

**Running Header:** Homosexuality Discourses in Zimbabwe's Online Locales

**“Even God gave up on them”: A Deconstruction of Homosexuality Discourses in Zimbabwe's Online Locales.**

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**Abstract**

Gay or queer relationships in Zimbabwe remain a site of discursive contestation. The rise in human rights advocacy has re/located the subject within the human rights premise, shifting the discussions away but not disconnected from the religious, political and cultural representations. This paper examined the societal constructions and attitudes toward homosexuality by analysing Twitter exchanges that followed the disclosure on the 21st of September 2018, by a teacher (Neal Hovelmeier) of St John's College in Zimbabwe, that he was gay. The disclosure prompted substantial online and offline debates on gay and queer relationships (what is popularly known as homosexuality in Zimbabwe) and produced two discursive divisions. The first division was against homosexuality and galvanised support across cultural, political, traditional, religious and social constructions. Though less popular, the other division found support from within the gay or queer community itself, the global North diplomatic missions resident in Zimbabwe, liberal left-leaning and some civil society organisations. The former's key feature is societal resistance to homosexuality which is constructed by way of inferences to Christianity and traditional belief systems about binary gender and sex categories and sexual relations. The latter has constructed homosexuality from the premise of human rights, acceptance and tolerance.

**Key Words**

Homosexuality, Zimbabwe, Online, Discourses, Sexualities, Religion, Culture

## **Introduction**

Gay or queer relationships in Zimbabwe remain a site of discursive contestation. The rise in human rights advocacy globally and to some extent in Zimbabwe has influenced a shift in how gay relationships are viewed (Phillips 2009; Muparamoto 2020). The discourse took a step further to embed homosexuality discussions within the premise of human rights, shifting the discussions away but not disconnected from the religious, political and cultural representations that had traditionally dominated it. We note that human rights advocacy has not been linear as not all human rights activists see gay relationships as human rights, hence differentiating themselves from queer advocacy, which associated gay relationships with human rights issues (GALZ, which an association representing the Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex [LGBTI] community in Zimbabwe). We are of the view that prevailing religious, political and cultural links have resulted in these diversions. This paper examined the societal constructions and attitudes of particular Zimbabweans (active on Twitter) toward homosexuality by analysing their Twitter exchanges that followed the disclosure on the 21<sup>st</sup> of September 2018 by a teacher (Neal Hovelmeier) of St John's College in Zimbabwe that he was gay. We are aware of the global nature of Twitter handles and the challenges in identifying nationalities, but we have used names, Twitter geographic locations, and languages (mostly used Shona, IsiNdebele and English) to identify Twitter handles by Zimbabweans. We are also cognisant to the fact that Twitter handles are generally used by the educated, middle and upper class. The paper primarily examined expressions on Twitter to unpack some Zimbabweans' attitudes and perceptions toward homosexuality. To contextualise this study, the paper begins by giving a background to the events that gave rise to this study.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of September 2018, a teacher (Neal Hovelmeier) at St John's College in Zimbabwe, addressed a special assembly where he disclosed to his students that he was gay. A letter from the school's Board of Directors shows that the disclosure was not voluntary but rather a result of an email the teacher had received from the *Daily News*<sup>1</sup> "asking him to confirm or deny allegations that he was gay and how he could reconcile that with his position as Deputy Head of the College". The request prompted the school management's decision to communicate his sexual orientation directly to stakeholders to avoid "a situation where stakeholders would learn first of this matter through a news report".

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<sup>1</sup> The *Daily News* is an Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (Pvt) Ltd owned daily newspaper in Zimbabwe. It has its sister publication, The Daily News on Sunday

The disclosure prompted substantial online and offline debates on homosexuality. This paper is a result of an interest in the discussions that occurred on Twitter and drew attention from across the Zimbabwean society locally and in the diaspora. The paper identified the key discourse sponsors as journalists, European diplomats, church leaders and political leaders. In Zimbabwe, the religious, political, cultural, and nature argument against gay relationships has been associated with former president Robert Mugabe and his era (Goddard 2004). It is important to problematise the effect of Robert Mugabe's departure on the above perspective. Simultaneously, the timing of the queer disclosure in the post-Mugabe era and within President Emmerson Mnangagwa's current era is interesting for analysis. Therefore, it is equally crucial to problematise the growing narratives on the human rights perspectives and Mnangagwa's coinage of a new dispensation. In 2018, towards the general election and for the first in its history, the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) had met with GALZ, the representatives of the LGBTI community in Zimbabwe. The meeting<sup>2</sup> in June 2018 was reported in the news media as signalling new and better relations between the government and the gay, lesbian and queer groups in the country.

Two divisions emerged from the Twitter discussions. The first division was united against homosexuality and galvanised support across cultural, political, traditional, religious, social constructions and the 'natural and sensible' order. The other division found support from within the gay community itself, global north diplomatic missions resident in Zimbabwe, liberal left-leaning civil society organisations and ordinary Zimbabweans. The former's key feature is resistance to homosexuality, rooted in the Zimbabwean nationalist project's epistemic knowledge, which produces what is reasonable or common-sensical (Mawere 2016). This resistance is constructed by way of inferences to Christianity as a dominant religion, the laws of nature' (stating that a man and a woman are naturally meant to have sex and not a man with a man or a woman with a woman) and traditional belief systems about sexual relations.

Further, the discourse on resistance argues that homosexuality is a foreign practice that only gains discursive salience through external imposition. The concerned teacher was white, which helped associate gay relationships with whiteness (see Goddard 2004). The human rights discourse is seen in terms of whiteness as well, and the discursive support from the European

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.newzimbabwe.com/ed-courts-gay-vote-as-zanu-pf-in-surprise-meeting-with-lgbt-reps/>

diplomats again helped in entrenching views that constructed queerness along with whiteness and foreignness planes. This kind of narrative becomes very salient in a nation where nativist politics is at play and where constructions of the nation in terms of fecundity have become part of the everyday (Mawere 2016; forthcoming). The latter constructed homosexuality from the premise of human rights, acceptance and tolerance. This became a counter-discourse that sees Zimbabwean nationhood as exclusive and intolerant of diversity.

### **Contextualising Homosexuality in Zimbabwe**

The presence or absence of homosexuality or its indigeneity or foreignness in pre-colonial Africa, and in pre-colonial Zimbabwe in particular, is now an exhausted debate. Scholars like Epprecht (1998) and Goddard (2004) have managed to prove its existence and anthropologists, especially those relying on functionalism and ethnographic studies for claiming homosexual absence have failed to be convincing, and at worst, proved to be heterosexists as their focus was based on reproduction and 'normal' sexual behaviour (Gelfand 1985; Shoko 2010). The British colonial sodomy laws, such as the common law (introduced by Cecil Rhodes' British South Africa company), that guided the sexualities of citizens (Han & O'Mahoney 2014), also help prove gay relations and how gay relations fell-out with the colonial project.

Post-colonial Zimbabwe inherited and even tightened sexuality policing from the colonial state. In the Robert Mugabe era, claiming gay identities and gay rights was met with brute responses and was seen as going against the national project. The formation of gay clubs in the 1980s in Harare, the formation of the Gays and Lesbians Association of Zimbabwe (GALZ) in 1990 and the activities surrounding the government's ban of the GALZ exhibition stand at the 1995 Zimbabwe International Book Festival (ZIBF) where the then president Robert Mugabe gave a scathing statement on homosexuality (Epprecht 1998) evidence the presence of queer sexualities in Zimbabwe. The other following numerous attacks (especially during the era when Mugabe conflicted with the West), of those who identify as gays during political rallies (Mawere 2016) and the culture of labelling political opponents as gays (Mawere forthcoming) testify to how those who identify as gays are supposed to remain hidden in Zimbabwe. The national project, in many ways, normalised heterosexual relationships. This normalisation is seen in Zimbabwean nation-craft, where fecundity and being *mwana wevhu* (child of the soil) is seen as intrinsic to nationhood (Mawere 2016; forthcoming). To that extent, publicly claiming gay identities, especially the homosexual identity, was unacceptable and such an identity also became a negative one and a metaphor used on dissenting voices (Mawere 2016;

2020). In Zimbabwe, opposition politicians and factional opponents have often been denigrated as ‘gay gangsters’<sup>3</sup>. The labelling is meant to ostracise the opponent ‘other’ through constructing them as ‘gay’ and thus ‘undesirable’. Mugabe also often described the Tony Blair-led British cabinet and parliament as a bunch of “gay gangster”<sup>4</sup>. The prevailing Zimbabwean nation-craft, which has been normalised and internalised among Zimbabweans in various ways, has led gay relations to be under surveillance and censor and the identities to be hidden and unspeakable, making their coming out a spectacle.

However, this political homophobia, which is linked to nation-craft by associating it with the land's fecundity, is limited in explaining the rejection that the practice receives from opposition political party supporters and even some human rights groups that are oppositional. Homosexuality was probably appropriated and hijacked by Mugabe and Zanu Pf into a nationalist and patriotic discourse for political gain. However, it is also possible that Mugabe and Zanu Pf used popular morality tastes and the crafted national sentiments as a strategy to entrench and strengthen their political position by naturalising and normalising heterosexuality. To this end, this could have been one of the many efforts to reconnect the party with the base. Rejecting homosexuality, in many ways, was capitalised on and linked with the Zanu-Pf's notion and construction of Zimbabwean nationalism, which is formulated around land and fecundity and therefore positioning heterosexuality as normal. It is crucial to note how Zanu-Pf culture has been internalised into Zimbabwe's body-politic to the extent that it has been normalised and moralised. There are many Zanu-Pf continuities that are witnessed on other political formations to the extent that one might argue that being a different political formation does not entail having a different ideological foundation or mind-set. The origins of these sentiments, not an aspect addressed in this paper, can be fragmented but at the same time enjoy convergence that is purely accidental, coincidental and contingent.

Nevertheless, the growing verbal attacks of gay relationships also sent disobedient messaging as it signified a growing gay presence. Goddard (2004) is correct to argue that Mugabe's attack

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<sup>3</sup> Mliswa labels rivals ‘gay gangsters’: <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2014/09/mliswa-labels-rivals-gay-gangsters/>

<sup>4</sup> Mugabe in new jibe at Blair's ‘gay gangsters’: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/mugabe-in-new-jibe-at-blair-s-gay-gangsters-1125662.html>

on the homosexual community gave the subject discursive salience and generated society-wide discussions. In addition, it is essential to note the developments in the health sector (especially the inclusion of men who have sex with men in HIV/AIDS interventions), the ZANU-PF interface with GALZ in 2018, and President Mnangagwa's Davos interview<sup>5</sup> as a shift in how gay identities are currently viewed in Zimbabwe. For example, the extended Zimbabwe National AIDS Strategic Plan 3 (ZNASP3)<sup>6</sup> conceded that "nearly 2000 new infections each year among men who have sex with men (MSM)". Also, the proliferation of social media platforms has created opportunities for discussions on gay themes and therefore unmasking what has been previously hidden. Within this shifting and diverse context, we analyse the Twitter exchanges associated with Neal Hovelmeier's self identification as gay, a disclosure triggered by Daily News's pressure to expose his sexual identity.

### **Articulation as a method to unbolt homosexuality attitudes**

The methodology used in this paper is qualitative with a robust social constructionism emphasis. The theory of articulation is applied as both theory and method to understand some Zimbabweans' attitudes and perceptions that were active on Twitter when Neal Hovelmeier (deputy head at St John's College in Zimbabwe) displayed toward homosexuality. To complement it, inductive discourse analysis is used to deconstruct the constructions of homosexuality on the Zimbabwean online locales. This paper analysed tweets that originated from the particular people/organisations active on Twitter following the teachers' disclosure. The names used are as they appear on Twitter but their offline identities where possible are brought in to give an idea on their nationality, personalities, and ideological basis to enhance the analysis. These are Larry Moyo<sup>7</sup>, Jealousy Mawarire<sup>8</sup>, Caesar Zvayi<sup>9</sup>, Philippe Van

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<sup>5</sup> <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/01/24/africa/zimbabwe-president-emmerson-mnangagwa-davos-intl/index.html>

<sup>6</sup> <http://nac.org.zw/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Extended-Zimbabwe-National-AIDS-Strategic-Plan-3.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Editor of the tabloid newspaper *HMetro* (owned by the state-controlled Zimpapers newspaper stable)

<sup>8</sup> Former journalist and spokesperson of the opposition political party *National Patriotic Front*

<sup>9</sup> Editor-in-Chief at *The Herald* (owned by the state-controlled Zimpapers newspaper stable)

Damme<sup>10</sup>, Simon Thomas<sup>11</sup>, Sofia Calltorp<sup>12</sup>, Shingi Munyeza<sup>13</sup>, Fadzayi Mahere<sup>14</sup>, Tich Ray<sup>15</sup>, *Zim Media Review*<sup>16</sup>, *Daily News*, Nqobani Nyathi<sup>17</sup>, EU (European Union) in Zimbabwe, and Povo Zim<sup>18</sup>. The tweets from these users were selected firstly through a scan-type reading of messages (suggested by Carvalho & Burgess 2005) that seemed relevant and addressed the subject of homosexuality directly and then a follow-up reading was done to sample tweets based on the number of likes, retweets and likes. This level of sampling enabled the researcher to narrow down the focus to those tweets that generated enough discussion and that accounted for a broader and divergent audience and discussion. This selection process led the researchers to choose eighteen (18) tweets with a combined 1674 replies, 1641 retweets and 4667 likes. The study analysed all the replies and coded those that were relevant into categories that built into the themes discussed below. The study used inductive coding (Braun & Clarke 2006, Charmaz 2010) with an agenda of limiting the influence of theory and literature.

This paper contends that there is a need to examine homosexuality attitudes and perceptions by discursively analysing the constructions people make on the subject. This approach elevates the subject to the level of discourse and ideology. The method brings in debates that cut across religion, society and politics. As methodology and theory, this paper applies the theory of articulation as the entryway of understanding homosexuality attitudes and perceptions in online communities in Zimbabwe. Articulation is a theory from structuralism and Cultural Studies that argues against determinism and essentialism (Slack 1996). The subject can be seen through articulation which is the joining of forces across political, ideological, cultural and religious divides, where individuals collectively form a bloc or alliance on a particular subject at a particular time. The resultant social formation, depending on how much it discursively appeals to common sense and use other strategies of discourse, can become dominant and impose its hegemonic force at that particular time. Discourse tools such as common sensing (Gramsci 1971, Hall & O'Shea 2013) practices and ideas, othering, distanciation (McManus 2000),

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<sup>10</sup> Former European Union Ambassador to Zimbabwe

<sup>11</sup> United Kingdom Deputy Ambassador to Zimbabwe

<sup>12</sup> Swedish Ambassador to Zimbabwe

<sup>13</sup> Entrepreneur, businessman and pastor in Zimbabwe

<sup>14</sup> Constitutional lawyer and lecturer at the University of Zimbabwe

<sup>15</sup> Influential Twitter Opinion Leader in Zimbabwe (real name not known)

<sup>16</sup> Twitter-based media reviewers and monitors

<sup>17</sup> Opinion leader

<sup>18</sup> Popular Twitter handle on Zimbabwean affairs

passivisation and nominalisation (van Dijk 1990) can be used to achieve discursive hegemony. For example, the study appreciates that the attitudes and perceptions that people have towards homosexuality cannot be reduced to single explanations of religion, culture, ideology or politics. Instead the paper attempts to see how all these converge at particular moments to agree on common interest issues but that their convergence is not permanent and has no necessary belonging. A case to make is that, through this study, it has been established that the key discursive actors do not necessarily belong to single classes, religions, political parties and cultural maps. However, their convergences on rejecting or tolerating/accepting homosexuality are purely acts of accidents, contingency and common interest.

Ideologies are manifested in discourses through attitudes and values accorded and contained in texts and also the identities that underlie the “us” vs “them” categorisation. Representations of ‘us straight/heterosexuals’ the occidentals are projected against ‘them’ the subaltern (homosexual, bisexual and transgender) and orient (see Cohen 1972/2004). As the results sections shows, the discourses on heterosexuality are meant to serve the existing structures of social and moral authority that govern sexual orientation in Zimbabwe. The constructions of homosexuality along the ‘them’ planes is meant to achieve this objective. The idea is to undermine and segregate in the hope of gaining subservience to the mainstream sexuality hegemony of heterosexuality. The discourse analytical framework used in this paper is an attempt to establish the links between hegemonic belief systems on homosexuality in Zimbabwe and how the constructions constitute a hegemonic sexuality ideology that embodies the worldviews of the culturally and morally dominant.

*A priori* bi-polar oppositions that are used in the construction of the ‘straight/heterosexual’ versus the ‘gay/homosexual’ legitimise particular worldviews on sexual orientation and at the same time render them common-sensical and natural. This is synonymous with the Gramsci’s (1971) concept of commonsense. Being a heterosexual is made a commonsense discourse while being homosexual becomes an inversion of common sense, hence constituting moral and social deviance. The hegemonic nature of heterosexuality is achieved by both consent and coercive manipulation. At the first level, due to the dominance of the heterosexuality common sense discourse, homosexual communities have been closed out of available spaces of expression. This generates a ‘spiral of silence’ (see Baran & Davis 2011) which then is interpreted as giving in and consenting to the dominant order of sexual relations and identities. The ideological constructions of homosexuality are explained in relation to the dominant social and cultural



formations that are characterised by strong affinities to patriarchy, traditional religious beliefs and Christianity, all of which embody rules of belonging and the need to be socially and morally correct.

### **‘Even God gave up on them’ - Homosexuality and Christianity**

The entrenching of the discourse within the contours of religion was achieved by the way Jealousy Mawarire set the agenda for discussion when he constructed the subject as potentially a religious subject by twitting;

*I will not support homosexuals because even God gave up on them. (Romans 1: 24-30). If God, the Creator, gave up on these reprobates, who am I to like them? This particular teacher is crazy shown by his choice to disclose his sexuality away in SA [South Africa] with kids. What did he want to do?*

Mawarire’s tweet attempts to discuss homosexuality from and within a biblical narrative that superimposes the supremacy of God to close any other argument and unauthorise homosexuality as both unspeakable and sinful. The reference to Romans 1: verses 24-30 becomes a discursive strategy to embed his attitudes on homosexuality on ‘Biblical’ moral grounds. If God is against the practice, humans, as God’s obedient children, should not oppose their “Creator”. Mawarire obviously followed the radical stance against gay relationships which was witnessed in the Mugabe era. Mawarire’s Christian value sentiments that construct homosexuality as a sin and an unnatural practice are amplified by Caesar Zvayi’s tweet. Zvayi was the Editor-in-Chief at *The Herald* (Zimbabwe’s largest daily newspaper by circulation - state-controlled and has been seen as pushing the agenda of the state). Although Zvayi was not a spokesperson of the government and did not tweet as one, the comments by the editor are essential in understanding the mentality within the state about the subject of homosexuality. Zvayi’s tweet is put below:

*The St Johns gay saga shows what happens when people invert nature. God in his wisdom created a man and a woman, man in his folly inverted this. The result social, moral entropy.[ I have no problem with gays. It’s between them & God, but by jove they must keep it indoors!]*

Zvayi’s tweet begins by arguing that homosexuality is unnatural. Like Mawarire’s, Zvayi’s argument is derived from a Biblical narrative of creation where God in his wisdom, “created a man and woman” but man had overturned God’s wisdom resulting in moral and social decay and degeneration.

Some responses to Mawarire's and Zvayi's tweets also follow the Christian value narrative and refer to homosexuality as condemnable through biblical justifications. One response argued "No to homosexuality [...] God is not a fool" that he created a man and a woman and another made the inference that "God created Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve". This resonates with a local Zimbabwean song, "Mwari akasika Adam na Ever, haana kusika Adam and Steve [God created Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve" (song by Tawanda Mumanyi/Seh Calaz 2015<sup>19</sup>). Another user opined, "if God wanted man to marry man or women to marry women why didn't He do that when he saw that Adam wanted someone to fellowship with him and be the help he needed. Why Eve not another man?" Furthermore, some users argued that the teacher was the "serpent seed" to imply that the devil planted him among 'innocent and God-fearing people'. For others, his disclosure was well-calculated to "woo interested boys at the school ... [and it is] totally unacceptable". The disclosure was seen not as a matter of one expressing their sexual orientation but a concealed attempt to recruit (woo) and molest 'innocent boys'. This positions him as foreign and a pollutant, which, following Zimbabwe's nation-craft, is buttressed by his racial identity (whiteness and gay) and its link with reinvented foreignness and colonialism.

Following this, therefore, the teacher and homosexual people in general no longer represented God's will but that of the devil/satan. One user even argued that the "teacher is a devil and must be hung by the balls until he is very dead". Although there is no direct reference to the Bible, the label 'devil' implies the use of a Biblical inference. Homosexuality, according to this user, was punishable by death, not just death but the process of dying was to be extremely painful. Maybe this could be an instrument to show those 'would-be' homosexuals that society does not accept them and will kill them. This relates to sentiments once made by Aneus Chigwedere when he was the Minister of Education Sport and Culture that a festering finger should be cut to save the whole body from destruction: "homosexuals are the festering finger" in the nation (Chigwedere 1996, p.14). Other users saw homosexuality as a curse. One user noted that "it's being cursed to be gay, you want the curse to go to our children no". In this construction, being a homosexual was not natural or a matter of choice. It was a curse and the disclosure by the teacher was seen as having the power to transfer the 'curse' to innocent children, making the homosexual curse contagious.

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<sup>19</sup> Seh Calaz (2015): Adam and Eve: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ZQnzCzIO4>

Thus, several responses saw the creation of a man and a woman as an expression of God's will and wisdom, hence marking homosexuality as unacceptable because it was never part of God's plan from the time of creation. To claim a homosexual identity, therefore, was seen as equal to subverting God's will and this can/could be punishable. As obedient children of God, humans ought to obey their Creator, including His will in relation to sexual orientation. The aspect of sexual orientation was arguably fixed when God created a man and a woman. The teacher, who is an 'outsider', because of his sexual orientation, was accused for trying to reinvent himself in a Christian society and has no 'right' to belong because his practices 'defile' and are contrary to God's will.

However, Zvayi attempts to move, in the last part of the tweet, to the middle ground, by claiming that he "had no problems with gays". He avers that was an issue between them and their God. Important to note is that the middle ground he sought to infuse into his message had already been pre-empted by the first part which had argued that God's will was for a sexual relationship between a man and a woman. Therefore, his earlier message had built a narrative that God did not approve homosexuality. From another angle, Zvayi's comment moves away from Mwarire's position of intolerance and although seeing homosexuality as unnatural, he admits its present reality which people should learn to live with. In this way, Zvayi acknowledges the limitations that society has in stopping gay relations. In some ways, this shows how the Zimbabwean authorities have succumbed to some pressure to decriminalise gay relations. This is in the context that at the time Zvayi was the Herald's Chief Editor and might have, therefore, unofficially stated the position of the government, which, the government spokesperson avoided commenting on to avoid clearly positioning the Mnangagwa dispensation. Mnangagwa himself, in an interview<sup>20</sup> with the Cable News Network (CNN) at Davos in 2018 avoiding stating his position on the subject. When asked about his government's stance on the gay community, Mnangagwa responded: "Those people who want it are the people who should canvass for it, but it's not my duty to campaign for this .... In our constitution it is banned -- and it is my duty to obey my constitution". Zvayi's response, therefore, fits in well with the middle ground rhetoric of the 'new' dispensation that characterises the post-Mugabe regime. The comment acknowledges some 'disorder', yet reflects on the limitations to correct the disorder. This kind of ambivalence and or subtleness

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<sup>20</sup> <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/01/24/africa/zimbabwe-president-emmeron-mnangagwa-davos-intl/index.html>

is to achieve some neutrality or borderline which is carefully crafted to avoid hurting both sides and losing the constituency of any of the sides. Mnangagwa's new dispensation needs re/engagement with the 'outside', yet it also has to satisfy the prevailing nationalist, moral, cultural and religious sentiments around gay relations. Zvayi's narrative suggests that gays are allowed to live to satisfy some advocated 'human rights' constituency and the identity of the post-Mugabe dispensation as 'new' and 'open' and engaging, but also that their lives should be at the margins to avoid the public gaze.

Homosexuality, in Zvayi's conceptualisation, is neither biological nor natural but a result of social construction: "man in his folly inverted this". Zvayi notes that homosexuality, wherever it existed, was not suitable for public disclosure but something to be kept in private. This privatisation of gay relations is to avoid their social re/production or spreading since there will not be public texts that would lead to its re/production. Implicit in Zvayi's constructions is the notion of tolerance as long as the practice is kept private. This builds into the disjuncture in Zimbabwean discourses on homosexuality over a long time. Whereas homosexuality has always been part of the Zimbabwean social infrastructure, the issue never acquired a discursive presence to enable it to enter wider moral discussions.

Analogous to Zvayi's promotion of concealment, most people saw homosexuality as "deplorable to the mass" but acceptable "behind closed doors". This view is both supportive of homosexuality and at the same time sees the disclosure of one's homosexual orientation in public as unacceptable. The call for non-disclosure strengthens the invisibility of homosexuality but without eliminating it. Views such as "He has a right to do things behind doors" signified the acceptance of homosexuality as a human right. However, disclosure in public is unacceptable: "this teacher brought his bedroom issues and preferences to our sons". The implication is that while the teacher has a right to sexuality choice, the label "this teacher" involves the aspect of seeing the teacher as 'different' to "our sons" who are not supposed to be 'polluted' by 'homosexual' disclosures. The concept of 'othering' is significantly manifest under these tweets. "This teacher" who is a homosexual, had no right to talk to "our sons" who are by implication heterosexual and spiteful of homosexual practices. The government's position, which seems to have been articulated by Zvayi through the *Herald*, affirms this position that while people have their right to sexual orientation, the right to gay choices is limited to the private. Disclosure is seen as going beyond the boundaries as it is considered as both inviting or influencing others to 'unnatural' acts and also exposing 'dirty linen' to the

public. The other aspect on the tolerance but non-disclosure of the gay identity rallied so much on societal norms, culture and beliefs, rather than just Christian values and although related to the above, it is important to discuss it separately.

At the same time, dependence on Christian values is a generalisation that all Zimbabweans are Christians. In many ways therefore, not only those identifying as homosexuals are stripped of citizenship but also those that are non-Christian. For example, Zvayi received condemnation from users who accused him of using religion to ridicule homosexuality, noting that not everyone in Zimbabwe was Christian. One user argued that “Moral/biblical arguments are shallow on this issue because we don’t subscribe to the same values/religion”. Some users contested that homosexuality was not an aspect of God but biology: “I don’t think this guy ever decided after peer pressure or anything to be gay. Let’s understand it from another angle, it’s not cultural, it’s biological”. “Why should they keep it indoors? They are humans just like us and should feel free to love whom they want without having to hide it”.

Other users rejected Mwarire’s narrative, arguing for example that “Personally I can’t lift up the bible and lynch him cz I think sensitive issues lyk these shld b btn him and his maker”. These rejections called for tolerance in the belief that if at all, the practice is sinful, God should be the ultimate judge. Interesting to note however, is that those who called for tolerance as a Biblical imperative do not see homosexuality as a human rights issue. Mwarire was accused by other users who argued, from a Biblical plane, that “God has never given up on a sinner. He loves everyone. Even bigots like you who think homosexuality is worse than adultery and smallhousing .... Check the bible you intensely love to mis(quote)”. This rebuttal, while it calls for tolerance, continues to entrench the belief that homosexuality is a sin. The comparison of homosexuality with adultery and extramarital relationships (*smallhousing*) sees all of the practices as occupying the same levels in terms of sin. What the text does is to see homosexuality as sin BUT that it can be tolerated because it is not bad compared to other types of sin.

### **Insensitive to ‘societal norms and beliefs’ - Homosexuality and Culture**

While the above theme related to how people perceive homosexuality from a Christian perspective, a theme closely related to this sees homosexuality disclosure as insensitive to the ‘societal norms and beliefs’ of Zimbabwe. This theme constructed homosexuality as immoral at society level, although admitting and tolerating its ‘private’ existence, again othering and

marginalising it. The key sponsor of this theme was Shingi Munyeza (a pastor, motivational speaker, and business leader in Zimbabwe). Munyeza's tweet appealed to what could be termed 'a rational morality appeal'. He attempted to layout the role of a teacher in society. His tweet is below:

*“Educators as role models*

1. *Watch what you model, where you model, how you model.*
2. *Your private lives must never be exposed to our children.*
3. *Be sensitive to societal norms and beliefs.*
4. *Tolerance must be exercised through respectful engagement”.*

To summarise Munyeza's message, the disclosure by the teacher about his sexual orientation was a failure and he did not watch for the kind of values he was promoting: “what you model”. From this perspective, the model of a homosexual teacher was/is not desirable. The sexual orientation of the teacher was/is his private affair and was not to be told to “our children” who are ‘innocent’ and do not deserve ‘bad’ role models who promote ‘wrong’ values and belief systems. The disclosure itself was not “sensitive to societal norms and beliefs”. While it was understandable that the teacher could be homosexual, it was undesirable for him to be so much ‘insensitive’ to the norms and beliefs that are, by implication, against homosexuality and homosexuals.

Munyeza's argument is that it was wrong for the teacher to disclose his sexual orientation, especially at a school because the students were “minors who might need parental guidance on the matter”. By assumption, the parents would have seen the issue from the same point of view as Munyeza and condemn homosexuality. In bringing the aspect of parental leadership, whether he was correct or not, Munyeza becomes a mouthpiece that speaks on behalf of those parents and his condemnation of the teacher becomes a parental duty. He constructs his actions, thus, as one who has the interests of children and their parents at heart (his belief of a society) and his voice becomes a moral voice. The teacher, by opposition, while he is expected to act in a *loco parentis* relationship with his students, had dismally failed to avail his moral leadership and rather sought to promote ‘wrong’ models and belief systems. This argument sees parenting and parenthood using the heterosexual ideal and is already infused in the politics of othering.

Munyeza sees and understands that heterosexuality belongs to the ‘correct’ basket of “society norms and beliefs” that the teacher should have promoted. The text implicitly imposes heterosexuality dominance and the need for any alternative or different orientations to respect the ‘proper’ values, obviously creating inequalities. By writing about society in general, Munyeza dwelt into the mainstream discourse that only recognises straight/heterosexuality as the only acceptable sexual orientation. The generalisation of ‘society’ achieved the purpose of casting the debate into the wider society, which he himself represents and which by extension is under threat from homosexuality as represented by the teacher. Munyeza appropriates for himself the role of society leader and his tweet becomes an effort to speak authoritatively on behalf of society. Through his tweet, Munyeza casts out the ‘homosexual’ teacher as an outsider whose ‘alien’ beliefs and practices contradicted the ‘true’ society that Munyeza speaks on behalf of. Positioning the teacher as an outsider, which is obviously vindicated by associating his race with foreignness, Munyeza assumes an authoritative and powerful voice as an insider who possesses and is able to speak out societal norms and values.

Largely, Munyeza’s tweet attracted confirmation from most people who responded while there were still some minority voices that attempted to dislodge the mainstream ideology on sexuality promoted by Munyeza. One user argued that people should be allowed to hold on to their different beliefs: “We must hold our beliefs dear ... while allowing others to hang onto theirs”. However, Munyeza defended his earlier position by arguing that what the teacher had done was to “impose one’s personal life to a whole school” further asking “So will we have adulterers, fornicators, fraudsters, etc. coming to assembly and confess so they are not stigmatised?” Munyeza puts homosexuality in the same bracket as adultery and fornication, acts which by Christian standards are wrong and are sinful. However, crucial to observe is that Munyeza draws similarities between homosexuality and crime: “fraudsters” which implies that homosexuality itself, in his view, is a crime and those who identify themselves as homosexuals are by this understanding ‘criminals’. In response to Munyeza, one user saw Munyeza’s views as resembling “ignorance” and “shocking” at the same time. As expected from a pastor, Munyeza sprung to defend his views by invoking the Bible, referencing I Corinthians 6: 8-10. While at the beginning the attempt was to participate on the rationality and common sense plane, Munyeza draws and taps back into his original source of his worldviews, the Bible, and adds an emphasis that he was “a Christian”. By correspondence, a Christian is ‘expected to condemn homosexual practices because they are ungodly’. The reference to the Bible is also an attempt, at least on his part, to appropriate Christian values as a yardstick for evaluating

moral practices. And by these benchmarks, homosexuality was wrong and instilled wrong norms and beliefs in “our children”.

GALZ, a pressure group advocating for LGBTI rights, engaged Munyeza and argued that it was important to introduce the subject of sexuality to mould students who were aware of the rights of different gender groups. Some users agreed with the GALZ position and argued that “A gay teacher coming clean to announce his sexuality does not make him a paedophile”. Further, others sought to broaden the discussion to include aspects of religion into focus by arguing, for example “can we then say Christians have no right to confess their faith where Christianity is not the norm. The burden of equality is the discomfort of respecting contrary but equal views and opinions, that is what’s moral, that is what’s right in my opinion”.

Munyeza suspected that the disclosure could have been “a well-orchestrated publicity stance,” with another user responding by noting that “the teacher has succeeded in provoking debate around LGBT and which I view as an endeavour to normalise LGBT in our society. This must not be condoned especially at a Christian school. This is a litmus test for the Second republic”. The discussion had begun to move out from just looking at the disclosure as an isolated incident to a larger societal issue where the objective was to bring a discussion meant to normalise an ‘abnormality’ in “our society” which does not, by implication, condone such kind of ‘immoral’ behaviour. The unfolding narrative, therefore, is that the government (the second republic<sup>21</sup>) had an obligation to make sure that homosexuality was not condoned in “our society”.

On probing whether it was necessary for the teacher to disclose to students, one user argued that “His speech very clearly explains why he made the decision. His students face the same issues he has battled in life bullying, bigotry etc. These are real issues faced by people in the real world. People want to continue sweeping it under the carpet to appease their own biases”. In response to this argument, one user averred that “This problem you allege he battled with only required him to restore to the right sex orientation of being normal. It doesn’t require to speak in public .... Why are there no animals like gays?” The discussion raises key issues in the discursive process. While sympathisers believe that gay, lesbian and queer people are mistreated and stigmatised in Zimbabwe and that there should be someone to talk for them,

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<sup>21</sup> The Second Republic is a name used by the Emmerson Mnangagwa government to distinguish itself from that of Robert Mugabe (the First Republic).



there are Zimbabweans who think and believe that the gay, lesbian and queer people who are ‘suffering’ from bigotry and bullying are doing so out of choice because all they should do is to return “to the right sex orientation of being normal”. The ‘return’ to the ‘normal’ is assumed to be a matter of choice, since they (the homosexuals) left the ‘normal’ for the ‘abnormal’ sexual orientation.

### **Human Rights, Cultural Intrusion, and Othering Africa: Homosexuality as a Foreign Practice**

Zimbabwe is a signatory to several international charters on human rights, and most of these have been ratified by the Zimbabwean parliament. This has made necessary the emergence of new calls for the country to recognise and legalise homosexuality because it is a fundamental right. The discourse on homosexuality in Zimbabwe attracted the attention of diplomats, especially, the European Union (EU) mission to Zimbabwe, the former EU Ambassador to Zimbabwe (Philippe Van Damme), the United Kingdom deputy ambassador to Zimbabwe (Simon Thomas) and Swedish Ambassador to Zimbabwe (Sofia Calltorp). All of them called for tolerance and respect of the human rights of queer identities. Key among these were the engagement that Philippe Van Damme managed to generate. This study uses the following tweets to discuss the topic:

Van Damme attempted to mainstream the acceptance of human rights.

1. *Homosexuality exists everywhere; not result of personal choice but fact*
2. *How society responds = culturally determined, but culture = dynamic & evolves*
3. *Non-discrimination = not cultural issue but #HumanRights principle*
4. *Culture has2 evolve & recognize universal #HumanRights*

The European Union issued a tweet accompanied by a Declaration by the High Representative, Federica Mogherini on behalf of the EU on the occasion of the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia first issued on May 17 2018. The tweet noted

*All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and human rights, regardless of sexual orientation #NoToHomophobia*

Like Van Damme, the EU articulated the subject of homosexuality within the lines of equality and human rights. The Italian embassy in Zimbabwe also contributed to the discussions on the EU thread in support of the EU position. The Italian embassy @ItalyinZimbabwe argued that “letting others know your opinion on sexual orientation” was not equal to imposition and called the disclosure ‘dialogue’. Sofia Calltorp came out in support of tolerance and inclusivity.

*Following debate at St John's college on important issue of diversity in #Zimbabwe. An open and free society is a tolerant society where everyone's rights are respected #NoToHomophobia @SwedeninZW @SweMFA @hu*

Simon Thomas supported the disclosure by the St John's teacher and saw it as a sign of principled leadership. In his tweet he argued:

*I applaud St John's College for their principled leadership on this important diversity issue. #NoToHomophobia #Zimbabwe*

The tweets from the diplomats will be discussed here as a group. Firstly, a group of curated replies is given to provide an idea of how homosexuality is perceived by Zimbabwean participants. A sample of curated replies to the European Union, Sofia Calltorps, Philippe Van Damme and Simon Thomas are presented below:

*"If you come to Africa leave your evil practices at the doorstep".*

*"These westerners will never stop to surprise us! Can we change our culture to promote your western culture of man marrying another man! No and a big no keep your Europe and we keep our Africa!"*

*"Zimbabwe is a Christian nation we don't want such acts, there is no place for gays and lesbians. The bible says be fruitful and multiply, if a person of same sex meet as husband and wife should they reproduce?"*

*"Not in Africa thank you. You can't be imposing your cultural elements on Africans and expect to win all the time. I can assure you that you guys will never convince Africans on this one. Keep it to yourselves. Leave the Africans alone".*

*"Yes in your countries but not in Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe we say Nooooo to homosexuality. On this we unite regardless of political affiliation. Homosexuality is an abomination in Zimbabwe".*

*"@euinzim @ItalyinZimbabwe what you guys need to appreciate is the fact that we are Africans and we have our own cultural norms and beliefs. Some of our laws are rooted from our cultural beliefs. Our failure to embrace some of your beliefs should not strain our relationship".*

The diplomats are seen as people trying to impose 'undesirable practices' on the Zimbabwean society in the name of human rights. Zimbabweans construct homosexuality as an 'other' practice which does not represent 'us' the Zimbabweans. Van Damme for example, sought to rearticulate the discourse by arguing that homosexuality was not linked to any particular society but a fact of life across the world. This attempt, it seems, was to dispel the argument that sees

homosexuality as foreign to Africa and Zimbabwe. He argued that while societies used culture to respond to homosexuality, culture was not static but evolutionary, thus culture in Zimbabwe was expected to evolve and ultimately accept homosexuality as a fact of life. Van Damme brings in the aspect of universal human rights as a yardstick upon which to accept non-discrimination and acceptance. Accordingly, cultures had to evolve in order to be able to recognise and accept homosexuality. The use of the human rights plane is an endeavour to appeal to those who celebrate and embrace human rights and liberty, especially the opposition political bases whose policies largely mirror values of centre-left liberal ideologies.

The tweet from Van Damme managed, to a lesser extent, to attract support. For example, one reply noted: “Everyone is entitled to freedom of choosing a sexual partner. Heterosexuals need to learn to respect people who choose otherwise just like homosexuals respect our sexual choices”. However, rebuttals were quick with some users arguing that “This is not about America! Let’s define ourselves based on our own culture and evolve”. The rebuttal loosely makes the argument that the global North is attempting to impose homosexuality on Africa and that there was need to allow African countries to define what they wanted without ‘foreign interference’. In condemning homosexuality, one user commented that there was no need for “sane people [to] debate about homosexuality it’s not morally correct, let’s respect nature and its designs. Man and woman were designed to have sex together case closed”. Emergent from this conceptualisation of homosexuality is the view that only ‘insane’ people can waste time debating an issue that is ‘immoral’ and ‘unnatural’ because nature was clear that only men and women can have sex.

While other people called for messages that “shouldn’t disrespect our brothers and sisters in the LGBTI community”, respondents argued that homosexuals should “just behave normally. Why would one man want to be sexually involved with another man is it a mental problem or maybe genetic”. For those who hold these conservative views, normally homosexuality was unimaginable but could be understood by identifying those who practice it as having ‘mental problems’. While the diplomats attempted to treat homosexuality as an issue of human rights, respondents to their tweets dismissed the universality of the concept of human rights. “The proponents of human rights want us to believe that human rights are universal, they are not. The human rights corpus is still developing and there are a lot of grey areas. Homosexuality is not a human right but a civil liberty and each country has its own laws to deal with that”. Interesting from this comment is that while human rights are widely accepted and regarded as

universal, the rejection of their universality as a planetary vulgate serves to show that consumers of culture actively participate in discourse, not only as consumers but have an agentive role in asserting (whether truly or conveniently) their views and rejecting planetary conceptions that they do not need to agree with.

Global North countries, one user argued, needed to respect the fact that “Africans have their own set of dos and don’ts and this time coloniality has no place in our decision making”. The user portrays Van Damme’s attempt to frame homosexuality as a universal fact as similar to attempts at determining and defining what ‘Africans can do and cannot do’. It becomes a perception of cultural colonialism. This time, Africa was not going to “stoop to your level each time so as to seek approval”. The African, interestingly, is constructed as a ‘unity’, an identity that is always in opposition to the global North, in opposition to cultures that are un-African such as homosexuality. Inasmuch as the ‘African’ is never explicitly defined, the constructions produced in the text unites all those/that are against homosexuality as the correct Africans while gay, lesbian and queer people and their sympathisers and global North’ sponsors’ are constructed as ‘outsiders’ who have no right to belong.

The construction of culture as evolutionary and dynamic by Van Damme received criticism as that could have meant that the culture he referred to was an outside culture because, as one participant argued, “during the constitutional outreach [2009-2013] Zimbabweans religiously, culturally and morally said they won’t give recognition to homosexuality, and seems you think your culture and moral standards are higher”. What is implied here is that if the people rejected homosexuality during the constitution-making process, the subject was a closed matter because the people had spoken against it. Thus, there was resistance to “Some kind of ‘cultural imperialism’ of thinking that one’s culture is more superior than the other. Please Mr Van Damme leave us with our primitive culture. This kind of ‘colonial gaze’ makes some vomit”. The key argument raised across these responses is that homosexuality does not form part of the Zimbabwean culture, and by extension, homosexuals are also a creation of the ‘outsiders’, (the Europeans and the global north in general). Most users saw the diplomatic reconstructions and rearticulations of homosexuality through the human rights lens as an attempt to colonise and influence ‘our culture’. The majority of the respondents then sought to disarticulate and decouple homosexuality from the cultural because for them, it is simply not there in ‘our culture’ and therefore there is no need to accommodate it.

Others saw the attempt at promoting homosexuality in Zimbabwe as a way of trying to ‘westernise’ Zimbabwean culture. “In other words, those who are averse to homosexuality are so dumb in as far as they are failing to evolve. Why should evolving of culture be imposed on people? Why can’t you respect that their culture does not evolve on that particular issue? This kind of ‘OtherING is nauseating’”. The responses to Van Damme show that homosexuality is constructed actively on the planes of power and superiority/inferiority binaries. The debate carries with it sub-texts of race, colonialism, and cultural imperialism. Such sub-texts find more resonance if participants are tied to particular histories associated with the above sub-texts. Any attempt to mainstream homosexuality along the human rights argument is met with fears of cultural erosion. The geopolitics of the north and south is invoked by those in defence of protecting ‘Africa’ from cultural invasion and corrosion. The rejection of homosexuality as a foreign concept is done by placing the agency of the issue elsewhere. In this instance, it is a foreign concept and therefore should be accepted ‘there’ and not ‘here’. Distanciation works well in eluding agency and responsibility. ‘We should not talk about it because it is not our problem’.

The discourse resurrected Mugabe’s worldviews on homosexuality with some users noting “I really miss RG’s [Robert Mugabe] stance on homosexuality”. Mugabe was cited in Matthew Engelke (1999, p.299), arguing:

Is any sane government which is a protector of society’s moral values expected to countenance their [GALZ] accessions? I find it extremely outrageous and repugnant to my human conscience that such immoral and repulsive organisations, like those of homosexuals who offend both against the law of nature and the morals of religious beliefs espoused by our society should have any advocate in our midst and even elsewhere in the world. If we accept homosexuality as a right, as is being argued by the association of sodomite and sexual perverts, what moral fibre shall our society ever have to deny organised drug addicts, or even those given to bestiality, the rights they may claim and allege to possess under the rubrics of individual freedom and human rights.

This accusation still finds space in the current discourse. This suggests that there is some kind of shift regarding the approach being used by Emmerson Mnangagwa’s ‘new dispensation.’ Other users bemoaned Mugabe’s departure from political leadership and saw his absence as giving rise to what they called ‘excessive freedom’. One user noted “*kungobva kwa Pres RG pachigaro vanhu vakutoita freedom inoenderera kudarikira kudai. Kubvarukira chaiko kwe freedom vanhu vakufeeder* on crazy ideas such as these [Since the departure of President Robert

Mugabe from power, people are having excess freedom. The freedom is too excessive to the extent that people are now entertaining crazy ideas such as these]”. Homosexuality, according to this user, is not normal, hence the allusion to ‘these crazy ideas’ which cannot be enjoyed under normal conditions but within environments of excessive freedom and unhindered liberties. There was a need, therefore, to limit this freedom such that “these crazy ideas” cannot find platforms of expression and that they stop spreading to ‘feed’ people. Homosexuality becomes a practice that is immoral and can only be stopped by imposing legal and regulatory restrictions. The Mugabe era is therefore associated with holding moral, cultural, religious and naturalised values while that of Mnangagwa is associated with an openness that turns society upside down. Mugabe is narrated as a firm disciplinarian who managed to limit individual’s and groups’ freedoms to levels that maintained the sanity of the country.

Othering as a discursive tool, is used extensively in the discussions. A case to note is that gay and queer people are not just the despised ‘other’ but are actively stripped off their right to citizenship and belonging. They are not part of ‘us’ and therefore should live elsewhere. This links with the attached narrative of foreignness. One user opined: “They must never be recognised in our society. Should not be given any special treatment or recognition”. The text implies that homosexuals are not Zimbabwean, which is referred to as ‘our society’ so they should not be recognised. Once they disclose their homosexual orientation, their rights to belong to a nation and a state are removed. So, in this case, disclosure marked an end to belonging and citizenship since Zimbabwean citizenship and belonging was seen in heterosexual terms.

The racial character of GALZ at its formation is essential for contextualising the import of some views that see homosexuality as foreign and a preoccupation of white people. This context has a discursive significance as people easily associated homosexuality with being white (which by extension means Western) and affluent. Hence, when GALZ speaks about the need to accept homosexuality, the discussion unintentionally takes a racial track and begins to construct the practice as foreign and against the culture of ‘us’ locals who are black. It is in this way that the heterosexual identity has been associated with Zimbabwean nationalism while the homosexual identity has been associated with foreigners and pollutants. This is evidenced by how the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) under Robert Mugabe and Mugabeism has both racialised and homosexualised the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party and its late founding President, Morgan Tsvangirai (Mawere 2016; 2020). Such

an identity has also been extended to a Zanu-Pf faction, the Generation 40 (G40), whose leaders are referred to as gay-gangsters, which also coincides with their alleged lack of the liberation war history and therefore their possible polluting and repulsive nature (Mawere 2016; 2020; forthcoming). In the context of this paper, it is essential to note that the teacher at St John's College who revealed his gay sexual orientation at the school assembly is also white. The overtones that people made about him being an 'outsider who sought to influence our culture' could be explained by linking them to this discussion. He is white (loosely translated a Westerner) and his homosexual behaviour does not represent 'our society' 'us' black Zimbabweans.

Jeremy Youde (2017) attempted to discuss homosexuality rejection in Zimbabwe by looking into the 'political'. Homosexuality research had predominantly examined the issue from the viewpoint of religion and history. Youde (2017, p.62) argued that the rejection of homosexuality by Robert Mugabe and Zanu Pf is part and parcel of a nationalist political project meant to promote what Terence Ranger in 2004 called 'patriotic historiography', a political agenda based on promoting the ethos of the liberation struggle and building a 'political mindset' that exalted the ruling party and saw the 'west' as arch-enemies. Further, the political construction of homosexuality by Mugabe as a 'western' concept resonated with Zanu Pf's bigger ideological agenda that always sought to give agency for all that was wrong in Zimbabwe to the actions of 'neo-imperialists' from the global North. This historiography was built on a particular frame of Zimbabwean-ness, cultural protection and patriotism. Youde (2017, p.67) argued: "LGBT persons and rights are constructed as foreign and Western, which in turn makes them inimical to a genuine Zimbabwean identity and, by extension, traitorous". While Youde (2017) mainly focuses on what he calls 'political homophobia' as expressed through Mugabe and Zanu Pf, what this paper finds missing in these arguments is that the rejection of homosexuality is an issue that transcends and traverses political, ideological lines and allegiance and galvanises opponents.

Homosexuality's association with whiteness and foreignness provides a political economy to talk about colonialism and its links with whiteness, foreignness, colonialism and the 'new' alludes to Zanu-PF's nativist politics and its position as the gatekeepers of Zimbabwean nationhood. Key to note is that homosexuality defied the liberation struggle propaganda and the issue's collusion with patriotic historiographies of Zanu Pf and Mugabe could be explained as an example of accidents, contingency and the coincidence of time and space and as

opportunism on the part of Zanu Pf. This is only achievable by rearticulating the homosexuality discourse in Zimbabwe, not as an issue with tribal political belonging, but as an issue worth exploring without limiting it to theoretical compartmentalisations. Valuable from Youde (2017), however, is that the appropriation of anti-western narratives on homosexuality by Mugabe could have worked in upholding a national sentiment that unfortunately was constructed in opposition to everything western and seeing the west as the sponsors of neo-imperialism in terms of culture, politics and economics. Epprecht (1998, p. 644) noted that Mugabe and the Zanu Pf party constructed homosexuality as a threat to an idealised patriarchal culture and national values, frequently and explicitly linked to Western imperialism and 'reactionary forces'. This construction allowed Mugabe's supporters to portray him as 'brave' and to flatter anti-gay vigilantes as 'heroic' in a nationalist sense.

### **Conclusion**

The deconstruction of the tweets shows positions and nuances in the public discourse on homosexuality and how they link to traditional and religious norms, ideological and political positions as well as the dynamics related to international engagements over the issue. This paper analysed the dichotomous representations that exist in the language used in the tweets and replies and this representation produces intended and unintended ideological alienation to those represented as the 'other'. The first level of analysis sought to understand how the juxtaposition of 'us' heterosexuals and 'them' homosexuals function within the first order of signification in reference to specific sexual identification (see Deacon *et al.* 2007). At the second level, the bi-polar contra-distinctions link to how society perceives that which is signified and how they generate meanings and value/moral expectations of the sexual identities and forms of relations between the opposing sexual orientations. Drawing from Deacon *et al.* (2007, p.143), these value/moral expectations become mentally, socially, politically and culturally institutionalised and embedded and hence exert enormous "normative pressure" on those signified as the 'other'. The ideological/cultural constructions of homosexuality build moral and social/cultural consensus and legitimise dominant worldviews of heterosexuality or homosexuality. The paper, by way of discourse analysis, is an attempt to deconstruct the moral and social myths and expectations that are structured in the tweets and replies. The codes employed in the texts to naturalise heterosexuality were examined to understand how they, although taken for granted, carried heavy ideological points that produce expectations and seek for the acceptance of these expectations and hence lead to moral and social conformity. The codes and connections used in the discourse greatly inform how society views and acts towards



or against the homosexual community where homosexuals are constantly viewed in opposition to the 'normal' and morally acceptable practices of heterosexuality.

This paper also utilised the discursive instrument of passivisation (van Dijk 2000, p.39) to trace how, through the tweets and replies, homosexuality was placed in passive role (passivised) as something being decided against/done. The subject only acquired an agentive role when being constructed in the negative (when it is thought that homosexuals have done something wrong) in which case its agency is overemphasised. In this case, the St John's teacher was given an agentive role as far as he was wrong to announce his sexual orientation to school children. The discourse saw his disclosure as an attempt to mainstream homosexuality and recruit his students. Further, the paper examined the labels attached to homosexuality and homosexuals in the Twitter discussions. The labels are important in discourse because they create identities that can define people and determine societal attitudes towards those defined by those labels. There is an apparent inequality between homosexuals and heterosexuals in the discourse. Heterosexuals have more discursive power and had definitional power over what is to be seen as normal and abnormal. The homosexuals and those who supported them occupied minority discursive spaces and their worldviews were subsumed by the dominant hegemonic variant of heterosexuality. The paper shows that Zimbabweans are not like-minded in terms of their attitudes and perceptions on homosexuality, hence colluding with or challenging static meanings of the Zimbabwean 'identity' and 'culture' that is used to determine nationhood and citizenship. At the same time, the paper has reflected on ways in which debates on homosexuality evoke contested global, racial, political, economic and power relations between the West and Africa, particularly Zimbabwe.

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