and power. Foucault's concept of genealogy traces the history of the subject, looking at the development of people and subjects. His focus is largely on deconstructing notions of truth, particularly on apparently accepted facts which are assumed to be without history. His genealogy consists of a "painstaking rediscovery of struggles together with the rude memory of their conflicts": it is about disturbing "what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself" (Foucault 1977:83).

Critical historical and anthropological studies (Achmat 1993; Epprecht 1998a, 1998b, 1999, 2001, 2004, 2008; Moodie 1998) all point to major distortions and exclusions of truth about African same-sex relations by historians. Such distortions and exclusions have largely been driven by what I characterize here as three forces: first, the hegemony of state-related historical studies; second, the idea that the prevalence of same-sex relations among Africans was marginal and therefore not deserving attention; and third, the

epoch-specific political constructions of homosexuality. Each of these forces has presented a discourse of African same-sex sexuality as nonexistent or abhorrent, feeding the homophobic attitudes we witness today.

Same-Sex Desire in Africa

Studies based on anecdotal accounts of African societies suggest that Bantu[2] groups were largely patriarchal and gerontocratic, organized on principles of seniority that existed before colonialism (Epprecht 2001; Moodie 1988). A man's sexual identity was constructed in relation to reproduction; however, this is not to say that same-sex engagements never took place. In fact, evidence of same-sex relations in Southern Africa can be traced in early Bushmen paintings, depicting African men engaged in what appear to be same-sex sexual activities (Epprecht 2004). Traces of same-sex relations can be found not only in these paintings, but also in customary practices, cures, and punishments (Baum 1995; Epprecht 1998a, 1998b). While this is not to suggest that same-sex relations were publicly approved, such evidence does serve to shatter the prevailing discourse of a "sodomite-free" Africa.

The political economy of heterosexuality in effect silenced indigenous homosexualities, and traditional African societies tended to place great emphasis on maintaining a "proper" outward appearance (Epprecht 1998a). In line with this notion, same-sex desire was treated with a don't-ask-don't-tell attitude (Epprecht 1999). Marriage served to conceal and deny: "men who felt sexually attracted to males did not need to fear that this feeling would compromise the socially-necessary performance of heterosexual virility" (Epprecht 1998a:634), as they would simply marry. This idea is further explored by Donham's ethnography (1998), which uses Jabu, a participant in his South African study, to show that same-sex sexuality existed in the past: Jabu notes that an arrangement was made between families to hide a gay son by faking a marriage. Same-sex desire (homosexuality) was therefore never a "Western disease," but something that was silenced through heteronormativity.

There is overwhelming evidence that African men in the Southern African mine compounds were having sex with each other, and that other miners were aware of this (Achmat 1993; Epprecht 1998a, 1998b, 1999, 2001, 2004; Moodie 1998). Young men were persuaded to have sexual relationships with older men in the mines through lucrative gifts; some old men would give all their wages to the young men to have relationships with them (Epprecht 2001; Moodie 1988). Young miners would be "married" off to older workers through marriages known as *inkotsane* and would be expected to perform "wifely" duties. These marriages were common, and the state was aware of their existence, but chose not to intervene, as these "marriages" served to protect the nation's economic needs (Epprecht 1998a). This practice may be perceived as a response to an unusual situation imposed through white rule, but there are many examples in Africa of same-sex desire being accommodated within precolonial society.

In terms of same-sex identity construction in South Africa, Donham (1998) notes that among black men sexuality was understood in gendered terms. Donham, supported by Reid (2006), notes that effeminate men were seen as a third sex, a mixture between a man and a woman. These effeminate men were known as *skesanas*[3] and would sleep with men considered "real men." Donham further notes that the men who sexually engaged with the *skesanas* continued to consider themselves "real men." Sexuality was therefore also defined according to one's sexual role. Men doing the penetration were considered "real men," while those who had the receptive role were considered to be "women." This suggests that a "gay" or "lesbian" identity, as understood in modern Western terms, never existed in Africa. It seems to me that Africans have always seen sexuality in highly complex ways, which cannot readily be translated into the predominant Western sexual categories. Also, sexuality in one region in Africa cannot necessarily be compared in a meaningful way to another region. This is most evident in the case of Nigeria, an example I now move to discuss.

Nigeria

As much as the Nigerian government would have us believe that same-sex relations do not exist in Nigeria, ethnographic and historical evidence proves the contrary. Before colonialism in Nigeria, the people of Igbo and Yorùbáland lived without the restrictions of Western gender norms. Women were said to be highly organized, autonomous, and very powerful in these societies: the degree of autonomy and power that women enjoyed is evident in "goddess worship, matrilineality, dual sex systems, gender flexibility in social roles and neuter linguistic elements or systems" (Rubenstein 2004:351). Among the Igbo people, women—who were titled men, known as *ozo*, and titled women, known as *ekwe*—were central in running and coordinating the society's economic and political affairs. Women were chosen involuntarily as the *ekwe* by the goddess Idemili, and were chosen for their economic autonomy. To secure such autonomy, women took on many wives. There was therefore a separation between "gender" and "sex" (Amadiume 1987). This means that women could be male, and males could be women. This gave immense authority to women in three ways: first, all Igbo daughters were considered "male" in relation to Igbo wives; second, a brotherless daughter could also become a male through a process known as *nyayakwa* (replacement) to inherit the father's compound; and third, economically driven women could have multiple wives to maintain the house (Rubenstein 2004). The economically independent women were therefore "female husbands," allowing for same-sex marriages among women. While it is perhaps debatable as to whether the female husbands actually did have sexual relations with their "wives," the fact such relationships were actually allowed to stand by the African society at the time shatters the "heterosexual Africa" myth. Further, the practice of having female husbands was not only prevalent among the Igbo, but was present among the Nuar in Sudan, the

Nandi in Kenya, and the Fon in Dahomey (Murray and Will 1998; Morgan and Wierenga 2005). Presently in Benin, among the Fon, boys are allowed to enjoy close sexual friendships among each other to ease the sex drive. There are many other examples in Nigeria, such as the *yan daudu* men who live among Hausa-speakers: these men are cross-dressers, who "have sex with men and frequently engage in activities specifically associated with women, yet are nevertheless often married to women and have children" (Teunis 2001).

In all these societies, same-sex desire existed and was considered normal and tolerated by societies in which it existed. The difference is that it was not understood in the Western discourse of "gay" and "lesbian," and it may even have gone beyond sex to affectionate, caring relationships. We see this also with Uganda.

Uganda

Uganda has a long precolonial history of same-sex relations among men and women. The Nilotico Lango, an agriculturalist community north of Lake Kwanai, had men who assumed alternative gender status, that of the *mukodo dako*; these men were treated as women and could marry other men (Murray and Roscoe 1998). Similarly among the Iteso, who lived in communities in northwest Kenya and Uganda, same-sex relations existed among men who felt like women and became women for all intents and purposes, including voices, manner of walking, and speech; there are reports of group masturbation among young Itoso men (Karp, Karp, and Molnos 1973). The Bahima (Mushanga 1973), the Banyo (Needham 1973), and the Baganda (Murray and Will 1998) are other communities in Uganda where instances of same-sex engagements have been reported. It is no secret that King Mwanga II, the Baganda monarch (*kabaka*), engaged in sexual relations with other men: he made sexual demands upon his male servants and was enraged when they started refusing to accede to his advances on the grounds of their Christianity; his response was to order the killing of those who were converting to the new religion, and these slain servants are now called the "Uganda martyrs" (Tamale 2007). The king's same-sex activities were falsely presented by Western colonialists to show that the Baganda were disgusted at them; this was in keeping with the West's imposition of homophobia in Africa (Epprecht 2008). "The colonialists did not introduce homosexuality to Africa but rather intolerance of it—and systems of surveillance and regulation for suppressing it" (Murray and Will 1998:xvi).

Malawi

Malawian leaders would have us believe that same-sex sexual engagements do not exist in Malawi, but Malawi is no different in this respect from any other African state. Adamson Muula, head of the Department of Community Health at the University of Malawi, captures this sentiment well when

he declares "homosexuality happens [in Malawi]—deal with it" (Epprecht 2008:21).

Malawi has a long precolonial history of same-sex sexual engagement. It was, as observed in other parts of Africa, through heteronormativity—as supported and enforced by the colonialists—that Malawian same-sex desire was erased from the discourse of African sexuality among the Malawians. This is supported by historical evidence that shows that same-sex engagements were present in Malawi, as evidenced by mutual masturbation among boys and by *nkotshane* relationships in the mine compounds where Malawian migrants worked (Epprecht 2004). In the Zimbabwean mines, the Malawians and Mozambiquean men were seen to possess powerful *muthi*[4] because these men engaged in sexual relations with other men. These men would have intercrural sex with other men, and the semen released would then be used in *muthi.* The semen was therefore seen as possessing magic and/or protective charms. The Malawian migrants did not dispute this claim from other miners, with one participant going so far as to say "my dear, note one thing. This thing was and is extremely private, especially in our Malawi tradition . . . for it [*muthi*] to be effective and to last a long time, you must have sex with another man" (Epprecht 2004:122). Another example of the connection between *muthi* and engagement in same-sex male relations among the Malawian men is that of Dhuri, a Zimbabwean boxer from Nyasaland (Malawi). Dhuri was openly engaging in sexual relations with boys to win his boxing matches, and was never arrested by colonial authorities for his acts. For many, this was evidence of the effectiveness of his *muthi.* Although it was common knowledge that he engaged in sexual relations with other men, he drew many young African men to boxing. These examples that Epprecht presents make clear that homosexuality existed in traditional Malawi and that men saw great benefits in the semen from other men. While this discussion is scanty (see Epprech's 2004 book for more detailed analyses and other relevant examples), it does serve to shatter ideas of a "sodomite-free" Malawi.

Senegal

Senegal is another case of overwhelming ethnographic and historical evidence pointing to the historical and current existence of same-sex sexualities. Same-sex engagements not only existed in Senegal, but were silenced through race politics and heteronormativity as expressed through religion (Murray and Will 1998). Among many examples are Senegalese men with feminine demeanor, who dressed like women and made a living from prostitution. These men did not suffer in any way socially, though the "Mohammedans [refused] them religious burial" (Murray and Will 1998:107).

In an ethnographic study conducted among Senegalese men living in Dakar, Teunis (2001) found a thriving community of men who were not only known to exist by the whole city, but also had fixed language in defining their same-sex sexualities. These men referred to themselves as *gordjiguene*

(which translates as 'manwoman'). There were two types of *gordjiguene:* the *oubis* (open) and the *yauss* (the fallen woman or bad woman). The *oubis* were effeminate, and often spoke to each other in feminine pronouns, while the *yauss* were men who penetrated during sexual intercourse. The *yauss* were mostly married or had girlfriends, and largely presented masculine mannerisms. Teunis's findings are supported by Larmarange's (2009) work, which found a thriving same-sex community in Senegal.

Zande people

The Zande are Islamic-influenced people living in the forest of southwestern Sudan, the Central African Republic, and the northeastern Congo. As in the other African regions discussed, there is overwhelming historical and ethnographic evidence that the Zande people, both men and women, actually engaged in same-sex relations. The evidence ranges from chiefs engaging in sexual relationships with youths, who were considered "disease-free" by the Zande people (Murray and Will 1998), to the general acceptance of same-sex engagements. As Evans-Pritchard wrote after conducting his fieldwork "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" (1971:183). The engagement in male-to-male sexual relations among the Zande people even went as far as paying compensation to young boys, just as one would toward women (Murray and Will 1998). Evans-Pritchard (1971) also found evidence of same-sex relations among women: sisters who married brothers were reputed to engage in same-sex sexual practices; women were said to be engaging in same-sex relations using sweet potatoes carved into penis shapes and other things. Evans-Prichard's ethnographic accounts, together with Murray and Roscoe's collection, provide powerful insight into same-sex practices in Africa, and therefore shatter the myth of a "sodomite-free" Africa.

Homosexuality as Un-African

If there is overwhelming evidence that same-sex relations existed in Africa, how is it then that African leaders continue to claim that homosexuality is un-African? The answer to this question is twofold. First, the colonial influence is such that it has served to erode truth in Africa by imposing Western norms. The fact that religion is so frequently used in condemning homosexuality is proof of this point. Religion, both Christianity and Islam, has served to deny and place in question the morality and existence of same-sex relations. God becomes a perfect tool to silence indigenous same-sex practices, and, after all, who wants to go against God? The second issue pertains to the understanding of same-sex desire in Africa. Homosexuality

is indeed un-African. Epprecht concurs with my earlier assertions: "the word homosexuality, notably, suggests a clarity arising from a specific history of scientific enquiry, social relations, and political struggle that did not historically exist in Africa and still does not very accurately describe the majority of men who have sex with men or women who have sex with women in Africa" (2008:8). Issues of same-sex desire in Africa are therefore complex and have not historically been "personified" in the way they have in the West. The vitriolic responses that we now witness from African leaders have to do largely with the "personification" of the "gay" identity.

It appears that "being gay" (personifying, and/or visibly claiming a gay identity) puts oneself at a greater risk of being attacked or harassed. I argue therefore that it is in part this visibility or "personification" that has contributed to the reactionary responses we witness in Africa today. The public display of affection—the open claim of a gay identity—best explains why Tiwonge Chimbalanga and his partner Steven Monjeza were arrested by the Malawian government.

Homosexuality against Religion and Law and the Inherent Contradiction

In addition to the argument that Africa is "sodomite-free," African opponents of homosexuality often cite religion—particularly Christianity—and law as the reasons for their justifications for rejecting homosexuality. While specific passages in the Bible seem to condemn certain homosexual acts, the Bible itself is a foreign document in much[5] of Africa. This apparent contradictory acceptance and use of Christianity clearly presents a dilemma in understanding the debate about a "sodomite-free" Africa. If Africa rejects ideologies brought from the West, then surely religion brought from the West cannot be used to reject something that is being rejected for its foreign roots.

The laws used to condemn same-sex acts in Africa were introduced during colonialism through the so-called penal codes (Cowell 2010). It stands as an inherent contradiction that African leaders who challenged the colonial laws continue to use these laws, often in reformulated ways, to oppress others. If Africa is intent on repudiating Western impositions, then surely Western laws need revisiting. In sum, both the religious and the legal argument represent a contradiction in argument: if the intention is to rid Africa of Western impositions, then Christianity and Western laws cannot rationally be used to justify the rejection of homosexual acts.

It is true therefore to conclude that the rejection of homosexuality in Africa represents something deeper than a simple rejection of Western imposition. It is a rejection of the visible, political, and personified "gay" identity, allowing people to live "out" lives: an identity that troubles the pretense of heteronormativity. This is a point I will now explore.

The Causes of Homophobia

Given the weaknesses in the argument about a "sodomite-free" Africa, I wish to suggest that there are greater forces at work in the promotion of homophobia among African leaders. Homophobia has provided currency for many of these politicians in winning popular support: it seems quite easy to oppress minority groups in contexts where even questioning such oppression may effectively send one to prison. However, the spread of homophobia in Africa is largely driven by a neoconservatism that in effect works to create and foster patriarchy.

The twenty-first century has been characterized by demands for human rights, democracy, and accountability in world affairs, particularly in Africa. The human-rights agenda has prioritized gender parity (Mama 2003) and has therefore challenged the role and definition of manhood (Bhana, de Lange, and Mitchell 2009). In effect, men's position of superiority has been threatened and destabilized. In the field of HIV and AIDS, particularly in South Africa, considerable work suggests a link between the rise of the rights-based discourse and the rise in gender-based violence (Bhana, de Lange, and Mitchell 2009; Dunkle et al. 2003; Peacock and Levack 2004). The emancipation of women has troubled men's position in society. Similarly, a visible "gay" identity destabilizes men's positions in society, creating the need for men to reassert themselves. This is most evident in the "corrective rapes" that are perpetrated against lesbian women in South Africa, and now the determined moves to reduce homosexuality in Africa by introducing more stringent laws. As Bernedette Muthien, cofounder and director of Engender, a Cape Town–based nongovernment organization, notes, curative rape "has always been in society since the onset of patriarchy and been used as a tool to control people's sexuality, women in particular ways and also some men. Many, many of my women friends and comrades themselves are survivors of curative rape" (cited in Bucher 2009). Similarly, Nel and Judge note that "Lesbian, gay and transgender people who are perceived to subvert or undermine patriarchal gender stereotypes, roles and behaviors, are seemingly punished—through discrimination—as a form of social control" (2008:26). Tamale shares similar views:

> Any variation in sexual activity and sexual partners from heteronormativity is considered "pathological," "deviant," "unnatural," and condemned in the strongest possible terms. The gendered politics implicit in these views are crucial, since sexual activities that go against the grain of mainstream ones subvert conventional gendered relations and hierarchies. Sexuality therefore becomes a critical site for maintaining patriarchy and reproducing African women's oppression. (2007:19)

It is therefore important to understand that increased expressions of homophobia in Africa are not only reactions to the "personified" and visible

homosexual identity, but also a tool for sexism, an attempt to solidify men's position in society.

Mac an Ghail, citing Foucault, notes that "sexuality is best understood as a potential that develops in relation to varying combinations of social definitions, regulation, organization and categorization" (1996:200). Constructions of masculinities are therefore essential to understanding how men's roles have been challenged by gender parity and homosexuality. Connell's (1994) work has been seminal in understanding how men construct their identities. Key to this work is the idea that gender and masculinities are socially constructed. This type of analysis is underpinned by the idea that identities are fluid and changing depending on space, time, context, and other factors. As Morrell puts it, "masculinity is a [form of] gender [identification] and not a natural attribute" (1998:607). Similarly, Connell (1995) argues for a conceptual understanding of hegemonic masculinities. These are masculinities that are framed so as to regulate, silence, subvert, and police other forms of masculinity; to hold hegemonic masculinities in place, deviance is punished.

Hegemonic masculinities are held up through compulsory heterosexuality: men "are under the constant scrutiny of other men. Other men watch us; grant our acceptance into the realm of manhood. Manhood is demonstrated for other men's approval" (Kimmel 2000:214). The rise, visibility, and personification of "the homosexual" troubles conceptions of masculinity, thereby troubling heterosexuality itself. For the legitimacy of patriarchy to be in place, compulsory heteronormativity is promoted. Through heteronormativity, gender roles are entrenched and held up as fixed and legitimate. The legitimacy of patriarchy has therefore been questioned, not only through the emancipation of women, but now through the visibility of same-sex desire. I hold therefore that recent attempts to rid Africa of same-sex-desiring individuals symbolizes the rise in conservative sentiments seeking to legitimize patriarchy in African societies. If homosexuality is discredited, then heterosexuality—and thus patriarchy—remains intact. When men's status and heteronormativity are threatened, women and "gay" men become targets.

I wish to caution here that I do not believe in bracketing all African men together under the same umbrella as sexist and homophobic, nor do I wish to suggest that gender-empowerment drives are not genuine. Many men in Africa are genuinely interested in gender parity and addressing homophobia. However, much of what we see in terms of gender-based violence and increased homophobia is symbolic of an attempt to reassert the authority of men in society.

Countering the Homophobia

The new wave of homophobic laws and homophobic and gendered violence in Africa directly reflects the rise of conservatism, driven by patriarchy

which uses the appeal of tradition, law, and lies to keep men in positions of authority and to keep heterosexuality in place. The implications of this argument are twofold. First, issues concerning homophobia in Africa cannot be explored outside other forms of oppression. Understanding the intersections between gender and sexual orientation (and race) will allow for more targeted and comprehensive responses, which will address the root of the problem instead of the symptoms. Second, efforts that seek to destabilize the lies we have been told will need to be creative and more Africa-centered. While the assistance from the West has been useful in protecting the rights of many individuals who engage in same-sex relations in Africa, particularly when they risked imprisonment or their lives, Africa needs to begin fighting its own battles. International support cannot be a substitute for local organizing and resistance. The continuous rescues from the West feed directly into the hands of those who see same-sex relations as a Western imposition on Africa. If the West continues to deploy the politics of power and aid to protect same-sex-desiring individuals, that intrusion can serve to support African homophobes. I am not suggesting here that Western allies should not be vocal on these issues, but rather that African voices now need to start becoming louder. Activists across the continent need to work together to discover new and creative ways of addressing homophobia and sexism in Africa. Such creative approaches need to take careful cognizance of the context and work systematically from the grassroots. It is only when we persuade those with whom we live that conditions for same-sex-desiring individuals will change for the better in Africa. The politics of fear need to be replaced by better understanding.

Conclusion

In the above discussion, I have attempted to show that issues of homophobia in the current political climate in Africa cannot be isolated from gender. I have argued that the rise of homophobia reflects the rise of neoconservatism, fueled by patriarchy. I have challenged the lie that same-sex desire is un-African. I have shown that same-sex desire can be traced before the arrival of Western people in Africa; homosexual behavior has always existed in Africa and continues to exist, though it was understood differently from the current construction of the West. I have shown that the arguments of religion and law are internally contradictory, and should not be used to challenge same-sex desire. Finally, I have advocated for an approach that is creative and Africa-centered, and takes interconnections into account when addressing homophobia.

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NOTES

1. While this may be seen as a limitation in the paper, I argue that newspaper and Internet reports can offer just as important data as empirical data, particularly on complex and urgent matters such as the one under discussion in this paper. My intention in this paper is not to give an empirical sociological, historical, and cultural reading of the communities being discussed, but to present the most recent acts of homophobia in these contexts, which both newspaper articles and Internet reports are useful in capturing, and then use this information concurrently with existing scholarly anthropological, sociological, and historical work in theorizing the lies we have been told. I therefore do not go into details in the description of communities, as this is not the intention of the paper.
2. Bantu groups usually refer to more than four hundred African ethnic groups in sub-Saharan Africa. The term literally means 'people', but Dr. Wilhelm Bleek, a German linguist, used it to denote the similarities in the languages spoken in sub-Saharan Africa, thereby arguing for a common ancestry. This term in South Africa has negative connotations, as it was used by the apartheid government in its arguments for white supremacist rule.
3. A boy who likes to be penetrated during sexual intercourse (Donham 1998). *Skesanas* dressed like women and adopted only receptive roles in sexual intercourse.
4. *Muthi* is a term used in Southern Africa to refer to traditional medicine.
5. Versions of the Bible were in places like Ethiopia from early in its history.

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